and to distribute the proceeds to the poor. They proposed to live with no possessions, following in the footprints of the poor Christ. The really remarkable aspect of the document arises from the fact that it considers poverty as a juridical value. What we have here is a short juridical monstrum which must have been a considerable surprise to the thirteen-century experts in canon law. The Privilege of Poverty (Privilegium paupertatis) is in fact the privilege of living without any privileges. It is a privilege which guarantees a life with no guarantees. It is a privilege given directly by the pope, the highest authority in the Church, to a young laywoman who had made her profession of religious life into the hands of an uneducated layman.

It would take the rest of Clare’s life for her to convince a pope to extend this recognition of the ‘differentness’ of the way of life practised in the women’s community at San Damiano. She was quite literally on her deathbed when she received that long-awaited, official approval of their unique way of life. On 9 August 1253, just two days before she died, Pope Innocent IV signed the official approval of Clare’s Rule, confirming the way of life of the San Damiano community.

At the end of her life, after calling together all her sisters, she entrusted the Privilege of Poverty to them. Her great desire had been to have had the Rule of the Order confirmed with a papal seal and then, on the following day, to die. It all happened just as she had wanted. She learned that a brother had come with letters bearing the papal seal. She reverently took them, and she pressed that seal to her mouth in order to kiss it.

Clare’s tenacity in clinging to this privilege is rooted in her conviction of the importance of poverty to Jesus, exemplified for her also in the way Francis and his brothers lived.

The Son of God never wished to abandon this holy poverty while he lived in the world, and our most blessed Father

...
Franciscan houses disturbed the consciences of some friars, who felt unable 'to observe the Rule spiritually', and when they appealed to their ministers for help, they often received rebuke instead. They wanted the Order to return to smaller, contemplative groups of brothers living in hermitages, supporting themselves by manual labour and begging. Many of the Spirituals in fact lived in the hermitages of southern France and central Italy.

Meditating on the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore, many Franciscans, including Bonaventure, saw Francis as a prophetic figure, announcing the coming of a 'New Age' of the Spirit, one in which the Church would be renewed and reformed, and in which the Franciscan Order would play a pivotal role. Some Spirituals took this meditation a step further, promoting a dramatic, apocalyptic spirituality, in which their own sufferings at the hands of superiors in the Order and the Church only confirmed their special role as the 'elect' awaiting the dawning of a new spiritual age (and their enemies were then easily labelled as the 'Antichrist'). An outstanding example of this approach is the 'History of the Seven Tribulations of the Order of Minors', written by the leader of Italian Spirituals, Angelo Clareno (d. 1337).

UBERTINO DA CASALE

A friar who was profoundly affected by the teaching of Angela of Foligno, Ubertino (d. 1330s) had been a student of Peter John Olivi (d. 1298), one of the great teachers of the Spirituals. Olivi and Ubertino emphasised poverty as essential to Christian perfection and, with other Spirituals, admired the apocalyptic spirituality of Joachim of Fiore.

In the Introduction to his work Sanctitas vestra ('Your Holiness'), Ubertino raises up what the Spirituals considered the fundamentals of the Franciscan way of living the gospel, proposing especially the example of their life as one of the seven fundamental qualities of the tradition. That life is lived in highest and hence pacific poverty; in most innocent simplicity, and thereby it eschews all subtlety and cunning; in spotless purity, hence set apart from the din of the world; in deep humility, whereby it avoids superiority, and anything inimical to respect for the hierarchy; in assiduous prayer and work, defence against distraction, idleness, greed and worldliness; in perfect charity, defence against mutual persecution and hatred; in being an example to others, and hence avoiding offence to the faint-hearted and the laity.

But the 'highest and hence pacific poverty' of the Spirituals seemed dangerously close to views about the poverty of Christ that seemed heretical. Ubertino himself received his own punishment for his views: exiled to the hermitage at La Vena, Ubertino wrote his masterwork, the Arbor vitae crucifixae Iesu ('The Tree of Life of Jesus Crucified'). In the context of exile, under the censure of church authorities, Ubertino turned to meditation on the cross, not as a symbol only of suffering, but as a life-giving tree.

In an extended allegory, the Arbor vitae compares the life, suffering and death of Jesus to the roots, the trunk, branches and fruit of the Tree of Life. It also contains moving meditations on the inner life of Jesus, his suffering prompted by love, and that love itself as the moving force of salvation. Following Joachim, Ubertino predicted that the unfaithful and 'carnal' Church of his day would soon return to this life-giving Tree, after passing through the end of the sixth 'state' of salvation history. Francis inaugurated this era, one of spiritual renewal, and it continued in the work of his true followers, those who embrace Lady Poverty (that is, the Spiritual Franciscans). One of the visions of the Book of Revelation provided Ubertino with his point of reference: 'Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God' (Revelation 7:2):

Let us now return to the perfection of Francis, declared to be the Angel of the Sixth Seal, not only by external wit-
nesses but also by his most perfect life. He ascends from the rising of the sun: always rising from virtue to virtue of Christ's mortal life in his holy way of living, he modelled himself on the life of Christ. And he had preemminently the sign of the living God: because of the merit of his life he was found uniquely worthy to bear truly in his body the signs of the wounds of the Crucified. He shone uniquely with the life of Christ: as is clear from his observance of the Gospel; in crucifixion, profound humility, extreme poverty, burning charity, desire for our salvation, the suffering of the cross, and merciful condescension and compassion for sinners and the suffering.  

In the Book of Revelation, this angel (not identified as the 'sixth') calls for marking the elect with the sign of salvation (Revelation 7:3–8). But the 'sixth angel' blows his trumpet to unleash plagues that kill a third of humankind (Revelation 9:13–19), a prediction of the punishments to be inflicted on those who rejected salvation (thus a warning to Ubertino's opponents). The Arbor vitae, with its fulminations against the Antichrist in the Church, also reflects the polemics of the time, especially the struggle between the Spirituals and Pope Boniface VIII. Other popes (Benedict XI, Clement V and John XXII) turned the forces of the Inquisition against these radical Franciscans. The movement met its own apocalypse in the person of John XXII. After arrests and excommunications, the last four Spirituals who refused to submit were burned alive in the marketplace of Marseilles on 7 May 1318.

By the middle of the fourteenth century, the meaning of poverty in the Franciscan tradition had changed dramatically. From the desire to live sine proprio in Francis and Clare, the Spirituals transformed it into an apocalyptic sign, charged with notions of the impending upheaval of a corrupt and wealthy church establishment.

Despite the excesses of some of the Spirituals, we are beginning to see today the important service to the Franciscan tradition performed by these 'revolutionaries of the Spirit'. They remained familiar with the broad corpus of Francis' own writings, and kept alive valuable oral and written traditions about the early years of the Franciscan movement. Some of these traditions are reflected (and coloured by the Spirituals' prejudices) in works like The Mirror of Perfection and the Fioretti, The Little Flowers of Saint Francis'. And their relentless emphasis on the early style of life in hermitages helped to shape revivals of the practice of poverty and contemplation for centuries. These revivals included the Observant movement in the fifteenth century; and the 'houses of recollection', 'retiros' and the Capuchin reform in the sixteenth century. These groups in turn were the living environment for important Franciscan mystics and spiritual writers, and for the development of forms of popular devotions, as well as systems of prayer, meditation and contemplation.
Here Bonaventure establishes an important principle of the Franciscan tradition of contemplation: its availability to every true seeker. Francis did not put into words a system or technique of contemplative prayer. What he did offer was himself, his 'example', which others can follow. And the high point of this example is Francis' loving rapture of contemplative union with the crucified Christ during his retreat on the mountain of La Verna shortly before his death. The way to follow Francis' example is not, ironically, the intellectual quest so dear to Bonaventure as a theologian. It is rather a journey, a passing over, at the level of the heart, not the mind:

But if you wish to know how these things come about, ask grace not instruction, desire not understanding, the groaning of prayer not diligent reading . . . not light but the fire . . . This fire is God . . . and Christ enkindles it in the heat of his burning passion. 22

GIOVANNI DE CAULIBUS

An important Franciscan writer whose work would influence later generations was the Tuscan Giovanni de Caulibus (d. c.1335). As Lázaro Iriarte noted in the Introduction of his translation of this work, the 'Meditations' are one of the most significant texts of medieval asceticism and mysticism. They are a profoundly personal, interior meditation on events in the life of Christ, in a style characteristic of the Deuotio moderna. 23 The work was highly popular in its day, translated into many languages. Originally composed for a Poor Clare, it was later echoed in the Vita Christi of Ludolph of Saxony. In it we have a systematic approach to meditation on the Life of Christ, organised according to a weekly schedule, as in this 'Method to Use in Meditation on the Life of Christ'.

Now I want to give you a method to use when you preach or meditate on the preceding pages . . .

You should know that it is sufficient to meditate each time on a single episode or single word of which the Lord is protagonist, or which happened in his presence according to the Gospel account. You must make yourself present as if you were assisting at the event that is being described, remaining in simplicity, with the soul, as it were, naked.

. . . To meditate, choose a quiet hour . . . Divide the meditations in this way: start on Monday and go as far as the flight of Jesus into Egypt, and leave him there until Tuesday. Then, making the return trip with him, continue the meditation to the moment when Jesus opens the Book in the synagogue. Take up at that point on Wednesday, and go as far as the services offered to Jesus by Mary and Martha. Thursday take up the account again, up to the Passion. Friday and Saturday continue up to the moment of the Lord's resurrection. Finally, on Sunday, meditate on the whole account of the resurrection up to the end of the book. 24

Here we have the kind of practical instruction in a method of 'discursive' prayer that would be a mainstay of various schools of spirituality in the following centuries. But the Franciscan tradition was also to move in other directions, particularly in Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with a renewed interest in the 'art of contemplation'.

THE GOLDEN AGE

The great flowering of Franciscan contemplative practice and reflection had its centre in Spain in the sixteenth century, the so-called 'Golden Age' of Spanish mysticism. The most familiar names from that period are probably those of the great Carmelite mystics and reformers, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. But there are also some very significant figures from
the Franciscan tradition who contributed to that history as well.

The renewal of the Franciscan contemplative tradition in Spain and elsewhere grew out of a new form of the hermitage tradition of the Order. As mentioned earlier, in regard to the Spirituals, various reform movements after them turned back to the type of life modelled in Francis' Rule for brothers living in hermitages. In the latter part of the fourteenth century the movement called the 'Observance' grouped together communities of Lesser Brothers seeking a 'regular observance' of the Rule, with greater emphasis on poverty; emphasising the role of lay brothers (the head of the group was Paoluccio de' Trinci, a lay brother from Foligno); and a return to the life in hermitages, away from the larger urban friaries (conventi) and churches. It was the eventual dominance of this reform movement that led, in 1517, to the division of the Lesser Brothers (Friars Minor) into two distinct families: the Friars Minor Conventual and the Friars Minor of the Observance.

Another reform movement, with its centre in Spain, established retiros, contemplative Franciscan communities outside the large cities. These communities produced most of the great writers of Franciscan spirituality in Spain in the sixteenth century. As the movement spread to Italy, it inspired the foundation of other communities there. The Friars Minor Capuchin, founded in 1525, were originally called the Friars 'of Eremitical Life', because of their practice of the contemplative life in hermitages as a fundamental aspect of their Franciscan life. The Capuchins became another independent family of Friars Minor in 1619, and contributed greatly to the spreading of Franciscan spirituality during the Catholic Reformation, in the wake of the Council of Trent.

With this history in mind, let us turn to some of the authors from these new movements whose work contributed to the great revival of mysticism and contemplative prayer in Spain.

**HENDRIK HERP**

Little known today, but of great importance for understanding Spanish mysticism of the 1500s, is the Flemish Franciscan Hendrik Herp (d. 1477), also known as 'Harphius'. He was a disciple of the mystic Jan Ruysbroeck, and belonged to the Brothers of the Common Life in Delft, in the Netherlands. (This community of Brothers also gave us the classic of Catholic spirituality, *The Imitation of Christ.*) In 1450, unexpectedly, he became a Franciscan, joining the Observant Reform of the Friars Minor. Herp wrote several works on Christian mysticism, including *Spieghel der volcomenheit* ('The Mirror of Perfection') and a group of works assembled after his death by his disciples, the *Theologia mystica.*

The figure of Francis and the mystical writings of Bonaventure recur in his works, and he emphasises the affective (rather than intellectual) approach to contemplation seen in the *Soul's Journey.* Herp also expresses a great confidence that every Christian can reach mystical union with God, and thus represents one of many Franciscan exponents of the 'democratisation of contemplation'.

There follows the third and highest life, that called the transcendent contemplative life, represented by Mary Magdalene, who 'chose the better part' [Luke 10:27]. According to the tradition of the Scriptures, human beings were created to be in the company of angels in glory... The transcendent contemplative life occupies the highest rank in the divine illuminations. It therefore requires that a person climb many rungs of virtues, especially through true mortification. One must do all in one's power to prepare oneself beforehand, in a useful and sound way, to receive from God that supreme communication of the transcendent contemplative life. Sometimes people who are still in the life of proficients, or even beginners, receive this gift. Some [receive it] even in the first moment of their conversion, as happened to the Apostle St Paul. As