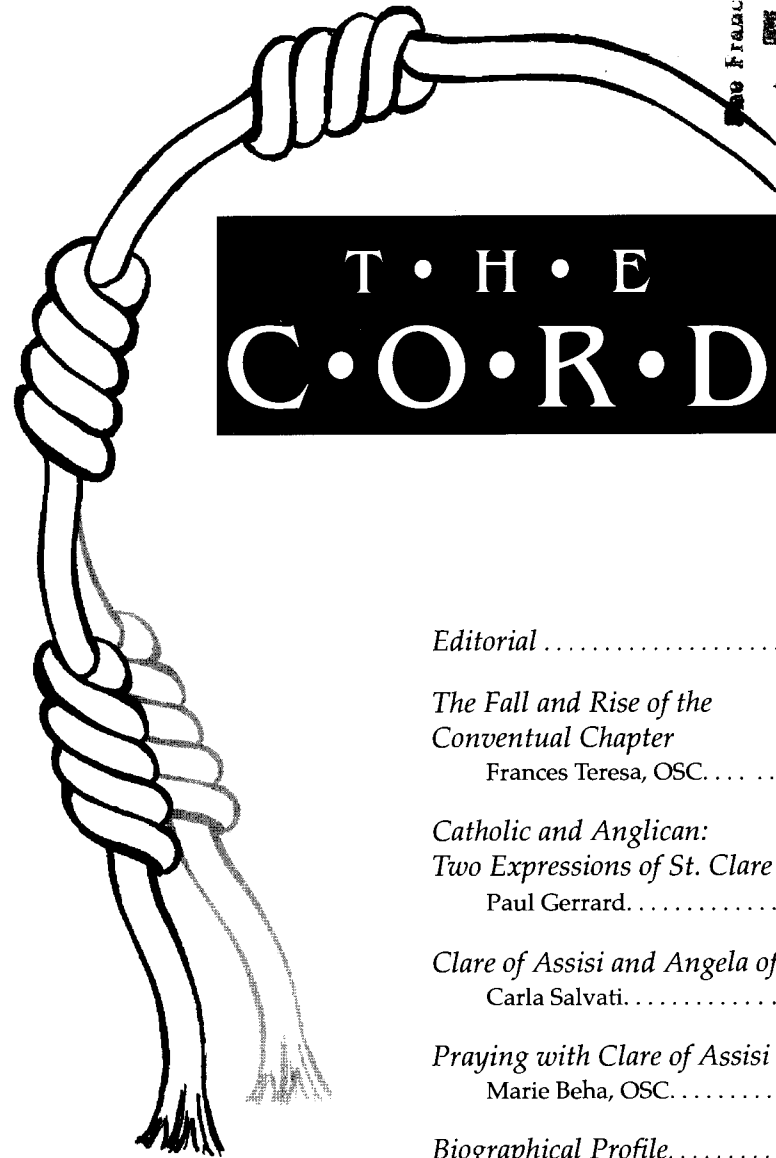
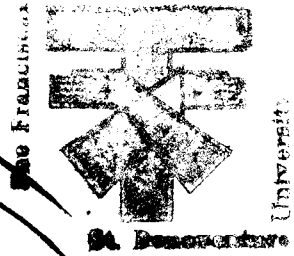


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THE CORD
A Franciscan Spiritual Review

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The Cord (ISSN 0010-8685 USPS 563-640) is published bi-monthly by the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: \$20.00 a year; \$3.50 a copy. Periodical postage paid at St. Bonaventure, NY 14778 and at additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Cord*, P.O. Drawer F, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778 USA.

NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS: Address all manuscripts to Editor, *The Cord*, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778.

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1. MSS should be submitted on disk or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper, one side only, double spaced.
2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.
Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks and not underlined or italicized.
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(1Cor. 13:6).
(RegNB 23:2).
(2Cel 5:8).
(4LAg 2:13).

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ADVERTISING: Ads should be sent to the editor at the above address. Cost: full page, \$50.00; half page, \$25.00; quarter page, \$15.00.

Cover design: Basil Valente, OFM and David Haack, OFM.

The Cord, 47.4 (1997)

Editorial

Perhaps one of the challenges of our time is to discover once again the value of being "useless." We live on an "edge of terror" that threatens us with our own lack of necessity. When we allow ourselves to meditate on the vast scheme of things, we are occasionally confronted with our own infinitesimal smallness and the fact that everything in the universe got on perfectly well without us for millions of years—and will do equally well when our brief sojourn here is over. It is a sobering and, yes, humbling thought.

Lest it be perceived as a depressing thought, there is the other side of the coin. In spite of our smallness and clear limitation, we, for some mysterious reason, *are*. It is the very wonder of this that so grasps the saints and the truly contemplative among us. Of all people they understand their own insignificance and nothingness. Thus, of all people, they stand most amazed at their own being—gratuitous, unmerited gift. This gift derives its value from the heart of the creative God, who at some specific, historical moment, like a delighted child playing a game, suddenly announces: "I choose you!"

Clare and Francis of Assisi certainly grasped this marvelous truth. They lived lives of radiant gratitude and praise, understanding that the gift of their own being and that of their sisters and brothers was the truest sign of God's love in action. The "usefulness" of creatures was a secondary consideration. Thus infants, the old, the sick, the handicapped, the poor and deprived—all ranked equally with the brilliant, the healthy, with vibrant youth and wise maturity. This is our heritage in the Franciscan Family—to know this and to live in the world believing it.

In this issue of *The Cord*, we once more focus on our Sister Clare, to admire her and to learn from her.

We offer our apologies for an unfortunate error in the last issue of *The Cord*. On page 139 the last line of Gerard Straub's article on "Lady Poverty" was omitted. It should have read: "Lady Poverty is rich not because she has given up much but because she has found much. God's love and grace are all the riches she needs."

"Lady Poverty is rich not because she has given up much but because she has found much. God's love and grace are all the riches she needs."

(Straub, "Lady Poverty," *The Cord* [May/June, 1997] 139.)

The Fall and Rise of the Conventual Chapter From Chapter 4 of the Rule to the General Constitutions

Frances Teresa, OSC

Anyone who has been a Poor Clare for more than twenty-five years would probably agree that some of the most far-reaching and influential changes have been in the role and status of the Conventual Chapter. The Poor Clare life, unlike that of some orders, has always had a place for consultation not only in practice but also in legislation, so that there is no sense in which the Chapter, as we see it today, can be called a new thing. What is new, however, is the expansion of its role, the spread of its concerns and the possibilities for the future which these make possible.

Thirty years ago, Chapter was, to all intents and purposes, a forum for correction and admonition, a well-trying and structured means for maintaining fervor and correcting faults. Today it takes its place among the actual instruments of government in a monastery. The matters entrusted to it are important and significant enough that the Sisters have a real role in shaping their own lives. It is one of our main channels through which the community can express its appropriate responsibility and provide the complementary balance to the way in which the Abbess exercises her appropriate responsibility.

These two modes of government are now seen as parts of the same whole in a way which represents a marked development from the relatively minimal place of consultation granted to the Chapter in, for example, St. Colette's Constitutions of 1434. The General Constitutions of 1989 say:

The Abbess is to summon the Chapter as often as there are questions to be discussed which are pertinent to it and at least four times a year. (Art. 249.3)

In matters where the decision is reserved to the Council but which seem to be of greater moment, the Abbess should be ready to consult all the Sisters. (Art. 246.2)

St. Colette says:

When all this [admonition of faults, etc.] has been concluded, then the Sisters discuss and decide any points which are to be discussed as the Form of Life says (103-111).

Urban IV, in his rule, makes no mention of the Abbess's acknowledging her faults—a point which Clare puts first. He ordains correction, reformation, and punishment, none of which are mentioned by Clare in this context.

What is new in the General Constitution is that the Chapter now has a long list of specific matters assigned to it as well as the power to decide which are the important matters on which the views of the whole community are to be sought (Art. 250 b12). In other words, the Chapter itself can draw upon its own agenda in a way which is apparently open-ended.

However, a glance at the original legislation of the Poor Sisters of St. Clare reveals that, although the present role of the Chapter is considerably expanded, it can be argued that we have not yet attained the full expression of Clare's vision of community. Clare stipulates that, at least once a week, the Abbess must call the Sisters together in Chapter (4.11). She is obliged to call them—*teneantur ad convocare Capitulum*. The same phrase is used in verse 1: the Sisters are bound to observe the canonical form—*teneantur formam canonicam observare* (4.1). This is stronger than a recommendation. It suggests that this weekly meeting is as obligatory as the observance of Canon Law about elections. That is a strong statement. Clare then goes on to define three quite clear areas which are to be the basis for an agenda for these Chapters—confession of public offenses and negligences, the well-being of the monastery, the contracting of debts.

Confession of Public Faults

Clare says that both she [the abbess] and her Sisters must confess their common and public offenses and negligences humbly (4.12)—*tam ipsa quam Sorores*—she, every bit as much as the Sisters. Clare is making a definite reminder of the absolute equality of the Sisters and the Abbess. She is also defining the area which should fall into these confessions: common and public offenses and negligences, which the Abbess commits as well as the Sisters. Nothing is said about correction, no mention is made of penances, in marked contrast to the Rule of Urban IV, written only eleven years after her death which says:

The Abbess shall call the Sisters together in Chapter . . . to correct, order and reform them. She shall mercifully impose punishment according to the public admission for both common negligences and faults.

Urban makes no mention of the Abbess acknowledging her faults, which Clare puts first, ordaining correction, reformation, and punishment. It is clear from the Canonization Process that Clare was well able to correct when necessary, and in her Rule she gives this matter a whole section, a section which is composed almost entirely of quotations from Francis's Rule of 1223 (Ch. 10) with one or two additions—apparently by Clare herself. For example, Francis speaks of “our Rule” and Clare of “our Form of profession”; Francis says: “I strictly command them,” and Clare: “they are firmly bound” because “they have renounced their own wills for God’s sake.” To Francis’s list of faults particularly to be avoided, Clare adds: “dissension and discussion, and let them be ever zealous to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love which is the bond of perfection.” Finally when Francis encourages them to patience, Clare adds “in difficulty.” These are clearly the fruits of her years lived in community and are quite other than the imposition of punishment, however “mercifully.”

Clare then directs that, mutual apology and forgiveness having been made and granted, the Abbess shall confer with all her Sisters about the good of the monastery (4.13), about matters practical and non-material, *utilitate et honestate*. She then adds, as if by way of explanation to an inquiry not asked but guessed: for the Lord often reveals what is best to the lesser (*minori*) among us.

As Regis Armstrong points out, Clare’s remarks about Chapter gain in force when we recall the complete absence of any mention of Chapter in the two previous Rules of Ugo and Innocent IV.¹ When Clare speaks about Chapter, she is often looking more to Benedict than to her long experience of Ugo. She makes one important and interesting change, however. Benedict says:

As often as any important business has to be done in the monastery, let the Abbott call together the whole Community and himself set forth the matter (Rule of St. Benedict 3, hereafter RSB).

So far Clare follows Benedict. The sources of the many quotations in her Rule are a study in themselves, and there is much to be learned from any changes which Clare makes as she quotes. The fact that the changes are often very slight only adds to their significance and their subtlety. Throughout her Rule we have a clear and developed enunciation of the basic principles by which she and Francis lived, those of *minoritas*, “lesserness,” and *fraternitas*, community. It is no exaggeration to say that these verses (11 and 12) spell out the heart of Francis and Clare’s vision in which all are sinful, all are redeemed, all are loved, and all are poor. She challenges us here to transcend that deeply-rooted dynamic by which every group of human beings tends to seek a leader to carry both the responsibility and the blame. Instead, she summons us to live

as co-heirs of the Kingdom where God shall be all in all. With this almost certainly in mind, she urges us to hear the “*minori*” among us. Benedict actually says: *quia saepe iuniori Dominus revelat quod melius est*—for it is often to the youngest that the Lord reveals what is best (RSB 3). Clare, however, says “*minori*,” not “*iuniori*”—“to the least” not “to the youngest.”

Unfortunately *minori*, like *minoritas*, has no real equivalent in English unless it be “leastness”; but we can well understand her meaning, especially as we know how dear this concept was to Francis and Clare and how central to their thinking. We may be sure that if Clare made this change from youngest to least, then she did so of set purpose. Even if ill and dying and perhaps quoting from memory, yet how significant that this change of word had taken place in her memory. She is making a clear statement to us that the “true Friar minor” and the true Poor Clare is often someone hidden in our midst, not notable in any way, and therefore one who receives the Lord’s revelation.

In this case, we ask ourselves what it signifies that Urban IV in his Rule changes the word back to “*iuniori*”? He retains the quotation as Clare gives it, speaking first of the Lord and his revealing and secondly of the one to whom he reveals, but Urban replaces Benedict’s word, the “youngest.” This change is one of those very small things which conceal great things and has meant that those communities who observed Urban’s Rule for so many years were, in fact, deprived of a clear expression of a fundamental insight. We all know who the youngest among us are. We do not always know who are the lesser. It could be any of us and will be each of us at some time. This can free us from human respect and enable us to listen to each other freely, open to hear the Word of God spoken by each other.

Colette in her Constitutions says that when the confession and admonition of faults have been concluded, then if there are any points to be discussed, as the Form of Life says, let the Sisters discuss and decide them, as it may seem expedient (111). One of the characteristics of Clare is the simplicity and limpidity of her thoughts and words when compared with those of others. In the whole of Chapter 4, her sparse Latin has barely a dozen adjectives. Colette, on the other hand, daughter of a more complex period, feels the need to give correspondingly complex instructions—the Sisters discuss and decide them as it may seem to be expedient, with due gravity and decorum, being most careful to avoid all superfluous, injurious, or ill-considered words of any kind (111).

What are these matters to be discussed? According to Clare they are

- the well-being of the monastery (4.13) (surely a very wide brief),
- that no heavy debt is to be contracted without the common consent of the Sisters,
- obvious necessity (4.14).

Does the “common consent of the Sisters” mean their unanimous consent? It seems that Clare hoped so. One’s first rather flippant thought in response is that therefore it will be highly unlikely that many communities will be contracting heavy debts. Communities are notoriously cautious—and rightly so. This may have been exactly the wisdom Clare wanted to summon. We know she tried to attain unanimity on important matters, for when it was a question of the reception of a candidate, she says that the Abbess is required to seek the consent of all the Sisters—*Sororum omnium consensum requirere teneatur* (2.1), again using the verb *tenere* which was used in reference to obeying Canon Law and the successors of Francis. So here, before contracting a debt the Abbess must consult with all; but Clare does not stipulate unanimity, perhaps because the readiness to contract debts is partly a matter of understanding the issues involved. However, the general message is that Clare would not have been happy with a canonical vote of “one more than half.”

With regard to the actual debt she gives no description beyond the words: no heavy debt—*nullum debitum grave*. Urban, on the other hand, has an eye on paying it off and so adds: burdensome—*onerosum*. He also has much more than Clare to say about the procurator. We know from what was happening in other monasteries of the period and especially from the records of some early Cistercian monasteries of nuns (which were usually better documented, and the records better preserved than those of early Poor Clares) that it was the custom for nuns to give their financial affairs into the care of a lay person or else a local abbot or monk. At this time, around 1250, there was considerable official concern about the poverty of some monasteries of nuns, for they did not always have enough food, had no financial security, and often needed help from the bishops or papacy to pay their debts—never a route to popularity! In the light of the connections between the Cistercians and the early Poor Clares, one wonders if the latter were allowed to share in the Cistercians’ exemption from certain Papal tithes and levies?

Clare nowhere spells out the details of the procurator’s work or accountability, but Urban, that man of affairs, does. He says:

Each of your monasteries shall have a procurator, someone prudent and trustworthy who must be appointed and removed from office by the Abbess and Chapter as seems most expedient. All the receipts and expenses are committed to the procurator who shall be accountable to the Abbess and the three Sisters specially assigned to the task by the Chapter (21).

Without this team of Abbess and three Sisters, the procurator may not sell or alienate anything of value and must also render an account of his stewardship to the Visitor. This would all be in line with the practice of the day and, though its details are more developed in Urban’s Rule (as is the case in almost

every area), we do find it adumbrated in Clare’s for she says: this should be done through a procurator (4.14)—apparently taking the reality for granted. The end effect is that the nuts and bolts of daily administration are left to be worked out in the best way by the individual Abbess and community. These matters do not engage Clare’s attention as much as do the unity of the house, mutual love and peace, or the form of our poverty.

The Well-Being of the Monastery

In Clare’s vision of community, all who hold office are elected by the common consent of the Sisters. This applies particularly to the Abbess. When Clare uses—as she does throughout—the Latin word *consensus*, she is again touching a deep Franciscan conviction that God speaks to the community as a whole. If anyone disagrees, she especially is to be listened to; she is, for the moment, the “minor,” the minority voice, and may well be the one through whom God is, at that moment, speaking. Whenever possible, a unanimous solution is the goal. Thus, with regard to those who wish to enter, Clare says: The Abbess is required to seek the consent of all the Sisters (2.1), but because she has lived for forty years in a community, she goes on to say: and if the majority shall have agreed . . . (2.1). Yet in spite of (or because of) those long years of experience, she can still put before us this great ideal and vision of unanimity—the consent of all the Sisters.

Urban simply says: The free election of the Abbess belongs to the Chapter (22) and seems to require no more than the canon law of the day to make the election valid. The present requirement of a two-thirds majority for a third and fourth term of office, although possibly based on reasons other than Franciscan idealism, is very much in line with Franciscan thinking. Francis and Clare always wished to move with the whole community, not simply by majority vote. It is far too easy for any vote to fall victim to power politics, but these would have had no commerce with *minoritas* as understood by Francis and Clare.

Urban then touches another basic issue when he says: the election is to be confirmed by the Cardinal Protector to whom this Order is committed (22)—something of which Clare makes no mention at all. Time and again we find that Clare was easily able to put the full weight of her trust in her Sisters, so we find her with no hesitation about leaving the responsibility for their lives in their own hands. It is good, too, to recall that she did not write the Rule in the first flush of her idealism and conversion but only after many years of faithful religious life.

Reading Clare’s Rule in the light of what she moved from as well as the ideal

towards which she moved, it is helpful to note that in the Rule of Innocent IV, the election of the Abbess has to be confirmed by the Minister General or the Provincial if the General be absent (4.11). Clare asks them only to come and through the Word of God "dispose [the Sisters] to perfect harmony and to the common good in the choice they are to make" (4.2).

Saint Colette, too, requires that the election be confirmed by the Minister General or, in his absence, the Provincial of the Province where the monastery is, or his Commissary—in other words, the one who holds the authority. Colette, however, is also very aware of the positive requirement which Clare is making and asks that instead of the Minister General or Minister Provincial (as in the Rule), the Visitor or Confessor give the encouragement and advice which Clare asks for (8.1). All of Colette's complex arguments for vocal voting (presumably the origin of the term vocals) were changed, of course, by the Council of Trent, and it was the Tridentine model which was embodied in Chapter 7 of the Constitutions of 1932.

In all these examples, we see an ideal being built up, Clare articulating her convictions about how the house should be organized and where real responsibility lies. She is not only convinced that serious decision-making can be placed on the shoulders of the Sisters themselves, but also that it is good for it to be so placed, that the Sisters are well able for such responsibilities and decisions.

Nearly all these points are tempered in Urban's Rule although they are present in essence. It is as if he recognized the essential elements of Clare's charism, but found the sheer simplicity and trust of it too much for his prudent and cautious mind. It has been a loss to the Order that within eleven years of Clare's death we were pointed back towards the more traditional monastic authority structures, towards patterns of life which placed greater reliance on hierarchy, division of responsibility, and confirmation from above. In the process, we lost some of the full force of Clare's total confidence in her community, her complete love and respect for the gifts and ability of each Sister. So we find, for instance, that Urban is not happy with a situation in which the Sisters simply choose their Abbess. He requires the Cardinal Protector of the Order (or his delegate) to confirm the Abbess in office, as indeed does Colette. Today, too, it is true that the Bishop or religious Superior will often say something like: I confirm you in office; but it is clear from Article 235 that the General Constitutions follow Clare, saying unambiguously that that Sister is Abbess who has received the votes and is to be proclaimed as such by the President. In this situation he is to proclaim—*proclametur*—whereas Urban speaks of confirmation—*confirmatio*. Clare is really asking simply for encouragement in unanimity.

Confession of Faults

The area in which Clare's gentle but resilient spirit seems most to have been overlaid is in that of the admission of faults at Chapter. Urban says that the Sisters are gathered together in order to be admonished, that the Abbess is to correct, order, and reform them. He provides no forum for the Abbess to acknowledge her own offenses and negligences. The actual wording of Colette's Constitutions is a little ambiguous here, but the inference seems to be that the Abbess (or her Vicar) impose penances on them, . . . admonish and reprehend them (107). The Sisters receive these admonitions with humility and perform them devoutly.

Clare sees the confession of faults as almost a preliminary rite to restore harmony, analogous to the confession and absolution at the beginning of Mass. By acknowledging failure and asking forgiveness, we clear away anything which might hinder us from listening together to the Spirit speaking to the Community. Time and again, what comes through to us is the high spirituality both of Clare's ideals and her daily practice—for no one doubts that what she has given us in the Rule is a description of the way she and her Sisters at San Damiano tried to live. For us today there is a double task. We need to steep our spirits in the wine of San Damiano. We need to learn how to drink that wine today and share it with the coming century.

The research being done into the social situation of medieval Italy, into the Beguines, into the movements of poverty and the new forms of women's religious life at the time of Francis and Clare, coupled with the insights of Vatican II, the clear enunciation of the great principles of subsidiarity (that nothing pass to a higher level of authority which can be done at a lower level), and *epikeia* (that the law be interpreted according to the mind of the legislator)—all these things are of inestimable value to us. They offer us a unique opportunity to respond to the vision of Clare in a way which is wholly true to her and wholly appropriate for our time.

One of the instruments for this task must be the general Constitutions. These blend the guidelines of Clare with the historical developments of the last 750 years. Like any synthesis, the Constitutions are threadbare in places, but because of their fidelity to Francis and Clare's most cherished principle of consultation, they offer an instrument of resolution for most (not all) dilemmas. This enables the community to do what Clare would have wanted us to do—to listen, talk, and work together as we seek to resolve and to synthesize. Synthesis is essential with regard to the Constitutions because there is little doubt that there are two strands within them, almost two schools of thought. Clare's guidelines are honored but we must decide for ourselves how we shall

implement the directives and resolve the contradictions, real or apparent. Hence we are told:

All points of the Rule are to be understood and applied according to the mind of St. Francis and St. Clare, in the light of the understanding and interpretation given by the Church and in the way in which they are set out and clarified in these Constitutions (Art: 15.3).

This is a key article, offering the only acceptable basis upon which we can put together pairs of articles which could seem contradictory or even mutually exclusive. True fidelity, we are told, is brought about by

our sharing together as Sisters, by meetings of the conventual Chapter, by meetings of the whole family (i.e. the Order) or by meetings specifically for the renewal of life (Art: 21.3).

This is a strong hint that renewal and vitality must spring from the roots of community. The Chapter is an instrument of life for a Community, the prime means to articulate and implement our Gospel calling and the ideals of Francis and Clare. "Chapters are of particular importance for the organization, renewal, and development of our life (Art: 221), which covers just about everything. It also frees the Abbess from the impossible responsibility of being the sole source of renewal and inspiration, the only organizer. In this way the Abbess will not carry the whole responsibility on her own (Art: 221), and the Abbess and the Sisters should try to forestall any harm to the Community (Art: 105.3) because we have a debt to all humanity (Art: 89.3) and that debt is that we show

a diversity of members who are continually growing into that unity of spirit which is brought about in them by love (Art: 88).

Endnote

¹Cf. *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1993), n. a, p. 70.

The true Friar Minor and the true Poor Clare is often someone hidden in our midst, not notable in any way, and therefore one who receives the Lord's revelations
(*Frances Teresa, OSC, p. 157*).

Catholic and Anglican: Two Expressions of St. Clare

Paul Gerrard

Introduction

In October 1994 I was lucky enough to attend the Mass in Westminster Cathedral, London, which marked the end of the Year of St. Clare. As a Franciscan historian it was wonderful to see all members of the family of St. Francis—friars, Poor Clares, and tertiaries—together to celebrate St. Clare. Indeed, for someone with a special interest in the Poor Clares, it was a once-in-a-lifetime day when sisters from several communities left their enclosure to gather around their foundress.

Among the sisters was a group from Freeland, Oxfordshire, who were indistinguishable from the others. However, this group was different in one way—they were from the Anglican Community of St. Clare which was founded in 1950. They form the contemplative branch of the Anglican Society of St. Francis. The Freeland sisters are different by their very institutional foundation.

The aim of this article is to look at the way in which Freeland differs from, and is similar to, one particular Roman Catholic Poor Clare house, Arundel in Sussex². In many ways the two houses exemplify the gains and problems that have been experienced in the Anglican-Roman Catholic ecumenical dialogue³. The roots of both houses pre-date the sixteenth century, and their lives are still influenced by the events of that period. However, this article will be looking at the institutional structures of the communities and will not seek to discuss or examine the theological issues that surround the ecumenical debate.

Arundel

The Poor Clare Convent at Arundel was founded in September 1886 from the house in Notting Hill, London, which itself had been founded from Bruges in 1855. The Notting Hill Poor Clares had been invited by Flora, duchess of

Norfolk, to found a new community in Arundel. The young duchess had sold some of her jewels to finance the construction of the new convent on land given by her husband, Henry, fifteenth Duke of Norfolk. Indeed, it was the duchess who handed over the keys of the enclosure to the new abbess, Mother Agnes Gasquet, after the enclosure ceremony on September 7, 1886⁴.

Beginnings were difficult. The local society had to get used to the needs of a mendicant community, and two sisters died in 1900 from consumption. Nevertheless, the Arundel community flourished, celebrating its centenary in 1986 with a community numbering forty-two sisters. There are fewer now, partly due to the foundation of a community in Myanga, Kenya, in the summer of 1992. Arundel itself has a tradition of becoming a second home for many Poor Clares who have come from other houses such as Leyland, Liberton, Sclerder, and Ellesmere. However, by far the biggest addition to Arundel's numbers came in March 1972 when the enclosed, third order regular community of Goodings amalgamated. This house had recently celebrated the 350th anniversary of its foundation in penal times in the Low Countries in 1621. Arundel is a community with a long history and also a great many different experiences of Poor Clare life. Furthermore, the foundation made by the community in Kenya has brought a great many new experiences and insights.

Freeland

In contrast to Arundel's relatively long history, the Anglican community of Freeland was founded only in 1950, although its roots lie in the revival of Franciscanism at the end of the nineteenth century. Barrie Williams gives an excellent account of the many different Franciscan orders that sprang up in the Church of England in the late 1800s and early 1900s⁵. The Freeland community is the contemplative branch of the Society of St. Francis (S.S.F.), founded in 1936 when the Brotherhood of St. Francis and the Brotherhood of the Love of God joined under the inspiration of Father Algy Robertson. The union of these two societies was announced in the Quarterly of the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross when the new society indicated their "hope that a new second order, for women, will come into being."

In fact the second order of the S.S.F. did not come into being until 1950, although preparations for it had been in progress for several years. Once again the inspiration was Father Algy, who encouraged five ladies to test their religious vocations. They became, on March 15, 1943, the Oblates of St. Clare. This group, with some additions and losses, found its way via Wantage and Cassington to the Cistercian-influenced community of Ty Mawr in Monmouth in January 1947. Of this group only three became religious novices in September 1947, but they were joined by two more novices in April 1948. These five sisters moved from Ty Mawr to St. Mary's Convent, Freeland, in January 1950. The two senior novices took their first vows on February 6 in the presence of

the abbess from Ty Mawr and Father Algy. The community of Ty Mawr, which had so helped the nascent community of St. Clare, continued to give assistance until the autumn of 1952 when the sisters elected their first abbess, Sister Elizabeth, who had been one of the earliest Oblates. With Father Algy once again present, she was installed as abbess on October 2, 1952. The Community of St. Clare was thus established as the second, contemplative order of the S.S.F.

Comparisons Between Arundel and Freeland

These two communities are very similar in many respects. This is perhaps not surprising or unpredictable as the key figure for both communities is the same—Clare of Assisi—who remains the point of reference for both sets of sisters. Since the call of Vatican II to return to the sources, it is more true now of Roman Catholic Clares than it may have been in the past⁶. However, there are one or two points to observe in the relationship between each house and the figure of St. Clare.

The Anglican sisters of Freeland, having been founded in 1950 with no precedents, look directly back to St. Clare without any obstacles or accretions. Therefore, their relationship with Clare and the manner in which they are allowed to interpret her are uncluttered by any historical precedents. In contrast, the sisters at Arundel, when they look back to St. Clare, do so through the preconceptions, practices, and ideals of the centuries that make up their history—the Victorian era, the experiences of penal times, St. Colette's reforms, and the diversity of legislation of the late thirteenth century. So, in that sense, the view the Roman Catholic sisters have of St. Clare is more opaque than that of the Anglican sisters. Reflecting their longer history, the sisters of Arundel come to St. Clare with more historical and psychological baggage than their Anglican counterparts.

However, some of this historical baggage also gives the Arundel sisters a greater link to St. Clare through the presence of a continuous tradition going back to San Damiano. This became a clear reality to two Arundel sisters who attended a conference of French abbesses. Among the houses represented there were several who were able to trace their history back to Clare's time, including Marseille, which is reputed to have been founded by Clare's own natural sister, Beatrice. These communities have an almost unbroken history going back to their foundation in Clare's time; and, although some were split up during the French revolution, they came back together when allowed to and resumed their community life as before. The Roman Catholic sisters can, therefore, not only tap into this history and tradition, but are indeed a part of it in a way that the Anglican sisters, in their newness, cannot be.

While there are many similarities in the two communities, there are also some differences in the specifics of each one's life. These do not necessarily

reflect, however, the Roman Catholic and Anglican nature of the houses. Indeed, of the eleven Roman Catholic Poor Clare communities with which I am familiar, each is different in its interpretation. This is due to the fact that each house is autonomous. Although federations exist, the Poor Clares have no central organization which could enforce uniform observance (even if that were wanted!). Indeed the British Association of St. Clare has few, if any, executive powers and is there to foster closer links between the Poor Clares in the organization. Therefore, differences between Freeland and Arundel are by no means necessarily because of the communities' different denominational backgrounds.

Poverty

For any Franciscans the practice of religious poverty is the key element in their life, as indeed it was for St. Francis and St. Clare. Both Arundel and Freeland have a keen sense of the spirituality that lies behind the realities of Clare's poverty in the following and imitation of Christ. One sister at Arundel noted that their life of poverty has its direction "from the Gospels; likewise Christ became as nothing, gave up everything, he was totally dependent on the Father." This is mirrored at Freeland: "It is inspired by the vision of Christ." It is not surprising then that, with such a similar conception of Clare's poverty and its aims, their practice of poverty is also very similar.

Article 117.1 of the Constitutions⁷ which govern Arundel notes that in the habit and all clothes "simplicity and poverty should shine forth." The simple, poor nature of Poor Clare clothing also extends to the other material realities of their surroundings, as article 153.2 of the constitutions relates: "Churches, monasteries and their furnishings should always be in accordance with holy poverty, all lavishness and extravagance should be avoided." This theory is confirmed in the description of Arundel's chapter room as "a collection of all different types of upright chairs. We don't have a carpet on the floor and [there are] odd curtains all around the room." Simple, poor furnishings are also seen at Freeland, where a visiting African Poor Clare commented that their house was poor and simple because of its lack of adornments. Similarly the community receives many things as gifts which others would not consider. For example, one friend sends her old brown cardigans to the Freeland sisters.

This poor lifestyle has many connected reasons lying behind it. There is the financial position of the house which does not allow the sisters to be either extravagant or careless with the things they have or are given. One sister at Arundel summed up her experience when she said that it had to be seen to be believed. She said: "We don't earn enough money to pay the bills. The pensions some of us get don't fit the bill either, but we manage. . . . God provides for us." Freeland has a similar experience where they also have no set income and therefore, to most eyes, they are financially insecure. Clearly this represents a twentieth-century attempt to recreate Clare's own refusal to accept

regular income. The two lifestyles both have their roots in Clare and as such are very similar.

However, another motivating force behind this life is also revealed in the constitutions of the Catholic houses, which says that the sisters should be happy with "clothing as befits other poor people" (article 117.2). This represents a desire to ground their poverty in a greater appreciation of what poverty means on the other side of the enclosure. It is an idea that has been embraced wholeheartedly by the Arundel sisters, one of whom said that the poverty of society has "to have reality in our lives." This may not necessarily mean being more or less poor than others, but rather expressing realistically the poverty of whatever society they are living in. Therefore, one sister at Arundel describes how she now has a small transistor radio, which is something she would not have had even ten years ago; but it is in keeping with the standards of her society in England. The experience is the same for the Anglican sisters. One said that the emphasis in their poverty was now on "realism," which "is all related to a different standard of living outside."

Although both communities appreciate the need to have authentic standards of poverty that are understandable to society, both also see the need for their lives to be counter-cultural in some way. They want to be, in Thomas Merton's phrase, "marginal." Although neither community would say they set out deliberately to be witnesses, they are aware of the fact that it does happen. At times they can see themselves, inadvertently and imperfectly in their view, standing out against the consumerist society of England. One experience of the Anglican sisters is equally applicable to both communities. The guest house they have near the convent had to be inspected by the fire safety officer, but he found it impossible to categorize them as they do not charge the guests. Similarly, both houses sell craftwork; yet no one is there to check that "customers" pay the right money, if at all.

This brief survey of some of the aspects of the poverty of the two communities has been selective, but it demonstrates the way in which both communities have similar ideas and practices because they have St. Clare as their starting point.

Authority

St. Clare's Rule constructed mechanisms of authority which were unique in the legislative history of religious orders, especially in regard to the responsibility held by the body of sisters and the role of the abbess. It is quite clear in the Rule⁸ that the sisters were to hold responsibility and power within the community through the chapter, which was to "meet at least once a week" to discuss all matters regarding the "welfare and good of the monastery." Similarly, Clare states that for the most important decisions, the "common consent

of the sisters is required," such as reception of novices and the election of officers. Clare sees the body of sisters as being responsible for their own life, both in terms of the internal mechanisms and the relationships with outside superiors.

Moreover, the role of the abbess in this system is one of a sister among sisters. Clare stresses that the abbess and the vicarress are "to preserve common life in everything," a theme often repeated throughout the Rule. The fact that Clare expects the abbess to confess her faults along with her sisters at the Chapter of Faults illustrates this in a very graphic way.

It is quite clear that for Clare the executive power within the community should be held by the sisters, with the abbess being the specific sister who has been given special responsibility. The Anglican community have taken this very seriously. First, the superior is not called "abbess" but rather "mother," and she takes action only when "she is aware of the mind of the community." Furthermore, all major decisions need to be made by the chapter. When, because of expediency, decisions are made without consent of the chapter, retrospective debate must take place. One sister from Freeland summed up the sisters' role in their own destiny when she said that they have "always had a tradition of the community being responsible for its own life." Although the Mother may become, by virtue of her added responsibility, the focus of the community, the Anglican sisters try hard not to develop any "personality cult." It is clear that the Mother is working with the other members of the house, on the same level, to ensure growth. The rule of life at Freeland says that "the Mother stands in the midst of the community, not above it."

The experience of authority is the same for the sisters at Arundel, although it is possible to argue that they use even more explicit language to position the abbess as a "sister-servant." As at Freeland, the constitutions make it clear that all major issues and decisions should be dealt with in the conventual chapter, or at least the chapter must give consent to the policy adopted by the abbess. The model of government at Arundel is the abbess and the conventual chapter.

Therefore, many of the structures and mechanisms of authority in the two houses are the same or very similar because they have their mutual roots in chapter four of St. Clare's Rule. However, other factors also play their part, most crucially the influence of contemporary British society. Both houses recognize that candidates have been shaped by contemporary culture, and this in turn affects their ideas and expectations. One Freeland sister acknowledged this interplay with contemporary culture and its roots when she said: "If we are concerned with the incarnation, then we should be finding expressions that are interrelated in some way with society." However, it is the figure of St. Clare which both houses retain as their touchstone, thus giving so many similar experiences and practices. Perhaps the clearest expression of the way in

which Clare is used as a yardstick for both communities is the practice of enclosure.

Enclosure

St. Clare's own thoughts on enclosure, as expressed in chapters two and five of her Rule, represent a more humane and sensible approach to providing a suitable method of protecting a life of prayer than previous and subsequent legislation. St. Clare clearly moved the emphasis from the perpetual enclosure envisaged by the papacy⁹ and expressed in Hugolino's Constitutions of 1218-9¹⁰ to a more "sensible" form of enclosure. Whereas Hugolino had written that the sisters could leave the enclosure only to found another community (that is, leave to be enclosed somewhere else), Clare wrote that the sisters could leave for a "useful, evident and approved purpose." This was not meant to be a *carte blanche* but was intended to enable the sisters to be responsible for their own lives and decisions. In her forty years in San Damiano, Clare had learned many lessons which were laid down in her Rule. She knew the value of enclosure as a way to live out her union with Christ. It was not an end in itself.

Over the centuries, Clare's idea of enclosure was gradually blurred. Reformers seeking to bring the order back to a perceived purity and a papacy intent on controlling religious women saw enclosure as a panacea for all abuses and evils. This resulted in strict papal enclosure being enforced for all contemplative women. This not only affected the Roman Catholic sisters, but also the Anglican community. In the early 1950s, Father Algy imposed upon the community at Freeland a strict enclosure because of certain Anglican Church expectations of contemplative women. However, Vatican II questioned and legitimized debate about these assumptions and models. This allowed both Catholic and Anglican sisters to find their own expression of enclosure without the pressure of historical models and expectations. Here again, it is Clare's spirit that is the ideal.

At Arundel the old style grilles and bars were removed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Now the limits of the enclosure are noted by discreet signs, ordinary doors, and modest barriers. The most obvious, visible sign to the casual observer is in the chapel, where the sisters occupy the front two-thirds, while the laity are behind them, separated only by a small barrier. The sisters are now with the people. Enclosure is still seen as very important, however. It provides the peace and quiet necessary for prayer and, for some sisters, represents their total gift of self to God.

The current enclosure at Freeland is, like that of Arundel, marked not by grilles but by normal doors. Although the Anglican sisters have never had grilles and bars, they were originally separated from the laity, who sat in a side chapel, unable to see the sisters. The Freeland community values enclosure as "the greatest privilege" granted to the community according to the Rule, that is to

have the peace and solitude it allows.

St. Clare, in her Rule, keeps the canonical norms of grilles, bars, and locks. Therefore, in not having them, the sisters are not just looking back to St. Clare alone, but are considering a social milieu different from that of the thirteenth-century. For the point of this paper, this matters little, as the culture of British society is a norm for both houses (although it is worth noting that some British Catholics feel enclosure means grilles and locks). Nevertheless, for most British people, the sight of grilles and bars does not represent a life of free dedication to and in God, but rather imprisonment and punishment.

Therefore, the material, overt expressions of enclosure have not been affected by St. Clare's ideals so much as by contemporary society. However, it is the spirit of St. Clare's humane intentions for enclosure that are encapsulated in the words "useful, evident, reasonable and approved." Moreover, in Clare's own life, there are times when she felt she could leave the enclosure,¹¹ implying that it was not an end in itself. It would seem that the driving forces in their expression of enclosure have been the same for both houses, that is the "tenor of the times" and the ideals and spirit of St. Clare.

Relationship with the Church

An examination of poverty, authority, and enclosure illustrates that, since the driving impulses and original models for the sisters have been the same, the resulting expressions have been very much alike. The person of St. Clare is a real figure for both communities. Access to her has been made more possible by the new scholarship which has erupted in the last fifteen years. Furthermore, the need to make St. Clare relevant to British society has also produced similar models. After all, the Anglican sisters do not deal exclusively with Anglicans, and they number among their "Associates," Jews, Catholics, and Evangelicals, just as Catholic Arundel has persons of many faiths visiting them.

It should come as no surprise that many of the internal features of the lives of Freeland and Arundel have a great similarity to one another. However, it is in the external relationships of the two houses that we can see differences both in the way the communities see themselves and in how others see them. A sense of their mission in the Church and the external mechanisms of authority illustrate the differing natures of each house.

It is quite clear that the Roman Catholic sisters at Arundel have a distinct perception both of their own mission and of their position within the structures of the Church. One sister said that they are "acknowledged as having a structural part of the Church and are a visible part of the whole shop." Article 160.2 of the new constitutions states that the contemplative life of the sisters is at the very heart of the Church and of the mystical body of Christ. The Church understands, as do the sisters, their role and mission in the Church's life. According to *Perfectae Caritatis*, contemplatives "offer God an exceptional sacri-

ifice of praise, lend luster to God's people with abundant fruits of holiness, sway them by example, and enlarge the Church by their hidden apostolic fruitfulness."¹² This four-fold mission of glorification, adornment, witness, and prayer is understood by the sisters and has been given a definite position within the Church by *Mutuae Relationes*, the papal decree on relations between religious and diocesan authorities.¹³ The bishops are to make contemplative communities centers of spirituality for the diocese in which they are located.

Arundel has followed this program by involving the laity more in the liturgy of the community and by being a base for meetings and a center for several prayer groups. Indeed, this is a role the community is happy to have. One sister says that now there is a "lot more personal contact, interaction with people, and sharing our life." Arundel is trying to find new ways to become more of a "center of spirituality" and is able to define its place with some clarity. One sister defined the place of the Clares within the Church as "in the middle, somewhere to do with the heart of it and the prayer of it and the general spirituality." While some members of the hierarchy do not understand or appreciate the life of the sisters, the majority appreciate it as a good in itself. One sister felt that the hierarchy "tend to have this idea that the contemplative life is a great thing and it is a wonderful thing to have in your diocese, although they don't often know what to do with us when they have got us." This seems to be changing, however. One bishop said that he is beginning to learn about the religious life in a way which would enable him to use contemplatives more actively. It would seem that the Poor Clares, the hierarchy, and the laity are gaining an understanding of the value of the contemplative life to differing degrees and that the contemplative life has a definite place in the Church.

In contrast, the Anglican sisters at Freeland, although acutely aware of their Franciscan mission, seem not to be as certain of their place in the Church. The sisters are keenly aware of the Franciscan value of a literal and visible living out of the Gospel life. One sister said that their mission "was living out the Gospel in daily life." Although the legislation speaks of all the elements of the four-fold mission clearly enunciated in the Roman Catholic constitutions, there seems not to be the same clarity of vision or firmness of conviction. That is not to say that the Anglican sisters lack any of the dedication of their Catholic counterparts, but rather that the Church's theology does not seem to give them the same level of support. For example, the Freeland Rule says that "our aim is that God be glorified," mirroring the Catholic words of *Perfectae Caritatis*, "exceptional sacrifice of praise." However, although this is repeated in the Freeland Rule, particularly when talking about the Eucharist, it is not as explicit as other Catholic legislation. The difference would appear to be a lack of explicitness in the definition of the Anglican sisters' role. Furthermore, the first reaction of many Anglicans is: "Oh! I didn't know we had contemplative nuns!"

Clearly many members of the Anglican laity and hierarchy do appreciate the sisters' lives and have been in contact for many years—the sisters' mailing list runs to over one thousand people. However, the Freeland community does not seem to have as clear a role as that given in *Mutuae Relationes* to Roman Catholic communities like Arundel. One Anglican sister feels that they "provide a place a lot of people can look to, an oasis." This role has neither a definite nor a recognized character in the Church.

The problem for the Freeland sisters is that contemplative religious life is a relatively new idea in the Church of England. Their position and role is still being worked out. In some ways it lends a very Franciscan experience of insecurity to their life, but at the same time, it is in sharp contrast to the Arundel sisters.

This difference is also reflected in the lines of authority that are present for both houses above the person of the religious superior—the Abbess at Arundel and the Mother at Freeland. For the Anglican sisters, the only authority above the superior is the bishop-protector, who has the final executive voice for any major decisions. In his role as protector, the bishop can make a canonical visitation of the house to check discipline and other matters. In addition, Freeland, like other Anglican religious communities, has access to the Advisory Council for Religious Communities, although, as its name implies, it only has an advisory capacity. Therefore, above the superior there is only the bishop-protector. Above this figure there is no one; indeed there is no canon law in the church of England that refers to religious communities.

In contrast, above the religious superior at Arundel, there is a dual line of authority. First, there is the diocesan authority which goes through the vicar for religious to the bishop himself. In addition to this line, and independent of it, is the quasi-authority of the Franciscan friars who deal with matters pertaining to the sisters' lives through the "Pro Monialibus" office.¹⁴ Both lines of authority ultimately end with the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in Rome (SCRIS).

What is the result of these two, contrasting lines of authority for each community? We have seen that the Anglican sisters experience a less definite role, whereas the Catholic sisters are more restricted and less autonomous. Certainly, Arundel is governed in many ways by the decisions of SCRIS and, therefore, by people who may not appreciate the realities of living out Clare's own ideals in twentieth-century England. For example, the norms governing enclosure laid down in the decree *Venite Seorsum* have little relation to the needs of the sisters themselves.¹⁵ Some of the Arundel sisters appear to be getting more and more exasperated. One sister summed this up neatly when she said: "For heaven's sake, we are a serious group of committed women doing this because we are called to it not because we have to, so why can't we make our own decisions?" Another said: "We are all tied up in canon law and

haven't got the freedom for initiatives and experiments and we haven't got the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them."

In contrast, the Anglican sisters, in accordance with Clare's own recognition that the sisters themselves are capable of making decisions concerning their own life, are free to express their following of St. Clare in a way which is wholly appropriate to their community and to their experience. Therefore, when the Freeland sisters want to change one element of their life, they discuss the issue, make a decision, and apply for approval from the bishop-protector. They are clearly more free to run their own lives than their Catholic sisters, who can do so only up to a point.

Therefore, issues of mission, position, and authority are all intertwined for the houses of Freeland and Arundel, and there are gains and losses for both. On the one hand, the Roman Catholic sisters have a defined, recognized position within the Church, but at the expense of a certain amount of freedom to exercise their own mature judgments about their life. On the other hand, the Anglican sisters have the freedom to live out St. Clare's ideals and inspiration as responsible, mature women in ways that they see appropriate. However, they have this freedom because the Church of England is still developing its ideas on the religious life. The sisters have a less structured place within the Church.

Conclusion

What can we say in conclusion about these two examples? First, it is quite clear that internally there is little difference. Behind the similarities lies the figure of St. Clare. Second, the differences between the two houses are in the structures that surround them in the respective Churches.

What in turn does this tell us about the ecumenical process and, in particular, the Anglican-Roman Catholic debate? There is clear evidence that in figures that pre-date the Reformation (in this case Clare and in a wider context Christ), there is real hope for close cooperation and union among the Christian Churches. As to structures and positions in the Church, we can see, perhaps, some solutions and ways forward. Arundel would like some of Freeland's legislative freedom but not at the expense of its defined role and position. Conversely, Freeland wants to keep its freedom, but at the same time could benefit from a more explicit affirmation of its place and role. Therefore, if both move towards one another, not compromising, but using the other's experience to benefit themselves, they could create a life which would be better suited to their needs and at the same time closer to one another.

Finally, and more personally, in the lives lived at Arundel and Freeland, there are real and genuine presentations of the ideals of St. Clare in the twentieth century. These lives are influenced not by any denominational origin, but by truly Franciscan values.

¹This article was originally presented as the closing paper of the Catholic Record Society Summer Conference 1995, 31 July-3 August, held at Plater College, Oxford.

²The author is indebted to the kindness and generosity of the communities of Arundel and Freeland without whose help this article could not have been written. Special thanks go to Sister Gillian Clare, C.S.Cl., at Freeland, and Sister Frances Teresa, O.S.C., at Arundel. The conclusions and observations of this article are those of the author having spoken to Poor Clares at the Arundel and Freeland communities, but do not represent the views of those houses.

³The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report: Windsor, September 1981* (London, 1982).

⁴*The Arundel Poor Clares: Notes on the First Hundred Years* (Crossbush, 1986).

⁵Barrie Williams, *The Franciscan Revival in the Anglican Communion* (London, 1982).

⁶See Paul Gerrard, "Clare of Assisi and the Poor Clares: A New Spring," in *The Church Retrospective, Studies in Church History*, 33, ed. R. N. Swanson (forthcoming).

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⁸"The Rule of St Clare (1253)," in *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. and trans. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap. (New York, 1988), 60-77.

⁹See Brenda M. Bolton, "Daughters of Rome: All one in Christ Jesus!" in *Women in the Church, Studies in Church History*, 27, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford, 1990), 101-15, and Brenda M. Bolton and Paul Gerrard, "Clare in Her Own Time," in *Contemporary Reflections on the Spirituality of St Clare (The Way Supplement, 80)* (London, 1994), 42-50.

¹⁰"The Constitutions of Cardinal Hugolino (1218-9)," in *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. and trans. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap. (New York, 1988), 87-96.

¹¹Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, trans. Sister Frances Teresa, O.S.C. (London, 1993), 88-91.

¹²"Perfectae Caritatis" (28/10/1963), 7, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Dublin, 1992), 625.

¹³"Mutuae Relationes" (23/4/1978), in *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Dublin, 1992), 209-43.

¹⁴The fact that the friars deal with those matters concerning the Poor Clares gives them some authority; if not *de iure* then *de facto*.

¹⁵"Venite Seorsum" (15/8/1969), VII:1-17, in *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Dublin, 1992), 671-5.

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(TextC1 6).



Sister Clare Ellen, OSC

Clare of Assisi and Angela of Foligno

Carla Salvati

Introduction

Clare of Assisi left 'the world' for what would become a cloistered life. But 'the world's' most intimate relationships followed her into the cloister when her sisters and mother joined her. Angela of Foligno never left 'the world'—but she 'prayed away' its most powerful bonds, she prayed for the death of her mother, husband, and children—and her prayers were answered. Both women dedicated themselves to Christ in a full and impassioned way. These biographical details are telling of the conditions in which they created interior space for a fuller relationship with Christ. Relationship, human and divine, was central for both Clare and Angela. I would like, in the following brief paper, to explore aspects of the spiritual journeys of these two extraordinary women, medieval mystics and exemplars, seen from the perspective of their relationships, both human and divine.

Clare of Assisi

Clare of Assisi was holy from her childhood, predestined for sainthood—this according to her hagiographer. A *topos* undoubtedly, but there is reason to believe that Clare was just the devout young woman Celano described. Ioanni de Ventura, a house watchman in Clare's household and witness at her process of canonization, declared that even as a child Clare saved food to give to the poor. She wore a "rough garment" under her clothes and "fasted, prayed, and did other pious deeds, as he had seen; and that it was believed she had been inspired by the Holy Spirit from the beginning" (Proc 20:5).¹ This portrait of Clare is reinforced by glimpses of the character of her mother, Ortulana. Ortulana was a very devout woman, as Ingrid Peterson points out, "Ortulana's religious journeys to Rome, Jerusalem, and Saint Michael's in Monte Gargano

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Clare of Assisi

Clare of Assisi was holy from her childhood, predestined for sainthood—this according to her hagiographer. A *topos* undoubtedly, but there is reason to believe that Clare was just the devout young woman Celano described. Ioann de Ventura, a house watchman in Clare's household and witness at her process of canonization, declared that even as a child Clare saved food to give to the poor. She wore a "rough garment" under her clothes and "fasted, prayed, and did other pious deeds, as he had seen; and that it was believed she had been inspired by the Holy Spirit from the beginning" (Proc 20:5).¹ This portrait of Clare is reinforced by glimpses of the character of her mother, Ortulana. Ortulana was a very devout woman, as Ingrid Peterson points out, "Ortulana's religious journeys to Rome, Jerusalem, and Saint Michael's in Monte Gargano

indicate that she was not an ordinary woman of her culture."² Ortulana's strength of character and the inspirational example of her devotional life undoubtedly nurtured and guided her daughter's spiritual development.

Clare's encounter with Francis, was not a conversion so much as a decisive event in a spiritual journey that was well underway before meeting him. As Clare's sister Beatrice bears witness: "Francis heard of the fame of her holiness" before going to preach to her (Proc 12:2). Evelyn Underhill says that the saints ". . . possess the power of stinging to activity the dormant spark in the souls of those whom they meet."³ In the case of Clare and Francis, the concrete *example* of his life sparked in Clare the vision of how to move forward in her own journey. Francis's preaching was the impetus for her to seek out a new form of service to God with Francis as her guide. Celano says: "She committed herself thoroughly to the counsel of Francis, placing him, after God, as the guide of her journey" (CL 6). Clare's spiritual development was a steady growth, built on a firm foundation. The drama and romance of her stealing out into the night to receive the tonsure from Francis belies the idea that this was an impetuous act of an impressionable young woman. It was a firm decision that followed as a natural progression of someone who already had 'inner formation' and trusted the leanings of her heart and soul.

Angela of Foligno

Angela's conversion, on the other hand, was a *break* with her past. While still living with her husband, she felt an inner transformation that led her to "put aside [her] best garments, fine food, and fancy headdress."⁴ Angela was not supported through her conversion; she speaks of "slanders and injustices" leveled against her, of the death of her mother, who had been "a great obstacle" to her. Angela says: "In like manner my husband died, as did all my sons in a short space of time. Because I had already entered the aforesaid way and had prayed to God for their death, I felt a great consolation when it happened."⁵

Is Angela's coldness in relating the death of her family a *topos*? Is her scribe creating the impression of monastic detachment to the links with the world to justify the exemplarity of a lay widow? As Lilia Sebastiani points out, Angela's lack of sentiment with regard to these untimely deaths seems shocking given her extremely passionate nature.⁶ Her startling statements are followed by the following: "I thought that since God had conceded to me this aforesaid favor, my heart would always be within God's heart and God's heart always within mine."⁷ For Angela, a *break* with intimate human relationships was necessary to create the inner space for union with God.

At a later point in the *Memorial* Angela does lament the death of her loved

ones, speaking of "the pain and sorrow I had felt over the death of my mother and my sons. . . ."⁸ She does not mention her husband. While it is risky to construct psychological portraits based on very scant *hagiographic* evidence, there are indications that Angela felt let down by some of her deepest human relationships. Unlike Clare, her decision to transform her life was not a natural development from her past, but a rupture—a venturing into the unknown—that began with the void left by the death of everyone she was most deeply attached to. Like Clare, her love for Christ was total; but Angela's need to *feel* Christ's love for her seemed more pronounced.

Relationship with Francis

Angela too was drawn by the example of Francis. The definitive moment of her conversion took place in Assisi ". . . when [she] saw a stained-glass window depicting St. Francis being closely held by Christ. . . ." ⁹ Angela joined the Third Order at a time when the cult of Francis dominated the spirituality of the day, a time when iconography depicted Francis as an *alter Christus*. Clare was in relationship with Francis the man, a person she advised and assisted as much as she was guided by him. Angela experienced an ecstatic moment before an icon of Christ embracing Francis—archetype of a divided Franciscan Order. It is telling that, gazing at the stained glass window, she heard Christ's voice telling her: "Thus I will hold you closely to me and much more closely than can be observed with the eyes of the body."¹⁰ Angela imaginatively *substituted* herself for Francis in Christ's arms—a bold transposition for a lay woman, considering the image reflected Francis as an *alter Christus*. Angela's impulse was clear from the outset—unmediated union with the divine. Even her saintly human exemplar was superseded. She is content only when she can say that nothing is between her and God—*nihil erat medium inter me et ipsum (Deum)*.¹¹

Mystics

Both Clare and Angela were mystics—their lives guided and shaped by a deep connection with divine presence. Evelyn Underhill says that with Francis "mysticism comes into the open air, seeks to *transform the stuff of daily life*, speaks the vernacular, turns the songs of the troubadours to the purposes of Divine Love. . . ." ¹² This description also captures the mysticism of Clare and Angela, who were not mystical philosophers, but indeed used the material of their daily lives and emotions to express their union with Christ.

With Clare this was reflected in the quality of her daily relationships. In a chapter entitled "Her Great Charity Toward Her Sisters" Celano tells us:

Frequently, in the cold of night, she covered them with her own hands while they were sleeping. She wished that those whom she perceived unable to observe the common rigor be content to govern themselves with gentleness. If a temptation disturbed someone, as is natural, she called her in secret and consoled her with tears. Sometimes she would place herself at the feet of the depressed [sister] so that she might relieve the force of [her] sadness with her motherly caresses (CL 38).

This portrait (corroborated by witnesses at the process of canonization) of Clare's care for her sisters—of tender, gentle, discreet, compassionate, consoling love—is that much more significant given that she was fully aware of the *exemplary* power of her actions. The actions speak not only of Clare's personal capacity for love, they express her vision of what human relationships, rooted in Christ, look like. Clare says in her *Testament*: "Loving one another with the charity of Christ, let the love you have in your hearts be shown outwardly in your deeds so that, compelled by such an example, the sisters may always grow in love of God and in charity for one another" (TestCl 18). Love of God and of one another are inextricably linked. Love itself, *the loving deed*, is exemplary for Clare. Confidence, trust, attentiveness to one another, these are the qualities that Clare encouraged in her sisters. Her vision of cloistered community had none of the emotional austerity associated with such a disciplined life in later centuries. Temptations were not shameful in Clare's community, they were "natural"; the action taken by a superior—compassionate tears.

Angela's mystical relationship with Christ was also marked by very human expressions of love, a tenderness which is striking in its *reciprocity*. Christ says to Angela: "You are very much loved by me; much more than you could love me."¹³ "I love you so much more than any other woman in the valley of Spoleto."¹⁴ "I will hold you more closely to me than can be observed with the eyes of the body."¹⁵ "Your whole life is pleasing to me."¹⁶ When Angela asks Christ why he so loves a sinner, he answers: "Such is the love that I have deposited in you that I am totally unable to remember your faults; my eyes do not see them. In you I have deposited a great treasure."¹⁷ And, in Angela's experience, Christ desired to *be* loved by her—"I want you to hunger for me, desire me and languish for me."¹⁸ Angela's *Memorial* is astounding in its testimony of God's preferential love for a *lay* woman—and His desire to *be* loved by her.

Angela loved Christ with all the passion of human love. Meditating on the fact that Christ had died for our sins set her so afire that she says: "Standing near the cross I stripped myself of all my clothing and offered my whole self to him. Although very fearful, I promised him then to maintain perpetual chastity and not to offend him again with any of my bodily members, accusing

each one of these one by one."¹⁹ Angela's gesture reveals her passionate daring. Caroline Bynum believes that the incident reflects shame over sex in marriage.²⁰ But Angela's nudity was not only occasion for self-accusation but also for *intimacy* with Christ. The scene has an erotically ambiguous quality not reducible to shame. Angela *offers* her nude body, her whole self, to Christ, and the singling out of each part of her naked body reflects not only the shame but the boldness of a sexually experienced woman.

Visionary Experiences

What do we make of the visionary experiences of mystics, the images they see, voices they hear? Evelyn Underhill suggests that we approach mystical phenomena as "forms of symbolic expression, ways in which the subconscious activity of the spiritual self reaches the surface-mind."²¹ Whether or not Angela actually heard Christ's words of love, there is no doubt that she *felt* deeply loved by him, that her relationship with the divine was neither remote nor forbidding, but affirming in ways human love can only aspire to be.

The sources give us fewer glimpses of Clare's visionary experiences. But the few that we do have reveal that Clare too felt an intimate, human love for Christ. "Very frequently while she was prostrate on her face in prayer, she flooded the ground with tears and caressed it with kisses, so that she might always seem to have her Jesus in her hands, on whose feet her tears flowed and her kisses were impressed" (CL 19). However the sources don't dwell on this aspect of Clare's spirituality. Celano even omits from his biography an unusual vision Clare had of Francis, which the Process of Canonization recounts:

Lady Clare also related how once, in a vision, it seemed to her she brought a bowl of hot water to Saint Francis along with a towel for drying his hands. She was climbing a very high stairway, but was going very quickly, almost as though she were going on level ground. When she reached Saint Francis, the saint bared his breast and said to the Lady Clare: "Come, take and drink." After she had sucked from it, the saint admonished her to imbibe once again. After she did so what she had tasted was so sweet and delightful she in no way could describe it.

After she had imbibed, that nipple or opening of the breast from which the milk came remained between the lips of blessed Clare. After she took what remained in her mouth in her hands, it seemed to her it was gold so clear and bright that everything was seen in it as in a mirror (Proc 3:29).

In "Una Visione di S. Chiara,"²² Marco Bartoli's gives an extensive analysis of Clare's vision and comments that Clare's love for Francis, "L'amore tutto

umano di Chiara per Francesco . . . ,”²³ helped her to escape the excesses of ecstatic exaltation characteristic of other women mystics, referring specifically to Angela. Clare’s vision of Francis does indeed reveal the depth of her bond with him—the extent to which a human relationship was the source of much spiritual nourishment. As to Angela’s ecstasies being excessive, I suspect that Clare was capable of equal excess. She was capable of being absorbed in contemplation for days when she would remain “out of her senses” (CL 31). When awakened from her trance by one of the sisters, she exclaimed: “May that vision be blessed, most dear daughter! Because after having desired it so long, it has been given to me. But, be careful *not to tell anyone* about that vision while I am still in the flesh” (CL 31).

Celano tells us Clare *secretly received divine whispers* (CL 31). The interior life and visionary experiences so central in Angela’s testimony do not receive the same attention in Clare. This is partly explained by hagiographic focus, which in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries gradually shifted away from a saint’s exterior behavior to her subjective, interior experience.²⁴ But in the case of Clare and Angela, I believe the sources reflect actual differences between them. Mystical experience became Angela’s *raison d’être*; for Clare it was the *secret* that fueled her vision of community.

Experiences of Desolation

We have noted that Angela’s *Memorial* describes a relationship with the divine that is almost unimaginably direct and deeply affirming to the point of Christ telling Angela: “My daughter, you are sweeter to me than I am to you.”²⁵ But why did Angela so often feel such desolation? With her graphically visual imagination, Angela compares her afflictions to “a man hanged by the neck who, with his hands tied behind him and his eyes blindfolded, remains dangling on the gallows and yet lives, with no help, no support, no remedy, swinging in the empty air.”²⁶ She says elsewhere: “I entertain the conviction that there never was any virtue in me. . . . [I am] full of anger, sadness, bitterness, conceit, and affliction.”²⁷ Angela felt such desolation that “. . . even if God were to speak to me . . . I would draw no consolation or healing from it.”²⁸ In sharp contrast to this, Clare’s sisters tell us that “she was always rejoicing in the Lord, was never seen disturbed.” She “. . . showed spiritual joy with her sisters. She was never upset” (Proc 3:6).

Clare responded to the affliction of her sisters in this way: “If Lady Clare ever saw any of the sisters suffering some temptation or trial, she called her secretly and consoled her with tears, and sometimes threw herself at her feet” (Proc 10:5). Would Angela have felt the desolation of God’s (apparent) absence if she had experienced the human consolation present in the cloister at

San Damiano, if she had had Clare to console her with her tears? Angela ventured fearlessly into intimacy with the divine. Is it perilous to leave human consolation behind? Was it Clare’s vision of divine and human love as grounded and mirrored in each other that kept her so constant and peaceful on her path?

Attitude Towards Suffering

But then desolation and suffering had acquired a new significance by the time Angela wrote her *Memorial*. Much attention has been paid to medieval women’s fierce ascetic practices often repulsive to modern sensibilities. Here too we can note a difference between Clare and Angela. Celano tells us that Clare performed even the humblest duties for her sisters: “She herself washed the mattresses of the sick; she herself, with that noble spirit of hers, cleansed them, not running away from their filth nor shrinking from their stench” (CL 12). Clare embraced tasks that were disgusting—but absolutely necessary. Angela also performed difficult acts of charity in her care of lepers but the following passage from the *Memorial* speaks of a different relationship to suffering:

And after we had distributed all that we had, we washed the feet of the women and the hands of the men, and especially those of one of the lepers which were festering and in an advanced stage of decomposition. Then we drank the very water with which we had washed him, and the drink was so sweet that, all the way home, we tasted its sweetness and it was as if we had received Holy Communion. As a small scale of the leper’s sores was stuck in my throat, I tried to swallow it. My conscience would not let me spit it out, just as if I had received Holy Communion. I really did not want to spit it out but simply to detach it from my throat.²⁹

Angela goes beyond the necessary and the charitable; suffering is ingested—literally internalized—as the leper’s scale becomes a *Eucharistic symbol* of Christ’s broken body on the Cross.

Personal Asceticism

Clare was fiercely ascetic, extreme in her fasting, while preaching moderation to her sisters. Evelyn Underhill, speaking of the mystic’s self-purification says: “Man has built up for himself a false universe: as a mollusk, by the deliberate and persistent absorption of lime . . . can build up for itself a hard shell.”³⁰ Self-purification is the breaking open of these shells to contact “the tides of the Eternal Sea.”³¹ Clare’s thirteenth-century hagiographer echoes Underhill closely when he says that Clare “broke open the alabaster jar of her

body by the scourgings of her discipline so that the house of the Church would be filled with the fragrance of her ointments" (CL 10). While it is wise to doubt male clerics' views of female asceticism, I suspect in this case Celano was closer to expressing Clare's own intent than any suggestion that her severe fasting was internalized misogyny. There is no reason to doubt that Clare was in complete control of her fasting; she *chose* to fast as she did, to embrace the Cross and its salvific power to the very limits of her being.

Angela's asceticism was as harsh as Clare's, but she attributed a different meaning to it. The *Memorial* expresses a shift in perspective with regards to the role of suffering in relationship with God. For Clare, as for Francis, one suffered with Christ—it was an offering from humanity to God, the gift that was "perfect joy." For Angela suffering was a gift *from* God. God says to her: "And to those who are, strictly speaking, his sons, God permits great tribulations which *he grants to them as a special grace* so that they might eat with him from the same plate."³² "I deposit in you a love of me so great that your soul will be continually burning for me. So ardent will be this love that if anyone should speak to you offensively, *you will take it as a grace* and cry out that you are unworthy of such a grace."³³ "This bed [the cross] is my bed to rest on because on it Christ was born, lived and died. Even before man sinned *God the Father loved this bed and its company (poverty, suffering, and contempt)* so much so that he granted it to his son"³⁴

Influence of the Stigmata

Is it possible that the perception of suffering as gift from God developed in part from meditation on the Stigmata of Francis? Bonaventure described the Stigmata as Christ piercing Francis's flesh with the wounds of the Passion because of Francis's compassionate love for the Crucified. Mystical union, sealed by the physical sign of Stigmata—the gift of pain—became, through Bonaventure, *the* Franciscan *exemplum* made even more explicit and central in the *exemplum* of Angela.

Conclusion

Clare of Assisi and Angela of Foligno were extraordinary women, mystics and Christian exemplars. They "followed" Francis only to the extent of creating *their own* footprints behind him. Both women had extraordinary confidence in their experience of the divine and from this confidence created powerful models of holiness that came to be accepted, despite their originality, by ecclesial authority. In Angela's case, confidence in her *experience* of God went so far as saying: "I understood that all those things which have been said in the

Scriptures . . . do not seem to express anything of its innermost meaning, not even to the extent of a grain of sand compared to the whole world."³⁵ And Clare stood firm, even against the power of several popes, remaining faithful to her vision of poverty. Juxtaposed, their stories reveal an interesting paradox—it was the woman in the cloister who expressed her love for Christ through human relationships and the woman in the world who desired freedom from human intimacy for exclusivity with God.

Endnotes

¹References to Clare sources are from *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap. (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

²Ingrid J. Peterson, *Clare of Assisi a Biographical Study* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 49.

³Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1913), 111.

⁴*Angela of Foligno Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 126.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See Lilia Sebastiani, "La Beata Angela da Foligno," *Santità e Agiografia* (Genova, 1991), 203.

⁷*Angela of Foligno Complete Works*, 126.

⁸Ibid., 143.

⁹Ibid., 141.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹*Il Libro della Beata Angela da Foligno*, Thier Calufetti, critical edition (1985).

¹²Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen, 1949), 460-461.

¹³*Angela of Foligno Complete Works*, 140.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 141.

¹⁶Ibid., 142.

¹⁷Ibid., 152.

¹⁸Ibid., 153.

¹⁹Ibid., 126.

²⁰Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 206.

²¹Underhill, *Mysticism*, 271.

²²See Marco Bartoli, "Analisi Storica e interpretazione psicanalitica di una visione di S. Chiara d'Assisi," *Archivium Franciscanum Historicum*, (Rome, 1980), for an extensive analysis of this vision from both the psychoanalytic and historical-symbolic perspectives.

²³Ibid., 472.

²⁴See Peter Dinzelbacher, "Movimento religioso femminile e santità mistica nello specchio della *Legenda sanctae clarae*," *Chiara di Assisi, Atti del XX Convegno Internazionale*, Spoleto, 1992.

²⁵*Angela of Foligno, Complete Works*, 143.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 197.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 201.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, 163.

³⁰Underhill, *Mysticism*, 198-199.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Angela of Foligno, Complete Works*, 161.

³³*Ibid.*, 150

³⁴*Ibid.*, 206

³⁵*Angela of Foligno, Complete Works*, 192.

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Praying with Clare of Assisi

Marie Beha, OSC

How did the saints pray? Not as I pray, of that I am sure. I let my imagination run with the question. Undoubtedly they went to prayer eager to be there; once there, they must have spent long hours gazing at the face of God wrapped in contemplative union. It all sounds wonderful, but unrelated to my everyday experience. And that is the trouble. It doesn't even sound human.

But only humans can, and sometimes do, pray. It is what I want to do and so I go back and ask the saints: "How *did* you pray? What was your prayer like? As a follower of Clare of Assisi, I address my query to her. Though I cannot do a personal interview, I can look for hints in her writings and in the descriptions of those who knew her personally.

I suspect that Clare's answer will, in its basics, be very comparable to that of other holy men and women whom you might choose to question. Let us go ahead and ask, sure that the Communion of Saints promises an answer in life's gifting.

By Way of Introduction.

I think it is interesting to realize that the saints tended to say very little, almost nothing in fact, about their own prayer. You have to read between the lines of what they wrote to others, realizing that their insights could only have come from their own experience.

Why the reticence? In the case of Clare, I think part of it may have been cultural. We who live in an age of rampant individualism can hardly conceive of a period where the communal had priority. The family, the neighborhood, the city-state, the church—these were the realities that gave life its context and meaning. The individual was significant primarily in relation to them. Medievals likewise lacked the sophisticated emphasis on self-awareness that is so much part of our psychological age. To ask how an individual prays presupposes not only an interest in the self, but also the vocabulary for describing individual experience. Clare of Assisi had neither.

Beyond such historical considerations, I think the saints were reticent about their prayer because it was too sacred to be objectified in words; most of the time, it was beyond verbalization. Love has a way of stammering and eventually growing silent. I am reminded of the story of Thomas Aquinas, who at the end of his life was asked by Christ: "Thomas, you have written well of me; what would you have?" And Thomas's fabled response: "Yourself, Lord, just yourself." After which he never wrote another word, leaving his monumental *Summa* unfinished.

If we find ourselves reluctant to talk about our prayer, we are in good company. "Many words" contradicts the gospel criterion for prayer. What we need to be concerned with is a deepening relationship with God. But saying little does not mean having nothing to say. The saints did speak about prayer, advising others and, at times, seeking advice themselves. In doing so they revealed their heart.

Living Prayer

Not only did the saints care about formal prayer, even more importantly they lived prayer. Prayer was their life. Nice, but our pragmatism asks: "How"? In her Rule, written during the final years of her life, Clare warns her Sisters to work in such a way that "they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion," (7:2). "Spirit of prayer": the phrase comes easily off our tongue; but what does it really mean? Obviously, Clare is not suggesting twenty-four hour prayer marathons or some kind of a split-level consciousness that would involve doing something while we try to think of God.

We get a hint of Clare's meaning in another chapter of the Rule where she speaks of "praying always with a pure heart" and adds "in humility and with patience" (10:10). If prayer is to become our life so that we do pray always, our hearts need to be "pure," totally given to God; we need to grow into a kind of single-heartedness, so that God has priority in all we do. The focus of our lives is always on the things of God. This is where we live.

The image that comes to mind is that of a compass. When someone moves from one place to another it swings, sometimes wildly, but always seeking true north, where it ultimately comes to rest. The same process repeats itself in the dynamism of true devotion. As we move from one situation to another, the needle of our heart swings, sometimes wildly, as we focus on one activity after another. Ultimately, we come to rest in the direction of our deepest desiring.

But perhaps you and I protest: I surely experience those swings back and forth from one thing to another; I am not so sure that I ever come to rest, much less that I rest in God. Clare responds to our realistic concern when she adds humility and patience in times of difficulty to the focus of a pure heart.

Humility opens us to truth, putting everything into true perspective: who God is, who we are, the preciousness of each individual, the grace that lies hidden everywhere. But this only happens if we are patient, if we accept the cross that will mark every life caught up in the paschal mystery as well the "nothing" that will be the staple of most of our prayer.

As prayer becomes the directional force in our life and as we grow in humble self-acceptance, we become better able to name the sinful tendencies that pull at us and then to turn from them more quickly. We are less upset by this experience of our own weakness and more appreciative of God's faithful love. Patient self-acceptance dredges our capacity for love's surrender. Our focus begins to shift from self at center stage to a sustained thrust toward God and the things of God. Our life bears the fruit of "praying always."

Such a focused life is the climate of prayer, the air where we breathe in God's spirit. But sustaining such a life of prayer presupposes that times of explicit prayer have a certain priority in our life. They did for Clare as for all the saints. Her days were patterned by the regular rhythm of the liturgy, both the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours. It was a strong steady diet, rich in the word of God where many hours given to prayer nourished her spirit. But the amount of time she gave to liturgical prayer, even its dailyness, are less important than her dedication. It is quite possible to make a substantial investment in times for prayer without really being there. We are only being dutiful—or compulsive. The saints were present to God in their devotion. Clare gave herself the gift of time for prayer; her heart's devotion required it.

How do we know that Clare did this? One of the most striking evidences for me is the way in which her writings are almost a tissue of Scriptural references. This was not the work of scholarship, leafing through a commentary or even looking up references in her own Bible. Given her period in history, Clare had no such resources. She must have known whole sections of Scripture by heart. That is the way we too must come to know them. Though the well-developed memory of the medieval is no longer our contemporary heritage, perhaps we can repeat favored passages over and over until they come spontaneously to mind, forming a kind of backdrop to our thinking and ultimately to our living.

Over the years Clare grew in understanding of the Scriptures. What she experienced opened up new meanings in the word of God, and these new insights into Scripture revealed still more of God's work in her everyday life. The same process enables us to come to ever new understandings of passages that are already very familiar to us. Then daily reality further illumines God's word in a constant cycle of revelation/experience leading to conversion.

Clare not only listened to Scripture, she also studied it in more formal ways. How? One of the witnesses at the process of her canonization, speaks of

her willingness to listen to learned sermons. (Proc 10:8) The *Legend Of Clare* points out that she knew how to take something good out of any sermon (CL 37). It is an art worth cultivating especially in our hypercritical age. As a result, Clare could draw on the ideas of others, quoting them in her writings even without having the possibility of recourse to books. We, on the other hand, are more likely to be overwhelmed with the richness of our resources, so surfeited with material that we lack the receptive heart to take in, understand, savor what we read or hear.

In addition to Scripture, the prayer-filled living of the saints was nourished by the sacramental Word of God. Clare received Communion as often as Church practice in that period of history permitted. Scholars debate whether she only received at the seven times per year stipulated in the Rule (3:14) or whether she may have communicated much more frequently, even daily. It is unlikely that we will ever really know. But what we do know is the importance of the Eucharist in her life. Many hours of her prayer were spent in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and she often remained in choir after all the other Sisters had left. This was the place to which she returned instinctively in times of trouble. We may be familiar with the story of how she faced a mob of Saracen soldiers who were literally climbing over the walls of the monastery. At the sight of this woman, armed only with the Sacrament of the Body of the Lord Jesus, the whole barbarian horde fled, routed by the strength of her devotion. (Proc 9:2)

Clare also encouraged the Sisters to frequent the Sacrament of Penance, confessing at least twelve times a year. (RCl 3:12) It was a generous option at a time when Lateran IV, the Vatican II of its time, was making once-a-year confession mandatory. What Clare legislated, she first of all lived. The Sisters recall that she confessed frequently and, at the end of her life, made a general confession in the presence of at least some of the Sisters; it was something they never forgot. (Proc 3:23)

The Sacraments remain a staple of any life of prayer. The ongoing conversion implied in a life of authentic devotion seems to require some form of "confession," an opportunity to acknowledge our failures before another, expressing our sorrow and desire to change. The Sacrament of Penance, in addition, allows the pray-er to receive the powerful grace of the sacrament and to do this in the context of the Church. I suspect that it is no accident that the lives of the saints abound in examples of their taking frequent advantage of this Sacrament.

What is true of Confession is even truer of the Sacrament of the Eucharist where our prayer's desire for union finds daily realization. Small wonder that Clare's Sisters remember how fervent her reception was, how prolonged her thanksgiving. They used to wait for her to emerge from choir, anxious to catch

a glimpse of the glory reflected on her face. (Proc 9:10) The same transforming of our lives awaits each of us in this Sacrament of realized union.

The Geography of Personal Prayer

Liturgical, sacramental prayer inserts the individual into the rich stream of communal prayer in the church. It is the "face" of a life of prayer, the one immediately visible to others. But such an outside, lacking an inside, would be empty indeed. Periods of personal prayer, more or less prolonged, are essential to any prayer-filled life; they are its heart.

What was the geography, the environment, of Clare's personal prayer? The question is bold and we only dare to seek hints of an answer in her writings, reading between the lines as she speaks of the God whom she had come to know in those hours of frequent and fervent communing. While she did not legislate times of individual prayer in her Rule, Clare led, as she did in many other instances, by her example rather than by exhortation. That she prayed often is amply witnessed by the Sisters in their testimony during the process of her canonization. They speak of her remaining in prayer after night prayer (Proc 10:3), as well as her rising during the night to keep vigil (Proc 14:2). While, as we have already mentioned, Clare spent a great deal of her prayer time in the choir, the Sisters also speak of her having a special place where she often prayed (Proc 7:9) None of the saints seems to have grown beyond such practical details as having times and places set aside for their personal prayer. As their relationship with God deepens the time is never enough; the places become more inclusive; the need to provide for both continues. It clearly did for Clare.

We also know that Clare felt free enough in her relationship with God to give bodily expression to her devotion. Her Sisters make repeated reference to her praying prostrate on the ground (Proc 1:9; 9:2). Clare knew herself as a poor one before God; her humility found natural expression in this kind of close union with the earth. The Sisters also speak of her tears (Proc 6:4; 10:3), whether of joy or of sorrow we will never know. But we do know that her prayer effected transformation so much that, when "she returned from prayer, her face appeared clearer and more beautiful than the sun" (Proc 4:4).

Though our own devotion may be far from any such brilliance, still we too pray in our bodies. Where else? If even our most private devotions are constrained by a stiff at-my-Sunday-best, I may need to allow myself the same kind of freedom that I would express with a good friend; for that is what prayer really is—a heart-to-heart sharing with a friend. Instinctively the saints seem to have known this. They directed their attention to God by allowing their bodies to relax enough to express what they were really feeling.

In addition to the geography of times, places, and bodily expression, Clare and other saints also cultivated the silence and solitude that provide an environment favorable to a life of prayer. We know that Clare did this and, in her Rule, urged her Sisters to a flexible kind of silence that allowed them to "communicate always and everywhere, briefly and in a low tone of voice, whatever is necessary" (RCl 5:4). In an age like ours, so geared to communication, it is a helpful caution. Does constant noise pervade our personal space, whether the background sound of endless chattering or the ever-present TV? Granted that much of this may be beyond our control, we can make decisions about some of it and so contribute to the quieting of our world as well as our hearts. Hopefully we would learn in the resulting stillness to be better listeners.

But it may also be worth noting that Clare's cautions about unnecessary talking are not absolutes. She who gloried in the title "sister" knew that speaking appropriately was another aspect of maintaining an atmosphere of quiet. What we need to say must be said lest it pursue us into prayer. Self-righteous silence, the protest of withdrawal, the laziness of shirking the responsibilities of communication are non-vocal ways of polluting the atmosphere of true charity. When our prayer seems lacking in fruitfulness, Clare seems to suggest that we may need to examine whether our over-all pattern of communication in both silence and speech expresses our desire to live in love.

Prayer in Person

Given the geography of prayer, its time and place, what did saints like Clare do once they began their periods of personal prayer? I suspect that most of the saints might find this contemporary concern with discovering a successful formula a bit strange. After all, what is really important is not performance but desire for God. Clare knew this so her prayer was essentially simple. "Love God and Jesus, his Son, who was crucified for us sinners, from the depths of your heart, and never let the thought of Him leave your mind," was her impassioned plea to Ermentrude (LEr 11). She wrote from experience.

While our heart may well say yes, this is what I want, we may also need help in translating this desire into daily practice. Clare obligingly answers in her letters to Agnes of Prague. Clare first suggests a gathering of our spirits: "Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of Glory! Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance!" (3LAg 13). In other words, lay aside your preoccupations and bring your whole being, all your faculties into unity in the divine presence. Even our distracted attempts to do just this are already prayer in practice.

Clare goes on instructing Agnes, using her favorite image of the mirror. This was a common medieval symbol of the spiritual life, but Clare is unique

in using it to express spiritual growth. She suggests to Agnes (and to us!): "Gaze upon that mirror each day and continually study your face within it that you may adorn yourself within and without with beautiful robes" (4LAg 15:16). Practical as ever, Clare begins by studying her own face, seeing herself reflected against the backdrop of the holy gospels. Do we think like Jesus, speak like Jesus, act like Jesus? Though our questioning may well begin with the fresh realization of how far we are from being mirror images of Jesus, the more basic concern is not how we see ourselves but how God sees us. What particular imaging of Jesus does God ask us to incarnate? The answer must unfold in all the prayers of our daily lives.

Clare continues urging Agnes to keep looking into this mirror that is Jesus: "Look at the border of this mirror, that is, the poverty of Him Who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. O marvelous humility! O astonishing poverty!" (4LAg 19-21). Contemplation of the incarnation was central to Clare's Franciscan vision. Here she learned the lessons of the poverty that was to become the titular heritage of all who would follow her inspiration. It was a poverty as real as lack of necessary accommodations and a substitute stable and manager. But it was an equally real interior poverty of holy humility. The divine coming down to dwell among us of the Incarnation gave Clare a sense of the richness of holy poverty. That, in turn, enabled her to sustain a very radical form of material poverty, combining it with an appreciation of her own worth that was neither exaggerated by false pretensions nor denied by pseudo-humility.

These same themes of poverty and humility are also discovered "at the surface of the mirror" where Clare considers "the untold labors and burdens that Jesus endured for the redemption of the whole human race" (4LAg 22). Only through a life of prayer did Clare and her Sisters grow into the kind of lovers whose lives would be motivated by a desire to share in Jesus' work of redemption. Nothing would be so small, so trivial, that it could not be transformed into the divine design of bringing everything together into Christ Jesus.

As Clare continued to gaze at Jesus, she contemplated "in the depth of this same mirror . . . the charity that led Jesus to suffer on the wood of the Cross and to die there the most shameful kind of death" (4LAg 23). Clare's contemplation, like that of so many of the saints, was marked by the sign of the cross. How often she must have knelt before the Crucifix at San Damiano, the very same one that had spoken to Francis in his vocational discernment: "Francis, go and repair my church; it is falling into ruins." We know that, at first, Francis took the directive literally, beginning to rebuild the partially ruined chapel of San Damiano (LM 2:1). Only later would he come to realize that his ministry was to repair the whole Church. That was what Clare would do too, not by becoming an itinerant preacher like Francis, but by living faith-

fully her call to a life of prayer. This is a ministry in which we each can share, one that transforms daily fidelity into love's labor.

In another letter to Agnes Clare summarizes this whole process of mirroring Jesus: "Gaze upon Him, consider him, contemplate him, as you desire to imitate him" (2LAG 19). That is as close as Clare ever came to a formula for prayer. "Gaze"—direct your attention, the whole focus of your life toward Jesus. "Consider"—reflect on the "how" and the "why" of your life in the light of the Jesus of the gospels. "Contemplate"—keep looking with the kind of love that transforms the one who sees into what is seen. Then "imitation" will be less a conscious self-improvement project and more a matter of interior conversion issuing necessarily in external reflection.

Just as a mirror can catch the light of the sun and concentrate it with such intensity that another object will catch fire, Clare continues using this same mirror image to symbolize the apostolic aspect of all contemplation. In her Testament she invites her Sisters "not only to be a form for others in being an example and mirror, but even for our sisters whom the Lord has called to our way of life as well, that they in turn might be a mirror and example to those living in the world" (19).

Because true interior prayer deepens charity, it necessarily affects others, first of all those who are most neighbor to us, that is, those with whom we live. Clare knew that the close living together of the Sisters in the small space of San Damiano provided ample opportunity for them to live their love for one another. Relating to each other as sisters, sharing each others' poverty, correcting, forgiving, accepting forgiveness, authenticated their life of prayer. Life in community helps to keep contemplation honest, just as contemplation makes close community viable. "See how they love one another," spoken of the first Christians, remains the most reliable criterion of growth in prayer, both Clare's and our own.

Prayer articulated in this language of love concentrates the power of the Spirit, igniting a fire that is not only discernible but also tends to spread rapidly. This truth is made literal in the delightful legend in which Francis invited Clare and a few of her Sisters to join him and some of the friars for a never-to-be-repeated meal. While these saints were speaking of their hearts' love of Jesus, the citizens of Assisi, looking down into the valley where poverty's banquet was being shared, saw a fire raging and ran down to extinguish the flames.

Whatever the historical accuracy of this story, its poetic truth makes it worth repeating. Love speaks; it spreads. This is what happened over and over again at San Damiano. Clare's life of poverty lived in contemplative love attracted others: her sisters, Agnes and Beatrice, her mother Ortolana, cousins, friends, the young girls of the surrounding towns. The people of Assisi heard the same good news and began to make their way down the hill in a steady

stream that threatened to become a torrent. Parents brought sick children to be healed; the poor sought the alms of a blessing; Francis sent troubled friars; the Pope came and was consoled in the burdens of his office. Clare's prayer was undisturbed. Her secret? Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

As our own life of prayer deepens, a flame is lit in our hearts. We love more, first of all, those who are closest to us, the people with whom we live, those who have special claim to our charity. We serve their needs more faithfully, bear their burdens more willingly, forgive their failings more generously. It is not an easy way to live; beyond us many times. In truth, to love with the love of Christ is always beyond us. And so we are brought back to humble prayer. We can't; God can and God will, if we ask with an openness to receive.

Though genuine prayer can always be tested within the immediate radius of daily living in community, it is never limited by it. Living in love moves out to an ever widening world of others. Clare realized that this was as true of her enclosed Sisters as of Francis's pilgrim Brothers. A gospel form of life is essentially missionary. Ours must be too. Nothing lies beyond the circle of our concern because this is the way God lives and loves. A life of prayer expands our horizons outward towards the limitlessness of God.

In summary Clare's life of prayer brought her in humility and patience to a single-hearted devotion to God and the things of God. Hers was a gospel life nourished by the word of God in Scripture and in sacrament. The focus of all her living was that Word of God become incarnate and dwelling among us. Clare kept looking at Jesus, until she became Jesus living for others—for her own Sisters at San Damiano, for the people of Assisi, for the rebuilding of the Church of God, for all the world in its loved reality. This is how she prayed; this is how the saints pray. It is how they invite us to grow in living prayer.

**Gaze upon Him,
consider Him,
contemplate Him, . . .
imitate Him**

(2LAG 20).



Sister Clare Ellen, OSC

A Biographical Profile of Edward and Mary Zablocki Buffalo, New York



Mary and Ed Zablocki, of Buffalo, NY, were married in 1981 and professed as Secular Franciscans in 1983. Since 1995 they have been co-chairs of the Work Commission of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States. The Commission is one of four created to foster the efforts of Secular Franciscans to evangelize the world—the others being Family, Peace and Justice, and Ecology. Ed and Mary have given presentations on the spirituality of work and publish two newsletters—*Dignitas* and *In The Trenches*—offering a Catholic and Franciscan perspective on work.

Since 1993 they have been active in the revision and promotion of the correspondence course on the Franciscan Missionary Charism, known in the U.S. as *Build With Living Stones*, participating in *Assisi '94*, which brought together Franciscans from every part of the family from around the world.

Past service to the Secular Franciscan Order includes Mary's stint as minister of their fraternity, Ed's service as councilor and vice-minister for Holy Name Province, and their mutual efforts to coordinate activities for Secular Franciscans in Western New York.

Mary has been a registered nurse since 1974 and today works in labor and delivery at Sisters' Hospital in Buffalo. She is also a writer. Her prose and poetry have been published in *New Covenant*, *The Cord*, and various Secular Franciscan publications. She is currently writing a novel about nineteenth-century Ireland, based on her own family history.

Ed, as a Tyng Fellow at William College, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and graduated *magna cum laude*. He holds a masters' degree in public administration from the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he has worked in research administration for the past thirteen years. He has contributed two articles to *The Cord*, "Finding Identity as a *Secular Franciscan*" (November,

1993), and "Extending Franciscan Mission: Secular Franciscans and the Renewal of the Temporal Order" (March/April, 1996). He contributed to and edited a study guide, *Secular Franciscans: Evangelizers of the Culture* (1988) and for several years published *Good News*, the newsletter for the Secular Franciscans of Holy Name Province. The Zablockis have two sons, Francis and Paul, who are sixteen and fourteen respectively.

We are very grateful for the enthusiastic support which Ed and Mary give to *The Cord*. We appreciate as well the fine contribution they make in promoting the Franciscan charism locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.



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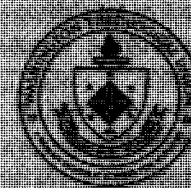
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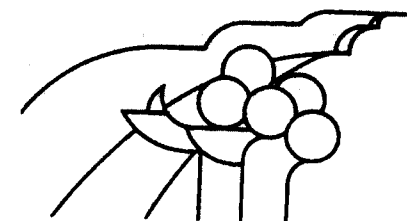
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Friday, August 1-Saturday, August 9

"The Soul's Journey Into God." André Cirino, OFM, and Josef Raischl, SFO. Cost: \$425. Contact: Tau Center, 511 Hilbert St., Winona, MN 55987, ph. 507-454-2993, fax 507-453-0910, e-mail taucentr@luminet.net.

Tuesday, August 18-Thursday, August 21

32nd Franciscan Federation Conference: Encountering the Human Face of God. Keynote: Elizabeth Dreyer. Rochester, NY. (See ad, p. 195.)

Friday, August 29-Friday, September 5

A Family and a Rule. Margaret Carney, OSF. Cost: \$240. Contact: Shalom Retreat Center, Dubuque (see above).

Tuesday, September 2-Thursday, September 4

The Next Generation of Franciscan Women! Networking gathering for formation personnel. At Wilke-Barre, PA. Contact: Patty Podhaisky, OSF, 2851 W. 52nd Ave., Denver, CO 80221, ph. 303-458-8640.

Friday, September 26-Sunday, September 28

Facing the Christ Incarnate. Sponsored by the Franciscan Federation at Madonna Retreat Center, Albuquerque, NM. Contact: Franciscan Federation, PO Box 29080, Washington, DC 20017, ph. 202-529-2334, fax 202-529-7016.

Saturday, September 27

Mysticism in the Marketplace: Franciscan Tradition of Prayer. Franciscan Day of Recollection in Preparation for the Feast of Francis, with Ingrid Peterson, OSF. At St. Anthony Shrine, the Worker Chapel, 100 Arch Street, Boston, MA, ph. 617-542-6440, fax 617-542-4225. Contact: Violet Grennan, OSF.

Friday, October 10-Sunday, October 12

Facing the Christ Incarnate. Sponsored by the Franciscan Federation at Franciscan Sisters of OLPH, St. Louis, MO. Contact: Franciscan Federation, PO Box 29080, Washington, DC 20017, ph. 202-529-2334, fax 202-529-7016.

Thursday, October 30-Sunday, November 2

Franciscan Connection, A weekend experience for candidates in initial formation. Srs. Diane Marie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Imler. At the Portiuncula Center for Prayer, Frankfort, IL. Contact Jean Schwieters, OSF, 727 E. Margaret, St. Paul, MN 55106, Ph. 612-772-1740.

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions	FormViv	Form of Life for St. Clare
BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun	2Fragm	Fragment of other Rule II
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	LaudDei	Praises of God
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians	OffPass	Office of the Passion
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful	OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful	RegB	Later Rule
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	RegNB	Earlier Rule
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God	Test	Testament
ExhPD	Exhortation to Poor Ladies	TestS	Testament written in Siena
ExpPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father	UltVol	Last Will written for St. Clare
		VPLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

Writings of Saint Clare

1LAg	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCl	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCl	Blessing of Clare

Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacque de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum Commercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection