

The Rediscovery of the Canticle of Exhortation *Audite* of St. Francis for the Poor Ladies of San Damiano

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“Das wiederentdeckte Mahnlied ‘Audite’ des hl. Franziskus für die
Armen Frauen von San Damiano”

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In the course of the celebration of the 750th anniversary of the death of St. Francis, Father Giovanni Boccali, novice master of the Franciscan friary of San Damiano in Assisi, made a discovery that must be considered nothing short of sensational. In fact, it was at the insistence of two nuns of St. Clare's Convent in Assisi that he found the right track. The friar came across the Canticle of Exhortation *Audite Poverelle* of St. Francis on page 57rv of an early fourteenth century manuscript preserved in the Poor Clare Convent of St. Fidentius in Novaglie near Verona.

The discoverer made the text available in a provisional edition and wrote a concise commentary on it for *Forma Sororum*,¹ a review published for the Italian Poor Clares. In 1978 the author wrote a critical defense of the authenticity of the Canticle in an article in *Collectanea Franciscana*. In it he touches on the historical background of the document, describes the two manuscripts dating respectively from the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, republishes the text, explains the stylistic peculiarities of written and spoken Old Italian, and appends a very brief commentary to the individual verses.

Among the arguments he adduces, particular weight must be given to his observation that the manuscript, encased in wooden covers over its leather binding, originally belonged to the Poor Clare Convent of Santa Maria in Campo Marzio, Verona. This house was founded in 1224, during the lifetime of St. Francis and St. Clare (Boccali, vol. 1, pp. 15ff). A local tradition ascribing the foundation of the convent to St. Agnes of Assisi lacks solid evidence. Nevertheless, the early date of its establishment at least indicates the possibility of a close connection between Assisi and Verona. Even more remarkable is the striking agreement, pointed out by the author, between the Canticle of Exhortation and the accounts given by the Three Companions in the so-called “Compilation of Perugia” (*Legenda*, or more correctly *Compilatio perusina*, chap. 85; Marino Bigaroni, O.F.M., p. 45; Rosalind B. Brooke; Boccali, vol. 2, pp. 19-21).

Specialists in Franciscan literature eagerly awaited the reaction of Italian literary circles to the discovery of the Canticle. Already in 1979, Aldo Menichetti, professor at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) published an article in which he improves somewhat on Giovanni Boccali's treatment of linguistic and stylistic peculiarities and also delved deeper into their significance. Franca Brambilla Ageno, professor in Parma, well known as an expert on the Canticle of the Sun (more accurately, The Praise of the Lord for His Creatures – *Laudes Domini de Creaturis* [Compilatio perusina], chap. 45: Brooke, p. 170) and as the publisher of Jacopone da Todi, improved in some points on the work of Professor Menichetti. She also added a study of the rhyming lines to the efforts of her two predecessors to organize the verses (Franca Brambilla Ageno, pp. 7–8). I follow her arrangement in the present article.

1. The Old Latin Text of the Canticle of Exhortation

There is a miniature of St. Francis on page 57r of the parchment. He holds up the index finger of his stigmatized right hand as if admonishing his unseen hearers. His left hand grips his habit and cord (Boccali, vol. 2, pp. 20–21). The copyist states expressly, before giving us the Old Latin text: "*Haec verba fecit beatus Franciscus in vulgari*" (idem. p. 17 – "The Blessed Francis wrote these words in the vernacular."). In contrast to Brambilla's arrangement (pp. 7–8), I employ only the letters A – D for the four stanzas of varying length connected by means of lines with the like-sounding vowels, erroneously called strophes. The result is the following sequence of rhyming verses:

- A 1. Audite, poverelle dal Signór[e] vocate,
 2. ke de multe parte et provincie sète adunáte:
 3. vivate sémpre / en-veritáte,
 4. ke en obediéntia moriate.
- B 5. Non guardate a la vita de-fóre,
 6. ka quella de lo spirito / e-miglióre.
 7. lo ve prégo per-grand'amore
 8. k'aiáte discrecione // de le lemosene ke ve dà-el Segnór[e].
- C 9. Quelle ke sunt adgravate de infirmitáte
 10. et l'altre ke per lor[o] s[u]ò ádfatigáte,
 11. tutte quante lo sostengáte en-páce,
- D 12. Ka multo ve[n]deri[te] cara quésta fa[t]íga,
 13. ka cascúna será-regína // en celo coronata cum la Vérgene María.

In this arrangement, which departs here and there from the division found in the manuscript, we have four stanzas: A – D. Two of them, A and

B, contain four rhymed lines; the third, C, has three; and the fourth, D, has only two. It is to be noted that the vowels of the two halves of line 8 in stanza B (*discrecione / Segnóre*) rhyme with each other as well as with the final vowels of lines 5–7. Likewise, in D 13, the words *regína* and *María* rhyme with *fati'ga* in line 12.

The word-rhythm of the literary masterpieces of the Middle Ages depends to a great extent on a metrical agreement of the concluding syllables of the *cursus*. These consist of two or more (seldom three) unaccented syllables in the last two words (see *LThK* III, 111). Menichetti (pp. 8–9) deserves great credit for calling attention to the fact that the *cursus* structure of the *Canticle of Exhortation* is in harmony with that of the *Canticle of Brother Sun*. In his opinion, B 8 must be considered an exception. But a new arrangement (Brambilla's) solved the problem. Noteworthy too is the responsorial character of the *Canticle*, in which two lines usually respond to one another. A number of Old Italian words which occur in both poems and which are close to Latin (like the opening word *Audite*) reinforce Boccali's arguments (I – II) for the genuineness of the *Canticle of Exhortation*.

2. English Translation

The following translation was made by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap (*Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* [New York, 1982]), pp. 40–41:

1. Listen, little poor ones called by the Lord,
 who have come together from many parts and provinces:
2. Live always in truth,
 that you may die in obedience.
3. Do not look at the life outside,
 for that of the Spirit is better.
4. I beg you through great love,
 to use with discretion the alms which the Lord gives you.
5. Those who are weighed down by sickness
 and the others who are wearied because of them,
 all of you: bear it in peace.
6. For you will sell this fatigue at a very high price
 and each one [of you] will be crowned queen
 in heaven with the Virgin Mary.

3. A Historical and Spiritual Commentary

Fortunately the so-called *Mirror of Perfection* (chapter 90) and the *Compilation of Perugia* are in substantial agreement about the circumstances

surrounding the first singing of the canticle (chap. 45: Brooke, p. 85; Bigaroni). Here is a translation of the text of the compilation, which without any doubt is based essentially on the account given by the Companions.

After the Blessed Francis wrote the praises of the Lord for his creatures, he composed at the same time and in the same place (probably in the late fall of 1224 at San Damiano) some devout words with a musical accompaniment for the greater consolation of the Poor Ladies of the convent of San Damiano. He did this especially because he knew that they were very depressed by reason of his illness. Since his infirmities prevented him from visiting and consoling them in person, he chose to share these words with them by means of his companions.

Through them he wished to express his wishes for them in brief form and for all times: that they should live together in one mind and in love, since they had been converted to Christ through his example and preaching at a time when there were still very few brothers. Their conversion and way of life redounded to the honor and edification not only of the friars whose offshoot they were, but of the entire Church of God.

And since the blessed Francis was aware that the Poor Ladies had from the beginning of their conversion, without interruption, both of their own free will and out of necessity, led an extremely strict and poor life, his heart was always drawn to compassion for them. Therefore, he admonished them in his message: Since the Lord had brought them together from various places to practice holy love, holy poverty, and holy obedience, they should continually live and die in the exercise of these virtues – especially that they should make use of the alms given them by the Lord carefully (*discrete!*) with joy and thanksgiving for the support of the body; that above all they should practice patience – the healthy ones in providing the necessary care for the sick, and the sick ones in enduring sufferings and privation (Brooke, p. 170; Bigaroni, pp. 244–246, with an Italian translation).

The Canticle of Exhortation has a close biographical affinity with the much better known Canticle of Brother Sun. Now a living image of the Crucified, Francis toward the end of September 1224 returned from Monte La Verna to the Marian sanctuary of the Portiuncula. In addition to the piercing pains of the stigmata, the holy founder suffered for years from recurrent attacks of malaria. His liver and spleen, the reservoirs of the malaria parasites, were swollen. Progressive anemia, complete physical exhaustion, and a wretched digestion plagued him. While in Egypt with the Fifth Crusade (1219–20) he had contracted a very contagious conjunctivitis, popularly known as the “Egyptian eye disease,” or in medical terms, *conjunctivitis trachomatosa*. As a result of this terrible infection, gelatinous granules form in the conjunctiva. In advanced stages they spread over the cornea and result in seriously blurred vision. The conjunctiva smarts severely, discharging a purulent fluid accompanied by pain in the area of

the trigeminal nerve (the fifth cranial nerve, which includes the optic nerve) and progressively painful hypersensitivity to light (*photophobia*).²

Almost blind and completely helpless, his body racked in agony, Francis lay in a little darkened cell. Because of his sensitivity to light, the brethren built it out of straw matting around his bed in one of the rooms of the house that had served some of the friars as a center for the pastoral and material services they rendered the nuns. In the long hours of interior and exterior darkness which he endured during the month he spent in San Damiano, the saint suffered severe temptations to despondency. Once while he was in the trough of discouragement, the Lord spoke to him interiorly and assured him that he would partake of heavenly glory. For a short time he pondered over this experience, and then, as a fruit of his indescribable joy in his guaranteed and eternal happiness with God, he dictated the *Canticle of Brother Sun* to one of his companions. This hymn in praise of God for His creatures is a masterpiece of religious sentiment.³ It embraces the whole of creation in brotherly-sisterly joy.

The *Canticle of Exhortation* belongs to the same spiritual genre as the *Canticle of Brother Sun*. At any rate, we learn from the *Legend of the Three Companions* that it was composed shortly after the world-renowned *Canticle of Brother Sun*. According to the explicit statement of the *Companions*, the patient was still living in a little hut near the convent of nuns when he dictated this hymn for Clare and her sisters. From a purely human and medical viewpoint, this intensely poetic composition of the saint is a mystery. During an acute viral infection accompanied by severe headaches and general physical debilitation, a patient easily loses not only his orientation for time and place but experiences the loss of personal relationships with his closest associates. The sufferer is in danger of focusing his attention exclusively on his own body and its distress. During the course of his long illness, Francis endeavored to conquer the temptation to self-pity by allowing himself to be led by the grace of divine love, and through it to compassion for the cares and sufferings of others.

Some general observations on the *Canticle of Exhortation* should pave the way for a better understanding of its content. The hymn *Audite* is, like the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, unmistakably influenced by the poetic hymns we call the psalms. This is not surprising. We may assume with a great degree of certainty that when Francis was nine or ten years old, he attended the parish school of San Giorgio, and with the aid of the psalter learned to read and write Latin. The *Canticle of Exhortation* differs, however, from the *Canticle of Brother Sun* in a more frequent use of rhyming syllables. In assessing the poetic quality of this composition, we must remember that, after the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, it is one of the earliest specimens of a vernacular tongue that was only slowly breaking loose from the parent-Latin. Its vocabulary, imagery, style and poetic form are naturally still very

much limited in this early stage of linguistic development. As we have already pointed out under number 2 above, the phrases of the *cursus* recur with astonishing regularity in the four stanzas which are linked by rhyme and content. To dismiss this phenomenon as merely an echo-effect or traditional sound pattern without any purposeful poetic aim, as G. Folena (p. 348) claimed for the Cantic of Brother Sun, is no longer tenable, after the convincing analysis of A. Menichetti and Franca Brambilla Ageno (pp. 8-9 and 7-8).

It is regrettable that the musical accompaniment to the Cantic has been lost. The Legend of the Three Companions definitely states that there was such a melody: *Quaedam sancta verba cum cantu* (chap. 45; Brooke, p. 170). Likewise the copies of the oldest manuscript of the Cantic of Brother Sun left three spaces blank under the first line (codex 338 of the Bibliotheca communale of Assisi. See Polena, pp. 346-47). Evidently these were meant to be filled in with a musical notation for the syllables based on the Gregorian melodies used with the psalms (p. 346). Very likely some easily learned psalm tone was chosen for the Cantic of Exhortation. Quite possibly Francis hummed the melody to the musical "King of Verses," Brother Pacifico (see *Compilatio perusina*, chap. 43; Brooke, pp. 162-66), who thereupon wrote down the notes under the first lines of the Cantic in such a way that they could also be sung for the three following verses. Since Francis was unable to move, Brother Pacifico, with some other brothers, must have been sent to the Poor Clares to sing Francis's message and to teach them how to sing it. The Cantic of Exhortation was meant to bear a consoling message. The Poverello, confined to his sickbed, managed to arrange a vicarious visit by means of a song composed expressly for them and to be sung to them.

Over and beyond its immediate situational purpose, the Cantic of Exhortation had an incomparably wider goal - that of serving as a spiritual last will and testament for the Poor Ladies. The Legend of the Three Companions mentions expressly that in it Francis wished to express his mind not only for that particular occasion, but for the future as well (*tunc et semper*. Brooke, p. 170). This, by the way, is sufficient reason for us to penetrate as deeply as possible into its meaning. The Three Companions also refer to a number of spiritual elements such as sisterly love, the history of the nuns' conversion and the aims of the Second Order which we look for in vain in the Cantic of Exhortation. This fact leads us to suspect that in addition to the Cantic, the Poverello dictated the outlines of an accompanying letter, or at least commissioned one of the brothers to draw up this expanded message. Since the reproduction of the essential elements of the Cantic of Exhortation is in itself a remarkable achievement for a medieval chronicler, we have a right to trust him also in this detail.

In the accompanying letter (or oral communication), the theme of

sisterly love is stressed with impressive clarity: "*caritate esse unanimes et ad invicem conversari.*" The Poor Clares should be "entirely of one mind" (see 1 Cor. 1:10); they should carefully shun all divisions and factions; they should be considerate and helpful toward one another. Otherwise why had they been led to Christ through the example and teaching of the order's founder? The Franciscan commitment as a sign of conversion to Christ must be stressed. Francis's role as founder of the Second Order is unmistakably expressed in this message. Clare's conversion as well as that of her first companions was brought about through his influence. The Order of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano is the *plantula* ("the little shoot") lovingly planted by the friars, an original relationship, as Clare often acknowledges (for example, her Rule, chap. 1, nos. 1 and 3. Grau, *Klara*, p. 90). Francis based the urgency for harmonious community life on their common conversion to Christ and their commitment to the spiritual heritage of the order.

There was evident danger that the Poor Ladies, who had voluntarily shut themselves in a strict enclosure, should experience spiritual isolation within the narrow walls of their little convent.⁴ During the lifetime of St. Clare, some fifty nuns lived there (Boccali, vol. 1, p. 23). For this reason the holy founder expressly called on them to be aware of their social role in the service of the Order of Friars Minor, indeed of the entire church. Through her fasting, Clare sought to atone for the sins of others and to help the preachers of the Gospel touch the hearts of the faithful. Her third letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague admirably expresses this aspect of her vocation (no. 3. Grau, *Klara*, p. 122): "Taking the words of the Apostle in their true meaning, I look upon you as God's own helper and as the support of the fragile members of His ineffable body" (see 1 Cor. 3:9; 6:15; 12:25).

After this brief introduction, the task of recognizing the basic spiritual message of the Canticle should be easier. When one tries to interpret some great masterpiece, there is always the danger of taking it too literally or projecting one's own preconceptions into the text. I hope to escape both these traps through a faithful and strict reliance on the data of Franciscan literature.

Stanza A

Lines 1-2. Like some Old Testament prophet or St. Benedict in the prologue of his Rule,⁵ Francis catches the attention of his hearers at the very outset. To understand an important message and carry it out in practice demands close attention and an interior readiness to accept it. The *Poverello* is speaking to the *Poverelle*. To convey the meaning of the Italian diminutive, the English language must have recourse to circumlocution. *Poverelle* means "poor little sisters" and connotes compassion for the

severe poverty they undertook voluntarily, as well as through necessity. The word *poverello* means something like "poor little fellow." The address also implies a freely-chosen state of childhood before God, so as to be worthy of His Kingdom (see Matt. 18:3). It includes, too, the charming amiability and joyfulness of a child. In its concrete application to the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, *poverelle* signifies the absolute interior and exterior poverty implied in a wholehearted following of the poor Jesus and His mother.

The holy founder reminds the "poor little ones" of a deeply-rooted conviction of his: a call to religious life is a freely given grace of God. Clare, too, shows her keen awareness of this in her Rule of 1253: "If anyone, by divine inspiration, should come to us with the desire to embrace this life . . ." (chap. 2. Grau, *Klara*, p. 91).

Francis sees proof of the role of grace in the Franciscan calling from the fact that in the short space of twelve years that elapsed since Clare's flight from her parents' home (1212), candidates from various parts of Italy came flocking to San Damiano. And in fact sisters from Rome, Pisa and Ferrara, in addition to those of Umbria, testified at the process for the canonization of St. Clare (Boccali, vol. 2, p. 23).

Lines 3-4. After the first two introductory lines, Francis starts his exhortation to his spiritual daughters. With matchless brevity he admonishes them to "live in the truth." This little phrase, of Johannine inspiration (see 2 John, 4, and 3 John 3) does not refer to doctrinal orthodoxy but rather to truthfulness in conduct. The sisters at San Damiano should live and die in accordance with the truth of their commitment. As in other writings of the saint, the word "obedience" stands for the whole of Franciscan life. To make profession in the Order of Friars Minor was equivalent to "being received into obedience" (*RegNB* II; Esser and Hardick, *Schriften*, p. 53). The collector of the Compilation of Perugia, in his introduction to the Canticle of Exhortation, explains this Franciscan principle under the heading of the three vows. It is interesting to note that the term "chastity" is replaced by the word "love." Modern man is especially called to the genuineness of his life-style. To be "real" before God, our own conscience and our fellowman, not allowing our daily conduct to give the lie to what we solemnly professed before God - this is the clear challenge of Stanza A. The beatitude of the "Praise of the Lord for His Creatures" begins to be realized in those who daily lose their life through obedience (see Part 3 above; Esser and Hardick, *Schriften*, p. 121). "Happy those whom she (Sister Death) finds doing His (the Lord's) will. The second death can do them no harm."

Stanza B

Lines 5–6. With a few sure strokes, Francis sketches the special danger lurking in the cloistered life of the Franciscan nuns. Even though voluntarily adopted, a life isolated behind convent walls can lead to a hankering after the things of the world. In his final Rule for the First Order (chap. 2. Esser and Hardick, *Schriften*, p. 82) the holy founder counters this temptation with the Gospel image of the plowman who is distracted from giving his full attention to his work and looks backward. There are times when even dedicated religious entertain picturesque mirages about life in the world and a family of their own. Francis emphatically stresses the superiority of a life dedicated to God in celibacy. Through it the religious is concerned above all else “with the things of the Lord” (see 1 Cor. 7:32). As far as possible, he allows himself to be led only by the Holy Spirit and His grace. It is this interior openness to divine grace, not the physical seclusion of the cloister as such, that is contrasted with “the life outside.” In the same line of thought, he encourages his sons to endeavor “to possess the spirit of the Lord and His holy operation; to pray with a pure heart and to have humility and patience in persecution and infirmity” (*RegB*, X; Esser and Hardick, *Schriften*, p. 87).

Lines 7–8. As a result of the “privilege of seraphic poverty” (see Grau, *Klara*, pp. 25ff, 133–35), wrested from Pope Innocent III and later confirmed by Gregory IX, the Poor Ladies of San Damiano were completely dependent on the care of the “divine Almoner” (see *2Cel* 77; Grau, *Klara*, p. 301) and the generosity of their benefactors. This explains the seriousness of Francis’s exhortation that for that love which is God Himself (see 1 John 4:16, and the *RegNB* XVII: Esser and Hardick, *Schriften*, p. 67; Register, p. 243 b), they make use of every divinely-given alms *discrete*, that is, with responsibility and discernment. Consequently the Poor Ladies must never, by accepting superfluous alms, deprive those poorer than themselves of the necessities of life. A corollary would be their duty to show reverence and care in their use of the things given for their daily sustenance.

In a parallel account, the Three Companions are in substantial agreement with other documents. Expanding the theme, they speak about the joy and gratitude with which God’s loving gifts are to be received. They are in agreement with earlier sources when they write of *discretio* as prudence in caring for one’s body (27. Esser and Hardick, *Schriften*, p. 130; Grau, *Klara*, p. 3; Letter to Blessed Agnes; Grau, *Klara*, pp. 123ff). Francis and Bishop Guido had to command Clare in virtue of holy obedience to eat at least a piece of bread each day (Celano, *Life*, no. 18; Grau, *Klara*, p. 51).

We are not interested here in applying modern anthropological criteria that could judge Clare’s behavior unnatural. Rather, the inhabitants of the

First World should feel themselves challenged by her. They have forgotten what it means to fast, to the extent that about a third of them are overweight, while in other regions countless human beings starve to death each day!

Stanza C

Lines 9–11. These three lines deserve some special attention. The reason for the exhortation becomes clearer when we keep in mind Francis's own health problems, and also the fact that there were many sick nuns at San Damiano – a fact that was brought to light in the process of the canonization of St. Clare.⁶ The sisters lived in constricted quarters; they were undernourished; they practiced extremely rigorous fasting; they ate only once a day, except on Sundays, Thursdays, and Christmas; they ate no meat or dairy products (see Clare's Third Letter to Blessed Agnes, no. 4; Grau, *Klara*, pp. 123ff). All these austerities inevitably left them susceptible to the diseases prevalent in the Middle Ages, especially malaria and tuberculosis. Eventually an infirmary, measuring sixteen by seven meters, was built over the present refectory at San Damiano (Boccali, vol. 1, pp. 66ff).

These observations should provide a sufficiently clear backdrop for the earnest admonitions of the saint. His first concern is for the sick nuns who are bearing the heavy burden of suffering. Our introductory remarks on the health of the holy founder at the time he dictated the *Canticum of Exhortation* show how well acquainted he was with bodily pain. Only from this biographical background does the statement of Celano take on its full significance. He looked upon his trials not as sufferings but as sisters, because they united him with the saving cross of Christ and thereby opened for him the way to heavenly glory (2*Cel* 212; Grau, *Klara*, pp. 50, 59).

It is significant, from the viewpoint of the psychology of Francis, that he addresses the same admonitions to the healthy as well as to the sick, to those who nurse the patients as well as to those who are the recipients of their care: "All of them should bear it in peace." Despite its brevity, this phrase is full of meaning. Prolonged suffering or day-by-day work for the bedridden carries with it the danger of discouragement, interior rebellion, and even outspoken expressions of impatience. "Peace" is set over against these failings. It is a cheerful, total, and constantly reiterated yes to God's will as it is expressed in the here-and-now. Only in this way can the sick and those who care for them experience a radical transformation of their feelings. What before seemed abhorrent becomes attractive through the transforming power of love! (See the Testament of St. Francis, no. 1; Esser and Hardick, *Schriften*, p. 94).

Stanza D

Lines 12-13. These two lines flow naturally from the two preceding ones. Anyone who carries the earthly burden of his own suffering or that of caring for the ill with interior peace, will soon learn what a rich reward it earns. The rather startling notion of "bargaining with God" for the effort spent in overcoming pain or caring for the ill harks back to the saint's experience as a merchant and brings to mind the conversation he had with his blood brother Angelo shortly after the voluntary renunciation of his goods before Bishop Guido. On a certain winter's morning, Angelo saw Francis shivering with the cold, and he remarked with bitter mockery to his fellow-townsmen: "Tell Francis to sell you a pennyworth of his sweat." Thereupon the saint answered with a smile: "Indeed, I will sell my sweat more dearly to my Lord" (2*Cel* 12; Grau, *Klara*, p. 237).

A willingness to accept illness patiently or to care devotedly for the sick will be crowned with imperishable glory, just as Mary, the queen of heaven, was crowned for her virginal life dedicated to the exclusive service of the Lord (see Luke 1:38; 1 Cor. 7:34). Here we naturally think of a parallel passage from the Canticle of Brother Sun: "All praise be yours my Lord, through those who grant pardon for love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace; by you, Most High, will they be crowned" (tr. *Omnibus*). What is peculiar to the Canticle of Exhortation is the explicit reference to Mary as a prototype, showing that God crowns His own grace in the sufferings and accomplishments of His creatures. For Clare, sounding the Marian theme represented an ever-renewed attempt to adapt Franciscanism to the demands of a woman's sensibilities (see Lothar Hardick, in Grau, *Klara*, pp. 186-88). When Clare was about to leave this world, the appearance of the mother of God surrounded by a throng of virgins was the final complement of her special love for Mary (Celano, *Life*, no. 46; Grau, *Klara*, p. 73).

It was an enriching experience to reflect on the spiritual content of the Canticle of Exhortation addressed by St. Francis to the Poor Ladies of San Damiano. Unlike the Canticle of Brother Sun, this Old Italian hymn will hardly become world-famous. Its scope is too narrow, directed as it is to the Poor Clares. For a variety of reasons, however, it merits careful study. The musical exhortation takes its place among the earliest examples of the Italian vernacular. It reflects in a unique way the proclamation of the Gospel after the manner of the *Laudes* - religious hymns sung in chorus by groups of the faithful, and which in turn were inspired by the medieval ideals of chivalry. It offers convincing proof of the concern the holy founder had for the Poor Ladies of San Damiano. Finally, it contains some very important elements of Franciscan spirituality as mirrored in the contemplative, cloistered life of the Poor Clares. The discovery of this

spiritual testament was the crowning achievement of the close of the Franciscan jubilee year of 1976. It is an omen of a hoped-for fresh beginning which must be expressed in action rather than in words.

Notes

1. I feel that I must dispense with strictly critical methods. References to relevant quotations will be given in parentheses [within the article itself] in the shortest possible form.
 - (a) For sources, see:
 - Marino Bigaroni, O.F.M., *Compilatio Assisiensis* dagli scritti di fr. Leone e Compagni su S. Francesco d'Assisi (Assisi, 1975);
 - Rosalind B. Brooke, *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci* Oxford, 1970);
 - For 1-3 Celano, see Engelbert Grau, O.F.M., *Leben und Schriften der hl. Klara*. Einführung (Werl in Westphalia, 1964);
 - Kajetan Esser, O.F.M. and Lothar Hardick, O.F.M., *Die Schriften des hl. Franziskus von Assisi. Einführung* (1972), hereafter cited as *Schriften*. Meanwhile, the sixth completely revised edition has been published in Werl in Westphalia, 1980;
 - Engelbert Grau, O.F.M., *Leben und Schriften der hl. Klara* (Werl in Westphalia, 1976), hereafter cited as *Klara*;
 - *Der Sonnengesang des hl. Franziskus von Assisi* (Werl in Westphalia, 1980). German translation by P. Leutchen, 1976, accompanied by modern meditations by P. Renni (Lucerne-Munich, 1976). See my review in *CF*, 46 (1976):325ff.
 - (b) Among the published works I have consulted are:
 - Giovanni Broccoli, O.F.M., "Parole di esortazione alle 'poverelle' di San Damiano," in *Forma Sororum*, 14 (1977):54-70;
 - "Canto di esortazione di san Francesco per le 'poverelle' di San Damiano," in *CF*, 48 (1978):5-29;
 - A. Menichetti, "Una 'prosa' volgare di san Francesco," in *Studi e Problemi di Critica Testuale*, 19 (1979):5-10;
 - Franca Brambilla Ageno, *Proposti al testo della "prosa" volgare di san Francesco*, 20 (1980):5-8. I am indebted to Professor Giovanni Pozzi, O.F.M.Cap., of Fribourg, for making a copy of this article available.
2. For an account of the saint's illnesses, see my article "Laudato si, mi Signore, per quelle che . . . isostegno infirmitate," nn. 2-3.
3. See G.F. Folena, *Überlieferungsgeschichte der altitalienischen Literatur*, vol. 2 (Zurich, 1964), pp. 335-49. It is the best and most comprehensive introduction to the problem of the Cantic of Brother Sun in German. See *CF*, 35 (1965):418-19.
4. See Engelbert Grau, O.F.M., "Die Klausur im Kloster S. Damiano zu Lebzeiten der hl. Klara," in *Studia historico-ecclesiastica* (Rome, 1977), pp. 311-46. The author convincingly corrects Heribert Roggen, O.F.M.'s booklet on Clare which shows little concern for the use of reliable source material. See also *CF*, 41 (1971):400-4.
5. See the Prologue, no. 1. See B. Steidle, O.S.B., *Die Benediktus-Regel lateinisch-deutsch* (Beuron, 1975), p. 54: "Ausculta, O fili, praecepta magistri." 6. See Zefferino Lazzeri, O.F.M., "Il processo di canonizzazione di S. Chiara d'Assisi," in *AFH*, 13 (1920):403-507, or in *Fonte Francescane* (Assisi, 1978), pp. 2299-2383. See also Giovanni Boccali, vol. 2, pp. 26ff.
7. Line 12 as given in the manuscript presents considerable difficulty. For "vederi" See Boccali, vol. 2, pp. 18, 28. According to the text proposed by all three authorities mentioned in n. 1b above, the word should probably be read "vendirete."