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KANTAYA PHIENVEJA

Francis of Assisi

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An insane man, you might be considered as one, if you go against the majority or do something different from your society's conventional traditions. Changing the way people think seemed impossible and ridiculous but Francis of Assisi did it by using all his might and heart. St. Francis was a man with a strong determination to change the way people think about themselves and what makes a decent human being. This great man whose ideas completely went against the main trend at that time strongly rejected the Dark Ages social structure and notions and intentionally convinced people to do the opposite. It can definitely be said that St. Francis has influenced today's culture, social structure and people's notions about life. To this day, many people still believe in his ideas and faithfully follow them.

In his time, the early high middle ages, St. Francis saw the social transformation where feudalism slightly turned into capitalism. Feudalism, during this time, was the only system which was used to rule the people and their society and it separated the people into two groups - the lords and the slaves and it defined their status in society. The lords owned the land and the slaves had to work hard for them. No matter how hard they worked, they were still poor and treated like animals. They were also forced to fight in all wars and no one had the courage to fight against the authority¹.

¹ Annenberg contributors. "Feudal life: What was it really like to live in the Middle ages." *Learner.org Teacher professional development*. 2 Aug. 2012. < <http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/feudal.html> >

Due to the economical, social and political problems during this period, the people faced even more problems and they started searching for something to believe and trust in. Therefore, they started to turn towards Christianity. Christianity at the time was the most powerful institution and it influenced every aspect of life of people. The head of the church, the Pope, had the power to excommunicate people from the church. The Pope preached to all who would listen if money or taxes were paid to the church, you would become closer to God and God would speak to you through a preacher. Many historians have claimed that this era was one of the worst times in the history of Christianity.² As feudalism was gradually being replaced by capitalism, the people became driven by profit and were concerned only with making money and acquiring more wealth³. St. Francis witnessed these occurrences and realized these capitalistic ideas were wrong.

He thought people should not live like this, the poor should not be oppressed by the rich and people should not have to pay money to get into God's good graces. He denied both feudalistic and capitalistic notions and decided to devote himself in reforming these structures.

St Francis's three strongest ideas which he always emphasized were " Richness is not important", "Equality in society" and "God is everywhere"⁴ which totally opposed the capitalist and feudalistic concepts as well as the church and its teachings. To go against capitalism, Francis taught people that we should live in poverty which meant that money should not be the most important thing in our lives and we should

² Historylearningsite writer. "The Medieval Church". *History learning site*. 5 Aug. 2012. <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/medieval_church.htm>

³ "What is Capitalism?". *The world socialist movement*. 5 Aug. 2012.< <http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/what-capitalism>>

⁴ "Francis of Assisi". *The pathology guy*. 2 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.pathguy.com/francisc.htm>>

not focus on wealth and riches⁵. Instead, we should donate our money to help the needy and to use it to enrich society. He not only said but he also acted upon his words and became a model for his followers and others. Once, he gave all the money in his pocket to a beggar as well as begged for money from the church and donated it to the poor⁶.

Equality in society was another idea that Francis wanted people to comply with. He persuaded people to deny the old structure. He taught that all people were the same. We should treat people and all living creatures the same way, in the way we want to be treated and we should help each other no matter who he or she is. St. Francis once helped a leper by healing his body without any loathing and also eased the leper's suffering by consoling him. He did not consider who he should treat or should not, he treated all people, especially the abject indigent. He had a powerful faith in equality and wanted society to hold to these principals. He desired a society that would not harm any living thing.⁷

During this period, people were told if they wanted to get closer to God, they had to pay somethings such as money or taxes to the church but this act was totally against God's messages. For Francis, God existed everywhere and could be reached directly by behaving decently and living in his good graces.⁸ To make it easier for everyone to have access to God, St. Francis set a rule and told people to follow it. This rule was named "The Rule of St. Francis"⁹ which guided his followers on how to live their lives properly. St. Francis claimed that he had a personal conversation with God on the day he returned

⁵ Boff, Leonardo. *Saint Francis: A model for human liberation*. 1982 . p.48-80.

⁶ Whitney Hopler. "Francis of Assisi: Miracle Man and Patron Saint of Animals". *Angle & Miracles*. 2 Aug. 2012. <<http://angels.about.com/od/MiraclesReligiousTexts/p/Francis-Of-Assisi-Miracle-Man-And-Patron-Saint-Of-Animals.htm>>

⁷ "The joy of Francis." *St. Francis' region*. 6 Aug. 2012. <http://www.stfrancisregion.org/media/Regional_Newsletters/joy_of_francis_Summer_Fall2010.pdf>

⁸ Boff, Leonardo. *Saint Francis: A model for human liberation*. 1982 .p.81-104

⁹ Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar H. McNeal. *A Source Book for Medieval History* .1905. pp. 499-507

to Assisi. After that, he started restoring the churches, helped people especially the poor and taught to all to follow in God's teachings.

St. Francis aimed to change people's notions about social structure, wealth and religion. What strategies enabled him to meet his goals? The answer is "St. Francis lived and breathed what he taught and act as his words." He lived by what he preached because he wanted to be the great model for all people to follow him. Even though he faced many hardships, he never waived from his goal. He continued to spread his thoughts and teachings and he also founded an organization-The Franciscan Order-which focused on his principles. Shortly after this order was established, it became very large. He and his followers took his ideas out of Assisi and traveled to other countries to spread them.¹⁰

St. Francis was a powerful preacher who contributed all his properties, all his money as well as his entire life in changing people's ideas about being decent humans, to reject any and all social structures that did harm or hurt any living thing. Even though his teachings did not totally change the world, however, it has impacted people's ideas and attitudes towards each other. To this day, many people still follow and firmly believe in his ideas.

¹⁰ Claudia Herrera Hudson, "HEROES OF FAITH HERO:SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI". *My hero project*. t6 Aug. 2012.< <http://www.myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=assisi>>