

## **Franciscan Bookreviews: *Franciscan Sources***

by André Cirino OFM

**CLARE OF ASSISI: EARLY DOCUMENTS.** Regis J. Armstrong, OFM  
Cap. Paulist Press. New York/Mahwah. 1988. 345pp.

Due to the fact that we shall celebrate the eighth centenary of Clare's birth in this decade, much work and research on Clare is beginning to emerge. This volume is by far the best material available on St. Clare in the English language up to the present moment. Let me summarize its contents from the book itself:

The story of this fascinating woman is hidden among a number of diverse sources, many of which, until now, have been inaccessible to the English-speaking student. In this volume, the full range of thirteenth-century source material on the life and legacy of Clare of Assisi is presented. Included are the complete writings of Clare herself: her letters, her Rule, her Testament and Blessing. Also the writings that concern Clare and the Poor Ladies, done by their contemporaries, are presented--documents like the Rule of Cardinal Hugolino, the letters of Gregory IX, Cardinal Raynaldus, and St. Agnes of Assisi, plus the Mandate, the Bull of Canonization and others. Lastly, the writings of her contemporaries that deal with Clare and Francis and their followers, which give a picture of her in the context of the broader Franciscan movement of the day, have been gathered here.

Based on the most up-to-date historical and textual scholarship, these lucid translations bring to light the little-known treasures of Clare's life and teaching. The writings are complemented by masterful introductions and notes that fill out the texts and make this volume an unparalleled omnibus of sources on "the Light One" of Assisi.

It is definitely recommended for all friary, convent and Secular Franciscan libraries. Each friar would benefit from a personal copy for prayer, study and reflection.

### **THE CLASSICS OF WESTERN SPIRITUALITY**

Many of us may be familiar with the series of books put out by Paulist press called **THE CLASSICS OF WESTERN SPIRITUALITY**. It is described as a library of the great spiritual masters. In this series six volumes at present are works of Franciscans themselves or about Franciscans. Each volume has an introduction to the particular works of the writers that have been translated.

First we note the volume that is titled **FRANCIS AND CLARE: THE COMPLETE WORKS**, by Ignatius Brady, OFM and Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap. It is a translation into English of the writings of Francis and Clare themselves. It is the latest and best translation in English of the writings we have thus far (although R. Armstrong has retranslated all the writings of Clare which are also published by Paulist Press titled: **CLARE OF ASSISI: EARLY DOCUMENTS.**) This book is

indispensable, not only for friary or convent libraries, but each Franciscan should have a personal copy of this work.

Second, there is the volume that is simply titled: **BONAVENTURE**, translated by Dr. Ewert Cousins, of Fordham University. It contains three writings of the Seraphic Doctor: his *Life of St. Francis* (the *Legenda Major*), *The Soul's Journey Into God*, and the *Tree Of Life*. While we may be more familiar with the first two works of Bonaventure, the TREE OF LIFE may not be as familiar. It is a series of meditations on the life of Jesus. They are brief, very different writings of Bonaventure. They make for excellent meditations. This volume is definitely recommended for friary and convent libraries.

**DE ILLIS QUI FACIUNT PENITENTIAM: THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER. ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT, INTERPRETATION,** Robert Stewart, ofm. Instituto Storico Dei Cappuccini, 1991, 461pp.

"Let us, then, begin the journey toward an interpretation of the 1978 Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order." [p.43] And indeed, it is a journey! Robert Stewart's work on the 1978 Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order is an important contribution not only to Franciscan research, but also to the material available to the Secular Franciscan Order itself. It is a work done in five chapters.

Stewart has the new 1978 SFO Rule in his hands. What he does with his work is to give us the complete story of the evolution of this new Rule from its origins, development, and interpretation.

The author goes back to the sources and hears Celano [I,37] speak of Francis giving a "norm of life" to those lay people who decided to follow him. What exactly was this norm of life? Stewart answers this question in Chapter I as he moves on his journey from the "norm of life" of Celano to what he ultimately identifies as the "primitive Rule"--namely, the Volterra manuscript discovered by Sabatier. This manuscript [also called Letter to All the Faithful I or Recensio Prior] he calls the Earlier Exhortation.

Since this Earlier Exhortation was written with the penitents in mind who desired to follow Francis, the author in Chapter II goes back to the Old Testament and surveys the notion of "Penance," journeying up to the 13th century when Francis himself began "to do penance." [Testament]

Stewart now has the primitive document in hand and in chapter III he analyzes it as well as the Later Exhortation. A helpful tool that the author begins to use very effectively in this chapter and throughout the rest of the work, is to place these documents side-by-side in parallel columns. It was the first time I saw how very close these two documents were to each other in form, style, content. Since Stewart is concerned with the ultimate result, that is, the 1978 Rule, he then analyzes the Memoriale Propositi of 1221, placing it alongside the Later Exhortation. It is so clear that a movement is made from the biblical language of the earlier two documents to the juridical style of the Memoriale.

Pope Nicholas IV [the former Jerome of Ascoli, General Minister to succeed Bonaventure] issues the Rule of 1289, the Supra Montem. We are now four documents away from the Primitive Rule/Earlier Exhortation. Stewart's analysis shows the movement away from the primitive thrust of Francis' ideas.

The Rule of Nicholas IV is not touched until Leo XIII writes a new Rule in 1883 in which "Leo actually presented his interpretation of that Way of Life," [p.230] transforming "the very nature of the Order by minimalizing many of the prescriptions or by removing the more difficult demands within the Rule of 1289." [p.223] This now puts us five documents beyond the Primitive Rule/Earlier Exhortation of Francis.

In chapter IV, Stewart initiates his treatment of the "Rule Project" that ultimately brings to birth the 1978 Rule. The process begins in 1965. In 1969, the Assisi Congress is held where the Secular Franciscans come up with the famous "motion 9" that "listed 17 essential elements of the spirituality of the Order." [p.250] These 17 elements led to a first text in 1974, to a redaction and new text in 1975, to three more texts--that of the Local Commission, the Assistants General and the April 1977 redaction [now about 10 documents removed from the Primitive Rule/Earlier Exhortation]. There are two more versions after April, 1977 before the 1978 Rule is produced--the Rule Stewart had in his hands when he began his work.

Stewart writes: The new Rule of 1978 was promulgated so that the Secular Franciscan Order might 'gain a new impetus' and 'flourish vigorously'. But the new Rule has not, in general, engendered a new impetus within the Order. This failure suggests that the Rule might well be flawed or that it might not as yet have been correctly understood. [p.317]

Why would Stewart see the Rule of 1978 as flawed? He says that its basic three chapters [excluding the Prologue] were taken from "motion 9" of the 1969 Assisi Congress. This gathering of Secular Franciscans came up with 17 essential elements they considered to be the core for a new Rule. The Volterra manuscript of the primitive Rule was not certified as authentically Francis' work until Esser published his findings in 1975. If this was the Primitive Rule, it should have served as the basis for consideration of a new Rule.

Nevertheless, an important move was made by the four general ministers before the final text was submitted to the Vatican for approval. They tacked on the entire Volterra text as the Prologue of the New Rule. And thus it was approved.

Stewart believes that if the three chapters of the Rule are the focus, then the "flaw" emerges. But he sees potential for the Secular Franciscan Order to consider the Prologue--in effect--Francis' Primitive Rule/Earlier Exhortation as the basis of a "new impetus" in the Order.

Stewart's last chapter is a creative possibility "towards an interpretation of the Rule of 1978," using Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Approach as well as Lonergan and Gelpi's ideas on conversion.

As a spiritual assistant to a Secular Franciscan Fraternity for the last nine years, I welcome Stewart's research. It gives some fine background material for teachings

about the Secular Franciscan Order. The chapter on Penance [II] is worth the entire book. I recommend a copy for each Secular Franciscan Fraternity, for every library.

**ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI: WRITINGS FOR A GOSPEL LIFE** by Regis Armstrong, OFM CAP, New York: Crossroad, 1994, 240pp.

It has finally happened--a book has been written on the writings of St. Francis for the ordinary person. Armstrong, with his extensive background on the Writings of St. Francis which he translated for the English-speaking world, has produced a work that is much less technical, i.e., free from academic distractions. This book is laced with solid interpretation, interesting questions, and profound spirituality.

From working for many years with these Writings as well as Franciscan study and research. Armstrong has been able to convey to us the heartbeat of Francis as found in his words. He shares his love for the Scriptures: "Francis would have his followers focus their energies on receiving the words of Scripture into their heart each day and letting those words form and shape their lives and ministries" [p. 14]. He speaks of the value of fraternity for Francis: "Curiously, he (Francis) never uses the word 'community'" [p. 16]:

Francis's followers have a somewhat curious sense of fraternity. We do not consider it in the sense of community, that is, as people living together in a particular place or region and usually linked by common interests. Neither work nor shared vision brings us together in Francis's understanding. It is simply the Holy Spirit....In fact, Francis proposes a spirituality that maintains: to grow spiritually is to strengthen our fraternal bonds [p. 122].

Armstrong also states: "We should not forget that Francis never uses the word 'superior' to describe those entrusted with authority" [p. 109]. And on prayer, we read: "He (Francis) envisions a prayer that also takes its expression from our day-to-day experiences and uses them as stimuli or means for discovering the presence of God.

The book is rich:

1. because of its easily readable analysis of the Writings of Francis;
2. because of the spirituality woven into the text.

It is for the ordinary Franciscan. One might call this work a "democratization" of the Writings of Francis. It is recommended for all Franciscan libraries, but especially for spiritual reading and development.

**ST BONAVENTURE: WRITINGS CONCERNING THE FRANCISCAN ORDER** by Dominic Monti, OFM, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, New York, 1994, 281pp.

This translation of the writings of St. Bonaventure in this volume are a welcome addition to the English publications on the seventh general minister of the Order of Friars Minor. I found the introductions to entire collection of writings and to each of the writings themselves to be insightful and informative. They helped to explain the existence and reason for the particular writing. And the accompanying footnotes filled in some of the historical pieces that made for interesting reading. For example, Monti writes that “the general minister enjoyed tremendous authority;...there was no general council whose consent he needed for any of his decisions....There was no ‘generalate’ in Bonaventure’s day; his small staff moved about with him. He did maintain an occasional base of operation at the friary of Manates-sur-Seine, outside Paris” [pp. 29,31].

I think this volume would be of particular interest to general and provincial ministers, to our Poor Clare Sisters, and to novices.

In the first place, I think general and provincial ministers would be particularly interested in Bonaventure’s two encyclical letters sent to the brothers of the Order [p.57 and p.225]. In these letters, the first one written some ten weeks after his election in 1257, Bonaventure tries to come to grips with problems and abuses that were plaguing the Order. After reading these two letters one can see that many of the problems Bonaventure struggled with are still with us in the Order today. It might be encouraging for ministers in leadership to see that their difficult work is similar to that of our brother Bonaventure.

In the second place, the Poor Clares may find this volume significant because of Bonaventure’s letter written to the Monastery of St. Clare in Assisi, which “letter was written during Bonaventure’s sojourn on Mount La Verna in the fall of 1259” [p. 67]. He wrote this during the same time of composition of *The Soul’s Journey Into God*. “By Clare’s death in 1253, there were about 110 monasteries” [footnote, p. 189]. Monti includes in this collection *Two Letters on the Friars’ Relations with the Poor Clares*. From the statistic given above, this concern for the Clares was no small task. The letters, together with Monti’s introductions and footnotes, give a good idea of the struggle to continue serving the Clares and its eventual outcome.

In the third place, the collection of writings includes Bonaventure’s *Instruction for Novices* (c.1260). “This little treatise was undoubtedly written to help Franciscan novices--and their masters--understand better the purpose and the expectations of their year of probation” [p. 147]. While Franciscan novitiates today are not being conducted in the same manner as in Bonaventure’s time, it is worth reading for insight and comparison. “Bonaventure draws heavily on the writings of Augustine, Gregory the Great, and the Cistercians, yet a work that he could have very aptly cited here--the *Admonitions* of Francis--is not mentioned” [ibid.].

While I found it a bit tedious to plough through *The Constitutions of Narbonne, Statutes Issued by the Chapter of Narbonne, Statutes Issued by the Chapter of Paris*, I nevertheless felt it was helpful to catch the flavor of the organizational structure of the Order in the 13th century.

I would recommend this book for any Franciscan Library.

**ANTHONY OF PADUA: SERMONES FOR THE EASTER CYCLE** by Charles McCarron, OFM Cap and *SERMONES* edited by George Marcil, OFM, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, New York, 1994, 230 pp.

This book is a significant work on Anthony of Padua/Lisbon. In part one there is a brief *vita* of Anthony/ Ferdinand that

is not a traditional hagiography but a critically accurate chronology of Anthony's life...us[ing] as our primary sources the early lives of Anthony, particularly the *Vita Prima* (ca. 1232). and the *Legenda Juliana* (ca. 1235). In pursuing this method an image of Anthony emerges which may both surprise and disappoint the reader. Anthony appears as a tireless evangelist and a revered member of the early Franciscan fraternity. He does not emerge as a wonder worker [pp.3-4].

The chronology did not disappoint this reader. Since this part of the book is McCarron's research for his thesis, it shows the painstaking labor to render a critically accurate account. It studies the possible dates of Ferdinand's birth--1191 and 1195. "A recent study of the saint's body puts his age at the time of death at ca. 39 years and 9 months. This would place his birth at some time in August or September 1191" [p.6]. McCarron examines the class of Ferdinand's birth family, his early education in the cathedral school of Lisbon, his entry at age 15 into the Canons Regular of St. Augustine at Sao Vicente, near Lisbon. The author takes a look at the political situation of Portugal, Ferdinand's transfer to the Abbey of Santa Cruz at Coimbra, his ordination at age 25 and his first encounter with the Friars Minor.

In 1217 the Friars Minor were given the poor hermitage of St. Anthony of Egypt at Olivais, near Coimbra. "Several reasons can be offered to explain Ferdinand's decision to enter the Friars Minor" [p.17]. The Order's missionary thrust and the experience of Ferdinand of the proto-martyrs of the Order played a role. When Ferdinand joined the Friars Minor, "he took the name of the hermitage's patron as his own" [p.18]. The rest of Anthony's is well known and well worth the study of this brief *Vita*.

It was the next two sections that were most fascinating. In section two, McCarron examines just what "intellectual tools were available to" [p.27] Anthony. Since the book is dealing with Anthony's *SERMONES*, there follows a brief overview of the development of spiritual exegesis of the Scriptures, the basis of Anthony's preaching. This all leads to a discussion of the influence of the School of St. Victor at Paris (and Augustinian) on Anthony's preaching. "The Abbey of St. Victor became the center in Paris of the traditional Augustinian approach to theology....The last of the great Victorine figures was Thomas Gallus...a great influence not only on Anthony...but on the Franciscan School in general." [p.35] The influence of the decrees of Lateran IV on Anthony's preaching are also considered.

In section three, McCarron examines the nature and structure of Anthony's *SERMONES*. "As Etienne Gilson has said: 'To read a medieval sermon without being presented with the technique is to comprehend absolutely nothing' [p.43].

Those who turn to the *SERMONES* expecting to find unified sermons on the scriptural texts will be disappointed. After examining these texts, the twentieth-century reader will find it hard to understand how Anthony drew large crowds to hear his preaching. Obviously, then, these are not the sermons he delivered. Nor are these texts which were to be read from the pulpit....In writing his *SERMONES*, Anthony provides his readers with materials from the Fathers, the Scriptures, and the *Glosses* that will enable them to compose pastorally effective sermons. Thus Anthony continues to fulfill the commission of Francis to teach the friars. [pp.45-46]

This was an amazing insight, for anyone who has tried reading these medieval *SERMONES* would come away with the ponderousness of the text. Immediately, the thought of the proliferation of "homily helps" that have emerged since Vatican II came to mind. As such, these *SERMONES* would be invaluable tools for a preacher's reflection and preparation.

This book should find a place in every Franciscan library.

**THE FRIARS** (The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society) by C.H. Lawrence, Longman, London and New York, 1994, 245 pp., \$30.00.

In Western Europe, and in Assisi as well, the beginning of the 13th century witnessed both economic and social changes. When we look more closely at Assisi, a new and wealthy "middle class" was arising and the feudal form of government was giving way to the rise of the "communes--self-governing city republics owning no lordship below that of king or emperor" [p.2]. General editor David Bates writes:

A confident new secular culture had arisen, associated with the growth of towns, with the rise of a literate and an articulate laity, with the development of new sciences and the creation of the first universities--and with the spread of heresy. The orders of begging friars which developed at the time around the charismatic figures of St. Francis and St. Dominic were a strikingly new response to this challenge. They embodied a revolutionary concept: preachers going out into the world to reclaim it for God, rather than retiring from the world into enclosed monasteries to do (God's) work. Yet if the Mendicants were dedicated to combating the ills of this new society, they were themselves inescapably its product too. Their origins, growth and, above all, their impact upon the world around them are the subject of this book.

The author Lawrence explores the friars' movement in the towns and cities, schools and universities, in the houses of kings and popes, and in the last chapter "afar unto the Gentiles."

In chapters two and three, Lawrence gives a survey of Francis and the Order's origin, growth, crisis and change. These two chapters which skim through the century of

our Order's beginning and growth are a good summary of its events and development that can be used by anyone to give an overview of the Order.

Professor Lawrence writes: "(t)he powerful impact of the mendicant idea...that the authentic imitation of Christ involved an active ministry of preaching and service, as well as voluntary poverty, proved impossible to withstand" [p.100]. He then pursues with clarity the friars' mission to the towns as well as the universities in such cities such as Oxford, Paris, Cologne. This chapter on the universities is most helpful in grasping the medieval concept of the university and its workings.

Lawrence also examines the friars' impact on the clergy (The Complaint of the Clergy--chapter eight), on rulers (In the Houses of Kings--chapter nine), the popes (In the Service of the Papacy--chapter ten), and early evangelization (Afar Unto the Gentiles--chapter eleven).

This volume is helpful for formators giving instruction to candidates for the Order. It would be a good reference in our formation libraries as well as the library of any Franciscan house.

**THE HISTORY OF FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY**, edited by Kenan B. Osborne, ofm, St. Bonaventure, New York, The Franciscan Institute Publications, 1994, 345pp., \$16.00.

This is a one-volume summary of Franciscan theology that has been well worth the wait for its recent appearance. Editor and contributor, K.B. Osborne has gathered together in this book a summary of the theology of several of our forebears:

1. Alexander of Hales (Kenan B. Osborne, ofm);
2. Bonaventure (Zachary Hayes, ofm);
3. Peter John Olivi, (David Flood, ofm);
4. John Duns Scotus (Mary Elizabeth Ingham, CSJ);
5. William of Ockham (André Goddu, PhD).

Each of the authors has put together a glimpse, a summary, a sampling of the theology (and at times, philosophy) of each of these early theologians. It makes for an experience of integration to read these essays in a single book. But their writing does more than just summarize. It gives the reader a substantial taste of the theology of each of these five friars as well as the longing and desire for more, which, hopefully, can be done by picking up any of the works each author suggests in their footnotes.

Editor Osborne includes a sixth chapter in the book on "The Franciscan School through the Centuries" by George Marcil, OFM. While reading this chapter which scans the topic from the beginning of the Order down to the present century, it seemed that it might be helpful to read this chapter first. Then, having an over-view, one could read about the theologians individually.

A seventh chapter on "The Feminine Side of Franciscan Theology" by Margaret Carney, osf, takes a hard look at "certain aspects of the historic exclusion of women

from the theological enterprise..." because "(w)omen were excluded from the medieval universities" [p.232]. Nevertheless, Carney suggests that

women such as Angela of Foligno, Margaret of Cortona, Angelina of Montegiove/Marsciano chronicle lives of extraordinary spiritual and apostolic power. Careful reading of these *legendae* leads one to speculate on the congruence between themes found in the formal theological works of the Franciscan friars and the spiritual experiences, personal activities of charity, healing and spiritual counseling that are typically described in the lives of these women [p.335].

Two final thoughts before ending this review are:

1. Such a book would be most beneficial for both reading and discussion in the formation programs of any branch of our Order--both male and female. It links our candidates with the theological root system of our Order. It gives students insight into the flavor of Franciscan theological thought.
2. In his preface Osborne mentions "the production of a volume on Franciscan philosophy...already...published" [p.ix] by Jose Antonio Merino, ofm, intitled *Historia de la Filosofia Franciscana*, (Biblioteca Autores Christianos: Madrid, 1993). It would be worth our while to have such a work translated into English for use in formation.

This volume by Osborne is a must for formation libraries and a welcome addition to any convent or friary library.