

## Summary

In this doctoral thesis, *The Spirituality and Mysticism of Nature in the Early Franciscan Tradition*, I have begun with an attempt to clarify the notions of spirituality and mysticism. The former, was seen as an approach to God embodied in outlook, practice and lifestyle, and the latter, mysticism, was defined as a felt awareness and knowledge of the presence of God. My hypothesis is that nature played a very important part in both the spirituality and mysticism of Saint Francis of Assisi, and in the spirituality of the movement he founded.

In a systematic attempt to investigate my theme, I began with a study of the chief places associated with Francis. They present a kind of mirror of his soul and reveal, I believe, a good deal about his outlook and way of living. They tend to be remote and solitary places, often high in the mountains or near water, often desolate and harsh and usually beautiful, and what was later to become known as 'romantic'.

I turned then to the world of nature, beginning with the celestial bodies, sun, moon and the stars, and the elements of the sub-lunar world. The world of living things, fruits and flowers, animals, wild beasts and tame, fish and birds was examined. Nearly all the evidence here came from that collection of Franciscan stories and anecdotes which forms one of the great treasures of stories in world literature.

The fourth chapter was devoted to the poetry of Francis, above all to the *Praises of God* and *The Canticle of the Creatures*. After examining the circumstances of its composition, I took the stanzas one by one and examined them in the light of what they reveal of Francis spirituality and mysticism.

The purpose of chapter five was to gather the fruits of my research and evaluate the hypothesis I proposed. I concluded that Francis, incorporated nature into his spirituality and mysticism in a very original way. I hold that Francis was a great nature mystic, and that his nature spirituality is still full of vigor and potential for the future.

### Key Terms

Francis of Assisi; Spirituality; Christian spirituality; Creation; Ecological Consciousness; Environment; Franciscan spirituality; Nature spirituality; Mysticism; Christian mysticism; Cosmic mysticism; Mystical; Mystical experience; Mystical theology.