

The Ecstasies of St. Francis: The Way of Lady Poverty

by John Ryan Haule

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Book to be published by Lindisfarne Books

Sample chapters.

- 1. Rearranging Our Sensibilities**
- 2. Loosening the Veil Around Francis**
- 3. Poverty as a Spiritual Practice**

Synopsis of the Book

This book employs the same thirteenth and fourteenth century sources other modern works have done, but it does not seek to tell the life story of Francis, does not represent his sainthood as a morality tale for the reader to revere or question, has nothing to say of ecology, and draws no theological conclusions. Instead, it asks what was Francis doing and how did he do it? On the evidence in the earliest biographies, it concludes that Francis became who he was by experimenting with his awareness -- which resulted in his learning several techniques for entering ecstatic states of consciousness.

The practice of poverty was the primary technique. But to understand it, we have to ignore the "asceticism" or "self-punishment" -- even "masochism" -- that is so disturbing to most investigators and attend, rather, to what was going on in Francis' mind. Where did he direct his attention? His earliest biographers make it clear that he attended to disturbances in his body-and-mind, his awareness of himself, so that every embrace of a leper and every exchange of clothes with a beggar was an experiment to see what this bold and socially challenging act would do to his awareness.

The central discovery he made was that the very tender "narcissistic" sector of his psyche held the secret. He learned to arouse his consciousness to an emergency pitch by courting a "narcissistic crisis," setting loose powerful and chaotic emotions. By standing firm in this emotional tumult, he discovered a portal onto an alternate universe, which he saw as the "kingdom of God" that Jesus of Nazereth had come to preach.