**Belief in the In-Between Spaces:**

**St. Clare and the Common Good**

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A few years ago, one of the premier American feminist theologians and the first woman-president of the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Dr. Serene Jones published a wonderful theological work on grace in modern life.[[1]](#footnote-1) Having grown up in Oklahoma, the daughter of a brilliant and renowned theologian, she writes what she calls a “prairie theology,” a down-home realistic way of speaking about grace and sin. In her final chapter, she tells the story of her parents’ love not in the sentimental hues of piety, but in the difficult and harsh palette of pain and rejection.

After many years of an apparently happy marriage and devoted church going, Dr. Jones’ mother brutally revealed that she had been having a long affair with a family friend. She harshly detailed how she never really loved her husband and then she cruelly went on to replay day after day how disappointed she was in her husband and what a waste of a relationship they had. The revelations shocked Serene and her siblings and devastated her father, who never had a clue about the deep disdain the only love of his life had for him. He continued to care for his infirmed wife with the same devotion he always did, until the day she lost her tortured grip on life. She went to her grave with bitterness and venom in her spirit.

Dr. Jones speaks insightfully of her father’s reaction to his wife’s revelation and cruel attacks, in the brilliant way that only a feminist theologian can write:

Mercy is the whole process of becoming permanently forgiving, of living in a mode of divine knowing and presence. Sometimes, unfortunately, life moves in the other way, pivoting us away from grace and leaving us bereft in the desolate land of sin.

My father, at age eighty, learned this hard truth the day he heard of my mother’s infidelity. He forgave her for her lie and never felt she should be punished for it or willed her any harm. He forgave her because he lived with the constant knowledge of mercy. He knew she was a haunted woman. But he could not reconcile what she had done to him with his larger vision of God and the ultimate meaning of human life. It was as if her betrayal threw a huge boulder into the middle of his core belief system, shattering his sense of the divine and all the theological truths he thought he held.

Watching this happen to him reminded me of the trauma patients I have worked with as a pastor. When a person’s world is violently exploded by an event that exceeds his or her capacity to make sense of it – usually because it doesn’t make sense or couldn’t have been foreseen or stopped – ordinary thought processes freeze up. Everything stops making sense. We suddenly feel powerless, disconnected from others, and easily startled by or afraid of the next anticipated blow. It’s a hellish place to be stuck.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Serene goes on to detail how her mother’s betrayal shattered her father’s theological foundation and how his disinterest in life triggered her whole family’s questioning of religion. The whole network of faith that had glued their lives together was coming undone. Serene brilliantly tells us why:

Belief lives in the in-between space of our relationships, our connective tissue. When that tissue tears, the whole group feels the rip.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Today, I want to speak about the in-between spaces of our relationships. All of us live in a time of serious social, cultural, political and religious disruption. For the past two years, we have lived in a time of social distancing, isolated from one another in our homes and sometimes even in our very rooms away from the relationships that give meaning to our lives and support to our spirits. The pandemic revealed even deeper levels of polarization, mistrust, and divisions among us. While we made a remarkable breakthrough in science, applying it was compromised by a breakdown in our spirit as a nation, our confidence in the union that binds us together. As David Brooks reminded us recently:

In 2020, Americans failed to socially distance and test for the coronavirus and suffered among the highest infection and death rates in the developed world. Millions decided that wearing a mask infringed their individual liberty.

Americans have always been an individualistic people who don’t like being told what to do. But, in times of crisis, they have historically still had the capacity to form what Alexis de Tocqueville called a “social body,” a coherent community capable of collective action. During World War I, for example, millions served at home and abroad to win a faraway war, responding to recruiting posters that read “I Want You” and “Americans All.”

That basic sense of peoplehood, of belonging to a common enterprise with a shared destiny, is exactly what’s lacking today.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Something in the in-between space of our social relationships, something in the connective tissue of what binds us as a people has torn. The results are dangerous and they haunt our national character. The insurrection of the US Capitol by MAGA supporters, white nationalists and supremacists is testimony of our fragile cultural state.

Once again, David Brooks has written, “Social trust is a measure of the moral quality of a society – of whether the people and institutions in it are trustworthy, whether they keep their promises and work for the common good.” He goes on to suggest, “When people in a church lose faith or trust in God, the church collapses. When people in a society lose faith or trust in their institutions and in each other, the nation collapses”.[[5]](#footnote-5) A recent Pew research study found that Americans are losing their trust in institutions; their trust in one another is eroding.[[6]](#footnote-6)

An international think-tank, *More in Common,* released a report in May 2021, that surveyed the levels of trust and mistrust in America. Their summary is haunting.

Every democracy depends on a threshold level of trust among its citizens and in its key institutions of government, business, and civil society. Currently however, the United States falls short of that ideal. According to More in Common’s research, less than one in four Americans believe the federal government, American corporations, and national media to be honest. This distrust is not limited to institutions either: fewer than two in five Americans feel “most people can be trusted.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

We would like to believe that the breakdown of social trust among us is temporary and that our distrust will dissipate and disappear as soon as the pandemic is over. However, George Packer, in a piece in *The Atlantic* last June, says that the pandemic did not break America, but revealed what was already broken:

When the virus came here, it found a country with serious underlying conditions, and it exploited them ruthlessly. Chronic ills—a corrupt political class, a sclerotic bureaucracy, a heartless economy, a divided and distracted public—had gone untreated for years. We had learned to live, uncomfortably, with the symptoms.[[8]](#footnote-8)

What is eroding is the sense of social trust between us. Our politics have become hopelessly polarized and paralyzed, as we foment “culture wars” and ignore the rise of authoritarian regimes, even in once democratized nations. We watch the escalation of hardline apartheid regimes and state-sponsored genocide, the rise in racial attacks and the deepening chasm between the privileged few and the poverty-stricken many in the world.

What is being lost is the sense of the “common good.” Philosophies of individualism, autonomy, and choice have replaced a social good that coordinates all private goods and would allow us to construct a society where all voices are heard and all rights are protected. We have lost our confidence that such an ideal is even possible or worthy of pursuit. Instead, we have reduced all actions to struggles between private self-interests where only power dynamics prevail. Every opinion is suspected of a desire to dominate or deprive. Mediation is never about a higher or more transcendent social good. It is simply a utilitarian counting of votes and heads where there are only two inevitable choices: winners and losers. We have returned to Thomas Hobbes’ pessimistic anthropology, that we live inevitably in a “war of all against all.”

We need to do something new, something more radical than our decades’ long emphases on independence, autonomy, self-actualization, and personal choice. We need to think about our common good. We need to reflect not so much on the space where each of us can be free and express herself openly and honestly. We need to be aware of and attentive to the connective tissue that binds us to one another, not just here in Chapter, not just here and between America, Brazil and Jamaica. But, here in the great web of relationships that we have with a global world.

It will not be easy. We still live in a highly racialized society, where the color of one’s skin and the texture of one’s hair continue to condition social advancement, access to higher education, levels of medical care, safety on our streets, and employment in the workplace. We still live in a grossly class-based society, despite our cherished and sentimental anthems to democracy and equality, where income gaps are rising, poverty is deepening, and the middle and lower classes of American households are less wealthy today than they were two or three decades ago. All because the wealthy class has their hands on the political levers of power and are now able to gerrymander districts, stuff courts, and restrict voting to achieve their ends.

We are here today because we want to speak and act with faith. We know that only the power of faith can solve the social mistrust that afflicts us. Only faith can provide the political will to contribute to the social good and only faith can develop in us the conversion of imaginations and worldviews required to construct a common good that is durable and just.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Today I want to spend some time speaking with you about another woman theologian, the First Franciscan woman, Clare of Assisi. I want to discuss with you her vision and her practice of the common good. I believe it is a palliative offering to our polarized world today. It will challenge the way we live our spiritual and social lives. It will demand a conversion of our imaginations and worldviews, the most difficult aspect of conversion there is to accomplish.

**Clare and her Conversion of Imagination**

While Francis was part of the merchant or working class of Assisi, Clare grew up with the status and privileges of the upper class as part of the nobility of Assisi. She lived a life that was protected, supervised, subordinated and controlled by the men in her family. That is until the day she decided to escape and forfeit her privileged lifestyle and become, at the age of eighteen, the first woman in the Franciscan movement, vowing absolute poverty and determined to live as austere and as generous a lifestyle as characterized Francis who was twelve years her senior.

She steals away in the middle of Palm Sunday night and walks through “the door of death,” (the castle door that was only used to transport dead bodies out of the castle and as an emergency escape during times of civil unrest). She makes her way to Francis, receives her tonsure, renounces her nobility and becomes a public penitent, according to the model of Francis and his early friars.

Clare extracted herself from the domestic and protected life that nobility required of her. She refused to follow the script of women in the Middle Ages that required women to be spoken for, curfewed, and accompanied. She refused the gender norms binding her to an arranged marriage. She sells off her dowry and her inheritance. Therefore, she released herself to take on the total freedom of absolute poverty.

For the twenty-seven years that Clare outlived Francis, she never outgrew his memory or gave up on the fight to be an austere and poor community like the one Francis first created when he founded the Franciscan movement. She saw herself and her sisters as equal members of the First Order and of the original Franciscan movement. At the end of her life, she goes on a hunger strike in order to protect her absolute poverty but also to secure the access her sisters had to the brothers of the First Order.

Canon law was being interpreted in such a way that would have restricted access to the brothers to the Lesser Sisters. This was inconceivable to Clare. How could sisters live without their brothers; how could the brothers survive in fraternity without their sisters? One needs to remember that, by this time, Clare had lived decades within the spirituality of Francis’ “cosmic order,” a cosmology of a “universal fraternity” that included lesser sisters and brothers, brother sun and sister moon, with mother/sister earth. One could not conceive of a world where brother sun refused to acknowledge or work in harmony with sister moon. Nor could Clare make sense of a Franciscan movement where access between sisters and brothers was rejected, neglected or canonically discontinued. Her hunger strike was a forceful and highly feminine way that she could reclaim the Franciscan movement as a bisexual reality, a gendered equality between women and men.

One sees Clare’s radical courage and cleverness in using her body as a tool for resistance. Like Francis who regularly used his body as an important signifier of powerful doctrinal claims (i.e. standing naked in the public square, in the snow and on his deathbed)[[10]](#footnote-10), so Clare used her own body to shame the Church into recognizing and respecting the radical nature of discipleship for women.

At the very end of her life, she will refuse to eat until the Pope provides assurance that her sisters can live poverty as absolutely and as fully as the men do and that her sisters will have equal and unfettered access to the brothers, at her discretion and not by consent of some male cardinal protector. It was just days before her death that the Pope granted Clare and her sisters “the privilege of poverty.” It was an even more stunning achievement. One might call it more amply, “the privilege of mutual charity and the common good.”

**Clare and the Common Good**

It would be wrong and quite reductionist to interpret Clare’s emphasis on poverty in ascetical terms alone. Clearly, she understands and values the benefits of penance, but poverty serves a greater goal. It is the insurance of the relational life that she and her sisters want to live. It is the guarantee of the “mutual charity” around which everything they do and all that they pray focus on.[[11]](#footnote-11) Clare is rejecting the power dynamics of her day that cluster people according to the class into which they were born and to which they were fated to live for the rest of their lives. There is no upward mobility, as we know it, in the Assisi of her day. There are only hierarchical arrangements, pre-determined privileges, and guaranteed access to power and position for the few who have been “willed by God” to inherit the goods of the earth. Only the *majores* have guaranteed primary rights to the world’s goods and, because of this, everyone else has to beg their indulgences, request their favors, and show them the divinely-ordered respect that they believe is their due.

The life of minority that Francis and Clare live begs all of this. Clare sees a higher principle at work in the world: “the love that God has for us.” It is the relational love existing within God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and poured out in and for us as energy and example. For Clare, the practice of “mutual charity” guides the way she serves as leader of the community.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Although burdened with the title of “abbess,” Clare never practices that title in its traditional form. If an abbess is in some sense a “first among equals,” then Clare’s concept of minority leads her to consider herself as the “last among the least.” It is from that position of humility, selflessness and self-effacement that Clare serves the sisters by washing their hands and their feet, making decisions for the common life, praying and working with one another. Mutual charity has no hint of domination or deprivation.[[13]](#footnote-13) The goal of all community discussions is not to arrive just at a consensus of wills or to achieve some aggregate inflection point of private interests. The endpoint is the “common good,” the dynamic form that makes community life vibrant and inspiring, inclusive and empowering.[[14]](#footnote-14) Mutual charity is the common good that makes all personal interests and individual integrity thrive for one and for all.

**The Freedom to Live Mutual Charity**

One of the freedoms that Clare seeks to find within the Franciscan movement is that of pursuing above all an intentional life.[[15]](#footnote-15) She is seeking to live a life of her own making, following pursuits of her own Gospel persuasions. She has lived all of her adolescence by the dictates of culture and convention. She has done what was required of her as a good Christian noble woman of faith. She wants more, not against or in opposition to the Church, but deep within it. She does not intend to walk away from the faith in order to pursue her dreams. Her dreams lie deeply within the Church, because they center profoundly and with clarity on Christ. They are so deep that not even the men and women of her time recognize their source. It will take time for the people and priests of her age to understand or appreciate how Clare’s intentions make up a new spiritual charism in the Church. Her dream has deep resonance with the mystical traditions found in Eucharistic theology.[[16]](#footnote-16) Clare has insights into communion from a very young age. They will bear fruit in generations to come.

Thus, Clare seeks to live an intentional life of compassion and a feminine form of mutual charity. The forms of religious life current in her time work for the purposes of hierarchy, the separation of powers, for control of the passions and the smooth conduct of the habits of religious living. “Good religious” live by the law and order of religious decorum and to find God’s will precisely and unequivocally in obedience to the commands of a religious superior.

Clare is looking for something else. She wants to find God’s will in mutuality and interdependence. She believes strongly that God’s will should be found precisely in the connective tissue between us.

Those who suffer from rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can teach us a great lesson here. RA is fundamentally an inflammation of the connective tissue that bonds joints to one another, allowing digital function and ambulatory locomotion, our ability to walk.[[17]](#footnote-17) Over time, the tissue becomes more and more inflamed and then starts to erode and deteriorate, leaving bone to scrape against bone, destroying flexibility and agility and causing enormous pain. With RA, our joints no longer function well together.

I would like to use this image for our situation in society and the church today. The connective tissue that joins us one to the other in society and the church is eroding. The pain we are experiencing is not so much around dogma and teaching as it is around the connective tissue between us, in the in-between spaces that give us our flexibility, agility and agency to act with purpose and passion.

Today we need women and men in religion who value and indeed are passionate about the importance of the connective tissue in the Body of Christ. We have eyes to see and ears to hear the joys, anxieties, hopes and dreams of this age, and yet we are hobbled in our ability to act flexibly and with agility, because bone is now scraping against bone, joint against joint. We need women and men who are willing to repair the connective tissue between us.

Enough of the “culture warrior” bishops of the past few decades who seem to love the sound of bone against bone! Enough of those religious women and men whose voice in the Church is only that of protest and provocation. Inflammation when sustained is corrosive of the agility and flexibility that the people of God need to respond to change in a time of extreme accelerations.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The identity politics of the 1980s and 1990s and the reactions to it in the early decades of the 2000s have crippled and paralyzed us in government.[[19]](#footnote-19) Insurrection is the tragic consequence of the alienation and isolation that private interests and aggressive competitive economics create.

The comparable exercise of identity politics in the church has led to heresy watchdogs, church militant groups, liturgical police, the weaponization of communion,[[20]](#footnote-20) and a deepening experience of alienation and isolation within what is supposed to be “the community of the Beloved.”[[21]](#footnote-21) As a result, we too as a church seem to be weakened in our ability to respond to the ethical challenges of the day, including the ecological degradation of the planet, the dangerous rise in violence and terrorism, the exploding development of extreme poverty, especially among women and children, and the over-all growing “globalization of indifference” to life itself.[[22]](#footnote-22)

We need specialists who are passionate about the connective tissues of the Church and who are committed to their healing, whenever and wherever they become inflamed or eroded. It is no longer enough to stand on the “right side” of an issue. Dogmatic certainty, whether on the left or on the right, is not what is needed today. We need to let go of the surety of our personal dogmas and the security of our private spaces and autonomous choices. It is not enough to stay inside the safe parameters of tolerance thinking that stops dialogue and discussion when every person has arrived at their maximum level of autonomy and choice. Tolerating the harsh tones of bone against bone, as long as everyone is sincere in her personal beliefs, is still painful and paralyzing.

We need to love and to be passionate about our in-between times and places. We need to gather more and more deeply. We need to name what connects us not just in theory but also in real practice. We should protect and cherish those rituals, events, and ordinary behaviors that bond us. We need to help others learn how to cherish and deepen what connects them in their families, neighborhoods, church and world. This is a great and timely prophetic enterprise: to heal the in-between places that have been inflamed by the tensions of an increasingly aggressive and isolating age.

**Clare and the Repair of our Connective Tissues**

Clare knew the tensions and troubles of her violent and greedy age. She realized how traumatized her world had become by the endless wars that pitted the nobility against the merchants and isolated the poor in misery and disease. In her monastery at San Damiano, she developed a methodology and a spiritual practice on how to repair and restore connective tissues that became inflamed.

Jean Molesky-Poz demonstrates what she calls Clare’s “praxis of presence,” the pathway that leads from a culture of isolation and self-interest to a culture of mutual charity and common good. Using the Letters of Clare to Agnes, she highlights four steps to mutual charity. I will use them but expand on her analysis and develop a stage theory that leads to the repair of the connective tissues in our communities.

First, we must *gaze upon* and *pay attention* to the uniqueness of our own lives with a special attention to all our relationships, to all our social and religious connections. The Scriptures tell us that we were “knit together in our mother’s womb” (Psalm 139). From the first moment of our existence, we are connected to others. We need to gaze upon and contemplate all those to whom we are connected, all who have made us and who continue to make us who we are in the world. I do not mean just the obvious friends and relatives, but also the great web of ordinary women and men, who feed, nourish, comfort, challenge, educate, support and sustain us. I am thinking of those who get food to our pantries, prescriptions to our medicine cabinets, gas to our cars, lights to our desks, water to our faucets, and words to our ears. Enter into the cathedral of your life and gaze upon all those people, known and unknown, who have sustained you since you were born. Look at them. Gaze upon them. Appreciate what they do for you, how they support and sustain you each day and at every moment of your life.

Second, *consider* that this sustaining assembly is deeper and wider than you have ever imagined. It is made up not simply of friends, neighbors, acquaintances, classmates, and bands. You belong and connect to a universal fraternity that includes all creatures on the earth, in the sky, and under the waves. You are related and you are connected to every species on the planet, every bird in the sky and ever fish in the sea depends on you and waits for you to recognize and love them, as well. You share the inner composition of the most distant planets and billions of stars across the unimaginable expanse of the universe. You are not alone. You are not isolated. You have yet to understand the length, height or depth of your bonds in the created world.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si,* has been eloquent and insistent on the need for us to consider the fraternity that all creatures of the earth have with one another.[[23]](#footnote-23) We must consider and acknowledge this great sorority and fraternity, recognizing not only their existence on the planet, but accepting their right to praise God and serve God’s will in their own way without danger from humanity. The social teaching of the Church now begs us to consider what our sisterhood and brotherhood with them means and requires of us.[[24]](#footnote-24)

To consider develops in us a new meaning, purpose and intentionality that we will come to mother earth not to pillage and profit from her, but first to listen to her deeply, carefully and respectfully in all the ways that she speaks. We will listen attentively to the chorus of birds singing God’s praises in the morning and we will watch the great work undertaken by all God’s creatures morning through night. To consider is to recognize how all God’s creatures serve God and support us in the humility and beauty that God gave to each of them.

Third, Clare calls us to *contemplate* the love that is the energy behind and the binding force that connects all creatures to one another. This is a step deeper than consideration. It is the awesome realization, as Dante says at the end of Il Paradiso, that it is “Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.” (Canto XXXiii, 145.) This is a profound realization – that, at the root of all that binds us and all that we share are not vague principles or abstract scientific equations. Gazing and considering bring us to the overwhelming realization and humble acknowledgement that it is Love that binds and stitches us one to the other. The Book of Creation speaks to us and confirms that what will heal the damage done to our political, social and religious communities is nothing other than generous and receptive love. We must let the energy of love found between creatures reconcile, reconnect and re-member us to all parts of our humanity and to all parts of the creaturely world, especially those parts that we have ignored or disconnected ourselves from.

Finally, Clare calls us to *repair* our common home. It has become a contemporary cliché that the hierarchy forced Clare into a damaging enclosure. Some suggest that she never wanted a contemplative life and only begrudgingly accepted what men forced upon her. I do not have that impression of Clare at all.

She never seemed to care that she was not “on the streets,” or doing ministry in the parishes or around the world. She knew what she wanted and she built her life with courage, conviction and confidence, based on the designs of her deep prophetic mind. She constructed a common home and she repaired the isolation and alienation that her sisters had experienced in their own conventional lives. She did this by tending meticulously and passionately to the connective tissues that joined the sisters to one another.

Edward Coughlin OFM taught us many years ago the ways Clare used to build a community around an intentional mutual charity.[[25]](#footnote-25) She did this in four ways. She *respected* her sisters and she showed them *deep warmth, affection and care* in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of their lives together. She was *responsible and accountable* to her sisters. She was never aloof, above, or apart from her sisters. She was always present to them. Moreover, Clare was willing to *change* for them, becoming ever more humble, kind, considerate and compassionate.

**Conclusion**

Five years ago, Pope Francis begged the world to give a “preferential option” not only to the poor, but also to the planet, because now both are abused, marginalized and excluded in the interests of immediate profits and short-term economic gains. He reminded us that we must retrieve what we are losing: our connections within our “common home.”

Repeatedly, the Pope has focused our attention on what we have and what we hold in common. He has called us to pay attention to the connective tissues between us, to get beyond the philosophical and theological obsession we have with our individual rights, our private interests and our autonomous choices. He asks us to go beyond an ideology that simply tolerates individual rights, but ignores common goods. He calls on us to deepen and expand our understanding of diversity.

Diversity is more than the accumulation of differences. The Pope is suggesting that diversity is only possible when there is an ecosystem that allows different species to exist, interact, cooperate and participate in the world in the beauty and complexity of their differences. Said another way, ‘*hacceitas*’ is empty without *fraternitas.*

We are called to something radically new, an attention to what binds and strengthens, what supports and sustains us as a people, as a community, as a congregation and as a planet.

Clare of Assisi made San Damiano more than a convent. She made it a common home, where children came for healing and pilgrims arrived to pray, where cardinals sought counsel and lepers begged for mercy. Clare built a common home, where there were no aliens or strangers, no divisions by status or class. There was only mutual charity and a common good, developed in contemplative prayer and protected by absolute poverty because Clare knew that it was love that moved the sun and the other stars.

It is Love that binds us together as sisters and brothers. May it ever be so for Allegany Franciscans and Franciscan friars, in the magnificent common home our gracious God has given us.

St. Clare, pray for us! Amen.

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1. Serene Jones, *Call it Grace* (New York: Viking, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Serene Jones, *Call it Grace,* 295-296. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Serene Jones, *Call it Grace,* 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. David Brooks, “Our Pathetic Herd Immunity Failure,” *New York Times* (May 6, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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7. More in Common, *Two Stories of Distrust in America,* mic\_two-stories-of-distrust at: moreincommon.com/our-work/publications/. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. George Packer, “We are living in a Failed State,” *The Atlantic* (June 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Lisa Cahill describes these three requirements of political will, conversion of imaginations, and constructive agency as the necessary ingredients of the common good. Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Social Justice and the Common Good: Improving the Catholic Social Teaching Framework,” *Journal of Moral Theology,* Vol 1 Issue CTEWC Series 1 (May 19, 2021), 106-118 at: <https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/article/24217>. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Marco Bartoli, *Francis’ Nudity.* Gilberto Cavazos-Gonzalez, trans. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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16. For an overview of Clare’s spirituality, see Joan Mueller, OSC’s extensive work: *A Companion to Clare of Assisi: Life, Writings, and Spirituality* (Brill, 2010); *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); *Clare of Assisi: The Letters to Agnes* (The Liturgical Press, 2003); and *Clare’s Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources* (The Franciscan Institute, 2001); for an understanding of the uses (and abuses) of Clare’s Eucharistic theology through the post-Tridentine era, see: Nirit Ben-Debby, “St. Clare Expelling the Saracens from Assisi: Religious Confrontation in Word and Image,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* , 43:2 (Fall 2012), 643-665. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
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