

Francis and Clare: A Critical Examination of the Sources
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Several questions have been proposed whose answers can help us to appreciate the manner in which Francis and Clare both enjoyed special graces as individuals, and at the same time were so mutually responsible for the development of the early Franciscan fraternity. We can pose the question: In what way did Francis and Clare share a mutual gift of grace, or to be more precise, in what way did they foster together an impulse of the Spirit manifested in definite structures in the church? We can further pose the question: In the development of this grace and of these structures, what elements were clearly personal and unique to Francis? What elements were personal and unique to Clare? The purpose of answering these questions is the establishment of a just estimate of Clare's originality and responsibility for the development of the Franciscan charism during the first critical decades of the history of the order. While a few would argue that Clare was not, in her own right, a woman of great sanctity and fortitude, it is not always so clearly understood that she also was responsible for a certain historic unfolding of the Franciscan movement and its spirituality in her own right. When viewing Clare and analyzing her life, do we tend to think of her in an auxiliary role to Francis and the brothers? Do we regard her as a most faithful disciple of Francis but with a notion of fidelity that is static and imitative? Or, finally, do we take account of the period in which Clare continued during the twenty-seven years after the death of Francis to govern, to write and to legislate, as a period that establishes her separate and significant responsibility for the growth of the Franciscan vocation in the church? We are most likely to appreciate correctly the achievement of these long years of leadership if we appreciate correctly the nature of the response of Clare to the invitation of Francis and, perhaps just as importantly, the nature of the invitation of Francis itself. In order to establish this appreciation, we will reconstruct from the early sources the history of the initial encounters of the two founders, the reception of Clare, the initiation of the Order of Poor Sisters, and the gradual changes that occurred in Francis's relationship to the corporate group, as well as the gradual assumption of responsibility and influence on the part of Clare.

1. Method for Use of Sources

The first question that arises is: What selection is to be made among the early sources? We are indebted to Englebert Grau for his analysis of the current knowledge of the sources for the life of St. Clare.¹ With the affirmation that he offers regarding the primacy of the *Process of Canonization* as a fundamental document, we take this source as the starting point as a constant frame of reference.² The *Process* is indeed unique among the early Franciscan materials. Making use, as it does, of the sworn testimony of persons who knew her and her family personally, it provides us with a record whose veracity is ascertained. Since it is a legal testimony, it is also devoid of literary ornamentation and theological speculations. Its very ordinariness inspires a sense of confidence in the material preserved.

If, with the *Process* in hand, we take up the *Legend of St. Clare*, we discover that the use the author of the *Legend* made of the *Process* is exhaustive.³ In a table published by Lazzeri with his edition of the *Process* in 1920, we discover that while there are several instances in which the *Process* contains more details than does the *Legend*, the *Legend* adds relatively few details of major significance, with the exception of information concerning the miracles, to the material of the *Process*.⁴ To be precise, there are thirty-two details found in the *Process* which are not repeated in the *Legend*, while the latter adds twenty items to our store of knowledge. What we do discover in the *Legend*, of course, are the hagiographical additions that tell us what major lines of interpretation were first used to testify to the sanctity of St. Clare and to interpret her life and miracles in a manner that combined veracity with edification and inspiration. In fact, owing to the massive amounts of common materials that can be compared in both documents, the reading of these two items simultaneously gives us a splendid opportunity to watch the medieval hagiographer at work.

In addition to these two major sources, we might avail ourselves of several other texts that date from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards.⁵ These remaining fonts are regarded by Grau as of secondary importance, much of their content being dependent upon the *Process* and the *Legend*.⁶ Further, Chiara Augusta Lainati has shown that for similar reasons they were not included for publication in the *Fonti Francescane*.⁷

This brings us to the question of the sources for the life of Francis that should be utilized. And here we encounter a twofold problem. The first is that, obviously, these biographies have Francis and the founding events of the Order of Friars Minor as their focus. The material on Clare contained in them is clearly limited in quantity. Secondly, the situation that dictated the writing of a particular biography or story concerning Francis can be counted upon to influence the way in which Clare's part in the drama of Franciscan beginnings is depicted.

Thus, trying to discover the story of the role of Clare in Franciscan history *via* the fonts for the life of Francis can yield only partial success. Added to this difficulty is the very nature of the sources for Francis in themselves. Here looms before us all the intricacies of "The Franciscan Question." In an address given in 1981, Edith Pásztor, of the University of Rome, summarized many aspects of the then-current *status questionis* and concluded her summary with a plea to her colleagues to attempt a greater collaborative effort of communication regarding works in progress.⁸ She pointed to the research of the now-deceased Raoul Manselli in establishing a method of form criticism that obviates some of the difficulties involved in a rigid adherence to traditional labels of "official" or "non-official" for the biographies. She also pointed to the dangers inherent in ascribing sources to the "Spiritual Party" without taking account of more recent research that has exposed the fallacies to which these attributions of earlier decades have given rise. Rosalind B. Brooke, in describing what she calls "the most auspicious and distinguished contribution to the study of St. Francis to appear for many a year,"⁹ hails Manselli's work, *Nos qui cum eo fuimus*, as a major innovation in the study of Francis and the methods of his first biographers. While hailing Manselli's precision in following his own technique of *Formkritik*, Brooke points out that Manselli's avoidance of the use of the *Witness of the "Anonymous of Perugia,"* the *Legend of the Three Companions*, or the *First Life of Thomas of Celano*, must be taken into account and thus indirectly indicates the need to profit from Manselli's major work, while at the same time augmenting it with attention to other areas, particularly the question relating to the dating of the *Witness of the "Anonymous of Perugia,"* and the *Legend of the Three Companions*, and the relation of the Greccio letter to the sources.¹⁰ Taking our cues from the combined insights of these two Franciscan scholars, we approach the question of what biographies should be used to draw our portrait of Francis and Clare.

What we propose to do is to construct a portrait of the relationship of Francis and Clare that depends upon the *Process* and the *Legend of St. Clare* on the one side, and an inclusive reading of the major biographies of Francis on the other. Thus the sources for Francis and Clare will include the *Actus Beati Francisci et sociorum ejus*,¹¹ the *Anonymus perusinus*,¹² the *Vita prima* and the *Vita secunda* of Thomas of Celano,¹³ the *Legenda maior*,¹⁴ the *Legenda Perusina (Compilatio Assisiensis)*,¹⁵ the *Legenda trium Sociorum*,¹⁶ and the *Speculum perfectionis*.¹⁷ Once we have drawn from these biographical sources we shall place alongside them certain other texts from the writings and from external witnesses that relate in a particular manner to the factual event under consideration. Thus, for example, in treating of the beginnings of Clare's life at San Damiano, we will consider the *Form of Life* given to Clare by Francis at that period. After pursuing this composition

work, we will give separate consideration to certain sections of the *Actus-Fioretti*, which have played a prominent role in coloring our understanding of the relationship of Francis and Clare.

A simple recitation of this plan, however, is hardly sufficient as a justification for adopting what may well appear an overly ambitious and confusing attempt to employ multiple texts simultaneously. Those familiar with the voluminous research on the textual intricacies of these sources, and the questions of dating and authorship, will smile at the naiveté of such a proposal. Perhaps it is, however, this very wealth of scholarship that emboldens us to hazard this reading. Whereas such a process would have certainly led to hopeless confusion a few decades ago, it can be attempted at this point in time precisely because we possess an adequate critique of the materials at hand. A judicious use of these critical materials allows us to use each of these major biographical sources in a way that does not lose sight of what strengths it brings to our topic and what inadequacies it entails.

We wish to study these sources as they shed light upon the chronological sequence of events in the lives of Francis and Clare. We adopt for this purpose the chronology for the life of St. Clare presented by Becker, Godet and Matura in their edition of her writings.¹⁸ Beginning with the first evidence of mutual influence, we will examine each event in this sequence. The event will be traced in each source that speaks of it. The absence of material in some sources will also prove instructive. For each item in the chronology, we will gather information from all the biographies listed above.

In addition to developing our knowledge of factual chronological events, we will also need to consider the particular point of view that each source contains. What spiritual or pedagogical motives inspired the composition of these works? Each of these biographical sources was, we know, inspired by a specific need or motive. These motives ranged from papal decree (in the case of the *First Life of Thomas of Celano*) to formative pedagogy (in the case of the *Legenda maior*).¹⁹ In utilizing the biographies of Francis, we will note the material they contain and any keys of interpretation that must be used in virtue of our knowledge of that biography's *Sitz im Leben*. In this way, we will discover that at times the choice of material or the interpretation of material concerning Clare is influenced by factors that were operative when the biography was written. These same factors may have had little or no bearing on the original event. In certain instances the period of composition was a moment of highly charged meaning for the life of the evolving order. The need to recapture a precise understanding of the words and the intentions of Francis moved more than one of the early companions, or subsequently their disciples, to engage in some writing activity. As Manselli has demonstrated, this determination – as evidenced in the pericopes that he studied from the various manuscripts attributed to

the companions – enjoyed a kind of vocational fervor all its own.²⁰ The writers had a mission to perform. They were conscious of certain dangers that resulted from lack of proper evidence of the real Francis and his desires. Their intensity and purposefulness informs their work. Their purposes must be clear to us in order to make use of their work in relation to other sources. While it would appear that there will always be room for more surprises in the study of the Franciscan sources, it would also appear that we are at a juncture at which we can assay this kind of reading with a modicum of confidence. This we intend to do.

Let us now proceed to construct a portrait of the mutual vocation of Francis and Clare from the early sources. In this way we hope to end with a thorough compilation of information about the events in chronological order for the life of Clare as pertaining to Francis. We also hope to end with a realization of how certain elements came to be emphasized or minimized when, in subsequent years, biographies and other materials were written not only to recapture that past, but to influence the outcome of contemporaneous debated in the life of the order.

2. Chronological Survey

A. San Damiano Prophecy to Clare's Conversion

The first notice we find in which Francis indicates a knowledge of Clare's future role, although she herself is as yet unknown to him, comes in the form of the prophecy related in the *Second Life of Thomas of Celano* 13: "He most enthusiastically stirred up everyone for the work of that church and, in a loud voice in French, prophesied before all that there would be a monastery there of holy virgins of Christ" (see *Omnibus*, p. 373).²¹ This material is augmented in the version presented in the *Legend of the Three Companions* with a short encomium for the Poor Sisters, which troubles to note the role of Gregory IX in providing "glorious institutions" and the subsequent confirmation of their life by the Apostolic See (*Legend of the Three Companions* VII 24). In the *Second Life* 204 we find an allusion to the prophecy, while the *First Life of Thomas of Celano* makes no mention of it.

Clare would recall this moment in writing her *Testament*. She recalls this moment as one of prophecy regarding the vocational graces given to all those who became part of the company of Poor Sisters: "We can consider in this, therefore, the abundant kindness of God to us. Because of His mercy and love, He saw fit to speak these words through His saint about our vocation and choice through His saint."²²

Thus this prophetic utterance of Francis, made even before he had a following of brothers, was transmitted and finally committed to writing towards the middle of the thirteenth century while Clare was still living. It

is worth noting that it was an important enough addition to the biographical materials on Francis for Thomas of Celano to include a double reference in his *Second Life*.

(1) *Early Life of Clare*

In the *Process* we find many testimonies concerning the evident holiness of Clare even prior to her encounters with Francis and the brothers. It is most important to note that this document contains eyewitness accounts of persons who were members of her family household and/or blood relations. Let us give first place, then, to these witnesses and allow them to relate what they knew of the spiritual gifts that Clare evidently enjoyed from her earliest years.

One witness, Lady Bona de Guelfuccio of Assisi, affirms her belief that Clare "had been sanctified in her mother's womb" (*Proc XVII 1*).²³ This belief came from observing her holiness both before and after she had entered religion. Bona relates her prudence in terms of staying hidden and avoiding public notice, "not wanting to be seen by those who passed in front of the house" (*Proc XVII 4*). Bona also provides the precious detail of Clare sending alms to those who were working on St. Mary of the Portiuncula, in addition to her sending food to the poor (*Proc XVII 5*). Clare also encouraged her companion to make the pilgrimage to St. James in Compostella (*Proc XVII 6*).

Another witness, Lord Ranieri de Bernardo of Assisi, echoes Bona's sentiments. His important contribution is the admission of his own proposal of marriage, which was met not only with a refusal, but with Clare's admonition to him to despise the world (*Proc XVIII 2*). He lists her good deeds as fasting, praying, and giving alms. Her conversations in the household were spiritual (*Proc XVIII 3*).

Pietro de Damiano, a neighbor, estimates that at age seventeen Clare already had determined to live in virginity and poverty. Her inheritance was sold to be given to the poor and all believed in her "good manner of life" (*Proc XIX 2*).

Iovanni de Ventura, the watchman of the Favarone household, describes her as being of "upright life and dress, as if she had been in a monastery for a long time." He adds that in spite of the elegance of the household, she saved food for the poor. In addition to fasting and prayer, he testifies that she wore "a rough garment under her clothes" while still in her father's house (*Proc XX 1-4*).

Beatrice, the natural sister of Clare, remembers her life as being "from her childhood almost angelic" (*Proc XII 1*). A very important assertion is contained in the record of Beatrice. She tells us that "after St. Francis heard of the fame of her holiness," he preached to her (*Proc XII 2*). The "after" allows us to conclude that Clare's reputation was indeed known beyond

the confines of the Favarone household. It is also a detail of chronology that comes from the witness closest in relationship to Clare. Beatrice is a repository of privileged information, because as she herself attests, "she acted and talked with her as with her own sister" (*Proc XII 7*).

Pacifica de Guelfuccio also corroborates this testimony from her years of experience as neighbor and relative. Clare's love of the poor and the fact that she willingly visited the poor (*Proc I 3-4*), her life of piety and good works (*Proc I 1*), her dedication to virginity (*Proc I 2*), and her reputation and the great veneration of all the citizens are cited (*Proc I 3*). Pacifica also allows us to glimpse the maternal piety that may have inspired Clare's early aspirations in recording the pilgrimages that she (Pacifica, that is) shared with her mother Ortolana (*Proc I 4*). Pacifica was not only an intimate of the family, but after her entrance into San Damiano served Clare almost day and night, thus also ranking as one who knew intimately the entire span of Clare's story (*Proc I 3*).

What emerges in mosaic fashion when we arrange these fragments of testimony is a portrait of a young woman who from childhood was seen to be especially gifted in the things of the spirit. She was charitable to the poor in person and through intermediaries. She was known for her purity of life and desire to avoid worldly gossip and encounters. She was openly known to be devoted to prayer, almsgiving, penitential practices, and fasting. She was held in high regard for her spiritual qualities. While her family actively sought a suitable marriage, acquaintances and relations are able to affirm (at least in hindsight) that her intentions towards a dedicated life were visible even before the dramatic events of her Palm Sunday flight. What is most striking in this emerging mosaic is the pattern of practices ascribed to Clare at this period of her spiritual development. This is not simply a vague declaration of good intentions. She is seen as evolving a form of life even at this early stage. It is, in fact, a form of life consonant with the elements of lay penitential spirituality then in flower.²⁴ How else can we explain such details as the desire to remain hidden, the choice of sober dress, the use of a penitential garment, the prayer, fasting, almsgiving and the consistent ministry to the poor? Such was the young woman who would soon meet the same Francis who had alternately shocked and gladdened Assisi with his decision to challenge its mores and institutions (*1Cel 11, 23*). Such was the young woman to whom Francis would turn to fulfill the prophecy made some years earlier in the Spirit for the radical renovation of the church of San Damiano, for the transformation of the repaired edifice into a structure of living stones (*1 Pet. 2:5*).

(2) *Response to First Preaching*

Clare was twelve years of age when Francis rebuilt San Damiano. When she was fifteen, he returned to the Spoleto valley with the *Rule* which Innocent

had approved verbally and with the preaching mandate that accompanied the *Rule* (1*Cel* 33). It is estimated that their first meeting occurred in 1211, when she was about seventeen years of age. During these five years, what impression did the young Franciscan movement make upon Clare? Given the notoriety which Francis had attained in his early conversion activity in Assisi (*AnPer* 17; *L3S* 54), and the growing fame and positive regard the friars slowly achieved after their return from Rome (e.g. 1*Cel* 36; *L3S* 54), it is difficult to believe that Clare could remain unaware of the phenomenon blossoming on the edges of the commune in which her family had powerful social positions.

We turn to the *Witness of the "Anonymous of Perugia"* for our first indication of the milieu created by the early preaching activity of the friars, and the effects which most likely included Clare in their general wake.²⁵ In reading the account of the early ventures of the friars, we are immediately struck by the aspect of what today would be called vocation recruitment evident in these early missions. The author cites the text of Matthew 10:34–35 as the preaching theme and informs us: "In the same way many women, virgins and those not having husbands, after hearing their preaching came to them with sorrowful hearts and said: 'What shall we do? We cannot be with you. Tell us, therefore, how we can save our souls.' For this reason they established monasteries of recluses for doing penance in every city in which they could. They also appointed one of the brothers to be their visitator and corrector."²⁶ This material is incorporated into the *Legend of the Three Companions* in the fourteenth chapter. There, we are told, "not only men, but also women and unmarried virgins were fired by the brothers' preaching, and, on their advice, entered the prescribed convents to do penance" (*L3S* XIV 60). Interestingly, Bonaventure introduces Clare into the *Legenda maior* through this same perspective of describing the broad phenomenon of the impact of the friars' preaching. First he describes the growth in the numbers of those who accept a life of penance and then, within this ambit, states: "Young women, too, were drawn to perpetual celibacy, among whom was the maiden Clare, who was especially dear to God" (*LMaior* IV 6). If, indeed, the recollections preserved in the *Witness of the "Anonymous of Perugia,"* and subsequently in the *Legend of the Three Companions* and the *Legenda maior*, represent a very early stratum of recollection of the beginnings of the fraternity, then the description of the feminine vocational response to the friars' preaching provides an important context for the meetings of Francis and Clare.²⁷ Consensus at this point regarding the relationship of these sources allows us to accept these citations as a key to understanding the environment in which Clare and Francis seek one another's company to treat of the things of the Lord.²⁸

(3) *First Encounters*

In the *Process*, we learn of the nature of the first meetings of Francis and Clare. Returning momentarily to her sister Beatrice, we recall that her statement was that Francis had already heard of Clare before their first meeting (*Proc XII 2*). We read the accounts of Bona de Guelfuccio with interest fired by the fact that she accompanied Clare on these visits. We learn thus that Clare went many times, accompanied by this companion, and that she feared discovery of these encounters by her parents. She was eighteen at the time. The content of these meetings is described by Bona as "preaching." The preaching theme is "converting to Jesus Christ." Francis, too, was accompanied, apparently by Brother Philip, for Bona tells us that he also preached to Clare on the same theme (*Proc XVII 3-4*). Amata, the niece of Clare, speaks of the "exhortation and preaching of St. Francis" (*Proc IV 2*), while Pacifica uses the term "admonition" (*Proc I 2*). Lord Ugolino de Pietro Girardone testifies that it was public knowledge that Clare entered religion "at the preaching of St. Francis and his admonition" (*Proc XVI 3, 6*), and Filippa and Cecilia repeat similar thoughts (*Proc III 2; VI 1*). Can we discern any further development in the preaching theme? Is it possible to discover further content in the admonition or exhortation referred to by the witnesses?

At this point we can attempt a comparison alluded to earlier, between the raw material of the *Process* and the re-working of that material in the *Legend*. The *Legend* refers the discernment that brings Clare and Francis together to "the Father of spirits" (see Heb. 12:9). He sees each of the saints as responding in different ways to these divine promptings. Celano implies a more active interest in Francis in the prospect of meeting Clare than we see in the simple narratives of the *Process*. Francis is depicted as longing for spoil, wanting to wrest Clare from the world and win her for Christ. The frequency of their visits, however, Celano ascribes to Clare's eagerness to hear the words of Francis which "seemed to her to be on fire." Whereas the remembrance of Bona simply states that Francis urged the conversion to Christ upon Clare, Celano has Francis encourage her to despise the world and its deceptive beauty. He then introduces the bridal imagery and theme of spiritual espousal: "He whispered in her ears of a sweet espousal with Christ, persuading her to preserve the pearl of her virginal purity for that blessed Spouse whom Love made man" (*LegCl 5*).²⁹

Then an important passage follows that attempts a description of the inner transformation taking place in Clare after she receives guidance from Francis: "Immediately an insight into the eternal joys was opened to her, at whose vision the world itself would become worthless, with whose desire she would begin to melt, [and] for whose love she would begin to yearn for heavenly nuptials."³⁰

This insight is translated into a determination to live in virginity which Celano couches in terms of rejection of allurements of the flesh in favor of marriage with the great King (*LegCl* 6). He then summarizes the effect of this early guidance: "Then she committed herself thoroughly to the counsel of Francis, placing him, after God, as the guide of her journey." The goal of this journey is Christ and her efforts to gain Christ, related via the words of Paul in Philippians 3:8.³¹ That these events represented a radical change in Clare's spiritual perception and experience of grace is further attested to by words she spoke as her death approached. We are told that in her final days when the chaplain admonished her to accept her sufferings in patience, she replied "in a very unrestrained voice: 'After I once came to know the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ through his servant Francis, no pain has been bothersome, no penance too severe, no weakness, dearly beloved brother, has been hard'" (*LegCl* 44).

(4) *Palm Sunday*

Again it is to the *Legend* we must turn in order to find the specific description of the turning point at which Clare decides to act upon the counsel of Francis. "The solemnity of the Day of Palms was at hand when the young girl went with a fervent heart to the man of God, asking [him] about her conversion and how it should be carried out" (*LegCl* 7). Francis instructs her in specific detail to dress in her finery and join the townspeople in the cathedral. The narrative that follows (which has no parallel in the *Process* excepting the detail of Clare's opening of the barred door, XIII 1) raises as many questions as it answers. What was the precise meaning of the bishop's gesture in carrying the palm to her? Why did she not leave by the usual door? Who accompanied her? How did she manage to get through the guarded city walls and to the Portiuncula without detection or interference? Celano leaves us with the questions and briefly but beautifully describes the scene of her investiture, having placed her flight in the liturgical light of the banishment of Jesus beyond the city walls, celebrated in Holy Week (*LegCl* 7).³²

In the *Process*, our witness, Beatrice, also underscores the alacrity with which Clare followed the counsel of Francis, telling us that "she went to serve God as soon as she was able." It is at this point in her testimony that Beatrice adds the detail that Clare sold her inheritance and gave it to the poor (*Proc* XII 2-3). This allows us to infer that Francis followed the same pattern in advising Clare about her entrance into his company, as he had in the case of Bernard (*1Cel* 24; *2Cel* 14; *AnPer* 10-11; *L3S* 30). She goes on to say that Francis "gave her the tonsure before the altar in the Church of the Virgin Mary, called the Portiuncula, and then sent her to the church of San Paolo de Abbatissis" (*Proc* XII 4). This is repeated in Ugolino (*Proc* XVI 6), by Bona (*Proc* XVII 6), Ranieri (*Proc* XVIII 3) and Iovanni (*Proc* XX 6).

Interestingly, while five witnesses in the *Process* state that it was Francis who tonsured her, the *Legend* depicts the scene more communally and states that "the brothers . . . received the virgin Clare with torches" and that then she had "her hair shorn by the hands of the brothers" (*LegCl* 8).

The text cited previously adds the detail that Francis then led Clare to the Church of San Paolo, with the *Legend* adding the detail that indicates this was a temporary exigency (*LegCl* 8). Neither the three witnesses who give information concerning her struggle with her parents in San Paolo (*Proc* XX 4; XVIII 3; XX 6) nor Celano (*LegCl* 9) indicate that Francis was present or took any role in this confrontation. Indeed Celano presents the miniature drama as a trial that proves the mettle of Clare and provides growth in hope and love. It is Beatrice, then, who provides the information that her transfer to Sant'Angelo de Panzo was made in the company of Francis, Philip and Bernard (*Proc* XII 5). Interestingly, the dramatic story of the flight of Agnes to Sant'Angelo and the second violent encounter of Clare with her relatives is not recounted in the *Process*. Celano does not place it in chronological sequence as part of the story of Clare's conversion, but rather treats it as a part of the section on the power of her prayer (*LegCl* 24–26). Here again Clare endures this threat, and that to her beloved sister, independently of any obvious intervention by Francis. This omission is important in that it indicates that while Clare sought spiritual direction from Francis, she was thoroughly capable of taking initiatives that had serious social and legal consequences on her own. She responds to the questions of her own property and her family obligations in her own right.

The final stage of her pilgrimage to San Damiano is also treated sparingly. The *Process* tells only that she stayed for a little time (*Proc* XII 5) and then went to San Damiano (*Proc* XX 7). The *Legend* tells us that the move was necessary because her soul was not at rest (*LegCl* 10). This is followed by one of those lyric passages, however, in which Celano eulogizes this fact and provides several layers of analogy or metaphor. The indications are that the significance of the final choice of monastery was present to a later observer, even if it was only a seminal appreciation at the time of the decision. Celano had, in fact, already exercised this theme in the biographies of Francis (*1Cel* 19–20; *2Cel* 204).

Clare entered into the confines of San Damiano accompanied only by Agnes. Her reputation, however, quickly spread, and with it the number of members of her new sisterhood (*LegCl* 10). That her influence was limited to women is negated by the statement of Iovanni: "Then she went to the place of San Damiano, where she became mother and teacher of the Order of San Damiano, and she begot there many sons and daughters in the Lord Jesus Christ, as is seen today" (*Proc* XX 7). The *Legend* enlarges upon this also: "The ardor of young men was no less moved to enter the struggle, and

was provoked to spurn the allurements of the flesh, through the strong example of the more fragile flesh" (*LegCl* 10). Clare was formally installed as the abbess after three years, as is attested to by Pacifica, who was present when Francis insisted upon it (*Proc* I 6). What can we assume about the years that intervened between her arrival at the monastery and her assumption of formal governance in accord with church legislation?³³ Have we information from sources that allows us to fit additional fragments into our mosaic, that allow us to glimpse something of the development of the Order of Poor Sisters, but more, something of the development of the way in which Francis and Clare continued to strive together in order to know Christ (Phil. 3:10)?

B. First Years at San Damiano: 1212-15

We possess an important witness to the nature of Francis's instruction of Clare and her sister in the Form of Life. Esser states that this writing of Francis was preserved in the sixth chapter of the *Rule of St. Clare* and is thus found inserted in the original Bull of Innocent IV preserved in the protomonastery in Assisi. As for the time of composition he states: "We may certainly assign this little work to the beginning of St. Clare's religious life."³⁴ Gregory IX also refers to this simple rule of life in his letter to Agnes of Prague of May 11, 1238.³⁵ It is preserved by Clare and is composed of a single sentence: "Since by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most high King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have the same loving care and special solicitude for you as [I have] for them."³⁶

Three features of this brief instruction immediately strike the reader. The first is the Trinitarian foundation for the life of the Poor Sisters. The second is that the term "spouse" is in relation to the Holy Spirit, a relationship that is also proposed in the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* 8. This attribution casts an interesting light upon the description of the direction of Francis as recounted in the Legend in sections 5 to 7, in which the bridal imagery is used to pose a relationship with Christ analogous to and superior to an earthly betrothal. The third is that the term that Francis uses to describe his relationship to the brothers and to the sisters is one of "loving care and special solicitude." This loving care and special solicitude is pledged in words of solemn promise ("I resolve and promise") and involves not only the personal fidelity of Francis to the relationship but the continuing fidelity of the brothers corporately as well.³⁷

If we wish to pursue further the question of the nature of this loving care in the mind and heart of Francis, we must go forward chronologically to

consider his language in chapter six, number 8 of the *Approved Rule*. There, when speaking of the quality of the love that must exist among the brothers, he admonishes: "And let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for, if a mother has such care and *love (diliget)* for her son born according to the flesh (see 1 Thes. 2:7), should not someone *love (diligere)* and care for his brother according to the Spirit even *more diligently (diligentius)*?"³⁸ This expression of love or esteem that is implied in Francis's use of *diligo* contains the image of a maternal solicitude expressed in feeding, nourishing the other person. We will return later to an examination of further implications of Francis's choice of language in this primitive *Form of Life* for Clare and her companions.

When we press our investigation into these early years at San Damiano upon the other sources, we find little; and yet this "little" should not be passed over without comment. Celano, in writing his *First Life* some fourteen years after this period, delights in playing upon the image of the "living stones." Noting that Clare's conversion took place six years after that of Francis, he likens her to the foundation of the reconstructed chapel: "The Lady Clare . . . the most precious and firmest stone of the whole structure . . ." (*1Cel* 18). In his *Second Life* he recalls that "after the virgins of Christ began to come together in that place . . . they professed the greatest perfection in observing the highest poverty and in adorning themselves with all virtues" (*2Cel* 204). When Clare recalls these yearly years, however, she evokes a portrait that contains more of the hard edges of reality: "When the blessed Francis saw that we had no fear of poverty, hard work, suffering, shame, or the contempt of the world, but that, instead, we regarded such things as great delights, moved by compassion he wrote a form of life" (*RCl* VI 2).

Again in the *Testament* she repeats this memory with the addition that Francis's amazement was augmented by the fact that "we were physically weak and frail" (*TestCl* 8). That Francis turned to Clare for help also is attested by a section found in the *Legenda maior*, in which Francis turns to both Sylvester and Clare, asking for help in discerning whether he should live as a hermit or give himself to the task of preaching: "He also asked the holy virgin Clare to consult with the purest and simplest of the virgins living under her *Rule* and to pray herself with the other sisters in order to seek the Lord's will in this matter" (XII 2). Because Bonaventure is not following a strict chronology, he does not indicate the time of this request.³⁹ What is more to be noted is that Francis, through the brothers, receives the joint reply of Clare and her sisters and Sylvester as the will of God. The friars return and tell him "God's will as they had received it," and he immediately takes to the roads to carry out the divine command (*LMaio*r XII 2). The confidence of Francis in the prayer and discernment of Clare is unequivocal.

The only event that can be firmly dated for this period is Clare's assumption of the office of abbess sometime between 1215 and 1216 (*Proc* I 6; *LegCl* 12). Beyond this we possess a number of items that betoken the continuing communication of Francis and Clare, but which do not submit to easy chronological identification. For example, we have the story of Francis sending Brother Stephen to be cured of a mental illness by Clare (*Proc* II 15; *LegCl* 32), and the information that she frequently prayed the *Office of the Passion* that Francis composed (*LegCl* 30).

We have the record of Francis's efforts to temper the severity of Clare's penances, and evidence that this concern was shared by the sisters of the monastery, as stated in the *Process*. We see Francis, accompanied by the bishop, intervening to force Clare to eat enough to sustain bodily health (*Proc* I 8: II 8).⁴⁰ The presence of the bishop in this scene warns us that Clare was most likely resisting the cautionary advice of Francis and the sisters. He clearly felt constrained to bring some higher authority to bear upon the situation. It would appear that such involvement would pre-date the appointment of Hugolino as cardinal protector. It also heightens our awareness of the role of the bishop in the early organization of the sisterhood, which began with the conferral of the palm branch, most likely continued in the donation of San Damiano, and was now being acted upon in a pastoral confrontation. In another very interesting record of the *Process* we find that Francis recommended five women as candidates to the monastery. One of these, however, was not judged suitable by Clare. The sister recalling the events, Cecilia (who had herself entered because of the exhortations of Clare and the preaching of Philip [*Proc*. IV 1]), states that Clare was under considerable pressure to accept even this woman. She did so reluctantly, and in the end her judgment was vindicated. Cecilia affirms that this took place while Francis was still living (*Proc* VI 15). Thus we can also assume that while each had supreme confidence in the special spiritual gifts of the other, there was nothing of the magical or fatalistic about their consultations.

It would also seem possible to develop an entire discussion on the theme of the material contained in the *Process* and in the *Legend of St. Clare*, which bear witness to the constant and pervasive influence of Francis upon Clare. We refer here to a kind of influence which is manifested in a continuous stream of events or records, not one of which can simply be assigned to individual instances. It is impossible to read many details of the activity of Clare without discerning therein a response to the preaching and intentions of Francis. This response is neither mechanical nor mimetic. Clare appears to possess a talent for translating themes found in the writings of Francis into concrete, incarnate activities and norms for decisions. A single example will suffice at this point to indicate a larger pattern. Francis, in his letters to the clergy, to the custodians, and to the entire

order, advances the Eucharistic reforms sought by the Fourth Lateran Council.⁴¹ In one place he specifically urges: The chalices, corporals, appointments of the altar, and everything which pertains to the entire liturgical order advances the Eucharistic reforms sought by other texts (2*Cel* 201e; *LP* 80b; *SpPer* 4) Francis determines to send the friars out with ciboria and griddles to bake hosts. Turning to the *Process*, we find numerous references to the work of spinning and sewing that Clare performed (*Proc* I 11; II 12; VI 14; IX 9), in order to prepare sets of altar linens to be distributed in local churches. This kind of symbiosis of thought and missionary intent can be found repeatedly. To launch such a study would take us too far afield at this point in our discussion. The evidence that such a study would reward our efforts to identify these secondary levels of correspondence is plentiful.

We close our considerations of this early period with a final document, the famous letter of Jacques de Vitry, written in 1216 from Genoa.⁴² In the letter, Jacques de Vitry does not mention either Clare or Francis by name, but gives a general account of the groups he encountered during his travels in Umbria, whose titles are the Lesser Brothers and Lesser Sisters. He depicts them as working daily to capture souls. In fact, his assessment of the influence of their evangelization parallels this description found in the *Witness of the "Anonymous of Perugia"*, number 41b. His description of the women states: "The women live near the cities in various hospices. They accept nothing but live from the work of their hands. In fact, they are very much offended and disturbed because they are honored by the clergy and laity more than they deserve." The indication in this report is that both groups of the early Franciscan movement are well known and equally known. The women are seen as part of the group with separate but equally important functions and witness values to offer. What is also important is the information that the Franciscan women are already so highly regarded just four years after Clare came to San Damiano. The early experiences of contempt, referred to above – and the spiritual consolation they created – seem to be a thing of the past by 1216. It is also clear that de Vitry witnessed plural manifestations of the groups, for he speaks of hospices. This would seem to corroborate the words of the *Process* and the *Legend* that speak of the rapid spread of Clare's influence.

We know, however, that at approximately the same time that de Vitry recorded his impressions, changes were at work in the structure of both the church's response to this phenomenon and in the structure of Francis's relationship to Clare and her sisters. These changes present us with a point of division in the story of these beginnings. For within the previous year Clare had been named abbess, and in another year Cardinal Hugolino would enter as a commanding presence in the development of the form of life of the Poor Sisters. Thus from Jacques de Vitry we receive this

miniature of the mosaic we are fashioning, a cameo of the image of these first Franciscan women in the springtime of their foundation and their pilgrimage in history.

(C) *The Middle Years: 1215-20*

In examining the years between 1215 and the return of Francis from the Holy Land in summer of 1220, we find little that gives explicit notice of contact between Francis and Clare. Yet within this five-year period major changes took place in both branches of the order that must have required deliberation and discernment. Clare requested and received from Innocent III the *Privilege of Poverty* prior to his death in July of 1216. This was one of the actions which was a unique testimony to her unity with Francis's vision. Then followed the period in which Hugolino became cardinal protector, legislated a new rule of life, and introduced Cistercian visitors. The next notice we find of Francis is his reaction upon returning from the Holy Land to the initiative of Philip. Jordan of Giano's chronicle tells of Philip's success in obtaining certain papal privileges to facilitate his work among the monasteries of Poor Sisters.⁴³ Francis had the privileges revoked. Philip was closely associated with Clare and her monastery from the beginning of her conversion, and it is difficult to imagine that the reaction of Francis would not have had some repercussions there.

(1) *The Later Years: 1221-24*

In this segment of time, seen as later years in the life of Francis, we do not find strict evidence of actual collaboration in the sources. However, we have only to consider the monumental task Francis undertook in the composition of the *Rule* to realize that this was a period in which decisions of great moment for both foundations were being made. In the *Rule of 1221* (chapter 12) Francis addressed the question of suspicious relations with women and provided limitations for those exercising sacramental offices or spiritual direction for them. When this material was transposed into the *Rule of 1223* (chapter 11), a single sentence enjoined chaste behavior with women. To this was added a strict prohibition against going into monasteries of nuns without the required permission of the Apostolic See. When we also consider the publication in 1220 of *Cum secundum consilium* with its requirement of a novitiate,⁴⁴ and the explicit regulations for the punishment of fornication in the *Earlier Rule* (chapter 13), we may conclude that Francis is being forced to deal with the consequences of the rapid expansion of the brotherhood during a period in which training in discipline was not advanced to the level required.

Thus, while there is no evidence to suggest an exact date for them, it is here that we would do well to treat of four segments of the *Second Life of*

Thomas of Celano that speak simultaneously of Francis's rapport with San Damiano and the problem of training the brothers by word and example. The first two (2*Cel* 204–5) are entitled "How Francis Wanted His Brothers to Deal with the Poor Sisters." The first segment (204) begins with a laudatory introduction which links the order to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and extols the poverty and virtues of the sisters. Then a shift occurs: "Though their father gradually withdrew his bodily presence from them, he nevertheless gave them his affection in the Holy Spirit by caring for them." The next words echo Clare's *Testament* (number 8) in recalling the privations the sisters embraced, and then we find a summary of the *Form of Life* with its promise of continual care. To this is added an important note, however: "He emphatically commanded that it should always be so, saying that one and the same spirit had led the brothers and the Poor Ladies out of the world." Then in 205 follows a dialogue in which the brothers query Francis as to his reduction of visits to San Damiano. His answer is a strong affirmation of affection: "Do not believe, dearest brothers, that I do not love them perfectly." He then insists that his conduct is motivated solely by the necessity of giving example. Then the section concludes with Francis's counsel about the kind of brother who may be sent as a minister to the Poor Sisters: "I do not want anyone to offer himself of his own accord to visit them, but I command that unwilling and most reluctant brothers be appointed to take care of them, provided they be spiritual men, proved by a worthy and long religious life." This exposition is followed in *Second Celano* 206, with two examples of brothers punished by Francis for visiting monasteries for reasons of simple personal affection for relatives living therein. Finally in *Second Celano* 207, Francis applies these restrictions to himself. The story recounts that his vicar had asked him repeatedly to preach to the sisters at San Damiano. Francis reluctantly agreed. The touching detail is included that the sisters came to hear the sermon "though no less to see their father," – almost as if to heighten the dramatic effect of what followed. Francis then gave his symbolic sermon of being sprinkled with ashes and reciting the *Miserere*. Nor were the sisters impervious to the message conveyed that "they should regard themselves as ashes and that there was nothing in his heart concerning them but what was fitting this consideration." The moral was then drawn that his visits to the sisters were forced upon him and rare, that the brothers should behave likewise, keeping guard "against the snare laid out for them."

If this last sentence seems to have carried us far from his protestations of love in *Second Celano* 204, we can perhaps find additional indications of the dilemma Francis faced in three other sections (2*Cel* 112, 113, 114) that treat of the more general topic of conduct toward women. The first of these (112) contains the strongest negative statement regarding Francis and women in the sources under consideration.⁴⁵ It also includes his famous

protest that he would recognize only two women by sight. And yet this harsh description in which women are described in terms of honeyed poison and importunate loquaciousness is followed by the assurance that he taught by wonderful and brief words those women who had demonstrated a life of holiness. It should also be noted that this section ends with an apostrophe by the author in which he eagerly echoes the perjorative attitude toward the impediment that women constitute. In *Second Celano* 113, we find a delicate parable (also in *Speculum perfectionis*, number 86) in which Francis teaches prudent mortification of the sense of sight in the pursuit of chastity. It is noteworthy that in this small *exemplum*, with its overtones of the troubadour lyrics, the source of the difficulty is not imputed to the woman, but to the weakness of the male messenger. In fact, the entire tone of this tiny account is in stark contrast to the preceding text. Then *Second Celano* 114 makes the application with the actual instance of Francis's refusal to look directly at the women to whom he is preaching. He cautions against looking upon a bride of Christ and cautions against any dealing with women other than those required by pastoral responsibility. Thus we need to juxtapose one set of stories that reflects Francis's teaching of the discipline of chastity to be observed in all dealing with women, with another group of stories that strikes us as truly ambivalent in their attempt to combine faithfulness to the Poor Sisters with punitive reactions to friars who presumed to serve them without permission.

What factors are at work influencing this portrait of Francis's relations with Clare and her sister? While *Second Celano* 204 has parallels in other sources (*LP* 45; *SpPer* 90; *2Cel* 13), sections 205 to 207 do not. Likewise *Second Celano*, numbers 112 to 114, is taken up again by Bonaventure in *Legenda maior*, chapter 5, number 5, and *Speculum perfectionis*, numbers 86 and 95. These items enter into the biographies, therefore, with the publication of Celano's Second Life in 1247. Let us consider for a moment the context in which these additional materials were collected for addition to the biography of Francis. Among the other events taking place in the order, the question of the relationship of the friars with the Poor Sisters was by no means a dead issue at this point. When *Quo elongati* was promulgated in 1230, with its prohibition against the brothers serving as preachers, Clare rebelled.⁴⁶ Simultaneously with the publication of Celano's second biography and its collection of new materials from the early companions came the *Rule* of Innocent IV, which included specifications of the friars obligations to the Poor Sisters.⁴⁷ Such explicit links were not present in the *Rule* of Hugolino under which the Poor Sisters and other monasteries had been operating. That the brothers were by no means in agreement regarding the nature of their obligations to the sisters is clear.⁴⁸ In addition, the Order of Friars Minor was struggling with its own concerns regarding the observance of poverty as reflected in the

papal decisions of the period and the beginnings of formal commentaries upon the *Rule*.⁴⁹

Can we thus conclude that the choice of materials we see in *Second Celano*, numbers 204 to 207, represents an attempt to answer a question that was very present to the brothers in the middle years of the thirteenth century, namely, how far was their obligation to the Poor Sisters defined? In the attempt to answer the question, the companions and friars who responded to the appeal of Crescentius in 1244 recalled these stories that treat of Francis's instructions on the point. They were recalled and put in writing under the pressure of finding historic models for contemporary dilemmas.⁵⁰ (How often do we not engage in the same exercise?) What is fascinating is the degree to which they were still insisting twenty years after the death of Francis on the very intention which he made explicit in both the *Form of Life* and the *Last Will*, that is, the obligation to care for the sisters, while at the same time exercising maximum caution lest this obligation become a license to engage in questionable relationships. What cannot be overestimated is the profound sense of fidelity to this relationship that continued to inspire the biographers of Francis, particularly Celano and the contributors to the *Legend of Perugia*, at a point in time when a compromise might have been struck on the pretext of conserving time and energy for more pressing missionary and conservationist endeavors.

E. The Final Years: 1224-26

In these final years of the life of Francis, Clare contracts the serious illnesses that will be her portion for the remainder of her life. The chronology for her life places this at approximately the same time as the reception of the stigmata by Francis.⁵¹ Indeed from this point on, the communication between Francis and Clare and her sisters takes place within the ambit of the declining health of Francis and the urgency on both sides of the enclosure of San Damiano to have some final experiences of communion. In the penultimate year of his life, Francis stays in a hut near San Damiano, during a time of excruciating suffering and spiritual oppression (*LP* 42-44; *SpPer* 90). Triumphant through grace over his temptations of spirit, he writes the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, with its magnificent interplay of masculine and feminine symbolism. But upon finishing this masterwork, he is further inspired by the news of the grief and concern of the sisters for him to write another song especially for them (*LP* 45). In contrast to the sentiments recorded in *Second Celano* 204- or perhaps in a kind of odd harmony with them - we read of his final sentiments: "Since he could not go in person to visit and console them, he had his companions bring them what he had composed for them. . . . When he thought of them, his spirit

was always moved to pity, because he knew that from the beginning of their conversion they had led and were still leading an austere life" (LP 45).

The *Canticle of Exhortation* that he then sent them expresses tender sentiments illumined by faith in their vocation and the reward that awaits them. The language is familiar, colloquial: "Listen, little poor ones . . . I beg you through great love . . . Each one [of you] will be crowned queen in heaven" (*CantExh*).⁵² Once more we must consider the particular font in which this pericope is found. We are dealing here with some of the material gathered from the early companions. Celano did not choose to relate the material about this song for the Poor Sisters, although *Second Celano* 204 parallels the material. Thus it falls to the *Legend of Perugia* (or *Assisi Compilation*) to preserve the warmth and particularity of detail of this incident. Given the determination that informs this work to preserve details revealing the complexity and intensity of the personality of Francis, we read this story with particular interest. We have here a record drawn from recollections of those who bring us closest to the Francis remembered by his friends as "a real, even if very unusual religious leader trying to face the human problems of life."⁵³ We have here a precious testimony of the depth of attachment that existed at the last between Francis and his companions, and Clare and her companions.

Thus we come to the death of Francis. In the *Second Life* 204, we read that Francis, when close to death, emphatically commanded that the sisters always be entitled to help and counsel, based on his conviction that the basis of the vocation of the brothers and sisters is one. However, just as the final days of Francis begin to be counted, the friendship of Clare emerges from within the collective concern of the Poor Sisters. In the *Legend of Perugia* 109 (see *SpPer* 108) we find the poignant description that she, being ill herself and feeling herself in danger of death, "wept in bitterness of spirit and could not be consoled." It is the only instance in the sources that portrays Clare in such emotional and spiritual extremity.⁵⁴ In her anguish she sends word to Francis through one of the brothers. She has one simple human longing – to see him before her death. Francis receives the news and is moved with pity. Further, he ponders what she desired and, as he has done on other occasions, sends a letter which for him is symbolic of his desire to be personally present to the recipient.⁵⁵ The letter contains an absolution and a blessing. Then the writer adds that he also sent an inspired verbal reassurance that she would indeed see him before her death and be consoled.

In her *Rule* (chapter 6) Clare preserves the tenor of a letter of Francis which is also contained in the *Opuscula* as the *Last Will*.⁵⁶ While this may not be identical with the letter sent by Francis at this time, it does allow us to know some of his last wishes for the community of Clare. It is a simple but significant directive insisting that the life and poverty of Jesus Christ

are the goal of his vocation and that of the sisters. They must guard against being taught or advised by anyone to depart from this. Seen in light of the activity of Hugolino during these years to regulate and provide financial stability for the many convents of the Spoleto valley, we can discern in this final message more than a simple homiletic exhortation.⁵⁷ It is a plea for fidelity to the charism endangered not by enemies as much as by the beneficent intentions of friends.

The account of the funeral of Francis as contained in *First Celano* 116–17 combines classic elements modeled on early hagiographic sources.⁵⁸ However, we find agreement in the *Legend of Perugia* 109 and the description of the iron grating of the enclosure being removed, with the additional details that “the friars took the holy body from the bed and held him at the window in their arms for a good hour.” Celano describes the sisters kissing “his radiant hands,” and Bonaventure includes Clare and the sisters as witnesses to the stigmata based on this information (*LMaior* XIII 8). This particular segment of an otherwise triumphal procession to San Giorgio relates the contagion of grief “shared by all, so much so that hardly anyone could keep from weeping” (*1Cel* 117). Thus this last hour of earthly contact between Clare and Francis ends in a combination of consolation and affliction. Celano concludes somberly: “When he had been taken away, the door which will hardly ever be opened for so great a sorrow, was closed (Matt. 25:10) to them.” On the other side of that door, Clare was left to live out twenty-seven years beyond “her comforter in soul and body” (*LP* 109) in pursuit of their shared vocation.

3. Two Accounts: A Parable and a Dream

Before summarizing our findings concerning the shared vocation of Francis and Clare, we must pause to give special consideration to two further accounts from the early sources. The first will be *Fioretti* 15, the story of the meal shared by Francis and Clare. The second will be the dream of Clare related by Sister Filippa in the *Process*.

A. Actus-Fioretti 15

We have, up until this point, avoided the use of the materials contained in the *Actus-Fioretti*. This avoidance reflects a common tendency to classify the *Actus-Fioretti* as a romanticized exercise in the fourteenth century piety or polemic. Such avoidance results in the danger of ignoring both the strength of oral tradition that is generally acknowledge to serve as its base, and the tremendous popular impact that has subsequently generated many conscious and unconscious impressions and images of Francis and his early companions.⁵⁹ Of the five incidents involving Clare in this work, three have

counterparts in early sources (16, 19, 35). The miracle of the sign of the cross on the bread relates a story after the death of Francis. We therefore offer our comments only on chapter 15: How St. Clare Ate a Meal with St. Francis.

First, we note that this particular story comes from the *Actus*, the early stratum of material, and that its historicity has been opposed by Robinson, but affirmed at least in part by Cuthbert.⁶⁰ The chapter ends with details concerning Agnes's mission to Florence and the fear of the sisters that Francis would ask Clare to leave for service in another monastery. That the sisters of San Damiano were thus sent to provide government and formation for other monasteries is known, and this concluding observation adds to the sense of the story being rooted in an identifiable time.⁶¹ But the object of the story is to allow us to share the wonder of the *cittadini* of the area near the Portiuncula who, thinking their woods are on fire, arrive in "the Place" to discover Francis, Clare and their companions rapt in a mutual ecstatic experience. We are faced with two possibilities: 1) the tale is true but the "fire" is embellishment;⁶² 2) the tale is a parable meant to convey a lesson in story form. Assuming – if only for the sake of enlarging the argument – the second approach, we choose to ask how this story survived and why. What value did it represent in this collection? Edith Pásztor has pointed out how critical it is to provide a proper sense of the dating of the *Actus*, the section in which this chapter is located.⁶³ Brown, for example in his introduction, dates the work after 1327; Pásztor suggests dates between 1313 and 1318. Thus its composition is contemporaneous with (or very close to) the period in which the disruption of the Spiritual Party and the investigations of the theologians of the order and the Bulls of John XXII bring a definitive end to the early contours of the Franciscan dream. And yet here, rising from the embers of inquisitorial fires, are collections of stories that breathe the early simplicity and ingenuousness. If the oral tradition from which this story comes is indeed based upon an actual event of those early years, which has been glossed with details of a more fabulous nature, then we can be grateful for the preservation of the tale and meditate upon its implications. If the account is not based upon fact but is presented in a kind of verisimilitude, we can hazard the opinion that it represents what Mircea Eliade describes as the myth of return to a primitive Eden-state.⁶⁴ Is this story more ordained towards keeping alive a memory of a brief moment in the egalitarian beginnings of the Franciscan movement? Is it a recollection of a time before clericalization and claustration had severed relationships and pared them to the legal minimum? Is it, in fact, more a parable-prophecy of the future, a story intended to preserve an image of an Eden-state in which man and woman walk in the garden, hold converse with God, and in which fire burns but does not consume, as a sign of Yahweh's presence? Was there hidden deep

within the wellsprings of this complex heritage of history and hagiography of the first Franciscan century this myth of radical optimism that both recalled an original, liminal movement? And in the very preservation might the early companions have sustained the hope that such a goal, the goal of return to Eden-Portiuncula, was worth the suffering that was everywhere in the tempest-tossed order?⁶⁵

B. The Dream

There remains a final section of the *Process* which requires a special treatment, the story recounted by Sister Filippa of the dream of Clare in which she is nursed by Francis as a child at its mother's breast (*Proc* III, 29). While we find the full account in Filippa's testimony, there is reference to it by two other witnesses, Cecilia and Amata (*Proc* VI 13; IV 16). Because this account is unique in the sources for Clare and Francis, we recount it here in full:

The Lady Clare also related how once, in a vision, it seemed to her that she brought a bowl of hot water to St. Francis along with a towel for drying his hands. She was climbing a very high stairs, but was going so quickly, almost as though she were going on level ground. When she reached St. 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, and after she did, what she had tasted was so sweet and delightful that she in no way could describe it.

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

In a search for the roots of the images presented in this dream, we return first of all to the *Form of Life*, recalling that there Francis promised to Clare and her sisters a relationship characterized by "loving care and special solicitude" (*Form Viv* 2). This same expression is found in the *Approved Rule*, chapter 6, number 8, where Francis asks: "If a mother has such care and love for her son born according to the flesh (see 1 Thess. 2:7), should not someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit even more diligently?" Thus Francis employs an image of maternal nurture in the *Rule*. In this passage the citation from Thessalonians shows Paul reminding his audience that "we could have insisted on our own importance as apostles of Christ. On the contrary, while we were among you we were as gentle as any nursing mother fondling her little ones." Nor is this the only instance in which Francis characterizes himself in maternal imagery. Thus does he address Leo (*EpLeo* 2); and the brothers sent to live in hermitages are to be mothers (*RegEr* 1, 2, 4). Likewise the biographies are rich in instances in which this maternal relationship of Francis to the

brothers is signified. When he takes the primitive community to Rome, he is the "poor woman in the desert" (1*Cel* 16b; 2*Cel* 16b; *L3S* 50; *LMaior* III 10). Later when encountering difficulties with his responsibilities, he is a small hen whose wings are too short to protect her brood (2*Cel* 24a; *L3S* 63b).⁶⁶

In searching further for the source of this image that recurs so often in the thought of Francis and becomes so powerfully present to Clare in her dream, we are led to the monastic writers of the twelfth century. We are particularly indebted to Professor Caroline Walker Bynum for her summary of this theme in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. In the fourth chapter of this work (*Jesus as Mother, Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing*), she provides a rich study of the rise of the image of the abbot as a mother, and even offers several instances of the nursing abbot-mother from the literature of the period. In particular, she cites Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, citing such passages as the following: "Learn that you must be mothers to those in your care, not masters (*domini*); . . . Be gentle, avoid harshness, do not resort to blows, expose your breasts: let your bosoms expand with milk, not swell with passion."⁶⁷ Bynum explains: "Breasts, to Bernard, are a symbol of the pouring out towards others of affectivity or of instruction, and almost invariably suggest to him a discussion of the duties of prelates or abbots. Bernard not only develops an elaborate picture of the abbot (he usually has himself in mind) as mother, contrasting *mater* to *magister* or *dominus*, and stating repeatedly that a mother is one who cannot fail to love her child; he also frequently attributes maternal characteristics, especially suckling with milk, to the abbot when he refers to him as father."⁶⁸ We cannot do justice here to the supportive research on the feminization of religious language of this period or the search among the Cistercian writers for new images of authority that are included in this invaluable chapter of Bynum's work. Suffice it to say for our purposes that she provides evidence that the image of Francis nursing Clare does not rise from a purely private and unique relationship, but rather from a widely published font of twelfth-century spirituality.⁶⁹ Given the fact that Cistercian writers are so prominent in the propagation of this imagery, and that Cistercian visitors were appointed to San Damiano, we can conjecture that these very images may have well been presented in homiletic form within the monastery. Recall that the *Process* and the *Legend* recount that Clare distinguished among sermons, enjoying those of the learned in the arts, as well as those of the more simple preachers (*LegCl* 37).

This dream will undoubtedly continue to fascinate students of Franciscan life and literature and will continue to admit of varying levels of interpretation.⁷⁰ For our purposes it is important to affirm that in itself the dream is less mysterious to our twentieth-century eyes when viewed in the

light of the language of Francis himself. This language must, in turn, be viewed against the background of religious language and developments in the affective spirituality that spilled over into the thirteenth century from the streams of the twelfth.⁷¹ These reflections are not intended to minimize the importance of this dream as a key to the inner relational world of Francis and Clare. In fact, its value as such a key is enhanced when we consider that apparently it was not a biographical fact known to all the sisters. It is fully shared only by Filippa. It is very significant that the three women who possess knowledge of it, Filippa, Cecilia and Amata, all testify that they were specifically encouraged by Clare to join her (III 1; IV 1; VI 1). From the beginning, Clare shares her spiritual insight with these three. The dream is known to them. What is more surprising is the fact that evidence (verified by the word of sworn testimony) that so clearly underscores the spiritual intimacy and delicacy of affection between the two, should be so little known, in contrast with the *Fioretti* chapter just discussed. This can be explained by the fact that until recently the *Process* has been so little publicized as a source. It might also be ascribed to a certain modern reticence that is puzzled in the face of a description of such intimacy. What this testimony confers upon us in this final stage of our consideration is the confirmation that between Francis and Clare there did indeed exist a relationship at once public and personal, characterized by a profound inner unity. This unity, far from marking them as two human beings made of something more than mortal stuff, places them in a long procession of great religious figures who contributed generation after generation to the process of spiritual development in a world where "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

Summary Observations

What can we offer as conclusions about the nature of the shared vocation of Francis and Clare, and about the relationship that grew in response to this charismatic gift? Reviewing our attempt to see the events of their lives reflected in a comprehensive survey of the sources, we are able to state the following:

1. The relationship between Clare and Francis is the relationship of equals. Clare has already achieved a reputation for holiness prior to her first meetings with Francis. Francis respects her ability to govern her community and defers to her judgment in certain matters. Clare, on her part, likewise sees Francis as an essential presence in her vocational story, but possesses independent judgment and responsibility.
2. The work of Clare and Francis in establishing a new way of evangelical life is a work of shared suffering, hardship, teaching, prayer, discernment, and success. At the same time we must acknowledge that the relative

silence of the sources on the actual events that involved them both between 1213 and 1224 presents a serious obstacle to making an accurate assessment of their shared labors.

3. The evangelical liberty of spirit that apparently characterized the earliest years of the brotherhood and sisterhood gradually gave way to concerns for discipline, ecclesiastical approval, and the structural adjustments that this entailed. Thus we see a gradual physical separation occur, occasioned by the clarification of regulations for enclosure on the one side, and the need to rectify abuses among the friars on the other.

4. The sources for the final years of Francis's life reveal a consistency of intention regarding his conviction that the vocation and rights of the sisters are equal to those of the brothers. Among his final gestures of personal concern and affection we find special communications directed to Clare and her companions.

5. The language, imagery and symbolism used to characterize the relationship of Francis to Clare and her sisters is rooted in the great literature of medieval monasticism, not only in the tradition of the troubadour lyrics.⁷² It is a language that reveals an inclusiveness of many persons who share a common experience of prophetic awareness and work. It is language that reveals the affectivity forged by an evangelical chastity. This chastity, while not lived without cost, is the fundamental option that infuses every human relationship.

6. The relationship of Clare and Francis is, above all, a relationship that demonstrates the presence of Christ as grace: "These are they who believe in his name – who were begotten not by blood, nor by carnal desire, nor by man's willing it, but by God" (John 1:13).

Notes

1. E. Grau, "Die Schriften der Heiligen Klara und die Werke ihrer biographen," in *Movimento religioso femminile e francescanesimo nel secolo XIII* (Assisi, 1980), pp. 195–238.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 226–27.
3. *Legenda sanctae Clarae virginis*, F. Pennacchi, ed. (Assisi, 1910).
4. Z. Lazzeri, "Il processo di canonizzazione di santa Chiara d'Assisi," in *AFH* 13 (1920):403–507. The table is found on pp. 427–430.
5. Examples of such texts include: B. Bughetti, O.F.M., "Legenda versificata S. Clarae Assisiensis (saec. XIII)," in *AFH* 5 (1912):237–60; 459–81; 621–23; *ibid.*, "Miraculum S. Clarae adhuc viventis in eius Legenda praetermissum," in *AFH* 5 (1912):383–94; M. Bihl, "Tres Legendae minores S. Clarae Assisiensis (saec. XIII)," in *AFH* 7 (1914):32–54.
6. Grau, *Die Schriften der heiligen Klara*, pp. 231–35.
7. C.A. Lainati, "Le Fonti riguardanti il Secondo Ordine Francescano delle Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara," in *Approccio storico-critico alle Fonti Francescane* (Rome, 1979), pp. 134–35.
8. E. Pásztor, "The Sources of Francis' Biographies," trans. Patrick Colbourne, *Greyfriars Review* 1 (1987):31–40.
9. R.B. Brooke, "Recent Work on St. Francis of Assisi," in *Analecta Bollandiana* 10 (1982):653–76.

10. Ibid., pp. 674–75.
11. *Actus Beati Francisci et sociorum ejus*, Paul Sabatier, ed. (Paris, 1902); “St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies,” *English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, Habig, ed., 4th rev. ed. (Chicago, 1972), pp. 1267–1350, hereafter cited as *Omnibus*. The Little Flowers of St. Francis are often referred to by English-speaking persons as the *Fioretti*. More precise terminology employed in scholarly articles is reflected in the title *Actus-Fioretti*. This title indicates something of the complex textual history by which the Latin original became famous in its Italian version. See *Omnibus*, pp. 1276–92.
12. L. DiFonzo, “L’Antonimo Perugino tra le fonti francescane del sec. XIII,” in *MF* 72 (1972):117–483; *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., ed. and trans. (Paulist Press: New York – Mahwah, 1988), sections 41b, c.
13. Thomas de Celano, “Vita Prima S. Francisci,” *AF* 10 (1926–41):1–117; *Omnibus*, pp. 227–355; “Vita Secunda S. Francisci,” *AF* 10 (1926–41):127–268; *Omnibus*, pp. 359–543.
14. Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae, “Legenda Maior S. Francisci,” *AF* 10 (1926–41):555–652; *Bonaventure*, E. Cousins, trans., (New York, 1978), pp. 179–327.
15. *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci*, R.B. Brooke, ed. and trans. (Oxford, 1970).
16. T. Desbonnets, “Legenda Trium Sociorum,” in *AFH* 67 (1974):38–114; *Omnibus*, pp. 853–956.
17. *Speculum Perfectionis seu S. Francisci Assisiensis Legenda antiquissima autore frate Leone*, P. Sabatier, ed. (Paris, 1898; *Omnibus*, pp. 1103–1265.
18. M.F. Becker, J.F. Godet and Th. Matura, *Claire d’Assise: Ecrits*, Sources Chrétiennes 325 (Paris, 1985), pp. 66–75.
19. R.J. Armstrong, *The Spiritual Theology of the ‘Legenda Major’ of Saint Bonaventure*, Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1978.
20. R. Manselli, *Nos qui cum eo fuimus: Contributo alla questione francescana* (Rome, 1980), pp. 275–80.
21. “Ferventissime ad opus illius ecclesiae animat omnes, et monasterium futurum esse ibidem sanctarum virginum Christi, audientibus cunctis, gallice clara voce prophetat.”
22. “In hoc ergo considerare possumus copiosam benignitatem Dei in nobis, qui propter abundantem misericordiam et caritatem suam de nostra vocatione et electione per sanctum suum dignatus est ista loqui” (*TestCl* 15; *Ecrits*, p. 168).
23. All references to the *Process* will be indicated within the text, using the Roman numeral indicating the witness and the paragraph number of the citation.
24. See A. Vauchez, “L’idéal de sainteté dans le mouvement féminin franciscain aux XIII^e et XIV^e siècles,” in *MRFF*, pp. 322–23.
25. Armstrong, *Clare*, p. 261.
26. *AnPer* 41 b, c: “Similiter et multae mulieres virgines et non habentes viros, audientes praedicationem eorum, veniebant corde compuncto ad eos, dicentes: ‘Quid faciemus et nos? Vobiscum esse non possumus. Dicite ergo nobis quomodo salvare nostras animas valeamus.’ Ad hoc ordinavit per singulas civitates quibus potuerunt monasteria reclusa ad paenitentiam faciendam. Constituerunt etiam unum de fratribus qui esset visitator et corrector earum.”
27. Di Fonzo, cited in n. 12 above, pp. 117–483.
28. Brooke, “Recent Work,” p. 675.
29. *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., ed. and trans., (Paulist Press: New York-Mahwah, 1988), p. 194, used by permission of Paulist Press. Clare, however, does use this mode of expression in her letters. See for example *ILAg* 19–30.
30. This text appears to parallel that of *L3S* 7–8, in which Francis, at an early stage of

- conversion, is similarly moved with inner sweetness, and in which a marriage metaphor is used to express his experience. See also *2Cel* 7.
31. "Her soul . . . received whatever he said of the good Jesus with a warm heart. She . . . considered as almost dung everything acclaimed by the world in order that she might be able to gain Christ" (see Phil. 3:8; *LegCl* 6).
 32. The author speaks of her flight as "leaving the camp," a citation of Heb. 13:13: "Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp and share His shame. For there is no permanent city here on earth; we are looking for the city that is to come."
 33. The Lateran decree forbidding the foundation of new religious orders required some measures to be taken, since Clare, unlike Francis, had no oral or written approval for her form of life.
 34. C. Esser, *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*, Bibliotheca Franciscana Ascetica Medii Aevi XIII (Grottaferrata, 1978), p. 162.
 35. *BF* I, 242-44.
 36. *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap. and Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M., edd. and trans., Classics of Western Spirituality (Paulist Press: New York, 1982), p. 44. [Used with permission of the copyright owner - Editor].
 37. Armstrong and Brady, *Francis and Clare*, pp. 44-45.
 38. Italics added.
 39. *Actus-Fioretti* 16 relates this to a time shortly after the conversion of Francis.
 40. For comments on the bishop's role at this time see J.F. Godet, "Progetto evangelico di Chiara oggi," in *Vita Minorum* 56 (1985):222.
 41. Armstrong and Brady, *Francis and Clare*, pp. 49, 52, 55.
 42. Armstrong, *Clare*, pp. 245-46.
 43. L. Oligier, "De origine regularum ordinis sanctae Clarae," in *AFH* 5 (1912):181-209; 413-47.
 44. *BF* I, 6.
 45. A number of other negative statements attributed to Francis by Brother Stephen and recorded by Thomas of Pavia also deserve study, but they are beyond the scope of this investigation. They are found in *AFH* 12 (1919):382-84.
 46. *Quo elongati*, ed. H. Grundmann, *AFH* 54 (1961):20-25.
 47. Armstrong, *Clare*, p. 110.
 48. Oligier, "De origine," pp. 421-27.
 49. M.D. Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty* (London, 1961).
 50. Further development of Innocent's program to give the friars jurisdiction over all monasteries of the Poor Sisters will be treated in another article.
 51. *Ecrits*, p. 71.
 52. A summary of the findings on this Umbrian dialect composition can be found in Desbonnet's Introduction, in *François d'Assise: Ecrits*. Sources Chrétiennes 285, T. Desbonnets et al., edd. and trans. (Paris, 1981), pp. 46-47.
 53. Brooke, "Recent Work," p. 671.
 54. Only in the description of the attack of the Saracens (*LegCl* XIV 22) do we find Clare described in tears that express personal extremity, and nowhere else do we find her described as experiencing bitterness of spirit.
 55. Examples can be found in *2EpFid* 3; *2EpCust* 6-7; *EpMin* 21.
 56. *RegCl* VI 3; Esser, *Opuscula*, p. 318.
 57. M. Sensi, "Incarcerate e reclusa in Umbria nei secoli XIII e XIV: Un Bizzocaggio Centro-Italiano," in *Il Movimento religioso femminile in Umbria nei secoli XIII - XIV* (Regione dell'Umbria, 1984), pp. 94-96.
 58. Armstrong, *Clare*, p. 259, n. 15.
 59. R. Brown, "Introduction to the Little Flowers of St. Francis," *Omnibus*, pp. 1282-83.
 60. See *Omnibus*, p. 1517, n. 1, chap. 15.

61. *Omnibus*, p. 1517.
62. Cuthbert of Brighton, "A Disputed Story Concerning St. Clare," in *AFH* 6 (1913):670.
63. E. Pásztor, "I papi del Duecento e Trecento di fronte alla vita religiosa femminile," in *MRFF*, 38.
64. M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, Philip Mariet, tr. (Glasgow, 1960). Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the nostalgia for paradise and accompanying mystic phenomena in primitive traditions. Eliade describes the symbolism of the garden, mastery of animals, and the fire surrounding the Garden of Paradise (pp. 65-71). Eliade believes that this nostalgia was victorious in Francis.
65. T. Johnson, "Liminality and the Religious Experience of Saint Francis of Assisi," in *The Cord* (Jan. 1985):19-27. In this article, Johnson applies anthropologist Victor Turner's concepts of the stages of the formation of a community to the early Franciscans.
66. The friars, in turn, are seen as women who are sterile when their preaching does not proceed from prayer, while the humble brothers are the fruitful mother-figures (*2Cel* 164b; *LP* 71c; *LMaior* VIII 2; *SpPer* 72b).
67. C.W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 148.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.
69. This statement does not imply a lack of appreciation for the deep personal and affective bond that existed between Francis and Clare. Rather, it is important to understand such material in the sources in terms of their cultural or anthropological context as well as the inter-subjectivity they indicate.
70. See, for example, the excellent study of M. Bartoli, "Analisi storica e interpretazione psico-analitica di una visione di S. Chiara di Assisi," in *AFH* 73 (1980):449-72.
71. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 166-69.
72. F.X. Cheryyapattaparambil, *Troubadour Influence in the Life and Writings of the Man-Saint of Assisi* (Rome, 1985).