“Attitude Towards Ownership and Possession”

An important aspect of Francis and Clare’s worldview was their attitude towards ownership and possession… Francis and Clare both rejected all forms of ownership and embraced lives of complete poverty. Francis turned his back on a comfortable merchant-class lifestyle to embrace a simple beggar’s life without material possessions. For her part, Clare absolutely insisted that she and her sisters living in the Monastery of San Damiano would own absolutely nothing. There were a number of reasons that Francis and Clare desired to live lives devoid of all ownership.

First, Francis and Clare believed that ultimately everything belonged to God because God was the Creator and ultimate source of all. We humans are simply enjoying that which God has granted us to enjoy: things are not ours.

Secondly, through their own lives Francis and Clare wanted to reflect God’s own generous self-giving love that had been displayed in a special way through creation, the Incarnation, and in the sending of his Spirit.

Thirdly, Francis and Clare wanted to be just like Jesus, who had been born into conditions of poverty in a stable, and who had lived a poor life detached from ownership.

Fourthly, Francis and Clare wanted to break down societal barriers that separated them from the poor and marginalized, among whom God was in a special way to be found, and to use their resources to help those in most need.

Lastly, Francis and Clare wanted to distance themselves from all that might interfere with relationships—relationships with creation and other
people but especially their relationships with God. Francis in particular held that the desire to possess (or to appropriate) for oneself led not only to seeing oneself as separate from the rest of creation but also to conflict with others. The desire to possess also reflected a turning inward toward the self and a failure to recognize that, ultimately, all belongs to the sovereign and absolute God. In short, for Francis, the drive to possess or appropriate for oneself resulted in a failure to recognize that God alone is God, and, thus, to a disrupted relationship with God.

[The Admonitions; and The Song of the Dawn by Leclerc]

Francis encouraged his followers to live without anything of their own. For Francis, the concept of ownership or possession applied not only to material goods but also to attitudes. Thus, one could think about ownership and possession not only in a material sense but also in an attitudinal sense. This latter form of ownership or possession could involve stubbornly holding onto having things one’s own way, consistently wanting to be “right,” holding oneself to be better or holier than others, or protectively guarding one’s image, time, interests, worldview, and positions. Francis called his followers to let go of these attitudes, all of which reflect a turning in towards oneself and away from life-giving relationships with God, others, and creation.