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A Christian Remedy in a Climate of Fear

Francesco Bernadone, the War with Perugia, and Conversion

IN A 1957 LECTURE, medieval historian Christopher Brooke said, “No medieval saint has been as popular in the last two generations as St. Francis; and popular, not only with Roman Catholics, but with men and women of every denomination and of none.”¹ He goes on to attribute this popularity to the publication of Paul Sabatier’s *Vie de S. Francois d’Assise* in 1893. While there is no comparable publication today, the figure of Francis of Assisi remains popular. During a recent visit to a “big box” retail outlet this author noticed plastic outdoor-display versions of the saint available in three different sizes. While the modern fascination with Francis is closely tied to his perceived association with animals and the environment, there is something to be gained by a reexamination of this iconic character. By considering not only his teachings but also the setting of Francesco Bernadone’s life one uncovers a uniquely Christian remedy for a society locked in a climate of fear and change.

I. The Setting

Located on a rocky hilltop in the Spoleto valley in central Italy, late twelfth-century Assisi afforded a young man all the temptations of

medieval urban life. While the modern attraction of both Perugia and Assisi is their picturesque beauty, as hilltop citadels their strategic command of the valley speaks to their once competitive and violent posturing. Although neighboring Perugia had eclipsed it for two centuries, by the year 1200 proud Assisi was preparing for a showdown to establish dominance. The climate was particularly hostile since Perugia had interfered in an internal struggle between Assisi's popular and noble classes. Assisi wanted revenge. The civic atmosphere was, therefore, one of retribution.

Born into this climate of civic pride bolstered by a growing economy in 1181, Francis was the child of a wealthy textile tradesman, Pietro di Bernardone (whose family came from Lucca), and his Provençal wife, Pica.² From a young age his father instilled in Francis the concept that material possessions were the measure of existence. It is no surprise then that he was a greedy youth and that this greed manifested itself even on a civic level. In 1202 Assisi formally launched a war against Perugia. Francis, the sources tell us, as a personification of Assisi's vices of pride, revenge, greed, and vanity, happily stepped forward to fight. Given Francis's later advocacy of peace, his contemporary biographers are not only telling a story, but also teaching a lesson.

The conflict went beyond mere rivalry. Larger Perugia's loyalties lay with the papacy while smaller Assisi was allied with the Holy Roman Emperor. It was the classic smaller emperor-allied Ghibelline city versus a larger papal-allied Guelf city—a situation that encouraged violence throughout Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as the unity of the Holy Roman Empire was beginning to crack. Warfare between Italian towns such as Assisi and Perugia was almost incessant. When small towns were at war it was not uncommon for all men over the age of fourteen to render military service.³ Friedrich Heer provides an appropriate description of medieval society. He writes that its daily life was “warfare, unrest, tumult, hatred, envy and the lust for power.”⁴ It is often easy for the modern student of history to forget the inherent violence of

medieval Europe. This instability was partially due to weak centralized authority. Caught in the crosshairs between vacillating loyalty either to Church or emperor, the communities of the Spoleto valley were particularly prone to violence. Because of the constant conflict, the fighting classes became increasingly brutal by the tenth century. In fact, John McNeill suggests that after the tenth century “terrorism” was widespread. He states that the soldiers fought “by plundering and ravaging the unarmed peasantry and devastating the lands they tilled, rather than in honest battle with foemen worthy of his steel.”⁵

These conflicts, however, had the effect of creating communal unity. The feudal concept of *fidelitas* was not abandoned with the rise of towns. Feudal loyalty was, instead, in the early stages of transformation into civic or communal loyalty that would certainly make use of violence and conflict as a means of providing urban unity. For example, the violence associated with feudal society became an integral and organizing principle of places like Assisi as loyalty and vindication of rights were no longer simply the forte of warriors. Municipal action, commercial transaction, and religious expression were all the occasion and opportunity to share in the violence to which the valley was particularly susceptible.⁶ According to one writer, “The history of Florence is almost peaceful, compared with that of Perugia.”⁷ Francis’s biographer, Thomas of Celano (writing less than a decade after the death of Francis), called the war between Assisi and Perugia “a great massacre.”⁸ One might speculate that without the violence and unifying fear, the cities and towns of central and northern Italy might not have been born. Nevertheless, Francis was swept up in the furor. One of his chroniclers writes, “With no thought for his soul and indulging his flesh, Judging naught with his head, but all with emotion. . . . He pursues what’s unreal.”⁹ Francis was not only looking for personal glory, he was caught up in the desire to avenge his town’s honor and assert its civic pride.

Another consideration when examining this period is Church structure and authority in the growing communities. As Italian towns emerged in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries and competed for independence (from either the pope or the emperor), they often found themselves outside the established Roman structure. The monastic community and parish priests traditionally worked within the feudal structure. They were often unequipped to deal with people who lived and worked in a town whose fundamental heresy, according to McNeill, was liberalism. It was this unchecked freedom within urban areas that gave rise to the Waldenses in France and the Humiliati of Lombardy.¹⁰ Both movements can be considered reformist with a desire to return to the principles of the Gospels, specifically poverty and brotherhood. In a general sense, then, as secular pride and military power expanded there was no strong corresponding ecclesiastical influence. Given the complaints received by the papacy about the growing number of lay preachers in the urban areas and problems that they were creating for local bishops, the Church seemed ill-equipped to deal with the unique religious problems in the expanding urban areas.¹¹

With this lack of religious order, hysteria sometimes erupted in urban areas. Heer provides a sense of the chaos: "Life inside the walls was ebullient, raucous and quarrelsome. The restoration of order by ringing the church bells or through the intervention of the town watch or the town government (often very strict) was an everyday affair."¹² The disorder contributed to the growth of the flagellants who were a particular problem in Perugia in 1259 and Bologna in 1260. The most common reason for turning to such violent gestures of renunciation and self-immolation were expectations of the end of the world inspired by the teachings of Joachim of Fiore. Although born out of the uncertain conditions in urban centers, the hysteria did not usually result in mass terror but did encourage a new form of conversion.

II. Conversion

Cities were places for conversion, and conversion itself was taking on an expanded meaning. Today's concept of conversion involves acceptance of the basic doctrines of a given faith. The starting point is usually ignorance or disbelief. For those in thirteenth-century Europe, Christianity and the concept of Christendom were, if not fact, then certainly part of an established tradition. Throughout the medieval period conversion meant converting to a religious life—joining a religious order. With the growth of towns and itinerant preaching, however, the notion of conversion was changing. The chronicles for the city of Bologna for 1204 state, "In this year brother Albert of Mantua came to Bologna and preached there for six weeks and many were converted."¹³ Clearly these converts were not ignorant of the teachings of the Church as there is nothing in the record of heresy or ungodliness. The same chronicle for 1207 says that Albert of Mantua traveled to Bertinora, Siena, Castel Nuovo, and Imola, "making peace" and converting in cases of homicide. Conversion in these cases did not involve joining religious orders. Rather, it was considered some form of internal change from formal religion to effective religion.¹⁴

As an increasing number of urban dwellers found themselves in the turbulence of civic life, simplistic messages that encouraged a return to the fundamentals of the Christian faith gained popularity. With the basic tenets of the Christian faith unquestioned, many looked for a nonviolent corrective to the judgment of God seemingly manifest in war, murder, plague, and general strife. Traditionally the freeing aspect of poverty has been put forward as the fundamental aspect of the early Franciscan movement. Poverty in light of the developing concepts of military misconduct adds another dimension. The concept of a just or even divinely inspired military engagement changed to protect the commercial aspects of towns in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This is demonstrated in the penalty for military misconduct, such as unjustly seizing property

where the guilty party was not only required to perform traditional good works, but to also restore the damaged or destroyed property.¹⁵ Although Francis's advocacy of poverty stood in stark contrast to the emphasis on wealth and prosperity among members of the growing merchant class, such as his father, his renunciation of warfare meant that he was under no obligation even to protect the wealth of others. Francis was, therefore, removing himself, by degree, from the trappings of wealth at the very moment they were becoming increasingly important in measuring status in the urban areas of central and northern Italy. This moment would be short-lived. His method of renouncing material wealth was accepted and even attractive during his early ministry as he sought to imitate the acts of Christ and his apostles in the Gospel. In the years immediately preceding his death, however, there is a growing sense of conflict among his own followers, some of whom felt that material possessions were necessary for the order. This emphasis on poverty was a point upon which Francis would not bend. He went so far as to surrender leadership in 1220, six years before his death, rather than oversee the acceptance of wealth or possessions for the order. According to Holl, while Francis never criticized the Church, his method of poverty can be seen as a rebuke of the wealth and prosperity of the Roman curia. This may be the reason why, just prior to his death in 1226, Francis was carried from the bishop's house in Assisi to the Porziuncola, one of the ruined churches he had restored during his early ministry.¹⁶

While poverty was important, clearly the overriding feature of Francis's early ministry was obedience; all other characteristics of his movement were tied to it. Obedience was, in fact, the essence of Francis's conversion experience. His experiences in war as well as profit seeking frame his conversion for it was not simply a reaction to but a repudiation of both. Although traditional biographers summarize his conversion as an imitation of Christ's poverty, this interpretation can be overly simplistic. He was not out to abandon the world but to shift the focus from material dependence toward

a reliance on the Gospel and the Church.¹⁷ In Celano's account of Francis's conversion there appears to be a lesson as the conversion takes place gradually. In the first incident, Francis is on his way to fight in war; in the second, he is celebrating in the streets of Assisi; and in the third, he seems to be on a business trip to Foligno. At each of these moments Francis is called to submission. His old life of war, partying, and materialism is gradually rejected in favor of obedience. John Stevens takes this further and calls Francis's conversion an "exchange."¹⁸ He exchanges war for peace, partying for suffering, and materialism for poverty. It is a rejection of Francis's own values and should be seen as a personal abandonment rather than a blanket condemnation of society's values.

Francis was no political reformer. In the fragments of his own writing that survive, he rarely speaks for the group. Rather he speaks of himself for the benefit of others. His concept of peace took on the characteristic of a personal quality with real value for the individual soul as well as for relationships with others. The value of this method is demonstrated by the type of people who joined Francis's movement. Despite a renunciation of wealth and property, his early disciples were men of property who may have tired of the incessant conflict. After renouncing his own possessions, Francis told the bishop of Assisi, "If we had property we should have need of arms to defend it." According to McNeill, this suggests that for Francis the claiming of possessions necessitated killing, precisely what he was rejecting in favor of what he considered a greater treasure.¹⁹ In this spirit, he even advocated a new approach to the Crusades that would abandon reliance upon military means and, instead, attempt to peaceably convert "Brother Turk" by argument. With a personal faith that he considered true, there was no obstacle or enemy so powerful that obedience to that truth could not overcome.

Obedience was first owed to the Gospel and then to its Christ-appointed guardian, the Church. This obedience seemingly flew in the face of the developing civic values of the time. Francis did not oppose the growing prosperity of the towns, but only the negative

consequences of that prosperity. Specifically, Francis, drawing on his own experience, taught that riches do not translate into happiness. He preached that the cardinal vice was indifference to the misfortunes of others. He admonished his followers,

Let us, therefore, have charity and humility and give alms because it washes the stains of our sins from our souls. Blessed is the person who supports his neighbor in his weakness as he would want to be supported were he in a similar situation. Blessed is the servant who returns every good to the Lord God because whoever holds onto something for himself *hides the money of his Lord* God within himself, and *what he thinks he has will be taken away from him*.²⁰

This social concern was not simply the result of expiation. In his *Testament* (1226) he writes of his first experience with lepers: “When I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and *I showed mercy* to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body.”²¹ At first sight the lepers made him nauseated but when he had pity on them, their affliction became a source of spiritual and physical consolation. The sense is that one must share the suffering of others. For Francis, this experience is active obedience to the Gospel; this is his conversion.

Francis’s biographer, Adolf Holl, suggests that the theme of sweetness occurs so frequently in stories of Francis that it must be significant. In the process of his conversion—whether exchanging his clothes for those of a beggar, renouncing war, or simply retreating from his friends—Francis refers to the *dolcezza* inherent in the experience. According to Holl, the term is significant in that “it synchronizes three sense perceptions—sight (lovely), taste (sweet), and touch (smooth).” In sum, the renunciation of secular values filled him with tenderness toward the world. Initially, according to the earliest biographies, Francis appears not to have known the final result of such a rejection. Using a modern term, he simply knew

that the values that measured success in his culture were bankrupt. Living at the cusp of the medieval notion of feudal community and the beginnings of economic individualism, he was able to renounce what he considered worldly pursuits in favor of a type of obedient and even careless joy that not only forced a return to Gospel simplicity, but also put him in direct opposition to a value system that measured the worth or success of an individual according to material prosperity. Holl states very succinctly that Francis was happy whenever he acted contrary to sound common sense.²²

The dominant theme emphasized by the Church was that of Christ as conqueror or ruler. Since the collapse of Rome in the fifth century and the rise and fall of various feudal powers, the Church had become the enduring and often stabilizing authority. While Francis certainly does not threaten this status, his perspective provides a different emphasis. For him, Christ becomes the model of suffering and humiliation that can be considered more appropriate for the growing number of poor in the urban centers. In towns like Assisi there was a widening and visible rift between rich and poor. Francis's own family appears to have risen to the level of the *nouveau riche*, a group that would have viewed the lower classes, and manual labor in general, as something to be despised. As part of his conversion experience, Francis is not merely revolting against the authority of his father. Rather, he is connecting to the urban poor, which Holl appropriately defines as the ninety-five percent that engage in "sweaty business."²³ Francis's early ministry involved the physical labor necessary in rebuilding ruined churches. Many Franciscan scholars emphasize the spiritual aspects of the movement, particularly after the death of Francis in 1224, but for Francis physical effort appears to have been as important as spirituality. In his *Testament*, Francis states that he engages in such labor because he sees "nothing of the son of God most high in a tangible sense."²⁴ Physical labor, abhorred by the nobility, connected Francis to the urban poor as well as to the human suffering and degradation of his model, Christ. Francis famously carried a broom with him so that when he entered churches, he could clean them.

For Francis, happiness or, more to the point, joy was intimately bound with renunciation of the pleasures of the world and obedience to God. His separation from the world took place in stages that can be illustrated by his attitude toward the law and his reaction to lepers. Extant in all accounts of Francis's life and pivotal to his conversion experience are the words of the painted image of Christ in the ruined church of San Damiano. According to Bonaventure's account,

Francis knelt in prayer before a painted image of the Crucified, he felt greatly comforted in spirit and his eyes were full of tears as he gazed at the cross. Then, all of a sudden, he heard a voice coming from the cross and telling him three times, "Francis, go and repair my house. You see it is falling down." . . . he was terrified at the sound of the voice, but the power of its message penetrated his heart and he went into an ecstasy.²⁵

This ecstasy took priority and Francis broke not only Church but also civil law by stealing a bolt of cloth from his father's store, selling it, and giving the money for the reconstruction of the ruined church of San Damiano. These acts of filial disobedience and misuse of his father's property were legally punishable by exile. There is some evidence that the Bishop of Assisi was sympathetic to Francis's cause and even assisted in the public renunciation of his family and birthright.²⁶ As the concept of urban values and civil responsibility were nascent, Francis is caught at a moment when medieval priorities ascribed more importance to his act of rebuilding the church than the act of stealing property from his father. At a future time the latter would be the greater crime but Francis was simply dismissed as *pazzo* (crazy). In fact, according to Celano's account, Francis says, "The Lord told me that he wanted me to be a new fool in the world."²⁷ The label of holy fool can be seen as a method of confronting a new type of conversion experience that bridged the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Another good example of both his conversion and renunciation

of contemporary values is Francis's struggle with lepers. From an early age he seems to have been repulsed to the point of nausea by leprosy. As stated above, in his final *Testament*, Francis writes that he found lepers horrible but by serving them, "that which had before seemed to me horrible was transformed into sweetness of body and soul."²⁸ According to Celano, he often averted his eyes and covered his nose when encountering them. Holl refers to this condition as a phobia that Francis eventually, by the end of his life, worked to overcome: "Crossing over the threshold of nausea was for Francis the beginning of a new life."²⁹ In the account of *The Little Flowers*, Francis encountered a leper who desired to be bathed. Once Francis began washing, "by a divine miracle, wherever St. Francis touched him with his holy hands, the leprosy disappeared, and the flesh remained completely healed." The same account states that as soon as his wounds were healed "interiorly his soul began to be healed and cleansed . . . he immediately began to have great compunction and remorse for his sins."³⁰ Thus, the process of healing lepers contains the elements of physical suffering and pain corresponding to sin, and a healing process that corresponds to an internal cleansing and conversion. As Francis participated in the physical act of comforting those afflicted with leprosy, he was not only undergoing the process of conversion himself, but he was demonstrating a new form of behavior that could provide a basis for converting society at large to a revolutionary form of Christian obedience and charity. By working past something he had considered repulsive in his youth, Francis psychologically and physically created a fundamental break with the societal values that ostracized such people and brought himself closer to the Gospel values that would eventually inspire biographers to compare his life to that of Christ.

This new type of Christian presence seemed as radical in his time period as loving one's enemy in the post-9/11 world. It is this aspect of Francis's ministry that causes him to be labeled *alter christus*, or another Christ. He was not merely advocating what Marvin Becker has called "a new mode of being," he was challenging Chris-

tians to live in conformity with what they professed to believe.³¹ By cloaking his message in the garb of the Church or “official piety,” he stood outside the condemnation suffered by other groups that advocated a return to Gospel simplicity. He wrote, “Blessed is the servant who has faith in the clergy who live uprightly according to the rite of the Roman Church.”³² This was his master stroke of obedience: “Francis internalized the heroic and made the epic deed of chivalric literature the stuff of everyday spiritual life.”³³

III. Peace

Of course, the consequence of this new mode of being was peace. Francis did not need Rousseau to understand that property was tied to violence; he saw it in his daily life. Tommaso of Spalato wrote that Francis “spoke of the duty of putting an end to hatreds and of arranging a new treaty of peace.”³⁴ In his “Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples” (1220), he urges civic leaders to put aside “this world’s cares and preoccupations.”³⁵ In one of his “Admonitions” he writes, “Those people are truly peacemakers who, regardless of what they suffer in this world, preserve peace . . . out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁶ The warring towns of Italy were reminded to be peacemakers. The civic pride that led Assisi to seek vengeance toward Perugia ought to be replaced with the humble act of making peace. *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, written in the late fourteenth century, provides a pertinent object lesson. The town of Gubbio suffered terror because “there appeared a very big wolf, fearsome and ferocious, which devoured not only animals but even human beings.” Francis resolved to end the violence and ended up inspiring the wolf to be peaceful and live in accord with the people of Gubbio. Francis’s biographers used the episode to tell the people of the town that “God allows such things and pestilences because of sins; and the flame of hell, which lasts forever for the damned, is much more dangerous than the fierceness of the wolf, which *can only kill the body*.”³⁷ The lesson’s moral seems to be

that man is a wolf to other men but that all were created by God to be brothers and to live in peace.³⁸ To his famous “Canticle of the Creatures” (1225) Francis added the “penultimate” verse when he heard that an argument had broken out between civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Assisi:

Praise be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon
for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.³⁹

Francis’s efforts at peace should not be interpreted as taking sides. In the changing climate of civic loyalties, Francis knew no “against.” Even when he was before the Sultan, Francis offered no condemnation. According to Celano, the Sultan “was moved by his words *and listened to him very willingly*.”⁴⁰ Francis is like the idealistic Wilson; he wanted peace without a victor.

There was a certain urgency in the Franciscan message. The Franciscan friar-theologian Thomas of Pavia, who wrote in 1260 of the debate on the Last Things, alludes to the cause by drawing extensively on the writings of Joachim of Fiore (c. 1132–1202). Joachim had constructed a paradigm for understanding world history that corresponded to the three persons of the Trinity and to Scripture. The Age of the Father, which lasted from Creation to the birth of Christ, corresponded to a literal interpretation of the Old Testament. The Age of the Son, which lasted from Christ’s birth to 1260, corresponded to a literal interpretation of the New Testament.⁴¹ The final age, the Age of the Holy Spirit, would last from 1260 to the end of time, and would correspond to a spiritual interpretation of Scripture.

Of more immediate implication for the thirteenth century was Joachim’s description of a new order of monks that would usher in this new spiritual age:

The order of monks has the image of the Holy Spirit Who is the Love of God, because this order cannot despise the world and those things which are of the world unless it has been called by the Love of God and driven by the same Spirit Who led the Lord into the desert: so that it is said to be spiritual because it walks not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.⁴²

It is not surprising that the followers of Francis would be attracted to this view of history. Apparently, as Joachim had predicted, a new order had appeared whose founder had placed an emphasis on a more profound living of Gospel spirituality. In his Rule of 1221 Francis stressed a spiritual living: “If a friar is clearly determined to live according to the flesh and not according to the spirit, no matter where he is, the others are bound to warn, instruct and correct him.”⁴³ This new movement also involved a motivation fueled not by the production of literature but by the fulfillment of prophecy. According to Nieto, “They felt themselves living already in the eschatological, pregnant time. . . . To write books or pamphlets was simply a waste of time and energy.”⁴⁴

Appeal to the Holy Spirit was not new in medieval theology, but it had been problematic. For example, in the early twelfth century Peter Abelard proposed that truth could be both spiritually revealed and verified through reason.⁴⁵ Rather than deny the spiritual power, he argued that it was essential in developing what he called man’s inner kingdom, or the kingdom of the mind. This “individual” development, however, was hindered by the medieval concept of a unified Christendom and the authority of the Church with its system of penance. For the Church to acknowledge the power of a spirit that resided in each believer, it would have to deny a portion of its own authority over the ultimate spiritual power—salvation. Movements that relied on an inner spirituality had been suppressed in the past. Therefore, when the life of Francis was interpreted within the spiritual framework of Joachim, an old problem reemerged.

Writing about Francis, Celano was influenced not only by the political and religious events during Francis's life, but also by Joachim's concept of history. Casting Francis as a sort of new prophet, Celano writes that "Francis was led on by the spirit of God with which he was filled, and therefore he saw long before what in the future would be before the eyes of all." He goes on to write, "In this *last time* this new evangelist . . . diffused the waters of the Gospel over the whole world . . . and preached by his deeds the way of the Son of God and the doctrine of truth."⁴⁶ Both the prophetic tone and the important divine mission of the order as characterized by Celano had dangerous implications for the Roman Church.⁴⁷

The dangerous implications were stifled by the Church when, in 1209, Innocent III sanctioned the group. It would, after all, have been problematic for the papacy to condemn the Franciscans at this early stage. It would have been tantamount to denying that one could, in fact, live according to the method prescribed in the Gospel texts. In the years after 1209 the order grew so quickly that more formal organization as well as support and property became necessary. By the time of Francis's death in 1226, the contrast of the poverty of the Franciscans with the wealth and prosperity of the Church was diminished.

IV. Joy

The Church was not the only part of society undergoing change. Francis's advocacy of poverty must be seen against the background of the emerging municipal organization of Italy. In his total renunciation of property, Francis was following a pattern of conversion that can be found in all ages. His extreme version, however, was prompted by the violence, glitter, and instability of urban life.⁴⁸ Francis turned to poverty as an ideal of purity. In an undated document Francis defines true joy. It has nothing to do with worldly accomplishments or even miracles such as healing the sick. Joy is described as suffering, humiliation, and rejection.⁴⁹ Francis is connecting with the destitution of

the urban poor and showing that such a condition could be accepted with joy and was even helpful in salvation. Like his ability to cast his message in obedience to the Church, his emphasis on poverty and the ills associated with it is key to his success. He was able to tap into a negative aspect of urban life and turn it into a positive.

Thomas of Celano describes an episode that exemplifies this position. Before founding his order, on an early pilgrimage to the urban squalor that was medieval Rome, Francis “took off his fine clothing and dressed himself in a poor man’s clothes, He happily settled among the poor in the square in front of the church of Saint Peter, a place where the poor are abundant.”⁵⁰ Two years before his own death, Francis writes, “Those weighed down by sickness and the others wearied because of them, all of you: bear it in peace. For you will sell this fatigue at a very high price and each one will be crowned.”⁵¹ Even for those who did not join one of the three orders of Franciscans, this position on poverty in a Christian context must have been comforting in an urban environment where poverty was so evident. Poverty for Francis was not a vice or source of shame. Instead, it was a virtue that led a person closer to God.

The message of Francis of Assisi was perfectly suited to the times. For Francis, the earthly city was not merely the absence of God; specifically, it was the absence of virtue. The pride that led Assisi to war with Perugia should be replaced with humility and peace; the search for wealth replaced with the ideal of poverty. The climate of fear that accompanied urban life—suffering, hunger, danger—ought to be remedied by Christian submission. There is no place in Francis’s position for retaliation; joy always follows submission. After all, even when the wolf at Gubbio submitted there was no sense of ever killing it even though it was responsible for the death of others. In one of his last known letters to the order Francis writes to “humble priests of this same brotherhood in Christ, and to all simple and obedient brothers, from . . . Brother Francis, a worthless and weak man, your very little servant.”⁵² While the simple lifestyle advocated by Francis was modified during his own lifetime,

the popularity of it is demonstrated by the thousands of devoted Franciscans who poured into Europe's growing towns and personified his example of Christian living. It was an example that sought not confrontation in the name of materialism as a remedy for fear, but rejection of vice accompanied by an optimistic, peaceful, and obedient acceptance of suffering for the sake of joy.

Notes

1. Christopher Brooke, *Medieval Church and Society* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1961), 197.
2. *The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano, The First Book*, in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint* (New York: New City Press, 1999), cf. n. A, 182.
3. Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World* (New York: Signet, 1961), 77.
4. *Ibid.*, 224.
5. John McNeill, "Asceticism versus Militarism in the Middle Ages," *Church History* 5, no. 1 (March 1936): 8.
6. In fact, as Daniel Waley points out, merchants were making the transition from itinerancy to fixed locations in the towns by the thirteenth century. This resulted in not only a desire for safety but also the lust for dominance. See Daniel Waley, *The Italian City-Republics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 42.
7. Gabriel Faure, *The Land of St. Francis of Assisi* (Boston: Hale, Cushman and Flint, 1925), 23.
8. *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano, The First Book*, in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, 243.
9. Henry D'Avranches, *The Versified Life of Saint Francis of Assisi (1232–1239)* in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 430.
10. The Waldenses received approval from Alexander III in 1179 and the Humiliati were founded in 1178. The latter were excommunicated in 1184 but reconciled and given a rule in 1201 by Innocent III. See Fr. Lazaro Iriarte, OFM Cap., *Franciscan History, The Three Orders of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Patricia Ross (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 2–3.
11. Adolf Holl, *The Last Christian*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 55–56.
12. Heer, *The Medieval World*, 69.
13. *Corpus Chronicorum Bononiensium*, ed. A. Sorbelli, ii, 68; R. W. Southern, *The Middle Ages* (New York: Penguin, 1970), 273–74.
14. Southern, *The Middle Ages*, 274.
15. Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 215–16.

16. Holl, *The Last Christian*, 53.
17. John Stephens, "The Conversion of St. Francis" in *City and Countryside in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, T. Dean and C. Wickham ed. (London: The Hambledon Press, 1990), 33.
18. *Ibid.*, 40–41.
19. McNeill, "Asceticism versus Militarism," 25.
20. "Later Admonition and Exhortation To the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful)" (1220?) in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 47; "The Undated Writings, Admonitions [18: Compassion for a Neighbor]" in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 134.
21. "The Testament," *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 124.
22. Holl, *The Last Christian*, 35–36, 45.
23. *Ibid.*, 50.
24. "The Testament."
25. Bonaventure, "Major Life," in *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1991), 640; see also Thomas of Celano, "Second Life," in *Writings and Early Biographies*, 370–71 and "Legend of the Three Companions," *Writings and Early Biographies*, 903–5 for accounts of the same event.
26. Holl, *The Last Christian*, 45–47.
27. Celano, "First Life," *Writings and Early Biographies*, 12.
28. Francis of Assisi, "The Testament of St. Francis," *Writings and Early Biographies*, 68.
29. Holl, *The Last Christian*, 41.
30. "The Little Flowers of St. Francis," *Writings and Early Biographies*, 1358.
31. Marvin B. Becker, *Medieval Italy, Constraints and Creativity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 151.
32. "The Undated Writings, Admonitions [26: Let Servants of God Honor the Clergy]" *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 136; see also "The Earlier Rule (The Rule Without a Papal Seal)" (1209/10–1221) [Chapter 19: That the Brothers Live as Catholics] in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 77.
33. Marvin B. Becker, *Medieval Italy, Constraints and Creativity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 155.
34. As cited in *ibid.*, 154.
35. "A Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples" (1220), *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 58.
36. "The Undated Writings, Admonitions" [15: Peace], *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 134.
37. "The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi," *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 601–4.
38. Heer, *The Medieval World*, 224.
39. "The Canticle of the Creatures" (1225) in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 113–14.
40. "The Life of Saint Francis" Thomas of Celano [Chapter 20, The desire to undergo martyrdom which took him first to Spain and then journeying to Syria; and how God saved sailors from danger, multiplying their supply of food] in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 229–31.

41. Joachim of Fiore calculated that each age lasted forty generations, which placed the Age of the Son at a terminal point of 1260. Joachim of Fiore, *Concordia novi et veteris testamenti* as cited and trans. in R. J. Armstrong, "The Spiritual Theology of the "Legenda Major" of Saint Bonaventure." Ph.D. dissertation (Fordham University, New York, 1978), 24–25.
42. Ibid.
43. Francis follows Paul, "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). Francis of Assisi, "The Rule of 1221," in *Writings and Early Biographies*, 35–36.
44. Jose C. Nieto, "The Franciscan Alumbrados and the Prophetic-Apocalyptic Tradition," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 8, no. 3 (Oct 1977): 6.
45. Abelard has traditionally been thought of as placing reason above spiritual revelation in the search for truth—especially when studying his arguments with Bernard of Clairvaux. This view, however, is distorted. Abelard acknowledged the dangers of confusing emotional excitement with faith. The role of reason, he argued, would be to clarify those points of faith which could be solved. See Heer, *The Medieval World*, 112–13; Southern, *The Middle Ages*, 231–32.
46. Thomas of Celano, "First Life," *Writings and Early Biographies*, 315, 304.
47. In his attack on the Roman Church, Joachim referred to Rome as the Scarlet Woman. See G. G. Coulton, *From St. Francis to Dante: Translations from the Chronicle of the Franciscan Salimbene* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 150–51.
48. Southern, *The Middle Ages*, 282.
49. "True and Perfect Joy," *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 166–67.
50. "The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul," by Thomas of Celano, The First Book [Chapter 4, How he dressed in poor garments and ate with the poor in front of the church of Saint Peter, and the gift he offered there] in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, 247.
51. "The Canticle of Exhortation for the Ladies of San Damiano" (1225), *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 115.
52. "A Letter to the Entire Order" (1225–1226), *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 116.