

Courtney A. Krolikoski

**MALADY OR MIRACLE? THE INFLUENCE OF ST FRANCIS  
ON THE PERCEPTION OF LEPROSY IN THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES**

MA Thesis in Comparative History  
with the specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies

Central European University

Budapest

May 2011

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by

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(United States of America)

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Examiner

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Supervisor

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I, the undersigned, **Courtney A. Krolikoski**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with the specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 23 May 2011

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Signature

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	i
<b>QUOTATIONS</b>	ii
<b>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</b>	iii
<b>I. Introduction</b>	1
<i>Understanding Leprosy</i>	3
<i>Current Scholarship on the History of Leprosy</i>	7
<i>Situating This Thesis: Aims and Goals</i>	11
<b>II. The Medieval Leper: “Cast Ye Them Out of the Camp”</b>	15
<i>Dealing with Lepers: The Old Testament</i>	17
<i>Dealing with Lepers: The New Testament</i>	22
<i>The Early Middle Ages: Living in Imitatio Christi</i>	27
<i>Lepers in Medieval Society</i>	33
<i>Summary</i>	44
<b>III. Saint Francis and the Treatment of Lepers in the High Middle Ages</b>	47
<i>The Franciscans: Rise and Controversy</i>	48
<i>Saint Francis of Assisi: Conversion by Lepers</i>	52
<i>Summary</i>	75
<b>IV. The Medieval Leper: Inclusion Through Exclusion</b>	78
<i>Changes in the Care of the Leprous</i>	80
<i>Veneration of the Infected: Saints After Francis</i>	86
<i>Preaching: About Leprosy, To the Leprous</i>	103
<i>Summary</i>	111

<b>V. Conclusion: Malady or Miracle?</b>	113
<i>Looking Ahead: New Exclusions?</i>	117
<b>APPENDIX</b>	120
<i>A: Saints Before Francis Who Interacted With Lepers</i>	120
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	128
<i>PRIMARY SOURCES</i>	128
<i>SECONDARY SOURCES</i>	130

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And finally, a large thanks to YOU for picking up this thesis and finding interest in what lies between its pages.



## QUOTATIONS

Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter.

African Proverb

Biff: I know that even now, having watched enough television, you probably won't even refer to them as lepers so as to spare their feelings. You probably call them 'parts-dropping-off-challenged' or something.

*from Christopher Moore, *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*,  
(New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 342.*

For it is in the millions of small melodies that the truth of history is always found, for history only matters because of the effects we see or imagine in the lives of the ordinary people who are caught up in, or give shape to, the great events.

*from Orson Scott Card, *Shadow of the Hegemon*,  
(New York: Tor Books, 2001), 358.*

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *The Bardi Altarpiece* - c. 1250, Florence, Santa Croce, Bardi Chapel
2. *The Bardi Altarpiece - Detail* - Florence, Santa Croce, Bardi Chapel
3. *Saint Elizabeth Caring for the Sick* - *Krumauer Bildercodex*, c. 1350, ÖNB. Cod. 370, f. 88v.
4. *St Elizabeth and the Lepers turning into the Crucified Christ* - *Krumauer Bildercodex*, c. 1350, ÖNB. Cod. 370, f. 93r.
5. *Hedwig washes and kisses the feet of the lepers* - *Hedwig Codex*, c. 1360, The Getty Museum, Malibu, CA., f. 30r.

## I. Introduction

*Words are the most important thing we have. A few words, one word, can change history. Imagine the correct words had been spoken by those people who are in charge of our lives. A few well-thought-out words and things might have been different. Unfortunately they have chosen all the wrong words.*

The Pearl Diver, Jeff Talarigo<sup>1</sup>

In many ways leprosy has long been regarded as *the disease* of the Middle Ages. With a longstanding presence in the Western world, stories and images of the disease have been woven into a complex and often horrifying narrative. The earliest known archaeological evidence of leprosy in Europe dates to 600 years before Christ, but it may have developed earlier in either China<sup>2</sup> or North Africa. Its spread into the western world was gradual, spreading as populations grew and expanded their territories. Unfortunately, contrary to Michel Foucault's dramatic statement otherwise,<sup>3</sup> leprosy is still prevalent today. At present it exists in over twenty countries around the world, most prominently India, and it continues to infect an estimated 100,000 new individuals every year.<sup>4</sup> Overall there are an estimated two to three million people worldwide who are permanently disabled due to the effects of the disease.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Talarigo, *The Pearl Diver* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 150. *The Pearl Diver* is a modern historical fiction novel which follows the life of a 19-year-old Japanese pearl diver who is diagnosed with leprosy in 1948. Because of her diagnosis she is forced to leave her home; her name is even erased from her family register. This novel chronicles her subsequent life as a stigmatized member of society and her life in exile at the leprosarium on the island of Nagashima.

<sup>2</sup> The history of leprosy in China is a fascinating topic as, much like the study of leprosy in the Christian West, the disease was linked with religion and moral values throughout much of the Middle Ages. For an in-depth study of leprosy in China see: Angela Ki Che Leung, *Leprosy in China: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> In *Folie et déraison* Michel Foucault states "At the end of the Middle Ages, leprosy disappeared from the Western world." Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2006), 2.

With such a long and dramatic history, leprosy is seemingly ever-present and ever-recognizable. Much in the same way that HIV/AIDS was viewed in the 1980s (and in some ways continues to be viewed today), the stigma of leprosy was pervasive and overpowering throughout the Middle Ages. Even today leprosy has retained a legendary status; the image of the ulcerated and agonized faces of lepers with clappers in hand haunts the historical understanding of the disease. However, much like HIV/AIDS, the real understanding of leprosy, as well as those it infected, is much different from the picture often presented.

Leprosy was, without much doubt, the most stigmatized disease of the Middle Ages. As such, according to Luke Demaitre, it was arguably the only disease which was “most completely borne by the people who had it and most exclusively discussed by those who did not.”<sup>5</sup> Leprosy may have captivated the imaginations of the medieval world, but it may have also been given more attention than the reality it represented. Once the disease was fully developed in a host, the physical effects were traumatizing. It is because of leprosy’s overt nature at this stage that it was easy to recognize. Scientific and religious treatises, numerous works of art, and legends are just some of the media which both depicted and dispersed contemporary social understandings of the disease.

The Church, as the ruling elite of the High Middle Ages, both used and manipulated the image of the disease based on its Biblical heritage. Before the thirteenth century leprosy was often portrayed as an affliction of the morally ill rather than as an illness borne by the infected. However, after the turn of the thirteenth century, the image of leprosy came to be depicted more and more as a disease of the *pauperes Christi*, the so-called ‘poor of Christ.’ Lepers, according to

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<sup>5</sup> Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 16.

this view of the Church, were diseased in this life so they could enjoy the next life without suffering. Although both perceptions of the disease have coexisted throughout its history, a shift can be seen in the dominant perceptions in society across the Middle Ages. This shift — from an illness of a person’s character to an illness miraculously given by God — can be traced through the history of the disease and sheds light on the social climate and attitudes towards leprosy.

## Understanding Leprosy

It is impossible to discuss the history of a disease and the lives of the people it affected without first understanding the nature of the disease itself. The disease which is today understood to be leprosy most likely appeared in the Western medieval world sometime around the fourth century and reached its peak between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> The exact biological origins of leprosy were only discovered in 1873 after scientists had spent centuries trying to identify the disease. Gerhard Armauer Hansen identified the microorganism, *mycobacterium leprae*, as the bacterium responsible for causing leprosy.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it was not until the 1940s that sulfone-based antibiotics were found to be useful for treating the disease.<sup>8</sup> Despite knowing its source and the means to cope with it, leprosy today still “remains something of a medical enigma.”<sup>9</sup> With a long and often stigmatized past leprosy has remained almost as elusive to modern researchers as it was to medieval doctors centuries ago.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Goodich, ed., *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 111. However, the disease has an even longer history; “Significantly, some of the earliest evidence of the disease, dating from about 600 years before the birth of Christ, survives from the subcontinent, although China and the Nile Valley may lay claim to an even loner history of the infection.” Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, vii.

<sup>8</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Contrary to popular beliefs — both medieval and modern — leprosy is not highly contagious. Today known as Hansen's Disease in order to dissociate the disease from its stigma, *mycobacterium leprae* is related to the tuberculosis bacteria and manifests in five different forms. Hansen's disease is a granulomatous disease which targets the peripheral nervous system as well as the lining of the upper respiratory tract. According to current theories it is thought to be spread from person to person through respiratory droplets, not through sexual contact as was once believed. The greatest factor determining the chance of contagion is the quality of the immune system of the individuals who come into contact with the bacterium.<sup>10</sup> This is partly because Hansen's disease is a slowly multiplying microorganism and as such can take as long as a decade (and often even longer) to develop fully enough for symptoms to become present. Numerous individuals who are regularly exposed to it remain immune to its effects, while only a relatively small percentage succumb to the disease.<sup>11</sup>

The degree of manifestation of the disease is based on the ability of the host's body to resist and defend itself against infection. It is this factor which made the identification and diagnosis of leprosy elusive for centuries.<sup>12</sup> The five different forms of the disease range in their manifestations from the more minor and mild tuberculoid form to the more severe lepromatous form. The tuberculoid form of the disease tends to remain localized in different regions of the body. Patches of skin can become discolored and ulcers may develop, but usually this form of the disease remains localized and relatively undramatic. Although the tuberculoid form is less

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<sup>10</sup> As François-Olivier Touati explains, "l'évolution pathologique qui peut être extrêmement lente est, en effet, fonction du degré de défense immunitaire de chaque individu, variable dans le temps au sien d'un même organisme." François-Olivier Touati, *Maladie et société au moyen âge: la lèpre, les lépreux et les léproseries dans la province ecclésiastique de Sens jusqu'au milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: De Boeck & Larcier, 1998), 81.

<sup>11</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> J. N. Hayes, *The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Response in Western History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 20.

virulent than other strains of the bacterium, left without treatment its effects can become just as severe.

The lepromatous form of the disease is the form by which the disease is most recognizable. Causing progressive nerve damage, the bacterium affects the peripheral nerves of the body, the skin, and at its height the bones themselves.<sup>13</sup> Symptoms of lepromatous leprosy are diverse. The skin and nerve cells of the extremities are the first areas of the body affected by infection. As a result the skin becomes pale or otherwise discolored and desensitized. Due to the loss of sensation, sores and ulcerous wounds develop and secondary infections are able to develop. The face can become greatly affected by the disease; the cartilage of the nose can erode, which may cause the bridge of the nose to collapse, and the eyes can deteriorate to the point of blindness. If the palate and the larynx are affected by the infection the voice becomes raspy and horse.<sup>14</sup> Only finally, as a result of prolonged infection and exposure, do the extremities become seriously deformed or lost. The effects on the body are dramatic and devastating, which is perhaps why it has held an almost mythical status throughout history.

Despite the modern medical knowledge of leprosy, it is important to understand that a disease which was labeled as leprosy in premodern times<sup>15</sup> may have looked remarkably different from Hansen's Disease. Since today many other diseases are known to have similar physical symptoms to leprosy, they may have also been labeled as such during premodern times.

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<sup>13</sup> Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, vii.

<sup>14</sup> R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 43. Moore continues, "the throaty voice of the leper, for instance, is the result of damage done in this way to the larynx — and also produces an erosion of the bones of head, limbs, hands and feet which can be clearly distinguished by the archaeologist." Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> For the understanding of the term "premodern" this thesis will follow that of Luke Demaitre in his pioneering book, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*: "The term *premodern* is understood somewhat idiosyncratically here, as preceding the modern history of leprosy, which began in the late eighteenth century." Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, vii. I find this to be the best way to look at the disease of leprosy in the context of this thesis; premodern as before the knowledge of the bacterial causes versus the modern understanding of the disease.

Therefore, the challenge for historians of medicine, and historians of leprosy in particular, is to avoid speculating on whether or not individuals labeled as lepers in the Middle Ages *actually* were infected with leprosy.<sup>16</sup> Relegated to the margins of society, individuals who received the label of *leper* were forced into a new life which was exceedingly different and tumultuous from the normal order of the medieval world.

The language of leprosy carried (and in effect still carries) a unique stigma. Due to this, for many decades, the term *leper* has been considered controversial and shunned in both historical and medical discourse relating to the disease.<sup>17</sup> However, as the term *leper* (as well as its Latin roots and English derivatives) was the medieval diagnosis, I believe it is the most appropriate way to refer to those who were believed to be infected with the disease. This is because what is most important to this study is the diagnosis and subsequent social treatment which a person received during the Middle Ages. A diagnosis of leprosy determined the fate of the individuals who were suspected or eventually determined to be leprous. Therefore, this study will treat the label of leprosy as it was applied at the time of the diagnosis, regardless of accurate medical diagnosis according to modern understandings of the disease. Much in the same way as Carole Rawcliffe, I will employ the term as a means to reflect the vocabulary used within the medieval sources relevant for this thesis. The term of *leprosy*, and any of its derivatives, will therefore be used, albeit potentially controversially, throughout this thesis.

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<sup>16</sup> To attempt to diagnose individuals with the disease retrospectively is a troublesome feat and ought to be avoided. It is best to treat all historical cases of individuals described as being “lepers” as though they were — as it was this label which was most important. Only when skeletal remains are found and analyzed by paleopathologists can one determine the precise medical history of specific cases.

<sup>17</sup> Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, xii. Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 11.



## Current Scholarship on the History of Leprosy

Scholarship on the history of leprosy in the Middle Ages has evolved greatly over the last four decades. Since the 1974 publication of Saul Brody's *The Disease of the Soul*,<sup>18</sup> many historians of medieval medicine have become interested in the disease because of its overarching status as *the* disease of the Middle Ages and the disciplinary boundaries that its study transcends. Brody's book has become a major source for those who study the history of leprosy, but it presents a simultaneously bleak and sensationalist understanding of the disease. In the leprosy section of his book *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*<sup>19</sup> R. I. Moore follows in a similar vein to Brody, as he also focuses on the leper as a problem for the medieval world. In this book Moore, focused only the negative attitudes towards the lepers, presents the disease as being a mark for persecution and segregation.

However, other scholarship which takes Brody's work as a starting point has contributed nuances to some of Brody's conclusions, and subverted others. Most importantly, modern research has shown that medieval lepers were not always the scapegoats of the Christian elite, as Brody and numerous others have suggested. Although the leprous were segregated from medieval society and restricted by numerous ordinances and regulations, their lives were, perhaps, not as oppressed as was once believed. Much of the study of the history of leprosy in the Middle Ages over the last ten years has been focused on distinguishing historical myth from historical reality. Current studies are equally focused on understanding the role historically played by the myth and understanding the historical reality itself.

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<sup>18</sup> Saul Nathaniel Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 42-56.

Living with leprosy in medieval England was often times quite different than on the continent, something which has been recently explored and stressed extensively by Carole Rawcliffe. Though bound by the same canon law as the rest of Europe, the English treatment of the diseased varied greatly from other regions of the medieval world. Rawcliffe has shown that making grand generalizations about the disease and the diseased across space and time can result in a misleading picture of the disease.<sup>20</sup> When studied in conjunction with the Black Death and the changing attitudes and doctrines on purgatory, English lepers who lived in leper houses can be seen as valued members of the Christian community instead of segregated scapegoats.<sup>21</sup> Despite being depicted as threats to society because of heightened fear of disease, lepers prayed for the souls of the donors who paid for their admittance to the houses. In England these institutions saw a rise in the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries, with over 320 existing by the end of the fourteenth century. While this rise can be seen as a means to meet the needs of a growing epidemic, it is more likely due to English noblemen trying to avoid being regarded as *Dives* from the Gospel of Luke.<sup>22</sup> In an attempt to find the reality amidst a disease loaded with intense imagery and symbolic value, Rawcliffe focuses her study on English soil.

Studying medieval leprosy on the European continent is equally focused on trying to determine the differences between the myth and the reality of the disease. How lepers were recognized played a large part in the medieval understanding of the disease. Required to dress in distinctive clothing and carry marks of their disease, lepers were easily distinguishable not only due to their disease, but also through material representations of their status. Luke

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<sup>20</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, "'A Mighty Force in the Ranks of Christ's Army': Intercession and Integration in the Medieval English Leper Hospital" (paper presented at the *Leprosy, Language and Identity in the Medieval World* conference, King's College, Cambridge, 12-13 April, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Demaitre's current work is a departure from his book *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*,<sup>23</sup> which greatly transformed and shaped the understanding of the premodern medical approaches to the disease. His present focus is related to how the leprosy were depicted in medieval art and how this might offer an alternative perception on how they were viewed and treated.<sup>24</sup> His specific emphasis is the clapper, the rattle (or at times a bell<sup>25</sup>) which the leper was required to shake to announce his presence to the healthy. Once seen as a warning sign to alert the healthy to the presence of a leper, Demaitre has considered that perhaps that was not quite the case.<sup>26</sup>

The study of leprosy in the Middle Ages has attracted many scholars not only because of its content, but also due to its potential for interdisciplinary research. Many fields of study, including, but not limited to archaeology, religious history, linguistics, and literature, continue to come together to try to create a complete picture so that the nature of the world in which the leprosy lived can be fully understood. The French historian François-Olivier Touati perhaps best exemplifies the multidisciplinary perspective on the history of leprosy with a focused study of leprosy in the province of Sens. His book *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, which provides a comprehensive picture of medieval leprosy in Sens, has been groundbreaking in challenging many of the dominant medieval perceptions of the disease.<sup>27</sup> Touati has helped to break down the

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<sup>23</sup> Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*. This book deals with the written development of the medical and social perceptions of the disease.

<sup>24</sup> Luke Demaitre, "The Clapper as 'Vox Miselli': New Perspectives on Iconography" (paper presented at the *Leprosy, Language and Identity in the Medieval World* conference, King's College, Cambridge, 12-13 April, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting here, Demaitre notes, that the image of the leper with the bell is almost exclusively that of the English lepers in the Middle Ages; its presence is rare on images from the continent. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Luke Demaitre, "The Clapper as 'Vox Miselli.'"

<sup>27</sup> Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 8; Nicole Bériou and François-Olivier Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus: Les lépreux entre conversion et exclusion aux XII<sup>ème</sup> et XIII<sup>ème</sup> siècles* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo, 1991); François-Olivier Touati, "L'apparition des léproseries dans la province ecclésiastique de Sens: fondations et répartition aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles," in *Actes du 110e Congrès national des sociétés savantes, section d'histoire médiévale et de philologie*, (Paris, T. I, *Santé, médecine et assistance au Moyen Âge*, 1987); François-Olivier Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*; François-Olivier Touati, *Archives de la lèpre: atlas des léproseries entre Loire et Marne au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 1996).

myth that lepers were overly stigmatized members of the medieval world, instead showing how they were also, in many ways, included in the society they were cast out from.

One field which has been revolutionary in reshaping the understanding of the leprous in the Middle Ages is archaeology. Excavations of medieval leper houses across Europe have helped to shape the understanding of how these houses functioned in medieval society. For example, an excavation in Winchester, England, a mile outside the gates of the boundary of the medieval city has shed light on life inside a medieval leper hospital.<sup>28</sup> Based on current excavations of graves, 40% of the inhabitants of Saint Mary Magdalen were affected by leprosy in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, a figure proportional to the rates of the disease understood at the time in England.<sup>29</sup> The addition of archaeological findings such as these to the study of the history of leprosy has brought an immense amount of data to help with creating a comprehensive picture of leprosy in the Middle Ages.

Scholarship today is focused on creating a multidisciplinary approach to the study of leprosy in the Middle Ages. Where the study of leprosy in the Middle Ages had been solely focused on the regulations imposed on them by the Church and cities, the addition of archeological, literary, and biological data has created a more complete understanding of what life might have been like for the leprous. By merging numerous fields of research there has been a shift in focus to new and often overlooked texts and sources. Alongside this, emphasis has also been placed on the role of the cultural context. The regional character of leprosy varied greatly both for medieval understandings of the disease and social reactions to it, as seen with the

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<sup>28</sup> Simon Roffey, "The Archaeology of a Medieval Leper Hospital: Saint Mary Magdalen, Winchester, in Context" (paper presented at the *Leprosy, Language and Identity in the Medieval World* conference, King's College, Cambridge, 12-13 April, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

differences between England and the rest of Europe. The historiographical status of the field is changing to be one more driven by re-evaluations, contexts, and comparisons.

### **Situating This Thesis: Aims and Goals**

The reasons for this study are personal as well as academic in nature. Since my youth the practice of medicine has always fascinated me. Through numerous science classes, history classes, and over many years, my interest in the subject has developed and, in a way, led me to this thesis. That lifelong interest combined with a background in psychology — where the inner workings of personal and social interactions and perceptions are at the forefront — brought me to the history of medicine as an eager student. Studying the history of leprosy has allowed me the opportunity, alongside numerous well-respected historians, to provide a voice for those whom history has often overlooked. Although they were often discussed and widely regulated throughout the Middle Ages, lepers left little or no evidence of their existence outside the archaeological findings. Studying the history of leprosy, therefore, has become a way for me to satisfy all the facets of my academic interests.

One area within the growing field of the history of leprosy which has been largely neglected is the role that charismatic religious leaders — namely, saints — played in changing the medieval perceptions of the disease. In the twelfth century the roles of such figures were widely influential and respected. As sources of great religious devotion as well as widespread dissemination of hagiographic materials, saints had an immense impact over all aspects of the medieval world. In this thesis I intend to examine the late twelfth-century shift in attitudes towards the leprous, particularly through the influence of one widely known and influential saint

— Saint Francis of Assisi.<sup>30</sup> Through close reading of the selected sources, as well as situating these sources in their historical context, I hope to present a comprehensive understanding of one man's influence over social perceptions of a highly stigmatized disease.

The chapters of this study will, where appropriate, incorporate as many supporting images and as much textual evidence as possible in the scope of the analysis. Although chronologically this thesis begins in Biblical times and spans until the fourteenth century, it is by no means a complete or comprehensive account of all instances of leprosy across that time period. Selections of materials to be included were made consciously based on their overall importance and impact on the social perceptions of leprosy.

The first chapter of this thesis will introduce the background to the historical climate of the social understanding of leprosy at the turn of the twelfth century, in a sense setting the stage for Francis's interactions with the lepers. It chronicles both the relevant ecclesiastical and secular legislation which dealt with regulating the lives of the lepers in the medieval West. It will also provide a background for the role of the leper in medieval hagiographic texts. This chapter will highlight how, despite both images of leprosy being present in the Early to High Middle Ages, the dominant perception was that lepers were cursed by God.

Chapter two traces the development of the role of the leper in the hagiographic materials of Saint Francis of Assisi. The goal of this chapter is to show what role the lepers played in Francis's conversion and his life as the founder of a large and influential mendicant order. I will examine the various major narratives of Francis's life, focusing on the final moment of his

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<sup>30</sup> I was fortunate enough to be invited to present a paper on this topic at a recent conference held at Kings College, Cambridge University which focused on leprosy in the Middle Ages (*Leprosy, Language and Identity in the Medieval World* conference, King's College, Cambridge, 12-13 April, 2011). Scholars present included Adelina Angusheva-Tihanov, Elma Brenner, Luke Demaitre, Rafaël Hyacinthe, Peter Kay Jankrift, Julie Orlemanski, Carole Rawcliffe, and François-Olivier Touati.

conversion. I will argue that this moment — meeting a leper on the plains below Assisi — was the final and ultimate moment of conversion for Francis. To do this, I will closely analyze the main features of the episodes within Francis's *vitae*, both written and illustrated, which detail his interactions with lepers. I will then compare their similarities and differences in light of the historical climate in which they were written.

The final chapter will follow the impact that both Francis and the Franciscan Order had on the treatment and care of the leprous in the High Middle Ages. The analysis in this chapter will be threefold. First, I will examine the rise of leprosaria as a reaction to the changing perceptions of the disease. François-Olivier Touati's book on the rise of the leprosaria in Sens will provide a valuable point of analysis for this study, as it is the most comprehensive and systematic study of the leprosaria in medieval France. Secondly, I will highlight some of the saints who, in light of the legacy of Francis and the Franciscan Order, cared for the leprous as a mark of their extreme holiness and devotion. This is not to say that these saints merely followed in the footsteps of Francis to emulate his piety. Instead, many holy men and women, on their own initiative, sought to care for the leprous out of a profound desire to humble themselves before God. This section will place particular emphasis on the female saints of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, such as Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and Saint Hedwig of Silesia, who took up caring for lepers as a mark of female piety. Finally, I will examine the changing use of preaching as a tool to both preach to the leprous about their disease and their status in society as well as the use of leprosy as *topos* for preaching to society about the burdens of sin. With the rise of the number of leprosaria in the medieval landscape there was also a rise in the practice of preaching to the sick at those leprosaria. Because of this, collections of sermons *ad status*

appeared for preachers to use as a basis for their own sermons directed at the leprous. Nicole Bériou and François-Olivier Touati, in their book *Voluntate Dei leprosus: Les lépreux entre conversion et exclusion aux XII<sup>ème</sup> et XIII<sup>ème</sup> siècles*,<sup>31</sup> provide a comprehensive collection and analysis of the known surviving texts of such sermons. Written by preachers like Jacques de Vitry, these sources provide an immense amount of information concerning the attitudes of the medieval world towards both lepers and leprosy after the turn of the thirteenth century.

Through this thread of analysis, this thesis aims to examine how the changing perceptions of leprosy may have been aided by one prominent charismatic religious figure.<sup>32</sup> Saint Francis may have not been solely responsible for this shift, but, as I hope to demonstrate through this thesis, his impact cannot be denied. Though both attitudes towards leprosy were ever-present in medieval society, and though it is impossible to state direct causation for the shift in attitudes, I hope with this thesis to shed light on an area of study which has, to date, been largely unexplored by historians of leprosy.

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<sup>31</sup> Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*.

<sup>32</sup> It is important to note here that the revival of Arabic and other Eastern medical texts may have also helped to change the perception of leprosy in the High Middle Ages. While this field of study is incredibly interesting, it is not directly prevalent to the scope of this thesis. I will not, therefore, directly discuss the influence of these medical texts. For an extensive study on this topic please see Luke Demaitre's book *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine* as it is an excellent study on the history of leprosy within the developing medical field in premodern times.



## II. The Medieval Leper: “Cast Ye Them Out of the Camp”<sup>33</sup>

*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “Instruct the sons of Israel to cast out of the camp every leper, and those who have a slow of seed, and those who have been polluted because of the dead; cast out of the camp both male and female, lest they contaminate it while I am dwelling with you.” And the sons of Israel did so, and they cast them out, beyond the camp, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.*

*Numbers 5:1-4*<sup>34</sup>

Lepers held an interesting position in medieval society. While it is impossible to know for certain whether individuals diagnosed with leprosy were *actually* lepers, the social stigma attached to the label was real.<sup>35</sup> As described earlier, in its early stages leprosy is relatively ambiguous when compared to other skin diseases. Since it is only in the later stages of the disease when an individual’s appearance becomes that of the deformed and ulcerated leper, the process of diagnosis was a difficult in the Middle Ages. This process relied heavily on the guidelines for handling the diagnosis of leprosy as set in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. Because of this, before the late thirteenth century, physicians played little to no role in the diagnosis or treatment of leprosy. Instead, as prescribed within the legal ordinances of Leviticus,

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<sup>33</sup> This phrase from *Numbers 5:3* comes from the English translation of the Douay-Rheims Bible and can be found at [www.drbo.org](http://www.drbo.org) (last accessed 16 May 2011).

<sup>34</sup> *Numbers 5:1-4* as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Locutusque est Dominus ad Moysen, dicens: Praeceptum filiis Israel, ut eiiciant de castris omnem leprosum, et qui semine fluit, pollutusque est super mortuo: tam masculum quam feminam eiicite de castris, ne contaminent ea cum habitaverint vobiscum. Feceruntque ita filii Israel, et eiecerunt eos extra castra, sicut locutus erat Dominus Moysi.* Alberto Colungam O.P. and Laurentio Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio* (Matriti: Biblioteca De Autores Cristianos: 1959), 110. I have decided to use the ‘Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible’ because it is the most recent English translation of the Latin Vulgate. It uses the Douay-Rheims as a guide for its translations and as such stays much closer to the original meaning of the Vulgate than other modern versions of the Bible.

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, according to R. I. Moore, doctors in the twelfth century were cautious with the tests they ran in order to determine if a person was to be diagnosed as a leper, suggesting an understanding of the severities associated with the diagnosis. They “knew that leprosy could easily be confused with several less dangerous conditions, and some of the tests which they employed, such as the dropping of cold water on the suspected spot of skin to watch how it ran, were capable of contributing to an authentic diagnosis of Hansen’s disease.” Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 44.

priests (and also, at times, already diagnosed lepers) played the leading role in determining cases of leprosy.<sup>36</sup> These Biblical references, as well as others on the treatment of leprosy and the leprous spanned the Middle Ages, influencing both Church and secular legislation as well as the lives of those under their jurisdiction.

The term *lepra* (as well as its other Latin derivatives) was highly charged in the Middle Ages. Interestingly, when the generic Hebrew term for skin diseases, *Zarā'at*, was translated into Greek in the Septuagint it became *λεπρά*. From this Greek word the term *lepra* — meaning explicitly the disease of leprosy — was an easy selection for Jerome when he produced the Vulgate translation of the Bible.<sup>37</sup> This shift in terminology, as well as the identification of the symptoms as being those of the leprous, had immense repercussions for the perception of the disease throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>38</sup> With the shift in term from the generic 'skin disease' to the specific disease of 'leprosy' came a change in moral understandings of the disease. At various times throughout the Middle Ages it conjured up images of diseased and deformed faces, ideas of moral depravity, the elect of God, or the contagion of disease. The term of *lepra* holds within it a microcosm of the importance and power of language. No matter the current image of the disease, to be labeled as *leprosus* meant an individual was stripped of his or her previous life and moved outside the boundaries of his or her former society.

At the forefront of this process was the Church, whose prescriptions and rituals created a persona of the leper which still exists in the minds of the world to this day. Early medieval Church documents, in accordance with the contemporary image of the disease, portrayed lepers

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<sup>36</sup> Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 35

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> The language of the disease of leprosy is important as well as interesting in its study. Unfortunately, there is not room in this thesis to do it justice. For a detailed history of the language of leprosy see: Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*.

as morally reprehensible individuals and, because of this, their disease was seen as a punishment from God. As noted by Peter Richards, it was a punishment reserved for some of the most vile of sinners — the lecherous, wanton, and the lustful.<sup>39</sup> However, this Old Testament understanding of the disease was complicated by the presence of lepers in the New Testament. The stories in the Gospels of Jesus healing ten lepers and Lazarus being taken into the bosom of Abraham by angels after being ignored by a rich man provided templates for examples of expressing piety. These stories provided an alternate understanding of the disease — that of a disease given by God to be borne by people in this world to alleviate suffering in the next.

The characterization of leprosy depended on a number of factors in the Middle Ages. The Biblical foundations of the disease painted a dichotomous understanding of the disease; separate the leprous from the clean members of society, but remember the actions of Jesus and show them compassion. Saints replicated the actions and teachings of Christ, but twelfth-century Church councils reminded the world that lepers were members of the *other* and should be treated accordingly. This chapter will focus on the impact and development of these two images from their Biblical roots until the turn of the thirteenth century. These two views of leprosy coexisted throughout the Middle Ages, providing an often blurry understanding of how society was meant to deal with the ‘unclean’ in their midst.

### **Dealing with Lepers: The Old Testament**

Much of the medieval understanding of how to deal with leprosy came from the Old Testament book of Leviticus. Leprosy, as a category of disease, existed as a mark of ritual

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Richards, *The Medieval Leper* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1977), 66.

impurity in Biblical texts long before the disease itself was widespread in Europe.<sup>40</sup> As part of the Hebrew Torah (from the Hebrew תּוֹרָה) or Pentateuch (from the Greek Πεντάτευχος), Leviticus outlines the founding ethical and legal doctrines of Judaism. The five books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) were assimilated into the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, providing a historical basis for the new Christian covenant with God. The Book of Leviticus was important for the Jewish tradition because it dictated the laws and rituals prescribed by God for the priestly tribe of Levi. These laws were intended to meet the pressing needs of both the priests as well as laymen. Though seen as only a predecessor to this new covenant between God and the followers of Christ, the Old Testament laws still retained their influence over certain religious and legal practices in the medieval world. The nature of the text, therefore, primarily concerned the religious and moral significance of leprosy, but also, eventually came to have influence over the social perceptions of the disease.<sup>41</sup>

In particular, two chapters of Leviticus (13 and 14) had the greatest influence as they detail both the medical and judicial regulations pertaining to the treatment of lepers.<sup>42</sup> They were reserved for the use of priests to explain how to examine the skin of the suspected leper.<sup>43</sup> Because the Old Testament law recognized the disease as being a mark of unclean, it became the basis of the Church's understanding and handling of leprosy. Chapter 13 outlines the array of symptoms of a disease which it had come to call leprosy and what should be done if a person

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<sup>40</sup> Catherine Peyroux, "The Leper's Kiss," in *Monks & Nuns, Saints & Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 176.

<sup>41</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 102.

<sup>42</sup> However, as Luke Demaitre notes, "this influence was less visible in academic discussions than in official documents." Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 77.

<sup>43</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 102. Touati continues by explaining "aux dispositions préconisées et au rituel de purification en usage: ils énoncent la Règle (*Tora*) sous une forme casuistique, qui envisage, à peu de distance des interdits alimentaires, des sacrifices, de la purification des femmes accouchées ou des proscriptions relatives au sang, l'ensemble des gestes humains quotidiens vécus dans une société théocratique." Ibid.

was suspected of being infected. It described leprosy as not only being repulsive and a symbol of the unclean, but contagious as well.<sup>44</sup> While this description of what ‘leprosy’ is according to Leviticus is vague, it did have an influence on the medieval medical response to the disease.<sup>45</sup> According to Leviticus, lepers had ulcers and pustules, white hair where the skin had become infected, and the infected skin had sunk lower than the rest.

And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: The man in whose skin of flesh there will have arisen a diverse color, or a pustule, or something that seems to shine, which is the mark of leprosy, shall be brought to Aaron the priest, or to anyone you wish among his sons. And if he sees that leprosy is in his skin, and that the hair has turned a white color, and that the place where the leprosy appears is lower than the rest of the skin and the flesh, then it is the mark of leprosy, and at his judgment he shall be separated. <sup>46</sup>

This text from Leviticus, aside from explaining the symptoms of leprosy, also dictates that anyone suspected of being leprous ought to be brought directly to a priest.<sup>47</sup> This sentiment

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<sup>44</sup> J. N. Hays explores the manners in which the Christians may have differed from the Jews in their understanding of the nature of “cleanliness” and disease. “Hence the ‘scaly skin disease’ of the Hebrews, the mark of a ritual uncleanliness, was equated by medieval Christians with leprosy, a disease that in ancient Greece and Rome (and in the world of medieval Islam) was known and had no such ritual associations. In addition, medieval Christianity placed different emphases, or perhaps even different meanings, on the concept of uncleanliness.” Hays, *The Burdens of Disease*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 77.

<sup>46</sup> Leviticus 13:1-3 translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Locutusque est Dominus ad Moysen, et Aaron dicens: Homo, in cuius cute et carne ortus fuerit diversus color sive pustula, aut quasi lucens quippiam, id est, plaga leprae, adducetur ad Aaron sacerdotem, vel ad unum quemlibet filiorum eius. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 89.

<sup>47</sup> This became a key facet of the diagnosis of leprosy and will be discussed later in this chapter.

is also echoed in Leviticus 13:7-8,<sup>48</sup> 9-10,<sup>49</sup> and 18-9;<sup>50</sup> each time reiterating how the priest was the sole person responsible for pronouncing a judgment of the disease.<sup>51</sup> What is interesting in this chapter of Leviticus is the care required of the priest when determining if an individual is infected with leprosy or if they are afflicted by another sort of skin ailment. The suspected person, if their symptoms fell into other more ambiguous categories, were sent into seven days of seclusion in order to heal and therefore prove their condition not to be leprosy.<sup>52</sup> After those seven days (and even in some cases another seven days might be allowed) the final judgment was passed by the priest on the nature of the person's condition.

Based on the laws within Leviticus, if the priest determined a person to be free of leprosy then they were declared 'clean' and allowed to return to their lives. However, if they were found to be leprous they were declared 'unclean' and separated from society. In the tradition which came from Leviticus, lepers were to be separated from the clean part of society so as to not spread their unclean status. In order to keep the 'clean' and the 'unclean' separate, lepers were

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<sup>48</sup> "But if the leprosy increases again, after he was seen by the priest and restored to cleanness, he shall be brought to him, and he shall be condemned of uncleanness." Leviticus 13:7 translated in: "Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible," (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Quod si postquam a sacerdote visus est, et redditus munditiae, iterum lepra creverit: adducetur ad eum, et immunditiae condemnabitur.* Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> "If the mark of leprosy has been in a man, he shall be brought to the priest, and he shall look upon him." Leviticus 13:9-10 translated in: "Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible," (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Plaga leprae si fuerit in homine, adducetur ad sacerdotem, et videbit eum.* Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 89.

<sup>50</sup> "But when there has been an ulcer in the flesh and the skin, and it has healed, and in the place of the ulcer, there appears a white or reddish scar, the man shall be brought to the priest." Leviticus 13:18-9 translated in: "Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible," (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Caro autem et cutis in qua ulcus natum est, et sanatum, et in loco ulceris cicatrix alba apparuerit, sive subrufa, adducetur homo ad sacerdotem.* Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 90.

<sup>51</sup> This distinction of a person being brought to the priest upon the suspicion of leprosy was echoed in 1215 in the 22 Canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>52</sup> These instances occur in Leviticus 13: 4-6, 20-7, 31-34. Demaitre notes that these periods of seven days showed an advanced understanding of the disease; "In giving [the priest] the option of isolating a suspect temporarily, 'for seven days,' Levite law anticipated the practice of allowing signs to become less ambiguous with the passing of time, which was common in European examinations...The Mosaic ordinances...recognized the developmental character of the disease, in emerging, growing, and advancing stages. They also reflected differential recognition by distinguishing *lepra* from scabies, burn lesions, and baldness." Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 233-4.

moved beyond the gates of the city and stripped of their previous lives. Not only were they physically removed from their communities, but they also received the marks of their disease which would distinguish them as lepers:

Therefore, whoever will have been spotted by leprosy, and who has been separated at the judgment of the priest, shall have his clothes unstitched, his head bare, his mouth covered with a cloth, and he himself shall cry out that he is contaminated and filthy. The entire time that he is a leper and unclean he shall live alone outside the camp.<sup>53</sup>

These injunctions laid out in the Bible determined the status and quality of the lives of the leprous were determined in the Middle Ages. Moved ‘outside the camp’ and made easily distinguishable by material marks of the disease, the leprous were constantly marked as being ‘other.’ Interestingly, chapter 14 of Leviticus offers a way by which the leprous might be able to reenter their community. The chapter details the rites by which a leper can be cleansed from his disease.<sup>54</sup> The leper is led again to the priest, much as they had been when they had first been accused of leprosy, and the priest performed another examination with rituals of purification using water, blood, and oil. In essence, this is the reverse of the process the person went through when being diagnosed as a leper, however it marked the leper as being a sacred figure (moving from the status of ‘unclean’ to ‘clean’).<sup>55</sup> Despite its presence in the Old Testament law, as well

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<sup>53</sup> Leviticus 14:44-6 translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Quicumque ergo maculatus fuerit lepra, et separatus est ad arbitrium sacerdotis, habebit vestimenta dissuta, caput nudum, os veste contextum, contaminatum ac sordidum se clamabit. Omni tempore quo leprosus est immundus, solus habitabit extra castra.* Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 90.

<sup>54</sup> “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: This is the rite for a leper, when he is to be cleansed.” Leviticus 14:1-2 translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Locutusque est Dominus ad Moysen, dicens: Hic est ritus leprosi, quando mundandus est.* Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 91.

<sup>55</sup> “La réversibilité du processus confirme son caractère sacré.” Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 103.

as its proximity to the criteria for diagnosis, these processes of ritual purification were rarely recognized or performed by the Church.<sup>56</sup>

With thirteen unique references in its pages, the Old Testament provided lists of symptoms, punishments, means of recovery, and purification rituals.<sup>57</sup> Leviticus, in particular, provided the foundation from which the medieval practices for dealing with leprosy were developed. It was not unique of Christianity to cast the leprous out of their cities,<sup>58</sup> as other cultures often also removed the diseased from their midst. However, the evolving motive and rationale for the separation was distinctly Christian. Leprosy, according to the Christian church, was an external manifestation of a person's inner nature; a diseased soul was dangerous not only to the leper himself, but to society around him.<sup>59</sup> However, the New Testament provided a different picture of how lepers ought to be seen.

### **Dealing with Lepers: The New Testament**

Where the Old Testament provided a bleak understanding of leprosy, providing details on how to recognize the disease and sending those infected outside of the cities, the New Testament cast the leprous in another light. Much of the focus of the stories told in the Gospels of the New Testament is the power of Jesus in alleviating illness. One fifth of the miracles described as occurring in the Gospels either show or hint at the healing powers of both Jesus and his elected

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<sup>56</sup> Though not practiced by priests, many lepers may have attempted some of these practices outlined in Leviticus to cure themselves. Some bathed in the Jordan River, believing it to have healing properties.

<sup>57</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 102.

<sup>58</sup> As Peter Lewis Allen notes, it is important to recognize that the treatment of lepers in the Western world did not necessarily correspond to all areas of the medieval world. Where lepers in the medieval West were segregated from the rest of their society, things were different in the rest of the medieval world. For example, "...lepers were allowed to roam freely in Byzantium and in the Medieval Islamic world." Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 26.

<sup>59</sup> Goodich, ed., *The Other Middle Ages*, 11.



disciples.<sup>60</sup> While the healing of a leper only occurs in four Gospel stories, it nonetheless made a lasting impression on the medieval world. With two main groups of these stories, the New Testament highlights the favorable, and even divine, status of lepers. Three of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) tell of Jesus's miraculous healing of lepers, suggesting that the disease was one which was both given and taken away by the divine. From the Gospels the hybrid figure of Lazarus was also created, who was a leper favored by God. This composite Lazarus, who was drawn from two separate stories in the Gospels, eventually became one of the most well-recognized and widely venerated saints of the Middle Ages. These stories from the New Testament provided an alternative perception of the leprous as being the elect of God rather than 'unclean' members of society as portrayed in the Old Testament.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story of Jesus healing a single leper who approached Jesus in the streets when he was about to enter the city. In Matthew this occurs moments after delivering his "Sermon on the Mount." Crowds gathered around Jesus after he had come down from the mountain, eager to approach him and be healed. The first individual to come forward to Jesus was a leper, who said, "Lord, if you are willing, you are able to cleanse me."<sup>61</sup> Jesus reached out his hand, and with a single touch the leper was cleansed of his malady. This same event occurs in the Gospel of Mark<sup>62</sup> after Jesus had gathered his disciples and is traveling "preaching in their synagogues and throughout Galilee, and casting out demons."<sup>63</sup> In

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<sup>60</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew 8:2 as translated in: "Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible," (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Domine, si vis, potes me mundare*. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 969.

<sup>62</sup> Mark 1:40 as translated in: "Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible," (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Et venit ad eum leprosus deprecans eum: et genu flexo dixit ei: Si vis, potes me mundare*. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 993.

<sup>63</sup> Mark 1:39 as translated in: "Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible," (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *erat praedicans in synagogis eorum, et in omni Galilaea, et daemonia eiiciens*. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 993.

the Gospel Luke this miracle<sup>64</sup> also occurs after Jesus had gathered his disciples. The man who was here described as being ‘full of leprosy’ fell to the ground before Jesus begging for healing, which Jesus granted to him.

This miracle of Christ is not necessarily comparable to the other miracles he performs in the Bible as there is no reference to the forgiveness of the leper’s sins.<sup>65</sup> Instead, the leper recognizes the holiness of Jesus and humbles himself by asking to be healed from his disease. Interestingly, in accordance with the principles of chapter 14 of Leviticus, in all three tellings of the healing of this leper, Jesus sends the leper to the priest to be ritually purified and declared clean. Each time after curing him, Jesus tells the leper: “See to it that you tell no one. But go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses instructed, as a testimony for them.”<sup>66</sup> By acting in accordance with the Judaic laws, Jesus showed that those ancient laws were still applicable to his followers. The importance and basis of membership in the Christian community is here shown to be still within the power of the priests.

Later in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus performs another healing of the leprous, this time on a larger scale. In Chapter 17, Jesus, who is on his way to Jerusalem, comes upon ten lepers on the road. The lepers, while remaining at a safe distance from Jesus, ask him to take pity on them and heal them from their affliction. In response, just as he had done with the leper he had healed

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<sup>64</sup> “And it happened that, while he was in a certain city, behold, there was a man full of leprosy who, upon seeing Jesus and falling to his face, petitioned him, saying: ‘Lord, if you are willing, you are able to cleanse me.’ And extending his hand, he touched him, saying: ‘I am willing. Be cleansed.’ And at once, the leprosy departed from him.” Luke 5:12-3 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>).

<sup>65</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 104.

<sup>66</sup> “And a leper came to him, begging him. And kneeling down, he said to him, ‘If you are willing, you are able to cleanse me.’ Then Jesus, taking pity on him, reached out his hand. And touching him, he said to him: ‘I am willing. Be cleansed.’ And after he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.” Mark 1:40-2 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *Et ait illi Iesus: Vide, nemini dixeris: sed vade, ostende te sacerdoti, et offer munus, quod praecipit Moyses, in testimonium illis.* Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 969.

earlier, Jesus tells them to “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”<sup>67</sup> After they had departed for the priests they were cleansed of their leprosy. However, despite all ten of them having been cleansed by Jesus’s command, only one of the lepers — a Samaritan — returned to Jesus to thank him for what he had done. Surprised that only one returned to him, Jesus said: “Were not ten made clean? And so where are the nine? Was no one found who would return and give glory to God, except this foreigner?”<sup>68</sup> Because he returned to thank Jesus, this leper is depicted as showing exemplary piety. His act was seen as one of great devotion and conversion.

One other figure of a leper emerged from the Gospels as an example of piety. This leper, who came to be known as Lazarus, was actually a composite of two stories within the Gospel. The first was the story from the Gospel of John about Lazarus of Bethania, the brother of Martha and Mary (the woman who had washed Jesus’s feet with her hair).<sup>69</sup> The two women were hopeful that Jesus would heal their sick brother, but instead he left the city with his disciples. However, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been buried for four days. The parable from the Gospel of Luke known as *Dives et Pauper*<sup>70</sup> provides the second story which factored into the figure of Lazarus. In this story a beggar named Lazarus, a leper who was “covered with sores,”<sup>71</sup> was begging at the gate of a rich man’s home. The rich man constantly ignored the beggar, never giving him any of food or showing him any other charity.<sup>72</sup> Eventually Lazarus

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<sup>67</sup> Luke 17:14 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>).

<sup>68</sup> Luke 17:17-8 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>).

<sup>69</sup> John 11:1-45

<sup>70</sup> Luke 16:19-31

<sup>71</sup> Luke 16:20 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *ulceribus plenus*. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 1031.

<sup>72</sup> “Wanting to be filled with the crumbs which were walling from the wealthy man’s table. But no one gave it to him. And even the dogs came and licked his sores.” Luke 16:21 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *cupiens saturari de micis quae cadebant de mensa divitis, et nemo illi dabat: set et canes veniebant, et lingeabant ulcera eius*. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 1031.

died, but “he was carried by the Angels into the bosom of Abraham.”<sup>73</sup> Shortly after, the rich man also died. However, because he had rejected helping Lazarus, he was sent to Hell. The rich man next tried to convince Abraham to let Lazarus help him out of the fires of Hell.<sup>74</sup> Abraham responded to him by saying, “Son, recall that you received good things in your life, and in comparison, Lazarus received bad things. But now he is consoled, and truly you are tormented.”<sup>75</sup> His story dramatized the idea that the leper, outcast and desperate, could still be redeemed by God’s grace.<sup>76</sup> This figure of Lazarus became the ideal picture of the poor, leprous beggar who was favored by God as well as deserving of the charity of others.

These Gospel stories greatly impacted the perception of leprosy in the Middle Ages. These associations of the leprous with being the elect of God helped to shape the perception of the disease across the Middle Ages, particularly because of the wide-reaching influence of the Bible.<sup>77</sup> The stories of the healing of the leprous by Jesus depicted leprosy as a disease which was only curable through miracles. Whereas the figure of Lazarus, who was both raised from the dead by Jesus and also carried into the bosom of Abraham by angels, presented the leprous as being the favored people of God. Both of these images were important in the perception of the disease and, as such, had an immense impact on piety throughout the Middle Ages.

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<sup>73</sup> Luke 16:22 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *portaretur ab angelis in sinum Abrahae*. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 1031.

<sup>74</sup> Luke 16:24 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). In Latin: *intingat extremum digiti sui in aquam, ut refrigeret linguam meum, quia crucior in hac flamma*. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 1031.

<sup>75</sup> Luke 16:25 as translated in: “Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible,” accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>. Latin: *Fili, recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua, et Lazarus similiter mala: nunc autem hic consolatur, tu verocruciaris*. Colungam O.P. and Turrado, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam Nova Editio*, 1031.

<sup>76</sup> Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss,” 179.

<sup>77</sup> Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 84.

## The Early Middle Ages: Living in *Imitatio Christi*

The Biblical understanding of leprosy provided the framework in which medieval society treated leprosy. This dichotomous view of the disease, the sinful and unclean leper contrasted with the favor shown by Jesus and God to them, persisted and coexisted from Biblical times into the Middle Ages. At this time it was also believed that sainthood was bestowed upon those who lived an exemplary life, which is to say, a life in *imitatio Christi*. Living in this way was already considered a mark of supreme piety in the late antique Christian world.<sup>78</sup> However, its practice declined in the early Middle Ages as new paths of sanctity developed.

The medieval understanding of sainthood was fluid and therefore adaptable.<sup>79</sup> As such, saints were a key component of the Christian community in the Middle Ages; they were venerated both during their lives and after their deaths because of their privileged relationship with God.<sup>80</sup> In lay society, which was ambivalently dominated by the influence of the Church, an individual who was regarded as having a privileged relationship with God had the potential to serve as an important connection between the secular and sacred worlds. It was only after the turn of the eleventh century<sup>81</sup> that the practice of living in *imitatio Christi* was revived in reaction to a growing sense of spiritual crisis within the Church.<sup>82</sup> The ultimate goal of *imitatio*

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<sup>78</sup> Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 2 (1983), 7.

<sup>79</sup> According to Avaid M. Kleinberg, it was "personal, concrete, and of an ad hoc nature." Kleinberg goes on to note that this meant sometimes "medieval communities venerated simultaneously very different individuals who belonged to the same external categories, indifferent to the logical contradictions such behavior entailed." Avaid M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2001), xv. Head expands upon this by explaining that, for citizens of the medieval world, "[s]aints demonstrated their holiness through their actions, whether it be in the willingness to accept martyrdom, in the rigors of extreme asceticism, in the wise exercise of episcopal office, or in the heroic defense of their virginity...There could be no better advocate at the final judgement than someone who already belonged to the 'fatherland' of heaven." Ibid., xiv.

<sup>81</sup> Gábor Klaniczay, "Legends as Life Strategies for Aspirant Saints in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Folklore Research* 26, No 2 (1989): 152.

<sup>82</sup> This period of 'spiritual crisis' within the Church will be discussed later in this chapter.

*Christi*, then, was to mirror the perfect life of Christ. While it is impossible for man to live such a perfect life, saints were perceived as attempting, instead, to live as though they were Christ's apostles.

To live this *vita apostolica* a saint adhered both internally and externally to the words and actions of Christ as depicted in the Gospels.<sup>83</sup> This manifested itself in multiple ways in medieval hagiography, but of particular importance to this thesis is the appearance of lepers in the Gospels. Christ, as was discussed above ministered to, loved, and healed the leprous. Starting in the fourth century the image of following in the way of Christ though touching the leprous appeared in stories that circulated widely.<sup>84</sup> This image of devotion given to the outcasts presented a pattern for later generations of faithful to follow. In crossing the social boundaries to embrace or heal a leper, saints were following both the words and actions of Christ.

Two of the most notable saints who interacted with the leprous before Francis were Saint Martin of Tours and Saint Radegund. Their *vitae* provided a literary tradition which future saints' hagiographers — including those of Saint Francis — used as a template for recording their lives, emphasizing their sanctity, and providing a glimpse of the underlying social commentary of their times. While Saint Martin and Saint Radegund are the two most notable saints to have episodes depicting their interactions with the lepers in their hagiographies, they are by no means the only ones. Other saints who interacted with the leprous include: Saint Amatus (d.418), Saint Romanus of Condat (d. 463), Saint Benedict (d. 547), Saint Severin (d. 482), Saint Fursey (d.650), Saint Frideswide (d.735), and Saint Julien the Hospitaller (7th Century).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Gábor Klaniczay, "Legends as Life Strategies," 152. Klaniczay explains that living the *vita apostolica* "exemplified the individual's emerging capacity to break out of the given social status through conversion to a 'classical' religious way of life. By choosing to follow the 'original,' apostolic model, a confrontation was forced between the secular and religious contemporary alternatives." Ibid., 152-3.

<sup>84</sup> Peyroux, "The Leper's Kiss," 173.

<sup>85</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*. For more information on any of these saints, see Appendix A.

Of perhaps greatest importance among these is Saint Martin of Tours,<sup>86</sup> who was born in 316. Martin was the first saint to be recorded as having physically engaged with a leper. The first, and most important, biography of Saint Martin, written by Sulpicius Severus, would serve as a model for many hagiographies throughout the Middle Ages. Martin was seen as being the first saint to fully embrace the *vita apostolica*. The episode of Martin healing the leper is one of the most brief miracle episodes within the *Vita Martini*<sup>87</sup> and it is also placed towards the end of a long list of miracles performed by the saint. Despite this, the image of Martin kissing a leper was one which was taken up as a mark of extreme piety. Though short, this image of a saint kissing a leper emerged as a new and enduring idea of sanctity.<sup>88</sup>

While near the gates of Paris, Martin was surrounded by a large crowd who were eager to catch a glimpse of the holy man. While there a leper approached Martin and grabbed onto his clothing. With the crowd gathered, “he [Martin] gave a kiss to a leper, of miserable appearance, while all shuddered at seeing him do so.”<sup>89</sup> The reaction of the crowd towards both the leper and Saint Martin’s kiss was an expression of social disgust. Despite the horror of the crowd, Martin blessed the leper “with the result that he [the leper] was instantly cleansed from all his misery.”<sup>90</sup> This short episode provided the reader of Martin’s life with three key elements to understanding leprosy in the fourth century: the leper’s appearance (‘miserable’), the crowd’s reaction to the

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<sup>86</sup> For a more complete discussion on the life of Saint Martin of Tours, see Régine Pernoud, *Martin of Tours: Soldier Bishop, and Saint*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006); Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983);

<sup>87</sup> Michael Roberts, “St. Martin and the Leper: Narrative Variation in the Martin Poems of Venantius Fortunatus,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 4 (1994), 84.

<sup>88</sup> Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 144.

<sup>89</sup> Sulpitius Severus, trans. Alexander Roberts “On the Life of St. Martin,” *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 11 (1894), 11, (accessed 12 October 2006, <http://www.users.csbsju.edu/~eknuth/npnf2-11/sulpittiu/lifeofst.html>). ...leprosum miserabili facie horrentibus cunctis osculatus est atque benedixit. Sulpice Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 292.

<sup>90</sup> Sulpitius Severus, “On the Life of St. Martin,” 11. *Statimque omni malo emundatus*. Sulpice Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 292. Luke Demaitre explains that saints, like Saint Martin, who healed leprosy held a dramatic power which “stands in contrast with the invisibility of medical practitioners in early stories of miraculous cures of leprosy.” Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 1.

kiss ('all shuddered'), and the result of the kiss for the leper ('instantly cleansed'). With this episode, Severus made Martin's kiss a cure for the most horrific and dramatic disease of the time.

This kiss was both revolutionary because of its healing power and because Martin physically crossed the boundary between society and the leprous. The emotional responses of the crowd suggests an established relationship between society and the leprous which is greater than the precedent set in the Biblical treatment of the disease. The image of the disease presented in the Bible never hints at any social repulsion of the leprosy. Instead it only provides an understanding for the process of diagnosis and ritual exclusion for the leprous and it also shows the desire of the leprous to be cleansed. The shuddering reaction of the crowd highlights the fourth century social perception of the leprous as being something disgusting and revolting. Martin shows no evidence of this revulsion when he breaks the social boundary to kiss the leper who had reached out to take a hold of his cloak.

However, Martin's interaction with a leper was not an isolated incident in the early Middle Ages.<sup>91</sup> In the sixth century a Frankish princess went even further than Martin in breaking the taboo associated with the leprous. Saint Radegund was born in 520 to royalty within the German land of Thuringia. Though she was married, through family ties and political aspiration, Radegund bore her husband no children and eventually rejected her royal marriage and founded a cloister in Poitiers. Radegund was well-known and respected by many for her charity and humility with the poor and the sick. The *Life of the Holy Radegund (Vita Sanctae Radegundis)*, written shortly after her death by Venantius Fortunatus, was written to highlight the magnitude of Radegund's ascetic qualities.<sup>92</sup> It also provides detailed description of the

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<sup>91</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 88.

<sup>92</sup> Jo Ann McNamara, John E. Halborg, and Gordon Whatley, ed., and trans., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 63.



attention Radegund paid to the leprous. One day when some lepers arrived at her cloister she sent an assistant to see how many there were. Once they had been welcomed inside, Radegund “seizing some of the leprous women in her embrace, her heart full of love, she kissed their faces.”<sup>93</sup>

Unlike Martin before her, this kiss did not have the power to heal the leprous of their disease and misery. Radegund’s kiss instead showed them kindness and offered them what charity she could; “while they were seated at table, she washed their faces and hands with warm water and treated their sores with fresh unguents and fed each one.”<sup>94</sup> Radegund had so much humbled herself that she was able to care for the lepers without thought of the potential consequences of her actions. Later, when the lepers were departing one of Radegund’s attendants asked her: “Most holy lady, when you have embraced lepers, who will kiss you?”<sup>95</sup> Replying to this, Radegund simply stated, “Really, if you won’t kiss me, it’s no concern of mine.”<sup>96</sup> With this sentiment, Radegund showed that a true mark of humility and devotion to God lay in caring for the lepers as Christ had centuries earlier.

The kisses which both Martin and Radegund gave to lepers were, indeed, a way to show how they were living their lives in *imitatio Christi*. The Gospel stories where Jesus healed the suffering of the leprous provided a model for them to be considered proper recipients of divine charity.<sup>97</sup> However, Jesus never kissed a leper in the Gospels; he either touched (*tangere*) the lepers with his hand or healed them from a distance. It was only in the hagiographic texts that the verb shifted to the action of kissing (*osculari*). This shift implies, according to Catherine

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<sup>93</sup> *Life of the Holy Radegund*, translated in McNamara, Halborg, and Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 78.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss,” 180.

Peyroux, “a different register of interaction for the moment in which the holy person turned his or her attention to the leprous.”<sup>98</sup> Indeed, the kiss was one of the oldest practices in Christian tradition; an everyday greeting between Christians as well as a significant moment within the communion liturgy.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, the kiss between a saint and a leper was a gesture of extreme humility and one which incorporated an intimate moment of mutual Christian respect.<sup>100</sup>

While the image of kissing a leper was widely used in medieval hagiographic texts, it in no way became a cliché.<sup>101</sup> The appearance of the kiss in a text as well as the specific message it was trying to present varied greatly. Both Martin and Radegund met the lepers outside the boundaries of a city, as prescribed in the Old Testament legislation — Martin met the leper outside the gates of Paris and Radegund received the wandering lepers in her cloister. For Martin, the kiss was a way to show the virtues of living in the footsteps of Christ. For Radegund, the kiss was also a means to highlight her sanctity, but in a different manner than Martin. Radegund did not heal the leper, but she did show the importance of humility to sanctity. Instead of monotonously highlighting the devotion of the saint, every time the kiss appears in a new text it provides an unspoken social commentary on how, at that moment, lepers were perceived in the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Craig Koslofsky, “The Kiss of Peace in the German Reformation,” in *The Kiss in History*, ed. Karen Harvey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 19. Koslofsky goes on to explain this role of the kiss in early Christian tradition; “Tertullian (c.145-c.220) attested to its importance in the liturgy, asking ‘What prayer is complete if divorced from the ‘holy kiss’?’ He then referred to ‘the kiss of peace’ as ‘the seal of prayer.’” Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> This gesture has been linked to many other ‘kisses’ in the medieval world. “A gesture that united the participants in a notional community: the ‘feudal’ kiss of the vassal and lord, the monk’s mystic vision of kissing Christ, the kiss of peace between the clergy and the faithful. In the successive iterations of a saint’s voluntary embrace of a leper, the narrators returned, fascinated, to explore their holy protagonists’ capacity to create that brief, impossible community through a kiss.” Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss,” 180. This idea can also be found discussed in Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La raison des gestes dans l’occident médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); Karen Harvey, ed., *The Kiss in History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

<sup>101</sup> Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss,” 173.

medieval world.<sup>102</sup> In these ways, the kiss given by a saint to a leper retained an enduring reputation in the medieval world.<sup>103</sup>

### **Lepers in Medieval Society**

The status of the leper was often restated throughout the Middle Ages, in both ecclesiastical law and secular law. Although they were often legally excluded from the boundaries of medieval cities, the leprous also became an icon for the rise in social caregiving for the sick and the poor. Reduced to living outside the walls of the cities and often forced to wear distinctive clothing as well as other attributes of their status, the leprous were legally marked as an ‘other.’ At the same time, however, their situation saw an influx of money donated to the creation of hospices and provisions for their care. Much in the same vein as the dichotomy between the Old and New Testament treatment of the leprous, lepers were thus legally and socially treated in two distinct and contrasting manners.

The first non-ecclesiastical legal action which officially segregated lepers from the rest of society occurred in 635. It was prescribed in the *Code of Rothari* (*Edictum Rothari*) and can also be found in the *Leges Langobardorum*. The *Code of Rothari* was the first written compilation of Lombard laws, and most interestingly was not influenced by either Roman or canon law.<sup>104</sup> R. I.

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<sup>102</sup> As Peyroux explains, “in pondering tales of holy men and women who kissed lepers, it is the ‘unreliable’ narrators who hold our attention. These storytellers reveal not what certainly occurred, but what it was felt to be necessary to say when rendering the spectacular meeting between an exemplar of virtue and a figure of utterly abject misery and loss,” Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss,” 173. It is important to remember that the hagiography of a saint may or may not depict accurate renderings of situations. However, the written text is what was distributed and read by many, and thus impacted the social understanding of the disease as well as the treatments given to the leprous. As such, narratives “are both mirrors and guides to their contemporaries’ perceptions about the relationship between power and poverty.” Ibid., 174.

<sup>103</sup> Touati expands upon this idea of the kiss being an element which further shaped medieval tradition; “il n’est pas douteux que de telles images aient façonné, en même temps qu’elles l’accompagnaient, une proposition à se rapprocher des lépreux, à se soucier de leur place dans la société; on en verra plus loin les conséquences pratiques sur les communautés de malades: le baiser au lépreux est un acte fort de protection; il signe la parité reconnue de l’identité de l’autre, hautement significatif des liens féodaux.” Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 88.

<sup>104</sup> Moore, *The Formation of A Persecuting Society*, 45.

Moore suggests that this code is more a continuation of late antique traditions<sup>105</sup> than a response to a rise in the number of cases of the disease.<sup>106</sup> However, this legal decree clearly lays out a position on the status of the leprous which was used and referred to for centuries.

[Concerning Lepers] 176. On lepers. If anyone is afflicted with leprosy and the truth of the matter is recognized by the judge or by the people and the leper is expelled from the district (*civitas*) or from his house so that he lives alone, he shall not have the right to alienate his property or to give it to anyone. Because on the day that he is expelled from his home, it is as if he had died. Nevertheless, while he lives he should be nourished on the income from that which remains.<sup>107</sup>

Lepers, according to this regulation within the code, are to be ‘expelled’ from their homes as well as their cities. Furthermore, they retain no rights to their personal property because they have been declared, in essence, dead in the eyes of their community. This is a drastic interpretation of the disease which was not widespread within Europe in the Middle Ages, but was present in some regions.<sup>108</sup> Although they retain no legal status, they are still to have some sort of income to live off of, though how this income is to be generated is not implied in this text.

The *Code of Rothari* further mentions only one other reference to the status of the leprous. This statute discusses what should happen if a girl becomes infected by leprosy after her betrothal:

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<sup>105</sup> Moore explains that Emperor Constantine had not actually referred to the lepers when he “ordered the expulsion of lepers from the city of Constantinople and executed an official named Zoticos for giving them shelter instead. In fact, it looks as though this had no more to do with a drive to rid the city of the swarms of indigents and vagabonds who crowded into it than with any concern for public health.” *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>106</sup> R.I. Moore, *The Formation of A Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 45.

<sup>107</sup> Katherine Fischer Drew, *The Lombard Laws* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973), 83.

<sup>108</sup> It is important to note here that the leper ‘funeral service’ which is sensationalized both within Moore (Moore, *The Formation of A Persecuting Society*, 54-6) and Brody’s (Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 64-9) books has been proven by Carole Rawcliffe to be an isolated incident of maltreatment of lepers. This ‘funeral service’ (or ‘mock-burial’ or ‘the Leper Mass’) was not complete fiction, but have been given more attention than they deserve, as they were extremely isolated incidents. “In the case of medieval leprosy, the process has been proven less a matter of selection than an invention — or at least serious distortion. Neither the ‘Leper Mass’ nor the writ of exclusion, for example, were absolute fictions, although the process of repetition, elaboration and misquotation which has transformed them into planks of a national policy of segregation seems at times to resemble an academic game of Chinese whispers.” Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 39.

[Concerning the girl who becomes a leper after her betrothal] 180. Concerning the girl who becomes a leper after her betrothal. If it happens that after a girl or woman has been betrothed she becomes leprous or mad or blind in both eyes, then her betrothed husband shall receive back his property and he shall not be required to take her to wife against his will. And he shall not be guilty in this event because it did not occur on account of his neglect but on account of her weighty sins and resulting illness.<sup>109</sup>

Although the primary function of this statute was to provide a regulation for marriage, it also hints at the social understanding of leprosy in the seventh century. Leprosy here corresponds with sinfulness; the health of the body is directly linked with the health of the soul. By stating that leprosy is “on account of her weighty sins and resulting illness” this code highlights the attitude of the time. These two statutes remained the only Western legal sources concerning leprosy until the eleventh century.<sup>110</sup> However, this eleventh century rise of documentation concerning the leprous reflects a marked turn from the *Code of Rothari*.<sup>111</sup>

After the *Code of Rothari* there was a silence in the medieval West in legislation dealing with the status of the leprous.<sup>112</sup> However, at the turn of the twelfth century a new, physical form of treating the ‘problem’ of the lepers was established. Though there had always been hospitals and sick houses in the medieval West, it wasn’t until the eleventh century that a rise was seen in institutions directed at caring for the lepers.<sup>113</sup> Because of how their disease was viewed the leprosaria did not provide a hope for a cure, but instead functioned more as places of residence

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<sup>109</sup> Drew, *The Lombard Laws*, 84-5.

<sup>110</sup> Moore, *The Formation of A Persecuting Society*, 46.

<sup>111</sup> “They do occur, however, on the eve of a most dramatic alteration in the treatment of lepers, and one which represents a remarkable effort of organization and expenditure — the foundation of hospitals and homes for lepers which took place on a large scale all over Western Europe.” Ibid., 47.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>113</sup> “La plupart des ‘apparitions’ reconnues concerne des groupes humaines déjà en place: ce constat, d’abord frustrant, soulève d’importants problèmes chronologiques: il constitue toutefois par lui-même un indice des modalités suivies par l’ensemble des communautés. Englobés dans ce mouvement, certains cas mieux éclairés offrent l’opportunité de le mieux comprendre.” Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 36.

for the lepers.<sup>114</sup> During this time there was the first large-scale push for the foundations of institutions for housing the lepers, something which R. I. Moore explains as being representative of “a most dramatic alteration in the treatment of lepers, and one which represents a remarkable effort of organization and expenditure.”<sup>115</sup> The foundations of such houses, known as leprosaria, and hospitals grew over the years and eventually reached its peak about a century later.<sup>116</sup>

Providing charity to those who needed it was seen as a great act of charity. As lepers were not permitted to work to support themselves, both the ability to live at a leprosarium as well as the charity provided there were of greatest importance to their wellbeing. Though their disease was still dominantly viewed as a mark of God’s punishment, the foundation of leprosaria at this time hints at the less dominant attitude towards leprosy. Like Christ and Martin, helping the lepers was considered to be one of the greatest acts of piety. For this reason, leprosaria were often situated on the main roads leading into cities to both attract the alms of passing travelers and traders as well as to display the generosity of the benefactors who founded them.<sup>117</sup>

The establishment of these care centers and the number of those providing care rose dramatically after the turn of the twelfth century.<sup>118</sup> Before 1100 in the province of Sens in France there were only three leprosaria (known at present). However, by the end of the twelfth century there were over eighty leprosaria in the region (known at present).<sup>119</sup> There were a few

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<sup>114</sup> James W. Brodman, “Shelter and Segregation: Lepers in Medieval Catalonia,” in *On the Social Origins of Medieval Institutions*, edited by Donald J. Kagay and Theresa M. Vann (Lieden: Brill, 1998), 44.

<sup>115</sup> Moore, *The Formation of A Persecuting Society*, 47.

<sup>116</sup> “La présence confirmée, à partir de la fin du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle, des léproseries dont le nombre ne cesse de croître jusqu’au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle au moins.” Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 250. This rise of leprosaria in the thirteenth century will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.

<sup>117</sup> Elma Brenner, “Outside the City Walls: Leprosy, Exclusion, and Social Identity in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Rouen,” in *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France*, ed., Meredith Cohen and Justine Firnhaber-Baker (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 144.

<sup>118</sup> “Dès la fin du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle, un peu partout en Occident, les fondations d’hôpitaux et de léproseries se multiplient.” Francoise-Olivier Touati, “Une approche de la maladie et du phénomène hospitalier aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles: la léproserie du Grand-Beaulieu à Chartres” *Histoire des Sciences médicales*, 14:4 (1980): 421.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 282.

leprosaria founded at this time which Touati terms ‘grand leprosaria’<sup>120</sup> both due to their size as well as their function in the medieval landscape. One example of this sort of ‘grand leprosaria’ was built in the diocese of Paris near the city of Saint-Laurent in 1110. Situated on the northern outskirts of the city, this leprosarium was called Saint-Lazare of Paris and was dedicated to the composite New Testament figure of Lazarus. Saint-Lazare was one of the larger and more well-known leprosarium of early twelfth century which has resulted in better documentation of both its development and place in society. It was recognized again in 1122 in an act issued by Louis IV for the abbey of Saint-Denis (*prope Parisium, juxta domum leprosorum*).<sup>121</sup> Support was provided to Saint-Lazare by local merchants and craftsmen. The leprosarium was even granted both a butcher and a skinner who worked exclusively at their service.<sup>122</sup>

Perhaps one of the most well known of these early ‘grand leprosaria’ is the leprosarium of Grand-Beaulieu in Chartres. This leprosarium, when examined in detail, can be seen as a means to understand the greater workings of the growing network of leprosaria in the twelfth century. Yves of Chartres (d. 1115) was the first person to intervene on behalf of the lepers of Chartres.<sup>123</sup> He founded and dedicated a church to Mary Magdalene for the lepers somewhere between 1090 and 1107<sup>124</sup> in hopes that through devotion to her the lepers would benefit spiritually. There are two major collections of written sources on the foundation and operation of Grand-Beaulieu.<sup>125</sup> The first source is a collection of acts affecting the leprosarium between 1107 and 1297, which

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<sup>120</sup> Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 41.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>122</sup> “Concrète également et resserrant les liens de la léproserie avec la communauté urbaine est l’aide fournie par le milieu des commerçants et des artisans, comme à Chartres: ici deux bourgeois, l’un boucher et l’autre peaussier, exemptés par le roi et placés au service exclusif des lépreux.” Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 261.

<sup>123</sup> Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 41.

<sup>124</sup> Touati, “Une approche de la maladie,” 421.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 420.

detail the traditions and operations of the leprosaria.<sup>126</sup> The second is an account book which spans between 1250 and 1264. This source mainly documents land acquisitions, reconstructions of buildings, internal reform, and disciplinary actions.<sup>127</sup>

Though located outside the boundaries of the city, the leprosarium of Grand-Beaulieu à Chartres was greatly attached to the urban life of Chartres. In 1102 Theobald IV, the count of Blois-Chartres, allowed a yearly fair held by the patients of the leprosarium which lasted for eight days.<sup>128</sup> Though the fair was originally held in the countryside outside of Chartres, in 1151 it was moved into the city center. It is not known for certain if the lepers were also allowed to enter the city during these eight days, but their community was nonetheless granted substantial privileges.<sup>129</sup> Over the course of the eight days of the fair all people who normally traded in Chartres were required to do their business at Grand-Beaulieu's fair.<sup>130</sup>

Another example of a larger leprosarium which originated in the early twelfth century was Mont-aux-Malades in Rouen. Mont-aux-Malades was established between 1106 and 1135 and was patronized at first by the Anglo-Norman royal family and then after 1204 the kings of France.<sup>131</sup> Despite its lineage of royal patronage, it was also well supported by the citizens of Rouen. There are a large number of records which indicate gifts of land, money, and property donated to the exclusive use of the community at Mont-aux-Malades.<sup>132</sup> Much like Grand-

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<sup>126</sup> "actes de la pratique dont le nombre, sans égarde à leurs modes de tradition, et la répartition, entre 1107 au plus tôt et 1297, offrent un champ d'analyse homogène." Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> "Recueils fonciers: un livre de compte (1237) et trois cartulaires dont les rédactions s'échelonnent à partir de 1259; la confection de tels outils de reconstruction patrimoniale, résultat de compilations complémentaires, accompagne la réforme intérieure, disciplinaire, principalement accomplie entre 1250 et 1264, au Grand-Beaulieu." Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 534.

<sup>129</sup> Brenner, "Outside the City Walls," 153.

<sup>130</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 534. The leprosarium was also granted the commercial taxes on all goods entering Chartres.

<sup>131</sup> Brenner, "Outside the City Walls," 139. Patronage changed when Rouen came under the control of the French kingdom in 1204.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.



Beaulieu, Mont-aux-Malades hosted a yearly fair, which according to Elma Brenner indicates “that the people of Rouen and the surrounding area were not afraid to risk potential contact with the resident lepers.”<sup>133</sup> These yearly fairs hosted by leprosaria indicate the early twelfth century roots of a new sense of positive attitudes towards the leprous.

However, aside from these ‘grand leprosaria,’ most of the new twelfth century institutions were small and housed only a few patients. They were often attached to existing monastic institutions and because of this were treated in a similar manner. Early on, in particular, the idea was founded that leprosaria ought to be run as though they were monasteries for the sick or at least that the care of their inhabitants were under the direction of monastic rule.<sup>134</sup> For example, many of the early leprosaria relied on Chapter 36 of the *Rule* of Saint Benedict. In it Benedict stated that monks should care for the sick before and above all (*ante omnia et super omnia*) as though they were serving Christ.<sup>135</sup> Because of this, leprosaria were seen as the natural responsibility of local monastic communities. Because of this there was much focus in these early establishments on the spiritual health of the patients. Though they were still seen as being punished with their disease by God, the regulations of the early leprosaria focused on living in adherence to a completely religious lifestyle.

The twelfth century also saw a rise in the number of paupers and beggars across the medieval world.<sup>136</sup> As people were trying to find a means to express their religious devotion,

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Brodman, “Shelter and Segregation,” 36.

<sup>135</sup> “Le chapitre 36 de la *Règle* de saint Benoît est formel: ‘on prendra soin des malades avant tout et par dessus tout, de telle sorte qu’on les serve vraiment comme le Christ’” Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 251.

<sup>136</sup> For more on the concept and role of poverty in the Middle Ages, see: Mark R. Cohen, ed., *The Voice of the Poor in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Bronislaw Geremek, *Poverty: A History*, trans., Agnieszka Kolakowska (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Tadeusz Manteuffel, *Naissance d’une hérésie: les adeptes de la pauvreté volontaire au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Mouton, 1970); Michel Mollat, *Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990);

many turned to following in Christ's words and live a life of complete poverty while preaching the Gospel. Groups, like the Waldensians,<sup>137</sup> who devoted themselves to these practices posed a new problem for the Church. Because of this as well as the rising number of leper communities and leprosaria in the twelfth century, the Church needed to officially deal with the poor and wandering members of its community.

Church legislation concerning the leprous in the twelfth century was not based entirely on the laws established in Leviticus. With respect paid to the laws in the Old Testament, the Church further solidified the leper's status in the Christian community of the High Middle Ages with two major pieces of legislation. Both Canon 23 of the Third Lateran Council in 1179 and Canon 22 of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 helped to regulate the life and position of any person declared leprous in the medieval West. These two canons established the official Church sentiment towards both disease in general and the leprous specifically, creating a framework in which their lives played out for the rest of the Middle Ages.

In 1179 Pope Alexander III called for the Third Lateran Council to meet to discuss and determine some of the most important issues facing the Church in the twelfth century. It was this council which formalized the Old Testament process of separating the leper from medieval society, making it understandable and applicable to the medieval Christian West. According to canon 23 of this council, lepers were to be segregated from the rest of the community; outside the walls and gates of the cities, just as had been decreed in Leviticus. However, this canon also set another precedent for the lepers.

We have decided by apostolic charity that wherever some of them [the lepers] are gathered together in such a way under the rule of common life that they can

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<sup>137</sup> For more information on the Waldensians, see: Malcolm D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 70-96.

provide themselves with a cemetery and they are able to enjoy their own priest, they should be allowed to do so without contradiction. They should, nevertheless, beware not to do any injury to the parochial rights of old churches should they exist. This is granted to them for the sake of piety, but we do not want it to lead to the injury of others. We have also decided that they should not have to pay tithes for their gardens or the pasturing of their animals.<sup>138</sup>

Canon 23 acknowledged the communities of leprous poor which were rising in number and beginning to gather around the cities from which they had been excluded.<sup>139</sup> This decree gave communities of lepers, like those gathered in leper hospitals or in other small communities outside the walls of a city, an official status within the Church. It allotted them, officially, the right to their own places of worship, priest, and places of burial. According to Jacques Le Goff, this “helped to make them into closed worlds which the lepers could only leave if they made a space before them by making a noise with a rattle which they had to shake.”<sup>140</sup> Although they were diseased in body, and considered by some to be diseased in their souls, in this canon the lepers were granted in this canon the right to participate in spiritual life. Canon 23 officially recognized the place of the leper within the medieval world — although separated from their society, they were still members of the Christian community, and as such, entitled to the same means of salvation.

Although it may seem to have been a positive action for the leprous, canon 23 instead emphasized their exclusion. With regards to the *Dives et pauper* story (“granted to them for the sake of piety”), the Church knew it needed to provide for the leprous, as they were in many ways considered to be the elect of God. They were to be provided their own churches and cemeteries because they were not allowed contact with the rest of the Christian community. Instead of

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<sup>138</sup> Canon 23 of the Third Lateran Council, translated in Goodich, ed., *Other Middle Ages*, 146.

<sup>139</sup> Moore, *The Formation of A Persecuting Society*, 49.

<sup>140</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400-1500* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 321.

incorporating the leprous into the medieval world this canon further separated them from their peers, thus drawing more attention to their status as an ‘other’ in their communities. The canon explained this as a concern for the ‘clean’ members of society (“we do not want it to lead to the injury of others”), hinting at a concern for contagion — either of the physical malady or the soul. Although this canon did grant them an ‘official position’ in the eyes of the Church, it did not grant them one which was favorable to their condition.

In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council was called by Pope Innocent III and attended by an overwhelming number of both ecclesiastical and royal figures. With three patriarchs,<sup>141</sup> over four hundred bishops, eight hundred priests, and representatives from all the princes across Europe, this council has long been considered the greatest ecclesiastical assembly of the thirteenth century.<sup>142</sup> This council set out to resolve all the pressing and essential doctrinal issues facing Christianity at the time as well as the pressing contemporary issues facing the Church. This council is widely thought to have instigated a turning point in the history of Western Europe as it helped to simultaneously consolidate the authority of the Church and produced a major change in the devotional life of the laity.<sup>143</sup>

Aside from Canon 21, which required that every person to make an annual confession to his or her parish priest (or another properly qualified member of the clergy), the Fourth Lateran Council also placed the spiritual needs of a person above their physical needs. Canon 21 equated the confessional between a person and their priest in medical terms; arguing that the priest was just like a doctor. The canon required that a priest:

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<sup>141</sup> Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 199.

<sup>142</sup> Patrick J. Geary, ed., *Readings in Medieval History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 430.

<sup>143</sup> Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 131.

like a practiced doctor...pour wine and oil on the wounds of the injured, diligently enquiring into the circumstances both of the sinner and of the sin, from which to choose intelligently what sort of advice he ought to give him and what sort of remedy to apply, various means availing to heal the sick.<sup>144</sup>

This highlighted the understanding of the priest as a physician of the soul, responsible for both diagnosing sins and healing the laity of them.

This idea, of priest as physician of the soul, was emphasized and expanded in the following canon of the Fourth Lateran Council. Canon 22 states:

As physical illness is sometimes the result of sin — the Lord said to a sick man whom he had cured, “Go and sin no more, lest worse befall you,” — we by the present decree ordain and strictly command doctors, when it happens before anything else to call in doctors of souls, so that after his spiritual health has been seen to, the sick man may respond better to the bodily medicine — for when the cause ceases, the effect ceases...Furthermore, as the soul is more precious than the body, we forbid on pain of eternal anathema any doctor to prescribe anything for a sick man for his bodily health which might endanger his soul.<sup>145</sup>

This canon, according to numerous scholars, in a sense solidified the religious connection between sin and disease.<sup>146</sup> Here the precedent is set by the biblical understanding of sin as being a cause for bodily illness. The physicians of medicine of the body therefore are only allowed to treat the problems which afflict the body once the priests have healed the individual's soul.

Moreover, this canon also emphasizes the hierarchy of the soul over body by explaining that should there be a way to heal the body that might harm the soul, physicians were strictly prohibited from prescribing it for the patient. Though leprosy is not explicitly mentioned, it has been suggested by many historians that this canon helped to refine an internal mechanism for

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<sup>144</sup> Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council, translated in Geary, ed., *Readings in Medieval History*, 439.

<sup>145</sup> Canon 22 of the Fourth Lateran Council, translated in Geary, ed., *Readings in Medieval History*, 439-40.

<sup>146</sup> Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 132.

persecuting groups of those excluded from the Church.<sup>147</sup> However, as Touati suggests, the decrees of Lateran IV may have just been an expression of an overall hardening attitude towards outcasts.<sup>148</sup> Either way, this prescription, officially sanctioned by the Church, highlighted the association between the outward appearance of a disease and its link to illness of the soul, a depiction which had historically been linked with leprosy.

Providing the Church's official position on both the leprous and the ill in general, the Lateran decrees established a precedent for the perception of understanding leprosy in the High Middle Ages. However, this precedent provided two contrasting views on leprosy much in the same way the Old and New Testaments had in earlier centuries. In 1179, although the lepers were to be segregated from their cities because of their disease, they still were considered to be members of the Christian community and as such they were entitled to the same access to worship as the healthy members of society. Despite this, less than forty years later, disease was declared officially to be a mark of a diseased soul — something for which the Church declared itself the primary means of interceding and saving the sick.

## Summary

At the turn of the twelfth century the perception of leprosy stood at a crossroads between the Old and New Testament visions of leprosy. The dominant view of the disease during the

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<sup>147</sup> Moore explains, "The parallels in the development of the persecution of heretics, Jews and lepers are very striking. There were differences, but in each case although persecution was rigorous in theory it did not occur in practice until the beginning of the eleventh century and remained intermittent until its end; in each, rising hostility became sharply apparent in the middle decades of the twelfth; and in each a comprehensive apparatus of persecution was worked out towards the end of the twelfth century, codified by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1225..., and perfected by the middle of the thirteenth century or soon after." Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 62.

<sup>148</sup> Touati explains, "les prodromes de ce malaise, peut-être déjà suggéré par les mesures canoniques de Lateran III, se manifestent dans la province à l'issue d'une première 'crise' au tournant des XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Sans doute ont-ils été freinés un temps par un idéal de vie *héroïsé* avec le regain de religiosité de certains mouvements, mais aussi par les sentiments encore mêlés que les malades inspirent sous le coup des modèles antérieurs toujours rappelés." Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 764.

Early Middle Ages was that of the vile and sinful. Lepers were seen as having incurred their disease a punishment from God for their sins. Because of this, they had been deemed 'unclean' and as such were no longer considered to be members of the community. Legally they were completely excluded from their former lives, reduced to the margins of the medieval landscape. They were to be 'cast outside the camp' and were burdened with the social stigma that came along with their deviating and deforming disease.

Because they were excluded from their communities, lepers were entirely dependent on the charity of others. Prohibited from working, they were left to beg on the streets for money and food. The Biblical stories of Jesus's actions towards the leprous provided an example for the medieval world to follow; in his eyes lepers were worthy of these acts of charity. Though this did not alter the dominant perception of leprosy in the Early Middle Ages, it did provide a precedent for the actions of some holy men and women looking to live in *imitatio Christi*. When saints like Martin and Radegund kissed and cared for the lepers, they were crossing the same social boundaries which Jesus had crossed centuries earlier. This can be similarly seen in the early roots of the foundations of the leprosaria. To take in those whom society cast out and provide them with charity went against the social standards and perceptions of the time.

Despite the approval of the actions of Martin and Radegund, whom were both seen in their *vitae* as so holy that kissing the lepers did not repulse them, lepers were still largely stigmatized at the turn of the thirteenth century. The 23<sup>rd</sup> canon of the Third Lateran Council stood as a reaction to the rising number of leper communities and foundations of leprosaria across the medieval West. It further emphasized the exclusion of the lepers from the medieval cities as well as emphasized the need to contain and control their access to the Christian

community. Lepers, though allowed to participate in the Church, were still seen as the lepers of the Old Testament exclusion rituals.

It is at this point, this conceptual crossroad, that one layman would follow the actions of both Jesus and many saints before him and embraced a leper. With a historical background so drastically divided on how to handle the leprous, this man came forward at a moment when new means of exclusion were being enforced on the leprous. Although not the first man to cross the social boundary between the clean and the unclean, Saint Francis of Assisi used the kiss he gave to the leper for personal spiritual purposes and simultaneously altered social perceptions of the leprous. In essence, he took these new exclusions of the lepers and created instead a means for a new sort of inclusion.



### III. Saint Francis and the Treatment of Lepers in the High Middle Ages

*The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body.*

*Saint Francis of Assisi, The Testament*<sup>149</sup>

As has already been discussed, at the turn of the thirteenth century lepers were considered to be simultaneously punished and favored by God. These perceptions were fostered and disseminated both by their Biblical origins and by the official position of the Church. The idea of lepers being the cursed of God was the dominant perception of the disease in the medieval world until the late twelfth century. The thirteenth century, however, saw a positive shift in attitudes towards the leprous, favoring the image of the leper as the elect of God. This chapter considers one of the key factors in this change, namely, the influence of charismatic religious figures.

Previous scholarship on the history of leprosy in the High Middle Ages has not sufficiently considered the role played by such figures in reforming, or at least offering an alternative to, the reigning popular perception. This chapter will therefore examine the exemplary medieval case of Saint Francis of Assisi and the development of his Order, highlighting the role that one man seems to have played in the evolving religious and social understandings of leprosy. By the twelfth century the kissing of lepers was a familiar motif in the medieval world. Nonetheless, Francis's interactions with the lepers still constituted unprecedented transgressions of long-standing social boundaries. At a moment when the Church was experiencing a mounting spiritual crisis, Francis stepped up and kissed a leper, in effect

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<sup>149</sup> *The Testament* translated in Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint* (New York: New City Press, 1999), 124.

redefining the idea of sanctity for the High Middle Ages. Although outcasts from both religious and lay society, the leprous became central figures in this process.

The evolution of Franciscan hagiography during the thirteenth century was partially a response to and reflection of controversies within the Order. The *vitae* written during this time manipulate the story of Francis for contemporary purposes. The representation of 'the leper,' through these accounts of Francis's life, also evolved and took on a prominent place in the legacy of the saint. These events were crucial to the development of Francis's piety as well as to the early practices of the Franciscan Order. This chapter will thus consider the impact that these interactions may have had on bridging the gap between society and its hitherto most repulsive outcasts.

### **The Franciscans: Rise and Controversy**

To fully understand how Saint Francis of Assisi's interactions with the leprous were revolutionary in medieval society and hagiography it is important to understand the context in which they appeared in his life. Francis, as the founder of a dominant religious order, is seen as a turning point in the definition of medieval sanctity. Canonized only two years after his death, Saint Francis was a figure whose life and legacy were exceptionally important for the Church in the Middle Ages. His influence was, and can still be, seen in most aspects of medieval religious life.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country*, 126.

Francis's rise to prominence in the late twelfth century occurred at a moment when the medieval world was undergoing drastic changes.<sup>151</sup> The West was embarking on a phase of extensive expansion — both demographic and economic — which did not slow for centuries.<sup>152</sup> This expansion instigated a boom in industry and trade between the growing urban centers which, in turn, led to the rising urbanization and prosperity of towns. As the towns grew wealthier, greater importance started to be placed on money, capital, and credit. Because of this, power shifted into the hands of those who had the most access to wealth rather than into the hands of the Church. With a growing educated and literate laity, religious dissent was on the rise — dissent which led to the most formidable challenge the Church would see until the Reformation.<sup>153</sup>

Also, the Lateran councils were promulgating the statutes described in the previous chapter. The Church was eager to regulate every aspect of the lives of the Christian community (as well as the non-Christians who lived within its boundaries), and with the pronouncements from these councils they further refined their perceived role as the dominant power of the Middle Ages. Instead of relying blindly on the Church for spiritual guidance, members of the lay society themselves began exploring alternatives for expressing their religion and ensuring their salvation. Literate members of the lay society, based on careful study of the New Testament,<sup>154</sup> developed

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<sup>151</sup> For more on this topic, which has been well researched and discussed, please see: M. D. Chenu, ed., *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on the New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Steven Epstein, *An Economic and Social History of Later Medieval Europe, 1000-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000-1500* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London: P. Elek, 1978).

<sup>152</sup> According to Lawrence this expansion included “the rapid growth of international trade and commerce, the revival of urban life in the old lands of the Western Empire, and a sustained rise in population.” C. H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (London: Longman, 1994), 1.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. Although they were slow to accept it, Church officials eventually came to accept that people could commit to a Christian life without fully removing themselves from the secular world. *Ibid.*, 18.

radical interpretations of how people ought to live their lives in accordance with God. Groups formed and grew around these charismatic leaders, and the Church took careful notice. In the end these movements were either labeled as heretical and punished or called new monastic movements and, as such, sanctified in the religious community.

It was into this setting of growing spiritual crisis that Francis was born and out of it the Franciscan Order developed and came to prominence. Francis represented a new sort of spirituality which the Western world had not previously seen; one which contrasted with the prominent religious and social practices of the times. The ideals on which he established his order arose out of a commitment to living according to the Gospels; a collective form of the *vita apostolica*. Over the course of his life, Saint Francis went to great lengths to ensure his ideals remained focused and pure.

However, as the Order grew and spread further afield it began to struggle with internal administration, regulation, and focus. Even during his own lifetime Francis saw his Order dividing into two distinctive factions.<sup>155</sup> The most heated debates revolved particularly around the practice of poverty. In 1230, just four years after Francis's death, the leaders of the Order had to seek out papal interpretation of Francis's *Testament* and its' significance for the Order.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> According to Le Goff, it was the growth of this division during Francis's lifetime which prompted his early return from the Holy Land in 1220 and the composition of a new *Rule* in 1221. It was also because of this internal conflict that Francis resigned from the leadership of the Order; believing the Order to have strayed too far from his personal beliefs and goals. Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (Routledge: London, 2004), 17.

<sup>156</sup> Leaders within the Franciscan Order "were obligated to seek a papal interpretation of the Rule which declared his death-bed Testament to the brethren to be without binding force, and provincial ministers were ordering copies of it to be burned." Lawrence, *The Friars*, 26.

During the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries tensions began to escalate further, creating a schism between the two sides “beyond the sphere of discipline.”<sup>157</sup>

One side of this debate was composed of the Spirituali (or, the Spirituals)<sup>158</sup> who protested against the Order’s diversion from the original ideals of their founder. They wanted to preserve, and perhaps in a sense even revive, the simplicity and poverty of Francis’s beginnings.<sup>159</sup> They were a rigorist group whose emphasis was placed on complete humility and poverty — both as individuals and as an order. They also wanted to keep the Order distanced from papal authority, which they believed to be too willing to compromise religious beliefs for secular needs.<sup>160</sup> The other faction was composed of the Conventuali (or, the Conventuals). They were a moderate group who embraced the changing landscape of the medieval world; their focus was on a lesser form of poverty and following the Rule of Francis as it was interpreted and augmented by papal bulls. The aim of the Conventuals was to make membership in the Order more accessible to its growing numbers.<sup>161</sup> The reduced emphasis on complete poverty was

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<sup>157</sup> Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Image of St Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 100. It was this controversy around and within the Franciscan Order which provided material for Dante in the *Commedia*. Nick Havely explains that: “Concern about the Franciscans, poverty and their relationship to the ecclesiastical authority forms an important part of the *Commedia*’s political vision — a subject with which a substantial amount of modern Dante criticism has been concerned.” Nick Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>158</sup> For more detailed investigations into the rise of the Spiritual Franciscans as well as their controversy with the Conventuals see: David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c.1250-c.1450* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>159</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 106. According to David Burr the Spirituals sought to act in a manner as close as possible to what Francis originally wanted for himself and his Order. “Francis’s basic goal was the sort of self-emptying he saw in Christ, a behavior that involved not only humility but also love. Thus, in Franciscan legend, the final stamp of approval on Francis’s project was given not by the pope but by Christ himself on Mount Alverna when, toward the end of Francis’s life, he was granted Christ’s stigmata.” Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 2.

<sup>160</sup> The Spirituals eventually became devotees of the teachings of Joachim of Fiore and as such were ultimately deemed heretical by the Church. Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 17.

<sup>161</sup> Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 4. The Order was growing rapidly; it had risen to over thirty thousand members and had spread across Europe and into Africa and Asia. They were “in need of direction. The brothers were becoming gradually more divided in their interpretations of the Founder’s ideals and their day-to-day expression.” Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder* (New York: New City Press, 2000), 496.

meant to avoid discouraging the new and younger friars<sup>162</sup> by removing them completely from the comforts of the world.

This internal division in the Franciscan Order manifested itself perhaps most clearly through the hagiographic materials which concerned the saint. As Francis's visibility and importance grew, his reputation and his public image were carefully used and manipulated by many for various purposes. This manipulation of his image began during his lifetime and extended for many years after his death. Due to this rise of dissent within the Order there is no completely reliable source on the life of Francis. Through the manipulation of the story of Francis's life, both the Spirituals and the Conventuals were attempting to present an image of Francis which best fit with their developing priorities. There was a growing desire to produce an image of their founder that was aligned the most closely to their own beliefs for the Order.

### **Saint Francis of Assisi: Conversion by Lepers**

Born in Assisi in either 1181 or 1182, Saint Francis<sup>163</sup> was the first example of a new type of holiness which acted both contrary to the rising control of the Church in secular life but was also completely rooted in that society.<sup>164</sup> Le Goff explains that Francis's sanctity did not manifest itself through virtues and miracles, but instead through his living a completely holy lifestyle

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<sup>162</sup> Instead of being composed predominantly of members of the laity, the Franciscans had begun to accept a greater number of clerics and university masters into the Order.

<sup>163</sup> For more detailed and extensive discussions on Francis's life see: Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Image of St Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jacques Dalarun, *François d'Assise: Principes et modalités du gouvernement dans l'ordre des Frères mineurs* (Paris: De Boeck & Larcier, 1999); Chiara Frugoni, *Francis of Assisi: A Life* (New York: Continuum, 1989); Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (London: Routledge, 2004); Michael Robson, *Saint Francis of Assisi: The Legend and the Life* (London: Continuum, 1997); Roberto Rusconi, *Francis of Assisi in the Sources and Writings* (New York: Franciscan Institute, 2008); Richard C. Trexler, *Naked Before the Father: The Renunciation of Saint Francis of Assisi* (New York: P. Lang, 1989);

<sup>164</sup> François-Olivier Touati, "François d'Assise et la diffusion d'une modèle thérapeutique au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Histoire des sciences médicales*, XVI (1982): 175. Touati explains that Francis "représentant d'une sainteté nouvelle, François incarne un idéal enraciné dans la société contemporaine: révélatrice d'une sensibilité et d'une conception de la maladie, son approche vécue du monde des souffrants — les lépreux en particulier." Ibid.

which could serve as an example for others.<sup>165</sup> “Francis was no self-effacing saint,”<sup>166</sup> explains Rosalind Brooke; in his desire to imitate the life of Christ and His Apostles, Francis focused on a literal interpretation of the Gospel.<sup>167</sup> His first biographer, Thomas of Celano,<sup>168</sup> explains in the *Vita prima*, that in his youth Francis “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 vanities, he proved himself a more excessive inviter of evil and a zealous imitator of foolishness.”<sup>169</sup> Francis’s early years were spent in a cycle of lusting after personal glory and spiritual questioning. Unlike the common practice in most hagiography, where a saint has an instant transformation based on a moment of illumination, Francis’s conversion was an extended process.<sup>170</sup> It occurred over roughly five years and as such it was progressive and went through a number of stages. Early chapters of the *vitae* of Saint Francis document a progression

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<sup>165</sup> Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 13. Le Goff continues by explaining that Francis was “the friend and brother of all creatures and of all creation, he poured out so much tender care and fraternal understanding to all, so much charity in the highest sense (in other words, so much love) that history has granted him, as though in exchange, the same sympathy and affectionate general admiration.” Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 13. Brooke explains that despite his desire not to be noticed, his popularity grew and placed him at the center of the attention of many. “Popular devotion to the living holy man presented him with problems. He had to guard against the adulation going to his head and corrupting him; at the same time he had to fulfill, to their satisfaction and his own, the expectations he aroused.” Ibid., 29.

<sup>167</sup> According to Kleinberg, “Francis’s idea of sainthood was totalistic. One was a saint in whatever one did. Unlike other religious leaders, Francis did not accept a separation between the role of saint and the role of leader.” Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 139.

<sup>168</sup> Thomas of Celano was born around 1185 in Celano, a city located roughly seventy-five miles southeast of Rome in the Abruzzi. Thomas was a member of the Franciscan Order, joining around 1215. Although he was not among the earliest followers of Francis, it is evident through his writing that he most likely knew Francis personally. His educational background, while unknown for certain, is exemplified by his style of writing on Saint Francis. It is also apparent that Thomas of Celano was well acquainted with the monastic literary tradition and it also seems that he may have studied theology at Monte Cassino, Rome or Bologna. It is most likely due to his educational background as well as his high writing style that Pope Gregory IX sought out Thomas to write the *Vita prima* in 1228. Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 171.

<sup>169</sup> The *Vita Prima* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 183. Here Thomas of Celano continues: “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.”

<sup>170</sup> Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 26. Le Goff also notes that Thomas of Celano’s presentations of Saint Francis’s conversion show a number of inconsistencies. This is mainly due to the change in tone from the *Vita Prima* to the *Vita secunda*. “The conversion would be presented in the *Vita prima* in a ‘spiritual perspective’, or a psychological one, and in the *Vita secunda* from a ‘religious’, or mystical point of view. Here it is enough to recognise that a conversion is difficult to analyse and that the most important task for historians is to focus on the themes, on the episodes that marked its stages, and to extract their historical significance.” Ibid., 25-6.

towards a conversion which led him away from the secular world. Despite knowing that he wanted to become a man of God, Francis was unaware of how his process of conversion was to proceed.<sup>171</sup>

This process of conversion was a confusing and extended period in Francis's life in which he was building and defining his relationship with God. Many of the earlier episodes within his life can be, and have been, considered by scholars to be the main catalyst for Francis's conversion. However, according to Le Goff, many of these first events of Francis's conversion to a spiritual life actually amounted to 'false steps.' In the early acts of conversion, he showed "his uncertainties, his difficulty in sounding the right note, in moving from one life to the other."<sup>172</sup> This chapter will argue instead that the most important element, and therefore the defining element, of his conversion came at the hands of society's most repulsive figure — the leper.<sup>173</sup>

Free from the constraints of family and the responsibilities of the secular world, Francis was left to fully discover and refine his new purpose. He shed the clothing which had once marked his place in society and he traded the comforts of his family's home for the harshness of poverty. However, it seemed as though every time Francis removed himself further from society he would come to the realization that it somehow still was not far enough. This was the very point at which Francis received direction from God, telling him that he still had obstacles to overcome. Though Francis had renounced his secular lifestyle there were still traces of it left. It was only after Francis let go of himself that he was able to fully know and understand God's direction for his life.

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<sup>171</sup> Robson, *The Franciscans in the Middle Ages*, 14. Robson explains that "[t]he process of conversion was advancing, although Francis manifestly had no blueprint for his future." Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 28.

<sup>173</sup> Peyroux echoes this sentiment by explaining how Thomas of Celano presents "the crux of the saint's decisive conversion to an ascetic Christianity whose ethical imperative made continual reference to the material vulnerability of the radically poor." Peyroux, "The Leper's Kiss," 172.



“Francis,” God said to him in spirit “you have traded what you loved in a fleshly, empty way for things of the spirit, taking the bitter for the sweet. If you want to come to know Me, despise yourself. For when the order is reversed, the things I say will taste sweet to you even though they seem the opposite.”<sup>174</sup>

What Francis did not know was that to completely let go he would have to learn to love those whom the rest of society abhorred, the lepers.<sup>175</sup> Throughout his youth Francis had a “natural horror of lepers.”<sup>176</sup> This repulsion was so great that “when he saw their houses even two miles away, he would cover his nose with his hands.”<sup>177</sup> However, this longstanding aversion became the basis of Francis’s conversion as well as his ministry. By overcoming himself, and therefore his ties to the secular world, through the ‘bitterness’ of the lepers, he was able to enjoy the ‘sweetness’ of knowing God.<sup>178</sup> This, in essence, was the focus of his ministry: providing charity to the sick, with particular focus and devotion to the leprous.

What is most interesting about this ultimate moment of conversion for Francis is how it evolves with each *vita* over the course of the thirteenth century in light of the division in the order. All versions of this story<sup>179</sup> agree on one point: Francis met a leper on the plains below Assisi and, following divine inspiration, he kissed the leper. This is one of the main episodes

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<sup>174</sup> *Vita Secunda* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder*, 248. Latin: ‘Francisce,’ inquit illi Deus in spiritu, ‘pro carnaliter et vane dilectis, iam spiritualia commutato, et amara pro duicibus sumens, contemne te ipsum, me si velis agnoscere; nam, et ordine verso, sapient tibi quae dico.’ Enrico Menestò and Stefano Brufani ed., *Fontes Franciscani* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995), 451. These ideas of ‘despising himself’ and ‘trading the bitter for the sweet’ were motifs which would remain with Francis throughout his lifetime, his ministry, his Order, and his legacy.

<sup>175</sup> Peyroux suggests that through this, Francis “henceforth set his path irrevocably in step with the most wretched portion of humanity.” Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss,” 173.

<sup>176</sup> *Vita secunda* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder*, 248. Latin: *leprosos naturaliter abhorrens*, Menestò and Brufani, ed., *Fontes Franciscani*, 451.

<sup>177</sup> *Vita prima* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 195. Latin: *cum tempore vanitatis suae per duo fere milliaria eminus ipsorum domos respiceret, nares suas propriis manibus obturaret*. Menestò and Brufani ed., *Fontes Franciscani*, 292.

<sup>178</sup> According to Touati “la rencontre du père séraphique avec les malades, le regarde porté à leurs souffrances et l’attitude qui en découle constituent non seulement un axe majeur de l’itinéraire spirituel du pauvres d’Assise - motif déterminant de sa conversion.” Touati, “François d’Assise,” 175.

<sup>179</sup> Here “all versions of this story” refers to the *Vitae* which tell of Francis’s conversion in the plains below Assisi. There are versions of Francis’s *vita* which do not talk about his conversion process (the *Legend of Perugia*, for example, does not chronicle Francis’s life before his conversion, which will be discussed later in this chapter), and as such cannot be grouped into this category.

within Francis's life that adapted and manipulated with each evolution of the saint's biography. With each telling of the life of Francis the story of his meeting with the leper changed and gained more details. In the earlier versions of the *vita* the leper is only a tool with which Francis overcomes himself. However, in subsequent versions the leper eventually became a guise Christ used to test Francis's devotion. These *vitae* were used as a platform to express the image and beliefs of the two parties within the order to present the image of Francis which was most important to their aims.<sup>180</sup>

The first biography of Saint Francis, the *Vita prima*,<sup>181</sup> was completed a mere two years after his death by Thomas of Celano. It was written to present the new saint to the Christian world as an exemplar of piety and grace. Thomas consulted many people who knew Francis in order to generate a well rounded and balanced picture of the new saint and used the *vitae* of two earlier saints<sup>182</sup> as a framework for his text. Unlike subsequent biographies, the *Vita prima* was not subject to the internal struggle of the Order because it was written before the division became serious. Due to this, Francis's *vita* was written in an environment without a motive for misrepresenting the saint. As such, the *Vita prima* presented the official image of the saint, but it

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<sup>180</sup> The representation of Francis as an individual concerned with the suffering of the sick and the poor, according to Touati, "d'intègre, durant une centaine d'années au moins, au premier plan du discours social et religieux; le réel est transposé en modèle, à la fois expression des mentalités et guide du sentiment à l'égard des corps affligés, référence à une pratique." Touati, "François d'Assise," 176.

<sup>181</sup> The *Vita prima* was commissioned by Pope Gregory IX in 1228 to accompany the ceremonies of canonization held for Saint Francis on 16 July 1228. Robson, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, vi. On this matter, Brooke notes that it was more common for the *Vita* of a saint to be written prior to their canonization as evidence of the individual's piety. However, because Pope Gregory IX was well acquainted with Saint Francis the document was unnecessary for the canonization procedure. Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 39.

<sup>182</sup> Scholars, such as Jacques Le Goff and Michael Robson, have shown that when writing Saint Francis's biographies, Thomas used two prior *vitae* as models: the *Life of Saint Martin* by Sulpicius Severus and the *First Life* of Saint Bernard and the *Life of Saint Antony* by St. Athanasius. Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 20. Michael Robson notes in his work on Saint Francis that "[t]he biographies of St Antony the Abbot (251-356) by St Athanasius and St Martin of Tours (c. 316-97) by Sulpicius Severus were revered as the classical models for the composition of a saint's life. The influence of these standard texts can be glimpsed in the earliest biographies of Francis, whose virtues associated him with the apostles and their mission." Robson, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, vii. Also see: Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Image of Saint Francis*.

was not polemical.<sup>183</sup> It was perhaps the only *vita* which may have accurately represented the life of the saint.

According to *Vita prima* it was shortly after renouncing his family and his inheritance that Francis “moved to the lepers (*ad leprosos*) and stayed with them.”<sup>184</sup> Here the image of the lepers being the elect of God is overtly shown by Francis’s actions towards the leprous. He not only lived among the lepers, but he also “served all of them [the lepers] with great love. He washed the filth from them, and even cleaned out the pus of their sores.”<sup>185</sup> This task was obviously repulsive to Francis because, only lines earlier, Thomas explains how much the sight of the lepers disgusted Francis. As an example of his profound humility, Francis did this repulsive task because he knew it to be God’s will.

However, despite living among the lepers, Francis’s conversion was not complete. In the next paragraph of the *Vita prima* Thomas depicts Francis’s final moment of conversion:

When he started thinking of holy and useful matters with the grace and strength of the Most High, while still in the clothes of the world, he met a leper (*leprosum unum*) one day. Made stronger than himself, he came up and kissed him (*et osculatus est eum*). He then began to consider himself less and less, until by the mercy of the Redeemer, he came to complete victory over himself.<sup>186</sup>

When Francis came upon a leper — the figure which was the most horrible sight to Francis — his life was changed. This highlights the current social sentiment towards the position of the

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<sup>183</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 43.

<sup>184</sup> The *Vita prima* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 195.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. Latin: *diligentissime serviens omnibus propter Deum, et lavans putredinem omnem ab eis, ulcerum etiam saniem exergebat*. Menestò and Brufani ed., *Fontes Franciscani*, 292.

<sup>186</sup> *Vita prima* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 195. Latin: *Sed, cum iam gratia et virtute Altissimi, sancta et utilia inciperet cogitare, in saeculari adhuc habitu constitutus leprosum unum obvium habuit die quadam, et semetipso fortior effectus accessit, et osculatus est eum, Exinde quoque coepit seipsum magis ac magis contemnere, quousque misericordia Redemptoris ad perfectam suimet victoriam perveniret*. Menestò and Brufani ed., *Fontes Franciscani*, 292.

lepers in society; Francis embraced what most repulsed him. By giving a kiss (*osculatus*) to a leper Francis was finally able to gain complete mastery over himself.

This sequence of events — moving to live with the lepers and then later kissing the single leper — was ultimately reversed in all later versions of Francis's *vita*. The significance of this change is twofold. First, because it makes more sense structurally for the narrative. If Francis, as Thomas depicts, is living among the lepers when he meets the one whom he will kiss, the sight of a leper should not be as repulsive as before. Second, because it places the greatest importance of Francis's conversion on the kiss. By having Francis's first interaction with the leper come while he is still disgusted by their presence it shows, in a bold manner, Francis's dramatic rejection of all secular things. The kiss is the ultimate action of embracing the 'bitter' to gain the 'sweet' and as such becomes the epitome of Francis's spirituality. As it stands, the order of the episodes in the *Vita prima* devalues the importance of this kiss.

However, after the completion of the *Vita prima* and as things began to change dramatically within the Order the image of Francis also began to fracture.<sup>187</sup> The incident with the leper in Francis's conversion began to take a dramatic turn with the rising Spiritual faction. In 1244 the newly elected Minister General of the Franciscan Order, Crescentius of Jesi,<sup>188</sup> requested that brothers who knew Francis and brothers who knew of any miracles send him documentation. Crescentius, as an ardent opponent of the Franciscan Spirituals, hoped that an official compilation of documents on Francis's life so soon after his death might assuage

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<sup>187</sup> Despite this growing division within the Order and the manipulation of the image of Francis, Rosalind Brooke notes that "Information relating to St Francis that was written down in the middle years of the thirteenth century was to be of crucial importance in focusing the image of the saint that was projected, successfully, in the early fourteenth century, and has endured to this day." Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 102.

<sup>188</sup> According to Rosalind Brooke, Crescentius was a well-educated man who had joined the Order later in life. He was qualified in both medicine and canon law. Rosalind B. Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government: Elias to Bonaventure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 247. Crescentius was later deposed from his position as Minister General of the Order in favor of John of Parma, a member of the Spirituals, in 1247.

concerns raised by critics of the Franciscans within the Church.<sup>189</sup> Although this collection of new sources did not in itself drastically alter the image of the saint, parts of it were used to create and augment new *vitae* of Francis which did.<sup>190</sup>

One text which makes use of the wealth of documents compiled by Crescentius is the *Legend of the Three Companions*. This text claims to have been composed between the years of 1241 and 1247.<sup>191</sup> In places this text closely parallels Thomas of Celano's *Vita prima* as well as a version of the life written by a brother named Julian of Speyer. Despite this, the presentation of the life of Saint Francis in the *Legend of the Three Companions*, as stated by Rosalind Brooke, is one which is a "more comprehensive and more comprehensible account than can be found elsewhere among the early sources."<sup>192</sup> As such, it is an invaluable source in the collections written on Francis's life.

Francis's conversion at the hands of the leper in the *Legend of the Three Companions* also comes after an intervention from God. Because of the message he received in his dream, Francis was "overjoyed...and was comforted by the Lord."<sup>193</sup> This comfort was because he understood that he would one day eventually be able to fully remove himself from the secular world. Unlike the *Vita prima*, this text explains where Francis met the leper that would change the course of his life. After receiving the message from God Francis, like Jesus in the Gospels, met a leper on the

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<sup>189</sup> While he was Minister General, Crescentius also initiated a search for all documentary materials dealing with the life of Saint Francis and the early days of the Order. This document, called the *Assisi Compilation*, is perhaps one of the most comprehensive collections of stories on the life of Saint Francis.

<sup>190</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 102.

<sup>191</sup> However, it is uncertain if this compilation is in fact the direct result of Crescentius's collection as the dating of this text has been difficult for historians. Attached to the document is a letter which was supposedly written by Brothers Leo, Rufino, and Angelus, dated to 11 August 1246. However, the writing within the text suggests a series of serious questions which point to a later date of issue. "Theories abound; definite answers are lacking." Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 16. For a longer discussion on this topic see Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 147-9.

<sup>192</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 157.

<sup>193</sup> *Legend of the Three Companions*, translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder*, 74.

road near Assisi. This final moment of conversion in the *Legend of the Three Companions* contains a key difference from Thomas's *Vita Prima*:

One day he was riding his horse near Assisi, when he met a leper. And, even though he usually shuddered at lepers, he made himself dismount, and gave him a coin, kissing his hand as he did so. After he accepted a kiss of peace from him, Francis remounted and continued on his way. He began to consider himself less and less, until, by God's grace, he came to complete victory over himself.<sup>194</sup>

Rather than Francis just kissing the leper, in the *Legend of the Three Companions* the leper returns Francis's kiss with a 'kiss of peace.' Here it is the leper who allows Francis to be victorious over himself.

While these kisses exchanged between the leper and Francis on the road was the moment of Francis's conversion, it was followed by another interaction between Francis and the leprous. Unlike the *Vita prima*, in the *Legend of the Three Companions* it is after the kiss on the road that Francis moves to the lepers. It was at the house of the lepers that Francis cemented his conversion and began his ministry to them. This is just as God had desired of him:

After a few days, he moved to a hospice of lepers, taking with him a large sum of money. Calling them all together, as he kissed the hand of each, he gave them alms. When he left there, what before had been bitter, that is, to see and touch lepers, was turned into sweetness...With the help of God's grace, he became such a servant and friend of the lepers.<sup>195</sup>

From the moment he exchanged kisses with the leper on the road Francis associated the lepers with his ultimate mastery over himself. Despite the disgust he had felt towards the lepers in his youth, with each kiss and coin that Francis gave to the lepers at the hospice he reinforced his transition to his new life.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

Roughly around the same time as the *Legend of the Three Companions* another official biography of Francis was composed for the Franciscan Order. In 1244, only fifteen years after the completion of the *Vita prima*, Thomas of Celano was commissioned by Crescentius of Jesi to write another biography of Saint Francis. When composing this new *vita* Thomas used the documents collected by Crescentius. The aim of this new *vita* was to augment the previous version of Francis's *Vita* by bringing in the stories from the brothers who had known and been close to Francis.<sup>196</sup> Despite the motives of the Minister General to strike out against the Spirituals, Thomas attempted to present the saint in a way which might satisfy the desires of both constituencies.<sup>197</sup> The *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, or the *Vita secunda*, as it is commonly known, further detailed the life and teachings of Saint Francis.

The episode in the *Vita secunda* of Francis's conversion through the kiss to the leper is a marked departure from Thomas of Celano's first biography of the saint. After receiving direction from God to trade the 'sweet' for the 'bitter,' Francis "was moved to obey immediately the divine command, and was led through experience to the truth of these things."<sup>198</sup> Changing the order of events from Thomas's previous *vita*, Francis was first confronted with the leper in the plains below Assisi.

Among all the awful miseries of this world Francis had a natural horror of lepers, and one day as he was riding his horse near Assisi he met a leper on the road. He felt terrified and revolted, but not wanting to transgress God's command and break the sacrament of His word, he dismounted from his horse and ran to kiss him. As the leper stretched out his hand, expecting something, he received both money and a kiss. Francis immediately mounted his horse and although the field

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<sup>196</sup> Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 21. Michael Robson explains that their accounts of events during the life of the saint "harked back to the halcyon days of the fraternity and were critical of some more recent developments in the observance of poverty and buildings." He continues later, saying that "questions of discipline and the preservation of poverty were to the fore and the development of schools and the use of books were treated with a tangible unease." Robson, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, viii.

<sup>197</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 140.

<sup>198</sup> *Vita secunda*, Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder*, 248.

was wide open, without any obstructions, when he looked around he could not see the leper anywhere.<sup>199</sup>

Instead of being a moment of conversion, the *Vita secunda* treats the kiss given to the leper as the fulfillment of God's plan. In the *Vita prima* Thomas shows Francis calmly approaching the leper and then kissing him. In the *Vita secunda*, however, Thomas depicts the approach to the leper as something about which Francis is hesitant. In fact, in this version of the episode, the only reason Francis approaches the leper at all is so as not to go against God. To ensure that he does what God wants of him — instead of what he wanted to do, which would be to run away — Francis has to run to the leper. Francis understood that God wished that lepers be embraced and cared for by the rest of their community. Francis, understanding this, “made his way to the houses of the lepers and, giving money to each, he also gave a kiss on the hand and mouth, Thus he took the bitter for the sweet and courageously prepared to carry out the rest.”<sup>200</sup>

Another key departure from earlier *vitae* of Francis is the disappearance of the leper at the end of this episode in the *Vita secunda*. Having turned the ‘bitterness’ of the lepers into the ‘sweetness’ of God with a kiss, Francis looked around, searching for the leper who was nowhere to be seen. This supernatural element is an addition by Thomas of Celano which was carried further in later *vitae* and stories of Saint Francis. The leper's mysterious disappearance suggests that the leper was a divine tool who was sent in order to facilitate Francis's final moment of conversion.<sup>201</sup> In future versions (mostly those written by Spiritual authors) this element was so augmented that the leper was eventually considered to have been Christ, disguised to personally test Francis's devotion.

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 248-9.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>201</sup> Peyroux, “The Leper's Kiss,” 173.



By the middle of the thirteenth century these multiple depictions of Francis had been disseminated across the medieval world — both within and outside the Franciscan Order. Because of this, on 2 February 1257, Bonaventure<sup>202</sup> was appointed to the position of minister general by the Conventuals to try and restore a sense to unity to the diverging Order.<sup>203</sup> At the conclusion of the General Chapter in Narbonne in 1260, Bonaventure was asked to write a new *vita* of Saint Francis to bring uniformity to the diverse materials on life of the order's founder.<sup>204</sup> This new biography of Saint Francis, the *Legenda major*,<sup>205</sup> was also meant to unify and bring peace to the growing dissent within the order. In 1266, at the General Chapter meeting, Bonaventure's *Legenda major* was declared to be the only official *vita* of Francis's life. In a hope to end the internal division plaguing the Order,<sup>206</sup> all other documents regarding Francis's life were forbidden and because of this they were collected and burned.<sup>207</sup>

The *Legenda major* provides the longest and most descriptive version of the lepers' role in Francis's conversion to a spiritual life. Before meeting the leper, Francis was searching for a way to complete his transition to an entirely spiritual life; "he was removing himself from the pressure of public business, he would eagerly beg the divine kindness to show him what he

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<sup>202</sup> Born in Bagnoregio, near Viterbo, around 1221, Bonaventure never claims in any of his writings to have met Saint Francis; he does credit his devotion to the Franciscan Order to Francis's intercession. As a child, Bonaventure was very ill and it was only after his mother made a vow to Francis on his behalf that he recovered from his illness. While he was studying at the faculty of arts at the University of Paris in 1243, Bonaventure joined the Franciscan Order of Lesser Brothers. Bonaventure was one of the most influential theologians in the High Middle Ages; he was canonized in 1482 and in 1588 he was declared a doctor of the Church. For a more detailed biography of Saint Bonaventure, see: Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>203</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 242. Interestingly, Bonaventure was not present at the meeting of the Lesser Brothers at which he was elected to be Minister General.

<sup>204</sup> Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder*, 495.

<sup>205</sup> Despite being a 'new' biography of Francis's life and legacy, the *Legenda Major* includes substantial portions of Thomas of Celano's *Vita Secunda* as well as other important religious texts and documents which had been written to depict the events of Francis's life.

<sup>206</sup> Despite the intentions of the *Legenda Major*, according to Jacques Le Goff it did not include any text which could show that the Franciscan Order had deviated from Francis's axiomatic intentions. Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 20.

<sup>207</sup> Robson, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 7. Regarding the declaration to recall and destroy all other earlier biographies on the Saint: "This decision, which has provoked historians' wrath, may have been inspired by the general chapter of the Dominicans at Strasbourg in 1260 which enacted similar legislation regarding *vitae* of St Dominic." Ibid, 7-8.

should do.”<sup>208</sup> According to Bonaventure, Francis was still unsure of how he would be able to fully overcome himself in favor of the spiritual. All Francis knew was that “it was suggested to his spirit that a spiritual merchant must begin with contempt for the world and a knight of Christ with victory over one’s self.”<sup>209</sup>

Again in the *Legenda major*, while trying to figure out how to fully become a master over himself, Francis comes upon a leper while riding his horse on the plains below Assisi:

This unforeseen encounter stuck him with not a little horror. Recalling the plan of perfection he had already conceived in his mind, and remember that he must first conquer himself if he wanted to become a knight of Christ, he dismounted from his horse and ran to kiss him. As the leper stretched out his hand as if to receive something, he gave him money with a kiss.<sup>210</sup>

In this text Bonaventure highlights how the meeting between Francis and the leper was one which Francis was not prepared for. Francis was still ‘in this world’ when he came upon the leper because the meeting still filled him with horror and disgust. Despite that, he was able to overcome his aversion and embrace the leper in the manner which was in line with God’s desire. To become a ‘knight of Christ’ Francis imitated the New Testament actions of Jesus by showing mercy to the leper he met on the road. Francis is not running towards the leper because he is worried he might run away and break a promise to God. Rather, the running towards the leper is seen as a desire to complete his conversion and leave the secular world completely behind. Francis is running away from his previous life and into the arms of his new one.

Bonaventure next follows in the tradition which was started by Thomas of Celano in the *Vita secunda*. After kissing the leper and giving alms,

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<sup>208</sup> The *Legenda major* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder*, 533.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

Immediately mounting his horse, however, and turning all around, even though the open plain stretched clear in all directions, he could not see the leper anywhere. He began, therefore, filled with wonder and joy, to sing praises to the Lord, while proposing, because of this, to embark always on the greater.<sup>211</sup>

Bonaventure paid more attention to the disappearance of the leper than Thomas of Celano. For Bonaventure, it was the combination of meeting the leper and the leper's disappearance which solidified, in Francis's mind, his desire to complete his conversion to this new life. The disappearance of the leper here is seen as an affirmation by God to Francis of what he had done.

Later in this chapter of the *Legenda major* Francis has a vision in which Christ appeared to him fastened to a cross. This vision was one which greatly affected him and "the memory of Christ's passion was so impressed on the innermost recesses of his heart."<sup>212</sup> Because of this vision Bonaventure explains that Francis was finally ready to let go completely of his place in the secular world. It is after this vision when Francis visited the leper houses — places which had greatly horrified him in his youth — that he finally cemented his conversion to a spiritual life.

For previously not only had association with lepers horrified him greatly, so too did even gazing upon them from a distance. But, now because of Christ crucified, who according to the text of the prophet appeared despised as a leper, he, in order to despise himself completely, showed deeds of humility and humanity to lepers with a gentle piety. He visited their houses frequently, generously distributed alms to them, and with a great drive of compassion kissed their hands and their mouths.<sup>213</sup>

The idea of the leper being Christ in disguise is also expanded in this passage. Francis, who had overcome the 'bitterness' of the lepers, was able to visit them and enjoy the 'sweetness' of humbling himself before them. Though Bonaventure does not explicitly state that the leper Francis met in the plains below Assisi was Christ in disguise, he does bring the association

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 533-4.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 534.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

between Christ and the leprous to the forefront here. This explanation helps to understand exactly why the leprous were such an important group for Francis, as well as why they continued to play an important role in his ministry.

To further show Francis's growing humility and devotion to the lepers in his new life, Bonaventure continues:

From there the lover of profound humility moved to the lepers and lived with them, serving them all most diligently for God's sake. He washed their feet, bandaged sores, drew pus from wounds and wiped away filth. He who was soon to be a physician of the Gospel even kissed their ulcerous wounds out of his remarkable devotion. As a result, he received such power from the Lord that he had miraculous effectiveness in healing spiritual and physical illnesses.<sup>214</sup>

Despite the alterations from the previous *vitae*, the lepers remain at the forefront of Francis's conversion in Bonaventure's *Legenda major*. Here, when Francis moves to live with the lepers, it is depicted as being a logical extension of his conversion. Francis understood that God, to test Francis's faithfulness, brought the leper to him on the road so that he, like Christ, could show his humility and mercy. After that, particularly because of the disappearance of the leper, Francis saw serving lepers was the ultimate act of humility and godliness. Because the lepers were responsible for Francis leaving behind his old life he viewed caring for them as an important aspect of his new life.

Despite being designated as the only official life of Francis recognized by the Franciscan Order after 1260, other *vitae* of the saint were still written after the *Legenda major*. One such text is a prominent Spiritual text which is commonly referred to as the *Legend of Perugia*.<sup>215</sup> Though

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 539.

<sup>215</sup> The *Legend of Perugia* has been published under a number of different titles, including "*Legenda Antiqua* [*Ancient Legend*], *I Fiondi dei Tre Compagni* [*The Flowers of the Three Companions*], *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli Sociorum S. Francisci* [*The Writings of Leo, Rufino and Angelo, Companions of St. Francis*], *Legenda Perugina* [*Legend of Perugia*] and *Compilatio Assisiensis* [*The Assisi Compilation*]." Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 16. The translation being used for this study calls this document as "The Assisi Compilation."

it claims to have been composed between 1244 and 1260 it is more likely that its final version was completed around 1311, long after the completion the saint's earlier biographies.<sup>216</sup> Widely attributed to Brothers Leo, Ruffino, and Angelo,<sup>217</sup> this collection is full of stories and anecdotes of the saint which, if true, could only have been known to those who knew Francis personally. The collection emphasizes the unrelenting spirituality of Francis. According to this collection Francis observed the Gospels literally from the moment of his conversion until his death. Therefore, the moment of his conversion was not important to Francis's life as his 'real' life only began once he had finally become master over himself.

Despite the omission of the kiss, the leper still remains an important figure in this collection. There is no doubt in this text that Francis held deep love and concern for the well-being of the lepers. It is explained early in this collection that to live with and minister to the leprous was of greatest importance to Francis. The *Legend of Perugia* explains "thus at the beginning of the religion, after the brothers grew in number, [Francis] wanted the brothers to stay in hospitals of lepers to serve them."<sup>218</sup> Francis wanted the brothers to remember their devotion to humility above all other aspects of their spirituality. For Francis, this was the ultimate means of living life in the manner Christ had centuries earlier.

Associating with the lepers in the *Legend of Perugia* served as a testament of ultimate humility. This becomes clearly evident in a later episode of this collection where Francis returns to Saint Mary of Portiuncula. There he sees a brother called James the Simple ministering to a

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<sup>216</sup> "The Manuscript tradition of the *Legend of Perugia* is considerably more simple: it is found in Codex 1046 of the Biblioteca comunale Augusta in Perugia, dated 1311." Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 16.

<sup>217</sup> The exact authorship of this text has been widely disputed and debated in the study of Franciscan hagiography. According to Brooke, "many scholars still doubt that the stories as we have them truly represent what the companions wrote." Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 104.

<sup>218</sup> *The Assisi Compilation* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder*, 123.

leper who is covered with sores. Brother James was considered to be like a doctor for the lepers with the worst sores because “he gladly touched, changed, and treated their wounds.”<sup>219</sup> Because he was simple and cared for the lepers, James is seen as the type of brother whom Francis readily approved of within the Order.<sup>220</sup> Despite Francis’s desire to humble himself to the leprous, he reacts in a strange manner upon seeing Brother James with the leper at the church.

As if reproving Brother James, blessed Francis told him: “You should not take our Christian brothers about in this way since it is not right for you or for them.” Blessed Francis used to call lepers ‘Christian brothers.’ Although he was pleased that Brother James helped and served them, the holy father said this because he did not want him to take those with severe sores outside the hospital. This was especially because Brother James was very simple, and he often went with a leper to the church of Saint Mary, and especially because people usually abhorred lepers who had severe sores.<sup>221</sup>

However, upon saying these things to Brother James, Francis “immediately reproached himself, and he told his fault to Brother Peter of Catania, who was then general minister, especially because blessed Francis believed that in reproving Brother James he had shamed the leper.”<sup>222</sup> Because Francis believed what he had said to Brother James was insulting to the leper, a figure he associated with the essence of his apostolic lifestyle, Francis was determined to make up for his behavior. Francis then asked Brother Peter, the Minister General of the order, to allow him to complete the penance he believed to be required by his actions.

Brother Peter so venerated and feared blessed Francis and was so obedient to him, that he would not presume to change his obedience, although then, and many other times, it hurt him inside and out. Blessed Francis said: “Let this be my penance: I will eat together with my Christian brother from the same dish.” While

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>220</sup> According to Brooke “Brother James is revealed as the kind of brother Francis warmly approved of — even if he did not care for all his actions: a simple lay brother, who could help other poor folk and the afflicted and set them an example for Christian living. It also exemplifies the paradox of authority within the Order.” Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 121.

<sup>221</sup> *The Assisi Compilation* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Founder*, 166.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

blessed Francis was sitting at the table with the leper and other brothers, a bowl was placed between the two of them. The leper was completely covered with sores and ulcerated, and especially the fingers with which he was eating were deformed and bloody, so that whenever he put them in the bowl, blood dripped into it.<sup>223</sup>

This story in the *Legend of Perugia* exemplifies the two-part motivation of the Spirituals for making the collection. They wanted both to present an image of Francis based on how his companions remembered him and also to present an image of Francis which would keep the Order and the Brothers in strict observance to Francis's views and principles.<sup>224</sup> The story of Francis eating with the ulcerous leper promoted the figure of a saint who so greatly humbled himself that he shared a bowl with one of society's most repulsive outcasts. This is an image which was not easily erased from the memory of the medieval world, but also one which was not replicated in another written source on the life of Saint Francis.

It seems, therefore, in light of the controversies plaguing the Order, that the most appropriate place to conclude this section is with the role of the leper in the life of 'Saint Francis of Assisi' that we can deduce Francis himself wanted to present.<sup>225</sup> In his *Testament*,<sup>226</sup> the

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>224</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 120.

<sup>225</sup> Despite all his writings dealing with his vision of the Order, Francis never composed any truly autobiographical material. The *Testament* is the closest to this sort of document which exists, as it is believed to have been composed by him, and because it provides an insight into the desires of the saint. In his writings, however, there are allusions to episodes in his own life which he uses as examples to his followers in order for them to understand a message he is trying to communicate. According to Le Goff, Francis's own writings, therefore, cannot be greatly influential in the attempt to generate a picture of who Francis was or the image he was trying to project of himself. Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 14-7. This, therefore, makes reconstructing the image of Francis, as Francis himself wanted to be seen, a difficult task.

<sup>226</sup> The *Testament* was dictated by Francis and completed in October 1226, shortly before his death. It has been considered to be one of the most controversial documents ever written by Francis. He was adamant that it not be considered a binding document or seen as another version of the *Rule*. Instead, he wanted it to be read as a remembrance of his lifetime and the things which God had called him to do. Francis called the document his testament and "declared that he was writing it 'so that we may observe in a more Catholic manner the Rule which we have promised to the Lord.'" Regis J. Armstrong, and Ignatius C. Brady, trans., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 153.

closest document to an autobiography, Francis himself places the figure of the leper in a prominent position. The opening lines of this document read:

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.<sup>227</sup>

Francis understood that God brought him to the lepers and through interacting with them he was able to fully let go of all worldly ideals. For Francis, it was meeting the leper in the plains below Assisi that, in his mind, allowed him to fully overcome the influence of the secular world in his life. Before he met the leper he was in sin, and only after the Lord led him to them he was able to completely leave the secular world behind.

Although Francis does not chronicle his actual meeting of the leper in his *Testament*, he does show to his readers how important the meeting was to his life. Francis acknowledges how horrifying the lepers had once been to him, but also explains how it took God's intervention to show him the error of his ways. Lepers were not to be avoided and cast out, but to be embraced and cared for. By placing them in a dominant position in this personal text Francis shows that the lepers were of the greatest importance to him. With this placement in his *Testament* he highlights their role as being the final, and perhaps ultimate, catalyst for his conversion.

Written sources were not the only means for presenting Francis's *vitae* to the medieval world. While images of his interactions with the leprous are not as numerous as his other acts of charity or his miracles (for example his stigmata), they were nonetheless an important means of transmitting Francis's idea of compassion towards the leprous. As the dominant texts of Francis's

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<sup>227</sup> *The Testament* translated in Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents — The Saint*, 124.



*vitae* were written in Latin, the physical depictions of Francis allowed more than the Latin reading community to be affected by Francis's story. The use of visual depictions of his life, therefore, served as a means to disperse his *vitae* to individuals outside of the Order and the Church.

One image which depicted Francis caring for lepers was on the Bardi Altar Panel in the Bardi Chapel at Santa Croce in Florence. The exact date of its painting is unknown, though it might have been commissioned in 1252 for the first Franciscan church in Florence.<sup>228</sup> However, the panel was moved to the Bardi Chapel in the late sixteenth century.<sup>229</sup> This panel is unique because it depicts a large number of smaller scenes of Francis's life surrounding a large image of the saint.

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<sup>228</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 176.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.



Fig. 1. *The Bardi Altarpiece*<sup>230</sup>  
13<sup>th</sup> Century  
Florence, Santa Croce, Bardi Chapel

This arrangement highlights the actions of Francis during his lifetime. According to Brooke an arrangement like this places emphasis on Francis as being a role model for people seeking a path towards eternal salvation.<sup>231</sup> The painting was well thought out and as such can be ‘read’ by its

<sup>230</sup> Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate: una storia per parole e immagini fino Bonaventura Giotto* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1993). Image 31.

<sup>231</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 176.

audiences in a variety of manners and can be treated on many levels. As such this altar piece provided material for numerous sermons and commentaries on a variety of issues and themes.<sup>232</sup>

The scene which depicts Francis's interactions with the lepers is found on the right-hand column of the panel, just below where Francis stands.



*The Bardi Altarpiece - Detail*<sup>233</sup>  
13<sup>th</sup> Century  
Florence, Santa Croce, Bardi Chapel

This image, coupled with the images found close to it on the panel, highlight the important aspects of Francis's ministry. They emphasize the closeness of Francis's life to Christ as well as his role as a model for living in *imitatio Christi*.<sup>234</sup> In this particular frame of the Bardi altar piece, Francis is depicted twice, caring for the lepers in two distinct ways: washing their feet and

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>233</sup> Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, Image 171.

<sup>234</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 186.

holding them. Interestingly, it is the only image on the whole altar in which Francis is depicted twice performing similar acts of charity. The image on the left shows Francis holding a leper in his lap, much in the same way a mother would hold her child.<sup>235</sup> The image on the right shows Francis washing the legs and the feet of three severely ulcerated lepers. They seem to look particularly gruesome and infectious<sup>236</sup> as one is scratching at his sores while another is reaching his spotted arms out towards Francis.

The imagery of these two scenes places a great deal of emphasis on Francis's relationship with Christ. As Christ washed the feet of his disciples before the last supper, Francis too washes the feet of the lepers. Brooke notes that even the towel hanging between the two figures of Francis in this image can be seen as a reference to the Last Supper; "at the Last Supper Christ had taken a towel and poured water into a basin and washed the disciples' feet."<sup>237</sup> Francis in this image is therefore following the words Jesus spoke in the Gospel of John; "For I have given you an example, so that just as I have done for you, so also should you do."<sup>238</sup> The image therefore tells its viewers that just as Francis was following in the image of Christ (here a dual meaning can be seen in washing the feet of others as well as caring for the leprous) they should follow in his image.

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<sup>235</sup> It is also reminiscent of the Virgin holding the body of the lifeless Jesus in the *pieta* images. Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, 377.

<sup>236</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 187.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> John 13:15 translated in "Catholic Public Domain Version of the Sacred Bible," (accessed 17 January 2011, <http://www.sacredbible.org/catholic>). Brooke notes that "over the centuries monks and princes had washed the feet of the poor, particularly on Maundy Thursday, in imitation of Christ, so Francis' act of humility must be seen as conforming to a long tradition." Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 188.

## Summary

Saint Francis of Assisi was by no means the first holy man to kiss a leper, nor would he be the last. To physically cross the boundary between the clean and the unclean — the holy man and the leper — had long been looked upon as the ultimate gesture of humility. Though still acting within a longstanding tradition, Francis's actions were revolutionary in many ways in the historical climate of the thirteenth century. Where Martin's kiss had healed the leper from his physical deformities, Francis's kissing the leper healed Francis's soul. Like a mirror, the kiss given to the leper allowed Francis to finally see himself clearly.<sup>239</sup> Because of that moment of self realization Francis was able to trade the 'bitter' for the 'sweet.' Although he did not heal the leper, Francis helped to usher in a new understanding of the disease — one which spurred changes in compassion towards and care of the leprous.

What is of particular interest in these multiple versions of Francis's *vita* is the setting where the meeting between the leper and Francis took place. As has been said already, the meeting of the leper on the road directly imitates the actions of Christ in the New Testament stories as well as the life of Saint Martin after him. Francis's aim in his life and his ministry was to live in close accordance with the Gospels. This interaction with the leper highlights Francis's position as a figure of the revival of living in *imitatio Christi* in the High Middle Ages. Though Francis's touch does not heal the leper like Christ's touch did, his continued ministry to the leprous shows the same compassion.

The other interesting element of Francis's conversion is that it took place when Francis was alone. There was no one around and yet he still approached the leper out of the desire to

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<sup>239</sup> Touati, "François d'Assise, 179. "La vision du lépreux agit comme un miroir de sa propre condition de pécheur; franchir le pas — embrasser le lépreux — signifie reconnaître humblement cette condition partagée par tous et en accepter les conséquences: prendre part individuellement aux souffrances du Sauveur."

follow in the path laid out by Christ. With no witnesses to the most important event and ultimate moment of his transition from the secular to the sacred, Francis shows the individual impact of the spiritual.

Francis's impact on the medieval world is undeniable. Kissing a leper, as a paradigm, continued to affect devotional discourse as well as religious life through the remainder of the Middle Ages and well into the modern era.<sup>240</sup> It is possible that, through the dissemination of the *vitae*, Francis played a decisive role in the evolving religious and social understandings of leprosy. A central tenant of his order was ministering to the poor and the sick, specifically the lepers. Brothers — according to early statutes — were expected to live among the lepers for a period of time, humbling themselves much in the same way Christ had centuries earlier. Francis's legacy extended beyond the boundaries of his order. As Christianity experienced a sense of renewal, many other individuals followed closely in Francis's footsteps; showing compassion towards a leper became an indicator of humility, sanctity, and God's favor.

Through all his reported interaction with the leprous, Francis's hagiography emphasized the image of the leper as a pauper, deserving of charity, and Christ-like. Since the leper received a coin from Francis along with the kiss, the stories depicted the role the leper had played in medieval society. They were poor beggars who relied on the charity of others, like Francis. By giving the money to the leper in the fields below Assisi as well as the charity he provided at the leper houses, Francis showed to all those who read or saw his hagiographies that the lepers were deserving of charity. Where the later versions of Francis's *vitae* hinted at the leper being Christ in disguise the association was also present as a link between the suffering of the leper and the

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<sup>240</sup> Julie Orlemanski, "How to Kiss A Leper," *Postmedieval* (Forthcoming).

suffering of Christ. Despite the impact of the controversy within the Franciscan order on the evolving nature of Francis's *vitae*, all versions of his life served to reinforce these positive images of the leper.

The extensive hagiographic tradition which developed around the legacy of the saint, although manipulated to suit contemporary purposes, helped to blur the line between the excluded lepers and medieval society. Though lepers remained segregated and reduced to the margins of medieval cities, how they were perceived changed slowly. It was within this moment — one of revival, reflection, and new exclusions — that Francis stepped forward and embraced the most repulsive figure in medieval society. Saint Francis, through his actions and legacy, helped bridge the gap between medieval society and the lepers. In reviving the idea of living in *imitatio Christi* Francis brought caring for — and indeed kissing — lepers to a more central position within both religion and society. This kiss directly informed the *vitae* of numerous saints eager to follow in his example, collections of sermon exempla, and the rise in charitable donations to both the leprous and for institutions which provided for their care. These effects of one man kissing a leper will be examined in the following chapter.



#### IV. The Medieval Leper: Inclusion Through Exclusion

*For no one upon the earth can live without being tried.  
But whenever one trial is overcome, others will follow.  
Against those it is necessary to fight...But just as  
occasions for trials do not stop, so also the remedies do  
not stop. Because you see, first comes the trial, then  
follows the divine reward.*

Guibert de Tournai, *Sermon I*<sup>241</sup>

While it is true that both understandings of leprosy still existed after the dissemination of the *vita* of Saint Francis, the kiss he gave the leper shook the medieval perception of leprosy. The legacy of his act of compassion, coupled with the Franciscan devotion to serving the poor and the sick, helped bring the social perception of lepers as elect of God to the forefront. Although the lepers remained segregated from medieval settlements and cities, the boundary between the leprous and the healthy became more permeable. This can be seen in the rise of care for the leprous by members of both the lay and ecclesiastical communities. This shift in perceptions also resulted in a greater outpouring of charity given to the leprous by both the secular and ecclesiastical communities. While the shift in social perceptions of leprosy can be seen across medieval society, there are three areas which best represent the rise of the perception of lepers as being the elect of God.

Although leper hospitals (or leprosaria) had been founded before Francis's life, the number of new establishments grew greatly over the course of the thirteenth century. Although there were many catalysts for the rise in the numbers of both care facilities for the leprous and the volunteers who provided the care, the influence of Francis can be seen particularly in the

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<sup>241</sup> *Nullus enim super terram potest uiuere sine temptatione, sed cum una uincitur succedunt alie, contra quas oportet dimicare...sed sicut non deficiunt temptamenta ita non deficiunt remedia. Precedit enim temptatio, succedit divina remuneratio.* Guibert de Tournai, *Sermo I* in *Voluntate dei leprosus: les lépreux entre conversion et exclusion aux XII<sup>ème</sup> et XIII<sup>ème</sup> siècles*, ed. Nicole Bériou and François-Olivier Touati (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1991), 129-30. Translation mine.



number of leprosaria dedicated in his name. As a layman, Francis provided an example of how people could take control of their spiritual lives without joining the clergy. In the same way, members of the laity in the thirteenth century also began to search for ways to express their devotion to the Christian faith. With leprosaria they were able to provide direct care to the sick as well as financial support for the foundation of new establishments.

Perhaps the most direct impact of Francis's legacy can be seen in the rise of compassion shown to lepers in the hagiography of saints in the High Middle Ages. Francis set a precedent for holy men and women to express their sanctity through caring for lepers. To care for lepers came to be seen as one of the ultimate acts of humility which a holy person could perform. Saints took up the mantle of Francis and in most cases went even further in their acts of humility. Many thirteenth century hagiographies depicted saints embracing, kissing, and even, in some cases, licking<sup>242</sup> the sores of lepers. Some, like Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and Saint Hedwig of Silesia, used their money to establish leper hospitals and to physically participate in their work. The leper became an important figure in many hagiographies of the High Middle Ages, in many cases even surpassing the role they had played in Francis's hagiography.

The final area of medieval life which reflected the changing attitudes towards the leprous were the sermons delivered by members of the ecclesiastical community. In the sermons *ad leprosos* which remain today, by preachers like Jacques de Vitry, the changing attitudes towards the disease of leprosy can be clearly seen. Sermons which had earlier warned healthy members

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<sup>242</sup> As in the case of the Irish Saint Moling, who will not be discussed in this thesis. Saint Moling in one episode of his *Life* came upon a leper on the road who wished for Moling to take him to the local church. Moling removed all his clothing (so that the roughness of his clothing would not harm the leper's delicate skin) and went to pick up the leper. However, "'Now my nose,' says the leper. Moling gives his hand to him to blow it. 'Nay!' says the leper, 'for thy fingers will strip my skin off: put thy mouth round it.' The cleric puts his mouth round the nose and sucks it to him, and spits that mucus into his left hand." Whitley Stokes, trans., *The Birth and Life of St. Moling* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1907), 31.

of society of the relationship between sin and leprosy began to focus instead on the idea of leprosy as a divine reward. Often these sermons were tailored to be preached directly to the lepers in their churches and leprosaria. Preachers focused on the benefits of living in a holy manner while still in this world so that they could live with God without suffering in the next.

These three areas of changes in the care of the leprous highlight the changing social perception of the disease in the thirteenth century. Saint Francis's legacy made the leprous an example of a means to get closer to God — both the lepers themselves and those who provided cared for them. Because of this, leprosy was no longer predominantly considered to be a disease of the sinful, but instead it was viewed as a mark of God's divine favor. Although they were still segregated from the rest of society, the rise in compassion shown to them in the thirteenth century began to blur the lines between society and its outcasts. This chapter, therefore, will bring to the forefront the impact of Saint Francis's life and legacy on the treatment of the leprous in the High Middle Ages.

### **Changes in the Care of the Leprous**

As attitudes began to change positively towards the leprous at the turn of the thirteenth century, provisions for their care also began to change. Providing care for God's elect was seen as a means to express religious devotion. While some individuals would cross the boundary between the sick and the healthy to provide direct care to the leprous, others provided financially for the foundation of centers of care. These hospitals and residence centers for the leprous were built outside the city walls. As has been discussed previously, the organized foundation of leprosaria began in the eleventh century. However, their numbers continued to grow steadily well

into the thirteenth century.<sup>243</sup> The role of the leprosaria in both medieval society and on the medieval landscape was important. As such, leprosaria became prominent features of the medieval landscape and were physical marks of the changing social perceptions of the disease.

Although Francis's greatest influence was seen in Italy in the thirteenth century, it quickly spread across the medieval West. Unfortunately, research on the leprosaria in Italy has largely, to date, been limited.<sup>244</sup> As such, it would not provide a basis for reliable conclusions here. However, with the spread of the Franciscan Order, leprosaria in other regions of the medieval world provide a comparable picture. Presently the greatest research on leprosaria in the Middle Ages has been conducted in France England.<sup>245</sup> This study will use the data compiled by François-Olivier Touati<sup>246</sup> on the leprosaria in the province of Sens in France as a basis for examining the rise of the network of leprosaria in the thirteenth century. France has been selected both because of this wealth of data and because of the strong mendicant influence in the region at the time.

By the turn of the thirteenth century leprosaria were no longer simply places to house lepers who had been separated from society due to their disease. Instead, in the thirteenth century, leprosaria provided a place for lepers to be included somehow in the social fabric of the medieval world. This idea can be seen in the remaining foundation charters. For example, one charter from Maison Peinte states that the leprosarium ought to provide a place to rest for those

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<sup>243</sup> "La présence confirmée, à partir de la fin du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle, des léproseries dont le nombre ne cesse de croître jusqu'au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle au moins." Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 250.

<sup>244</sup> Indeed, some research has been done, but is still relatively minimal when compared with that of France and England. In her book *The Making of the Magdalen* Jansen discusses the presence of some of the leprosaria in Italy which had been dedicated to Mary Magdalen. This will be discussed later in this section.

<sup>245</sup> Peter Richard's book *The Medieval Leper and His Northern Heirs* also discusses cases of leprosaria in the region of Finland and Sweden. However, the research on this data is also still relatively small compared to that of France and England.

<sup>246</sup> This study will use the data from Touati's books for primary sources as well as reference: Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge* and François-Olivier Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*.

who suffered from the “sad disease of leprosy” (*ou sont logez gens enfermes [infirmes] de ladicte maladie de lepre qui sont vacabons et mendiens*).<sup>247</sup> Statutes like these suggest that the disease was not seen as being a divine punishment borne by those infected because of their neglect of spiritual health, but instead simply a characteristic of their physical health.

According to Touati the leprosaria in France developed alongside the rising development of urban centers in medieval society.<sup>248</sup> In the region of Sens, for example, there were 395 leprosaria for 3,297 parishes by the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>249</sup> However, the rise of the foundations of leprosaria did not necessarily indicate a rise in the predominance of the disease. For example, by 1227 King Louis VIII of France had over 2,000 leprosaria in his kingdom, but there is no archaeological or historical evidence to suggest that leprosy was widespread enough to fill all of these hospitals.<sup>250</sup> Arguing that the multiplication of leprosaria indicates a spread of the disease is therefore not necessarily true. It is, therefore, possible to posit that the increase in the foundations of leprosaria over the course of the thirteenth century actually corresponds with the changing perceptions of both leprosy itself and what it meant to care for the leprous.

The beginning of the thirteenth century saw the beginnings of a dramatic push in the foundations of new leprosaria. Information which hints at the existence of these leprosaria is vast. Not limited solely to archaeological evidence, Touati compiled this data also based on foundation charters, city documents, and other assorted official documents which made references to leprosaria in Sens. By 1250, ninety-three new leprosaria had been built across the province of Sens. The greatest concentration of these new leprosaria was around the dioceses of

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<sup>247</sup> This charter was for the fourteenth century leprosarium of Maison Peinte, Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 297.

<sup>248</sup> “Leur développement accompagne celui des centres urbains, principalement en chaque siège diocésain mais pas exclusivement.” Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 257.

<sup>249</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 294.

<sup>250</sup> Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 9.

the major cities of the region, with 22 founded in the Paris diocese and 28 founded in the Sens diocese.<sup>251</sup> In the period between 1250 and 1370 there were 130 new leprosaria founded in this region. In this period, the dominant diocese remained Paris (with 20 new leprosaria) and Sens (with 30 new leprosaria). It was this last period (1250-1370) which saw the greatest rate of growth after the turn of the thirteenth century.

The diocese of Paris, as a dominant region of Sens, had a large number of leprosarium founded between the twelfth century and the middle of the fourteenth century. One early thirteenth century example of a leprosarium is found in Le Roule. This leprosaria was founded in 1217 and was indicated in the acts of the city (*dedimus licentiam construendi capellam juxta leproariam de Roule ad opus leprosororum ejusdem loci*).<sup>252</sup> Another leprosarium was founded at Saint-Denis, and was dedicated to Lazarus. In 1231, a document written by the abbot of Saint Denis acknowledged the members of a leprosarium present in the region (*leprosi Sancti Lazari de Beato Dyonisis*).<sup>253</sup>

Likewise, the diocese of Sens was a dominant religious area of the province of Sens. As such, it contained a large number of leprosaria which were founded in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries. An example from this diocese is a leprosarium founded in Étampes which was dedicated to Saint Lazarus and Saint Michael. The earliest records of this leprosarium comes from 1120 in a document of Louis VI (*Stampensibus videlicet leprosis*) and a second document from around 1147 written by Louis VII (*fratribus S. Lazari de Stampis*).<sup>254</sup> A second example from this region was the Saint-Julien-du-Sault. Founded in 1211, this leprosarium was

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<sup>251</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 282.

<sup>252</sup> Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 316.

<sup>253</sup> Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 322.

<sup>254</sup> Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 336.

recognized (*de domo leprosorum Sancti Juliani*) in an “accord passé entre Miles d’Ordon et son oncle Hughes, prêtre de la léproserie.”<sup>255</sup>

In the High Middle Ages leprosaria were essentially religious institutions. This was due largely to the declaration made at the Third Lateran Council and reinforced as leprosaria constructed their own chapels and churches for their members. This can be seen first in the naming of the leprosaria as well as the saints to whom the chapels were dedicated. Mary Magdalen was a common patron saint of the leprosaria because of her close relationship to Lazarus.<sup>256</sup> This is one of the areas for which data from Italy is known on the leprosaria of the High Middle Ages. For example, the leprosarium where Francis is thought to have spent his early years ministering to lepers, located outside of Assisi at the Rivo Torto, was dedicated to the Magdalen.<sup>257</sup> Other leprosaria which were founded in Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which were dedicated to her include Santa Maria Maddalena in Terracina in Lazio, Santa Maria Maddalena de’ leprosi in Aversa, Campania, and Santa Maria Maddalena de Malsani in Prato, Tuscany.

One factor which motivated the foundations of these new leprosaria in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was charity. Since lepers could not work or otherwise care for themselves they survived on the alms and the kindness of others, essentially making them members of the poor. As the disease began to be seen as a mark of favor from God instead of punishment, many of the healthy members of society began donating both time and money to their care. To help the leprous became a way for members of lay society to express their piety through caring for God’s

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<sup>255</sup> Touati, *Archives de la lèpre*, 350. Records of this leprosarium even contain the names of some of the patients and volunteers who lived there. For a chart with these names and their dates of residence, see Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 377.

<sup>256</sup> Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 113.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

avored people. Many female penitents worked at leper hospitals as an example of their charity. Mary of Oignies, for example, worked at a leper hospital with her husband before she founded her own community in Liège.<sup>258</sup> Although these charitable donations may have been made with ulterior motives such as the spiritual health and eternal rewards promised for the donor and the donor's family, they were made in light of the new attitudes towards the disease.

This rise in charity was not simply the money donated for the foundation of the physical leprosarium, but also for the provision of care within the building. As has already been explained, the leprous were not permitted to work in order to provide for themselves. Their only personal potential for income was through begging on the streets for alms. However, with the rise of the leprosaria, lepers were provided for in ways they had not been previously. In most leprosaria the number of residents was often less than a dozen individuals, few of which were actually even leprous.<sup>259</sup> A great number of the inhabitants of the leprosaria were in fact the volunteers who lived and cared for the sick patients. With the changing understanding of the nature of the disease, people moved to the leprosaria as a means to devote themselves to God without entering and taking the vows of the religious orders of the High Middle Ages.

Foundations of new leprosaria saw a rise during this period of the thirteenth century and into the fourteenth century mainly because providing care for the poor and the sick came to have a potent spiritual component for the benefactors.<sup>260</sup> Through helping lepers live their lives in a

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<sup>258</sup> Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 113.

<sup>259</sup> Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 294-300.

<sup>260</sup> "Recent trends in historical research informed by developments in anthropology and sociology have led scholars to reconsider the place of hospitals and *leprosaria* within the social fabric of medieval society and urban growth in particular. Moreover, by the early thirteenth century as trade and profit grew more conspicuous within urban centres, charity, as a means of mitigating the defilement of accumulated wealth, became all the more pressing. Caring for the poor therefore came to have a potent spiritual and redemptive dimension as well as a social function." Anne E. Lester, "Cares Beyond the Walls: Cistercian Nuns and the Care of Lepers in Twelfth-and-Thirteenth-Century Northern France," in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe*, ed. Emilia Jamrozak and Janet Burton (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2006), 208.

manner appropriate to God both the benefactors and the volunteers were also taking care of their own spiritual health. Though the motives behind both forms of charity may not have been entirely altruistic for all benefactors and volunteers, the rise of leprosaria and care provided to the leprous reflect the changing attitudes towards their disease.

### **Veneration of the Infected: Saints After Francis**

Although the lepers were still required to remain outside the boundaries of the medieval settlements, the rise in the number of leprosaria provided a location for individuals to provide care. Much in the way Francis's interactions with the leprous were a mark of his extreme piety, other saints also adopted caring for the most repulsive members of society as a way to express their humility and piety. As such, crossing the boundary between the healthy and the sick and interacting with the leprous poor became key elements in the hagiographies of a number of saints in the centuries following Francis's death. Imitations of Francis's pious actions can be seen both through overt expressions of humility and compassion (a kiss or other touch) and the provision of long-term care and compassion.

This is not to say that individuals interacted with the lepers only to model themselves after Francis. Instead, because of Francis's impact on the social understanding of leprosy, the saints of the thirteenth century went to the leprous out of their own desire to provide care and show compassion. Two of the most prominent figures of this rising attention to the leprous were Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and Saint Hedwig of Silesia. Their interactions with the leprous, which will be discussed here, exemplify the changing attitudes towards the leprous poor as they both founded leper hospitals and provided direct care to the inhabitants. Other saints who interacted with the leprous, either in their lifetime or through their postmortem miracles in the



centuries after Saint Francis, include Saint Thomas Becket (d. 1170), Saint Hugh of Lincoln (d. 1200), Saint Louis (d. 1270), Saint Elzéar (d. 1323), and Saint Bernardino of Siena (d. 1444). Although many saints of both genders ministered to the leprous, it became one of the most outstanding marks of female piety in the thirteenth century.<sup>261</sup> The decision to care for the leprous emphasized the piety of the female saints vividly, separating them from the rest of the secular world.<sup>262</sup>

Perhaps the most prominent of these saints to follow Francis's example of providing care and compassion to the leprous was Saint Elizabeth of Hungary.<sup>263</sup> As a follower of the practices of the Franciscan Order — although she never joined officially — Elizabeth deeply believed in their practices of poverty and charity. Canonized in 1235<sup>264</sup> by Pope Gregory IX, Elizabeth's life became an example of female piety, chastity, and charity. Her canonization was pronounced in Perugia, the same place as Saint Francis, who was arguably the greatest influence on her life.<sup>265</sup> Francis's emphasis on providing compassion towards poor and sick as well as his emphasis on

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<sup>261</sup> "The hagiographic representations of such women demonstrate how they used an association with lepers to create their own form of *imitatio Christi*. Caring for lepers was an active way for women to pursue this ideal in two ways: by ministering directly to those with the disease who were thought to be Christ-like (metaphorically caring for Christ), and by participating in a life of physical suffering and self-sacrifice that mirrored Christ's own suffering on earth (being Christ-like)." Lester, "Cares Beyond the Walls," 220.

<sup>262</sup> "Many of these thirteenth-century female saints' lives make explicit the efficacy of caring for lepers in the process of achieving a penitential and pious ideal. The actions of women such as Yvette of Huy, Margaret of Ypres, and Mary of Oignies — who were connected with the Cistercian order or became Cistercian nun — reflect this. Within the structure of each *vita* choosing to care for lepers or contracting the disease was part of a conversion process that vividly separated religious women from their past in the secular world." Ibid., 219.

<sup>263</sup> For more detailed and extensive discussions on Elizabeth's life see: Ottó Gecser, "Lives of St. Elizabeth: Their Rewritings and Diffusion in the Thirteenth Century," *Analecta Bollandiana* 127 (2009); Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 209-43; Gábor Klaniczay, "Saint Elizabeth of Hungary: A European Saint," in *Schola Europaea. Les valeurs de l'Europe — L'Europe des valeurs*, ed. Ladislaus Havas, Ladislaus Takács, Emericus Tegye (Debrecini: Classica-Mediaevalia-Neolatina III, 2009); Kenneth Baxter Wolf, trans., *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth of Hungary: Testimony From Her Canonization Hearings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011);

<sup>264</sup> The canonization of Elizabeth was "one of the most expeditious processes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries." Cordelia Warr, "The *Golden Legend* and the Cycle of the 'Life of Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia-Hungary,'" in *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art, Iconography and Patronage in Fourteenth-Century Naples*, ed. Janis Elliott and Cordelia Warr (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 155.

<sup>265</sup> Klaniczay, "Saint Elizabeth of Hungary," 201.

voluntary poverty proved to be, according to Gábor Klaniczay, “the crucial influence that changed the life of this pious princess with such a shocking radicalism, that...in a few decades she came to be regarded as the female counterpart of Saint Francis.”<sup>266</sup>

While caring for the leprous was a way in which Elizabeth followed the example of Francis, it was not simply an act of imitation. Elizabeth’s interactions with the leprous were done much on her own initiative and she often exceeded Francis’s interactions with the lepers. Elizabeth viewed her actions of charity towards the leprous, as well as the other poor and sick which she cared for, as being worthy of divine rewards. This was not only because she freely gave alms to the poor and the sick, but also because it stood in stark contrast to her life of privilege at court.<sup>267</sup> The level of care she showed to the leprous poor became a mark of both her compassionate nature and extreme piety.

Born in 1207, Elizabeth was the daughter of Andrew II of Hungary and Gertrude of Meran. At the age of fourteen she was married to Ludwig IV of Thuringia after being betrothed to him and living in his court since the age of four. Their marriage, based on most accounts, was happy<sup>268</sup> and together they had three children. Despite being married and having children, Elizabeth, according to her *vita*, disdained the life of privilege that came with her marriage. She was deeply devoted to her spiritual health for her whole life.<sup>269</sup> She was, therefore, often looking

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> “Like Radegund, Elizabeth expected spiritual rewards in exchange, not only for sharing her ample resources with the poor and the sick but for eroding her own experience of privilege by exposing herself to its polar opposite.” Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 59.

<sup>268</sup> Dyan Elliott notes that the fact that the couple seemed to be genuinely in love was “a refreshing contrast to most hagiographies.” She expands upon this idea by saying, “Unlike most female saints, who are represented as finding marriage and husbands equally irksome and seem to spend much of their time evading the marriage bed, Elisabeth construed her prayerful vigils as genuine austerities precisely because they kept her from the side of her beloved husband.” Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 86.

<sup>269</sup> “While her husband was still alive, being religious, humble, very charitable, and extremely intent on her prayers.” *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*, trans. in Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 195.

for ways to devote herself more fully to her religious life. Around 1224/5 a group of Franciscan friars arrived at their court and during their stay taught Elizabeth about the way of life and the ideals of the Franciscan Order. As a result of this, Elizabeth had a chapel built for them in Eisenach and asked one of them serve as her mentor.<sup>270</sup>

In 1226 Conrad of Marburg, a preacher and inquisitor active in the region of Mainz, was appointed as Elizabeth's confessor.<sup>271</sup> He was a stern and controlling man who was devoted to Elizabeth upholding the virtues expected of a saintly woman. Elizabeth's spirituality, therefore, was largely shaped by Conrad's vision both of his role as her spiritual director and his vision for her spiritual legacy.<sup>272</sup> Not long after his arrival at their court,

while the landgrave was still alive, and with his consent, the blessed Elizabeth swore obedience to Master Conrad of Marburg, except with regards to the rights of her husband. She promised, at the hand of this same Conrad, that she would observe perpetual continence if she happened to outlive her husband.<sup>273</sup>

With this vow Elizabeth's devotion to both Conrad and her spiritual life were absolute. The combination of Elizabeth's enthusiasm and Conrad's fanatical style as a confessor quickly caused problems in the life of the court.<sup>274</sup> Conrad placed her spiritual health above her physical health, requiring that she be cautious of the food she ate<sup>275</sup> and the clothing she wore. He even required that she be beaten often after her nightly prayers by her handmaids as an act of penance. In a

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<sup>270</sup> Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, 248.

<sup>271</sup> Elizabeth's husband requested that Conrad become Elizabeth's confessor after the death of her first confessor; "Ludwig seems to have written to the papacy when Elisabeth's first confessor died, purportedly requiring not just a mere confessor but a man of learning as well." Elliott, *Proving Women*, 87-8.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>273</sup> *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*, trans. in Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 196. According to Dyan Elliott "for laywomen living in the world...such vows tended to bind the confessor and penitent in an intimate relation that fully participated in a heterosexual hierarchy approximating marriage." Elliott, *Proving Women*, 93.

<sup>274</sup> Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, 248.

<sup>275</sup> "Elisabeth's celebrated food asceticism wreaked havoc with her husband's board by requiring that she and her handmaidens refuse any food that might have been purchased with suspect funds. Although this discipline is justifiably construed by feminist historians as an act of subversion of her own social position, it is nevertheless significant that the practice resulted from Conrad's explicit behest." Elliott, *Proving Women*, 94.

sense, Conrad was preparing her life for her eventual canonization. She was widowed in 1227<sup>276</sup> and from that moment Conrad gained absolute control over Elizabeth's life.<sup>277</sup>

One of Elizabeth's major *vitae* came from a collection of stories known as the *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*. This collection of 'sayings' came from Elizabeth's four primary handmaidens and was based on their testimonies given during her canonization process. The four maidens detail episodes of Elizabeth's life, from her childhood until she was widowed, which was when Conrad dispensed with their services for Elizabeth. The *Dicta* had a longstanding presence in the medieval world; it existed in seven known manuscripts across the West.<sup>278</sup> After a while the collections of the *Dicta* were gathered and transformed into a more complete *vita*, which included both a prologue and a conclusion and came to be known as the *Libellus de dictis quatuor ancillarum*.<sup>279</sup> The *Libellus* is seen as a being a personal collection of stories of the saint's life from those who spent the greatest amount of time with her.

According to the stories in the *Libellus*, the leprous seem to have always been a source for Elizabeth to express her profound devotion to performing charitable works. Even before her husband's death, Elizabeth was keen to take in and care for those who were less fortunate than she. One Maundy Thursday one of Elizabeth's handmaidens, Isentrud, tells of how Elizabeth

gathered many lepers, washed their feet and hands, and then, after prostrating herself most humbly at their feet, kissed them in the most ulcerous and disgusting places. Wherever she found lepers, she sat next to them, consoling them and exhorting them to patience — no more horrified by them than she was by healthy people — and donating many things to them.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Ludwig died on his way to the Holy Land where he was headed to participate in the Fifth Crusade.

<sup>277</sup> Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 87. As a result of her promise to Conrad, Elizabeth took a vow of chastity after Ludwig's death, refusing to marry even when marriages were proposed by prominent members of her family. Conrad's hand in her life and her expressions of piety became even more harsh and extreme after Ludwig's death.

<sup>278</sup> Gecser, "Lives of St. Elizabeth," 54-5.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>280</sup> *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*, trans. in Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 201.

The lepers, according to her legends, never elicited a repulsion or disgust from Elizabeth. She gathered them for celebrations such as these, and also would go out of her way to help them whenever she came upon them. Her form of charity towards the leprous was intimate and personal; she would kiss them on their wounds and give them alms. What is also interesting to note here is how she would talk about patience to the lepers she came upon. This shows how her attitude towards their disease was of a positive nature; if the lepers were patient with their situation in this life, they would attain salvation in the next.

One of the most popular later legends of Elizabeth details a story about a leper whom she smuggled into the court. This story is in a *vita* of Elizabeth written by Dietrich of Apolda, commonly known as *Reinhardsbrunner Bearbeitung* or *Reinhardsbrunner Rezension*.<sup>281</sup> In this story Elizabeth bathed a leper, attended to his needs, and finally laid him to rest in her husband's bed. When Ludwig's mother heard of this she, reportedly, told Ludwig what Elizabeth had done. Together they went angrily to confront Elizabeth and to see the leper for themselves. However, when they arrived at the bed, the leper had been transformed into the image of the Crucified Christ.

Another time, the landgrave, master Ludwig, was in the castle of Nuenburg together with his mother, Sophia, and his spouse, Elizabeth. Then Elizabeth, lover of humility and worker of charity, having bathed a leper, laid him in the bed of the prince. Upon finding this out, her mother-in-law, taking his son by the hand, led him to the bed, saying: "Now you can recognize, whom Elizabeth stains your bed with." God, then, opened the inward eyes of the devout prince, who saw the Crucified One placed in the bed. Comforted by this contemplation, the pious

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<sup>281</sup> Gecser, "Lives of St. Elizabeth," 94.

prince asked his saintly spouse to lay such a leper frequently in his bed. For he understood, that Lord Christ was received and cherished in the sick body.<sup>282</sup>

By bringing the leper into her marital bed, Elizabeth was placing her charity and devotion to the leprous above all her other earthly relationships. In this story, the effect of Elizabeth's piety can be seen directly. Ludwig, who was at first upset about his wife's actions, was moved by the result of her pious actions. He even went so far in his admiration that he requested that Elizabeth to repeat her actions with the leprous often, as he finally understood the relationship between Christ and those who suffer. In some variants of this story the leper is also said to have turned into a sweet smelling rose, in the vein of the 'miracle of the roses' which was a much-used motif in Elizabeth's legends.<sup>283</sup>

After the death of Elizabeth's husband in 1227, Conrad gained an extreme level of control over her actions, far more than he had had while Ludwig was alive. Elizabeth, "striving after the highest perfection,"<sup>284</sup> asked Conrad how she might live out the rest of her life in complete religious devotion. Moreover, she became strictly devoted to her spirituality after Ludwig's death and attempted to live her life in the imitation of religious orders. She exemplified this particularly through her focus on providing alms to the poor and the sick in favor of living up to the standards required by a member of the royal family.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> *Die Vita de heiligen Elisabeth des Dietrich von Apolda*, ed. Rener (interpolation in) book 2, ch. 7, 40-41: *Alio tempore in castro Nuemburg dominus Ludwicus lantgravius cum Sophia matre sua et sancta Elysabeth coniuge sua simul erant. Tunc amatrix humilitatis misericordieque cultrix, Elysabeth, lotum in balneo lecto principis leprosum quendam reclinavit. Quo comperto socrus, apprehensa manu filii sui, duxit ipsum ad lectum dicens: 'Recognosce modo, quod his solet Elysabeth stratum tuum inficere.'* Tunc aperuit deus devoti principis interiores oculos viditque in thoro suo positum crucificum. Qua contemplacione consolatus pius princeps rogavit sacram coniugem suam, ut in stratu suo tales leprosos frequenter collocaret. Intellexit enim, quod in membris suis infirmis suscipitur Christus dominus et fovetur. As translated in Gecser, "Lives of St. Elizabeth: Their Rewritings and Diffusion," 94-5. Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 94.

<sup>283</sup> For a discussion on the 'miracle of the roses' in Elizabeth's *vitae* see Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, 369-372; Gecser, "Lives of St. Elizabeth: Their Rewritings and Diffusion," 76-80.

<sup>284</sup> *Summa vitae*, trans. in Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 93.

<sup>285</sup> The writers of her legends claimed that after the death of her husband, Elizabeth took up begging and performing menial jobs in order to support herself. Because of this she was required by her in-laws to leave her home at the castle of Wartburg. Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, 203. Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 87.

In a letter he wrote to Pope Gregory IX in 1232 he highlighted Elizabeth's devotion to the leprous and the poor. This letter, now known as the *Summa vitae*, was written to provide the pope with the context of Elizabeth's life for situating her miracles.<sup>286</sup> This letter chronicles Elizabeth's life after Conrad became her confessor in chronological order in a short summary.<sup>287</sup> In it, Conrad describes how Elizabeth took her widow's inheritance to found a hospital for the poor, the sick, and especially the lepers, at Marburg. She had this hospital built after Conrad had sternly refused to let her beg from door to door like a pauper.<sup>288</sup> The foundation of these leper hospitals, as discussed earlier in this chapter, was a means by which people were able to physically show their piety. For Elizabeth, taking in and caring for the poor and the sick was a way to express her humility and devotion to God. In the *Summa vitae* Conrad explains:

There in that town [Marburg] she built a kind of a hospital, taking in the sick and the weak. She placed the most miserable and contemptible people at her table and when I reprimanded her about it, she responded that she received from them a singular grace and humility. Like a prudent woman — which she most certainly was — she called my attention to the life that she lived before, saying that it was necessary for her to cure one extreme with its opposite in just this manner.<sup>289</sup>

Though Conrad reprimanded her for being in such close contact with the “most miserable and contemptible,” Elizabeth explained to him their role in her life. Caring for the poor and the sick was Elizabeth's way of compensating for her past of living comfortably at court. Despite all her attempts to lessen the secular aspects of her life at court, it was in her hospital where she was able to live the ascetic life she had always wanted. Much like Radegund and Francis before her, Elizabeth felt that embracing the lepers would help to undo the effects of her life in the royal

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<sup>286</sup> Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 91.

<sup>287</sup> Ottó Gecser, “Lives of St. Elizabeth,” 51.

<sup>288</sup> *Summa vitae*, trans. in Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 93.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

court.<sup>290</sup> Elizabeth lived at that hospital for the rest of her life, spending her remaining years divided between providing charity to the lepers and personal self-mortification under the supervision of Conrad.

On one occasion while working at her leper hospital, Elizabeth took it upon herself to care for the most repulsive leper there. She

took care of a certain woman who was fetid, leprous, and covered with sores and pus, whom anyone else would have abhorred even from a distance. Elizabeth bathed her, covered her, and tied strips of cloth on her sores, nurturing her with treatments. Laying herself down in front of her, she untied her shoes, wanting to take them off, but the leprous woman would not permit her to do this insisting on doing it herself. She trimmed the nails on her hands and feet and touched her ulcerous face with her hand; and the woman was actually healed for a time.<sup>291</sup>

Elizabeth's devotion to providing charity to lepers is exemplified in this passage. She cares for a leper who was so disfigured and grotesque that "anyone else would have abhorred even from a distance." Elizabeth attended to all aspects of the leprous woman's suffering, caring for her much in the way a mother would care for a child. Elizabeth's care for this female leper was also personal and intimate in nature, she attended to all areas of care the woman might have needed. It is also interesting to note here that the leprous woman was only "healed for a time," showing the effects of Elizabeth's profound care. Her touch, unlike that of Jesus or Martin, did not have the power to heal the leper. Instead, her compassion and continued charity were able to provide the leprous woman with some, albeit temporary, relief from her disease. Elizabeth, therefore,

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<sup>290</sup> Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 58.

<sup>291</sup> *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*, trans. in Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 207.



became a model for both female religiosity and the impact of acts of compassion towards the leprous.<sup>292</sup>

Elizabeth's always put herself in direct contact with the most grotesque of the lepers. On account of this, Conrad, despite being forceful and cruel in his devotion to Elizabeth's spiritual health, was also concerned about her physical well-being. Also within the *Summa vitae* Conrad explains to Pope Gregory IX his concerns over Elizabeth's interactions with the lepers. Conrad viewed these physical contacts between the holy woman and the lepers as detrimental to her safety.

[Elizabeth] took on, without my knowledge, the care of a leprous girl and hid her in her own quarters, taking upon herself every duty dictated by humanity. She humbled herself by feeding her, laying her down, washing her, and even removing her shoes, imploring the other members of the household not to be offended by such things. When I discovered this, I punished her severely — may the Lord forgive me — because I feared that she would be infected by contact with the girl.<sup>293</sup>

For Conrad, the lepers still represented the diseased outcasts of God. In this letter he explains how he was fearful of Elizabeth's actions because he was worried that she would be infected. He was so worried about Elizabeth's actions that he "punished her severely" — which, if in line with the rest of the depictions in Elizabeth's *vitae*, meant that Conrad beat her severely — to dissuade her from repeating such actions. According to this letter, however, Elizabeth viewed the leper as deserving care. Although her instructions to the rest of her household to not be offended by the presence and appearance of the leper, Elizabeth is showing how she herself views the leper.

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<sup>292</sup> "[Elizabeth] provided a multiplicity of models for female religious roles: pious saintly childhood, innovative affirmation of tender matrimonial love, motherhood with associations pointing towards no less that similarity to and emulation of the Virgin Mary, a courtly lady with exemplary self-restraint refusing splendor regarding dress and food, penitent widowhood with patient endurance of tribulations, and, finally, the status of a lay recluse dedicated to the works of charity." Klaniczay, "Saint Elizabeth of Hungary," 205.

<sup>293</sup> *Summa vitae*, trans. in Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth*, 94.

The stories of Elizabeth caring for the leprous were spread also through images, similarly to Francis. These images provided a visual way for Elizabeth's acceptance of the leprous to be spread across the medieval West. She is seen in these images as humbling herself by providing care for the leprous in ways which would have repulsed many.



Fig. 3. *Saint Elizabeth Caring for the Sick*<sup>294</sup>  
ÖNB. Cod. 370, f. 88v.

This image (Fig. 3) of Elizabeth washing the feet of two lepers and one (presumably) sick person comes from the so-called *Krumauer Bildercodex*<sup>295</sup> which was commissioned by Anne of Swidnica in the fourteenth century. The codex recounts (among other legends) the story of the important events of Elizabeth's life in a series of detailed images. The detail shown in these

<sup>294</sup> Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, 222, Image 41.

<sup>295</sup> Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, 220.

images is unprecedented in medieval codices of the High Middle Ages<sup>296</sup> and as such it provides a detailed addition to the sources of Elizabeth's hagiography.

The two lepers in this image are covered in ulcerated wounds on their arms and legs. Elizabeth is crouched in front of them, delicately washing the feet of the first in a basin of water. She tends to their wounds with care and devotion. Her crouching posture below the seated lepers shows her humbling herself before them, a clear mark of her devotion to their care. It is also interesting to note that she is alone with the lepers. There are no other people (such as Conrad) around to either help her care for the sick and the leprous or to chastise her for her actions. According to this image, her actions towards them are done entirely her own initiative.

A second image (Fig. 4) of Elizabeth from the *Krumauer Bildercodex* depicts the story of the leper in Elizabeth's marital bed transforming into an image of the crucified Christ, as discussed above.

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

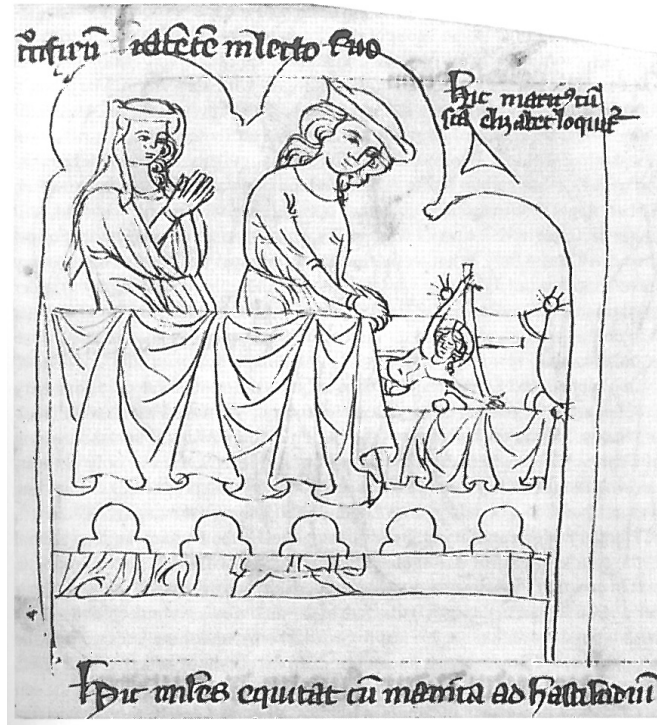


Fig. 4. St Elizabeth and the Lerposus turning into the Crucified Christ<sup>297</sup>  
Krumauer Bildercodex. f. 93r.

Even though this image does not contain the leper who had previously been lying in Elizabeth's bed, it does encapsulate the whole episode in a single image. As Ludwig pulls back the covers of the bed, the leper has turned into an image of Christ. Elizabeth is posed behind him, hands clasped in a prayer-like pose, knowing that if the leper is found she will be in trouble with her husband. Those who saw this image would have known that what is depicted as Christ was earlier a gruesome leper whom Elizabeth had been caring for.

The role of the leper in all of Elizabeth's hagiographies, both written and visual, was as a tool to highlight Elizabeth's piety. Not only did Elizabeth provide alms and care to the poor and the sick, but she also took in and personally tended to the worst of them, the leprous. Unlike Francis, who had been repulsed by the lepers in his youth, Elizabeth never flinched or turned away from the lepers. When she was told by her family members or Conrad to stop working so

<sup>297</sup> Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, 373, Image 81.

intimately with them she refused, unable to see how caring for them could be considered wrong. Just as both Christ and Francis had acted compassionately towards the lepers before her, Elizabeth, too, saw them as deserving figures of her charity. Her attitude towards them was in consonance with the rising positive attitudes surrounding the leprous in the thirteenth century.

Providing care for the leprous, both personally and by founding leper hospitals, did not remain a unique attribute of Elizabeth's life and legacy. As has already been stated, this became a mark of piety expressed especially by female saints. One other dominant figure in this respect was Saint Hedwig of Silesia, Elizabeth's maternal aunt. Although she began her devotion to a spiritual life much earlier than Elizabeth,<sup>298</sup> she was not canonized until 1267, more than three decades after her niece. Born in 1174/8, Hedwig's parents sent her to live in a Cistercian Abbey when she was five, where she remained until she married the duke of Silesia in 1203.<sup>299</sup> Despite being married and having six children with her husband, Hedwig's devotion to a religious way of life was paramount. So much so that after the birth of her sixth child Hedwig convinced her husband to enter into a spiritual marriage in which they would abstain from sex permanently for the rest of their lives.<sup>300</sup> Hedwig was clearly an extremely pious woman who was focused on living in a manner pleasing to God.

One story which is of particular interest to this study is based on an episode of Hedwig's life recorded by Caesarius of Heisterbach in 1225, called *De ducissa leprosa, que sanata est*,

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<sup>298</sup> "St Hedwig...had started leading the life of a religious when Elizabeth was still a toddler." Ibid., 240. Hedwig also outlived Elizabeth by more than a decade.

<sup>299</sup> In 1232 Hedwig changed her religious allegiance to the Franciscans from the Cistercians, thus showing her connection to the influence of the life of Saint Francis. Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 225. Elliott notes also that before entering into the spiritual marriage with her husband, despite being married and having children, Hedwig "distinguished herself by her moderate use of sex – a fact that her hagiographer details with zeal and upholds for imitation."

*dum ecclesiam beate Marie edificasset.*<sup>301</sup> This exemplum helps shed light on the status of Hedwig's religious devotion before Elizabeth's influence on her life. This episode in Hedwig's life suggests that she might have contracted leprosy herself.<sup>302</sup> According to the story, one night, after she was diagnosed with the disease, she was advised by Christ in a dream to found a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint Bartholomew the Apostle.<sup>303</sup> He explained that if she did this she would be miraculously cured of her leprosy. When she awoke, she went to her husband and told of what she had been told in her dream. He immediately set out to have the church be built in name of the Virgin Mary. In order to be even more pleasing to God, they also established a convent of the Cistercian order and sent their daughter to be raised there. Caesarius's report concludes that this action was enough to miraculously heal the princess,<sup>304</sup> and it was due to this that she devoted herself to an ascetic religious lifestyle. Though she is not mentioned by name in this text, her husband Henry is, and the story is located in Polonia, so there is little doubt that the *ducissa leprosa* in question is Hedwig.<sup>305</sup>

It is not certain whether Caesarius's record can be considered true, as it is the only account which describes Hedwig as having been both afflicted with and healed of leprosy. If it was true, it should have been included in other versions of the saint's *vitae* due to the miraculous healing from the most stigmatized medieval disease. Despite this, it is apparent that her actions

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<sup>301</sup> Alfons Hilka, ed., *Die beiden ersten Bücher der Libri VIII miraculorum*, in Alfons Hilka, ed., *Die Wundergeschichten des Caesarius von Heisterbach*, vol. 3 (Hanstein, Bonn, 1937), 84-85.

<sup>302</sup> *Dominus Deus, qui multus modis electos suos probat, ducis huius uxorem, feminam per omnia laudabilem, lepra percussit.* Hilka, ed., *Die beiden ersten Bücher der Libri VIII miraculorum*, 84.

<sup>303</sup> *Pro cuius emundatione cum dux, utpote uxoris unice dilecte, tam per se quam per alios religiosos Domino incessanter supplicaret multasque elemosinas erogaret, Christus, qui 'multum est sisericors' (ps. 120,8), ostendere volens, quantum matrem, de qua carnem suscipere dignatus est, diligeret, leprosam ducissam quadam nocte hiis verbis alloquitur dicens: 'Si oratorium edificaveris beate virgini Marie et sancto Bartholomeo apostolo, a lepra tua sanaberis.'* Hilka, ed., *Die beiden ersten Bücher der Libri VIII miraculorum*, 84.

<sup>304</sup> *Et ecce! mirum in modum, mox ut Deus ibidem laudari cepit, laudantis virtus infirmam sanavit et factum est gaudium magnum in terra illa, omnibus Deum glorificantibus, qui tanta eis ostendere dignatus est mirabilia.* Hilka, ed., *Die beiden ersten Bücher der Libri VIII miraculorum*, 85.

<sup>305</sup> Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, 240.

were influenced later by her niece's devotion to religious life. It was because of her niece that Hedwig and her husband founded a women's hospital at Neumarkt in 1230 which catered specifically for the leprous. This was, perhaps, one of her greatest acts of charity in her lifetime, as it highlighted her devotion to caring for the sick and the poor. Hedwig, for decades after its foundation, sent the hospital large donations in order to provide for its residents.<sup>306</sup>

One other episode in Hedwig's life in which she dealt with lepers was recorded in the *Vita sanctae Hedvigis ducissae Silesiae*.<sup>307</sup> This text, while short, describes an episode where Hedwig bathed and dried the feet of some lepers and then kissed their feet.<sup>308</sup> This text also goes on to explain how, after bathing the lepers, she provided them with new clothing.<sup>309</sup> Though Martin and Francis had kissed lepers as acts of charity and humility, they kissed either their hands or faces. Elizabeth's *vitae* only describe her kissing the lepers in the "most ulcerous and disgusting of places," but never tell where on the body these were located. Hedwig, however, is said to have humbled herself in that not only did she kiss the ulcerous wounds of the lepers, but she specifically kissed their feet, an act of extreme humility for a saintly woman to perform.

In the same vein as the saints before her, the important episodes in the *vita* of Hedwig were also disseminated through images. The short text of the *Vita sanctae Hedvigis* provides the context for an image of Hedwig which shows her caring for the leprous. This image (Fig. 5) depicts Hedwig mid-kiss with her lips pressed to the foot of a leper. She is kneeling down before

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Aleksander Szemkiewicz, ed., *Monumenta Poloniae Historica, IV* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1960-1), 522.

<sup>308</sup> *Lotis autem pedibus et extersis lintheo, deosculabatur humiliter non solum pedes sed et manus eorum ipsoque pauperes data elemosina studebat semper dimittere consolatos.* Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> *In cena domini specialiter illis amore, qui pro nobis ut leprosus voluit estimari, pedes abluit leprosorum et novis eosdem leprosos, quos laverat, vestibus induebat.* Ibid.

a group of sick people who have their feet in a washing basin.<sup>310</sup> In this image the leper is depicted as covered in ulcerous wounds. The leper's hair is unruly and his face is deformed and in a scowl. Hedwig, however, does not seem to be affected by the appearance of the leper. This image highlights Hedwig's humility and her role as a pious woman.

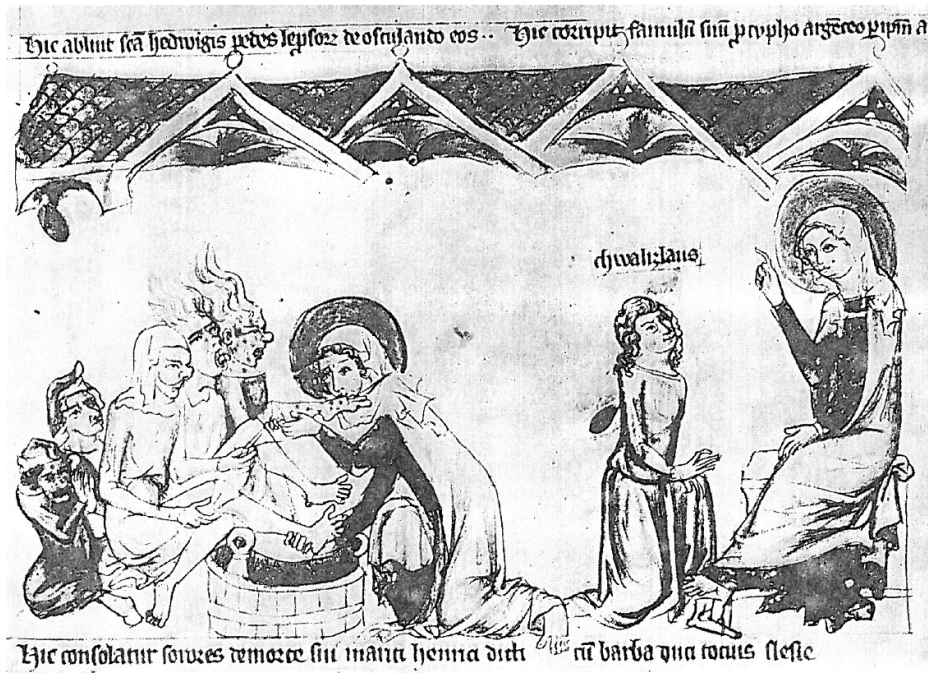


Fig. 5. Hedwig washes and kisses the feet of the lepers<sup>311</sup>  
Hedwig Codex, f. 30r.

The turn of the thirteenth century saw a shift in the importance of care for the leprous. Though money was being given to found the leper hospitals across the medieval West, the importance of the people who worked at them and cared for the lepers was of equal, if not greater, importance. The changing attitudes of society towards the leprous made them a growing

<sup>310</sup> The first sick person whose feet are in the tub (on the left) might also be a leper. The cloth covering of the mouth of the person is sometimes a visual indication of leprosy. As this image is entitled “Hedwig kisses and washes the feet of the lepers” it is possible that all three individuals are leprous, depicted at different stages of their disease. With the first person being not yet outwardly recognizable as a leper (wounds and ulcers, for example) and the last leper — the one which Hedwig is kissing — as being the most gruesome depiction.

<sup>311</sup> Wolfgang Braunsfels, ed., *Der Hedwig Codex, Sammlung Ludwig* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1972), 39. Abb. 32, f. 30r. According to Klaniczay in *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, is presently kept at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles.



target in need of charity. As a result, this provided more opportunities for individuals to express their piety through ministering to the leprous.

Holy individuals who viewed providing care to the leprous as an extreme example of piety, like Francis before them, often moved to live with the lepers in order to care for them. Elizabeth and Hedwig are only two examples of the many saints who, due both to their profound humility and desire to serve God, took to the lepers. Other female saints who interacted with lepers in their hagiographies include Saint Alice (d. 1250),<sup>312</sup> Saint Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), and Saint Catherine of Genoa (d. 1510). Women who provided care to the leprous were simultaneously separating themselves from lay society and humbling themselves before God. Because of this type of care-giving holy women became both physically and spiritually linked to God through his chosen people, the leprous.<sup>313</sup> To care for the leprous, those whom society had rejected, became a dominant mark of female religiosity in the High Middle Ages.

### **Preaching: About Leprosy, To the Leprous**

Changing perceptions of leprosy in the thirteenth century did not occur simply in the care and compassion shown to the leprous. Although the rise in institutions to house lepers as well as the rise in people interested in caring for them are both paramount physical examples of this shift in perception of the disease, ideas disseminated about the disease also changed. The best source for seeing the changing ideas of the thirteenth century is in sermons delivered both to and about the lepers. With the pronouncement of the Fourth Lateran Council, preachers began to place

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<sup>312</sup> Alice is reported to actually even have contracted leprosy due to her acts of charity and had to be isolated because of the disease.

<sup>313</sup> “To provide such care was literally to humiliate oneself in the eyes of lay society, but this humility was concomitant with elevation in the eyes of God. Through care-giving and begging alms for lepers religious women became linked physically and spiritually to God’s chosen people, the poor and the leprous.” Lester, “Cares Beyond the Walls,” 219-20.

greater emphasis on their role as spiritual physicians. As such they adapted the current medical imagery and theories in their sermons to both appeal to and contrast with the contemporary public opinions on disease.<sup>314</sup> These sermons spread the message that leprosy was a disease borne in this life in preparation for a celestial reward; lepers suffered in this life so that they would not suffer in the next.

Three major collections of sermons *ad status*, collections of sermons which were directed at specific groups of people, provide the best examples of the attention paid to the idea of lepers and leprosy in the thirteenth century. Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240), Guibert de Tournai (d. 1248), and Humbert of Romans (d. 1277) each composed a comprehensive collection of sermons which highlight the changing attitudes towards leprosy.<sup>315</sup> These three collections of sermons are valuable because they highlight the themes, argumentation, and rhetorical devices which were appropriate for their intended audiences.<sup>316</sup> These collections of sermons clearly show the ideas and social attitudes towards leprosy current in the the thirteenth century.

There are a few limitations in using sermons such as these as the basis for historical analysis. During the thirteenth century sermons were often composed using preexisting sermon outlines, models, or *repotartio* as a place on which to base their arguments. The recorded sermons which survive at present are not necessarily the exact sermons which were preached in the thirteenth century. The original sermons were generally given in the vernacular so audiences could understand the message. However, when sermons were written down for church records they were usually composed in Latin and based on notes taken during delivery. As such, the

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<sup>314</sup> Jessalynn Bird, "Medicine for Body and Soul: Jacques de Vitry's Sermons to Hospitallers and their Charges," in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2001), 92.

<sup>315</sup> Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 37. "Il faut attendre le XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle pour voir apparaître les lépreux dans trois collections particulièrement exhaustives de sermons *ad status*."

<sup>316</sup> Adam J. Davis, "Preaching in Thirteenth-Century Hospitals," *Journal of Medieval History* 36 No. 1 (2010), 74-5.

written sermons which have been preserved are, in a sense, often reconstructions of the original spoken sermon.<sup>317</sup> While it is true that because of this such sermons can be considered problematic historical sources, they still provide a glimpse of the historical ideas which were present at the time of their composition. These ideas which were presented and transmitted are of what is of the greatest importance to this section, as they provide an example of the social climate surrounding the perception of leprosy in the High Middle Ages.

Jacques de Vitry was an eloquent preacher and well-known ecclesiastic whose writings have been the source of much study in history. Of particular importance here are his two surviving sermons<sup>318</sup> *ad lepros et alios infirmos* which were written while he was the cardinal-bishop of Tusculum<sup>319</sup> between the years of 1228 and 1240.<sup>320</sup> These are the first two known texts written to address the lepers directly. Although Jacques de Vitry often used leprosy as a metaphor for sin,<sup>321</sup> these two sermons particularly point to a message of leprosy as a means towards salvation. These two sermons were meant to be preached directly to lepers as their message highlights the idea that leprosy is purgatory on earth.<sup>322</sup>

The first sermon *ad lepros* discusses the status of the lepers as the elect of God in light of the story of Job (*sufferentiam Iob audistis et finem Domini uidistis*).<sup>323</sup> Much like Job's suffering, leprosy was a visible sign from God highlighting their status as a member of God's beloved. Also like Job, according to Jacques de Vitry, the lepers could be certain of their celestial reward if they

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 75. "Even apart from language, a *reportatio* might reflect more about the *reportator* than the preacher, calling into question what we mean when we designate an 'author' for a particular sermon...In short, the *reportatio* was often a reconstruction of a reconstruction."

<sup>318</sup> The Latin text of these two sermons can be found in Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 101-28.

<sup>319</sup> Davis, "Preaching in Thirteenth-Century Hospitals," 75.

<sup>320</sup> Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 37.

<sup>321</sup> Bird, "Medicine for Body and Soul," 92.

<sup>322</sup> Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 24.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 101.

endured their suffering on earth while still remaining devoted to their spiritual health.<sup>324</sup> Due to this, he stresses that the leprous ought to welcome their disease as a blessing because of the immense spiritual reward they will receive in heaven. He promises them, if they accept and rejoice in their suffering in this life, they will enjoy the resurrection just as Christ did after he consented to his suffering.<sup>325</sup>

In his second sermon *ad leprosos*, Jacques de Vitry again stressed the importance of spiritual health in the light of physical sickness. To do this he stresses the importance of confession for the lepers.<sup>326</sup> This idea is exemplified by one passage in the sermon based on a famous *exemplum* in which an angel is disgusted by the scent of a rich and arrogant young man, but was unaffected by the smell of a rotting corpse.<sup>327</sup> Here Jacques de Vitry highlights how the physical body is nothing more than a container for the immortal soul of a man. The rotting flesh, therefore, did not bother the angel because the soul it had once contained was righteous and worthy of heaven. The arrogant youth, on the other hand, was revolting because his soul was focused on the secular world with no care for the desires of God or heaven. The health of the soul, therefore, is of greater importance than the health of the body. Lepers exemplified this

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<sup>324</sup> Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 24. “....appel sublimé à la conversion: signe visible de la sollicitude divine, semblable à celui manifesté à Job, la souffrance est une invitation à suivre un chemin parallèle à celui des moines, et à surmonter, comme Job, les épreuves par la confiance en Dieu”

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 42. “Disease, however terrible, should thus be welcomed as a blessing, not least because it marked the first step on the road to conversion, and thence to spiritual perfection.” Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 57. Davis also echoes this sentiment of relating the suffering of the leprous to the suffering of Christ; “By representing the poor and the sick in the image of Jesus, preachers sought to galvanise hospital workers to help the less fortunate. By the thirteenth century, it was increasingly common in devotional art, literature, and preaching to emphasise the humanity and suffering of Jesus, and to associate him with the beggar and leper.” Davis, “Preaching in Thirteenth-Century Hospitals,” 75.

<sup>326</sup> Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 42. “Les lépreux doivent se confesser aux prêtres, car la santé de l’âme a plus de prix que celle de corps; la péché, multiforme à la manière de la lèpre, est insupportable à Dieu et à ses anges; les pécheurs endurcis risquent la Géhenne.”

<sup>327</sup> Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 135. This story can be found under the subheading *Exemplum de heremita et angelo qui sepelierunt peregrinum* in Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 123-4.

condition, their physical suffering might be terrible in this life, but they could use it to intensify their spiritual health.

Humbert of Romans was the fifth minister general of the Dominican Order who, after stepping down from his position in 1263, also composed a collection of sermons *ad status*. However, unlike Jacques de Vitry, Humbert of Romans's sermons were intended to be used by preachers interested in directing their sermons towards the leprous.<sup>328</sup> He explains at the beginning of his second sermon *ad leprosos* that "it is regarded as an extremely pious act to visit [the lepers] from time to time or even, when one finds them in a place where one is praying, to talk to them about God, altogether or in a group."<sup>329</sup> He also highlights the temperament of the lepers as being quick to become hostile, and as such, preachers ought not mention the name of leprosy as their disease and should also refrain from any other topics which might upset them. He does, however, praise the piety of the men and women who have overcome their disgust and fear of the leprous in order to devote their lives to providing care.<sup>330</sup>

In this sermon, Humbert of Romans describes three types of lepers which all preachers must be aware of: the bad, the ambivalent, and the good.<sup>331</sup> He explains that each of them requires a different message. The first group is not only quick to become hostile, but according to Humbert of Romans, they have also hardened their hearts against God. He explains that many lepers "blaspheme God like persons in Hell and as a result of the injuries they have received."<sup>332</sup> He explains that the leprous, because of their disease, believe that God has forsaken them and

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<sup>328</sup> Goodich, ed., *Other Middle Ages*, 146. The Latin version of Humbert of Romans's sermons can be found in Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 156-63.

<sup>329</sup> Goodich, ed., *Other Middle Ages*, 146.

<sup>330</sup> Davis, "Preaching in Thirteenth-Century Hospitals," 77.

<sup>331</sup> Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 50.

<sup>332</sup> Goodich, ed., *Other Middle Ages*, 147.

because of this they “abandon themselves to lust and filthy behavior.”<sup>333</sup> Of the second group he explains that some may not sin, but they fail to do anything good which might help them on their path to salvation. Their failure to do anything positive because of their disease is, according to Humbert, as bad as the lepers who are constantly in a state of sin.

Though he describes many of the leprous as being quick to anger and hardened against God, with the third group he highlights the benefits which can come from the disease. It is the actions of this last group of lepers on which he suggests that preachers focus the message of their sermons. Humbert of Romans emphasizes how preachers ought to discuss the benefits of the disease. According to his second sermon, the lepers ought to spend their time in this life focusing on their status in the next. The leprous, therefore, need to confess their sins to a priest regularly, avoid committing new sins, and, finally, they must accept their current situation “with patience, again comforted by the example of Job.”<sup>334</sup> It was the role of the priest, therefore, to show how leprosy was not a punishment from God, but instead a gift. Priests, according to Humbert, are responsible for directing the souls of the leprous towards God.

The final preacher whose sermons *ad leprosos* survive is Guibert de Tournai who joined the Franciscan Order in Paris around 1240. He wrote three sermons *ad leprosos* which are focused mainly on exemplifying the life that a leper ought to focus on living while in this world. Though he modeled many of his sermons on those of Jacques de Vitry, he often modified both

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid. Humbert of Romans expands upon this idea, “They fight among themselves and sometimes get excited and beat each other. They throw at each other the charity they have received, lacking even the most minimal mutual loyalty. They stuff themselves with food and get drunk as a result of an excess of food. Putting aside any rein on the fires of their desire, they abandon themselves to lust and filthy behavior, which I prefer not to report.”

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

the style and the nuances of the message to be delivered.<sup>335</sup> What he did in his sermons was direct the message towards the gender of those who would be hearing them. As the leprosaria were increasingly segregated by gender (either as separate institutions, or with rigorous divisions within an institution) sermons to the lepers could cater more to a specific gender.<sup>336</sup>

His first and second sermons in particular are focused on the temptations for men which are present in this world that ought to be avoided in order to ensure spiritual health. It is not possible, according to Guibert, to receive the divine reward without having been first challenged. He explains in the first sermon that “just as occasions for trials do not stop, so also the remedies do not stop. Because you see, first comes the trial, then follows the divine reward.”<sup>337</sup> Lepers, therefore, are constantly being tempted in this lifetime, but if they resist their reward will be far greater in heaven. He explains that it is the goal of the devil to try and steer people off the path of God.

The Devil tests us with his trickeries. And he tempts us with all of his strength; he never sleeps, he has no body, because of this he does not rest from tempting us. And he tempts us with his trickeries. For you see, he who tempted Christ even tempts the Christian person.<sup>338</sup>

It is up to a person to resist these temptations in order to find their divine reward in heaven, just as Christ did. According to his second sermon *ad leprosos*, it is only through voluntary poverty, patience, and temperance that a person can overcome the temptations of the devil.

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<sup>335</sup> Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 45. Guibert “fait de l'exclusion le principal trait distinctif des lépreux: l'épreuve morale l'emporte, à ses yeux, sur l'épreuve corporelle. Sans négliger dans ses développements la pauvreté et la maladie qui font souffrir les lépreux, il ne les confond ni avec les pauvres, ni avec les malades, qu'il associe dans un autre status considéré immédiatement avant le leur.”

<sup>336</sup> Ibid. “Le frère franciscain conduit en effet à son terme la logique de différenciation sexuelle ébauchée par Jacques de Vitry. Sa classification envisage successivement les hommes, les femmes et les auditoires mixtes; et les remaniements qui en résultent laissent la hiérarchie des états de perfection, très lisible dans son modèle, à l'état de vestige insignifiant.”

<sup>337</sup> Translation mine; Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus*, 129.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 130.

In his third sermon *ad leprosos* Guibert focuses on the story of *Dives et Pauper* from the Gospels, which was discussed earlier.<sup>339</sup> He highlights how, much in the same way Jacques de Vitry had earlier, lepers suffer in this life in order to spend their eternal life with God in heaven. Much like the leper called Lazarus, they were the elect of God and their souls were destined for heaven. However, he stresses that the lepers of the thirteenth century still had to resist the desires of their current life and focus on living their lives in an acceptable manner so they might attain their heavenly life.

Through their sermons, these three preachers in different ways exemplified the changing attitudes towards both the leprous and the disease of leprosy. All three considered the disease of leprosy to a gift from God. However, their focus as well as their explanations behind this idea differ slightly. Jacques de Vitry emphasized the gift as being a means to suffer in this world in order to not have to suffer in the next. Because of this he encouraged the lepers to focus on their spiritual health, no matter the state of their physical health. Humbert of Romans focused on teaching other preachers how to deliver sermons to the leprous. He believed the lepers could use their suffering as a means to reach heaven. He emphasized how it is the role of the priests to keep the spiritual health of the leprous on a path which would ensure that they made the best use of the gift God gave to them. Guibert de Tournai's focus was on the temptations which the leprous might face in this world which would steer them away from God. Through his sermons *ad leprosos* he advised the leprous to focus on their spiritual health so that they might end up, like Lazarus, in the bosom of Abraham.

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 47.



## Summary

The legacy of Saint Francis's interaction with the leprous can be seen across the medieval West in the thirteenth century. The lepers, once ritually excluded from medieval society, became more incorporated and interwoven into the daily lives and perceptions of the Western world. Leprosaria became a prominent fixture outside of medieval cities as physical testaments to the spiritual benefits of caring for the leprous poor. The change in social perceptions of the disease from a punishment to a blessing led people to donate both money and time to serving some of the favored people of God.

With the foundation of new establishments to provide care for the leprous also came a sense of rising compassion for lepers. More and more lay individuals seeking to become closer to God took to caring for the lepers. With Francis having provided an example for piety, many moved to the leper hospitals to be closer to God's elect. Although Francis set the precedent for caring for lepers, his actions were expanded upon after his death. Many not only kissed and served the lepers, but also devoted great amounts of time and money to their care. This is particularly evident in the hagiographies of the holy women of the High Middle Ages who humbled themselves before God by providing direct care to lepers. Providing care and compassion to the less fortunate was seen as a mark of female religiosity.

The ideas about the disease of leprosy and those afflicted by it had changed greatly by the turn of the thirteenth century. Though the Old Testament attitudes towards the disease were still present, they were often outweighed by the contrasting view. Through thirteenth-century sermons preached at the newly established leprosaria, it is evident that both lepers and their society saw

their disease in a new light. The leprous were encouraged through these sermons to embrace their disease as a gift from God and to live their life in a way to make the best use of that gift.

In the centuries following Saint Francis, the disease of leprosy was no longer predominantly viewed as a punishment from God. Society, though still keeping the leprous outside the boundaries of their cities, blurred the lines between the two. The lepers were systematically included in the social fabric of the medieval landscape in the thirteenth century. Although still at the margins of social life, the role of the leper in the medieval world was becoming a positive mark of God's favor in the world.

## V. Conclusion: Malady or Miracle?

*I used to wonder, why did God give children leprosy?  
Now I believe: God doesn't give anyone leprosy. He  
gives us, if we choose to use it, the spirit to live with  
leprosy, and with the imminence of death. Because it is  
in our own mortality that we are most divine.*

*Alan Brennert, Moloka'i*<sup>340</sup>

For centuries, leprosy has conjured up images of grotesque faces, ulcerated or clubbed limbs, and the rattle of the clapper echoing across generations. As *the disease* of the Middle Ages, leprosy has long attracted historians to debates and discussion on how medieval society perceived and reacted to its presence. Modern research on the history of leprosy, however, has tried to distance itself from this stigmatization of the disease, as it does not accurately represent the complete picture of the medieval social perceptions of the disease. Based in both Judaic and Christian traditions, the social understanding of leprosy in the Middle Ages was twofold. It was simultaneously seen as a disease given by God both to punish the vilest of sinners for their transgressions and also to mark His favored to suffer in this world so they might attain salvation in the next. While both perceptions of leprosy existed in the Middle Ages, what this thesis has shown is how a shift occurred in the thirteenth century in which the dominant perception of the disease changed.

With two contrasting views of the disease, the dominant social perception of leprosy in the High Middle Ages was a marked change from the previous dominant perception. The aim of this thesis has been to highlight the role of one man, Saint Francis of Assisi, in this shift. At

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<sup>340</sup> Alan Brennert, *Moloka'i* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 306. *Moloka'i* is a historical fiction novel set in Honolulu, Hawaii, in the late nineteenth century. It follows the life of a young girl named Rachel who was diagnosed with leprosy at the age of seven. She is removed from her family and deported to Kalaupapa, a leper colony isolated on the island of Moloka'i. There the story traces both Rachel's new life in the colony — the other lepers sent there to be isolated as well those responsible for their care (and in particular one Franciscan sister named Sister Mary Catherine Voorhies) — as well as the social situation of the lepers at the colony.

present, scholarship on the history of leprosy has paid little attention to the role of charismatic religious figures such as Francis in reforming, or at least offering an alternative to, the social perception of the disease. Francis's dramatic action of embracing a leper came at a moment where society seems to have been attempting to redefine the segregation of lepers from medieval society.

In the early Middle Ages lepers were excluded from their communities and cities. They were viewed as being 'unclean' and, as such, not permitted to remain in contact with the 'clean' members of society. The legislation laid out in Leviticus required them to be cast out beyond the walls of settlements. Although this was the dominant perception of the disease, it coexisted with Gospel portrayals of the lepers as being worthy of the compassion of both God and Christ. It was because of the Gospel stories that saints like Martin and Radegund kissed lepers as a means to highlight their aim of living in *imitatio Christi* in the Early Middle Ages. Their holiness was shown in how they were able to cross the social boundaries set by Leviticus and kiss the figure which was considered to be the vilest part of society. The social perception of the disease in both cases can be seen through the reactions of those who witnessed the actions of these two saints. Both the crowd around Martin and Radegund's attendant responded to the presence of the lepers as well as the kisses they were given with disgust and horror.

The twelfth century saw the first shades of changing perceptions towards the leprous poor with the establishment of the first leprosaria. As lepers established communities composed of those who had been exiled from their places of residence, a growing need was seen for institutions to house and care for their needs. Foundations were laid for these establishments based on the early monastic rules which fostered the idea that lepers ought, due to the nature of

their condition, to live an ascetic life to care for the their spiritual health. Though still ritually separated from society as the ‘unclean,’ this early care shown to the lepers hinted at the impending change in the understanding of the disease.

Around the turn of the thirteenth century this position of the leper within medieval society was reinforced with the statutes of both the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils. Because of these early leper communities, as well as the rise of other wandering and begging poor, the Church needed to define where they fit into the medieval landscape. The canons of these councils which directly affected the lepers in the High Middle Ages dealt with the provisions allotted to the lepers according to the Church. As lepers relied exclusively on the charity of others for their wellbeing — for alms as well as physical care — the pronouncements of the Third Lateran Council both ritually included and excluded the lepers from the Christian community. It was into this historical setting that Francis overcame his personal physical repulsion and crossed the societal boundaries by kissing a leper in the plains below Assisi.

Saint Francis of Assisi was by no means the first holy man to kiss a leper nor would he be the last. To physically cross the boundary between the clean and the unclean — the holy man and the leper — had long been looked upon as the ultimate gesture of humility. Though still acting within a longstanding tradition, Francis’s actions were revolutionary in many ways based on the historical climate of the thirteenth century. Where Martin’s kiss, centuries before, had healed the leper from his physical deformities, Francis’s kiss to the leper healed Francis’s soul; it allowed him to finally take the ‘bitter’ for the ‘sweet.’ Although he did not heal the leper, Francis helped to usher in a new understanding of the disease — one which spurred changes in compassion towards and care of the leprous.

Francis's impact on the medieval world is undeniable. It is possible that, through the example disseminated in his *vitae*, he played a decisive role in the evolving religious and social understandings of leprosy. The role of the leper in Francis's life was immense; it was only through his interaction with the leper that Francis was finally able to come to know God. A central tenant of his order was ministering to the poor and the sick, specifically lepers and Francis's legacy extended beyond the boundaries of his order. As Christians experienced a sense of renewal, many other individuals followed closely in Francis's footsteps; showing compassion towards a leper became an indicator of humility, sanctity, and God's favor. Saint Elizabeth and Saint Hedwig both embraced the idea of showing compassion towards the leprous as a mark of female piety in the High Middle Ages. Their leprosaria as well as their repeated charity shown towards the lepers were resounding examples of the changing societal perception of leprosy.

The ideas about leprosy and those afflicted by it also were reshaped in the centuries following Francis. The rise in the establishment of leprosaria across the medieval West in the thirteenth century highlighted growing social compassion for the afflictions of the poor and the sick. The shift in perception of the disease can be seen as members of the lay community donated money towards the foundation of new leprosaria as well as in the growing number of individuals who moved to live and work at these hospices. The sermons preached both to and about the leprous also highlighted the changing attitudes towards the lepers in the thirteenth century. Lepers were encouraged to embrace their disease and to appreciate their suffering as a gift from God.

Francis was, as Rosalind Brooke has suggested, the dawn of a new day in the medieval world.<sup>341</sup> Although his impact was far reaching and influential on virtually all areas of medieval life and society, his impact on the treatment of the lepers — those who, for so long, had been overlooked or shunned by society — is perhaps the most telling part of his legacy. As a man who, above everything else, wanted to follow in the footsteps of Christ as a compassionate man of God, Francis not only changed his own life, but the lives of his followers and admirers as well.

Although lepers remained segregated and reduced to the margins of cities and towns in the Middle Ages, how they were perceived was slowly changing. It was at this moment — one of revival, reflection, and new exclusions — that Francis stepped forward and embraced the most repulsive figure in medieval society. Saint Francis, through his actions and legacy, helped bridge the gap between medieval society and the lepers. In reviving the idea of living in *imitatio Christi* Francis brought caring for — and indeed kissing — lepers to a more central position in both religion and society. The extensive hagiographic tradition which developed around the legacy of this saint, although manipulated to suit contemporary purposes, was how Francis was able to further blur the line between the excluded lepers and medieval society.

### **Looking Ahead: New Exclusions?**

Although Francis's impact on the treatment of lepers in the medieval West in the thirteenth century was undeniable, it was also not long lasting. While the lepers experienced a growing sense of acceptance (though still excluded from settlements) and their disease was seen

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<sup>341</sup> Brooke, *The Image of St Francis*, 6. "When I began to study St Francis I was under the impression that he appeared not out of a clear sky, since storm clouds were lowering, but as the dawn of a new day, bringing a change in the weather, a burst of sunshine. The likening of Francis to the sun, and to associated images of light, found public expression less than two years after his death."

in a more favorable light in the thirteenth century,<sup>342</sup> the early fourteenth century saw a different story. In 1321 in the Kingdom of France lepers were accused of being recruited by the Jews to poison the wells and fountains of the Christians. According to Malcolm Barber, the idea that such a plot actually existed in 1321 “is a revealing instance of medieval mental attitudes under the strains created by the economic and social problems of the fourteenth century.”<sup>343</sup> However, this ‘plot,’ which was said to have been planned for the French Jews by the Moorish king to overthrow the Christians, incited a mass panic in the southern regions of France through the spring and summer.<sup>344</sup> For a short period of time this plot was seen as the greatest threat the Christian community had ever faced.

In April 1321, in the region around Périgueux, systematic arrests were ordered for all lepers because they were suspected of playing a role in the plot.<sup>345</sup> By May more were gathered, tortured, and forced to confess to the plot. Those who confessed were condemned to death and were burned. In the wake of these events the *Chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis*<sup>346</sup> describes how, in June, King Philip V of France heard of these events.<sup>347</sup> Word came to him when he was staying in Poitiers about the large number of lepers who had been burned to death after having

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<sup>342</sup> It is here important to note that a ‘more favorable light’ does not mean that lepers were universally seen this way. There are many instances where lepers in the twelfth-fourteenth centuries, before the persecutions in 1321, were portrayed in a negative light. One major example of this is the twelfth century legend of Tristan and Iseult. This story centers around a love triangle between Tristan, Iseult, and Tristan’s uncle Mark. Iseult is betrothed to Mark, but she and Tristan are having an affair behind his back. When Mark finally catches them, he sentences Tristan to be hanged and Iseult to be sent to a leper colony. Though Tristan escapes and rescues Iseult, the threatened punishment of being sent to a leper house is seen as being equally as horrific as the gallows. The image of the leper, in this text is “a figure used throughout the text as a metaphor for sexual and linguistic deviance.” Joan Tasker Grimbert, ed., *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 89.

<sup>343</sup> Malcolm Barber, “Lepers, Jews and Moslems: The Plot to Overthrow Christendom in 1321,” in *Crusaders and Heretics, 12th — 14th Centuries*, ed., Malcolm Barber (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 73.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>346</sup> H. Géraud, ed., *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis de 1113 à 1300 avec les Continuations de cette chronique de 1300 à 1368*, vol. 2 (Paris: Société de l’Histoire de France, 1843).

<sup>347</sup> ...cum quasi circa festum sancti Johannis Baptistae, rumor publicus apud eum et apud omnes insonuit, quod in tota Aquitania fontes et putei erant, vel statim essent veneno infecti per leprosos. *Ibid.*, 31.



been forced into confessing. Further news came with sealed and signed confessions of lepers ‘admitting’ to being paid by Jews to poison wells with a particular potion which was to kill all the Christians who drank from the well.<sup>348</sup> In response, Philip issued an ordinance requesting the general arrest of all lepers for questioning. The ordinance required all lepers to be questioned (and tortured, if necessary) about their involvement in the plot and, if they confessed, to be sentenced to death. However, those who did not confess, or were born after that date, were to be imprisoned.<sup>349</sup>

These legalized and ritualized attacks against the leprous are indicative of a new form of exclusion the leprous faced in the fourteenth century. Current research on the events in 1321 in southern France has been limited and focused primarily on the supposed relationships between the lepers, Jews, and Moors. Future research ought to look at this ‘plot against Christendom’ in light of the changing social attitudes towards leprosy over the thirteenth century to see why, after decades of growing positive perceptions of the disease, the leprous became the scapegoats for such an event.<sup>350</sup> Although it is outside the scope of the present study, this would be a promising avenue for future research on the social perceptions of *the disease* of the Middle Ages.

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<sup>348</sup> “The Jew had told him [the leper] that the potion consisted of a mixture of human blood and urine, three unnamed herbs, and a consecrated host, all of which were mixed into a powder, placed in bags, tied with a weight, and thrown into the wells and fountains.” Barber, “Lepers, Jews and Moslems,” 64.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 65. Carlo Ginzburg in his book *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath* discusses this reaction against the lepers in great detail. He explains that, once caught, leprous women “who had confessed to the crime spontaneously, or as a result of torture, were to be burnt, unless pregnant; in that eventuality, they must be kept segregated until their confinement and the weaning of their offspring — then burnt.” Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 34.

<sup>350</sup> For more information on the persecution of lepers in the south of France in 1321 see: Barber, “Lepers, Jews and Moslems;” Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath*; Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge*, 701-54.

## APPENDIX

### A: Saints Before Francis Who Interacted With Lepers

\* The number in this column corresponds with the texts following this chart.

Date	Saint	Source	#*	Terminology	Secondary
316	Martin of Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (a-b) Sulpice Severus, <i>Vie de Saint Martin</i>, trans., Jacques Fontaine (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 292-3.</li> <li>- Paulin de Perigueux (461-491) <i>Vie de Saint Martin</i> // Paulinus Petricordiensis <i>De Vita Sancti Martini</i>.</li> <li>- Venance Fortunat (6th C)</li> <li>- Gregory of Tours (597)</li> </ul>	1	(leper) leprosum (kiss) osculatus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Régine Pernoud, <i>Martin of Tours: Soldier Bishop, and Saint</i>, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatus Press, 2006)</li> <li>- Clare Stancliffe, <i>St. Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)</li> </ul>
388-418	Saint Amatus	- <i>Vita S. Amatoris</i> , in Louis Maximilien Duru, ed., <i>Bibliothèque historique de l'Yonne, ou, Collection de légendes, chroniques et documents divers pour servir à l'histoire des différentes contrées qui forment aujourd'hui ce départeme</i> (Auxerre: Perriquet, Imprimeur de la Société, 1850), 154-5.	4	(leper) leprosi leprosorium	
390-463	Saint Romanus of Condat	- Gregory of Tours, <i>Life of the Fathers</i> , trans. Edward James (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), 8.	2		

Date	Saint	Source	#*	Terminology	Secondary
480-547	Saint Benedict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grégoire le Grand, <i>Dialogues</i> (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978-80).</li> <li>- (a) Gregory the Great, <i>Dialogues, Book Two: Saint Benedict</i>, trans., Myra L. Uhlfelder (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), 35.</li> <li>- P Aurelius McMahon, trans., <i>The Life of Saint Benedict: Patriarch of the Western Monks</i> (Baltimore: J. Murphy, 1880).</li> </ul>	6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carmen Acevedo Butcher, <i>Man of Blessing: A Life of St. Benedict</i> (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2006).</li> <li>- Lavinia Byrne, <i>The Life and Wisdom of Benedict</i> (London: Hodder &amp; Stoughton, 1998).</li> <li>- Adalbert de Vogue, <i>Saint Benedict: The Man and His Work</i> (Petersham, St. Bebe's Publications, 2006).</li> </ul>
d. 482	Saint Severin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (a-d) Eugippe, <i>Vie de saint Séverin</i>, ed. and trans. Phillippe Régerat (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1991).</li> <li>- Ludwig Bieler and Ludmilla Krestan, trans., <i>The Life of Saint Severin</i> (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1965).</li> </ul>	5		
520-586	Saint Radegund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (a) Venantius Fortunatus, <i>Vita S. Radegundis libri II</i>, ed. Bruno Krusch Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, II, 370-1.</li> <li>- (b)(translation) Jo Ann McNamara and John E Halborg, <i>Sainted Women of the Dark Ages</i> (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 78.</li> </ul>	3	(leper) leprosi, leprae leprosos (seize) conprehendens** (embrace) amplecteris (kiss) osculabatur, osculatur	

Date	Saint	Source	#*	Terminology	Secondary
d650	Saint Fursey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Vita virtutesque Fursei abbatis Latiniacensis et de Fuilano additamentum Nivialense</i>, in <i>Monumenta Germaniae historica, scriptrerum Merovingicarum</i>, 4. <i>Passiones vitae sanctorum</i>, pp423-51.</li> <li>- Oliver Rackham, <i>Transitus Beati Fursei: A Translation of the 8th Century Manuscript Life of Saint Fursey</i> (Norwich: Fursey Pilgrims, 2007).</li> </ul>			
d735	Saint Frideswide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- John Blair, ed., <i>Saint Frideside, Patron of Oxford: The Earliest Texts</i> (Oxford: Perpetua Press, 1988).</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Simon Yarrow, <i>Saints and Their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth Century England</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 169-89.</li> <li>- Anne Booth Thompson, <i>Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary</i> (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 142-53.</li> <li>- Mary Burke, ed., <i>Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain</i> (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 223-37.</li> </ul>

Date	Saint	Source	#*	Terminology	Secondary
7th C	Saint Julien the Hospitaller/ Saint Julien the Poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carolyn Taylor Swan, <i>The Old French Prose Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitaller</i> (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 2977).</li> <li>- <i>The Life of St. Julian the Hospitaller</i>, in <i>Saints' Lives in Middle English Collections</i>, eds., E. Gordon Whatley, Anne B. Thompson, and Robert (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004).</li> </ul>			
878-942	Saint Odo of Cluny (Saint Odo did not interact with lepers, but rather wrote on the miracles which accompanied the transportation of a relic of Saint Martin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- John of Salerno, <i>Vita sancti Odonis PL</i> 133.43-86.</li> <li>- Gerard Sitwell ed. and trans., <i>St. Odo of Cluny: Being the Life of St. Odo of Cluny by John of Salerno and the Life of St. Gerald of Aurillac by St. Odo</i> (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958).</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Barbara H. Rosenwein, "St. Odo's St. Martin: The Uses of a Model," <i>Journal of Medieval History</i> 4 (1978): 316-31.</li> <li>- Barbara H. Rosenwein, <i>Rhinoceros Bound: Cluny in the Tenth Century</i> (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1982).</li> </ul>

\*\*note the double meaning of *comprehendens*: she seizes the lepers, but the implication is also that she understands or 'gets' them; perhaps indicating the reason that she is not repulsed by the lepers.

1.
  - a. 3. Apud Parisios uero, dum portam ciuitatis illius magnis secum turbis euntibus introiret, leprosum miserabili facie horrentibus cunctis osculatus osculatus est atque benedixit. Statimque omni malo emundatus, 4. postero die ad ecclesiam ueniens nitenti cute gratias pro sanitate, quam receperat, agebat. Nec praetereundum est quod fimbriae uestimento eius cilicioque detractae crebras super infirmantibus egere uirtutes. 5. Nam digitis inligatae aut collo inditae, persaepe ab aegrotantibus morbos fugauerunt.
  - b. 3. Chez les Parisiens, au moment où il franchissait la porte de cette cité, accompagné dans sa marche par des foules considérables, il baisa et bénit un lépreux au visage pitoyable qui faisait horreur à tout le mond. Ayant été aussitôt purifié entièrement de son mal, 4. le lendemain, venant à l'église avec un teint éclatant, le lépreux rendait grâces pour sa santé recouvrée. On ne doit pas omettre non plus que des franges arrachées à son manteau et à son cilice exercèrent fréquemment des vertus curatives sur les malades. 5. Car, attachées aux chassèrent bien souvent leurs maladies.
2. "It happened one day, while on the way to visit his brothers, that he was overtaken by nightfall, and turned aside into a house of lepers. There were nine men there. Having been welcomed by them, immediately, full of the love of God, he ordered water to be heated and with his own hand he washed the feet of all of them. Then he had a large bed prepared so that they could all rest together on one couch, without any fear for the livid spots of leprosy. That done, while the lepers slept, Romanus, awake and chanting psalms, stretched out his hand and touched the side of one of the sick me, and immediately he was cleansed; he touched another with healing touch, and that one too was immediately cleansed. These men felt themselves restored to health, and each touched his neighbor, and when they had all thus been awakened, they begged the saint to cure them all. By the touches they had given each other they had already been cured. In the morning Rmanus saw that all shone with the freshness of their skin. He gave thanks to God, took his leave of each of them with a kiss, and departed, recommending to them that they keep those things pertaining to God in their hearts, and put them into practice."
3.
  - a. 19. Hanc quoque rem intremescendam qua peragebat dulcedine? Cum leprosi venientes, signo facto, se proderent, iubebat adminiculae, ut, unde vel quanti essent, pia cura requireret. Qua sibi renuntiante, parata mensa, missorium, cocleares, cultellos, cannas, potum et calices scola subsequente, intromittebatur furtim, quo se nemo perciperet. Ipsa tamen mulieres variis leprae maculis comprehendens in amplexu, // osculabatur et vultum, toto diligens animo. Deinde, posita mensa, ferens aquam calidam, facies lavabat, manus, ungues et ulcera et rursus administrabat, ipsa pascens per singula. Recedentibus praebebat auri vel vestimenti, vix una teste, munuscula. Ministra tamen praesumebat et blandimentis

sic appellare: ‘Sancissima domina, quis te osculetur, quae sic leprosos amplecteris?’ Illa respondit benivole: ‘Vere, si me non osculeris, hinc mihi cura nec ulla est.’

- b. Doesn’t this make one shudder, this thing she did so sweetly? When lepers arrived and, sounding a warning, came forward, she directed her assistant to inquire with pious concern whence they came or how many there were. Having learned that, she had a table laid with dishes, spoons, little knives, cups and goblets, and wine and she went in herself secretly that none might see her. Seizing some of the leprous women in her embrace, her heart full of love, she kissed their faces. Then, while they were seated at the table, she washed their faces and hands with warm water and treated their sores with fresh unguents and fed each one. When they were leaving she offered small gifts of gold and clothing. To this there was scarcely a single witness, but the attendant presumed to chide her softly: “Most holy lady, when you have embraced lepers, who will kiss you?” Pleasantly, she answered: “Really if you won’t kiss me, it’s no concern of mine.”

4. (XXVIII) Tunc Simplicius episcopus, vir summae simplicis atque caritatis, rumore adventus ejus praeventus, ei cum omni ordine clericali, nec non et cum Julio tunc oraefecto, officii sui turmis stipato, ire obvius non neglexit. Quem rite salutatum atque debitae venerationis assentatione purius honoratum, ad Aeduam civitatem perduxerunt. Peracto autem caliginosae noctis tempore, famuli Dei surgentes, ad Symphoriani martyris diversorium properant. Eo namque tempore nondum latis aedificiis ambiebatur, sed parvissimae cellulae angustiis obseratum erat saptum. Illae duae olivae et duo candelabra, luminosis lychnis praeceptorum Domini perlucetia, pariter ingrediuntur: alternatim se orationibus praeveniunt: volorum obsequia martyris dignitati persolvunt. Licet enim jam diu praefata cella fusset in honore martyris constructa, non tamen fuerat canonico more pontificis invocationibus dedicata. Tunc ante dictus Dei sacerdos Simplicius beatissimo Amatori postulatione incumbit, ut per ejus precum puritatem Symphoriani martyris Deo consecraretur habitaculum. Perficiente ergo Domino per suum famulum, quae fidelissimo athletae Symphoriano promiserat; protinus, praeunte ac subsequente turba populorum Deum collaudantium, in urbem regressi sunt. Et ecce subito, in ipsa brevitate itineris, tres leprosi, mundationis sui corporis integritatem cupientes, sese conspectui eorum praesentaverunt; poscentes // ut solitam precum salubritatem eis impenderent. Antistes vero ex fluente Jordanis lactes sumit, qui Reticio quondam episcopo jubente, ad Aeduam civitatem allati fuerant. Ex his in ora leprosorum irrorans, isuper oleo benedictionis omne corpus eorum crucis facto signaculo illinivit, et statim omnis morbus obsessos penitus dereliquit, ita ut sic pristino colori cutis superficies redderetur, tamquam si numquam fuisset lepticae iniquationis deteriorata languore. Proclamant omnes Deo gratias, et Symphorano martyri atque Amatori consona voce gratiae peraguntur, et sanitatis redditae opitulatio ulrisque populorum praeconiis deputatur.

5.

a. p. 168-9

- i. 26. De leproso mundato, qui reuerti ad propria, de lepram peccati magis incurreret, euitauit.
- ii. 26. À propos d'un lépreux purifié qui renonça à rentrer chez lui pour ne pas tomber davantage dans la lèpre du péché.

b. p. 170-1

- i. 34. Qualiter elephantiosus quidam, nomine Teio, curatus sit.
- ii. 34. Comment fut guéri un homme gonflé par la lèpre, du nom de Teio.

c. p. 246-7

- i. 26. 1. Post haec leprosus quidam Mediolanensis terrorii ad sanctum Seuerinum fama eius inuitante perrexerat: hunc sanitatis remedia suppliciter implorantem monachis suis indicto ieiunio commendauit: qui continuo die gratia operante mundatus est. Cumque recepta sanitate redire suaderetur ad patriam, protrahit se pedibus sancti uiri, petens, ne ulterius ad sua redire cogeretur, cupiens scilicet, ut lepram quoque peccatorum sicut carnis effugeret uitamque in eodem loco fine laudabili terminaret. 2. Cuius animum religiosum uir die uehementer admirans paucis monachis paterna iussione praecepit frequentatis cum eo ieiuniis in oratione continua permanere, ut dominus ei quae essent opportuna duorum mensium spatium uitae mortalis est compedibus absolutus.
- ii. 26. 1. Quelque temps après était arrivé un lépreux qui venait de la région de Milan et qui avait été attiré par la réputation de saint Séverin; comme il le suppliait en implorant un remède à ses maux, Séverin le confia à ses moines après avoir prescrit un jeûne: il fut guéri aussitôt par la grâce de Dieu. On lui conseilla alors de rentrer dans son pays, maintenant qu'il avait recouvré la santé. Mais il se jeta aux pieds du saint, lui demandant de ne plus le forcer à rentrer chez lui, car il souhaitait se débarrasser de la lèpre du péché comme il avait été guéri de celle du corps et terminer ses jours en ce lieu pour y trouver une fin digne de louange. 2. L'homme de Dieu admira fort ses sentiments de piété et demanda paternellement à quelques-uns de ses moines de demeurer avec cet homme en oraison continue tout en observant des jeûnes répétés, afin d'obtenir du Seigneur les grâces dont il avait besoin. Et c'est muni de tels remèdes qu'il fut délivré deux mois plus tard des entraves de la vie terrestre.

d. p. 264-5

- i. 1. Elephantiosus etiam quidam, Teio nomine, de longinquis regionibus sancti Seuerini inuitatus uirtutibus uenit, rogans eius oratione mundari. Accepto itaque ex more praecepto iubetur deum, totius gratiae largitorem, sine cessatione lacrimabiliter exorare. 2. Quid plura? Precibus beati uiri idem leprosus diuina opitulatione mundatus, dum commutat mores in melius, mutare meruit et colorem, regis aeterni magnalia tam suis quam plurimorum uocibus longe lateque denuntians.



ii. 1. Un homme gonflé par la lèpre, du nom de Teio, attiré par les vertus de saint Séverin, vint de fort loin pour lui demander de le purifier par ses prières. Selon l'usage consacré, il lui fut ordonné d'implorer sans cesse avec des larmes Dieu, le dispensateur de toute grâce. 2. À quoi bon en dire plus? Ce lépreux fut purifié par les prières du saint homme avec l'assistance de Dieu; et comme il avait changé sa vie en mieux, il obtint aussi de changer de couleur; il allait partout proclamant par des paroles que beaucoup répétaient les merveilles du Roi éternel.

6.

a. XXVI. *How a Servant Was Cured of Leprosy*: I must also tell about this incident, which I heard from Antonius, a man of high position. He said that a servant of his father had been so afflicted with leprosy that his hair fell out, his skin was swollen, and the infected matter could no longer be concealed. When sent to Benedict by Antonius' father, the servant was quickly restored to his former state of health.

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