

CLARE OF ASSISI: A WOMAN'S LIFE [Symbols of the feminine in her writings], by Jean-François Godet-Calogeras, Tau Publishing, Phoenix, AZ, 2013, 41 pp.

This little monograph is a study that encompasses:

1. What is the Feminine?
2. The Feminine in Clare's Writings.
3. The Women in Clare's Writings.
4. Men Referred to in Clare's Writings.

It is indeed this that we see when we look, with a hindsight of history, at Clare and Francis: a woman who was tender and strong, and a man who was strong and tender, both nourishers. When a man and a woman set about serving life, they become free from the entanglement of fear and competition. They stop marching to inhuman rules of gender domination and dance instead within the marvelous and freeing rhythm of mutual and loving service. Each acknowledges her or his difference as a woman, as a man; each nourishes the other to the point of completeness. In God's plan the truly human exists only when there is masculine and feminine, feminine and masculine.

This little book is recommended for any of our libraries, and especially for those in formation and study.

THE FIRST FRANCISCAN WOMAN: CLARE OF ASSISI AND HER FORM OF LIFE, by Margaret Carney, OSF, Franciscan Press, Quincy, Illinois, 1993, 261pp.

During the year of study at the Capuchin Franciscan Institute (Antonianum, Rome) I was privileged to take two courses given by Margaret Carney. In one of the courses on Franciscan Women, Margaret presented us with much of the research she was doing for this book. At her doctoral defense of this work, one of the examiners asked her if her stance on women in this work wasn't a bit much? She looked up from her desk and replied: "Absolutely not!" The audience stood and applauded her response.

For five years I was able to share the research of this work with our novices as well as three monasteries of Poor Clares (Bronx, Bordentown, Stamford). And the response has been positively refreshing. Margaret is a genius in her use of the sources, especially designing critical composites from them.

In chapter I, "Francis and Clare in the Sources," Margaret presents a chronology of both founders, especially looking in the sources for those times when their lives intersected or came together. As she presents this, she also offers fresh insights from the critical composite of the sources.

In chapter II, "The Rule of Clare" Margaret not only treats of the origins of Clare's form of life, but examines it in contrast to the Rules of Hugolino and Innocent IV which preceded her Rule. Clare, notes Margaret, was the first woman to write a rule that was approved by the church. Regarding Clare's Rule, Margaret writes: "It is extremely important to promote study that recovers the (Rule) text as a primary source of general Franciscan spirituality" [p.97]. In effect, she's saying that ignorance of Clare's Rule or any of the Rules of our Order, leaves a gap of ignorance in our Franciscan spirituality on our Franciscan journey.

In chapters III (Clare's Incarnation of Gospel Poverty), IV (Clare's Incarnation of Mutual Charity), and V (Clare's Definition of Governance), Margaret uses the image of an analytical 'trptych' in which Clare's Rule will be the central subject, but will be enlightened and commented upon by means of two adjoining sections. . . , a section that provides a brief survey of the situation of medieval women. . . , (a) section (that) deal(s) with...the historical development of the Friars Minor for the period between the death of Francis and the death of Clare [p.99]. So as Margaret treats of

Clare's ideas on poverty, mutual charity and governance, she flavors her research by giving a picture of what was happening with both medieval women and the friars. Her final chapter, "The Charism of Clare and Contemporary Religious Life" brings the entire discussion into focus for our present stage of living the charism as Franciscan men and women. This work should be in all our libraries, and without doubt, in those of our formation units.

CLARE OF ASSISI by Marco Bartoli, translated by Frances Teresa, OSC, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1993, 244 pp. Available in USA from Franciscan Press, Quincy College, Quincy, IL.

A biography on Clare that first appeared in Italian in 1989 is now made available in English—a most welcome addition to the new literature appearing on St. Clare. Bartoli, an Italian historian and specialist in St. Francis and St. Clare is of the school of Raoul Manselli [Cf. Manselli's *ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1988. Reviewed in a previous issue of Newsletter.] In this work Bartoli avails himself of the latest scholarship as he takes a closer look at Clare from her writings, the Legend, and other writings about her such as the Process of Canonization.

Bartoli then weaves his material together into very plausible insights into the life of the Lady Clare. He tries at times "to reflect on [her] attitudes and intentions" [p. 37], which Bartoli masterfully accomplishes through his approach to the sources. One aspect that seems to permeate the entire work is the attempt on Bartoli's part to fill in the gaps in the sources we have on St. Clare by using the later research, for example, that which is being done on women's studies and other forms of scholarship. An example of filling in the gaps would be the following. The reaction of Clare's family to her Palm Sunday flight from her home was to go to the monastery where she was and they tried by threats and promises to dissuade her from embracing this "worthless deed" [huiusmodi vilitas]. This was a scandal to the family. "What was the vilitas, the worthlessness of her act, which made it so unbecoming to her class and never before seen in the district" [p.46]? Clare converted her inheritance into alms and that of her sister as well, and gave it to the poor. What was the content of this inheritance? We can be sure it consisted of the dowry which the family had set aside for the marriages of Clare and Beatrice....The dowry system was becoming the custom whereby that part of the paternal inheritance due to the daughter was given her in advance...to enhance her chances of an advantageous marriage....Thus it is highly likely that Clare...would have received her dowry before she fled from her father's house. . . .Clare's `crime' [vilitas] was that she refused to use her dowry to procure a good marriage. . . .The vilitas not only referred to what she had done but also to the condition in which she was living. . ." [pp.46-48].

All the nuns at San Paolo Monastery were members of the nobility [who] had men and women servants. When Clare knocked at the doors of this monastery she was not seeking to be received as a nun which her social status would have permitted, but as a servant [*italics mine*] which her new social condition demanded....This would have been the `crime' which her family wanted her to renounce" [pp.49-50]. So when one reads in the Legend the words "worthless deed," vilitas, one could easily ignore the severity of the situation for Clare with regard to her family, her dowry, her status.

Another of Bartoli's gifts in this work is the frequency of parallel incidents he sees in the lives of Francis and Clare. In the incident just described above, Clare would have presented herself as "servant" in San Paolo Monastery. "Immediately after the famous episode of disappropriation before Bishop Guido, Francis had left Assisi and at length coming to a certain cloister of monks he spent several days there as a scullion" [p. 49]. This would have been the monastery of San Verecondo near Gubbio.

Bartoli parallels their lives when he says: "We know that the thread woven by Clare was linen, but the Process also speaks of silk, lasso and precious cloth" [p.61]. "Francis, child of a merchant family, would have been no stranger to this type of work" [p.62].

Another parallel between them was Clare's stance on "mystical marriage" to the Lord of Lords. "This has a completely Franciscan slant; just as Francis had wanted to become a knight of some lord and in the end became the knight of the Lord of lords, so Clare issues the invitation to marry this same Lord of lords" [p.127].

Every Franciscan would benefit by reading this book. It would be most beneficial for those in formation. Every library should have a copy.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. CLARE, by Ramona Miller, OSF, Franciscan Institute Publications, St.Bonaventure, NY, 1993, 100pp.

A most timely work during the eighth centenary year of Clare of Assisi's birth! Ramona Miller, a Franciscan Sister of Rochester, Minnesota and staff member of *The Assisi Experience*, has researched all the places associated with the life of St. Clare. She devotes a chapter to each of nine major places--the Family Home, San Rufino, Perugia, Porziuncola, Monastery of San Paolo in Bastia, Sant'Angelo in Panzo, San Damiano, San Giorgio, Basilica of Santa Chiara. In each of these sections, Ramona Miller treats of Clare's involvement, then gives historical background, some further reflections, and suggested readings. So if a pilgrim is interested in walking through Assisi in Clare's footsteps, this is the work to guide one into the heart of the Lady Clare.

Optatus van Asseldonck, OFM Cap says one can no longer study or speak of Francis without Clare or vice-versa. They are originators of the Franciscan movement. So on any trip to Assisi, a pilgrim would benefit from carrying both Desbonnets' and Miller's works. Finally, Eric Doyle, OFM wrote: "Besides the writings of St.Francis (and Clare) and the early written sources of (their) life and message, THERE STILL REMAINS ONE MORE SOURCE: THE CITY OF ASSISI ITSELF....Anyone who wants to penetrate the mystery of St.Francis (and St.Clare) really ought to visit Assisi." To learn this city-source well, the *GUIDE TO ASSISI: HISTORY AND ART* is an excellent companion to your journey. This book can be purchased in Assisi. Both volumes *IN THE FOOTSTEPS* can be purchased from: The Franciscan Store, Pulaski, WI.

CLARE OF ASSISI: INVESTIGATIONS, compiled by Mary Francis Hone, OSC, "Clare Centenary Series," Vol. VII, Franciscan Institute Publications: St.Bonaventure, N.Y., 1993, 115pp.

This book is a series of five lectures presented at the Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in May 1992.

In the first lecture, Sr.Roberta McKelvie, OSF gives us a fresh look at "Clare's Rule: Weaving Together Law and Life." It is a brief look at Clare's Rule using the "image of a tapestry, a weaving together of threads of different color and texture." [p.2] Some of the "threads" McKelvie looks at are the Franciscan vocation, the concept of law, living poorly, the work of one's hands, and the call as lived in unity of mind and heart. Regarding Clare's Rule, Sr. Margaret Carney, OSF says that ignorance of the Rule of Clare would be ignorance of one facet of our Franciscan spirituality. McKelvie's article is another help to dispel this ignorance for all Franciscans.

In "Clare of Assisi, the Eucharist and John 13," Michael Blastic, OFM Conv writes: "The image of Christ washing the apostles' feet struck Francis so much so that Francis' intention in naming the Order that of Friars Minor is strictly linked with this image of Christ as foot washer. This is a key element of Francis' spirituality, one that Clare made her own" [p.36]. From this premise, Blastic moves on to some fascinating reflections on Eucharist, Clare, and foot-washing--a refreshing insight worth pursuing.

In "Like a Beguine: Clare before 1212," Sr. Ingrid Peterson, OSF gives some fascinating background

to the Offreduccio Women—the women of Clare's extended family household, nine in all. She identifies each one and goes on to show how much of their life was "Like a Beguine" -- "women who sought an alternate to life in a monastic enclosure or in an anchorage" [p.57]. It is pertinent to an understanding of life at San Damiano, for several of these women become members of that very community.

In "The Legenda Versificata: Towards an Official Biography," Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap takes a look at this work on the Lady Clare, giving its background, an outline of the work itself, the insights it has to offer, concluding that it is a work not to be ignored.

In the last article "Elias and Clare: An Enigmatic Relationship," Michael Cusato, OFM makes some refreshing observations about Elias whose reputation has suffered a negative influence right into this century. Clare writes in her second letter to St. Agnes of Prague (c.1235-37): "In all of this, follow the counsel of our venerable father, our Brother Elias, the Minister General, that you may walk more securely in the way of the commands of the Lord."

This was written during the waning years of Elias' term as General Minister, the years he struggled with difficulties among the friars. Now in this battle (of Clare's for the privilege of poverty), apparently it was Elias who was highly instrumental in pleading Clare's case before Gregory IX, perhaps in 1228 but most certainly throughout the 1230s, as this letter makes quite clear. The praise which Clare reserves for Elias in her letter to Agnes and the esteem in which she holds him is thus directly related to his defense of the privilege of poverty for herself and her sisters. . . , a privilege she did obtain on 15 April 1238 [p.99].

Elias is generally regarded as the architect of the Basilica of San Francesco. "Clare does not appear to be opposed to the Basilica (because it was) not owned by the friars..., (and) the construction of the Basilica was dependent upon the alms of others." [pp.108-9] "Thus given the evidence at hand, Clare does not appear to have harbored any resentment of or antagonism towards Elias" [p.110].

This volume is valuable for any library, especially those of our formation units.

CLARE OF ASSISI: ICONOGRAPHY by Servus Gieben, OFM Cap., published by Chiesa di S.Maria della Consolazione, Rome, Italy, 1993, 100pp., available from THE FRANCISCAN STORE, Pulaski, WI .

In this centenary year of remembering the birth of St. Clare, this work is a unique contribution to volumes that are being published on the Lady Clare. Capuchin Friar Servus Gieben has spent 40 years in the Capuchin Historical Institute of Rome and is "one who has powerfully contributed in making known the artistic and cultural Franciscan heritage."

Servus Gieben has collected 85 works of art and combined them in this volume with commentary in English as well as Italian. He has grouped the plates of Clare under the following headings:

the portrait of her person, with the monstrance, the story of her life, cutting of her hair and investiture, the rule, prayer ecstasy, supper ecstasy, the assault of the Saracens, taking leave of Francis, papal audience, celestial visitations, coronation in heaven, Clare's tomb, and various devotions for the crib, passion, eucharist, the Madonna, the saints.

This collection is unique because it is the work of many artists from several different countries and centuries about the Lady Clare that Gieben has grouped together in a single volume. Prior to this collection, there have been attempts to publish art about St. Clare—but usually from a single artist. While the English is occasionally awkward, nevertheless, the sense is conveyed. It is a handsome volume and would be an important reference for any Franciscan library.

LIVING THE INCARNATION: PRAYING WITH FRANCIS AND CLARE OF ASSISI, by Frances Teresa, OSC, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, [Doubleday] 1993, 136 pp.

A most welcome addition to the Clarian literature that has been published during this eighth centenary of Clare's birth! Poor Clare Sister Frances Teresa of the monastery in Arundel, England,

is already familiar to Franciscans as the translator of the book by Marco Bartoli, "Clare of Assisi." And one gets to experience first hand the spirituality of Frances Teresa in this volume. The book has ten chapters that progress from conversion [first three chapters] to contrition [next three chapters] to communion [last four chapters]. It is through these "3 Cs" that Frances Teresa shares her insights on the spiritual journeys of Francis and Clare. Frances Teresa makes both a good and critical use of the sources and scripture as she takes us on these journeys in very practical and insightful language. It is very easy to resonate with the thoughts and ideas as they unfold for the reader. The author's gift emanates in the integration she makes of scripture, Franciscan sources, and her own insights.

At times her wisdom leapt out from the pages. Consider the following: "Grief is a solitary pilgrimage" [p.65]. "Both Francis and Clare saw that because our nothingness is so great, it is our greatest resource, the most 'God-sized' capacity in all our being" [p.108]. "Holiness is our greatest ecological contribution. Without it, we shall never balance the needs and rights of our diversified world. Holiness is the restoration of order in its most searching and creative form, an unfailing source of respect for others" [p.126].

This work, a fine interpretation of Francis and Clare, would be helpful for anyone making a private retreat. Any Franciscan would benefit from the wisdom of this volume. It is recommended for all our Franciscan libraries.

THE LIFE OF ST. CLARE VIRGIN, attributed at times to Fra Tommaso da Celano, translated by Catherine Bolton Magrini, Editrice Minerva, Assisi, 1994, 99pp.

This publication of the Legend of Clare has the advantage of being able to be used by itself as a compact paperback. It is also a new and good translation that is accompanied by ample footnotes that align quite well with the critical research on the life of Clare.

ST CLARE OF ASSISI by Chiara Augusta Lainati, OSC, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi, 1994, 112 pp.

Poor Clare Sister Chiara A. Lainati has produced a biography of Clare based on solid scholarship. It is a good little work to offer anyone you may desire to introduce to the Lady Clare.

THE WAY OF ST. CLARE OF ASSISI, by Fidel Aizpurua, OFM Cap., translated by Joseph Nacua, OFM Cap. Franciscan Institute of Asia, *undated*, 177 pp.

While working with our Poor Clare Sisters in the Philippines in 1995, Mother Auxiliadora Tan took me to visit the Franciscan Institute of Asia. And it was there that I purchased a little book on St. Clare. Having just opened it recently to read, I discovered a little known treasure.

Thadee Matura, OFM, writes in his Foreward:

Fidel Aizpurua offers us. . .a book presenting a vigorous synthesis, the life, the writings and the spirituality of this great Franciscan figure. The Author knows the writings of Clare in depth and works with them one by one. But it is not an exegesis or an interpretation that is purely historical or turned to the past. . . .Aizpurua confronts the texts and narratives of the past with the. . .experiences of the present.

With this brief overview of the book, it is set in three major sections containing 9 lessons each, outlined as follows:

I. LIFE

1. 13TH Century Italy: Light and Shadows
 2. A Young Searcher: Birth, Youth and Option for the Evangelical Life
 3. Like a Springtime: The Beginnings
 4. Struggle for the Gospel
 5. Clare and Francis
 6. An Explosion of Life
 7. The Mature Fruit
 8. The Rule: Wound and Yearning
 9. An Ideal Maintained
- II WRITINGS
1. The Adventure for a Poor Life: First Letter to Agnes
 2. The following of Jesus in the Love of the Poor: Second Letter to Agnes
 3. To contemplate from the Point of View of the Poor: Third Letter to Agnes
 4. Experiential faith: Testament of Clare
 5. Francis's Writings to Clare and her Sisters
 6. A woman in Love with the Crucified: Fourth Letter to Agnes
 7. Continuing Living Presence
 8. An Edifice of Faith: Rule of Clare
 9. A word of Total Support: Letter to Ermentrude
- III SPIRITUALITY
1. Being a Poor Clare: Past, Present, and Future
 2. Spiritual Experience of Conversion
 3. Daily Gazing Upon Jesus Christ
 4. Poverty: Place of Encounter
 5. Presence and Solidarity
 6. Fruitful Virginitiy
 7. To Celebrate for the Benefit of Faith
 8. Being Church in Novelty
 9. Yearning for the Day of the Lord

Each lesson has a paragraph in bold print introducing and situating the topic. Then a brief commentary of four to six pages follows. The lesson concludes with four or five reflective questions.

I found the material to be solid in regard to recent research on the Lady Clare. I found myself musing as to possible uses for the text. Certainly in Poor Clare communities as well as for the entire Franciscan Family, it would be helpful:

1. as an introduction for new candidates;
2. as a regular topic for successive house chapters of enrichment;
3. as a tool for reflective meditation;
4. as a possible dialogue tool between a formator and candidate;
5. for our SFO fraternities as an easy tool for Clarian instruction.

Matura concludes his remarks by claiming that all Franciscans "may avail themselves from now on of a **handbook** to facilitate their entering into the riches of Clare . . .(and) the feminine aspect of Franciscan spirituality." I strongly recommend this book for any Franciscan or Franciscan library.

THIS LIVING MIRROR [REFLECTIONS ON CLARE OF ASSISI], by Sr. Frances Teresa, OSC, Tau Publishing, Phoenix, AZ, 2011, 161 pp

Sister Frances Teresa has done it again—produced a thought-provoking, meditative, critically accurate work on the Lady Clare. The Author, a Poor Clare herself and a fine linguist, has woven Clare's story into a manuscript that lets Clare shine as she truly is—the Light of Umbria—and of the entire Franciscan family. Taking three of my comments above, let us look at samples of her creative work on the Lady Clare:

I thought-provoking, meditative

1. Clare and Francis are given us to be a compass, pointing always to God [p vii].
2. She is not a map, I believe, but a compass; she points to the path, to the Way, and says: this is where I walked and this is what happened [p ix].
3. What Francis and Clare will teach us is love; not only how to love God but how lovable God is, not only how to catch fire from God but how fiery God can be [p 3].
4. She heard a clear call from God to be a mirror reflecting Christ's complete self-emptying, reflecting the way he had emptied himself of glory and become one of us [p 5].
5. Clare said that the Lord had made her a mirror to reflect God's glory to us [p 10].
6. God has entered the heart of our muddle and given it life in abundance, recreating it from within, a method which Clare and Francis, who were familiar with God's style, called God's holy manner of working.
7. In the wilderness, we are cut down to size and sculpting forces engrave the features of Christ on us. . .[p16].
8. Virginité follows upon fruitfulness, it is the fruit of fruitfulness. . . .when Clare's sisters stress, as they often do, her lifelong virginité (and slightly shock us by seeming to regard it as remarkable), this is part of what they are meaning [p51].
9. *Regarding the Saracens/mercenaries being repelled by Clare, Frances Teresa comments:* The dynamics of genuine non-violence are such that they generate enormous power which is not force but energy. No other energy is quite like it; it is completely without aggression and therefore without weakness. It is like light, like the glory on the face of Christ, penetrating all things [p 71].
10. No one will be fruitfully celibate if their celibacy is rooted in a refusal of intimacy, a rejection of human needs or a denial of sexuality [p 94].
11. And this too is what love does for us, leaving the essence of the other in our hands like clear, bright gold and we see everything reflected in the brightness of this shining [p 102].

II critically accurate

1. Cathedral of San Rufino in Assisi had a chapel dedicated to the Holy Face, with a painting of the veil of Veronica which was taken once a year in procession around Assisi. We know this because we still have the breviary-missal used by Clare giving the rubrics for this procession [pp 4-5].
2. As we become more familiar with the format and structure of the medieval letter, the development of Clare's thought becomes much clearer to us. Her letters are densely packed with thoughts, and constructed in a way quite different from ours today. They are more like a piece of architecture than a casual communication to a friend, and this must always be borne in mind. The bonus is that we can scrutinize her words, constructions and parallels with a reasonable confidence that she did indeed mean the things we are reading into them [p 45].
3. At Francis' suggestion, she began the Order and, when he 'almost forced her,' she became abbess. This was only one of the conflicts which speckled their early relationship. On at least three occasions, Francis had such a determined confrontation with her that the community remembered it forty years later [p 91].

III a fine linguist

1. One of the words she loves to use about prayer is *considerare*, originally connected with star-gazing. Star-gazing at God, we look into the heart of things and are changed by that gazing [p 13].
2. The word she uses for cleave is *adhaerere*, the word used in Genesis 2:24 about a man cleaving to his wife; just so do we cleave to Christ and he to us. We cling to Christ by following in his footsteps; cleaving to his footprints, Clare says [p15].
3. She became *vilis*, one of the *vilitas*, someone of small value. . .contemptible and of no importance, the very opposite of her previous situation of honored *nobilitas* [p 34].

I certainly recommend this book to be read not only for the wisdom pointed out above, but for purposes of meditation so that Sr. Frances Teresa' s words may be pondered in our own hearts. Any Franciscan would benefit from owning a copy of this work, especially each Poor Clare.