

## Topic 10: The Franciscan Vision, Part 2

**Overview:** The experience of Francis lived on in his followers, notably St. Clare, St. Bonaventure, and John Duns Scotus, just to mention a few. The tradition of the Franciscan school has touched many hearts and minds, especially with its focus on the humanity of Christ and the needs of the poor. St. Clare represents the vision of St. Francis and brings in the feminine dimension of the Franciscan heart. St. Clare and St. Bonaventure carried on Francis's spirituality and added or emphasized different elements of it.

### St. Clare (1194–1253)

- When St. Bonaventure became the Minister General of the Order, he looked to the Poor Clares and their way of life.
- Clare is especially notable for her accentuation of poverty.
- St. Francis received her into the convent in 1212. She escaped her wealthy family in order to seek a more spiritual life.
- Francis saw Clare as a spouse of the Holy Spirit. What Francis was doing in the outside world, Clare was doing within the monastery. Today, there is debate over whether life in the enclosed monastery was a choice or an imposition. At the time, a woman could not enter into the religious life outside of the context of the monastery.

**Clare's Rule:** There are three prominent differences between Clare's Rule and Francis' later Rule, written in 1223. Clare emphasized:

- 1) The practice of a material separation from the world
- 2) The total permeation of everyday life with the pursuit of radical poverty
- 3) The struggle to preserve the unity of mutual love and peace as a means of achieving sanctification

Clare envisioned a return to the poverty of the Garden of Eden. This concept was present in an early Franciscan work, the *Sacrum commercium*.

- 1) Through this text, Clare saw poverty as the thing that led her to God and the fruit of her relationship with God.

In her focus on poverty, Clare captured what was happening in various religious movements of the time. Poverty provided a means of renewal for the Church.

**St. Bonaventure:** In 1259, St. Bonaventure was elected Minister General of the friars. He went to Monte La Verna, where St. Francis received the stigmata, in

order to open himself to the experience of God. After coming down from the mount, he began to reflect on the spiritual life, the impulse of St. Francis, and the Franciscan Order.

St. Bonaventure wrote three works that clearly articulate the vision of the Franciscan school.

1) The Journey of the Soul into God (*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*)

(a) In this work, he describes a theology of the spiritual path and expresses the vision of St. Francis. He invites us to experience what St. Francis experienced.

(b) The *Itinerarium* contains seven chapters.

(i) Chap 1 & 2 invite us to go out into the world and find God.

(ii) Chapters 3 and 4 invite us to go within ourselves.

(iii) Chapters 5 and 6 invite us to go beyond ourselves.

(iv) Chapter 7 invites us to be embraced by the crucified Christ.

2) The Major Life of St. Francis: This spiritual biography illustrates how the life of St. Francis parallels what Bonaventure described in his previous work. Francis exemplified the spiritual journey.

3) The Tree of Life: In the third part of the trilogy, Bonaventure presents his reflections on the Cross, inviting us to embrace and be embraced by the crucified Christ. St. Clare represents the vision of St. Francis and brings in the feminine dimension of the Franciscan heart.

## **Review Questions**

1. St. Francis and St. Clare had a very close relationship that models the masculine/feminine synthesis. What are some of the ways you might work on this synthesis in your life and relationships?

2. Jorge Mario Bergoglio chose the name Francis as pope. Given the fact that he is a Jesuit, many people thought he chose this name for the famous Jesuit saint, Francis Xavier, but he actually chose the name in honor of St. Francis Assisi. What elements of Franciscan spirituality do you see in this Jesuit pope?

3. In what ways is St. Francis a model for reforming the Church from within?