

**Review by William J. Short OFM**

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**FRANCISCAN SOLITUDE** by André Cirino, OFM and Josef Raischl, SFO, eds. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1995. 370 pp.

The renewal of interest in Franciscan forms of contemplative living has prompted a new and welcome publication from the Franciscan Institute. *Franciscan Solitude* gathers into one place and one language twenty-seven essays from Italian, German, Latin, and English sources. This is a large task of editing and translating, and the editors, André Cirino, OFM, and Josef Raischl, SFO, have done a fine job of making this Tradition accessible to an English-speaking audience.

The book's five chapters help to locate the Franciscan solitude tradition in its context. The pre-Franciscan experience of solitude is traced first, beginning with the New Testament accounts of Jesus in solitary places, moving through the desert hermits of early monasticism, and into the lay and women's eremitical movements in the centuries just before Francis and Clare. "Ideals of the Women's Hermitage Movement" by Edith Pásztor is especially important for casting light on the traditions contemporary with the growth of the Poor Clares. The work of Benedikt Mertens, OFM, on solitude and hermitages in the life of Francis (Chapter 2) helps to illuminate an aspect of Francis's „evangelical life" that has been gaining increasing attention in the past decade.

The heart of the book is Chapter 3 on the "Rule for Hermitages" with a critical edition of the text and commentaries. These pages make available Kajetan Esser's Latin and German work on the text, along with that of Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap., and Ignatius Brady, OFM. Many studies would end here. Fortunately this one does not. The editors have chosen (in Chapters 4 and 5) to show the ongoing vitality of the Franciscan Tradition of the hermitage from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Here can be found: Poor Clares' expression of the hermitage Tradition; an urban hermitage experience; Third Order Regular women and men interpreting solitude and the contemplative Tradition in a Pennsylvania parish or a South Bronx "cabin". Josef and Bernadette Raischl reflect on the meaning of this Tradition for a married couple.

Special recognition should be given here to the translators, especially Nancy Celaschi, OSF, who took on the daunting mass of the Italian texts. As a translator myself, I applaud her service and that of Berard Doerger, OFM, as well as that of the editors for their work on the German material. On the matter of the translations, I would suggest one change of term "houses of recollection" rather than "houses of gathering" for the sixteenth century Spanish contemplative communities.

André Cirino and Josef Raischl and their collaborators deserve congratulations for bringing to our attention this important and little-known piece of our Franciscan story. I hope they now have the opportunity to enjoy some of the silence and solitude of the hermitage they so clearly love.