

*Clare of Assisi and the Thirteenth-Century Church: Religious Women, Rules, and Resistance*, by Catherine M. Mooney. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. 291. ISBN: 9780812248173.

The thirteenth century witnessed the emergence of great religious diversity among the urban laity throughout medieval Europe. Groups of lay penitents, such as the beguines, humiliati, and the Franciscans, espoused virtues stressed by the *vita apostolica* in their observance and performance of poverty, chastity, and charity. Conversely, these groups attracted the attention of ecclesiastic authorities who sought to conform them to traditional monastic forms of life as outlined by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. It is within these religious and cultural contexts that Catherine M. Mooney situates her study of the experiences of Clare of Assisi and her community of San Damiano.

Mooney's work focuses on the conflicts between Clare's community of San Damiano and the papacy in order to highlight the women's motivation to define their way of life. This monograph is not to be mistaken for a biography of Clare or merely a comprehensive study of her life in San Damiano. Rather, Mooney successfully presents her analysis of Clare and San Damiano as microstudies in understanding the broader phenomenon of religious diversity and papal responses to it in the thirteenth century (5). Mooney reframes San Damiano as one among the many female penitential communities that insisted on following the principles of the *vita apostolica* and resisted papal initiatives to regularize their way of life. This reframing is revolutionary in itself because it emphasizes the actions of female penitents in preserving and negotiating their form of life in the broader context of the penitential movement in Italy.

Crucial to Mooney's methodological approach is her use of Clare's life as both the chronological and structural framework of the entire book, beginning with her birth in 1193 and ending with the year of her death in 1253. The book is divided into nine chapters that correspond with times in Clare's life that the author considers important milestones for the community of San Damiano. These periods include the women's relationships with Francis and his brothers and their interactions with Popes Gregory IX and Innocent IV. Together, the chapters encapsulate the prominent presence of penitential communities in Italian urban centres and their determination to define their religious way of life according to their own terms. Although Mooney's emphasis on Clare and her community's resistance to papal efforts to conform them to traditional monastic forms of life is well-established in the historiography, her work offers invaluable insights about the nature of the conflicts between Clare and the papacy. Her

study stresses the contributions of individuals whose actions shaped the directives of the papacy towards San Damiano. Consequently, Mooney's examination of the social networks of Clare's community of San Damiano highlights the joint efforts of penitential communities in resisting the forms of life that the papacy imposed on them.

Mooney's methodology directly affects her choice of sources. She consults texts that are either contemporary with Clare's life or composed shortly after her death. Mooney reevaluates sources that have been traditionally used by Franciscan scholars in their work to provide a historical narrative of Clare and her community. However, Mooney considers the significance of these sources in Clare's life and the social context of the thirteenth century. An example of this is Jacques de Vitry's letter from 1216, which Mooney explains has been interpreted by several historians as one of the earliest documents to refer to Clare and her community of San Damiano. However, Mooney argues that Jacques's use of the phrase "lesser sisters" in his letter referred more broadly to female penitential communities throughout Italy, rather than San Damiano, specifically (47). Mooney arrives at this conclusion by considering the historical context of the document in relation both to thirteenth-century Italian urban religious life and Clare's own experiences. Mooney consistently considers these factors and applies these methodologies in her meticulous examination of the language and structures of medieval texts throughout the monograph.

Moreover, Mooney's focus on sources that are contemporary or near-contemporary to Clare allows her to incorporate texts that have not been central in previous studies of Clare and her life in San Damiano. One example of this is the Acts for Clare's canonization from witness testimonies of her sisters from her community. The author selects testimonies from the Acts that were given shortly after her death. Mooney recognizes that although these witness statements are hagiographical, they contain information about Clare's early life, including the year of her birth, that is not present in other sources (17). Her examination of the historicity of hagiographical accounts of Clare not only contributes insights about Clare's early life, but also privileges the testimonies provided by women who were closest to Clare when she was alive.

The most notable sources that Mooney incorporates in her study are the letters of Innocent IV to Rainaldo of Jenne and Rainaldo's own letters to monasteries of the Order of San Damiano. The use of these letters is one of the monograph's contributions to the historiography of the penitential movement in Italy, as these letters have been long overlooked by historians. In examining these letters, Mooney constructs a new narrative concerning Innocent IV's failure

to place the *cura monialium* on the Lesser Brothers. She asserts that contrary to the traditional narrative provided by Franciscan scholars in attributing the failure of Innocent's *forma vita* to Clare, it failed because Rainaldo threatened to abdicate from his responsibilities as cardinal protector of both the Orders of San Damiano and Lesser Brothers (156–58). This forced Innocent to retract his imposition of the *cura monialium* on the brothers and, essentially, his *forma vita* on female penitential communities, including San Damiano (159). Mooney's analysis of Rainaldo's role in rejecting Innocent's *forma vita* not only stresses the discontent of the Lesser Brothers with respect to the *cura monialium*, but also places Clare and the women of San Damiano within a broader network of penitential communities who resisted papal initiatives to regularize the penitential movement in Italy.

Mooney's work is compelling and is an important contribution to Franciscan scholarship. As she demonstrates, penitential communities were diverse in the thirteenth century. However, Mooney also emphasizes that common among them was their insistence upon determining their own form of life amid interference from ecclesiastic authorities that sought to regularize them. Therefore, beyond the study of Clare and the penitential movement in Italy, the monograph also raises questions about the experiences of female penitential communities in other regions in medieval Europe, such as the Low Countries and France.

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