



Clare of Assisi: Gentle Warrior

By Wendy Murray Retail \$24.00

Author Questionnaire

Wendy Murray





1. Tell us about your personal Christian journey. Readers want to know more about you and your religious and spiritual background.

I grew up in the Protestant tradition and my faith came alive when I was a teenager through a spontaneous conversion in the context of the evangelical tradition. I carried the idealism of this faith expression for a very long time to the extent that, after I was married, my husband and I made the decision to go to seminary to become professional ministers in some capacity.

My husband became a pastor and for a short while I was one too -- we co-pastored. After a few years, however, I felt a different calling -- the calling to be a writer. I started writing articles for a local newspaper and that continued to grow in that capacity. After a few years, when we were living in Honduras, I was picked up by Time magazine and served as their regional reporter. When we moved back to the States I was hired by the national Christian magazine, Christianity Today where I worked for several years as an editor and also had the role of senior writer. I wrote many cover stories for them. I covered the whole gamut of ministry and thought leaders in the Christian community.

2. How and when did you first become interested in Francis and Clare?

The saddest part of my story is that my marriage ended after 24 years. There were a lot of reasons for that, but one of the most painful for me was the role of the church where my husband served as pastor. I won't go into it other than to say that when I needed the church's help, they did not help me and I lost my marriage. That was very disaffecting for me as a Christian and as a result, for a long time after that I left the church, at least in my heart. I attended a few services here and there and when I lived in Italy I attended a small Anglican church, which I very much enjoyed. But in terms of the apparatus of worship I did not want to be part of a church. I thought it was fake. And having been married to a pastor for a very long time and having been a pastor's wife, I understood the nuances (and duplicity) of ministry and felt I had ground to stand upon to conclude that. I wasn't simply one of those haters who finds any reason they can to leave the church. During the rehabilitation of my life shortly after my divorce, I was on a walking tour in Italy with my sister and I experienced an inexplicable awakening in Assisi through the person of Saint Francis. This experience, afterward, sent my life in a new direction. Being a writer, I promptly undertook reading everything I could find about Francis and even returned to Assisi for an extended stay, shortly thereafter, to explore libraries and do on-the-ground research. As a result, I was able to get a book contract and, in turn, wrote a biography of Francis (Basis Books, 2008) which, inevitably, introduced me to Clare. Her life, since then, has introduced a new level of clarity for me, especially as I have gotten older. Francis described his mission this way: "We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way." This has been true of his and Clare's roles in my spiritual rehabilitation and the trajectory of my later life.



3. Do you feel there's something distinctive that a Protestant Christian brings to telling of the life of Clare?

As a Protestant -- and as a journalist -- my exploration of Clare's life arises from a personal faith and journalistic curiosity that is not colored or constrained by tradition. As I did when I wrote my book on Francis, so it is true of my book on Clare: I wrote journalistically, looking beyond the received tradition to discover bits of her story that are often overlooked in the hagiographies. I believe these saints possess universal appeal and a spiritual vision that ought to be celebrated across faith traditions. My work explores Clare's life from the vantage point of her authentic humanity and how she carved out her spiritual vision even when much was going wrong for her. Her faith journey was not easy and she suffered. Not being shackled by the Catholic tradition, I am able to work from these raw materials and (hopefully) create a trustworthy picture of Clare that resonates with seekers of all faith traditions.

I have further desired to introduce these saints to those in the Protestant and Evangelical traditions, which have sadly neglected this aspect of the Christian faith. Protestants ought to know these heroic Christians and we ought to draw consolation from them.

Though these saints lived on a heroic level, they were human beings, like me and you, whose real lives intersected the brokenness of the world. Their stories render to the fellow pilgrims the bits of light they've come to know through their real lives and the world's brokenness and the suffering they endured because of it. They're a picture of what a human heart looks like that has lived a life of faith and suffered for it.

Sometimes, when I read the Bible it feels so familiar I can't hear it anymore; it is not touching me or moving me. But when I look at the life of a saint, I see a testimony that has contended with the same Bible in collision with the same broken world and yet who forged a path through. We can look at their lives, appreciate their struggles and possibly even appropriate their model.

So, over these years, I have drawn great consolation not just from Saints Francis and Clare, but also from many others. I have a host of invisible friends whose lives touch and inspire me and who help me along the way.

I live as they did, on that thin line between the world of Christ-belief and the world of brokenness. And in its own unique way, my life translates, as only my life can, what one life looks like that has been part of this collision of worlds and has survived it. Chances are, your life too is living on that same thin line and your life is translating your way of surviving the collision, as only your life can. So we are all saints together, saints like our heavenly companions on the journey, Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare.