

Mark of Whitstable
Gospel Chivalry:
Franciscan Romanticism
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A knight dubbed by a beautiful princess, in the painting on the cover of this book (Edmund Blair Leighton's *The Accolade*) catches the eye of those who share the pre-Raphaelite nostalgic fascination with things mediaeval and chivalric. This reviewer was first drawn to Francis in his youth at about the same time when tales of King Arthur also caught his imagination, and Capuchin Brother Mark emphasizes just how central the romantic chivalric vision was to Francis' re-presentation of the ideals of the gospel. It served as a powerful metaphor, attracting the youth of an era when codifying chivalry was the fashionable new idea, but Francis' choice of language was about a lot more than just vocational marketing.

The code itself was in part an ambiguous and finally unsuccessful attempt by the Church to respond to the violent evils arising from the feudal system, and one of the things this book does is to describe the historic development of that vision from the time of Charlemagne onwards (with the odd fascinating reference right up to the twentieth Century.) It was an ideal which Francis both appropriated, even so far as to call his Brothers his "knights of the round table", and "re-invented by a kind of inversion". His would be a knighthood that radically rejected the personal accolades and honours so central to chivalry's original appeal, and would of course replace the idealized glories of battle with the gospel imperative for Christ's servants to work for reconciliation as instruments of peace. Francis wasn't the first to reinvent chivalry - I was moved by the quotation from the night-time prayer of the 11th Century Knights Hospitallers as they honoured the poor and sick in their care as their liege Lords - but it certainly bore rich fruit for him. Not only Knighthood but also the vocations of the Royal Herald, the Minstrel, the Troubadour, the Courtly Lover - the whole panoply of that fairy-tale world, all find their fulfilment in Gospel Living and are considered here. The book raises some issues for me that require greater consideration (such as chivalry's patriarchal idealisation of the Feminine) and it occasionally feels repetitive, but it provides a refreshingly different look at the Franciscan charism and inspires a vision that is Romantic in the best sense of that word.

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