



Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi

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Acclaimed biographer Donald Spoto strips away the legends from the life of Francis of Assisi to reveal the true story of a man who has too often been obscured by pious iconography. Drawing on unprecedented access to unexplored archives, plus Francis's own letters, Spoto places Francis within the context of the multifaceted ecclesiastical, political, and social forces of medieval Italy, casting new light on Francis and showing how his emphasis on charity as the heart of the Gospel's message helped him pioneer a new social movement. This nuanced portrait reveals the multifaceted character of a man who can genuinely be said to have changed the course of history.

Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi Details

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From Reader Review Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi for online ebook

Rebecca says

3 1/2 stars

Whatever it is that keeps me from selling all that I own and living a life of servitude and simplicity is probably also keeping me from reaching a level of holiness that Francis Bernardone achieved. Clearly the man was holy.

While traveling in Italy, and Assisi in particular, during college, I was introduced to Francis of Assisi via Cimabue and Giotto's frescoes in the Upper Church of Francesco's (pre-earthquake!) as well as a visit to the Poor Clares of San Damiano. But my true admiration for the man came from reading **this** work of history.

[image error]

Donald Spoto has created a straightforward and well-researched (though perhaps not riveting) document of St. Francis' life. Mr. Spoto balances faith (which Spoto shows he, himself, has) with fact, dismissing the mythological versions of St. Francis and upholding, instead, his complete devotion to Christ.

There were segments of this book that were beautifully written. Here are a few of my favorites:

We have come to accept the inscrutability of inspiration, the sudden moment of illumination, the unforeseen leap of imagination that occurs in the expression of human genius. Archimedes, Kepler, Newton and Einstein in science have their artistic counterparts in Homer, Shakespeare, Mozart and Monet. The only thing we can say for certain about their moments of epiphany is that their precise source cannot be rationally explained; the person enlightened is perhaps astonished most of all. There are many such stories throughout history and in every culture; each of them changed lives past counting."

(p. 60)

The several paragraphs about birds, but particularly:

"...throughout the Middle Ages, birds were often used to represent souls, because they can fly up to God. They were also potent symbols of freedom. In the feudal system, the majority of people were tied to the land, and almost no one was mobile. But birds were unfettered, cheerful, singing, hopeful - everything workers aspired to be. As scholars have also long pointed out, the brilliant colors and intricate markings of birds were often regarded as parallels to the complex and colorful details of medieval heraldry."

(p. 103)

"This is perhaps the deepest form of prayer: a silent turning of the self toward God in acknowledgment of one's emptiness and impotence - the realization that one is helpless to effect one's own enlightenment or

salvation. This is perhaps also the deepest form of poverty: the conviction that one is completely contingent, dependent in the core of one's being on God, Who acts only mercifully, only on our behalf."
(p. 188)

"With that sort of iconography, the Resurrection, which is at the heart of Christian faith, was effectively ignored. With attention deflected to the suffering of Jesus in the past, the Risen Christ of the present - who suffers no longer and lives forever - begins to fade from the Church's ordinary proclamation of the fundamentals of faith."
(p. 196)

"And here we come very close to the true meaning of holiness. It is, at it's deepest level, a condition of spiritual integrity that always upsets public presumptions and counters the selfishness and madness of power that strangle so much peace in the world. Faith certainly professes that God continues to disclose Himself in all the intricate beauty of the world and its ongoing evolution, but perhaps God reveals Himself most of all in that sudden and unexpected radiance of extraordinary human goodness that we call sanctity."
(p. 213)

Anita says

The bio of St. Francis that I consider the best I've read: complete with historical background and culture of the time, to help the reader try to understand this saint. I loved it.

RandomAnthony says

I'm not Catholic but I read this book before I visited Assisi this summer. St. Francis was an interesting character, to say the least, and someone for whom I have the upmost respect. This book seems to be one of the better, more balanced biographies, and Spoto does a good job of historically contextualizing the stories and legends. I don't read a lot of this type of book, and I didn't know what to expect, but I liked it.

Rob says

Outstanding biography of this man of God.

Jessica says

I thought this book was absolutely exquisite. It gives a frank look at life in the middle ages and a wonderful down-to-earth portrait of St. Francis. The prose is intelligent but still accessible. I found St. Francis to be personally inspirational. I have a new hero! What a magnificent person. He struggled to know God's will for Him, and had to accept that what God wanted him to do and what he wanted for himself was not the same. A must read for any wishing to become a true Christian and true disciple. A life changing book.

Dan Hazen says

Scholarly foundation, but highly readable. The author is respectful, and orthodox in his view, yet doesn't romanticize and oft overly romanticized subject.

I love Francesco even more than I did before reading this...

Margie Dorn says

Really the best telling about Francis that I can imagine, for the modern reader. I've now read it twice.

Kathy says

Wonderful description of a life that I knew vaguely, in romanticized terms, and a prayer that I had grown up with. Well researched with insight into faith and relationships to God.

Marissa says

It is definitely a different take on Francis, one that really gets into the nitty gritty of who he was as a man. The author mentions somewhere in the book that saints are often portrayed as these people who looked at life with rose colored glasses and never faltered. This is not that type of story. It allows the reader to see the true humanity of Francis, being able to identify with his pain and suffering, as well as his triumphs. It makes me want to know more about Francis, to delve deeper into his person. I believe that this author, however, paints the truest picture of a truly great man.

Tony Kordyban says

Saints don't seem to be relevant as examples of how to live these days, because the typical description of a saint makes them sound too good to be true. No normal person could live like that.

"The Reluctant Saint" blasts through this problem. It makes the legendary St. Francis of Assisi into a real man, a man of his time. a man who ended up being good, not too good to be true.

Andrea says

This is the second time I have read this book. I highly recommend this book for anyone wanting to read a meaningful biography, grow deeper in acts of Faith, or better understand such amazing characters in the Middle Ages.

Amber Morrison says

Francis lived an extraordinary life, but Spoto wrote his story with so much heaviness that it felt like reading a social studies textbook. The history could have been something that kept you at the edge of your seat, but you were too busy falling asleep.

If Spoto's other titles are written differently, I might enjoy them. Otherwise, he's not enough of a storyteller for me.

Gregory says

Spoto gives a fascinating cultural/historical framework for St. Francis' life. This is not a work of hagiography, but a responsible and respectful biography on this most popular saint in the Christian world. Spoto adds his own musings on the challenge of following Christ as he tells us about St. Francis. A very inspiring book.

Willa Grant says

This is the best biography of St Francis I have ever read, the author presents a good medieval history background & has clearly studied his references well. I loved Francis even more after reading this. Francis was no plaster saint but a real, human & holy man of medieval times. As a follower of Francis I appreciated the realities of his life & beliefs being presented in such a clear manner.

Charles Brock says

Puts a very human face on an ordinary man who becomes an extraordinary Saint.
