

UNIT TWO, MODULE THREE

CLARE OF ASSISI – HER LIFE

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LESSON ONE

THE SOURCES FOR OUR KNOWLEDGE OF CLARE

AIMS

The aim of this lesson is to consider the documents from which we draw much (though not all) of our knowledge about Clare, to understand why they were written and learn how to read them with an awareness of the type of text they represent.

1. THE AUTHENTICITY OF DOCUMENTS

Before we can begin our study of Clare of Assisi, we need to spend some time in considering the sources of our knowledge even though we shall look at the texts in greater depth later on. First we must ask: how do we know what we know? How reliable is it? Why was it written and how does this alter the way we understand it? Two examples might make this clear. Advertising can be seen as a document written to persuade, and we all know how to read it with this awareness and do not accept everything it says at face value. Another example might be a document arising out of a situation of repression when the way of reading is almost the opposite: here we read between the lines and try to grasp the understatements and silences.

With documents relating to Clare, we have various categories: letters, history, polemic among them. The Primary Sources are always the writings of the person themselves, the Secondary Sources include letters to them or about them and other documents referring to them. A list of relevant documents between 1216 and 1300 would include the following and the footnotes tell you where they can be found:

A. Documents and letters to Clare

1. 1216 and/or 1228 The papal Privilege of Poverty ¹

¹ Armstrong R.J. Editor and Translator. *Clare of Assisi Early Documents*. Saint Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications:

2. 1220 Hugolino's Letter to Clare ²
3. 1228 A letter written when he was Pope Gregory IX ³
4. 1228 The letter of Cardinal Rainaldo ⁴

B. Documents and letters about Clare

5. The testimony of Jacques de Vitry ⁵
6. Thomas of Celano's First Life of Francis nn. 18-20 ⁶
7. References to Clare in the writings of Brother Leo ⁷
8. The Remembrance of the Desires of a Soul nn. 204-206 ⁸
9. The notification of the death of Clare ⁹
10. The Acts of the Process of Canonisation ¹⁰
11. The Legenda or official Life ¹¹
12. The references to Clare in the Fioretti

Clearly texts in the second group are concerned with witnessing to Clare's outstanding holiness and this is why they were written. Later in the course, we shall try to evaluate the extent to which events among the friars, the developing dialogue between the Order and the Papacy, conflicts between the friars themselves have all nuanced our material. Let us begin by looking at the historical documents which have come down to us, focussing mainly on Nn. 6, 10 and 11 in the above group, that is:

- Thomas of Celano's First Life of Francis nn. 18-20
- The Acts of the Process of Canonisation
- The Legenda or official Life

II THE SOURCES OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF CLARE

1 Celano 18-20 [Read] – this is our earliest written source of information in which Thomas of Celano speaks about Clare and the Poor Ladies. Some questions immediately become apparent because here, in this First Life, Celano speaks of Clare in the most glowing terms, while in his Second Life, The Remembrance of the Desires of a Soul 204-206 he completely fails to mention her by name although he talks about the Poor Ladies as a community. This lands us in the thick of some of the problems surrounding Clare and her role among the friars.

In these passages, Thomas of Celano speaks of Clare and the Poor Ladies as being the first work of Francis 'after he gained his freedom from his carnally minded father'. First Francis had responded to the call of the Crucifix by rebuilding some ruined chapels around the Spoleto valley. Now, liberated into greater insight, he began building spiritual houses of which the first was the little community at San Damiano. There he laid living stones on the foundation of Jesus Christ of which 'the Lady Clare was the most precious and strongest'. Celano speaks of Clare in words of intense admiration, even adulation, which is all the more remarkable when we recall that she was still alive at the time, still young for in 1229 she was only 35. We know that she knew this Life of Celano's well, and may wonder what she thought of his words about her.

1993. 1216 pp 85-86 1228 CAED pp 107-108

² CAED pp 101-103

³ CAED pp 103-104

⁴ CAED pp 105-106

⁵ CAED pp 313-314

⁶ CAED pp321-326, FAED I pp 196-199

⁷ CAED pp 330-331

⁸ CAED pp336-339, FAED II pp 377-379

⁹ CAED pp 129-131

¹⁰ CAED pp 132-185

¹¹ CAED pp 246-310

She is mentioned again towards the end of the Book Two 116-117, in the account of Francis' death. There we read how the friars brought Francis' body to San Damiano for Clare and her sisters to see him for the last time and, rather to our amazement, Celano puts on her lips a most powerful lament and protest at the death of Francis, truly a 'plaint' in the full meaning of the word. It is a passage of great sensitivity and some surprises, for he allows Clare to express her sorrow in strong and almost exaggerated words of grief, anger and distress. The whole passage throws her relationship with Francis into a strong and interesting light, one which we do not find in any other text and yet can see as the background assumption in much of Clare's own writing.

1) **The Acts of the Process of Canonisation** is the transcript of the inquiry into the 'life, conversion and conversation' of Clare inaugurated by Pope Innocent IV on 18 October 1253, after her death on 11 August. During this process, Bishop Bartolomeo Accorombani, Bishop of Spoleto [1236 - 1271], went with his team and notaries to take evidence from those who had known Clare during her lifetime. Among this team were Brothers Angelo and Leo, companions of Francis and friends of Clare as well as Brother Mark who was chaplain to the monastery of San Damiano. On 24 November 1253 they all went to San Damiano and interviewed thirteen of the sisters who had known Clare. On 28 November they saw two more sisters in the infirmary who both spoke 'somewhat fully'! Then Sr Benedetta, who succeeded Clare as Abbess, swore on behalf of and in the presence of the whole community that they could testify to Clare's holiness. Later that day others in the city were also interviewed.

This text was only discovered in 1920, by Fr Zeffirino Lazzeri¹² and has come to us in a 15th century Umbrian version of the original Latin. It should also be remembered that the sisters would mostly have spoken in the Assisan dialect which the notary translated into Latin as he went. The document is incomplete but is a wonderful source of information about Clare from sisters of her community and it does more than anything else to bring her to life for us.

We also have the text which followed the Process, the Bull of Canonisation *Clara claris praeclara* of Pope Alexander IV

2) **The Legenda** or Life of Clare was written to be read aloud (this is the meaning of the Latin word *Legenda*). It was commissioned by Pope Alexander IV at the time of St Clare's canonisation. Between the 15th and 20th centuries, three possibilities for an author have circulated.

The Author

- a) The first name, the earliest suggested, is that of St Bonaventure in a codex dating from the end of the 14th century although the author of the codex himself did not believe this attribution! However Bonaventure has had his supporters right up to the much respected Fr Zeffirino Lazzeri (1920) but he is not now widely held to have written the *Legenda*.
- b) The second name is that of Thomas of Celano, Francis' biographer, although the earliest codex naming him dates only from the 16-17th centuries. Here again many reputable scholars, including some working today, accept Celano's authorship, although Fr Regis Armstrong ofm cap, who translated the Canonisation Process and the Legend into English¹³ does not, largely on stylistic grounds. Giovanni Boccali ofm is another who does not accept Celano as the author¹⁴, detailing the way Scripture is

¹² This codex is now in the Finlay-Landau collection of the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, codex XXXVIII, 135

¹³ Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993

¹⁴ *Legenda Latina Sanctae Clarae Virginis Assisiensis*, Edizioni Porziuncola. 2001

differently used in both the Legend and 1 Celano, the omission of Francis after Clare's conversion, and similar points. Professor Frederic Rauell makes a further point when he says:

Strangely, the Second Life (of Celano) has a strong antifeminist accent which has given a strange image to the Franciscan movement. 2Cel 112-114 develops the argument to which the sources have given the title: Against familiarity with women. Can the author of this hard saying really be the same as the man who wrote the *Legenda Sanctae Clarae Virginis* which displays such respect and sensitivity towards the world of women? [...] It shows a fear of, above all, the glances of women and is repulsed by the *loquacitas mulierum*, the talkativeness of women. The figure of the gossip developed in the misogynous literature of the Duecento and the notion of women preaching became an obsession for the clerics of the succeeding centuries.¹⁵

- c) The third author is our old friend Anonymous. This is supported by the silence of so many of the codices, like that of Bartolomeo da Pisa, who knew the work and drew on it in their own writing and named no author. Further support to this is given by various lists of the works of both Bonaventure and Celano in which, again, the *Legenda* is not mentioned. Luke Wadding himself considered it an anonymous work. Boccali suggests that the author may have been a member of the Roman Curia commissioned by Alexander IV. There are several indications that the writer was not a friar minor but was one who understood the papal angle on the situation between the Poor Ladies and the Friars Minor.

At present no case is proven. It is possible we shall never know for sure.

THE SOURCES FOR THE LEGEND

- a) the *Actus sanctae Clarae*, namely the Acts of the process of canonisation, which is largely (though not entirely) present in the text of the Legend
- b) those others consulted by the author, whom he names as eye-witnesses of Clare's life, namely, friars, sisters and family members. By this time, Clare's sister Beatrice was the only one still alive. Others consulted would have been the companions of Francis, especially Leo, Angelo of Rieti, Juniper, Mark, Rainaldo and some others and possibly also the sisters Bona and Pacifica di Guelfuccio.

Thus there are two main sources for the Legend, the written documents and the eye-witnesses. Each supports and verifies the other while also giving our author so much material that he had to make some selections, in itself an interesting study.

THE DATE

This can be fixed at sometime after the canonisation process for Clare, namely August to November 1253, and before the death of Alexander IV on 25 May 1261, since it was he who requested the work. It would have taken time to collect the material, consult the witnesses, write the work and then take it to the Pope himself. The author suggests that the pope had to insist a number of times:

the papal authority has again and again placed it before me (Pref)

This suggests that he was a little dilatory and perhaps the date of completion was nearer 1260 than 1255, a supposition reinforced by the way he speaks of the church of St Clare (52) which was not completed until the end of 1258.

¹⁵ La Bibbia nella visione sponsale della *Legenda Sanctae Clarae Virginis*, in Dialoghi con Chiara d'Assisi, Ed Luigi Giacometti, Edizioni Porziuncola 1995 pp 68-69

OTHER SOURCES

1. The papal Privilege of Poverty 1216 and 1228
2. Hugolino's Letter to her 1220
3. Another letter in 1228 when he was Pope Gregory IX
4. The letter of Cardinal Rainaldo of 1228
5. The testimony of Jacques de Vitry
6. Celano's First Life of Francis nn. 18-20
7. The Remembrance of the Desires of a Soul 204-206
8. References to Clare in the writings of Brother Leo
9. The notification of the death of Clare
10. The Acts of the Process of Canonisation
11. The Legenda or official Life
12. The references to Clare in the Fioretti
13. The Remembrance of the Desires of a Soul 204-206

READING

It might be helpful at this point to read

- 3:1 Bartoli M., *Clare of Assisi: Introduction*, (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1993), pp 1-11.

This contains a very good survey of the literature around Clare and also her own writings, which we shall be studying in more depth later on.

For further reading, look at

- 3:2 Carney M., O.S.F., *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi & Her Form of Life*, (Franciscan Press, 1993), pp 21 -28.

These pages cover much the same ground but in more depth and from the slightly different perspective of one setting out to establish Clare's place in the Franciscan movement during her lifetime.

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LESSON TWO

EARLY LIFE AND BACKGROUND UP TO 1211/12

AIMS

The aim of this lesson is to give an introduction to Clare's family and background, and to mention some of the key people in her early life, to introduce the events of those early years and to take a brief look at courtly love and the position of women..

1193 – 1211/12

THE FAMILY BACKGROUND

Clare, or Chiara in Italian – was born in Assisi in 1193 or 1194, one of several daughters of Favarone di Offreduccio di Bernardino and of Ortolana his wife. We know the names of three girls, Clare, Catherine (who became Agnes of Assisi) and Beatrice. Tradition says there were five girls but nothing more than that is known. The absence of sons maybe one reason why the uncles had so high a profile in Clare's story and in family decisions. The possibility of other sisters is borne out by the apparent presence of two nieces in the San Damiano community – apparent because *nipote* is a wide ranging word and cannot be interpreted as strictly as the English word *niece*.

Ortolana, Clare's mother, was of Frankish origin. Gemma Fortini says that she was descended collaterally from Charlemagne and the royalty of France. The Franks were a gentle, cultivated race with an innate love of learning and culture. Ortolana was, we know, devout and courageous. Clare's family were members of the *maiores*, the aristocratic stratum of Assisi society, a fact which was to have a profound effect on Clare's childhood and later life. The Offreduccio house was in the Piazza San Rufino, probably next to the cathedral, although the building which is on that site now is not the house Clare grew up in, and we also know that during the uprising in Assisi, the house was burnt. There is a document in the archives of San Rufino, signed by Clare's grandfather and others of the nobility, agreeing not to re-build their houses higher than the cathedral.

One of our main sources of information about Clare's family is **Sr Pacifica di Guelfuccio** of Assisi who had lived with her sister **Bona** across the piazza of San Rufino. Pacifica was the first witness at the canonisation process. She was older than Clare, a friend of both the mother and the daughter, and as we listen to her speaking, we see that she sometimes spoke with Clare like the privileged friend of her mother, telling her, for instance, not to fast so fiercely. She gives us clear information about the family.

When asked how she knew these things, she responded that when she was in the world she was her neighbour and distant relative, and that only the piazza was between her house and that of the virgin Clare. (CP 1,2)

Ortolana was a great lover of pilgrimages as Pacifica tells us:

This lady, Ortolana, went beyond the sea for reasons of prayer and devotion. She likewise testified that she (the witness) accompanied her beyond the sea for reasons of prayer and devotion. They also went together to Sant'Angelo and to Rome. (CP 1,4)

'Beyond the seas' here means pilgrimage to the Holy Land, a dangerous undertaking at that time, but not an uncommon one. There was, we know, a lady in Pisa who ran what we would recognise as a pilgrimage travel agency, helping pilgrims to organise their trips. Sant'Angelo is San Michele de Monte Gargano in south Italy, then as now a place of pilgrimage which developed in honour of an apparition of St Michael the archangel in 490AD. St Michael is traditionally associated with mountain tops.

Filippa tells us a little more about Ortolana:

Lady Clare told her sisters how her mother, when she was carrying her, went into the church. While standing before the cross and actually praying for God to help and protect her during the danger of childbirth, she heard a voice telling her: You will give birth to a light that will shine brilliantly in the world.” (CP3.28)

The crucifix may have been the one in the cathedral of San Rufino, next door to the family home. Note that this was the first of two occasions when the crucifix spoke to someone and profoundly affected Clare’s life. We know too that her name, Chiara, which means *light, clear, bright* in Italian, was the result of this experience of Ortolana’s.

Later, Ortolana joined her daughter Clare at San Damiano. The bull of canonisation says she:

followed her daughter’s footprints and afterwards accepted this religious way of life. In this excellent garden¹⁶ which had produced such a plant for the Lord, she happily ended her days. But after a few years, that blessed Clare, very much urged by the insistence of the same Saint Francis, accepted the government of the monastery and the sisters.

This seems to suggest that Ortolana had entered before Clare became abbess, which we know took place in 1215/1216. On the other hand, the bull of canonisation may simply have told about Ortolana by inserting it into the text without careful concern for the historical sequence. A papal bull is not meant to be a biography. It seems clear, however, that Ortolana was a notable woman of great goodness. Sister Amata, Clare’s niece, tells us this story:

A young boy from Perugia had a certain film over his eye which covered all of it. Then he was brought to Saint Clare who touched the eyes of the boy and then made the sign of the cross over him. Then she said: “Bring him to my mother, Sister Ortolana (who was in the monastery of San Damiano and let her make the sign of the cross over him.” After this had been done, the young boy was cured, so that Saint Clare said her mother had cured him. On the contrary, though, her mother said Lady Clare, her daughter, had cured him. Thus each one attributed this grace to the other. (CP 4.11)

Favarone, Clare’s father, does not appear in the later events of her story and there are some indications that he had died before she came to a marriageable age.

14. The fact that Clare seems to have had possession of her dowry, which was often handed over to the girl on the death of the father, if she were old enough to take responsibility. Bartoli, in his recent book on Clare: **Beyond the Legend**¹⁷, suggests that this dowry could have been jewels, rich dresses etc rather than property or money (which was not much used at the time).

15. the absence of any mention of Favarone in the sources

16. the high profile of the uncles during Clare and Agnes’ conflict at San Paolo and Sant’Angelo

Pacifica says that she herself did not know him well. In the Italian, she uses the word *vidde* sometimes wrongly translated as ‘see’ but it actually means that she did not know him well, not that she had never seen him.(CP 1,4). However he seems to have taken no part in the confrontation at San Paolo so may have died, or been absent on Crusade or, simply, absent. His absence or death might be the reason why Clare managed to remain unmarried, apparently without family conflict, until she was 18, by which time girls of her social status were usually wives and mothers. Another and very powerful reason is, of course, Clare’s own inner conviction that God was calling her to

¹⁶ Ortolana means Gardener

¹⁷ St Anthony Messenger Press 2010

something else, coupled with her considerable determination. We should note that it was Monaldo and her other uncles who came to San Paolo and Sant'Angelo to bring Clare and her sister Agnes home. A further hint is connected with her inheritance which we will consider in its chronological place. On the other hand, one of the canonisation witnesses, Pietro di Damiano di Assisi, tells us that

he and his father lived near Clare's family home and knew her when she was in the world and knew her father, Lord Favarone, who was noble, great and powerful in the city. [...] There were seven knights of her household, all of whom were noble and powerful. (CP 19.1)

Favarone was of Lombard stock, which meant he would have been tall physically, probably blond (physical characteristics which Clare inherited) and war-like. The Lombard people constantly invaded up and down Italy during the early Middle Ages, and to this day there are many Lombard words in the Assisan dialect.

In **1198**, the people of Assisi, the *minores*, rose up against the imperial power of Frederick Barbarossa and destroyed it. Clare would have been three or four, Francis seventeen or eighteen. Assisi then entered into a turbulent period of families and cities fighting each other. This culminated with the Battle of Collestrada in 1202 when Francis was taken prisoner by Perugia. During this same war with Perugia, Clare's family, being among the *maiores*, fled from Assisi and took refuge in Perugia until the peace of 1205, confirmed in 1210. So we find these two on different sides in this war, living through a period which was, in different ways, formative for them both. While in Perugia, it seems that Clare's family stayed with their uncle Monaldo who had already left Assisi and sought refuge in Perugia. During this time, she also met Filippa, daughter of Leonardo di Ghislerio d'Alberico, Lord of the castle of Sassorosso. Clare and Filippa became friends for life and **Filippa** later joined Clare at San Damiano. They were also joined by **Benvenuta of Perugia**.

NOTES ON MEDIEVAL SOCIETY AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

Medieval society was roughly divided into three layers called *oratores* (those who prayed), *bellatores* (those who fought) and *laboratores* (those who worked). Knights and feudal lords, including Clare's family, belonged to the second group, those who fought. This knightly and courtly culture was the strongest lay culture in the west, to be distinguished from the clerical culture of the Church and monasteries. At its best its values were strength, courage and loyalty for the men, honesty and beauty for women.

The distinguishing characteristic of the courtly culture was its belief in the transforming and ennobling power of love. The roots of this culture were manifold but we should bear in mind that one root was the influence of Arab poetry and culture on men returning from the various Crusades. This influence was at odds with the dominant trend of a more aggressive attitude towards Islam, so that the beginnings of a cultural split becomes discernable, between the Church leaders and the ordinary Crusader who had been exposed to Arab and Islamic poetry, music and culture generally.

WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

Another root was the developing concept of woman and the shifting attitudes towards women which this engendered. This is a study in itself and is mainly relevant here because all these things were in the air at the time when Clare was growing up. The aristocratic woman of this period lived in almost total subjection, first to her father, then to her husband and then, often, to her son when she was widowed. Women, especially if they were beautiful, were good business assets for forming family alliances,

improving the family fortunes by a network of relationships and commitments. The only field which gave women any sort of independence was religion, although sometimes widowhood did, a situation which increased as more and more men died on the Crusades. It is also fair to say that the women of the *minores* sometimes had more freedom than those of the *maiores*, who tended to be very protected, rarely if ever left alone, heavily guarded by convention and custom. At the same time, of course, aristocratic women were expected to – and did – take up arms in defence of their home and property in their husband's absence. On the whole the upbringing of a young girl was in the hands of her mother until she reached a marriageable age, when the father would assume much if not all of the responsibility for choosing her partner. Such decisions would often be based on dynastic or financial and power grounds. It seems that the more aristocratic the family, the younger the children were betrothed, as is clear from the history of some of the royal children of this period.

More than most children, those of the *maiores* were victims of the fortunes of war, often being given as hostages to guarantee the good behaviour of a conquered king. War, fighting and aggression were deep in the psyche of the *maiores*, part of their duty and of their pleasure.

1210 - We do not know the date when the Offreduccio family returned to Assisi and began to rebuild their homes and to re-establish the *maiores* in positions of power, but can safely assume that 1210 was the latest date. It may well be that the turbulence of the times and the conditions of exile were two more reasons why Clare had reached this age without being married. Pietro di Damiano tells us a little more:

At the time, Lady Clare, a very young girl at that time, lived in a spiritual way, as was believed. He saw her father, mother and relatives who wanted her to marry magnificently, according to her nobility, to someone great and powerful. But the young girl, at that time about seventeen or so, could not be in any way convinced because she wanted to remain in her virginity and live in poverty as she demonstrated since she sold her inheritance and gave it to the poor. She was considered by all to have a good manner of life. (CP 19.2)

Often it was only through religion that women could find any outlets. Certainly the devout woman of the *maiores* would have had clear duties of charity for the poor and sick. So Ortolana took Clare to visit the local poor in their homes, to take them necessary food and clothes, to help care for the sick and old. Pacifica tells us, for instance, that

the Lady Clare very much loved the poor and all the citizens held her in great veneration because of her good manner of life. (CP1.3)

READING

3:3 Fortini A., *Francis of Assisi: Ch. 9, Saint Clare, Lady of Light*, (Crossroads, New York, 1981), pp. 327 - 337

LESSON THREE

HER CONVERSION EXPERIENCE 1212; SAN DAMIANO

AIMS

The aim of this lesson is an understanding of events around Clare's leaving home and beginning her religious life. We will try to show something of the inner journey beneath the external events and touch the broader issues with which she was grappling at this stage. This is important for our understanding of her charism and her position in the wider movement around Francis. Then we will consider the significance of San Damiano in Clare's life and in the life of the Franciscan movement – a significance which it has retained until the present day.

MEETING FRANCIS

By 1211, Francis' new brotherhood was beginning to be established. This was the year when he planned to go to Syria for the first time, but was thwarted by contrary winds and ended up in Slavonia where he stowed away for the return trip. Later that same year, he and Clare began to meet. Lady Bona, Pacifica's sister, tells us what happened next:

the witness (Bona) many times accompanied her to speak to Saint Francis. She went secretly so as not to be seen by her parents. Asked what Saint Francis said to her, she replied he always preached to her about converting to Jesus Christ. Brother Philip did the same. She listened willingly to him and consented to all the good things said to her. (CP 17.3)

The virgin ... desired to see and hear him with an undaunted heart.
They both came together by desire: the holy man longing none the less
for her presence, the good robber hoping to win her for heavenly pursuits.
He who desired more and to whom it was more appropriate,
anticipates the sight of her and very often is visited by her.
They alternate places and seek convenient times,
so that rumours might not be spread about their sacred endeavours.
The eager young girl went to the holy father
with hidden steps, content to have one companion.
The holy man spoke, his words carry the young girl away,
and she is taken to wherever the speaker's teaching takes her.
(Verse Legend 235 – 242)

This was the beginning of Clare's relationship with Francis. We do not know, but may assume, that she had been following his career closely. We do know that when she was very much younger, she had sent him money while he was working on the Porziuncola. Bona again:

Lady Clare, while still in the world, also gave the witness a certain amount of money as a votive offering, and directed her to carry it to those who were working on Saint Mary of the Porziuncola so they would sustain the flesh. (CP 17.7)

This could have been as early as 1208 while Francis was restoring small and ruined churches in the valley. The incident suggests some resonance from very early in the story, Clare being about 14 or 15 at the time.

It seems that Clare had already heard a clear call from God but was waiting for something, maybe she did not know what. These conversations with Francis were

clearly times of intense ardour for them both, and a relationship was forged which endured to the grave and beyond. Each writer has their own take on this relationship and on Clare's vocation, but my own opinion is that she was very clear about her call and Francis showed her how to follow it. It is true that the sources speak of him 'winning her for his Lord' but the witness of the sisters shows clearly that she was already won. He helped her with the 'how' of her vocation, but she always had, and retained to the end, great certainty about her response to the voice of the Lord. The *Legenda* speaks of Francis as the friend of the Bridegroom: 'a skilful agent of the most faithful Groom'. However, when we read the Legend we always have to bear in mind that the author was presenting Clare as a model for European women and was concerned to interpret her so that she was seen to conform to accepted norms. The aspect of Clare as the rebel, the one who was faithful to the original vision of Francis up to the point of stubbornness, the one who would not concede or compromise any more than Francis would, is a side of her which tends to be played down in the Legend. Thus, for instance, her major conflict with Gregory IX in 1230 and her reaction to his prohibition on friars visiting the sisters, is presented to us in a very anodyne manner and the narrative full of words like: the pious mother, sorrowing ... (Legend 37) This is why we must always read the sources for Clare, even more than those for Francis, with awareness of their background and intent.

LEAVING HOME - 1212

Francis, steeped in Scripture even this early in his Gospel life, had spoken to Clare of her call from God in the Scriptural language of responding to the invitation of the Bridegroom. As we shall see when we come to consider her letters, this insight never left her. It is important, too, to remember that the nuptial union they speak about takes place between God and humanity in the Incarnation. This insight arose for them both from their intense awareness of the Incarnation as something alive and active in their own lives. It was not an historical event in the past but a living reality in their immediate present. This understanding of the Bridegroom was, therefore, profoundly theological and it gave them both a language in which to express their cleaving to God in faith which they understood as the true work of the faithful soul. Through the indwelling of Christ, the faithful soul is, in Clare's words, greater than the heavens themselves.¹⁸ Our fidelity is first his fidelity, and by this fidelity, we become what he is: God's home and dwelling place, as Clare and Francis both say at different times.¹⁹

In the light of this, we can begin to interpret Clare's flight from home in 1211 or 1212. It is good dramatic stuff. The day was Palm Sunday evening, the date therefore was either 27 March 1211 or 18 March 1212.

READING

3:4 *Clare of Assisi; Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)

Read the account from the *Legenda* which goes with this lesson and Sr Cristiana's account from the Canonisation Process, and note the following points:

1. Conversion here means leaving the secular life and its values in order to embark on a life consecrated to God in religion and in virginity. This was the language of the period and significant language for Francis and Clare who understood that it meant a complete change of values and goals. This was true of them both, though

¹⁸ 3Ag 21

¹⁹ Francis: 1LtF,6 and Clare: 3Ag,22

differently, and equally true for Clare as for Francis, even though she seems to have been deeply committed to God from early childhood. Clare's leaving home and clothing in the habit of penance was the ritual externalisation of this inner change of direction. By leaving on the evening of Palm Sunday, Clare was symbolically inserting her life into that of the Passion re-enacted during Holy Week. It is clear from the sources that she and Francis planned this carefully, so we are justified in seeking out the meaning of every detail. In the light of this planning, it is interesting that they made, it appears, no practical plans about where or how she should live.

2. The presence of the Bishop in the story signifies the presence of the Church. The incident with the palm is taken to indicate the approval of the Bishop, or at least his un-written support. This was the same Bishop Guido who had protected Francis in his confrontation with his father, and again in his meeting with the Pope and Roman Curia, and who again appears during Francis' final illness. He was a consistent supporter of the Poor Ladies, giving them San Damiano and building on more rooms for them as their community expanded. It may be that at this early stage, he was willing to give Clare support but less willing to have an open confrontation with her powerful family. This may be the meaning of the incident and the biographer's comment that the palm was a fitting omen, a remark whose meaning is not, otherwise, obvious. Remember here, too, that at this time religious life was still considered almost an alternative to martyrdom, so Clare being given the palm by the church *can* be seen as hinting at religious life. When we look at the dossal, that painting of Clare surrounded by eight scenes from her life, painted at the request of the sisters themselves, we should note that the first scene shows Bishop Guido giving her the palm, and the last scene shows Innocent IV at her funeral, telling us that the church supported her from beginning to end.
3. We do not know who Clare's companion was in this flight. 'A virtuous companion' is all we are told, but her usual companion, Bona, tells us herself (CP 17, 16-17) that she was away in Rome on pilgrimage and her sister Pacifica is silent about this episode except to say that she entered religious life when Clare did. This is not really as clear as it seems at first, for did she mean at the Porziuncola (which Clare meant when she said accurately that she began her religious life on Monday in Holy Week) or did Pacifica mean at San Damiano? There is no indication of her presence at San Paolo or Sant'Angelo.
4. Clare's flight from home was in the line of the great Scriptural Exodus, from Abram (Gen 12,1) to the apostles, (Mt 4, 21-22) leaving all in response to a call from God, setting out with no knowledge of the destination, launching out into the deep. Her journey to the Porziuncola and the welcome of the brothers has strong echoes of the parable of the prudent virgins being found ready with lighted lamps to welcome the bridegroom. Clare was coming to the Bridegroom for whom she had left everything in a most literal way.
5. The brothers' warm reception of Clare was also that of any group welcoming a new member, and it was certainly Clare's understanding that by this act she entered into Francis' 'group'. By coming to the Porziuncola, she was coming to the house of the Bridegroom's mother, and all her life Mary was to be her model and mother in the Lord.
6. Clare received the tonsure and habit of a penitent, signs of the penitential act of conversion but also, in the intent of Clare, an act of consecration to God. The word 'tonsure' is used in the bull of canonisation though not in the Legend. 'Tonsure' was the technical term for the cutting of hair during the ceremony for the consecration of virgins, so in a sense is the expected word. The Legend, in fact, downplays Francis'

involvement, perhaps because the circumstances were so unusual, as Bartoli says. (p45) There might also be an investment in down-playing the fact that Clare joined the friars, though Francis, himself an official penitent, had the right to accept others into his company, and the prohibition against women only came along later. (1221) Bartoli goes on, though, to make the more important point that Clare and Francis crafted a liturgy which spanned the whole day and perfectly expressed all that Clare was setting out to do. We need to keep this in mind when we come to consider the changes and adaptations which circumstances led her to make later.

7. As far as we know, she made no other religious profession in her life, but she steadfastly clung to this one which made her one with the brothers. This was to become quite clear during her long struggle with Hugolino.
8. Because of these Palm Sunday events, the Porziuncola is the birth-place of the two Orders, the Friars Minor and the Poor Ladies, both of which began in that holy house of the virgin Mary.

In this temple's confines the wondrous life of the father shines;
thus was born the lesser Order and here a crowd of men was quartered.
The bride of God, Clare, here first shed her hair
the world's pomp refused and her Christ pursued.
Thus a sacred mother to ladies and to brothers
gives forth a brilliant birth for whom she brings Christ on earth.²⁰

The Legend itself comments that in the Porziuncola, a 'new army of the poor, began under the leadership of Francis and so the 'Mother of Mercies' was truly the one 'who brought to birth both Orders in her dwelling place'. (LCI 8) The Legend contains a number of details like this, not even found in the Canonisation Process, bearing out the author's assertion that he had consulted the brothers as well as the sisters. In this account we may be hearing the recollections of Leo, Angelo or any of those still living who had been present.

In this dramatic series of actions and their sequel, we also see the broad lines of Clare's spirituality. This includes her Scriptural understanding of God's invitation to the wedding feast as well as her strong conviction that she had joined the same group as Francis and the brothers. We see her acceptance of the new form of evangelical life which the brothers were developing, and by the presence of Francis himself we see something of Francis' role in her life and glimpse Clare's role in his life. By inserting herself in this intense way into the Passion of Christ, she was to be led deeper and deeper into a mystical union with the Word made flesh. Clare's theology, as we shall see, was profoundly scriptural and profoundly influenced by the San Damiano crucifix. Praying daily before this crucifix, its theology of the suffering and glorified Christ became hers, and emerges later in her four letters, enriched by her reflections on her own experience and that of others. We can justly say of Clare what Celano says of Francis on his way to Slovenia:

Burning with divine love
the blessed father Francis was always eager
to try his hand at brave deeds,
and walking in the way of God's commands
with heart wide open
he longed to reach the summit of perfection. (1C 55)

UNCERTAINTIES

²⁰ Mirror of Perfection Chapter 4, 84

From the Porziuncola, Francis and the brothers took Clare to the Benedictine monastery of San Paolo, of which nothing now remains except the small chapel and apse in the cemetery of Bastia and, inside the chapel, the altar of which the slab is almost certainly the one from Clare's time, and the cylindrical central column stands at one side. The chapel is now cared for by the Benedictine sisters of Santa Anna, Bastia, spiritual descendents of the once-powerful monastery of San Paolo.

There, at about 2.00 in the morning, she was received, not as a postulant but, almost certainly, as a servant, living a parallel experience to Francis' at San Verecundio where he worked in the kitchen, rather unsuccessfully. This monastery of San Paolo had great privileges of sanctuary, recently reconfirmed by Innocent III in a bull dated 5 March 1201, and a standing army to reinforce those privileges. It would also give protection to the one seeking sanctuary who had a specified period of time within which he must either prove his innocence or stand trial at the end of it. Clare seems to have made no claim to these privileges nor received any support because of them. She was seeking, in the words of Marco Bartoli, the privilege of having no privileges. So she did not go to Bastia to seek protection or for any other reason than (as the Legend says) to remain there until the Most High would provide another place.[LegCl 8] It was also a notable and public place from which to proclaim her option and commitment. Francis said of himself:

No-one told me what I must do but the most High himself showed me and at San Paolo, Clare awaited the word from the Lord which would show her what she must do.

It should be understood clearly that the opposition of her family was less to the idea of religious life as such, and more to the condition of life which she had chosen, that of *vilitas*, - the opposite of the *nobilitas* into which she had been born. This was Clare's and Francis' understanding of the *humilitas et paupertas* (humility and poverty) of Christ. She had become one with those who had nothing and who were servants of others. This was Clare's self-emptying, her *kenosis*.

SANT'ANGELO

Clare was escorted to Sant'Angelo by Francis and Philip the Long, about eight days after arriving at San Paolo. Sant'Angelo was then a small church, a few hundred metres from the present Carceri, on the slopes of Mt Subasio. In 1604 it was extensively rebuilt and is now in private hands. While she was there her younger sister Catherine joined her and together they confronted the angry family and triumphed. Francis himself cut Catherine's hair and gave her the habit, renaming her Agnes in honour of all she had already undergone for the Lamb of God. We only learn of this incident from the Legend, it is not mentioned in the Canonisation Process. The amount of detail suggests that the author learnt it from Agnes herself (who had died in the November between Clare's death and the Process). The arrival of Agnes at Sant'Angelo changed Clare's situation. Now there were two of them they could begin their new life in *fraternità*, in horizontal living and shared responsibility as we would say today. It was a new form of women's evangelical life. From this perspective, San Damiano was ideal since it was here that Francis himself had been summoned to his task within the Church by the words from the crucifix: Repair my Church. So Clare and Agnes went to San Damiano, further down the slopes of Mt Subasio, over to the west from Sant'Angelo. Clare lived there for the remaining 42 years of her life

SAN DAMIANO

Today San Damiano is a friary of the friars minor, is well preserved and much excavation has been done there. Much of it is open to the public. It is an interesting

irony that some of the land abutting on San Damiano was later owned by Pietro Bernadone, Francis' father.

San Damiano is undoubtedly one of the holy places of Franciscanism. Events at San Damiano fall into three groups: those concerning Francis and his early conversion story, those around Francis and Clare, and those around the various writings of Francis which arose from San Damiano. By now in your Course work, you probably know a little about each of these. Take time to reflect on them again but more specifically with the focus of San Damiano.

GROUP ONE – INCIDENTS CONCERNING FRANCIS

The crucifix in San Damiano speaks to him
he sells his horse and gives the money to the priest at San Damiano
he dresses as a hermit while working at San Damiano
he seeks help to restore the church
he goes for alms while working there
he seeks oil for the lamp before the Crucifix
he prophesies the coming of holy ladies to San Damiano
he prophesies the future
Francis as the initiator of a new form of women's religious life
Francis foresees the growth of this women's vocation

GROUP TWO – CONCERNING FRANCIS AND CLARE

his love for Clare and her sisters
his spiritual care for Clare and her sisters
he promises them help in the future as well as in the present
he seeks Clare's advice
his example of how to treat the sisters
he preaches to them without words but with ashes
two years before his death he is ill at San Damiano
Clare longs to see him again before he dies
his body is brought to San Damiano, the sisters' grief

GROUP THREE – FRANCIS' WRITINGS CONNECTED WITH SAN DAMIANO

Prayer before the Crucifix
His Forma Vivendi (Form of Life) for Clare and her sisters
his norms for fasting which he gives them (Letter 3 to Agnes)
the Canticle of Brother Sun and all Creation
the canticle: Audite Poverelle (Listen, Little Poor Ones)
His Last Will written for Clare and the sisters
other writings for Clare, now lost
the Rule of Clare based on Francis' Rule of 1223
Ubertino of Casale's evidence that Leo gave them scrolls about Francis, also now lost.

LESSON FOUR 1212 – 1216 EARLY RELIGIOUS LIFE

AIMS

This lesson looks at the nature of Clare's profession and its significance for her links with the friars. We also touch on forms of women's religious life of the period and Jacques de Vitry's testimony about the Lesser Brothers and Lesser Sisters.

Having claimed sanctuary at San Paolo and found herself apparently left very much to her own resources, and having then sought refuge at Sant'Angelo and again had to cope with the family on her own, Clare and Agnes finally came to San Damiano. There, her biographer says:

as if casting the anchor of her soul in a secure site, she no longer wavered due to further changes of place, nor did she hesitate because of its smallness, nor did she fear its isolation. (LegCl 10)

The biographer then goes immediately, and tellingly, to remind us that San Damiano had been repaired by Francis himself and that it was at San Damiano that the crucifix had spoken to him. In order to understand Clare's thinking, it is important to recall that she prayed daily before this crucifix. Now she was, as it were, taking up the torch of repairing the Church, having been helped by Francis to embark on the life of a penitent. The biography says that she 'received the insignia of holy penance' (LegCl 8) rather than the habit of religious life. So when Francis gave her the tonsure, Clare did not enter any monastic state of life but the life of a penitent like Francis himself. She was now one of the *minores*, the lesser ones. Did they, from the beginning, regard their call as a response to the summons from the crucifix? Does their profound originality reside in this and the interaction of this with their imaginations and spiritual talent? It will be helpful here to read.

READING

3:5 Bartoli M., *Clare of Assisi*: (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1993), pp 54-59
At Sant' Angelo in Panzo.

We should note that at San Paolo, Clare had experienced traditional monasticism in all its splendour. At Sant'Angelo it is probable that she experienced one of the newer forms of women's religious life, either a Beguine-type group or something similar. It seems that these women did not profess any particular rule at that time. The place was called a church not a monastery, which suggests that the women were simply grouped around a church building which they used. All that you have learnt in the lessons on Francis about the various poverty movements within the Church, come into focus here with Clare. She would have known about them and had her own opinion about them; probably she and Francis had discussed them; at Sant'Angelo she may have had first-hand experience of them, even the option of joining them, but 'her soul was not at peace'. So we need to begin to ask what exactly was she looking for, when neither the traditional nor the new seemed to meet her longing?

- Clearly (as Bartoli points out) she was not simply seeking somewhere further removed from her family, since San Damiano was actually nearer Assisi than Sant'Angelo, and anyway Clare had amply demonstrated that she was well able

to hold her own with the knights of her family.

- Clare was still thinking in terms of the penitential life rather than any formal religious life. She and Agnes were soon joined by their mother's friend **Pacifica di Guelfuccio**, sister of Bona, and gradually by others. Their canonical situation is far from clear. We can be certain that Bishop Guido of Assisi knew and supported them since San Damiano belonged to the diocese of Assisi. On the other hand, the group was under the direction of a young lay penitent, Francis, who had no canonical title under which to assume this responsibility. As far as we know, the terms and boundaries of his responsibility were never clearly defined.
- Further, they lived for several years following no known rule of religious life but, like Francis, followed the way of life of penitents and the Gospel-based Form of Life given them by Francis. This placed two dynamic things at the heart of their project: life according to the Gospel, and Francis' own solicitude for them.

READING

3:6 *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993) pp311-312

This short fragment cannot be called a Rule in any ordinary sense, rather (at most) a spiritual orientation, though it also tells us something significant about Clare's spiritual response to God. It may only have been part of Francis' covering letter to the Form of Life (whether adapted or not) approved by Innocent III in 1208/9. In the text, we see hints of their recognition of Mary as the paradigm of all Christians, the daughter and servant (*ancilla*) of the Father *par excellence*. Her 'Yes' opened the way to the Incarnation and in Friar Christ we see the fullest perfection of the Gospel, since for Francis and Clare, the Gospel is not so much what Jesus taught as who Jesus was and is. The passage concludes with the promise of Francis' and his successors' on-going care for Clare and her sisters, a promise to which she clung tenaciously all her life, even though this made her increasingly unpopular with the management level of the friars and with the papacy. For Clare, this promise was incontrovertible proof that she and her sisters were one group with the friars minor; this was what she had professed in St Mary of the Angels and to this she adhered until her death.

READING

In her Rule, Clare gives us some reflections on these early days.

3:7 *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993) pp71-72

Note that:

- her own life openly contradicts the Regula non Bullata of Francis which forbids the brothers to receive women into obedience. (RnB XII,3)²¹
- the expression she uses to describe her new condition of life is the same as that used by Francis in his Testament, that 'the Lord enlightened my heart to do penance'. Marco Bartoli, commenting on this, says:
- Penance is a definite state 'an attitude when confronted by life and by death, an attitude when confronted by oneself and by others, an attitude which encompasses the whole world, all people and God in a 'state', an existential

²¹ Regula non Bullata of Francis now referred to as Earlier Rule

situation.’ In this sense, penance for men and women of the 13th century was not only a religious dimension but a cultural one in the fullest sense. For Francis it became the fundamental human dimension, to be human meant to be a man or woman of penance because penitence is intrinsic to our rapport with God, and precisely because it is God that we relate to, we are ‘lowly’, ‘humble’, ‘sinful’ and ‘penitent’. ‘Penance’ is the condition from which we know God, it is an existential condition, it is the only possible condition for us before God because, ransomed by Christ, we are drawn to enter into love.’²²

READING

To know more about how their daily life went,

3:8 Francis of Assisi: The Saint: Jacques de Vitry, Letter I, VI and Historia Occidentalis. (ED vol. I pp. 578-585 (*Note: this reading is not in the readings section, you will need to see the book*))

In the beginning, it is possible (and probable) that Clare and her sisters did not keep enclosure as we understand it today, almost eight hundred years later. There is a strong tradition in Assisi that Clare worked among the lepers. Recently the little chapel of la Maddalena has been identified as the chapel of the women lepers. This chapel is just down the hill from San Damiano and some way from the chapel of S Bartolomeo which was that of the men lepers. Oral tradition suggests that Clare and her sisters came down to this chapel and returned to San Damiano at night, much as Jacques de Vitry described.

Jacques de Vitry had been advisor and friend of a famous Beguine in Liège, Mary d’Oignies. She died in 1213 and he had written her life as a model for the modern saint. On his way to take up his position as Bishop of Accra, he travelled to Italy (where he was much shocked by the behaviour of the curia) and realised that things were as bad in Italy as in France and Belgium. He saw, too, that the Franciscans in Umbria were, like the Humiliati in Lombardy and the ‘new’ religious of Belgium, presenting clear ideals of poverty and chastity, and at that time, they represented the only force in the Church capable of confronting both the heresies of the period and the general decadence of ecclesiastical life.

One interesting characteristic of all these movements was the central place given to women. From the turn of the century, women had come to the fore in the religious enterprise as sharers in the Spirit, in a new and different way. Women sometimes went on Crusades, they followed itinerant preachers, had visions and revelations, took an active part in the spiritual life of their locality – just as our two women, Clare and Agnes, did in Assisi. Jacques de Vitry offers these reasons for the presence of women in the new movements:

Certain devout and prudent virgins, not wanting to live in their parents’ house in the midst of secular people and immodesty and because of great dangers, above all in these days, took refuge together in monasteries which the Lord had multiplied across the whole world. Those who could not find a monastery willing to receive them, live together in a house [...] under the discipline of one who is superior to the others by reason of her honesty and prudence. She instructs them both by means of the written word and by customs, about keeping vigil, prayer, fasting and other afflictions and also by means of the work of their hands and poverty, subjection and humility.²³

²² Marco Bartoli: *Chiara*, Edizioni San Paolo, Turin 2001, p75 (trans. mine) and quoting I. Magli: *Gli uomini della penitenza* Milano 1977 p 38

²³ Jacques de Vitry Historia Occidentalis XXXV

NOTE

13. that these women were not nuns and did not live in monasteries but in private houses where they lived a form of life characterised by prayer, manual labour and penance. Their 'fasting and other afflictions' seem very severe to us today, to the point that some have considered their fasting as a kind of 'holy anorexia'.²⁴ It is important for us to site Clare's 'fasting and other afflictions' in the context of what was customary for women of the time who were serious about their commitment to God and the Gospel. This is particularly interesting since fasting caused one of the few disagreements between Clare and Francis. He thought she fasted too severely and finally, with the help of the Bishop's authority, insisted that she eat daily. Her biographer says, quite truly: It is not surprising that such rigour, observed for a very long time, subjected Clare to sicknesses, consumed her strength and enervated the vigour of her body. [LegCl 18].
14. The intervention of the bishop suggests that he acted as their local superior which in turn implies that he saw the small community as being, in some sense, a religious group, even at this early stage but in no sense as being part of any wider Order or movement. This fact further underlines their originality as does his apparent concern for the relative details of their daily life. San Damiano also, as has been said, belonged to his diocese and as the community grew, we know that he enlarged (ie paid for) the convent buildings to accommodate them.
15. The incident about fasting is also interesting because of Clare's resistance to Francis even though she had, as she loves to tell us, promised him obedience! While she always retained that (to us excessive) love of penance which had marked the early days of the first companions, Clare seems to have made an inner journey from a self-punitive attitude to the liberated moment when she could say: I thank you for having created me!

Bartoli says of this period:

"During those years when the friars' community was just beginning there was also, abroad in central Italy, a spirit of dualism which, in another form, can be seen in the Catharist heresy. The teaching of this group held that there were two first principles: good and evil. For the Cathari, the spirit had been created by the god of good, while the flesh had been created by the god of evil. The different groups had different cosmologies and different understandings of the interaction between the god of good and the god of evil. All of them, however, applied a rigorous morality arising from a strong disapproval of everything to do with the body. Some took this to the extent of having an 'endurance' that is a rite of purification to the point of death by starvation. This religious suicide was the equivalent of martyrdom for the Cathari and those who underwent it were much venerated as people who had attained the summit of perfection. This is why the catharist doctrine has been called, in modern times, a 'heresy of evil' [Manselli, Naples 1963]. We cannot exclude that some penitential current arose among the 'perfect' of the Cathari and that it was seen as a sign of that perfection. In this ascetic competition, women stood out precisely because they were considered (as the dedicatory letter of the Legend also indicates) as 'naturally' turned towards sin. So the religious woman needed, in a sense, to show, more than her male counterpart did, that she knew how to overcome the innate sinfulness of her own body."

We see no trace of this dualism in Clare or Francis, rather the contrary. Bartoli continues:

²⁴ cf R M Bell *Holy Anorexia* Chicago-London 1985

“Francis’ attitude to the heretics of his time was not that of doctrinal or theological condemnation but one of taking a stand on the existential plane. For him, the world of the senses was not evil, rather the contrary, it was created by God who is good. This is the experience of the Canticle of Creation, which can well be read as a strong and joyous refutation of every dualistic and pessimistic idea about creation.”²⁵

While we could truly say: where Francis went, Clare followed, a closer acquaintance with Clare makes it clear that she was a woman of great autonomy as well as being a clear and careful thinker. If she followed, it was out of her great respect for Francis but her ideas and thinking were very much her own. It is a mistake to see her as a shadowy follower, however faithful.

²⁵ Bartoli, *Chiara*, pp 81-82 [trans mine]

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LESSON FIVE

CONSOLIDATION AND STRUGGLE

AIMS

In this lesson we look at the way Clare's form of life developed and consider some of the pressures and stresses she experienced and the various rules and constitutions which preceded the writing of her own Rule.

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FORM OF LIFE

1212 In the Rule of 1221, Francis says

This is the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which Brother Francis asked the Lord Pope to be granted and confirmed it for him; and he granted and confirmed it for him and his brothers present and to come. Brother Francis and whoever will be the head of this Order promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and to his successors. And all the other brothers are bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors. (RnB Prologue)

In her Rule, Clare says:

The Form of life of the Order of Poor Sisters which blessed Francis began is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, without anything of our own and in chastity. Clare the unworthy handmaid of Christ and plant of the most blessed father Francis, promises obedience and reverence to the lord Pope Innocent and his canonically elected successors and to the Roman church. And as in the beginning of her conversion she, together with her sisters, promised obedience to blessed Francis, so she promises the same, inviolably, to his successors. And the other sisters are bound always to obey the successors of blessed Francis and sister Clare and the other canonically elected abbesses who will succeed her. (RCl 1:1-5)

Quietly, they instituted a wholly new model of life in which the leader promises obedience directly to the papacy (thus having all the flexibility of exemption from episcopal control) and the members of the community or fraternity promise obedience to the leader. With the friars this enabled their mobility to develop, and we also know that Clare sent sisters off to other monasteries to lead them in her form of life. Such leadership was always a service, a ministry, on the model of Jesus washing his disciples' feet (see Admonition IV)

Another characteristic of this form of life was the lack of personal property. Francis says: the brothers shall not acquire anything of their own, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all – and the mendicant order in all its freedom was born. For the Poor Ladies, such poverty was possibly more demanding and it forced Clare to think deeply about her motivation, especially when she saw that she and the sisters were experiencing real want. When we look at the illnesses mentioned among the community in the Canonisation Process, we can see that many of them were diseases of overcrowding and under nourishment. We know from Celano that those early years were also years of famine and great want in the area, and this must have pressed hard on the sisters living, for the first time, a form of life dependent on others, willing to enter into what Bartoli calls 'an ethic of exchange' among a poor populace who were accustomed to the wealth and self-sufficiency of the local Benedictine houses.

A third important characteristic was their attitude to work. In her Rule Clare says:

After Terce, those sisters to whom the Lord has granted the grace of working, should work at tasks which serve the integrity and common good, working faithfully and

devotedly so that, setting aside the idleness which is the soul's enemy, they do not quench the spirit of holy prayer and devotion which other temporal things must serve. (RegCl 7,1-2)

Francis, in the *Regula non Bullata* chapter 7, also stresses the significance of manual work. We know that Clare wove and spun and did some beautiful embroidery. This skill would have been part of her education. In the church of San Francesco in Gubbio and in the monastery of Zamora in Spain there are examples of corporals said to have been embroidered by Clare and the Protomonastery treasures an alb she made for Francis, the deacon. However the point is not that she worked well but that she recommends us to work as Friar Christ worked, labouring in the Father's vineyard. For them both, work was to serve prayer. We work because Christ worked, saying: the Father works until now and I work. Christ, our elder Brother, sets us the example. Work is the right mode for expressing *minoritas*, 'lesserness'. Clare and her sisters gave away the fruits of their work rather than regarding it as earning their living, differing in this from the Beguines whose weaving skills often led them to considerable wealth. At San Damiano the sisters lived with all the dependence of the poor rather than in the self-sufficiency of the established monastery which set out to create 'God's acre' in a way that was as independent of the secular world as possible.

READING:

3:9 Bartoli M., *Clare of Assisi, Work*, (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1993), pp 59-66

2. Factors which worked upon and modified the Form of Life

a) Clare accepts the government of the sisters

At this time, or even earlier, Clare was pushed by Francis to accept the task of government. Pacifica tells us:

Three years after she had been in the Order, at the prayers and insistence of Saint Francis, who almost forced her, she accepted the direction and government of the sisters. (ProcCan 1,6)

Bear in mind that Francis inserted into the *Regula non Bullata* (1221) the words:

All the brothers who have been established as ministers and servants of the other brothers should assign their brothers to the provinces and to the places where they are to be, and they should visit them frequently and spiritually admonish and encourage them (RnB 4,2)

So the pressure brought to bear on Clare was possibly part of a wider organizational thrust within the whole Franciscan movement. In this light, Francis' insistence that she accept the direction and government of the sisters makes more sense and should be thought of as a distinct event from accepting the Rule of Benedict, the title of abbess and Hugolino's Constitutions. Francis was himself experiencing that a growing community needs more structure than small beginnings do. Until then Francis had been the 'minister' of everyone but this had now become impossible. As he shared out the responsibilities and structures of government, he included Clare with regard to his community at San Damiano where Clare now became the equivalent of minister or guardian. So the Legend goes on to tell us that:

three years after her conversion, declining the name and office of Abbess ... compelled by blessed Francis she accepted the government of the ladies. (LegCl 12)

Like Pacifica, the author places this in 1215. It is also a fact that there are no papal documents naming Clare as abbess prior to 1228. The Privilege of Poverty granted her by Innocent simply says: To Clare and the other handmaids of Christ in the church of San Damiano in Assisi. So San Damiano is not yet a monastery in the technical sense, but only a church, like Sant'Angelo, where they do not follow a Rule but live a 'regular life' which meant some structures and commitment but without belonging to a recognised Order. It is in the letter which Cardinal Hugolino wrote to Clare in 1228 that we find her addressed as Abbess for the first time. The author of the Legend is our only source for her being called abbess as early as 1215/1216, and he was writing several decades later and, as we have suggested, not out of the Franciscan family. In fact, it seems that Clare was named 'minister' or even 'guardian' of San Damiano in 1215 and abbess later, prior to 1228, somewhere after 1218/1219. If that is the case, then Clare's opposition also had two parts. She was unhappy at being placed in authority in 1215 but even more unhappy at being placed under the Benedictine Rule and named Abbess a few years later.

b) Steps towards the adoption of a recognised Rule

In 1209 Innocent III had verbally approved Francis' form of life because he realized the importance of gathering the various 'new' movements and groups under the wing of the Church. This applied especially to the so-called 'poverty movements' for whom Innocent wanted to create space within the Church. However, with hindsight we may think a great mistake had been made at the 4th Lateran Council when they passed the famous Decretal 13, forbidding any new rules in religious life. For Francis (who had attended the Council) the earlier verbal approval of his Form of Life resolved the difficulty since it gave them canonical recognition even if '*praeter legem*' – outside the law, that is, it was a privilege or favour. St Dominic, in a parallel position, chose to adopt the Rule of St Augustine.

Innocent's failure to persuade the Council to adopt his vision for the poverty movements had direct consequences for Clare. The Church could not recognise them as belonging to Francis' 'religion' or Order, nor even as part of the Franciscan fraternity in its widest sense, nor could the sisters claim (as Francis could) any pre-conciliar recognition. It is also possible that at the Council Francis realised, possibly for the first time, the problems some of the men's Orders were having with the women's branches for whom they were unwilling to offer the 'spiritual services' of chaplaincy, confessions etc. and this had blown up into a major issue. In theory, Orders such as the Cistercians and Benedictines did not recognise a 'women's branch' but in practice could not deny the existence of numerous convents following the Benedictine, Cistercian, Norbertine etc rules. (There were also some interesting experiments in double monasteries, for instance (although a little earlier) that at Fontevrault in France where the superior of both men and women was the abbess.)

We do not know, but possibly these meetings at the Council gave Francis new insights into the problems his brothers might encounter. Was this the reason why he pushed Clare to adopt the Benedictine Rule? On the face of it, he was apparently ignoring all they had talked about earlier, all her commitment to poverty, all the motives which led to their Palm Sunday liturgy. How did this leave Clare feeling, we may wonder? All we know is that in 1215 or 1216 Clare found herself under pressure, even from Francis, to adopt an existing Rule and

the one suggested was that of St Benedict, the standard rule for contemplative women.

THE PRIVILEGE OF POVERTY 1216

At the beginning of 1216, Innocent III was in Perugia. Anton Rotzetter²⁶ even suggests that Clare sent a sister or went herself to Perugia to see Innocent and talk about her situation. We must not lose sight of what an extraordinary act this would have been, nor forget that there is no documentary evidence for such a meeting. However, we see Clare following Francis' path in many respects and it is not impossible that she too went, with great trust and simplicity, to see Innocent and seek his approval just as Francis had done.

It was through her personal initiative that she obtained this 'privilege of poverty' ... that no one could force her to receive property. (Rotzetter p 135)

For Clare, as for Francis, absolute poverty was the pivotal hinge for all Franciscan life. Francis came to see any act of appropriating something to oneself as the source of all sin (see Admonitions 2 and 3) and we know that some of the later Franciscans even took the view that all private property was the result of the Fall, an opinion which led them into a certain amount of trouble. Clare sought, in this Privilege of Poverty, what Francis had sought in 1209, 'not to be bound by the rules of existing Orders' (Rotzetter p 135) but to find some legal way of protecting the essence of her call to total poverty. Rotzetter again:

As for Francis, the pope sought a way to create a place for a new form of religious life in the Church by means of an exceptional norm, namely a *privilege*. (p 135)

There are many unanswered questions around the authenticity of this 1216 Privilege of Poverty and these will be looked at in more detail in the next lesson. However, the fact remains that as we unravel the events of 1215 – 1228, there is a logical place for this Privilege at this time, within the development of legislation and decisions around Clare and the sisters.

READING

3:10 *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)
The Privilege of Poverty of Pope Innocent III (1216). p.85-86

Note the titles given to Clare, to San Damiano, the acknowledgement of their poverty (*sicut manifestum est*, 'as is obvious') the careful link with John 14,6 and the allusion to the Song of Songs, the suggestion that Innocent had indeed understood Clare's heart and wished to leave her free from coercion. What does this suggest about Innocent's opinion of Clare?

1219 CONSTITUTIONS OF HUGOLINO

In 1219 Cardinal Hugolino dei Conti di Segni had been commissioned by the Pope Honorius III who succeeded Innocent III in 1216, to organise and regularize the numerous groups of religious women living in communities up and down central and northern Italy. We shall consider this in more depth in the next lesson. Suffice it to say here that Hugolino drew up a set of Constitutions for these groups of women, many of whom had fallen into a power vacuum due to the reluctance of the men's Orders to accept them. In 1219 we have texts of three letters addressed to the Poor Ladies in Perugia, Siena and Luca, offering them a form of life which Hugolino had drawn up based on the Rule of St Benedict. The text we have is based on that sent to Pamplona in 1228

²⁶ Rotzetter, A. *Klara von Assisi*, Herder, Freiburg 1993 p 134 ff

READING

- 3:11 *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)
The Form and Manner of Life given by Cardinal Hugolino (1219). pp 89-100.

The text is rigid, detailed, very focussed on austerity, enclosure and fasting.

READING

- 3:12 Bartoli M., *Clare of Assisi* The space of Sanctity: Clare and Enclosure, (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1993), pp. 91-97

We may wonder how Clare felt in 1220 when Francis petitioned the Pope for a Cardinal Protector and asked for Hugolino by name, and then, in that same year, resigned as Minister General and nominated Peter Catani in his stead. When Hugolino later became pope, Clare was more and more thrown back on her own resources in order to preserve her vision and integrity of life.

Note Hugolino's words 'the form of life given to you by us' suggesting that he was claiming to be the founder of the poor Ladies and this conclusion has been drawn by some historians.²⁷ In this context, see what Clare says in her Rule Chapter 1, v1.

1228 PRIVILEGE OF POVERTY OF GREGORY IX

Her resolve was put to the test when in 1228 Gregory was in Assisi for the canonisation of Francis (16 July) and visited Clare at San Damiano. There they had a notable encounter. Gregory very much wanted Clare to be part of his new organisation of religious women perhaps in a position which we today would recognise as a sort of mother general. Clare steadfastly refused, not primarily because she did not want the position but because she would never abandon her commitment to poverty and accept the firm financial basis that Gregory wanted. He was even willing to give her land to achieve this end. The Legend tells us:

Pope Gregory of happy memory, a man as very worthy of the papal throne as he was venerable in his deeds, loved this holy woman intensely with a fatherly affection. When he was attempting to persuade her that, because of the events of the times and the dangers of the world, she should consent to have some possessions which he himself willingly offered, she resisted with a very strong spirit and would in no way acquiesce. To this the Pope replied: If you fear for your vow, we absolve you from it.' 'Holy Father' she said: I will never in any way wish to be absolved from the following of Christ.' (LegCl 14)

We sense a world of misunderstanding in this dialogue. It also marked the turning point in Clare's relationship with Gregory. For the moment, though, he seems to have given in to her, even to the extent of reconfirming the Privilege of Poverty. The text is almost exactly the same as that of Innocent III and served the same purpose of enabling Clare and her sisters to follow their vision and avoid becoming fully part of the vast Benedictine Order. Forced to some extent, to be a Benedictine, Clare did so entirely in her own way, faithful and loyal to her vow of obedience made to Francis in the Porziuncola. However, Clare was also becoming well known and many communities were wanting to adopt her way of life. This did not fit with the papal intention of gathering all the women's groups under one umbrella. Many of these communities petitioned Rome to be granted the Privilege of Poverty and there were many complaints about Hugolino's Constitutions which were (rightly) considered impossible fully to live by.

²⁷ eg Mario Sensi in *Il Movimento religiosofemminile in Umbria nei secoli XII-XIV*

1247 RULE OF INNOCENT IV

On 6 August 1247 Gregory's successor, Innocent IV, adapted Hugolino's Constitutions in the light of the complaints and criticisms made by (primarily) the 'Order of San Damiano' clarifying certain points. Basically this was in response to the incessant demands of Agnes of Prague to be granted the Privilege of Poverty and the Form of Life of San Damiano. Innocent compromised by

acceding to your pious prayers, (I) grant to you and those who come after you, the observance of the Rule of S Francis with respect to the three counsels, namely obedience, the renunciation of property in particular, and perpetual chastity, as well as the Form of Life written in the present document, according to which you have particularly decided to live. (RegInn)

Note that Innocent's text:

- i contains prescriptions for a novitiate (in accordance with Lateran 4) and the earliest known profession formula,
- ii binds the 'Order of San Damiano' to the friars minor and (to some extent) places the sisters under the Minister General who also makes the visitation, and appoints a friar for confession and the sacraments and has a certain authority
- iii gives them the Liturgy of the Hours according to the custom of the friars minor, not according to the monastic hours of the Benedictine monasteries;
- iv brothers may not live near the women's monasteries but the Order must provide priests for the sisters, chaplains and brothers who promise obedience to the abbess!
- V reasons for leaving the enclosure are extended
- vi prescriptions regarding work and silence are revised
- vii prescriptions regarding fasting are revised though they are still far more rigid than those of Francis'.
- viii there are prescriptions regarding clothing, the dormitory and living spaces in general.

On 23 August Innocent obliged all the monasteries to observe his rule and he put an end to the numerous dispensations and concessions which Hugolino's Constitutions had needed. It was another attempt at organisation and regularisation, but not a successful one. There seems to have been a quiet revolt going on among these women for on 6 June 1250 Innocent was forced to concede that nobody was obliged to accept his Rule

Clare meanwhile was writing her own. We do not know when she began this though some think it was as early as 1235-40. On 8 September 1252 Clare asked Cardinal Rainaldo the Cardinal Protector to approve her text which he did verbally on 16 September. In 1253, somewhere after 27 April, Innocent III visits Clare and again in August before 11th when she died. On the first visit she asks him again to approve her text in writing and on 9 August 1253 he does so.

LATER LEGISLATION

In 1263, Pope Urban IV produced a further Rule which represented a definite shift back towards monasticism, and this was imposed on all the Poor Sisters throughout the world. It may be that this is the first time we see one of the disadvantages of autonomy, in that there was no leader to spearhead any opposition to this Rule, and the Rule of

Clare, while still honoured, ceased to be the Rule by which the Poor Sisters lived. This situation obtained until the reform of St Colette of Corby in 14th century.

In 1259 **Isabella of Longchamps**, sister of Louis IX of Francis founded a monastery and was given a Rule, possibly written either by Br Mansuetus or Matthew of Aquasparta or even Bonaventure himself. It was approved for that monastery only by Alexander IV and again, with some changes, by Urban IV in **1263** and made available to other monasteries. This is the Rule in which enclosure is promised for the first time and the rule which came to England for the foundations at Aldgate and Waterbeech (or Denny) near Cambridge. In England, they were known as the Minoresses. This approval was given just three months before Urban published his own text on 18 October 1263, a text largely written by John Cajetan Orsini, the future Nicholas III, then protector of the Order, helped – rumour has it –by St Bonaventure.

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LESSON SIX CLARE AND THE PAPACY 1

AIMS

This lesson and the next look at the interactions between Clare and the papacy, as far as we know them, and tries to unravel some of the threads involved. In this lesson we consider Innocent III and Honorius III.

From the beginning, Clare wanted – as far as was possible – to follow the Form of Life given her by Francis. When she came to write a rule at the end of her own life, she based it firmly and clearly on the Rule approved for Francis in 1223 by Honorius III. The Canonisation Process and the Legend both make it clear that during those thirty years, the papacy played a definite role in the development Clare's life and thought.

This lesson will draw largely on the work of Marco Bartoli and Maria Pia Alberzoni, both Italian lay historians, the latter the student of the former and he a student of Raoul Manselli. Maria Pia Alberzoni, in particular, has extensively explored the relationships between Clare and the papacy.

INNOCENT III 1198 – 1216

Our knowledge of Clare's dealings with Innocent III hangs on the unresolved debate about the authenticity of the 1216 Privilege of Poverty and with it, the authenticity of the Testament of Clare. In the Testament, it says:

I took care to have our profession of most holy poverty, which we have promised to the Lord and our blessed father, reinforced by privileges from the Lord Pope Innocent, in whose time we began (TestCl 43)

This text is the reason why the two documents stand or fall together.

On the other hand we should not forget that the incident is recorded in the Legend of Clare, that official biography written at the insistence of the Pope Alexander IV for her canonisation.

She asked a privilege of poverty of Innocent III of happy memory, desiring that her Order be known by the title of poverty. This magnificent man, congratulating such great fervour in the virgin, spoke of the uniqueness of her proposal since such a privilege had never been made by the Apostolic See. The Pope himself with great joy, wrote with his own hand the first draft of the privilege that was sought for, so that an unusual favour might smile upon an unusual request. (LegCl 14)

It is also mentioned by Mariano of Florence in his life of Clare, and Giovanni Boccaccio in his critical edition of the Legend of Clare considers its existence 'incontestable'. It is also reported in various codices of the Testament, beginning with that of Messina which is held by Bartoli Langeli to be written in the hand of Br Leo himself. The reading from Marco Bartoli's new book on Clare: **Chiara**, (pp 90 – 96) sums up the pros and cons very well. It will be helpful to stop and read this here.

READING

3:13 Bartoli M., *Clare: Beyond the Legend* (pp 90 - 96)

Until this issue is resolved, we cannot really evaluate Clare's dealings with Innocent III any further. Questions about the authenticity of the 1216 Privilege began with Sabatier in 1924 and recently most forcefully by Malaczek. Unlike Sabatier, Malaczek does not finally conclude that the Privilege of Poverty is authentic. Malaczek has been

fully answered by, among others, Niklaus Kuster ofm cap. Too long to print here, Malaczek's argument, in brief is that the language of the Privilege is not that used in canonical documents of the period, that such a privilege would find no place in the policies of Innocent III, that there is no documentary support for the Privilege and that the two (forged, in his view) texts find their *raison d'être* in the reform movements of the 16th century²⁸. The Testament stands or falls with the Privilege because it states quite unambiguously:

I took care to have our profession of most holy poverty, which we promise our holy father Francis, strengthened *with privileges by the Lord Pope Innocent during whose pontificate we had our beginning*, and by his other successors. (TestCl 42 or 12 in RA's translation)

READING

3:14 Kuster's Summary, Greyfriars Review vol. 15, Issue 2 p 251

The Privilege is unusual in that it is not a concession but a protection of an absolute. However, its existence is recorded in several places,

- i. the Testament of Clare 42,
- ii. the Legend 14,
- iii. possibly in the Canonisation Process 3,38; 12,20,
- iv. and certainly in later writers such as the sixteenth century Marianus of Florence (*Il libro delle degnità et excellentie del Ordine della Seraphica Madre* pp 51-52, num. 33).

The text of the Privilege is given in various codices. Marco Bartoli in *Clare: Beyond the Legend* (Pp90ff) says that some manuscripts attribute it not to Innocent III but Innocent IV. The earliest known manuscript is that in the monastery of Montevergine in Messina which Bartoli Langeli considers to be written in the actual hand of Brother Leo and dates it just a little after the death of Clare. If this is correct, it is proof positive indeed!

If genuine, the time of the Privilege must be the beginning of 1216, after the Lateran Council. In the Legend the account of the Privilege is followed by that of Gregory IX's intervention at San Damiano in favour of possessing material goods – unambiguously (an unsuccessfully) running counter to the Privilege, so that gives us a *terminus ad quem*, a cut-off date, because on 17 September 1228 and as a result of that encounter, Clare manages to obtain another Privilege of Poverty from Gregory IX '*Sicut manifestum est*'. This seems to have marked some form of surrender on Gregory's part. After this meeting with Clare, Gregory gives the Privilege to other monasteries, Monteluce 16 June 1229, Monticelli, Prague 15 April 1238 for instance. In practice, although the Privilege was much valued by those who obtained it, we must acknowledge that soon after the death of Clare the whole picture changes because Urban IV issued another Rule by the bull *Beata Clara virtute clarens*. This Rule allowed possessions in common and thereby annulled the Privilege. Throughout the centuries, the text of the Privilege and that of Clare's own rule have formed the inspiration for the various movements of reform within the Order.

HONORIUS III 1216 – 1227

There is no record of any direct contact between Clare and Honorius III but his

²⁸ Kuster's article is summarised in Greyfriars Review Volume 15 Issue 2, 2001 pp 171 – 252.

pontificate is, as Alberzoni remarks, highly significant for the development of the community at San Damiano. She says:

There are numerous reasons why we should consider this pontificate with close attention, reasons which are important both for the development and final systematization of the new forms of religious life - remember that it was Honorius who approved the rules of the Dominicans and the Franciscans – however much this fact has been neglected by historians. We also need to give attention to the most influential cardinal of the curia, Hugolino. He was charged with putting into effect the project of Innocent III, namely the re-organising of the women's religious communities, giving them a better defined juridical profile and placing them in direct dependence on the Church of Rome, all at a time when the men's religious Orders were making it more and more clear that they wished to re-negotiate their task of the *cura monialium*. Hugolino, while he was legate in Tuscany and Lombardy, became aware of the various expressions of women's religious life, most of whom had arisen spontaneously along the lines of the ascetic model suggested by the new poverty movements. Hugolino did all he could to regulate these communities, some of which already existed and some of which were called into being by him.²⁹

It is worth considering this in some detail.

The *Bullarium Franciscanum* prints a document from Honorius III to Hugolino, dated 27 August 1218, *Litterae tuae nobis*, although some now consider this to have nothing to do with the Franciscan scene (Alberzoni). This document allows Hugolino to take under the apostolic protection any goods offered for the foundation of new houses of religious women, most of whom were marked by their commitment to poverty. It should be born in mind (and this makes it relevant to our story) that many such groups had been inspired by the Friars Minor or the Dominicans although others were of older inspiration. Also the men's orders had tended over the last 20 years to pull out of offering pastoral assistance to these communities so that there was a considerable pastoral vacuum which Hugolino was attempting to fill.

In December 1219, Hugolino received from Honorius a solemn confirmation of the first 'Hugolinian' monasteries to whom he had, from July onwards, granted apostolic approval. These included Lucca, Siena and Monteluca in Perugia. The foundation document of Monticelli near Florence was a little different due, we may conclude, to the presence of Clare's sister Agnes as abbess. Their document refers explicitly to the *observantiae regulares* of San Damiano:

Nevertheless, besides the general Rule of St Benedict (which had been imposed on them) you have voluntarily imposed on yourselves the Regular Observances of the Ladies of Saint Mary of San Damiano at Assisi.³⁰

We begin to see how confused the picture is, and to gain a sense that Clare had influence with certain communities (eg Florence and Prague) who were then unwilling to surrender totally to the direction of Hugolino. They insisted on following the observance of San Damiano and were prepared to struggle to be allowed this.

READING

3:15 *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)
Agnes' letter to Clare, p 109

As a result, Hugolino's relationship with Clare, which had begun in such a glow,

²⁹ Alberzoni: Chiara e il Papato p39

³⁰ Early Documents p 349

began to experience considerable and increasing stress. Hugolino had originally gone to meet her, possibly in order to know more about the life-style of her community but certainly in order to introduce her to his *forma vitae* because he undoubtedly hoped to include this prestigious and growing community among his own foundations. It is generally accepted that Hugolino spent Holy Week and Easter at San Damiano in 1220 and afterwards wrote Clare a glowing letter about the experience.

READING

3:16 *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)
The Letter of Cardinal Hugolino (1220), p 101-102

Francis was in the far east when Hugolino first made contact with Clare. Hugolino saw in her form of life many qualities of his own, but with these major differences, that Clare intended to remain in absolute poverty and, above all, in close contact with Francis' community. It was a weakness of her position that at this date the friars did not yet have an approved Rule of their own. Alberzoni again:

It is not possible to establish whether Hugolino was already thinking of the San Damiano community in the role as exemplar for the other communities he was organising. [...] It becomes more and more clear that there was a new monastic institute connected with Hugolino's initiative and independent of San Damiano, although it, too, was undoubtedly strongly marked by poverty. In this early phase, too, it is not clear from the name of the new Order (*Order of poor ladies*) whether or not it was part of the project to impose strict cloister on the sisters, although this was an aspect of the negotiations of July 1219.³¹

Meanwhile the women's communities we know most about, in Perugia and Florence, Siena and Lucca, were quietly being shifted along a spectrum from seeking the protection of Rome to submitting their form of life for pontifical approval. In 1219, Hugolino drafted his own constitutions for these communities, based on the Rule of St Benedict. The heart of his text was the strict observance of enclosure for women whose life he interpreted in the light of the parable about the virgins waiting for the bridegroom. Thus juridically, was born the *religio pauperum dominarum de Valle Spoleti sive Tuscia* that is: the Order of Poor Ladies of the Valley of Spoleto or Tuscany. This was the first religious Order for women with no responsible masculine branch, in the history of the Church but it was, of course, under the close supervision of Hugolino himself.

Hugolino made three journeys around central-northern Italy in 1217, 1218-19 and 1221 and quickly ran into difficulties with those communities committed to strict poverty, outstandingly with Clare and, later as pontiff, with Agnes of Prague to whom we shall return in the next Unit. Alberzoni again:

Part of the question was the role at San Damiano of the friars minor who begged food for themselves and the sisters, in spite of there being 'sisters who served outside the monastery' and who often went out from the monastery to fulfil their tasks. This led Hugolino to give a decisive stress to enclosure over poverty, and in this we may also think we see some Cistercian influence, an influence which the cardinal of Ostia sought and greatly valued. The new direction came to be eloquently reflected in the name given the new *religio* or Order while at the start of the 1220s, around the time of Hugolino's early work as legate, the documentation shows a strong accent on poverty rather than on strict enclosure. Thus in the episcopal documents of foundation for the monasteries of Faenza and Milan, both on the Hugolinian model, it speaks of *poor sisters*. Still within the orbit of ecclesiastical documents but from the years immediately following, we find

³¹ *ibid* p 45

that slowly the definition becomes *poor sisters enclosed* and the rule of Hugolino is spoken of as the 'form of life for the poor enclosed ladies living in the valley of Spoleto.'³²

The monasteries were also being given more and more property, both land and goods, and this was seen as a response to the special requirement of strict enclosure. This was not Francis or Clare's vision for the community at San Damiano and we know that matters eventually came to a head for Clare during the pontificate of Gregory IX, Hugolino.

³² Alberzoni p 49

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LESSON SEVEN CLARE AND THE PAPACY 2

AIMS

To consider the relationship between Clare and Gregory and the dynamics at work, and to map the growth of her Rule up to the time of its approval by Innocent IV.

GREGORY IX 1227 – 1241

Opinions are divided as to whether Hugolino's election to the papacy was a grace or a disaster for the Franciscan movement as a whole, and for Clare in particular. On the one hand he was a long-standing friend and admirer of both Francis and Clare, on the other he was the source of ideas which were the complete opposite of theirs while being convinced that he understood them both, and especially Francis, extremely well.. Let us try and map the disintegration of his relationship with Clare.

27 July 1227 Gregory writes to 'his' monasteries, asking their prayers now he was elected Pope, saying that he had asked Brother Pacificus to take on the *cura monialium* but making no indication that Pacificus was a friar minor. At the time of his appointment Pacificus was already chaplain to the sisters at Colpersita, (since 1223/1224, so during Francis' lifetime) although that monastery was not included in the list of those for whom he was now appointed. It was a appointment designed to bring them closer to Hugolino's ideals, Pacificus (and Clare) must have been well aware of this which may be why he found it 'unbearable'. The tensions he was under can be imagined. H Grundmann comments on this letter:

Nothing could more clearly demonstrate how the Curia completely achieved those aims which Francis had tried all his life to prevent them from attaining.³³

14 December 1227 in *Quoties cordis* Hugolino transferred the spiritual assistance of the sisters, of San Damiano and the Hugolinian sisters, to the Minister General. There are two issues here:

- i) that Clare's community and Hugolino's community were beginning to be dealt with under the same legislation. To watch her community, which was Francis' community, being absorbed by clever legislation into another Order must have been a source of great anguish to Clare. Gregory was head-hunting her, we would say. Ever since Francis' death he had been trying to persuade her to enter into a closer legislative bond with his monasteries in order to give them an exemplar and 'head' and thus assist in re-organising the movement of religious women. This would not only entail strict enclosure for Clare but also, more important to her, the acceptance of financial stability and the abandonment of the Lady Poverty.
- ii) the old problem of the *cura monialium* which had been burning issue for some years, locking in conflict the sisters, the friars minor, the papacy and the cardinal protector. The friars did not want this charge, the sisters considered themselves part of Francis' order and both sides held that Francis would have supported them.

A few months later Gregory writes to the sisters, addressing Clare as abbess (for the

³³ Grundmann *Movimenti religiosi nel Medioevo* trad. italian Maria Ausserhofer & Lea Nicolet Santini, Bologna 1974

first time in a papal document). and indicating that he considers himself their founder:

... just as you have been well-instructed by us, so proceed and go forward, and live in the Spirit ... as daughters whom I love and have brought forth with tenderness.

On 16 July 1228 Francis was canonized by Gregory in the church of San Giorgio in Assisi, an act open to various interpretations, as the canonisation of Clare would later be. This was also the year when Thomas of Celano wrote his first life of Francis. What did Clare think and feel as she read what he had to say about her? The account in Fioretti 33 probably fits in here too. During this visit Gregory again tried to persuade Clare to join 'his' Order.

READING

3:17 *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)
The Legend of Saint Clare 14, p. 269-270

about Gregory's attempt to persuade her to give up her vow of poverty (ie to join his Order) and Clare's stinging reply: 'I will never wish to be absolved from following Christ'.

On 18 August 1228 Cardinal Rainaldo (Gregory's nephew) sent a letter to San Damiano and twenty-four other monasteries announcing his appointment as Cardinal Protector and removing Brother Pacificus from the 'unbearable burden' held since 1226, of being Visitor to the sisters and re-appointing Brother Philip the Long in his place. Philip had been visitor during Francis' absence in the Holy Land (1219-1220). This time he held the job until the debacle of 1230 and would be appointed again on 21 January 1233 until 1244. He had died by the time of the canonisation process in 1253. The earliest known visitor was in 1218, Ambrose a Cistercian and Hugolino's chaplain, who was succeeded by Philip, back in office in 1220 and replaced in 1224 by Brunetto a secular priest until 1226. It is difficult to know how to read these appointments and 'unbearable burdens' except to say that the list of chaplains/visitors to San Damiano suggests a number of political appointments, Gregory being anxious to increase the Cistercian influence and Clare determined to remain part of the friars minor. So Ambrose the Cistercian is appointed in 1218/1219, replaced by Philip, Ambrose again in 1220 replaced by Brunetto, a secular priest in 1224 until 1226 when, as we have seen, Pacificus takes over until 1228 when Philip succeeds him. Then in 1230 the friars are altogether forbidden to visit the sisters at all.

On 17 September 1228 Gregory shows that he has given in to Clare, sending her a letter *Sicut manifestum est* in which he concedes that San Damiano cannot be forced to receive property.

READING

3:18 *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)
The Privilege of Poverty of Pope Gregory IX (1228), p 107-108.

Soon after that a number of other monasteries petitioned and received the so-called Privilege of Poverty of Gregory IX 1228 which is almost the same as that of 1216. The as-yet-unresolved puzzle is that Monteluce in Perugia received a similar document earlier, on 3 January 1228 whereas that given to Clare is dated 17 September 1228, but that of Monteluce was not confirmed until 18 June 1231.

READING

3:19 Bartoli M., *Clare of Assisi*, The Constitutions of Cardinal Ugolino & A Letter from Ugolino to Clare, (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1993), pp 79-85

1230 and Quo Elongati – 28 September 1230 This letter was written in response to the friars' Chapter which had asked for clarification on certain points about which consensus eluded them. Gregory set out to clarify matters of *dubia* - doubt, *obscura* – obscurity, *intellectu difficilia* – problems of interpretation in the Rule of Francis. Gregory spoke confidently from his long-standing friendship with and understanding of Francis in a way which seems now to demonstrate that he had understood very little. One of the points at issue was that of the friars visiting the monasteries of women. Gregory replied:

The prohibition (on visiting monasteries of women) refers to all convents of nuns. And by the name Monastery we mean to indicate the cloister, the house and the offices of the house, because seculars too have access to all other parts so the brothers may also go there, in order to preach or for the quest. Naturally those to whom these tasks are given by their respective superiors will be men noteworthy for their maturity and integrity. However, this always excepts the monasteries of the aforesaid *reclusae* (of the Order of San Damiano). The faculty of approaching³⁴ them without a special licence from the Apostolic See is given to no-one.³⁵

At the very least, this was a drastic reduction in contacts between the friars and the sisters; nobody could now go to San Damiano without a special permission from the Holy See! It is not at all clear why this prohibition should refer to those who preach and not – as we shall see – to those on the quest for the sisters. Bartoli comments:³⁶

The last question put to the pope concerned the rapport with women's monasteries. The Rule forbade the friars from going to communities of women, except where they had received a special license from the Holy See. In the course of a general chapter however, held during the lifetime of Francis, the brothers were given a constitution which specified that this prohibition only concerned the monasteries of the Poor Ladies Recluses, that is the order founded by Cardinal Hugolino. So in 1230, when the same Cardinal Hugolino, now pope, saw this question put before him, he was very pleased to be able to specify that the prohibition concerned all versions of women's religious life and that only the Apostolic See could give a license to go to these women's monasteries.

Clare's reaction was immediate and vigorous, reminding us energetically that a law which is not accepted is not morally binding!

'Let him now take away from us all the brothers since he has taken away those who provide us with the food that is vital'. At once she sent back to the minister all the brothers, not wanting to have the questors who acquired corporal bread when they could not have the questors for spiritual bread. When Pope Gregory heard this, he immediately mitigated that prohibition into the hands of the general minister. (LegCLare 37)

Much remains obscure to us still. For instance, what is the significance of the bull (another one) dated **22 November 1236** (Etsi omnium illa cura) and addressed to all the faithful, in which access to the sisters of the order of San Damiano is forbidden under pain of excommunication.³⁷

Whatever the intentions behind this document, it is one more suggestion that Clare

³⁴ Not *entering* but *approaching*!

³⁵ Bullarium 70

³⁶ Chiara p17 (trans mine)

³⁷ BF 1, num 213, p 206 -207B

had fallen under heavy disapproval with Gregory. As far as we know he paid no more visits to San Damiano, and Clare seems to have been more and more marginalised as the friars developed along Gregory's lines. Here too, however, she seems always to have worked for unity and concord, so that while we find her maintaining links with the early group, Leo, Angelo, Rufino, Bernard, Giles, Juniper, Elias, we also find her seeking to make contact with the 'new' men. For instance, Alexander of Hales went to San Damiano to preach on one occasion when Br Giles was also present.

Clare's situation became even more difficult after the deposition of Brother Elias in May 1239, and from then on, with regard to Gregory, we can only say that, like Hamlet: the rest is silence.

INNOCENT IV 1243 – 1254 -

We do not know much about Clare's relationship with Elias beyond the fact that she firmly supported him to the end, but the dynamics of that relationship affected the way she handled her present situation. It seems that the rise of the Minoresses is connected with the deposition of Elias. The Minoresses were women religious inspired by Francis and seeking the spiritual assistance of the friars, and who were roundly condemned by Gregory and Innocent IV because they would not accept the strict enclosure of the Hugolinian form of life. The phenomenon was short lived for various reasons outside the scope of this lesson except to say that for friars seeking to shed the *cura monialium*, the refusal of the Minoresses to observe Hugolino's constitutions was a gift because it enabled them to refuse the *cura*.

Clare, also refusing, now had to find another solution as she too was now 'in opposition' – so much so that Angelo Clareno in the next generation actually speaks of Clare having been excommunicated by Gregory for her lack of co-operation over this. There is no documentary evidence for this excommunication, however. Clare's solution was the decision to write her own rule *and have it approved*. Innocent IV, for all his greatness, enters this story primarily as the one who does that for her, and in the prevailing climate, a man of vision and greatness was essential. The story is well known, how he came twice to her death bed and on his return to Perugia wrote in his own hand his approval of her Rule.

Why did he do this when it was against his policy of maintaining the developments of Gregory and encouraging uniformity among the pluriform Order of San Damiano? He had already tried to reinforce Hugolino's Constitutions with his own, substituting the Rule of Francis for that of Benedict, but making no concessions on the matter of poverty. Clare had already circumvented this very astutely by the Privilege of Poverty and in spite of the fact that the whole Order bore the name of her monastery, San Damiano, she continued along individualistic, if not almost unique, lines which she now set out to protect in a Rule of her own.

Whenever she began, the work was done by **November 1251** when Rainaldo, the cardinal protector, traveled with the papal court from Lyons to Rome and visited Assisi *en route*. He approved her Rule verbally. The Legend says:

she asked him to petition to have the Privilege of Poverty confirmed by the Lord Pope and the cardinals. (LegClare 40)

It is possible that the text means what it says, namely, that she sought to have the Privilege of Poverty reconfirmed by another pope. Most consider, however, that this refers to her Rule, partly because it was precisely the issue of poverty which distinguished it from that of Hugolino, and partly because Innocent IV later quotes Rainaldo's letter in his bull approving Clare's Rule and saying simply that he is

ratifying what Rainaldo has already said.

Nearly a year after Clare's conversation with Rainaldo, his letter *Quia vos* of **16 September 1252** permitted the observance of the Rule of Clare at the monastery of San Damiano. Possibly that intervening year was spent by Clare and Rainaldo in giving the text an acceptable canonical form. On **9 August 1253** two days before Clare's death, Innocent IV in the bull *Solet annuere* approved the Rule of Clare based on the 1223 Rule of Francis, with additions from the constitutions of Hugolino (1218/19) and Innocent IV himself (1247).

The charism given by the Spirit to Francis and Clare was thus finally and fully accepted into the Church.

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LESSON 8: THE CLOSING YEARS

AIMS

This lesson looks at the little we know of Clare's life after 1230 to her death in 1253. We will then consider the community's move to Santa Chiara and the expansion of the Order up to about 1300.

The years from 1230 were years of deepening holiness accompanied by considerable inner pain as the friars became more and more divided. Clare was close friends with all the early friars of all opinions, and then, as now, friars visiting Assisi made a point of going to San Damiano. Clare was increasingly and widely known for her holiness and the eulogy in the Bull of canonisation is not mere rhetoric:

Clare was silent, yet her reputation became widespread. She was kept hidden in her cell but was known throughout the world. [...] The distinguished and sacred Order of Saint Damian, now widely diffused throughout the world, came and had its salutary beginning from this woman. It was this woman, encouraged by blessed Francis, who gave the beginning to this new and holy observance; this woman who was the first and solid foundation of this great religious way of life; this woman who stood as a cornerstone of this lofty work. [...] She cultivated a vineyard of poverty, a garden of humility where a wide refreshment of spiritual nourishment was served. (Bull of Canonisation)

They were years during which she herself grew in the mystical life. There are several accounts of mystical experiences, both hers and others who were caught up in it from observing her. In fact one of the interesting aspects of the San Damiano community is what might be called a shared mysticism. These were also the years of miracles, mainly of healing but other miracles as well. During these years too, Clare saved the city of Assisi from the attack of Vitalis d'Aversa in 1241, an event now remembered annually on 22 June in the colourful Festa del Voto in Assisi. This festa lapsed in 1860 but was revived in 1924 by Fortini while he was podestà of Assisi.

READING

3:20 Bartoli M., *Clare of Assisi*, The Miracles of Clare, (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1993), pp 159 -175

THE EXPANSION OF THE ORDER UP TO 1300

These were also years of expansion for the Order during which Clare came to know Agnes of Bohemia or Saint Agnes of Prague. These two women became close friends, in fact we may think that Agnes gave Clare something which she lacked after the death of Francis – a peer and a partner. We shall consider Agnes in more depth later in connection with the letters Clare wrote to her, but no account of the expansion of the Order can omit her.

Some names of holy and famous Poor Ladies from this century can be gathered and we it is highly likely that Clare either had contact with some of them and would almost certainly have known about them. We know, too, that Francis himself gave Filippa Mareri in Rieti the Form of Life which he had given to Clare and her sisters at San Damiano. What has happened to all the correspondence between them?

Enselmina of Padua +1231
Umiliana of Cerchi +1246
Salome of Krakow +1268
Margherita Colonna +1280

Filippa Mareri +1236
Agnes of Assisi +1253
Elizabeth of France +1270
Agnes of Prague +1280

Cunegunde +1292
Mattia Nassarei +1300

Yolande +1298

A group of Poor Sisters was martyred in Tripoli in 1289 and another in Acre in 1291. There are also a sprinkling of names without dates as yet: Elena of Arcelle, Colomba of Rieti. Not a lot is known about any of these sisters and much research remains to be done.

SAN DAMIANO AND AFTERWARDS

Clare's health failed seriously around 1224, the year of the stigmata of Francis, a conjunction which probably tells us something about their relationship and her illness. She was ill for more than 28 years and several times nearly died. Her illness did not cramp her style however, and in 1234 she embarked on her long correspondence with Agnes of Prague. In 1240 she encountered the Saracens and 1241 routed Vitalis d'Aversa by her prayers.

READING

- 3:21 *Clare of Assisi; Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)
The Acts of the Process of Canonisation (1253) Second Witness, 20; Third Witness, 18, 19;
The Legend of Saint Clare, 21-23

In 1247 Innocent IV promulgated a revision of Hugolino's Constitutions and imposed it on all the houses of Poor Sisters who were under the jurisdiction of the Friars Minor. He did agree to the wishes of the sisters and remove the Rule of Benedict from the central position in the Constitutions, replacing it with that of Francis, but omitting the privilege of poverty. Exactly what he meant by the Rule of Francis, is not completely clear. He most probably had the approved Rule of 1223 in mind, though the sisters had been petitioning for the Form of Life which he gave Clare in 1211/12. It seems unlikely that they would ever be granted this since Francis' own legislation had moved on since then too. For the sisters, the absence of the Privilege of Poverty was a disaster and they raised a storm of protest. Eventually, Innocent gave in and declared that his Rule was not binding. In 1250 Clare's illness became more severe, yet these must have been the years when she was also finalising the text of her own Rule for which she finally gained approval in 1253, two days before her death. She was buried in the church of San Giorgio, as Francis had been and canonised by Rainaldo, by now Alexander IV, in the cathedral at Agnani on 15 August 1255.

READING

- 3:22 *Clare of Assisi; Early Documents*, ed. & tr. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap (Franciscan Institute Publications, New York, 1993)
Legend of Clare 44 -46 for an account of her death.

NOTES ON THIS SCENE:

The Minister Provincial from whom she received Holy Communion was probably Oddone of Acquasparta.

The two graces were the visit of Christ in the Eucharist and the visit of the Pope, indicating her life in Christ and in the Church

Agnes of Assisi had been sent to Florence in 1219 and as far as we know remained there until 1253 when she returned to Assisi to see Clare before she died. She herself died before the canonisation process the following November.

Brother Rainaldo seems to have been confessor to the sisters at this time, though we know little about him. There is a Rainaldo of Rieti but he is thought to have died in 1241/45

Brother Juniper was the much loved companion of Francis, simple and patient, called here a 'jester' – picking up on the old troubadour tradition. He died on 4 January 1258

Her blessing: the Latin makes it clear that there were two groups, the 'devotos devotasque' devoted men and women, and also 'omnibus dominabus monasteriorum pauperum' and all the sisters of the monastery 'tam praesentibus quam futuris' those present and those to come. An all-inclusive blessing, indicative of her inclusive world view.

Brother Angelo of Rieti signed the letter from Greccio, he was one of the three companions He is recalled in the anonymous text known as *The Acts of St Francis in the Rieti Valley*

Leo was one of the most important and closest companion of Francis, his confessor and secretary, and he left us many records. He was also very close to Clare, understanding them both better than anyone. He was present at the tribunal for Clare's canonisation and died after 1270.

The vision of Our Lady must have been on 8 August 1253. Note that the sisters could not tell one from the other, significant of Clare, the footprint of the Mother of God She died on the feast of St Lawrence was 10 August, that of San Rufino, patron of Assisi, 11 August. The Latin of the Legend plays with the words: *Laurentius* (Lawrence) and *laureanda* (crowned with a reward).

AFTER CLARE'S DEATH

At this point, Clare became the property of Assisi and her body was surrounded by a guard day and night on the orders of the podestà. The crowds would have been considerable because it was the feast of Rufino, their principal patron, and also the Pope and curia were in the town. Some manuscripts add here that the cardinals and prelates of the curia put precious rings into Clare's dead hand for them to be blessed (and then become relics!). The funeral was held next day in the little church of San Damiano. Had Cardinal Rainaldo not intervened, she would have been canonised there and then and we would have lost the valuable text of the Canonisation Process which does more than any other to give us the human Clare.

On **1 October 1253**, the community at San Damiano opened negotiations with the canons of San Rufino with a view to exchanging San Damiano for San Giorgio. Bartolì explains:

However the matter was not as simple as that. Next door to the church of San Giorgio was a hospital for which the canons of San Rufino were responsible and on that very day, 1 October 1253, they had obtained a bull from Innocent IV, who was still in Assisi, granting an indulgence to whoever contributed towards the costs of running the hospital. Meanwhile San Giorgio had become a shrine and the first miracles were beginning to happen at the tomb of Clare

In fact negotiations dragged on for a long time since the Canons of San Rufino did not consider the plan to exchange San Giorgio for San Damiano was an equal exchange. Finally, after almost two years of negotiations, the Benedictine Abbot of Farfa gave the sisters the little eleventh century church of San Giacomo a Muro Rupto. Even then the pope, Alexander IV, had to threaten the canons with excommunication before they would agree to the exchange. The Basilica of St Chiara was finished and consecrated within two years.

Clare was canonised by Alexander IV two years after her death, in response to

popular acclaim. She was the first non-royal saint for many centuries, the first of the close companions of Francis to be canonised. However, the popular acclaim did not extend to the rest of the Order and it was not until five years later that her feast was included in the calendar of the Friars Minor, at the Chapter of Narbonne in 1260. A copy of the Legend was not required to be in every Franciscan library until 1272, at the Chapter of Lyons. It was St Bonaventure who insisted that the friars celebrate the feast of Clare as a saint of the Order. Bonaventure never knew Clare but tells us that he went to Brother Leo for information, and he then wrote the sisters a letter (see below) which suggests that he had at least heard about the Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague. However, there is an ambivalence towards Clare on the part of the friars, which we sense. Bartoli asks:

Near Clare at the end of her life were Leo, Angelo and Rufino, the three representatives of a Franciscan spirituality which was not only in conflict with the conventual branch of the Order but which also sought to guide it along the same lines as the first generation of Franciscans. Was this the reason for so inexplicable a lapse of memory? (Clare of Assisi p199)

With regard to the exchange of property with the canons, Bartoli adds:

In order to achieve their desired move, the sisters had to accept a number of donations which were destined, in the end, to erode that ideal of absolute poverty which Clare had so defended. Other Rules were drawn up for the sisters, both those of the Protomonastery and those scattered throughout the world. In 1288 Pope Nicholas IV, in the bull *Devotionis vestrae precibus*, dated 26 March, sanctioned the right of the sisters to inherit, to acquire and to retain property, as – apart from the rights of the feudal system – nuns had done for centuries. Thus the pope definitively allowed the renunciation of the *Privilegium paupertatis*, the *Privilege of Poverty*. (Clare of Assisi p200)

A further note on the role of Bonaventure with regard to the Poor Ladies.

In 1259 two years after his election as Minister General, Bonaventure writes a letter to 'his beloved daughters in Jesus Christ, to the abbess of the Poor Ladies of Assisi in the monastery of St Clare and to all his sisters'. As his theme he takes the same as Clare in her 4th letter to Agnes, that of following the Lamb wheresoever he goes. If, as is thought likely, Bonaventure learnt about Clare from Leo, then we should not be surprised that he then goes on to speak about 'serving the poor crucified Jesus as brides of the eternal King'. Is this letter a summons to be faithful to the teaching of Clare (or at least a strong hint), at a time when the sisters were negotiating with the canons of San Rufino? 'Do not desire to possess anything under heaven but Christ crucified, as your Mother taught' he says. Rotzetter says:

Apart from absolute poverty to which, obviously, he alludes, Bonaventure takes up all the themes which echo with the mystical marriage of St Clare: that passionate love, fire, flames, dedication to the love of God, following the fragrance of Christ, marriage, wine, the chalice, drinking from it - it is enough simply to name all these to understand the attitude of mind on which the contemplative life of the 13th century was based. And Bonaventure himself was steeped in this mindset, as his own mystical spirit reveals. We can confidently say that Bonaventure had a spiritual affinity to Clare and that as minister general he felt responsible for the sisters. (Chiara d'Assisi p388 trans. mine).

However, many things are still not quite clear, for instance, why did Bonaventure collaborate with Isabella of France in drawing up a Rule for her sisters at Longchamps in Paris, around 1259-1263? Why was Isabella not simply given Clare's Rule, approved less than a decade before? In her Rule, Isabella was granted to be one with the friars but allowed to hold property. One wonders whether Clare's organic bond with the friars might have been recognised had she been able to compromise on poverty.

*A note on Isabella, as an example of the confused situation.*³⁸

Isabella was sister to Louis IX, King of France, and was born in 1225, dying in 1270. Her story is parallel to that of Agnes of Prague in many ways. Like Agnes she was much influenced by the friars, like Agnes she hesitated between founding a hospital or a monastery and finally chose the latter. Her brother supported her and gave land in Paris for a building which was finished in 1259. Four sisters came from Rheims in 1260 to help. By then, legislation for the Poor Sisters had run into much trouble and Isabella wanted to avoid all that. Tradition says that Rheims was founded in 1220 from San Damiano but is not one of the monasteries having the Privilege of Poverty – as far as we know. By Isabella's time, the friars in Paris were cultured and erudite, one manuscript of Isabella's Rule, dated 1259, carries the bull of approval attached, signed by Friar Mansuetus who was then plenipotentiary in the court of Alexander IV in Agnani. Mansuetus was in Paris in 1259 to negotiate a treaty between Henry III of England and Louis IX of France. He presented Isabella's Rule to Alexander IV for approval which he obtained, though only after some hesitation because of the prohibition of Lateran IV. It was approved for the house of Longchamps only (as Clare's was only approved for San Damiano). After modifications it was again approved by Urban IV on 27 July 1263 and made available to other monasteries. Three months later however, Urban published his own Rule for the Poor Sisters, drawn up, possibly, with help from Bonaventure, by John Cajetan Orsini, later Nicholas III, who was cardinal protector at the time.

³⁸ I am grateful for the notes of Sr Beth Lynn osc of Minneapolis, USA, for gathering together much of this information.

Unit Two, Module Three

Final Assignment

Write an essay answering one of the following:

1. How can we retrace Clare's conversion experience as a young woman, and the development of her Religious Vocation?
2. What was the role of women in Medieval society and how would this have affected Clare in her Religious Life?
3. What problems did Clare face with the Papacy and how did she deal with them?