



Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel of Life

Lawrence S. Cunningham

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Francis of Assisi is counted among the most important personalities of history. The life and ideals of this humble, semiliterate medieval friar have had a shaping influence on the Christian church that has spilled over into Western culture at large. This biography by Lawrence Cunningham looks anew at Francis's life and legacy, seeking to counter efforts to romanticize him yet without diminishing his deep piety or abiding significance. Pursuing a realistic view of the saint, Cunningham argues against common stereotypes that sentimentalize Francis as a "blesser of animals," as a "church rebel," or as a precursor of the "spirituality" movement. According to Cunningham, really seeing Francis requires the lens of theology rather than the lens of quaint spirituality so often used. Francis was a devotedly orthodox Catholic whose life must be understood as a response to reforming elements abroad in the church of his day. Francis's originality derived from his success in articulating the "ideal gospel life": his message and actions were a kind of "acting out" of the scriptures. Imbued with peerless scholarship, this book is also charmingly written. Cunningham is a master storyteller as well as a brilliant biographer -- qualities that his "Francis of Assisi" fully displays. It will at once inform and delight anyone interested in the fascinating life of Francis or his impact on church history."

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