

**Laetus, Triumphantus**  
A Simple Study of Francis of Assisi  
by  
Andrew Bortner Bede Campbell

*Holy Poverty puts to shame  
All greed, avarice,  
and all the anxieties of this life.*

*--Francis of Assisi, "Praises of the Virtues"*

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Francis of Assisi, "Poverty of the Virtues"  
and all the contents of this life.  
All good, master,  
Holy Poverty has to share

Among my earlier memories is an odd statue. It seemed to be of Jesus, but it was an atypical statue in many ways. First of all, Jesus wore a garment unlike any of those I had ever seen him depicted in before. He wore a white<sup>1</sup> robe, just like the priests and some of the acolytes did in my church. This wasn't too odd, I figured; the Book of Common Prayer **did** refer to Him as our "Great High Priest" on occasion, after all. He was holding a bird on one finger, this was something which I never had seen Christ depicted doing before; it wasn't really something I thought was inappropriate for Him, though. He was balding a bit on top. This was starting to push it. I knew that Jesus died when he was a young man, and it didn't seem right that the resurrected Christ would age, much less lose his hair. Maybe it wasn't supposed to be Jesus after all. No, it *had* to be a statue of Jesus; the hands and feet had wounds in them; I sort of thought some adult or another told me that only Jesus got nailed to a cross, other people were tied on. Somewhat later I was told about Saint Francis and learned the word "Stigmata,"<sup>2</sup> which I promptly forgot for many years. That statue **did** have a Christ-like face, though, or so I thought; other faces on religious statues, like on the rood screen at my home parish, looked either blank or angry. This one looked nice, like Jesus. It took many more years before anybody explained *imitatio Christi*.<sup>3</sup>

Saint Francis is probably the most easily-recognized saint, short of the Blessed Virgin herself. He is depicted as slim, bearded, balding, yet somewhat effeminate in poise, wounded in the hands and feet; only the monastic habit, tonsure, and inevitable animals differentiate his representations from those of Jesus. Childrens' stories of his Christ-like

<sup>1</sup> The entire statue (bird bath) was white. It just didn't occur to me that the robe would be any other color in reality.

<sup>2</sup> Stigmata is the word for the wounds which supposedly appeared, miraculously, on Francis in 1224, when he was 33 years old. Since then other people have suffered from stigmata, which, in modern times, is treated as a psychological disorder.

<sup>3</sup> Literally "imitation of Christ." Francis tried to live his life as closely as possible to Christ's (c.f. Admonition IV). Later, people would call him *Alter Christus*, or "The Second Christ," a title which he would have vehemently denied.

wounds, and his penchant for going out into the forest to speak with the animals abound, leaving in the mind of many, a sort of holy Doctor Doolittle where a flesh-and-blood person should be. Other treatments, aimed at church-going adults, portray him as mix of a white, mediæval Martin Luther King plus Marlin Perkins, reforming society while advocating ecology in his spare time.

Francis receives his fair share of media time. There have been film versions of his life, many books and stories, and even a St. Francis comic book. Still the Francis portrayed here is the same "nature boy" or "political activist" of the above accounts. Is this just an idealized representation of what Francis was like? Over five and a half centuries, much has happened to obscure the real Francis. Three basic types of people have worked to obscure Francis; they are the common man, the pope and clergy, and the Franciscan friars themselves.

People have always told tall tales about public figures. We do not need to look five hundred years into the past to see folk legendry in action; tall tales about George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Davey Crockett and Johnny Appleseed abound. The popularity of grocery-counter tabloids attests to the desire of people for news about their favorite celebrity; truth, in such accounts, often is a secondary consideration. This is nothing new; entire saints, such as Christopher, were made up to fulfill such needs. In addition to the tales contrived *by* the average man, writers have a penchant to embellish *for* the average man. Suetonius attributed all sorts of things to Caesar that Caesar would have probably never been caught dead saying: "I came, I saw, I conquered," and "The die is cast." Any high-school latin student will tell you that Caesar never wrote anything so dramatic in his life. Indubitably, the same thing has happened to Francis. Sometimes the additions or subtractions of material to someone's life are made for a more pragmatic reason than entertaining the populace.

The church was very powerful and very wealthy in Francis's time. Money flooded to Rome from the four corners of the world; the pontiff was more than a match for most monarchs in a battle of influence. If a person angered a secular ruler, he could flee into exile. In the thirteenth century the only way to flee the power of the papal monarchy was to run to the "barbarian lands" outside of Christendom. It was not beneficial to Rome to have "Little Brother Francis" gallivanting about Italy, and farther, preaching that the

apostolic life is one of poverty and scorn of temporal power; it was especially annoying that he had the gospel to back him up. It would doubtless be advantageous to limit Francis's power and credibility. It certainly wouldn't do to denounce a man whose cult among the people was as strong as Francis's; perhaps, however, the embarrassing message of mendicancy could be obscured.

The followers of Francis, also, had nothing to lose by polishing their founder's image. Unfortunately, a rivalry existed throughout the high mediæval period among the brothers of various religious orders. Each needed its founder to outshine the founders of the other orders. The Franciscans, as latecomers to the monastic game, needed all the more to be spectacular, and so we have the sort of miracle-fraud that Salimbene di Adam describes in his Chronicle.<sup>4</sup>

It is not the purpose of this paper to denounce any source used for Francis's histories, although, it is easy to see why extreme care and almost paranoid skepticism must be used in the evaluation of sources on Francis. It is the intent of this work merely to try to catch a glimpse of Francesco Bernardone through the sources which are simplest, and therefore least susceptible to tampering. The three safest sources are those which will be evaluated in this treatment. The first two sources are more matters of logic and obvious fact: the events which obviously did or did not take place and the ramifications thereof. After that, there are those writings written by the one person who could tell us the most about Little Brother Francis, that is, Francis himself.

Unlike Saint Christopher, we have no need to doubt that Francis of Assisi ever lived. Many things point to a real, historical person with very human qualities. First, and most obviously, the Order of Friars Minor was indeed founded. Papal records tell us that it was established and nurtured by Brother Francis. That it was founded at all tells us something about Francis. Some monastics, such as Anthony, seek solitude and have no desire to nurture followers or live in a community setting. That an order built up around Francis, and that he didn't leave this order, gives us reason to believe that he was a patient

<sup>4</sup> Salimbene was a thirteenth century Franciscan who wrote a fascinating chronicle which, among many other things, details methods used by the Franciscans to feign miracles.

man who had genuine concern for more than his own soul. That the people who knew him found him to be remarkable enough to write about and follow speaks to his charisma. Some measure of sanity is also indicated in this. Lunatics can and often do attract followers, however, such followings tend to disperse rapidly for one reason or another, and do not tend to gain papal approval.

We also know that Francis annoyed people. His teachings were hazardous and oft-times embarrassing to the papacy, other monastic orders, and common priests. Contrived saints don't seem to be bothersome to anybody, especially to the church hierarchy.

These points lead to further clues and safe assumptions which we may make about Francis. With Francis's teachings being so antithetic to a wealthy and powerful church, it is a wonder that he was not denounced as a heretic, excommunicated, or worse. Pope Innocent III, who reigned for most of Francis's life, was certainly not loath to excommunicating people; from 1208-1210 alone, such powers as Otto IV, King John, and the entirety of England all fell under sufficient pontifical disapproval to be excommunicated. Francis, a barefoot monk, managed to be annoying yet stay relatively unscathed; it is therefore safe to assume that Francis was quite a shrewd man. That the church did not experience a massive renovation shows that Francis lacked either the power or will, or both, to force the church to conform to his ideals. Only three years after his death, the inquisition in Toulouse prohibited non-clergy from *reading* the Bible,<sup>5</sup> yet Francis was permitted to live, and teach others to live, a life of strict adherence to the Gospel. This monk must have been quite a politician, indeed. Simple reason alone tells much of the personality almost forgotten behind the drama of popular legend.

Perhaps the most fertile ground for those who wish to get a glimpse of the humanity of Francis of Assisi is his own writing. As with most mediæval writings, one must be cautious of those writings which may have been added to, detracted from, or forged. It is not within the scope of this work to justify the sources which will be considered. Simply, they are those accepted by Marion Habig in her Saint Francis of

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Grun, The Timetables of History: A Horizontal Linkage of People and Events, based on Werner Stein's Kulturfahrplan, (New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone Book, 1982), p. 168.

Assisi: Omnibus of Sources.<sup>6</sup> Still it is worthwhile to note that Francis himself seemed aware of the dangers of censorship; we read in his "Rule of 1221," "In virtue of obedience, I, Brother Francis, on behalf of almighty God, and his holiness the Pope, absolutely forbid anything to be added to this Rule or subtracted from it;..."<sup>7</sup>

The texts considered are rather clear. An extremely brief précis of each follows. The "Letter to Brother Leo" is merely a short letter which greets Leo and encourages him to follow in Francis's footsteps, should he wish to. The "Rule of 1221" is a lengthy (23 seemingly disorganized chapters) hodge-podge of directives for his Friars Minor; the "Rule of the Third Order" is a similar construct designed for those who wished a life somewhere between the general run of christians and monasticism. The "Letter to a Minister" is a simple epistle to a nameless officer of the Order of Friars Minor; it encourages him to withstand opposition and promises to unify the Order on the topics of Confession at the next Pentecost Chapter meeting. "Religious Life in Hermitages" is a very brief set of guidelines for monks who wish to seek solitude after the fashion of the early monks. The "Rule of 1223" is a much-streamlined (10 chapter) version of the 1221 Rule; this one has an introduction and epilogue by none other than Pope Honourous III. The "Praises of God"/"Blessing for Brother Leo" seem to be a short poem/blessing written for Brother Leo, Francis's friend and secretary; a blessing for Leo appears on the back of the sheet containing "Praises of God." The "Letter to a General Chapter" is a letter to one of the larger gatherings of the Order of Friars Minor. It stresses reverence of the elements of sacramental wine and bread; it also stresses the dignity necessary for a priest to possess. Finally, it warns against paying too much attention to the music of hymns, rather than on the actual prayers in the hymns. The "Letter to All the Faithful" is a catechismic

<sup>6</sup> All translations, unless otherwise noted, are from Marion A. Habig, ed. St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis, Various Trans, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1979). Unless otherwise noted, the translator of quotations from Francis's works is Benen Fahy, O.F.M. Henceforth, quotations from the translations found in this omnibus will be cited by the title of the individual work, followed by the page number in Habig's Omnibus. E.G. "Rule of 1221," p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> "Rule of 1221," p. 53.

treatment of the Christian faith. This letter is the first of many to end in what I call *God's Xerox*, that is, a request that the reader make copies of the letter and distribute them, not unlike a modern-day chain letter. In the "Letter to All Clerics," Francis expresses concern over the security and handling of the eucharistic elements, the name of God, and The Bible. The "Canticle of Brother Sun" is probably the second best known writing attributed to St. Francis,<sup>8</sup> and almost certainly the best known of his writings. It is a poem of praise "through" the creatures of God. The "Form of Life" and "Last Will" are two very brief articles, apparently for St. Clare and her order. They are an encouragement to Claire and her "sisters" and a promise of friendship between the orders. The "Testament" seems to be a sort of final will for the Order of Friars Minor. It has a brief history of Francis's endeavors and an edict against the Friars petitioning the pope for a papal brief. In it Francis promises obedience to the Minister General; he also warns against various potential strayings from the form of life he set down. He carefully states that this "Testament" is not a new rule. He finishes by forbidding addition or detraction from the "Testament," requiring the reading of the "Testament" whenever the Rule is read, and ordering,

...I strictly forbid any of my friars, clerics, or lay brothers, to interpret the Rule or these words, saying, "This is what they mean". God inspired me to write the Rule and these words plainly and simply, and so you too must understand them plainly and simply, and live by them, doing good to the last. (Sic)<sup>9</sup>

The "Admonitions" are a collection of brief warnings about all sorts of things. Their seeming randomness and fragmentation point to the probability that this collection is an à posteriori catch-all compilation, written over a long period of time. Another poem from Francis's hand is the "Praises of the Virtues," which, like several other pieces of Franciscan poetry, sounds very much like parts of Laotze's Tao te Ching. Another prayer-poem is the "Salutation of the Blessed Virgin." Finally there are two works of liturgy

<sup>8</sup> The best known would seem to be the so-called "Prayer of St. Francis." Many scholars doubt that this prayer is indeed from Francis's hand, however.

<sup>9</sup> "The Testament of Saint Francis," p. 69.



which may be safely considered to be from Francis's hand. As its name indicates, the "Office of the Passion" is a rite for Passiontide ceremonies, and the "Praises Before the Office" is an antiphonal prayer series to prepare the worshippers for the main office.

While some of these documents may, indeed do, have useful historical facts to offer from the sort of straightforward reading intended (nay, **commanded** in the "Testament," q.v. above), I posit that there is valuable information to be gleaned from the style, nature of contents, and word selection of Francis. Also there is the elusive subject of his plea, near the end of the "Rule of 1221." "In the name of God I entreat the friars to grasp the meaning of all that is written in this Rule for the salvation of our souls, and recall it to mind again and again." There would seem to be some subtle message in this rule; alas, it has eluded me thus far.

There is a truism that, with enough digging, just about anything can be justified with Biblical quotations. The first thing which strikes a reader of Francis is his continual quotation from the Bible. Here we have a man who is intimately familiar with the scriptures; he mines them for justification, poetry, and inspiration. The "Office of the Passion," in fact, is mostly quotations from the Psalter. They are taken out of context, and out of sequence, and, while the end result is indeed a beautiful liturgy, one can't help but wonder at some of the re-arrangements. As an example, part of the first office, written for terce,<sup>10</sup> goes as follows:

Have pity on me, O God, for men trample upon me; all the day they press their attack against me.

My adversaries trample upon me all the day; yes, many fight against me.

All my foes whisper together against me; against me they imagine the worst.

They who keep watch against my life take counsel together.

When they leave they speak to the same purpose.

All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads.

But I am a worm, not a man; the scorn of men, despised by the people.

For all my foes I am an object of reproach, a laughingstock to my

<sup>10</sup> Terce is the service which takes place at 0900 in most christian religious communities.

neighbors, and a dread to my friends.

Holy Father, be not far from me; Hasten to my aid.

Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation!<sup>11</sup>

With the exception of the words "Holy Father" in the last line, this entire section is made up of quotations from Psalms 55, 40, 70, 21, 30 and 37. Two of the verses from Psalm 40 and two from Psalm 21 are consecutive in their respective Psalms. The verses from Psalm 40 are reversed in order and separated by a line from Psalm 70. The lines from Psalm 21 are merely reversed; yet the lines from Psalm 55 are exactly as they appear in the Psalm. Of course it is difficult to look for motivation when one is separated by over five hundred fifty years, by language, and by culture from the person motivated. Still, how different would this prayer be, if more of the original verse order were preserved? In English it might run like this:

Have pity on me, O God, for men trample upon me; all the day they press their attack against me.

My adversaries trample upon me all the day; yes, many fight against me.

They who keep watch against my life take counsel together.

When they leave they speak to the same purpose.

All my foes whisper together against me; against me they imagine the worst.

But I am a worm, not a man; the scorn of men, despised by the people.

All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads.

For all my foes I am an object of reproach, a laughingstock to my neighbors, and a dread to my friends.

Holy Father, be not far from me; Hasten to my aid.

Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation!<sup>12</sup>

Why would Francis rearrange the Psalter in such a way? Perhaps he didn't realize that they were out of order; maybe he was so familiar with the Psalter that he wrote this

<sup>11</sup> "Office of the Passion," p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> The lines are now, from top to bottom, Psalms 55:2, 55:3, 70:10, 40:7, 40:8, 21:7, 21:8, 30:12, 21:20, and 37:23.

without consulting the Bible. Maybe his version simply sounded better to him. It was, after all, in Latin, and probably a Latin with quite an accent. Both of these possibilities leave me unconvinced. This seems out of character; from his letters we see that Francis had a great respect for the scriptures as the word of God. In one letter he writes, "I urge all my friars and I encourage them in Christ to show all possible respect for God's words wherever they may happen to find them in writing. If they are not kept properly or if they lie thrown about disrespectfully, they should pick them up and put them aside, paying honor in his words to God who spoke them."<sup>13</sup> If Francis was averse to leaving the scriptures in a physical mess, why would he not be averse to putting them in a contextual mess? If the lines were only re-arranged, I would have no idea. There are, however, additions to the Psalms, not all of which have as little effect on the overall meaning of the line as the addition of "Holy Father" above.

Perhaps Francis needed to include concretely that to which the Psalms only mentioned through the vague veil of prescience. Several times Francis adds an entire line with "my Father," or some similar phrase, in it; such familiarity with the Deity is a Christian, not Jewish, concept. He quotes Psalms 73:12 at one point, saying "The Father of heaven, most holy, our King, sent his beloved Son from on high before all the ages, the doer of saving deeds on earth."<sup>14</sup> However, Psalm 73:12 reads, "*Deus autem rex meus ab initio operatur salutes in medio terrae.*"<sup>15</sup> The end works out beautifully, but the beginning has been replaced. Psalms 3:6 reads "*ego dormivi et soporatus sum exsurrexi quia Dominus suscipiet me.*"<sup>16</sup> This changes to "When I lie down in sleep, I wake again, and my Father, most holy, has raised me up in glory."<sup>17</sup> Again, Francis writes, "Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wondrous deeds; His right hand, his holy arm sanctified his Son.

<sup>13</sup> "Letter to a General Chapter," p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> "The Office of the Passion," 147.

<sup>15</sup> Psalmi 73:12, Biblia Sacra, iuxta vulgatam versionem. I translate this as "But God is my King from the beginning, who works salvation on Middle Earth."

<sup>16</sup> Psalmi 3:6, Biblia. "I lay down and I slept; I got up because the Lord lifts me."

<sup>17</sup> "Office of the Passion," p. 146.

The Lord has made his salvation known; in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice."<sup>18</sup> Most of this is from Psalms 97:1-2, with the important difference that the Lord's holy right arm is not sanctifying His Son in the psalm, it *salvavit* or *saluabit!*<sup>19</sup>

Francis lived with monks; this Office was written for monks. These people surely would have noticed if Francis was doing anything untoward with the liturgy, wouldn't they? Maybe not. These, and the several other additions to the scripture are nicely nestled among a plethora of accurate quotations. These quotations are not cited by Francis in the first place. Many monks could not read the Psalter in the first place; the only contact they had with it was via the liturgy. As for the monks who could read the psalter? Plenty of people today can, but don't, read well enough that they could 'check up on' their worship service to see if it matches the Bible; in Francis's time would they have been more likely to?<sup>20</sup> Now we see that Francis may have felt that the Psalms needed revision; they ought to be updated for the new age. Francis, a poet himself, may have thought that these wonderful works of sacred poetry were, unfortunately, out of date. They did not include the Incarnation as an event which had yet occurred.

No date exists for the writing of the "Office of the Passion." In those works at which we can know or knowledgeably guess a date, a progression of ideas may be seen, even over the brief span for which we have writings by Francis. The Francis of 1221 was opposed to friars speaking of others in a belittling manner. "They are to speak evil of none; there must be no complaining, no slander; it is written, 'Whisperers and detractors are people hateful to God'."<sup>21</sup> (Sic) Soon thereafter, in the "Rule of the Third Order," he writes,

<sup>18</sup> "Office of the Passion," p. 148.

<sup>19</sup> This is generally translated as "wrought himself victory," but I have no idea why. I come up with "was well" or "will wish well," neither of which make sense. In any case, it certainly is not doing what Francis said it was!

<sup>20</sup> Of course, in modern prayer-books, chapter and verse citation is given to help the enterprising soul who really *wants* to check up on his rector or liturgist. Francis's contemporaries were not so lucky; they would have needed to re-read the entire Psalter to check.

<sup>21</sup> "Rule of 1221," p. 41.

"35. The ministers of any city or place shall report public faults of the brothers and sisters to the Visitor for punishment. And if anyone proves incorrigible, after consultation with some of the discreet brothers he should be denounced to the Visitor, to be expelled by him from the brotherhood, and thereupon it should be published in the meeting. Moreover, if it is a brother, he should be denounced to the mayor or the governor.

36. If anyone learns that scandal is occurring relative to brothers and sisters, he shall report it to the ministers and shall have opportunity to report it to the Visitor. He need not be held to report it in the case of husband against wife."<sup>22</sup>

Not only does this contradict the edict against complaining and evil speaking, but also it shows that another of Francis's early ideals was soon sacrificed; Francis was originally disinclined to give brother power over brother. "All the friars without exception are forbidden to wield power or authority, particularly over one another."<sup>23</sup> What then would have been the place of the ministers, if not to wield power? "It is the duty of the friars who are elected ministers, and therefore servants of the other friars, to assign their subjects to the various houses of their provinces. Afterwards they must visit them often, giving them encouragement and spiritual advice."<sup>24</sup> So the ministers were, ideally, servants and caretakers of their brethren--at least in 1221. By the time of the "Testament," brothers were permitted to keep brothers prisoner with physical force, if necessary. "If any of them refuse to say the Office according to the Rule and want to change it, or if they are not true to the Catholic faith,...the custos must keep any such friar as a prisoner day and night so that he cannot escape from his hands until he personally hands him over to his minister."<sup>25</sup> Eventually this dissident friar would be handed over to the Bishop of Ostia. Nothing is said of what would happen from there.

On the other hand, Francis seems to have been, and grown more, respectful and fond of the fair sex over the years. In the "Rule of 1221," we have a typical warning

<sup>22</sup> "Rule of the Third Order," p. 174.

<sup>23</sup> "Rule of 1221," p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> "Rule of 1221," p. 34-35.

<sup>25</sup> "Testament of Saint Francis," p.69.

against the evils of women, but many of his descriptions of good take on a feminine quality. The first sentence, after the salutation, of the "Letter to Brother Leo" is, "As a mother to her child, I speak to you, my son."<sup>26</sup> When he gives instructions for friars who wish to live in hermitages,<sup>27</sup> he says that, "Two of these [friars] should act as mothers,...The mothers are to lead the life of Martha; the other two, the life of Mary Magdalen."<sup>28</sup> Women not only are used as symbols of what a friar should be, but also get special treatment. In the "Rule of the Third Order," a strict limit is put on the cost per unit of area of the cloth from which a brother's clothing is made. A similar limit is placed on ladies' textiles, but a clause indicates, "As to this price, however, and the fur cloaks they wear a dispensation may be given according to the estate of the woman and the custom of the place."<sup>29</sup> No such dispensation is given for men. Francis was also progressive in realizing that pregnant sisters<sup>30</sup> and sisters who had recently given birth had special needs. "10. Sisters who are pregnant are free to refrain until their purification from the corporal observances except those regarding their dress and prayers."<sup>31</sup> The bond between Francis's order and that of St. Clare, as expressed in Francis's "Form of Life" and "Last Will" for St. Clare, was unprecedented. The virtues in Francis's Poem, "Praises of the Virtues," Wisdom, Poverty, Humility, Love, and Obedience are all personified as Ladies and Queens. The creatures through which Francis gives praise in "Canticle of Brother

<sup>26</sup> "Letter to Brother Leo," p. 118.

<sup>27</sup> A hermitage is a place for a few monks, three or four being about the limit. Other Franciscan communities can be quite large.

<sup>28</sup> "Religious Life in Hermitages," p. 72. A footnote in Habig comments that, "The life of Mary is symbolic of the contemplative life; that of Martha of the active life." (p. 72, footnote 2.)

<sup>29</sup> "Rule of the Third Order," p.169.

<sup>30</sup> This refers to Sisters of the Third Order only, not the nuns! These third order members could be married and, if pregnant, *were indeed* expected to be married.

<sup>31</sup> "Rule of the Third Order," p. 170. The *purification* mentioned was a ceremony which took place thirty or sixty days after a woman gave birth, depending on the gender of the baby.

Sun," alternate in gender by line: Brother Sun, Sisters Moon and Stars, Brothers Wind and Air, Sister Water, Brother Fire, Sister Earth, after which the masculine Lord is mentioned, and we finish up with Sister Death. Francis seems to give "equal time" to the genders. Of course, the "Salutation of the Blessed Virgin" extols the feminine; and when Francis is closing the "Rule of 1221," he asks "...all virgins and all other women, married or unmarried; all lay folk, men and women...to persevere in the true faith and in a life of penance." Francis indeed gives women a relative abundance of treatment, most of it positive. To be fair, however, one must also note that married women needed their husband's consent if they wished to join the third order.<sup>32</sup>

In his letters, Francis's most vehement and repeated concerns were over misuse of the eucharistic elements. Time and time again he entreats the utmost of reverence for these corporeal vessels of the spirit of God. Francis seems to have had reason to believe these abuses were widespread; "And besides, many clerics reserve the Blessed Sacrament in unsuitable places, or carry It about irreverently, or receive It unworthily, or give It to all-comers without distinction."<sup>33</sup> Francis also was distressed by the thought that the name or word of God may be left "lying in the dirt."<sup>34</sup> In addition to the actual eucharistic host, the vessels which contain them, including chalices, corporals, and the priest, are to be treated with great reverence. While Lady Poverty is suitable for man, it is not suitable for the body or blood of God.<sup>35</sup>

The devil is a real creature for Francis, but Francis does not credit him with the sort of power that many mediæval thinkers do. It is the devil who prompts man to commit the sin of pride, and thus eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil all over again.<sup>36</sup> Devils are also highly intelligent, or so he says. "Any of the devils knew more about the things of heaven, and more about the things of earth, than any human being,

<sup>32</sup> "Rule of the Third Order," p. 174.

<sup>33</sup> "Letter to all Clerics," p. 101.

<sup>34</sup> "Letter to All Clerics," p. 101.

<sup>35</sup> "Letter to All Superiors of the Friars Minor," p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> "The Admonitions," p. 79.

even one who might have received from God a special revelation of highest wisdom."<sup>37</sup>

Yet, it is man who is responsible for his own fall; without losing self-control, no devil can injure a human in any way; we see this in the tenth admonition.

#### X. Exterior Mortification

Many people blame the devil or their neighbor when they fall into sin or are offended. But that is not right. Everyone has his own enemy in his power and this enemy is his lower nature which leads him into sin. Blessed the religious who keeps this enemy a prisoner under control and protects himself against it. As long as he does this no other enemy, visible or invisible, can harm him.<sup>38</sup>

The tenth admonition of Francis, however, holds more than a belief in the immunity of the pure from enemies; we see two ideas way before their time, and the contradiction of two of Augustine of Hippo's pet concepts. The lower nature, spoken of several times in Francis's writings sounds very much like Freud's concept of the id. Note that this lower nature is part of, but *only* part of the nature of the man himself. Augustine of Hippo long contended that all of human nature was abysmal; Francis acknowledges a lower nature, but only as *part* of human nature. Furthermore, this lower nature *could* be controlled by man, giving man a voice in the decision as to whether he would enjoy eternal bliss or suffer everlasting damnation. In Augustine's cosmos, one was handed the ticket to their eternal destination, and had no more choice in the outcome than a pot on a potter's wheel had of being defective.<sup>39</sup> By giving humans this power, Francis attributed to man a power reserved to God by earlier thinkers, and, to some extent, anticipates proto-existentialist philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard.

Francis seems, at best, suspicious of intellectualism. Around him scholasticism was racing to its peak. The only books permitted were those pertaining to daily worship, and these were allowed only to the brothers who could read.<sup>40</sup> As for those who could not

<sup>37</sup> "The Admonitions," p. 81.

<sup>38</sup> "The Admonitions," p. 82.

<sup>39</sup> The analogy is St. Paul's (Romans 9:21-24).

<sup>40</sup> "Rule of 1221," p. 34.



read, Francis proclaimed, "Those who are illiterate should not be anxious to study. They should realize instead that the only thing they should desire is to have the spirit of God at work within them, while they pray to him unceasingly with a heart free from self-interest."<sup>41</sup> He warns in "The Admonitions" that knowledge may become a source of satiety; that knowledge would be pursued as an end of its own would be unworthy vanity.<sup>42</sup>

Francis also places a great stock in obedience. Obedience is due to God, first and foremost. "The friars who withdraw from obedience and disobey God's commandments...can be sure that they are under a curse as long as they remain obstinately in their sin. But if they keep God's commandments...they can be sure that they are really obedient and have God's blessing."<sup>43</sup> For a monk, obedience is due to his superior; true obedience is "...Any good that he says or does which he knows is not against the will of his superior..."<sup>44</sup> No man is required to act against his conscience at the command of his superior, however. In this case Francis says,

"...the subject should not spurn his [the superior's] authority, even though he cannot obey him. If anyone persecutes him because of this, he should love him all the more, for God's sake. A religious who prefers to suffer persecution rather than be separated from his confrères certainly perseveres in true obedience, because he lays down his life for his brethren."<sup>45</sup>

Most importantly, from the historical, not religious, perspective, Francis pledged obedience to the pope; perhaps this is what kept him from excommunication or execution. We no longer have his Rule of 1209, but both rules that we do have profess Francis's allegiance to the pontiff. One interesting point, however, is that *only* Francis promised allegiance to the pope and his successors; the friars owed ultimate allegiance to Francis himself. It may have been a moot point, but, after Francis's death, there was no part of

<sup>41</sup> "Rule of 1223," p. 63-64.

<sup>42</sup> "The Admonitions," p. 81"

<sup>43</sup> "Rule of 1221," p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> "The Admonitions," p. 79.

<sup>45</sup> "The Admonitions," p. 80.

the rule guaranteeing Francis's successor's allegiance to the pope. Still both Rules for the friars, and the "Rule of the Third Order" require catholicism of their members; the only loophole is the extent to which one can flout the pope and remain a member of the catholic faith. Francis's twenty-sixth admonition speaks to the problem well. "Blessed is that servant of God who has confidence in priests who live according to the laws of the holy Roman Church. Woe to those who despise them. Even if they fall into sin, no one should pass judgement on them, for God has reserved judgement on them to Himself."<sup>46</sup> A friar should honor and respect the Church and its priests, not follow blindly; the pope is not mentioned at all, only the institution of the church.

Francis, we have seen, was an historical figure, indeed. He was possessed of rare qualities, qualities which allowed him to organize a group of friars whose purity outshone the purity of those in power, and maintain the, at least outward, blessing of those in power. Francis was a poet. He took it upon himself to rearrange and update the psalter, at least as it would be presented to his monks. He was an idealist who had to revise his own opinion on many things, from detractive speech to physical force. He was progressive in his view of women, and granted special dispensations, not granted to men, to those women who wished to take up a similar life to his own. Francis was anxious that the sacrament receive proper treatment and wished better treatment for the eucharistic elements, as the body and blood of Christ, than he would have accepted for himself. Francis believed in the existence of devils, but saw them as intellectual spirits, powerless in the face of self-control; the true enemy of a man lay within. Free will and self-responsibility are integral parts of the Franciscan milieu. Intellect was not important in and of itself. The proper use of knowledge and intelligence is the same as the proper use of *any* of God's gifts: the service of God in one's fellow man. Obedience was an important virtue for Francis; obedience, however, did not mean unthinking conformity; true obedience could also be found in one who refused to obey a command which contravened his ethics. No leave was given for affirmative second-guessing of superiors. Perhaps this is the shrewdness which allowed Francis of Assisi to flourish where lesser men would have been utterly defeated. Francis's life may have imitated Christ's, but he was far more complex

<sup>46</sup> "The Admonitions," p. 86.

than the popular iconography or legendry of the twentieth century shows. Francis of Assisi died on Saturday evening, the third of October, A.D. 1226, joyful and triumphant; he had fought the good fight for his convictions, and won.

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death,  
From whose embrace no mortal can escape...  
Happy those She finds doing your will!  
The second death can do no harm to them.  
Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks,  
And serve him with great humility."<sup>47</sup>

On Sunday the twenty-sixth of July, A.D. 1228 Pope Gregory IX canonized Francis of Assisi. The next day work began on a splendid tomb for Saint Francis's remains, in stark contrast to the poverty and simplicity to which Francis dedicated his life.

<sup>47</sup> "The Canticle to Brother Sun," p. 131.

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