



EVERYTHING BELONGS

The Legacy of Clare
with Sr. Margaret Carney

Paul Swanson: Hey everyone. Welcome to Everything Belongs where we seek to live the teachings of Richard Rohr forward. Today we are talking about Richard's book, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*, and we're focused on Chapter 9 *The Legacy of Clare: Living the Life at Depth*. And a lot of you are reading along here with us, but there's no pressure to do so. If you're just absorbing these conversations, you can still get to the depth and the marrow of this book through listening to these conversations and I'm so grateful here to be with Drew Jackson. Drew, how are you doing today?

Drew Jackson: I'm doing okay, Paul. How are you?

Paul Swanson: I'm good, I'm good. I love these chances for us to talk about this work and hear how it hits us from the various angles of insight of the Franciscan tradition. I would love to know, since in the latter half of the conversation you and I are in conversation with Sister Margaret Carney, an expert on Clare of Assisi, but how about you? When did you first come to know Clare of Assisi? Was she right there alongside Francis when you first entered the Franciscan spiritual tradition?

Drew Jackson: I heard about Francis in seminary and I heard about Clare very peripherally. It wasn't a focus, which seems to be on point with the way that Clare is introduced into this conversation with Francis as this side character in the story. Though, as you get into hearing more about Clare and her story, you realize how central she is to the whole thing, but it really wasn't until reading Richard's book *Eager to Love* that Clare started to become more in focus and in view for me as I thought about Franciscan spirituality.

Paul Swanson: I love that. I think that's the experience of so many of us where we first learned of Clare, it's almost like a sidekick and then you start to realize her own vibrant ministry and the specifics of it and her own unique genius that she brought to this movement that was happening. And there's some overlapping themes from the conversation that Mike and I have with Richard and that you and I have with Sister Margaret and I love one of the things that you brought up later with Sister Margaret by around the radicality. How does the radicality of Clare's lived experience and offerings speak in this moment do you think, for understanding the Franciscan tradition and how it can speak to us today?

Drew Jackson: I mean, there's so much in Clare's life that is really important I think for us to consider in terms of how we live out this tradition in our context today. Because as Richard reflects on in his book, Clare really took the teachings of Francis and lived them practically, put them into practice. Clare and the sisters brought them forward in a way that the brothers over time lost. And I know Richard expounds on that. We ask Sister Margaret Carney about that, and there's really something about the way that Clare and the sisters embrace this downward mobility that speaks so much and so vibrant leads us today.

Paul Swanson: I love just letting some of these themes rewash over us as we think about how folks might be prepared to hear them. We circle out some of those waters with Richard and I think it tees up more of the radicality that we get to with Sister Margaret about how she embodies that so much in her spirit. But how Richard, part of his own calling is how does he teach the breath and expression in a way to invite people to get a first taste of Franciscan spirituality and then later on I feel like Sister Margaret pushes us into the deep end of what that means in a lived experience.

Drew Jackson: And just the way that she wrestles with that as she tries to stay in her own life, faithful to the radicality of the tradition being in the midst of institutional life. So that's one of the things that we ask her about is how do you do that? How do you wrestle with that? And I think that's a question that for all of us in the various ways that we are living our lives, the jobs that we have, the places we're at, how do we wrestle with the radical call of Francis, of Jesus in the midst of these institutions and lived experiences that we have is an important one for all of us to keep wrestling with.

Paul Swanson: And that's why I keep being inspired and re-inspired by Francis and Clare and Jesus. It's like they keep opening up these windows to what does it mean to live in this radical way of love, no matter your context, to hear Sister Margaret speak of it in the, how to live into that in the institutional life. It's compelling and challenging to think, well, what does that mean for my own location in a nonprofit, in a neighborhood with the PTA? Just like the little things that the different communities that we touch. So I think there's so much in this conversation to glean from and so many things to take away. So we hope everyone will enjoy this conversation that Mike and I have with Richard as we step into Richard's Hermitage. And then after that, the conversation that Drew and I have with Sister Margaret.

Mike Petrow: From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petrow.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Drew Jackson: And I'm Drew Jackson.

Mike Petrow: And this is Everything Belongs.

Paul Swanson: Richard, thanks for having us back. It was a delight to talk about the integration of feminine masculine last time and today we're going to focus on Chapter 9 The Legacy of Clare: Living the Life at Depth. And thinking about Clare and I was thinking about the CAC, as the CAC is nearing its fourth decade, it's always been in this block right of Albuquerque in its entire almost 40 years.

Richard Rohr: Next door here is where we started.

Paul Swanson: That's what I thought. I was thinking about Clare's 40-year commitment to one spot, her enclosed community, San Damiano, outside the walls of Assisi and how that was her school of love, prayer and transformation. So as I think about you, four decades in Albuquerque, how do you see the CAC and Albuquerque as a school of your love, prayer and transformation?

Richard Rohr: Well, I hope it is. I sometimes hope that we are a school and not just a business. And don't hear that wrongly, I don't mean it in a terribly negative way, but I sometimes feel the people at a distance from Albuquerque, from the center, are more enamored with our teaching than the staff and the board are. How does that happen? Well, my five, man, movement, monument, machine, museum, you can't avoid them. We're already at the monument, machine level and that allows people to buy in at that level, which is what happened to Benedictine monasticism, which was the form of religious life until Francis.

The existing monastery stood on the hilltop on the edge of town, and this defined the monk,

defined what sincere Christianity was. But you know what? That's not really fair. Sincere Christianity didn't demand celibacy, didn't demand living in a big building where you shared everything in common. In terms of my order, disorder, reorder, the first 1,200 years in terms of sincere practitioners were the monastic movement. What Francis represents is disorder.

Mike Petrow: Oh, interesting.

Richard Rohr: His is not an imperial looking for more identification with the state, with order, with ownership, with obedience to an abbot. It's not top down. He takes the top down and he makes it shoulder to shoulder, but he doesn't throw out the respect for obedience. It's a new combination. Obedience, but not the idealization of obedience to another person.

Mike Petrow: I love that. When I think of Francis and Clare together as a dia, the two of them, you have Francis who's always on the road, he's always walking, he's always going somewhere, and then you have Clare who stays in one place, and I love both of those movements together. When I hear people talk about stability of place as a monastic value or a contemplative value, I'm 47. I've moved every five years, a big move. I've moved to a different region of the country every five years, the entirety of my adult life, so I don't relate to that, and lately I crave... My favorite Mythologist Martin Shaw talks about the difference between being from a place and of a place. I crave connection with a place and a community. How long have you been in this house, Richard?

Richard Rohr: This house?

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: 26.

Mike Petrow: 26 years in this house, 40 years in Albuquerque. And you have a little bit of Francis and Clare, because you've also traveled the world and done all this, but you've come home to this one place for four decades. Has it taught you something, the stability of just being here for so long?

Richard Rohr: I've learned to love this space more and more as I've watched the trees grow around the house that some of which we planted. As I've reflected on, I'll see movies of Germany or France or Italy and I can almost always say, "Oh, I was there, I was there. I was there and it's wonderful." But I have no need to go back, but I'm sure glad I was there. I wouldn't have the energy to do again. The food was sure good.

Mike Petrow: Well, I love having listened to you in this turn in the last few years with your focus on the practice of gazing and that idea of, I love when Ram Dass says, "Love a cat, love a tree, love anything, and let that move you to love itself."

Richard Rohr: He's right, he's right.

Mike Petrow: Your just willingness to be here and stay with one thing over time and let it teach you

and yet you have-

Richard Rohr: To love one thing is to learn to love everything. It's the same process, it's the same surrender, it's the same energy.

Mike Petrow: So I don't want to reduce... We'd be so wrong to reduce Clare to a figure in France's story because she was a teacher in her own right and it seems like she taught Francis quite a bit. What do you think Clare taught Francis and teaches us?

Richard Rohr: The first honest answer is I don't know. There's one wonderful story and it's now immortalized in some sculpture down in the plane below Assisi where one of the few times she left San Damiano was to have a picnic with Francis and another nun and another friar, but there's now four statues of sitting on the ground in this area, which they think it might've happened. She allowed herself to be taught by him, but he allowed him himself to be taught by her. But what was it? I don't know. Not that I doubt, but certainly I do think he admired her contentment in one place, whereas he's traveling all over central and northern Italy.

Paul Swanson: Well, to keep going with Clare and thinking about Clare's spiritual genius, and it does get overlooked because Francis was such a larger-

Richard Rohr: Franciscanism.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: We don't call it Clareism.

Paul Swanson: Thanks to authors like Sister Margaret Carney, the vitality of Clare is being shared more now than ever.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: And we've already touched in previous episodes about Clare's use the mirror as an image and polishing the mirror as her favorite metaphor for doing the work to be able to reflect God and likeness. So thinking about how a person like that gets formed-

Richard Rohr: Let me correct you. It's not really polishing the mirror, that's more Buddhism. For Clare, it's trusting the world of reflection, that the energy is transferred by gazing and reflecting.

Paul Swanson: So our role rather than polishing is just allow to be-

Richard Rohr: Yes, allowing the reflection.

Paul Swanson: Okay.

Richard Rohr: If you read her paragraphs on mirror, it's always reflecting, not getting the more perfect mirror. In fact, that would make her very different than a lot of teachers. It's not about asceticism or moral improvement in Clare, nor is it in Francis. Go ahead.

Paul Swanson: No, thank you for that because those details matter. Those details matter.

Mike Petrow: Well, it feels like Richard, you become more Clare-like as you've gotten older.

Richard Rohr: Well, probably, yeah. Just to accept the impression that comes your way as a gift, let it rub off on you, is the way we talk and all starting with Jesus as the impression of the Father. He received, then he turns the mirror on us and we receive, but it's not a moral asceticism. It gets us there. It's a reflection. Yeah, go ahead.

Paul Swanson: Thank you. Thank you for that. I want to think about these three different aspects of Clare and what they might have to teach us as contemplate as in the world today. We have Clare's own personhood with this mirror image. She founded a community outside the walls of Assisi, so outside the walls of the dominant structure at the time, and adopted a radical rule of life where poverty was bringing her closer to God. What do you think taking this mirror, this being outside of the Empire and also adopting a radical rule of life, what do you think we have to learn from her as contemplate as in the world today, that may be a little Distinct from what we had to learn from Francis, knowing that they overlap and are enmeshed and the waves pour over each other, but what do you think we particularly have to learn from Clare considering those three elements?

Richard Rohr: What comes to mind, I'm not sure it's the best answer, but the absolute centrality of lifestyle, of situating oneself inside the mystery of vulnerability in her case, not being structurally supported, structurally admired. When you shut yourself off, you don't just shut yourself off from the economic system, but from the gaze of other people telling you how wonderful you are.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Richard Rohr: If you go to San Damiano, you'll see the sisters all lived behind a wall. So if they had the admiration of Assisi, they didn't get to enjoy it. The men did, who they probably needed it, but they had to seek the reflection from God alone on a daily basis to know their own value. They couldn't seek, like we clergy can get it. People admire our sermon or admire our ministry or admire our quaint brown robe or whatever. They really refined the process by not going there very much, almost not at all. When you go into the present San Chiara church in Upper Assisi, in the medieval period, they finally had to move out of San Damiano, up the hill inside the walls. History had become so violent that everybody was afraid the nuns would be attacked. And so the nuns, we never forgave them for them because by night they stole the San Damiano cross and took it up there.

They still have it. The cross that spoke to Francis hangs in the upper church. When you come in the upper church, just sit there a while and you'll hear the feminine voices from the upper choir loft where can't see them chanting. So you know they exist. You hear their song, but you can't see them. The women deliberately separated themselves. They had begging nuns who went out every day into Assisi, wish I could take you all there and walk you down the hill from the gate to San Damiano. It's about a 12 minute, 15 minute walk, rather steep walk.

Mike Petrow: It is interesting to think about the activism, cultural criticism and counter-cultural move to step out of the male gaze in a patriarchal culture.

Richard Rohr: That's it. Step out of the male gaze. We don't need your admiration.

Paul Swanson: You've touched on it so well, where Francis spoke and preached about it and Clare quietly lived it.

Richard Rohr: Quietly lived it.

Mike Petrow: She's a real show, don't tell.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, which is-

Richard Rohr: A real what?

Mike Petrow: Show, don't tell.

Richard Rohr: Show. Oh, very good. Yeah. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I think in a time of a lot of telling right now, a lot of shouting from platforms, it's lovely to be reminded of the way of Clare, of just quietly doing what she does.

Richard Rohr: Quietly doing it and not needing or wanting your admiration.

Mike Petrow: Well, I love-

Richard Rohr: So I have to depend totally on the admiration of God.

Mike Petrow: Yes. You describe her as living with such depth in charity, in choosing and facing human with limitation, that she created a lifestyle that made both depth and divine encounter highly possible, emotionally necessary, and normally inevitable. It's a great sentence and it's a great way to live. Short of our listeners going and joining the Poor Clares, how would you invite our listeners into the potentiality of possibility that Clare created with her lifestyle, with her reflection, with her commitment to place with her leadership?

Richard Rohr: It's somehow seeking purity of art. I wish we had nearby a convent of healthy, Poor Clares. We have such a community in Cincinnati on the grounds of the minor Seminary. They're out in the woods now. But from the moment the door opens, it's all laughter and smiles.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Richard Rohr: I would have to say, the Poor Clares are much happier than the Friars, not the word grumpy, but the nuns are just lighthearted because I think by midlife they found purity of heart. Why am I doing this every day?

Mike Petrow: And I have to ask as we close. For some of our listeners, they might hear that in a different way. Purity heart and purity culture and purity codes could not be more different.

Richard Rohr: It has nothing to do with sex. Purity of heart has to do with motivation that has been purified. You have to have to get up each day over many days and ask yourself, "Why am I doing this?" And unless you come up with an answer for the love of, for the love of my wife and my children, you need as most of American needs now, fame and money and power.

Mike Petrow: With that commitment to a task. It reminds me of that movie that you talk about.

Paul Swanson: Oh, Perfect Days?

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Oh, yeah. Perfect Days is a beautiful movie directed by Wim Wenders about a man in Japan who cleans toilets. Is this something you're thinking about?

Mike Petrow: Yep, 100%.

Paul Swanson: And he does it with such dedication, such joy as a way of service. And you just watch him. The movie's mostly quiet. He barely speaks throughout the film, but you see his attention to detail, his attention to nature, his attention to those that he's serving. And to me, it's one of the most contemplative movies I've ever seen.

Richard Rohr: Was it ever in the theaters?

Paul Swanson: It was briefly. I think it was nominated for best foreign film last year. I was just blown away by it. I know I'll revisit it many times. And then as you see the intrusion of suffering, you see him wrestle with it, but maintain that same dedication and joy despite circumstances that his joy is larger than the trial.

Richard Rohr: He's written to me.

Paul Swanson: Yes, I do.

Richard Rohr: Wim Wenders. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I think he makes remarkable films like that, that point to this lifestyle.

Richard Rohr: I'd love it. Perfect Day. I'll look for it.

Mike Petrow: That commitment to a task or a service or a place or a tree or a cat. It's so beautiful. And what space for reflection. Yeah. Thanks both of you for this. This has been a really enlightening conversation.

Paul Swanson: It's been great. Thank you, Richard. Thank you, Mike.

Mike Petrow: Thank you, Clare.

Paul Swanson: And Opie.

Mike Petrow: And Opie.

Richard Rohr: Who's the man in Kentucky, the farmer?

Paul Swanson: Wendell Berry.

Richard Rohr: Wendell Berry. He's an example of this, who learns how to love one piece of land and talk about it so well.

Paul Swanson: I was going to bring him up earlier. He's got this great line about how maybe the gifts of marriage aren't actually available until you've been married for 50 years. And what I like about that line is just that maybe it's that long-term commitment where you learn so much about yourself and how to love because you know over and over again, you don't know how to love.

Richard Rohr: You don't know how to love.

Paul Swanson: And so after 50 years, maybe you've begun. And I just find that so humbling as somebody who's trying to figure out a love. Thanks again, Richard, for the time today. I appreciate it.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Wonderful. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Richard Rohr: For caring about such things. Thank you. God bless.

Mike Petrow: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Paul Swanson: Today, Drew and I are in conversation with Sister Margaret Carney. Margaret Carney is a member of the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Neumann Communities. Her education in theology and Franciscan studies took place at Duquesne University, the Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University and the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome. To name, but a few of Sister Margaret's accolades. She was the director of the Franciscan Institute, a founding member of the Commission on the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition, president of St. Bonaventure University and continues to serve as a lecturer and leader for Catholic higher education and Franciscan organizations of the United States. Sister Margaret's most recent book is *Light of Assisi: The Story of Saint Clare*.

Sister Margaret, welcome to *Everything Belongs*. We're so thrilled to have you here to talk about Chapter 9 *The Legacy of Clare: Living the Life at Depth*. When we were first talking with Father Richard about who we might want to be in conversation with on this book, your name got mentioned and he was over the moon and he was like, "Do you think we can get her?" Because his respect for your writing and teaching is on a next level. And so it was really fun to hear Richard respond in that way. So we just want to say welcome and we're thrilled to have this conversation with you. And as a way to begin, we would love to know you've immersed yourself so much in Franciscan spirituality and have written so exquisitely on Clare. How did you first get introduced to Francis and Clare of Assisi?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Well, just by way of preface, let me say that I'm very happy to be got by *Everything Belongs* for Father Richard. It's an honor, really. I began to be really attracted to the way of Francis as a teenager because back in that time, which is a very long time ago, people before the age of 21 could be admitted to the secular Franciscan order. And there were a group of dynamic Capuchins here in the Pittsburgh area where I was growing up that worked with the Franciscan high schools. There were four at the time to create high school level fraternities of Franciscans. And it would begin with you'd go off to a retreat house for a day and you'd come out, I want to be like Francis.

And so you entered into this organization and one of the things that we did during my

time, which was pretty advanced, was we set up a very intentional way of relating to the adult fraternities so that we were not just a group of teenagers moaning and complaining and talking to each other, but that we had a lot of adult friends giving us a hand to move forward. By the time I was ready to graduate, I knew though that I wanted to really enter the Franciscan order, which I did. And since that time, I think I have been able to stay the course because of numerous Franciscan men and women, but also men and women who aren't in the order, but who value religious life and the work that needs to be done and the life that needs to be lived. And so I'm still here.

Paul Swanson: In that spirit. Sister Margaret, it is wonderful to hear how you're drawn into this. What was it that eventually made you decide that you want to enter into religious life?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: I think that I really felt I was called to it. It's a mysterious thing. It wasn't that I didn't have other attractions. I wanted to write the Great American novel to be another Emily Dickinson or to marry and have a family, but this attraction to living as Francis lived took over all of that. And I just wanted to get as close to that as I could. And I was in a high school taught by Franciscan sisters who once they realized that I was getting serious about this, of course gave a lot of support. And it was a time when a lot of young people still looked at religious life as an attractive option.

Drew Jackson: Sister Margaret. I mean, there's so much about Francis's life that I know personally for me is so compelling. Was there something specific about Francis's witness that was really compelling for you and moving you toward stepping into religious life?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: I think, Drew, it was the joy. The fact that he was always focused on the life of Jesus, the suffering of Jesus, the suffering of the poor. But this joy bubbled up inside of him like a living spring of water. And I think it's the mystery of how do you live constantly engaged with the thought of a suffering savior, suffering all around you and still have that inner energy from the Holy Spirit. And so I do think that that was a magnet. Is it possible to live that way and to discover how one maintains that balance and it's become, I would say, even more important and more challenging with the passing years.

Drew Jackson: To that end, I know you've spent so much time inside of institutions, be it church, be it educational institutions. How has that meshed or clashed with embodying that prophetic and radical Franciscan lineage?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Drew, the way to work into those situations as a Franciscan is not one single way. So for example, there have been times when my work has been in a totally Franciscan setting, St. Bonaventure University. And in some ways it's almost like a dream job because everybody knows what we're about is a Franciscan mission. Do we keep our ideals? Do we act optimally all the time? No, we don't. But it's clear what should be and what we should all be striving for. And other times, the mission of the place or the people or the local community was a little more diffuse, a parish, a high school, et cetera. And I think what can happen, and this was happening to me in my younger years, was you become discouraged.

You just feel that what your ideals are, and this form, whether it was a school or your own religious community or the local diocese was just so far from what you thought was the right thing that you could become, you could just chuck the whole thing. And I was always

blessed to have really wise friends and mentors. And I remember one in particular, Father Robert McCreary, now deceased, who said to me, “Margaret, the difference between Peter and Judas, they both betrayed Jesus. One kept hanging around with the other believers, the other went off on his own and destroyed himself.” Keep hanging around with the other believers. And I just thought that was terrific advice. I look back now and I know it was terrific advice.

Paul Swanson: That line about hanging around believers and that not moving towards isolation. And it reminded me of something that I’m very interested in about Clare’s life, about her 40-year commitment to place, her enclosed community and participating in that as the school of love, of transformation, the school of prayer. And I think about that now in our very, we live in a culture that quickly picks up and moves, doesn’t think about place, and that is the grounds of one’s ministry and service to the world. What do you think we can learn from Clare’s commitment to place in today’s world? What is she teaching us, do you think?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Paul, I think you are onto something very important. First of all, let me say, we look back from the vantage point of the 21st century and we think about somebody committing to stay in one place for a lifetime, and it just feels like mission impossible. However, had she not entered into a monastery, she probably still would have been in one place, which the family palazzo, she would’ve been part of this noble family. So the notion that one is constantly on the move is I think so much a part of the American experience. We’re always pushing westward. Of course we’ve pushed westward, now we’re pushing to Mars, but it’s always like, let’s conquer the next thing. And I think for Europeans, places, you stay rooted in a place even though it’s long ceased to function, the Roman Forum for example. But it tells you something about who you are.

So I do think that we can be, shall we say frivolous about the importance of place. And yet we have to be able to look at places as places where life and grace and really good things happen and are facilitated by what are the contents of the place in terms of people and environment. But at the same time, the places can become a prison and we can become either so attached or so enmeshed That we can’t move out of it. But I do think we have a tendency in our culture when something isn’t working, move on, get rid of it, put it behind you. Some advice I’ve given to young friends to recent college graduates. Very often, your first job is not the dream job you thought you were going to get. And don’t be too quick to quit that job because you don’t want the first thing in your record of employment to be you lasted six months.

It’s like we don’t have the stick-to-itiveness of staying with a place and people long enough to break through to see if maybe there is a bigger life than what we imagine or experience in the initial stage. And I think for Clare, the place of course, was prepared by Francis for her. So it wasn’t simply the people from the local realty company came down and said, “Clare, we have three old monasteries for you to look at.” Francis had worked on this building and actually predicted that someday women would live there, which a lot of people think is very mysterious. But he knew about this movement of women to form small households of Christian life and piety. And so it’s not too much to imagine that he was thinking, “What am I doing this for?” Well, maybe someday we’ll have some women come and be part of this.

Paul Swanson: And I appreciate the lens of extracting lessons from our context and how it would’ve been

very different back then. And part of what I heard in that your response as well was that was the life of the times in Italy in Assisi of that time. And would you say that her commitment was more to the community or that was just the circumstances of the life, in those times?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: I would say it was the circumstance of the life. I mean, once you entered into a religious or monastic form of life, and San Damiano became more monastic within five years because of the church's determinations about it, you did not expect ever to leave that place unless you were sent to help found another monastery or there was a fire or a flood. In other words, you cast the anchor of your soul and that's where you would be. So it wasn't as though you're always like, gee, I wonder where I can move to next. It's not part of the mental horizon of people.

Drew Jackson: Sister Margaret, one of the things that comes through in Clare's work is that the metaphorical image of the mirror seems to be a favorite image of hers. And I was wondering if you could just elaborate a little bit on Clare's use of the mirror and what she meant by it and what we can learn from it.

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Well, I think Richard of course, does a wonderful job of opening this up for us and seeing what a rich pathway it is. So let me say, first of all, we need to know that the mirrors that Clare's would've known in her time are not quite the way ours are. This glass that gives you a perfect reflection. It was a polished metal. The reflection would not have been quite as photographically accurate, but it was for all of that a mirror. And I believe that probably mirrors were a sensation for women in particular who had to dress with very beautiful headdresses and hair stylings and things of that nature. And so Clare takes that and asks, when I look, what do I want to be looking back at me? And she uses that to give her sisters a way of thinking about what it means to gradually become a living example of what St. Paul said, "I no longer live. It is Christ who lives in me." So if I'm looking at that mirror, can I begin to see that Christ is living in me?

And so she offers that idea and then she works it through, very carefully look at the edges and look at the center. But she is also in doing that, giving the sisters the winning lottery ticket of how to become more contemplative. And the winning lottery ticket is you learn who was Jesus, you learn what he said, what he did, how he responded, how he did not respond, and that you keep focusing on that in that mirror until every time you look, you see it more clearly. And so on the one hand, it's a metaphor where it's a little, the woman is looking at the mirror, she's seeing Christ. Clare is very clear. You are seeing what you have studied because you're listening to the gospel, you're listening to the sermons of the friars or Cistercian monks who came and preached to them at San Damiano. So we're absorbing everything we can to know who Jesus was and who he is. And that becomes what you reflect out to the world.

Drew Jackson: That's such a beautiful image. As you say that, I keep hearing that refrain from the Apostle Paul where he says, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." And to see that reflected back to you and then to mirror that out into the world, that's beautiful.

Sr. Margaret Ca...: I'll share one little anecdote about how powerfully that image came to play a role later in my life, after I was done with my studies. For a period of time, I was the minister of my congregation and we entered into a dramatic renovation of our chapel, which was pretty

scary because the sisters loved the chapel as it was, but it really needed to be updated. And so we had a remarkable young designer and architect working with us, and we started to work on the processional cross, the cross you carry in at the beginning of mass or for a big ceremony.

And of course, we said we wanted to be like the San Damiano cross in the shape. And he began to talk out loud about what might happen with the figure of Jesus. And all of a sudden I just blurted out, "Could there be a mirror?" And everybody just looked at me like, "Are you kidding?" I said, "No. Could we make it a mirror?" He did. He created an orb in the middle of that cross, and when the cross moved down the aisle, all the sisters were reflected in it.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Sr. Margaret Ca...: So it can be very meaningful.

Paul Swanson: What a story. And that metaphor of the mirror has been potent in my own life, learning from Clare in that way. And one of the things about Clare is, oh, well, let me just say this about all the saints, like St. Francis is such a popular saint and there are statues everywhere, so many towns and churches named after him. And he overshadows almost every other saint that I can think of. And I think there's a loss in that of like Clare has so much to offer. And so I want to ask you Sister Margaret, what do you think that Clare uniquely offers that you wish more people would know about her outside the shadow of Francis? Not negating the fact that they had a wonderful relationship, but what would you love for people to know more about Clare, about whether it's her person or her practices?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Well, let me say first something about the shadow of Francis, and to say that there was a inevitability that she would be overshadowed because the male branches of the Franciscan order for eight centuries have been able to have their men educated, keep the Chronicles, men who are authors, scholars. So telling the story of Francis and the order always had resources. The women's monasteries didn't have that. Every monastery was independent. Some had a library that was fabulous, some very little. So you have a big difference in the resources for managing the scholarship necessary or the learning necessary. And so only when we come into the 20th century and you start to have the rising women's movement, do people start realizing, oh my golly, we've ignored these women. Let's start looking. And I'm happy to say the shadow of Francis is gradually moving away, and Clare is more and more emerging as a co-equal partner in this movement's founding and flourishing.

So I do think that what she represents that is different is precisely, and this goes back to your earlier question, Paul, the stability of trying to develop the life in a stable community in a stable place where circumstances remain somewhat predictable over time. So you learn how to govern, you learn how to manage problems, you learn where to go for help when you live in that a circumstance. The friars were itinerant. When they began to move away from central Italy, A, they didn't know languages, they didn't understand the cultures they moved into, and they could often get into real trouble because of that. And so the ability for them to come up with forms of community governing forms of even observing material poverty. For example, when the friars went to England, they were forbidden to beg. Why? England is an island economy.

England could not afford to have a lot of begging religious going door to door that people barely had enough. So the friars quickly had to come up with a means to be able to feed themselves that didn't depend just on begging. So we need to understand that encountering the difference in culture, in mission, in place had a huge impact on the friars. And Clare was able to leave us an example of in a stable situation, here are some of the ways that you grow and move together. And I would say as the friars more and more created similarly stable situations, monasteries in every town and little village and a form of governance that was able to be renewed every couple of years and so on, they too came to that. But they were an enormous international organization with very different problems and very different potential.

Drew Jackson: One of the things that Father Richard articulates in his chapter on Clare is that over time, the Franciscan brothers largely got caught up in institutions and with power. And in doing so, there was a loss of their social critique. And he says, "Francis's radical poverty was soon forgotten, deemed impossible or quietly rejected, for it placed him in a different social class than men prefer quite specifically the minors and not the majors." And then he goes on to say, he says, "Only Clare and her sisters created a way for the radical life of Francis to be actually lived with freedom and joy." And so what I understand Richard to be getting at here is the difficulty that the male ego has because of its relationship to power in embracing the downward path modeled by Francis and Clare. And so I just would love to invite you to speak just what are your thoughts on this, and would you articulate it similarly or differently? How have you seen that played out?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Well, the whole downward mobility vocation of Franciscans is certainly a big challenge. So I would offer these reflections. First of all, it is true that Clare and the sisters were able to hold on to an ideal that was very strenuous. And what we need to realize is the poverty that she wanted was that the sisters would not own vast lands of property, which monasteries typically owned and then rented out, and the tenant farmer would farm that property and bring produce or revenues back to the monastery. That's how the monasteries lived. That's how the women were fed and clothed. And Clare is saying, "No, no, no, we don't want that." And church leaders are like, "What do you mean you don't want that? That's the only way." And Clare is basically saying, "Watch me, give me a chance here. Just give me a chance."

So Clare is trying to demonstrate that women would be capable of earning their own way at a level of poverty and simplicity with the right circumstances, and that they don't need to own gazillions of acres or hectares of farmland or buildings or watermills, that there is a path which they can be successful. What is happening with the friars is a very different situation. And I want to say that we see the friars, and I think Richard is clear about this, falling away from the ideal. And once you start to fall away, you find all kinds of ways to justify it. But I would also say that we need to really understand the structures that made living the initial ideal, really difficult, if not impossible for the order once it reached a certain size. So for example, in the early years of Francis, the numbers of men were small. They could arrive in Assisi or Bologna or Spoleto and go around knocking on doors and there'd be enough soup for lunch.

Once you've got 5,000 people, you're not knocking on the doors to get soup for lunch. There has to be some system to provide for large numbers. And the other thing is that once

you move into these other economic realities like going to England or going to Germany, you may have to deal with the financial system of that country. Now, Francis doesn't want anybody touching money, having money, being able to conduct any kind of commerce. It becomes impossible. And so for 800 years, I will say 700, because I think in the last a hundred, there's been a huge sea change. The friars have struggled with the agony of how do we live really an impossible formula and at the same time manage to move forward in time and in the various cultures and economic systems of which we are a part. So the friars challenges, I think have been huge. And I would also say that size and the success of being a clerical group of men.

So in other words, it's not only there, a lot of them, a lot of them are priests, which means there is regular salary, there are gifts from grateful people, there are endowments to churches and to cemeteries. So the funding that comes because of priestly ministry is an asset that the sisters don't have to deal with. They're not going to see that kind of income. So you've got two really different sets of problems. And I do think that we're now reaching a place in Franciscan history where the real question that we need to face up to is, do we have a way of first living, secondly expressing and then legislating for a poverty, it's a very hard word, in the 21st century, a poverty that speaks to the economic system of our time? And I would submit that we have not done that well at all because we're seen as always very secure as people that always can manage to get an education, to have nice houses, et cetera, et cetera.

So where we see this return to a more radical evangelical poverty is usually in breakaway groups or in new foundations, and sometimes they last and sometimes they don't. But the size of the group matters enormously in terms of what you can enjoin on a group of human beings about doing without. And just let me add, the health. We live in an era where the need to take care of health is enormous, and the obligation of leaders to be able to care for the health of members is enormous. And so how do you enter into that very fraught part of our lives here in North America without just throwing up your hands and saying, "Oh, well, we just buy the most expensive of everything to take care of ourselves."

Drew Jackson: I mean, part of what I hear you saying is that it is extremely difficult for movements that start, they're small, they're grassroots in a way, and as they grow and become more institutionalized, to keep that same connection to the radicality that was there at the beginning of the movement, to sustain that forward and to live outside of the systems, it's an ongoing challenge and the welcoming of wrestling with that question. I'm sitting with that as you articulate that.

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Well, Drew, you're exactly right. And the reality is that the ability to do something new, innovative, radical, first of all, it depends on individuals and persons with a certain leadership charisma. It is got to be somebody who says, "I'm thinking about this in a way that someone else says, I'll join you." Sometimes somebody can roll out their dream and you're thinking, good luck, buddy. Send me a postcard if you manage to do this. But at other times you're like, "I want to be part of that." And I think one of the things the Franciscan order needs to do is find a way to create friendly incubators for men and women who want to try to develop some of these new possibilities but may need some help to do that. That's not easy to do because in my limited experience of working with some younger Franciscans who are looking for new pathways, when you say we want to form a new intentional form of life, how many people are going to uproot their present life form in order to make that

happen?

And so I don't know that we'll see lots of that, but I do think we have opportunities to give help to groups that they may be founding a new religious community, or maybe not, maybe they're just a group of Catholics, Christians, an ecumenical group that are on fire with the Franciscan ideal and are going to do what they can with it. But you also want to keep a certain level of discernment and discretion because sometimes a group like that can go overboard. And before you know it, you're working with a group of people who are more of a cult than a creed.

Paul Swanson: I'm taking notes here as you're sharing all that, and there's a few things that jump out in relation to this. You named the following away from the ideal. And I think about how one of the things that Father Richard articulates in this chapter is the theme of conversion is central to Francis and Clare. And I feel like what I hear you saying is in the here and now of our moment, how should Franciscans have a sense of conversion for their way of life in relationship to poverty, in relationship to place, in relationship to this moment in time? Can you speak a little bit more to that, that sense of conversion, that Franciscan conversion as a central theme?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Yep. Paul, you're singing my song because that initial experience of conversion, of being a penitent is the root charism of our third order history. The early, early, early lay people that joined Francis and didn't become nuns or friars or called the penitents and their call the word penance in that time meant to be ready to turn to God. And Francis summed it up with the great commandment, love of God, whole heart, whole soul, whole strength and love of neighbor. And that was the way the penitents committed to living. But that idea that it's not just an initial moment. I go through this religious conversion and then I'm set. I have to be ready throughout my life to turn the Hebrew word that preceded the Latin penitencia is shuv, and it means to turn. The Greek word metanoia, to be transformed. So throughout life, we're faced with different challenges about how one may give real evidence of being led by these Franciscan ideals.

And so I do think that it's possible, for example, to look at, let's just say in my own experience, I became a university president, all right? So I had many decisions that I had to make about being a university president that, is this consistent with the way I see myself trying to be an authentic Franciscan? And some of the decisions you make are not what most Franciscans would make to have a membership in the local business club where all the top business leaders go for lunch. Well, you have that as a university president because you go there to conduct the business of your university for lunch. Nobody thinks twice about it in the larger society, but all the nuns are like, "Oh, you're going off to the club again. Good for you." So you find yourself in those circumstances and it's easy to get used to, but as long as you keep honest about, am I getting too used to this? Maybe.

And there are lots of examples along the way of the vehicle you drive, the way you vacation, et cetera, where you can decide, I'm going to be just like my peers who are laymen and women. Or no, I can't be like my peers. Even though I belong in that category of people, I still have to live as a Franciscan. So there are constant decisions that you're called to make. And I would say the thing you don't want to do is become obsessed and overly scrupulous so that you don't pay attention to certain social expectations. And at the same time, you have

the inner freedom to say, “I need to do this because it’s part of my work and it will advance the mission of my institution.” And so I do think that constant ability to be honest about, do I need to turn away from this and turn to that, is a big part of keeping you on a level playing field.

Drew Jackson: And I think so much of what you said really leads into what I think is an appropriate last question, a place for us to land. And there’s an awareness in Clare of modeling over speaking the life that the spirit calls her to show, don’t tell. This living, this showing. And so short of joining the Poor Clares, what word might you offer to lean into Clare’s uncluttered life example to which you write was full of such depth and charity in choosing and facing human limitation created a lifestyle that made both depth and divine encounter highly possible, emotionally necessary, and normally inevitable. What word might you offer those listening?

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Well, Drew, you’re going to have to give me more than one word, all right? I would say the first-

Drew Jackson: Or collection of words.

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Give me a break here, Drew. I would say the first word is back to our reflection on the mirror. The first word is contemplate Jesus, because he is our guide and following in his footprints as Francis taught is the surest path forward for us. But where am I living out that following of Jesus? I’m living it out in this particular community of women and men because the friars were constantly in and out working with her. Even after the death of Francis, we see that the most loyal of the old guard, if you will, stayed in communion with her right up to her death. I call it a conspiracy of hearts. They were the ones holding onto the original ideals. So as she holds onto that ideal in a community, it’s the community that gives her every day the chance to exhibit what it is that she has learned from Christ.

And so you feed the hungry, is there enough food? Do we need the brother who helps us to go out and get us more bread or more oil? And we have these little vignettes of the sisters going out to beg and the brothers helping them. Are the sisters warm enough? We have these wonderful images of her putting the blankets over the sisters and taking care of the sick. Her care for the sick was a very, very big thing. And even Francis writes and he commends the sisters who are fatigued because of the care of the sick. So that was a major piece of constantly offering love and support so that these women would not feel they had made a mistake. And joining with Clare and her sisters, and she makes all kinds of allowances for the six sisters, and finally she stays at, I’m going to use a window, literally a window, but metaphorically a window to the town.

People come. They have personal problems they need help with. They have a child who is sick. They have issues perhaps with the bishop or with the mayor. She’s a counselor. I had one Poor Clare who lived at Assisi, not at the main monastery, but at the convent, say, “Margaret, there was no emergency room in Assisi.” San Damiano was the emergency room. You took your sick person there because those women understood medicinal healing and you could get help there. So she doesn’t just close herself off and sit in chapel day by day. And I think that’s one of the things we can mistake, that these women have unimpeded hours of reading the scripture. Now, we know Clare was able to sustain a trance-like contemplative

moment, but I think on a day-to-day basis, she was one hard-working gal, taking care of the sick, meeting the visitors, making sure they had enough in the kitchen. Is it a drought? Do we need to water the garden more? Teaching the younger sisters. She every day was building up that community in the spirit of Jesus.

Paul Swanson: I want to recommend anyone who's interested in diving more into Clare to read your work *Light of Assisi* as a way to steep in the life and work and ministry and spirituality of Clare.

Sr. Margaret Ca...: Thank you. I am pleased. I think the feedback I'm getting is that book has unveiled Clare to lots and lots of people who really did not know her well. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Thank you so much for your time today. It's a gift for us to be in conversation with you on this. I think we're walking away with full hearts and so much to think about. Drew, it's always a joy to be in conversation with you, and we just got off the horn with Sister Margaret. I'm curious, how did that conversation land for you? What percolated for you in that time with Sister Margaret?

Drew Jackson: There's so much in that conversation. I'm still sitting with her reflections on just the difficulty of living the radical way of Jesus that was exemplified by both Francis and Clare, how difficult that is as things become more institutionalized and getting caught up just in the systems of our present age. And she specifically spoke about the economic system. How do you live outside of that? Is it even possible? These are the things that, the questions that I'm sitting with, and what does it mean to have an authentic critique of the ways that our systems are pulling us to live in ways that are oppressive, that are oppressive not just to one another, but even to our own souls.

Because that, to me, is so much of what the invitation is in this way of simplicity, this downward path of poverty, is that it is a way to resist these dehumanizing forces that lead us into dehumanizing not only ourselves, but also one another. And to say, "How do we resist that?" It is hard. That's what I kept hearing from Sister Margaret, that it is hard, but it is necessary question for all of us to keep wrestling with, to keep sitting with, to not move away from and just accept like, oh, we can't do that.

Paul Swanson: I'm right there with you. The proactivity around what does the radical way of Francis and Clare that they learned from Jesus, what does that look like for us now? And to not only examine our own participation in systems, but to examine systems themselves and be able to have a critique, a lens and analysis about how we show up, how we participate, and how we don't. And I think her analysis around poverty in the 21st century and what that would mean today, spoke to me about this ongoing conversion and conversation with the radicality of the origins of not only, I would say Christianity, but also a Franciscanism. That there's got to be a continual renewal to keep that edge sharp about what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in this way, whether it's the Franciscan path or a different path, to not lose that vitality of life that comes through that downward mobility, living on the edge of the inside. And in the mirror conversation piece where she spoke about contemplating Jesus and the simplicity of that. How did that hit you in that way?

Drew Jackson: I mean, that struck me right away when we asked her that, and that was her first response. What do you want to leave us with in terms of how to live this forward contemplate Jesus?

There's such a simplicity in that, but there's so much, it's so profound in this invitation to consider what we are gazing at, and it really takes me back into some discussions that I just remember having when I was in seminary and just learning about the idea of why in ancient text and the Hebrew scriptures was there's so much language around worship and idolatry and that there was this idea that whatever you're looking at, whatever, or you're worshipping, you become like that thing.

So what I hear when I hear Sister Margaret say, "Contemplate Jesus" is she's saying, consider what it is you're gazing on and gaze on that which is lovely and just, is exemplifying that simplicity and mercy and forgiveness, because as you gaze on that, you become what you are looking at and you reflect that into the world. And so that's what was landing for me is that invitation to reconsider again and again. What is it I'm gazing on? What is it I'm looking at?

Paul Swanson: I think this is a beautiful way to end. And I know that with both of us having families and children, we think about what are our children watching? How much screen time do they have? What are their influences in their life? And I love that what you just shared about what are we gazing upon in our lives, whether it's with media, but what does it mean to contemplate Jesus as that ultimate formation that is shaping how we, not only see God, but see reality in our own participation in community, systems and relationships. So listeners, we invite you to consider what are you gazing upon and what would it mean for you to contemplate Jesus in this season?

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Corey Wayne: And me, Corey Wayne. The music you hear is composed and provided by our friends, Hammock. And we'd also like to thank Sound on Studios for all of their work in post-production. From the high desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.