



Francis of Assisi: A New Biography

Augustine Thompson

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Among the most beloved saints in the Catholic tradition, Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226) is popularly remembered for his dedication to poverty, his love of animals and nature, and his desire to follow perfectly the teachings and example of Christ. During his lifetime and after his death, followers collected, for their own purposes, numerous stories, anecdotes, and reports about Francis. As a result, the man himself and his own concerns became lost in legend.

In this authoritative and engaging new biography, Augustine Thompson, O.P., sifts through the surviving evidence for the life of Francis using modern historical methods. The result is a complex yet sympathetic portrait of the man and the saint. Francis emerges from this account as very much a typical thirteenth-century Italian layman, but one who, when faced with unexpected crises in his personal life, made decisions so radical that they challenge his own society—and ours. Unlike the saint of legend, this Francis never had a unique divine inspiration to provide him with rules for following the teachings of Jesus. Rather, he spent his life reacting to unexpected challenges, before which he often found himself unprepared and uncertain. The Francis who emerges here is both more complex and more conflicted than that of older biographies. His famed devotion to poverty is found to be more nuanced than expected, perhaps not even his principal spiritual concern. Thompson revisits events small and large in Francis's life, including his troubled relations with his father, his contacts with Clare of Assisi, his encounter with the Muslim sultan, and his receiving the Stigmata, to uncover the man behind the legends and popular images.

A tour de force of historical research and biographical writing, *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* is divided into two complementary parts—a stand alone biographical narrative and a close, annotated examination of the historical sources about Francis. Taken together, the narrative and the survey of the sources provide a much-needed fresh perspective on this iconic figure. "As I have worked on this biography," Thompson writes, "my respect for Francis and his vision has increased, and I hope that this book will speak to modern people, believers and unbelievers alike, and that the Francis I have come to know will have something to say to them today."

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