THE FRANCIS TRILOGY
OF
THOMAS OF CELANO

The Life of Saint Francis
The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul
The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis

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New City Press
Hyde Park, New York 2007
The First Book

TO THE PRAISE AND GLORY OF GOD ALMIGHTY,
THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.
HERE BEGINS THE LIFE OF OUR MOST BLESSED FATHER FRANCIS.

Chapter 1
HOW HE LIVED IN THE CLOTHING AND SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

1 In the city of Assisi, which is located in the confines of the Spoleto valley, there was a man named Francis. From the earliest years of his life his parents reared him to arrogance in accordance with the vanity of the age. And by long imitating their worthless life and character he himself was made more vain and arrogant. A most wicked custom has been so thoroughly ingrained among those regarded as Christians, and this pernicious teaching has been so universally affirmed and prescribed, as though by public law, that, as a result, they are eager to bring up their children from the very cradle too indulgently and carelessly. For when they first begin to speak or babble, little children just born are taught shameful and detestable things by gestures and utterances. And when the time of weaning arrives, they are compelled not only to say but to devote themselves to things full of excess and lewdness. Compelled by the anxiety of youth, they are not bold enough to conduct themselves honorably, since in doing so they would be subject to harsh discipline. A secular poet puts it eloquently:

Since we have grown up with the training of our parents,
all sorts of evils pursue us from our childhood.¹

a. Thomas does not give us a date for Francis's birth, but elsewhere he writes that Francis died in the twelfth year of his conversion (cf. n. 119), or twenty years after he had given himself entirely to Christ (cf. n. 88). Since Francis's conversion took place when he was about 25 years old (cf. n. 28), and since he died on October 3, 1226, he must have been born in 1181 or 1182. Gregory the Great (+604), whose second book of his Dialogues is dedicated to a life of Benedict of Nursia (+542), states the birth of Benedict in the same way, that is, without a date, cf. Gregory the Great, Dialogues I, introduction.

b. The literary tradition of the Middle Ages and the strong influence of Saint Augustine of Hippo (+430) on medieval hagiography prompted Thomas to stress the power of evil operative upon the young Francis.

c. Sereno, Ad Locutiam quippe sancti, n. 1, ap. 50, 1. The philosopher Sereno (+85 C.E.) enjoyed great popularity in the Middle Ages as a moralist and pronouncedCarsinus of Saint Paul. Thomas calls him a poet because of several plays attributed to him. The quotation here is from his letters.

This is quite true, for the desires of parents are more injurious to their children, the more they yield gladly to lax discipline.

But when the children advance a little more in age, they always fall into more ruinous actions by their own choice. For a flawed tree grows from a flawed root; and what was once badly corrupted can only with difficulty be brought back to the norm of justice.

But when they begin to enter the gates of adolescence, what sort of individuals do you imagine they become? Then, without question, flowing on the tide of every kind of debauchery, since they are permitted to fulfill everything they desire, they surrender themselves with all their energy to the service of outrageous conduct. For having become slaves of sin by a voluntary servitude, all the members of their body display the weapons of iniquity, and, displaying nothing of the Christian religion in their own lives and conduct, they content themselves with just the name of Christian. These wretched people generally pretend that they have done more wicked things than they actually have, so that they do not appear despicable by seeming innocent.²

²This is the wretched early training in which that man whom we today venerate as a saint—for he truly is a saint—passed his time from childhood and miserably wasted and squandered his time almost up to the twenty-fifth year of his life. Maliciously advancing beyond all of his peers in vices, he proved himself a more excessive tenter of evil and a zealous imitator of foolishness. He was an object of admiration to all, and he endeavored to surpass others in his flamboyant display of vain accomplishments: wit, curiosity, practical jokes and foolish talk, songs, and soft and flowing garments. Since he was very rich, he was not greedy but extravagant, not a hoarder of money but a squanderer of his property, a prudent dealer but a most unreliable steward. He was, nevertheless, a rather kindly person, adaptable and quite affable, even though it made him look foolish.³ For this reason more than for anything else, many went over to him,

a. Cf. Saint Augustine, The Confessions: "I pretended to obscurity; I had not consulted, but I might be thought from embarrassment for being more innocent, and he accused others for being more guilty" (II, 3, 7). This and all other Latin quotations from The Confessions have been taken from Augustine, The Confessions, translated with an introduction and notes by Maria Boulding, O.S.B. (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1997).

b. Thomas returns to the example of the early hagiographical tradition in which highlighting the goodness of a person before his conversion can be found. In this case there is a possible allusion to The Life of Saint Anselm of Canterbury (+1109) by Eadmer of Canterbury (+1124) in which he describes the saint as generous and rich. Cf. Eadmer, Life of Anselm I, 1.

partisans of evil and inciters of crime. Thus with his crowded procession of misfits he used to strut about impressively and in high spirits, making his way through the streets of Babylon.\(^a\)

Then the Lord looked down from the heavens and for the sake of his own name He removed his own anger far from him, and for his own glory he bridled Francis's mouth so that he would not perish completely.

The hand of the Lord was upon him, a change of the right hand of the Most High, that through him the Lord might give sinners confidence in a new life of grace; and that of conversion to God he might be an example.\(^b\)

Chapter II

How God Visited His Heart Through a Bodily Illness and a Vision in the Night

That man was still boiling in the sins of youthful heat, and his unstable time of life was driving him without restraint to carry out the laws of youth. At the very time when he, not knowing how to become tame, was aroused by the venom of the ancient serpent, the divine vengeance, or rather the divine anointing, came upon him.\(^c\) This ained, first of all, at recalling his erring judgment by bringing distress to his mind and affliction to his body, according to that prophecy: Behold I will hedge up your path with thorns, and I will stop it with a wall.

Thus worn down by his long illness, as human obstinacy deserves since it is rarely remedied except through punishment, he began to mull over within himself things that were not usual for him.\(^d\) When he had recovered a little and, with the support of a cane, had begun to walk about here and there through the house in order to regain his health, he went outside one day and began to gaze upon the surrounding countryside with greater interest. But the beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards, and whatever else was beautiful to see could offer him no delight at all.\(^e\) He wondered at the sudden change in himself, and considered those who loved these things quite foolish.

From that day he began to regard himself as worthless and to hold in some contempt what he had previously held as admirable and lovable, though not completely or genuinely. For he had not yet been freed from the bonds of vanities nor had he thrown off from his neck the yoke of degrading servitude. It is difficult to leave familiar things behind, and things once instilled in the spirit are not easily weakened. The spirit, even a long time after its early training, reverts to them; and vice, with enough custom and practice, becomes second nature.\(^f\)

Thus Francis still tried to avoid the divine grasp, and, for a brief time losing sight of the Father’s reproach while good fortune smiled upon him, reflected upon worldly matters. Ignoring God’s plan, he vocalized vanity and vanity, to do great deeds. A certain nobleman from the city of Assisi was furnishing himself on a large scale with military weaponry and, swollen by the wind of empty glory, he asserted solemnly that he was going to Apulia to enrich himself in money or distinction.\(^g\) When Francis heard of this, because he was whimsical and overly daring, he agreed to go with him. Although Francis did not equal him in nobility of birth, he did outrank him in graciousness; and though poorer in wealth, he was richer in generosity.

\(^a\) Medieval hagiography frequently describes illness as providing the occasion for conversion. In The Life of steps in the way of by the image of the light of the Gentiles, Francis. In this context Thome sees in the forms of the ancient serpent.\(^b\) The First Book

\(^b\) In order to express the rhetorical and poetic quality of Thome’s work, the translators have broken the text into seven lines. This allows the continuity of the story to be preserved. Thome’s work is generally expressed in a clearer way by the style of the text. For Thome see The Lives of the Fathers, vol. 13. This and other subsequent quotations will be taken from the following text: Gregory the Great, Dialogues, trans. John Ziesenis, O.S.B., The Fathers of the Church, vol. 59 (New York: The Catholic University of America Press, 1915).\(^c\) Cf. Is 63:10.\(^d\) Cf. Ecclus 48:3 (B.C.).\(^e\) Deuteronomy 25:7: “Even the return of the patient taken refuge in his sins, the name of which is written on their lips all the time, and they declare that place is only at that the object of desire, and that their habit produces a sort of second nature, which supplies a motive for many actions not aiming at pleasure at all.” Cf. Origen, De principiis VII 8; Augustine, Confessio XV 25:2.\(^f\) Cf. Origen, De principiis XV 7:4.\(^g\) Cf. Origen, De principiis XX 7:4. Augustine, Confessio XV 25:2.

Apulia is located in the southeastern part of the peninsula. It is the place where Walter of Irlanda, lord of Innocent III’s papal militia, was fighting against Manfred of Aragon, the rival of the German Emperor. The latter claimed the throne for the young Frederick II, who had been imprisoned in the papal court.
"One night, after Francis had devoted himself with all of his determination to accomplish these things and was eager, seething with desire, to make the journey, the One who had struck him with the rod of justice visited him in a vision during the night in the sweetness of grace." Because he was eager for glory, the Lord exalted and enticed him to its pinnacle. For it seemed to him that his whole house was filled with soldiers' arms: saddles, shields, spears and other equipment. Though delighting for the most part, he silently wondered to himself about its meaning. For he was not accustomed to see such things in his house, but rather stacks of cloth to be sold. He was greatly bewildered at the sudden turn of events and the response that all these arms were to be for him and his soldiers. With a happy spirit he awoke the next morning. Considering his vision a prediction of great success, he felt sure that his upcoming journey to Apulia would be successful. In fact he did not know what he was saying, and as yet he did not at all understand the gift sent to him from heaven. He should have been able to see that his interpretation of it was mistaken. For, although the vision bore some semblance of great deeds, his spirit was not moved by these things in its usual way. In fact, he had to force himself to carry out his plans and undertake the journey he had desired.

It is a fine thing
that at the outset mention be made of arms,
and very fitting
that arms be handed over
to a soldier about to do battle
with one strong and fully armed.
Thus,
like a second David
in the name of the Lord God of hosts
from the long-standing abuse of its enemies,
he might liberate Israel.
One day, when he had invoked the Lord's mercy with his whole heart, the Lord showed him what he must do. He was filled with such great joy that, failing to restrain himself in the face of his happiness, he carelessly mentioned something to others. Even though he could not remain silent because of the greatness of the love inspired in him, he nevertheless spoke cautiously and in riddles. Just as he spoke to his special friend about a hidden treasure, so he endeavored to talk to others in figures of speech. He said that he did not want to go to Apulia, but promised to do great and noble deeds at home. People thought he wanted to get married, and they would ask him: “Do you want to get married, Francis?” He replied: “I will take a bride more noble and more beautiful than you have ever seen, and she will surpass the rest in beauty and excel all others in wisdom.”

Indeed the unstained bride of God is the true religion that he embraced, and the hiddest treasure the kingdom of heaven, that he sought with great longing. For it had to be that the gospel call be fulfilled in the one who was to be in faith and truth a minister of the gospel.

Chapter IV
HOW AFTER HE SOLD ALL HIS BELONGINGS, HE DEVISED THE MONEY HE RECEIVED

9. Ah! Induced and strengthened by the Holy Spirit the blessed servant of the Most High, seeing that the appointed time was at hand, followed that blessed impulse of his soul. Thus, as he trampled upon worldly things, he made his way to the greatest good. He could no longer delay, for then a fatal disease had spread everywhere and infected the limbs of so many that, were the doctor to delay just a little, it would stifle breath and snatch life away.

After fortifying himself with the sign of the holy cross, he arose, and when his horse was made ready, he mounted it. Taking with him scarlet cloth to sell, he quickly came to a city called Foligno. There after selling everything he brought in his usual way, this successful merchant even left behind the horse he was riding, when he had obtained his price. Starting back, he put down his bags and pondered conscientiously what to do about the money. In a wonderful way, in an instant, he turned completely to the work of God. Feeling the heavy weight of carrying that money even for an hour, and reckoning all its benefit to be like so much sand, he hurried to get rid of it. Returning toward the city of Assisi, he came across a church on the side of the road. It had been built in ancient times in honor of Saint Damian and was threatening to collapse because of age.

Arriving at this church, the new knight of Christ, aroused by piety at such a great need, entered it with awe and reverence. He found a poor priest there, kissed his holy hands with great devotion, offered him the money he was carrying and explained his proposal in great detail.

The priest was astounded and, surprised at this sudden conversion in incredible circumstances, he refused to believe what he was hearing. Because he thought he was being mocked, he refused to keep the money offered to him. It seemed to him that Francis, just the day before, was living outrageously among his relatives and acquaintances and exalting his stupidity above others. But Francis stubbornly persisted and endeavored to create confidence in his words. He pleaded, begging the priest with all his heart to allow him to stay
with him for the sake of the Lord. Finally the priest agreed to let him stay, but out of fear of Francis' parents did not accept the money. The true scorer of wealth threw it onto a window opening, since he cared for it as much as he cared for dust.

For he desired to possess wisdom, which is better than gold, and to acquire understanding, which is more precious than silver.

Chapter V
How his father persecuted and bound him

While the servant of the most high God was staying there, his father went around everywhere like a diligent spy, wanting to know what had happened to his son. When he had learned that Francis was living in that place in such a way, he was touched inwardly with sorrow of heart and deeply disturbed by the sudden turn of events. Calling together his friends and neighbors, he raced to the place where the servant of God was staying.

The new athlete of Christ, when he heard the threats of his pursuers and learned in advance of their coming, lowered himself into a hiding place, which he had prepared for himself for this very purpose, wanting to have room for their anger. That pit was in the house and was known to only one person. He hid in it for one month continually and scarcely dared to come out even for human needs. Whenever food was given he ate it in the secrecy of the pit, and every

service was provided to him in secret. He prayed with flowing tears that the Lord would free him from the hands of those persecuting his soul and that he could favorably fulfill his fervent wishes. Fasting and weeping, he earnestly prayed for the Savior's mercy, and, lacking confidence in his own efforts, he cast his care upon the Lord. Though staying in a pit and in darkness, he was imbued with an indescribable happiness never before experienced. Then totally on fire, he abandoned the pit and openly exposed himself to the curses of his persecutors.

He rose, therefore, swift, energetic and eager, carrying the shield of faith for the Lord, and strengthened with the armor of great confidence, he set out for the city. Running with holy fervor, he began to accuse himself of idleness and sloth.

When all those who knew him saw him, they compared his latest circumstances with his former and they began to reproach him harshly. Shouting that he was insane and out of his mind, they threw mud from the streets and stones at him. They saw him as changed from his earlier ways and weakened by starving his body. They blamed everything he did on starvation and madness.

But since the patient person is better than the proud, God's servant showed himself deaf to all of them, and neither broken nor changed by any wrong to himself he gave thanks to God for all of them.

For in vain do the wicked persecute those striving for virtue, for the more they are stricken, the more fully will they triumph.

As someone says, "Disgrace makes a noble mind stronger."

For some time rumor and gossip of this sort raced through the streets and quarters of the city, and the noise of that ridicule echoed here and there. The report of these things reached the ears of many, finally reaching his father. When he heard the name of his own son mentioned and that the commotion among the townspeople swirled around him, he immediately arose, not to free him, but rather to de-

a. Bernard of Clairvaux (+1153) writes of a similar desire expressed by Saint Malachi (+1164). Cf. Bernard, The Life and Death of Saint Malachi the Irishman, 5. This text is important because it provides an example of the homiletic style of Bernard of Clairvaux whose influence on the spiritual literature of the early thirteenth century—and hence on Francis—was significant.

b. In the changing economy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, such an attitude toward money was common. Money was "potable" wealth and sources for its propagation new opportunities to greed and exploitation. Cf. Lester K. Little, Religion and Poverty in Medieval Europe (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), especially pp. 32-41; George Doller, William Marshall: The Flower of Chivalry, translated by Richard Haward (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 87-90.

c. The image of a trained athlete appears in homiletics from the third of the martyrs to describe one initiated into the struggle of the spiritual life. As one had to practice physical patience or self-discipline to be a stoic athlete, so one had to do the same in the spiritual life. Bernard of Clairvaux portrays Malachi as an "athlete of the Lord." Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, The Life and Death of Saint Malachi the Irishman VIII, 16. All passages from this text are taken from Bernard of Clairvaux, The Life and Death of Saint Malachi the Irishman, translated and annotated by Robert Mayer, (Kalamazoo: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1978).

d. A monk of the early twelfth century, described the Anglo-Saxon saint, Guthlaid (+714), as "an athlete of Christ," of Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlaid. 3. 2. All passages from this text are taken from Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlaid, text, translation and notes by Norman Coggrave, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

e. For similar descriptions see Alex, Bishop of Auxerre, Vita sanctorum s. Bernardi 4; Eckard, The Life of Angelus II, 28; and Gregory the Great, Dialogues II 17.

f. Once again Thomas uses military imagery which were frequently used in medieval homiletics. Cf. Felix, The Life of Saint Guthlaid 27. "Then girding himself with spiritual arm . . . he took the shield of faith," Doce, Bernard of Clairvaux, The Life and Death of Saint Malachi the Irishman 22. "He puts on the weapons as mighty with God."

g. Geoffrey of Auvergne, author of Book Four of the Vitae priores s. Bernardi, writes: "When his battles and close relatives saw this [Bernard] was considering leaving the world and adopting this way of life, they began to use every means to keep him from trying and made Bernard change his mind."

h. Thomas seems to refer to St. John's Epistle, Monastic 4, 10:33. Hicuit enim ejus epulum in omnem annosannum, quod sanctitatis ad hominem (For this is the best that the generous spirit has within itself, that it is useful toward honorable things).
stroy him. With no restraint, he pounced on Francis like a wolf on a lamb and, glaring at him fiercely and savagely, he grabbed him and shamelessly dragged him home. With no pity, he shut him up for several days in a dark place. Striving to bend Francis's will to his own, he badgered him, beat him, and bound him.

As a result of this Francis became more fit and eager to carry out his holy plan. Neither the reproach of words nor the exhaustion of chains eroded his patience.

Those taught to rejoice in suffering will not deviate from an upright intention and way of life nor be stolen from Christ's flock because of beatings and chains. Nor will they fear in the flood of many waters whose refuge from oppression is the Son of God, who always shows them his sufferings, greater than those they endure.

Chapter VI
HOW HIS MOTHER FREED HIM
AND HOW HE STRIPPED HIMSELF BEFORE THE BISHOP OF ASSISI

13 When his father had left home for a little while on pressing family business, the man of God remained bound in the prison of his home. His mother, who had remained at home alone with him, did not approve of her husband's action and spoke to her son in gentle words. After she saw that she could not dissuade her son from his proposal, she was moved by maternal instinct. She broke his chains and let him go free. Thanking Almighty God, he quickly returned to the place he had been before. Since he had passed the test of temptations, he now enjoyed greater freedom. Throughout these many struggles, he began to exhibit a more joyful appearance. From the ini-

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a. The same spirit of persecution by one's father appears elsewhere in hagiography. Cf. Eusebius, The Life of Aulonos, LXXI. "This is to say, he stirred up in his father's mind so keen a hatred against him that he persecuted him so much, or even more, for the things he did well as for those which he did ill." (This and all future references are taken from: Eusebius, The Life of Aulonos, Archb. of Caesarea, edited with introduction, notes by Richard Southern, London, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1966.)

b. As a merchant in the cloth trade, Pietro di Remmone was able to travel to cloth fairs in Champagne. He would have taken the usual trade route from the Mediterranean to the North Sea. Since the end of the 13th century Champagne had been the main center for trade between East and West. Trade fairs were held every day in Trespey, Passavia, Burgundy, and Languedoc. Generally Italian businessmen were the driving force and the masters of trade traveling the routes of the Alps and Apennines, at times in harsh weather. They traveled alone or in groups, in caravans. Cf. Map B, p. 206.

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juries inflicted he received a more confident spirit and, now free to go anywhere, he moved about with even greater heart.

Meanwhile, the father returned and, not finding him and hearing the news of his son, he turned to reviling his wife. He raced to the place, shaking and screaming, so that if he could not call his son back, he might at least drive him from the area. But since the fear of the Lord is the assurance of fortitude, when the child of grace heard that his father in the flesh was coming to him, he went out on his own to meet his father crying out loudly that binding and beating led to nothing. In addition, he declared he would gladly suffer anything for the name of Christ.

14 When the father saw that he could not recall him from the journey he had begun, he became obsessed with recovering the money. The man of God had desired to spend it on feeding the poor and on the buildings of that place. But the one who did not love money could not be deceived even by this appearance of good, and the one who was not bound by any affection for it was not disturbed in any way by its loss. The greatest sorner of the things of earth and the outstanding seeker of heavenly riches had thrown it into the dust on the windowsill. When the money was found, the rage of his angry father was dimmed a little and his thorny greed was quenched a bit by its discovery. Then he led the son to the bishop of the city to make him renounce into the bishop's hands all rights of inheritance and return everything that he had. Not only did he not refuse this, but he hastened joyfully and eagerly to do what was demanded.

15 When he was in front of the bishop, he neither delayed nor hesitated, but immediately took off and threw down all his clothes and returned them to his father. He did not even keep his trousers on, and he was completely stripped bare before everyone. The bishop, observing his frame of mind and admiring his fervor and determination, got up and, gathering him in his own arms, covered him with the mantle he was wearing. He clearly understood that this was prompted by God and he knew that the action of the man of God, which he had personally observed, contained a mystery. After this he
became his helper. Cherishing and comforting him, he embraced him in the depths of charity.

Look!
Now he wrestles naked with the naked.
After putting aside all that is of the world,
he is mindful only of divine justice.²
Now he is eager to despise his own life,
by setting aside all concern for it.
Thus
there might be peace for him,
a poor man on a hemmed-in path,
and only the wall of the flesh would separate him from the vision of God.