'opuscula', the writings of Francis, on which to base this, or not if we are looking at Francis' specific attitude towards her.148

This conclusion leads us to postulate that Francis had great importance for Clare but that Clare did not have an equivalent importance for Francis. However, this is not an entirely new observation. Bonaventure himself noted this imbalance and, in the *Legenda Maior* inserts a second episode in which Francis was, at a particular point, overwhelmed by doubts about his vocation:

What do you think, brothers, what do you judge better? That I should spend my time in prayer, or that I should travel about preaching? [...]. When he had mulled over these words for many days with his brothers, he could not perceive with certainty which of these he should choose as more acceptable to Christ. [...] Choosing, therefore, two of the brothers, he sent them to Brother Sylvester, who had seen the cross coming out of his mouth, and at that time spent his time in continuous prayer on the mountain above Assisi. He was to ask God to resolve his doubt over this matter and to send him the answer in God's name. He also asked the virgin Clare to consult with the purest and simplest of the virgins living under her rule, and to pray herself with the other sisters in order to seek the Lord's will in this matter. Through a miraculous revelation of the Spirit, the venerable and the virgin dedicated to God came to the same conclusion: that it was the divine good will that the herald of Christ should preach.149

Here we have an incident being used, and wisely, by Bonaventure in order to highlight his balanced understanding of the Franciscan charism: two contemplatives (Sylvester and Clare) were charged by God himself to communicate to Francis his will that Francis give himself to the active life. Bonaventure's testimony is undoubtedly a late one given that we find no sign of such an episode in any of the preceding Lives, either of Francis or of Clare. However, Bonaventure's voice on a subject so debated within the Order cannot be taken lightly. It is probably not without reason that an episode in which Clare assumes the role of a guide to Francis, only surfaced after her death in 1253. In fact, as far as we can tell from her writings, Clare did not like to speak of herself at all and therefore hid behind the memory of Francis, but after her death her sisters would have had no problem about recounting such an incident in order to underline the bonds which bound the sisters to the brothers. The observation that there is no mention of this incident in the Canonisation Process does not carry much weight, since at the Canonisation Process they were called to give evidence about the holiness of Clare, while this incident could be thought of as pertaining more to the holiness of Francis.

In any case, whether the incident was 'invented' by Bonaventure, or transmitted by the sisters at San Damiano via Brother Leo (to whom Bonaventure turned at the beginning of his time as General in order to learn about Clare and her companions) or whether the account is historical fact, it remains as evidence that a few years after Clare's death, the Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor wanted to underline the importance of Clare in the life of Francis. It is difficult to say anything more about the importance of Clare in Francis' life. It is true, as we have already noted, that in the *Legend of Saint Clare* Francis appears occasionally and that these occasions refer mainly to the earlier times of Clare's religious life. However, this silence in the *Legend* is amply made up for by the Acts of the Process of Canonisation.

Sister Filippa di Leonardo di Gislerio, the third witness at the process, says, at a certain point in her testimony:
Lady Clare also related how once in a vision, it seemed to her she brought a bowl of hot water to Saint Francis along with a towel for drying his hands. She was climbing a very high stairway, but was going very quickly, almost as though she were going on level ground. When she reached Saint Francis, the saint bared his breast and said to the Lady Clare: Come, take and drink. After she had sucked from it, the saint admonished her to imbibe once again. After she did so what she had tasted was so sweet and delightful she in no way could describe it. After she had imbibed, that nipple or opening of the breast from which the milk comes remained between the lips of blessed Clare. After she took was remained in her mouth in her hands, it seemed to her it was gold so clear and bright that everything was seen in it as in a mirror. The Legend makes no mention of any such vision. The matter may have seemed too sensitive to put into a text written for the edification of young women who wanted to choose religious life. Indeed, some of the sisters at the Canonisation process, people like sister Amata, referred to the same vision where she says:

She said the same as Sister Filippa concerning all these things: the miracle of Saint Clare's mother, her vision and the breast of Saint Francis, the miracle of the night of the Lord's Nativity.

Obviously Clare did not tell only one sister about her vision, but she told all those who were living with her. These in their turn, during the process, did not forget to tell about it as among the notable events of Clare's life. It seems that the vision did not cause any embarrassment either to Clare or to the other sisters at San Damiano. Rather the contrary, for the sisters, it demonstrated the holiness of their mother.

Through the witness of Filippa, we touch something which was an aspect of medieval monastic culture, although, probably for lack of material, it has not been much studied. This is the question of how, and in what way did women give themselves to the salvation of souls. How did they preach, instruct and share their personal mystical experiences with them and even their dreams?

What seems strange here is the fact that Clare did not speak with her sisters about her relationship with Christ but her relationship with Francis. However, if we look closely the matter it is not as strange as it seems at first. In all probability the vision took place after the death of Francis, given that Sister Amata, who mentions it in her evidence, did not enter until after 1228 or 1229. In that case we are dealing with a period of great uncertainty for the community at San Damiano. As we have seen the loss of Francis was followed by a considerable pressure being applied to Clare to renounce some of those elements of her religious experience which she considered fundamental, namely poverty and her link with the friars. Obviously, in these circumstances Clare and her sisters would have looked back to the one who had been their strong support, even though the blessed father was now dead.

The vision appears as a consolation, a divine response to her need. In the details of everyday life such as a towel or a basin of water, Clare could see in that very everydayness that there was a path upwards through the weariness of life at San Damiano. There at the summit Francis awaited her and the ascent seemed to her very easy. When she reached Francis, he gave her his own milk to drink. The fact that the saint was presented as in a feminine body did not pose any problem to Clare or to the other sisters. It is obvious that what is being expressed here is the spiritual maternity of Francis who gives Clare something to drink and nourishes her and thereby recognises her as
a daughter. For her this was an experience of happiness: it was so sweet and delightful that there was no way she could explain it.

Then, however, the dream had an unexpected development: after she had drunk,

what she had tasted was so sweet and delightful she in no way could describe it. After she had imbibed, that nipple or opening of the breast from which the milk comes remained between the lips of blessed Clare. 154

In other words, a part of the body of Francis, a part of Francis himself remained with Clare. Finally, after she took what remained in her mouth in her hands, it seemed to her it was gold so clear and bright that everything was seen in it as in a mirror. Clare had not only interiorised a part of Francis, but she herself had been transformed; her image and stature were the equal of Francis'. She herself through her dream had been transformed into a mirror of Francis, into another Francis. This then is the concrete significance which the vision must have had for the sisters of San Damiano. Confronted by any questions about who was their support after the death of Francis, the dream responds that it was Clare herself who had now been transformed into another Francis and that she would now be all the support they might need. This too is the reason why the sisters tell about the vision during the Canonisation process.

Just this dream on its own would be enough to demonstrate the depth and spiritual liberty which characterized the rapport between Clare and Francis. To this we can add the expressions used by Clare in her Rule where, abandoning legal formality, she defines herself most warmly as the 'unworthy handmaid of Christ and the little plant of the most blessed father Francis'. 155 We must not forget that here, as in the account of her vision, Clare is speaking of Francis some time after his death. So here too their relationship seems asymmetrical since from the time of Francis' death in 1226 until her own death in 1253, she transformed herself into a watchful witness of the blessed father's memory.

Clare, a witness to Francis
For over twenty-seven years, Clare survived the man who had persuaded her to leave everything in order, as a poor woman, to follow the poor Christ. Throughout these twenty-seven years she preserved and defended—sometimes not without difficulty—the ideal of life which she had learnt from Francis himself. These same twenty-seven years were also among the most dramatic in the history of the Franciscan movement. These were the years of beginning to build the basilica in Assisi while, simultaneously, Brother Elias became more and more alienated. They were the years of the canonisation of Francis but also the years of Quo elongati and of what has been described as the transition from 'intuition to institution'.

Throughout this time, Clare was not an isolated onlooker but one of the protagonists who determined and influenced the development of this religious movement which Francis had set in motion. Her prestige at the heart of the Order must have been considerable if we reflect that it was to her that Gregory IX himself went with great respect, and she who was, at the same time, in easy contact with Brother Elias as well as with Leo, Angelo and the other companions.

There is an incident which is related in one of the secondary sources which perhaps typifies the way in which the Franciscan movement had come to value Clare's role as custodian of Francis' memory. This source is the Life of Brother Giles, in which we are told that once a very learned brother had been invited to preach at San Damiano. While he was speaking, Brother Giles interrupted him and replaced him as the one speaking to the sisters. At the end, he