

Review of the Saint in Medieval Europe - Take Francis as an Example

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ABSTRACT

Medieval Europe is a period full of mysteries. Many elements in Europe changed during that specific period, like the cities, the farms, the different rules in the government, and the limitations of kings as Christians, etc. What attracts me most is the saints in the Medieval Europe, they were the people who enabled people to pay attention to Christianity, their spirits were sacred and pure, they were brave and loyal to the God. This paper will talk about saint in medieval Europe by taking Francis as an example

Keywords: Medieval Europe, Saint, Christianity, Francis

1. INTRODUCTION

Christianity originated in the Jewish community in Palestine under the Roman Empire in the 1st century AD. The 1st to 5th centuries were the period when Christianity was founded and spread from Israel to the Greco-Roman cultural region. It was the early stage of the development of Christianity and the period when the apostles and early church fathers established the basic doctrines and theological doctrines of Christianity. This period is often referred to as the first stage in the development of Christianity. In 395, the Roman Empire was divided into Western Rome with the city of Rome in Italy as the center and Eastern Rome with Constantinople as the capital due to internal contradictions and foreign invasions. With the division of East and West Rome, Christianity also began to split into Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Until 1453, the Eastern Roman Empire was destroyed under the attack of the Turks who believed in Islam, which was the second stage in the history of the development of Christianity.

The immediate fuse of the Reformation Movement was that Pope Leo X sent Dominican monk Ditcher to

Germany in 1517 to sell indulgences in the name of building St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, which aroused great disgust. It is said that on October 31 of the same year, Martin Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses (see figure 1) against the selling of indulgences in front of the Wittenberg church, which opened the prelude to the religious reform movement. Luther put forward the reformation slogan of "Only the Bible, Only by Grace, Only by Faith", which was inherited and followed by later reformers. The wave of reformation spread throughout Western Europe, causing one reformation movement after another in areas where the Holy See was weak. The reform movement led by Zwingli took place in Zurich, Switzerland, and the radical faction headed by Calvin established a civil class republican presbytery church in Geneva, resulting in the Protestant Calvinism (ie Reformed or Reformed). Under the promotion of King Henry VIII, the United Kingdom carried out top-down reforms and established the Church of England (Anglican Church) independent of the Holy See. Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and other countries reformed from top to bottom, and successively replaced Catholicism with the Lutheran Church as the state religion. Thus began the development of Christianity in the world.

The 95 Theses
by Martin Luther

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.
7. God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive to the vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to the canons themselves, nothing should be imposed on the dying.
9. Therefore the Holy Spirit through the pope is kind to us insofar as the pope in his decrees always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.
10. Those priests act ignorantly and wickedly who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penalties for purgatory.
11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept. Matthew 13:25
12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.
14. Imperfect piety or love on the part of the dying person necessarily brings with it great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater the fear.
15. This fear or horror is sufficient in itself, to say nothing of other things, to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.
17. It seems as though for the souls in purgatory fear should necessarily decrease and love increase.
18. Furthermore, it does not seem proved, either by reason or by Scripture, that souls in purgatory are outside the state of merit, that is, unable to grow in love.
19. Nor does it seem proved that souls in purgatory, at least not all of them, are certain and assured of their own salvation, even if we ourselves may be entirely certain of it.
20. Therefore the pope, when he uses the words "plenary remission of all penalties," does not actually mean "all penalties," but only those imposed by himself.
21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.
22. As a matter of fact, the pope remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to canon law, they should have paid in this life.
23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few.
24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.

Figure 1. Ninety-five theses (excerpt)

If thinking about a group of people who were so famous and powerful, people will definitely think about who was the leader or who started this organization. And when talking about the Saints (see figure 2 for the photo of some medieval saints), people must know about their "boss", Francis (see figure 3 for the Iconography of Francis). Francis used to be a normal person in a quite rich family who hung out every day and did nothing seriously. Francis was described as "From his earliest years of his life his parents reared him to arrogance in accordance with the vanity of the age. And by long imitating their worthless life and character he himself was made more vain and arrogant." [1]. It is hard to imagine that a person like him can make such a great change simply because of a disease. What made him have such a significant change? How did he change? What was his view toward the world at the time he recovered? The venom of the ancient serpent made both his body and mind suffer from affliction [1]. Perhaps he was so suffered from the illness and could not recover quickly

because God did not want him to recover not until he realized his fault. To some extent, this is described as "Thus worn down by his long illness, as human obstinacy deserves since it is rarely remedied except through punishment, he began to mull over within himself things that were not usual for him." [1]. At first, the author does not have a really clear understanding of why the punishment must be illness and how illnesses can affect a person like this. Since this is mentioned as "he [Francis] went outside one day and began to gaze upon the surrounding countryside with greater interest. But the beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards, and whatever else was beautiful to see could offer him no delight at all. He wondered at the sudden change in himself and considered those who loved these things quite foolish." [1]. The reason for the punishment is suggested that the brothers should not be surprised when a trial of fire has come upon them [2]. A Christian should overcome the whole process of the affliction from the mind and body; since this is the process that is described

as if a Christian is suffered from affliction, he or she should not be ashamed but glorify God by this name [2].



Figure 2. Medieval Saints



Figure 3. Saint Francis of Assisi Medieval Iconography

Francis was a person who squandered his money and life in his early life. However, when he grew up, he changed. He became a man who devote himself totally to the God, gave up all of his money, suffer from illnesses, and bullied by some rude people. At this time, Francis changed a lot, he did not complain about or show reluctance to all of these difficulties, whereas he embraced those challenges, feeling like these are the challenges the God asked him to experience. He felt like find a treasure granted by the God, and he showed his obedience and humility to the God. For example, the first

mission he received from the God was that he was asked to repair the church at that time in the Medieval Europe. Francis started this job right away. He talked with those people who guarded the church, asked for the permission to repair the church, and when he was discovered by his father, he threw his clothes away, and told everyone around that he is the servant of the God.

After his mother released him, he left his home. During his journey, he always talked to the poor, got ill without complaints, etc. And finally, he got more and more assistants to finish the mission of the God with him together. They all became the loyal servant of the God and preoccupied to fulfill their tasks.

2. ANALYZE

Talking about the events and legend happen after this disease is the most attracting part, this really shows me a world full of mysteries that the author does not even know before, it also helps me have a clear understanding about the hardness that Christians ought to suffer from. And the first thing that shocked me is that from the perspectives of Christians, poor means “wealthy”, as it is provided in the passage “Although Francis did not equal him in nobility of birth, he did outrank him in graciousness; and though poorer in wealth, he was richer in generosity.” [3]. It is poor from outside that cause the sublimation in spirit, closer and closer to a real a saint, as it is mentioned “He was burning inwardly with a divine fire, and he was unable to conceal outwardly the flame kindled in his soul. He repeated that he had sinned so grievously and that he had offended eyes of majesty.” Francis was so reverent to God, and the conversation that really attract me is that when people asked about whether he wants to get married, he answered “I will take a bride more noble and more beautiful than you have ever seen, and she will surpass the rest in beauty and excel all others in wisdom.” [3]

And after “fortifying himself with the sign of holy cross”, he started his journey toward his first destination—Foligno. The legend began from that time on. And the author was so admired to Francis about his mind of devoting himself totally to the God, he hated his wealth, saying that “Feeling the heavy weight of carrying that money even for an hour, and reckoning all its benefit to be like so much sand, he hurried to get rid of it.” [4].

A Christian, or a saint, to be specific, should really pay attention to the things which are very holy for them. Just like the meaning of dust for Francis, and this was the time for Francis to totally discard the mundane life. After the time he cut down all the relationships between his parents and himself, the mission that the God give him finally had the time to be fulfilled.

The things Francis did when facing his parents, especially his father, perhaps were unbelievable from nowadays perspective, whereas the author was imprinted

by him again. After he was found by his father and dragged to home like a prison, his mother freed him after heard about his destination, and his father found him again later, he simply “he [Francis] neither delayed nor hesitated, but immediately took off and threw down all his clothes and returned them to his father. He did not even keep his trousers on, and he was completely stripped bare before everyone.” [1]. And then at the same time the bishop found out that he had the mission given by the God while did not tell everyone about that, he “cherishing and comforting him”, being his helper [5-6].

And then Francis began his mission. The holy man was quite abnormal from my perspective, he had a really interesting experience that he met a bunch of thieves while travelling in a certain forest, since he was singing at that time, then he was bit by those people while yelling out loud that he was the herald of the God. This also caused him suffer from a strong bullying and then he was thrown into a ditch with deep snow, whereas he was yelling with great happiness, to some extent [7]. Perhaps this is because that the Christians hold a really strong perspective that people who gave you pressure or harm you are those who can help being stronger. With all of these experiences, Francis began his journey of rebuilding church and spread Christianity.

Francis received patronage from important churchmen, first the bishop of Assisi and then the cardinal bishop of Ostia, the nephew of Innocent III and later himself pope as Gregory IX. Francis was permitted to found an order in 1210 and he led the order until his death in 1226. The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano was finished in 1260. This rapid growth seems to have taken everyone by surprise. Francis's original vision of a group of men living in apostolic poverty and teaching personal reform by word and example was not easily adapted to a large order of missionaries. Moreover, there were struggles within the order over leadership. Francis had designated Brother Elias as his successor, but he was ousted and excommunicated in 1244. The order had originally been composed of lay men, but it was taken over in mid-century by priests within the order. As a result, how people presented Francis also changed rapidly through the century. This might influence how did Thomas of Celano write about Francis. Some of these people, particularly the followers of Peter Waldo or Valdes, got into trouble with the church over their pious practices and their rejection of property.

3. CONCLUSION

There was a priest told Francis that “Christ’s disciples should not possess gold or silver or money, or carry on their journey a wallet or a sack, nor bread nor a staff, nor to have shoes nor two tunics, but that they should preach the kingdom of God and penance.” [8]. The author does not quite understand that if they do not have any food, how could they survive under the great pressure from the

harsh environment? Then this inspired me, it said that “After him, brother Bernard, embracing the delegation of peace, eagerly ran after the holy man of God to gain the kingdom of heaven.” [9-10]. The word “the kingdom of heaven” make me suddenly know that all of what they did are kind of redemption to make sure that they could go to heaven after they died, the life after they died is the thing more crucial than the real life in the living world. Many of the saints along with Francis got an understanding of this and they suffered from the same pain as Francis and finally they went on different ways to achieve their own goals of finishing their own mission in their mind.

Unfortunately, the pain and illnesses Francis suffered, and perhaps also happened on other saints, made him have a lot of illnesses in his later life. Although this is quite unfortunate and cruel to me, the author contend that Francis and other saints were desperately waiting for this moment, the time, the opportunity, finishing their missions, going to their dream place, the “kingdom of heaven”.

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