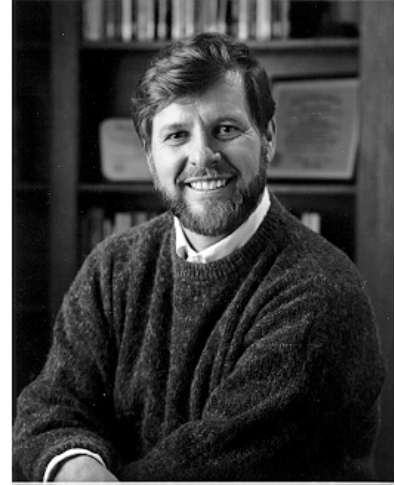


Growing Edges

January 1997

In our day of anti-heros, we need examples of faithful living that we can genuinely admire. So from time-to-time (often at the beginning of a new year), we at RENOVARÉ hope to feature particular individuals that are sterling models of Christian spirituality for us. In this issue we look at two such individuals—Francis and Clare who were both from Assisi, a small town in Northern Italy. Together they laid the foundation for the world-wide Franciscan movement.

The “Friars Minor” (as they called themselves) became the most dynamic spiritual movement of the thirteenth century, drawing thousands into their ranks and inspiring tens of thousands more to a deeper devotion to Christ. Francis and Clare were at the heart of this spiritual explosion, Francis setting the pattern for the men’s expression of the movement and Clare for the women.



Combinations to Emulate

The delightful stories of Francis and Clare are recounted well in the resources we are making available on page five. What I want to stress here is the unique combinations we find in their lives—combinations that make them especially inviting models for us today even though we live in drastically different circumstances.

First, between Francis and Clare themselves we find a wonderful combination of devoted friendship which at the same time is free from sexual overtones. In Francis and Clare we see the deepest care and most passionate respect for one another without the slightest hint of eroticism. This is a powerful lesson to us who live in a culture that makes “love” and “sex” virtual synonyms.

Second, we see intense contemplation combined with evangelistic fervor. When Francis asked Clare for counsel on whether he should devote himself to contemplative prayer or to evangelistic preaching, she wisely replied that God wanted him to do both. What an instructive model for us today.

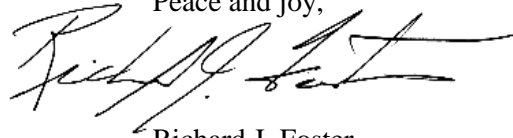
Third, we discover a radical critique of the Church combined with a profound love for the Church. When St. Francis heard the divine Word, “rebuild my church,” he went about obeying that command in such a way that called into question every craving for possessions, every hankering after status, every yearning for honor. Yet, through it all it is impossible to question Francis’ great devotion and concern and love for the Church, the community of Faith. It is a combination we would do well to imitate.

Fourth, we find an authentic charismatic leadership combined with a profound commitment to Christian community. In our day gifted leaders are sorely tempted to go their own way without regard for either the traditions that have gone on before them or the guidance and counsel of those around them. But for both Francis and Clare submission and obedience to Christian authority were central to their calling. In this they teach us.

Fifth, we learn from these two how to have an ecological sensitivity that refuses to deify creation. Francis could express the deepest reverence for nature—taming the wolf of Gubbio, preaching to the birds, writing his canticle to “Brother Sun and Sister Moon”—without ever worshiping nature. Consistently he called upon all of the creation—Brother Wind and Sister Water, Brother Fire and Sister Mother Earth, as well as the entire human creation—to “Praise and bless my Lord (God) and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.” It is solid guidance for us today.

These, I believe, are combinations that we can all appreciate and embrace. And I would hope we will find many inventive ways to integrate these combinations into our day-to-day experience.

Peace and joy,



Richard J. Foster

P.S. In my November Pastoral Letter I shared about our financial need and the challenge gift of \$13,000.00. Well, as of this writing we have received \$23,187.15. How absolutely wonderful! This is more than enough to put us back on course. Wholeheartedly, we thank each one of you for your generosity and care.

RJF

Growing Together

This section focuses upon *praxis*, and I suggest we take the five combinations I noted in my opening letter and see what we can do to get them working into our daily experience. In each category I will give a few hints, and then you can use your creative imagination to take it from there. May God's very unique blessing rest upon you as you continue to experience Christ as everliving Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend.

Combination #1 — *Devoted friendships that are free from sexual overtones.*

- Write out a prayer of thanksgiving for the one or two most devoted friends over your lifetime.
- Have coffee with someone in your work environment: if at home, a neighbor; if at an office, a work associate.
- Watch to see if God will point out someone in your sphere of contacts that you should get to know better; e.g. the clerk at the bank, the secretary at the office, the anonymous person at the gym, etc.

Combination #2 — *Intense contemplation combined with evangelistic fervor.*

- Take a walk through your neighborhood, praying for the people living in the homes you pass.
- In the morning prayerfully consider every person you will be seeing that day, inviting God to teach you their heart needs.

- Find a neighbor you have never met and invite her/him/them over for dinner.

Combination #3 — *A radical critique of the Church combined with a profound love for the Church.*

- Write a letter of appreciation to your spiritual leader.
- Refrain from any words of critique for one month.
- Consider three ways your church could more fully reflect Christ's love for the poor. Are any of the three you have listed things you should be doing?

Combination #4 — *An authentic charismatic leadership combined with a profound commitment to Christian community.*

- The next time you have a "great idea," share it with two or three others for their counsel and wisdom.
- Give your "great idea" to someone else and let them run with it.
- Go to those who are less able than yourself and learn from them.

Combination #5 — *An ecological sensitivity that refuses to deify creation.*

- Look at every petal on a flower.
- Meditate on Psalm 8.
- Prostrate yourself on the floor and worship God.

Richard J. Foster

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An annual, tax deductible gift of \$15.00 is welcome to help cover publishing expenses. If you cannot help, we understand. Some will be able to give more and in this way the unity of the Body of Christ will be maintained.

Francis and Clare *Selected Passages*

Below are excerpts from the books featured on page five. We hope they provide a few windows into Francis' and Clare's lives and pique your curiosity.

Devoted Friendship

Clare and Francis are so closely united in their destiny that the one cannot be perfectly understood without the other. For, if he was the incomparable master who initiated her into the "Gospel Way," she was his most faithful disciple—the one who carried his ideal to the very heights. . . . It is certainly no exaggeration to say that she held an essential place in the Gospel movement begun by the Poverello of Assisi.

Francis played a decisive rôle in the vocation of Clare Favarone. When Assisi witnessed in amazement the radical conversion of the rich and very worldly Francis Bernardone to the poverty of Jesus Christ, Clare was thirteen and he twenty-four. In spite of the social gulf that separated the daughter of an aristocrat from the bourgeois son of a merchant, the young Clare followed with intense interest the development of her compatriot's new folly: the arrival of his first companions, their life of extreme poverty, their boundless charity towards all, their hours of prayer and long vigils, and the burning words of Francis' preaching.

There arose in the heart of this girl, who was totally oriented towards God, a desire to see and hear Francis; and he, knowing her reputation for purity, charity and piety, wished to meet her. "He visited Clare and she more often him" (Life 5). One can imagine the subjects this ardent man . . . discussed with this eager and passionate girl who was searching for a way to consecrate herself totally to God.

Francis became Clare's spiritual director. . . . Clare states in her Testament that Francis' "example and teaching" were the origin of her life as a Poor Lady. . . . The lives of the two founders, knit together in these hours of their youth, were never to be unravelled. This beautiful friendship was so deeply rooted that it effected a perfect communion of ideal and life. (*Clare Among Her Sisters*. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1987.)

St. Clare and Brother Silvester Reveal to St. Francis That He Should Preach

Shortly after his conversion,
St. Francis, humble servant of Christ,
having gathered many friends into the Order,
nonetheless wrestled with a concern:

Should I pray all the time?
Or should I preach sometimes?
What is God's will?

His humility did not permit him
to trust himself completely,
nor his prayers.

So he asked others to pray about this:

"Brother Maseo, go ask Sister Clare,

along with her more spiritually inclined sisters,
to ask fervently that God show me
the better way:

To give myself to preaching,
Or to spend all my time praying.

Then go to Brother Silvester
to ask the same thing."

Brother Maseo left,
shared St. Francis' wishes with St. Clare,
then with Brother Silvester.

Immediately Brother Silvester prayed;
Immediately he got an answer from God.

"Brother Maseo,
God says you must say to Brother Francis,
'God calls you to preach
not just for yourself,
but to help others too;
God wants many saved through you.'"

Hearing that answer,
Brother Maseo went to St. Clare
to learn what God told her.

She and her friends got the same message
Brother Silvester received.

Brother Maseo went back to St. Francis
and the saint showed much love
welcoming him:

Francis washed his feet,
and also prepared food for him.
After eating,
Francis asked Maseo
to go to the woods with him,
where Francis knelt in front of him,
baring his head
and crossing his arms.

"What does my Lord
Jesus Christ
ask me to do for Him?"

Brother Maseo replied,
"Christ spoke to
Silvester,
Clare,
and Clare's sisters.

Through them He tells you
to go right into the world
preaching.
You are special to Him
not just for yourself.
but even more for others."

When St. Francis heard this,
he knew Christ's will,
stood to his feet,
and said with enthusiasm,

"We go in God's Name!"

(*The Little Flowers of St. Francis: A Paraphrase*. New York: Alba House, 1992.)

Clare's Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges

To her dearest Sister Ermentrude: Clare of Assisi, a lowly servant of Jesus Christ: health and peace.

I have learned, O most dear sister, that, with the help of God's grace, you have fled in joy the corruptions of the world. . . Remain faithful until death, dearly beloved, to Him to Whom you have promised yourself, for you shall be crowned by Him with the garland of life.

Our labor here is brief, but the reward is eternal. Do not be disturbed by the clamor of the world, which passes like a shadow. Do not let the false delights of a deceptive world deceive you. Close your ears to the whisperings of hell and bravely oppose its onslaughts. Gladly endure whatever goes against you and do not let good fortune lift you up: for these things destroy faith, while these others demand it. Offer faithfully what you have vowed to God, and He shall reward you.

O dearest one, look up to heaven, which calls us on, and take up the Cross and follow Christ Who has gone on before us: for through Him we shall enter into His glory after many and diverse tribulations. Love God from the depths of your heart and Jesus, His Son, Who was crucified for us sinners. Never let the thought of Him leave your mind but meditate constantly on the mysteries of the Cross and the anguish of His mother as she stood beneath the Cross.

Pray and watch at all times! Carry out steadfastly the work you have begun and fulfill the ministry you have undertaken in true humility and holy poverty. Fear not, daughter! God, Who is faithful in all His words and holy in all His deeds, will pour His blessings upon you and your daughters. He will be your help and best comforter for He is our Redeemer and our eternal reward.

Let us pray to God together for each other for, by sharing each other's burden of charity in this way, we shall easily fulfill the law of Christ. Amen.

(*Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*. New York, Paulist, 1982.)

God's Revelation to St. Francis About His Friars

Jesus says in the Gospel record,

"I know My sheep and they know Me."

Likewise, Francis knew his sheep.

Francis, the good shepherd, knew because God told him about the pluses and minuses of his friars.

Accordingly, he knew how to bring healing where needed, humble the proud ones, lift self-esteem in the discouraged.

An example of his divine insight:

Once in a friary discussing God with the friars, Brother Ruffino did not appear.

Ruffino had gone to the forest to contemplate God.

Well, when Ruffino finally came out of the woods, he passed by at a distance from the others, and St. Francis saw him.

St. Francis, with Ruffino in the background, said to the other brothers:

"Identify the holiest soul

God possesses on the earth."

They all named St. Francis.

But Francis declared,

"Very dear friends, I am the most worthless soul God possesses on earth. But do you see Ruffino fresh from the woods?"

God revealed to me that his soul is one of the three most holy souls on earth. That's why I do not hesitate to call him *Saint* even during his lifetime, for his spirit has found itself deep in God by grace. Revered in heaven, Our Lord has canonized Ruffino."

But St. Francis never called him *Saint* in Ruffino's presence.

(*The Little Flowers of St. Francis: A Paraphrase*. New York: Alba House, 1992.)

The Canticle of Brother Sun

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of
weather
through which you give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for
Your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

(*Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*. New York, Paulist, 1982.)

Going Deeper

We have gone through quite a process to come up with the four resources listed here and feel that if you really want to know the heart and message of Francis and Clare, these resources will give you an excellent picture.

Brother Sun, Sister Moon is a film directed by the famous Franco Zeffirelli. While it contains some of the prejudicial concerns of Zeffirelli, I am amazed at how well it sticks with the actual events of Francis' and Clare's early life. And it gives an emotional impact that is awfully close to the kind of shock treatment Francis' actions had upon his contemporaries. The photography is stunning and the music enchanting.

Francis and Clare: The Complete Works is part of the Paulist Press *Classics of Western Spirituality* series and is simply the best thing around for the actual writings of these two. It contains Francis' dying words to his followers, "Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord our God for up

to now we have made little or no progress," and Clare's letters to Agnes of Prague in which she writes, "Love him totally who gave himself totally for your love." The Introductions are invaluable and throw extensive light on the lives and times of Francis and Clare.

Clare Among Her Sisters is a tender book which reveals to us the personage of Clare within the whole female evangelical movement of the thirteenth century. In her day she was called a "lofty candlestick of holiness that burned brightly in the tabernacle of the Lord," and this book helps us to see why.

The Little Flowers of St. Francis: A Paraphrase is an attempt by Asbury Seminary professor Donald Demaray to make the old stories of Brother Ugolino about St. Francis and his companions accessible to modern readers. And it is an imminently successful attempt! It retains the charm and innocence of these early tales and the "poetic" type style adds to its simplicity. If you have never read the *Fioretti*, *The Little Flowers*, here is an excellent way to get started.



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	<i>Brother Sun, Sister Moon</i> (Franco Zeffirelli)	20.00	
	<i>Francis and Clare: The Complete Works</i> (Regis Armstrong & Ignatius Brady)	20.00	
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	<i>The Little Flowers of St. Francis: A Paraphrase</i> (Donald E. Demaray)	14.00	
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1/24/97- 1/25/97	RENOVARÉ Regional Conference	Tallowood Baptist Church 555 Tallowood Drive Houston, Texas 77024	Richard Foster Jim Smith George Skramstad	Margaret Campbell and Almena Downey— 713-781-1886
1/26/97	Preach at Worship Services	Tallowood Bap. & Holy Spirit Episcopal (see above & 12535 Perthshire, Houston)	Richard Foster	Margaret Campbell 713-781-1886
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3/9/97	Preach at Worship Service	Pearce Memorial Church (see address above)	Richard Foster	Daryl Smith— 716-594-9488
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