

Bringing out of our storehouse the flesh and blood of our tradition in such a way as to feed future generations . . .

*The Prophetic Heart* (1994) — Joseph P. Chinnici OFM



## The TAU

From the time of Ezekiel the sign of the TAU, marked on the forehead of those turning to God in faith and repentance has long represented faithfulness and wholehearted love. It was used for healing and victory.

Pope Innocent III, evoked the sign of the TAU from Ezekiel when opening the Fourth Lateran Council in 1216 calling for the renewal of the Church, “Mercy will be granted to those to bear the TAU, a mark of a life of penance and renewal in Christ.”

And so Francis, who was present at the Council, wanted to sign himself with the TAU, and his brothers along with him. The TAU became the sign of the little Band’s mission: the preaching of faith and repentance (Rule of 1221:23).

Thomas of Celano, writing in 1252, notes, “The TAU symbol had, above all others, his preference. Francis used it as a signature for his letters, and he painted a drawing of it on the walls of all the cells.” One of these paintings, believed to be created by Francis, is found in the little chapel of Mary Magdalen at Fonte Columbo in the Rieti Valley where Francis wrote his Rule.

Another very precious document, housed in the Basilica of St. Francis, is Francis’ own handwritten blessing for Brother Leo — signed with the TAU.

*Above all else, the TAU meant mission for Francis: a mission to proclaim the Goodness of God by a wholehearted following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ because of whom all life is sacred.*



## The Evolution of the Rule of the Third Order Regular

“To do penance” is the genesis of the spiritual journey of Francis:  
*“The Lord inspired me, Brother Francis, to embark on a life of penance.”*

(Testament 1)

It is important to understand this expression in the Gospel as meaning conversion, a going away from the spirit of the world toward a total consecration of oneself to God. . . . It is altogether certain that the Poverello by his word and example raised up a penitential movement that was marked by his charism. . . . The Third Order, although it was founded for persons who were not able to abandon their obligations in the world, began to evolve towards regular community life about the end of the thirteenth century. This development was due in part to the social-political situation of women at this time and to the appearance of many religious societies and the desire for a more perfect way of life in caring for the poor and the sick.

**Bearing Christ to the People.** Pierre Peano OFM, translated by Aidan Mullaney TOR & Thomas Edwards TOR, Franciscan University Press, Steubenville, OH, 1996. p17, 21, 23

**1289 (Nicholas IV) ... 1521 (Leo X) ... 1927 (Pius XI)**

### *Supra Montem: Rule of Nicholas IV,* *August 18, 1289 - Rieti, Italy*

**Nicholas, Bishop and Servant of the servants of God, to our beloved sons and daughters in Christ, the Brothers and sisters of the Order of Penance, both present and to come: greetings and apostolic benediction!**

It was upon the rock of the Catholic faith that Christ’s disciples established the Gentile nations, who up to then had been walking in darkness, when, with sincere hearts burning with divine love, they carefully preached the Gospel to them. This same faith, the solid foundation of the Christian religion, which cannot be shaken by storms or tossed about by the waves, the Roman Church continues to maintain and serve. . . .

Wherefore the glorious confessor of Christ, blessed Francis, the founder of this Order, pointing out by words and example the way leading to God, instructed his children in the purity of this same faith. He wanted them to *confess it boldly, retain it firmly, and carry it out in their deeds.*

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***Supra Montem - 1289***

- The officially recognized Rule of the Third Order Regular until 1521, and of the Secular Tertiaries until 1883;
- The “Order of Penance” is officially called “*Franciscan.*”
- Global themes: love of poverty and the struggle against greed; love of the cross and the struggle against sensuality; love of humility and the struggle against pride.  
(This could be read as a Rule emphasizing the Vowed Life; however, it was written for all the voluntary penitents seeking to live the Gospel in the spirit of Francis and Clare, and has a distinctly *lay* character. The text substantially remained that of the Ancient Rule 1221-1228)

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\* **1289 - 1521: Two Hundred Year Transition - Monks and monasteries ...**  
 Marco Polos’s Travels ... Dante’s Divine Comedy ... Ottoman Empire ... Hundred Years’ War -(France & England) ... Ming Dynasty in China ... Black Death ... Aztec Civilization in Mexico ... Giotto depicts *Life of St. Francis* on Basilica walls in Assisi ... Chaucer’s “*Canterbury Tales.*” ... Gutenberg’s moveable type ... Overthrow of Byzantine Empire - (end of Middle Ages) ... Spanish Inquisition ... The Renaissance ... Columbus discovers America ... Henry VIII in England ... Slave ships sail to America ...



***Inter Cetera: Rule of Leo X, January 20, 1521 - Rome, Italy***

\* *Because of the spread of the Order of Penitents of St. Francis to the whole Christian world, there was a need to draw a clear line of separation between fraternities of Tertiaries living “in the world” and groups of brothers and sisters who had taken vows and were living a common life.*

- Written expressly for franciscan religious tertiaries;
- Reflects the call to reform of the V Lateran Council (1515-1517) - This can be seen best in Chapter X:  
 All and everything contained in this Rule is a matter of counsel, to facilitate the salvation of the soul, and nothing is obligatory under pain of sin. ... The Brothers and Sisters are obliged to keep the three essential vows... Those Sisters are also bound to observe enclosure, who have expressly vowed the same; and this we permit to every Convent, provided that the charity which they are accustomed to exercise toward the sick, or religious propriety suffer no detriment.
- Provided for OFM “Visitor” annually to TOR Houses; some Tertiary Congregations kept to Rule of Nicholas IV, 1289 in protest.

**1521-1927: Four Hundred Year Transition** - The Elizabethan Age ... Protestant Reformation ... Council of Trent ... Ottoman Empire ... Settlement of North America ... The Age of Enlightenment ... Industrial Revolution ... American War of Independence ... French Revolution ... Napoleonic Suppressions ... Irish Famine ... American Civil War ... Victorian Age ... Rise of German Empire ... WWI ... Russian Revolution ... Gandhi in India ...



### **Rerum Conditio: Rule of Pius XI, October 4, 1927 - Rome, Italy**



**Pius**, Bishop, servant of the servants of God, as a perpetual memorial of the matter: Such was the state of affairs, especially in Italy, towards the close of the twelfth century and for some time thereafter that, though Christendom was universally established in the Faith, still great numbers of people, going astray in the quest of transient things, and puffed up with the pride of life, gave way to every depravity of morals, and *as the charity of Christ ran low*, fell everywhere to nursing feuds, plunging the various communities into disastrous civil strife.

Now it is well known that the task of reforming society in those days was committed by God particularly to **Francis of Assisi**, who strove *to unite the world in mutual charity* by off-setting unbridled vice with the pursuit of Christian humility and poverty. So it was that, as vast numbers of disciples rallied about this remarkable man, the family of Francis grew to an extent that was truly boundless, being swelled by the members of the three Orders *which Francis himself founded*, as also by those *Tertiaries* who in their desire for greater perfection began to lead a life in common, and became known as **members of the Third Order Regular**.

- This Rule took into account Franciscan spirituality and legislation contained in the new Code of Canon Law;
- The emphasis on *charity* can be considered a hallmark of this Rule;
- “There is no question at the present time that congregations inserted the New Rule as an introduction to their Constitutions, but *it held a very hidden and rose-thorned position*. Their life, previously regulated, continued to follow its established way. *Neither rules nor customs were adopted or formed to conform to the spirit of the New Rule.*”

Cajetan Esser OFM. **Life and Rule**. A Commentary on the Rule of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. FHP, Chicago IL, 1967, Preface, p.ix.

***The Heritage of the three Rules giving shape to the 1982 Rule  
and the rebirth of a charism.***



1. Each Rule calls the penitent to *reconciliation with one's neighbor* as witness to a sincere desire (and ability) to live a life of continuous conversion.
2. The Eucharistic Liturgy is a daily component of this penitential spirituality, even though in earlier centuries, the *reception* of Eucharist could be only three times a year. The Sacrament of Reconciliation could also be received three times a year.
3. Care of the sick, even to mitigating the *cloister* observance, is a very important witness in this life.
4. Each Rule calls the Franciscan to nourish his or her spiritual life by monthly days of *Renewal*, and enrichment through spiritual conferences.
5. The Rules of 1289 and 1521 presents the penitential spirituality more in terms of deeds, or actions to perform (fasting, alms, prayers); The Rule of 1927 places greater stress on *charity*.
6. In the writing of all the Rules, the members of the Third Order had *minimal* voice in the development of these Documents.
7. *None* of the Rules contain selections from the Writings of Francis and Clare except for the final blessing from Francis' Testament which concludes ALL of the rules.

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### **Helpful References**

1. **Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Penance RESOURCE MANUAL.** Compiled and Edited by Seraphin J. Conley TOR. *Convento dei Ss. Cosma e Damiano, Via dei Fori Imperiali*, 1, 00186 Roma, Italia. 1994.
2. **Bearing Christ to the People: the Franciscan Sisters, Their Origins, History and Persisting Values.** Pierre Peano OFM. Translated by Aidan Mullaney TOR and Thomas Edwards TOR. Franciscan University Press, Steubenville Ohio 43952. 1996.
3. **The Franciscan Sisters: Outlines of History and Spirituality.** Raffaele Pazzelli TOR. Translated by Aidan Mullaney TOR., Franciscan University Press, Steubenville OH 43952, 1993.

**SOURCE:** This resource was originally part of the *Rebirth of the Charism* Program sponsored by the *Franciscan Federation TOR*, Washington, DC, 1997. It is in the *Resource Manual for the Study of the Third Order Regular Rule*. ED. Kathleen Moffatt OSF for the International Franciscan Conference – TOR, Rome, Italy (2013) pp. 109-112.

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