There is an energy and vitality about this book that makes it engaging, challenging and provocative. The author states the argument which is woven throughout her narrative, that Francis’ "unique and irrepressible relationship with the extraordinary Clare Favorone of Assisi was initially rooted in love, (which) evolved into mutual renunciation as each pursued their individual life as a penitent religious". It is in many ways a 'romantic' book - from the author's descriptions of the extent to which she went in pursuit of information about Francis and Clare, to her descriptions of that life and the recurring themes of chivalry, the code of knighthood "and the command of love".

That the long list of research situations, from "sitting in caves" to "being yelled at by an Italian film director" should give more credence to her thesis is illustrative of some of the "yes, but" or "maybe" qualifications that came often to my mind as I read her version of the life of St Francis and St Clare. At times she uses her imagination to describe scenes in a way which is valid for the era in which her story is set, yet at other times she allows her imagination to draw conclusions which are questionable. Although she draws on early Franciscan sources, she also makes more than a passing reference to GK Chesterton's writing on St Francis; however, her use of Fortini's Francis of Assisi (in translation) includes a description of the rite of separation of a leper who enters a leper hospital as a prelude to a discussion on Francis' insistence on evangelical poverty.

This is an interesting book, a 'feelings' perspective on the life of Francis and Clare, a good illustration of the Ignatian style of meditation in using all of the senses to get into a scene. There are a few inaccuracies of verifiable information, so if it is used as a resource for study, other texts are required to check for accuracy. With that qualification and a recognition of the author's stated intent in telling the story, it is a book to enjoy, and perhaps a taster that might lead to a more serious study of the two saints.

Maureen CSF