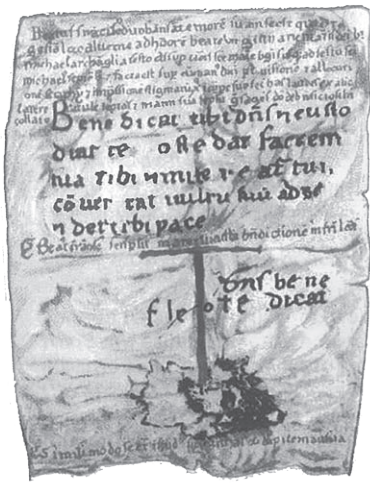


Bringing out of our storehouse the flesh and blood of our tradition in such a way as to feed future generations . . .

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.

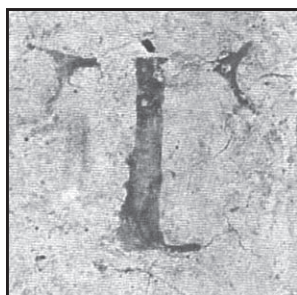
Pope Innocent III, evoked the sign of the *TAU* from Ezekiel when opening the Fourth Lateran Council in 1216 calling for the renewal of the Church, “*Mercy will be granted to those to bear the TAU, a mark of a life of penance and renewal in Christ.*”

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 Franciscan Third Order and The Penitential Tradition

The following is an abbreviated version of the original article published in *The Cord*, 61.2 (Apr/June 2011): 169-173.

Elise Saggau, OSF

BIBLICAL GROUNDING

The Judeo-Christian religious tradition sees human beings as creatures in relationship with a Creator upon whom they are absolutely dependent. Human fulfillment is recognizing that, as creatures, we are loved beyond measure by the God in whom “we live, move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The Hebrew Scriptures tell a story of human beings falling and rising. The *historical* books recount the faithfulness of God to promises made to the patriarchs and the faithlessness of the people of God as they repeatedly forget who they are and who God is. The *prophetic* books constantly call the people back to their fundamental vocation: to be witnesses to who God is in relationship with humans. The books of *wisdom* reflect on the responsibility of humans to choose the morally good life in the midst of any trials they must endure. All these writings recount the never-ending need for human beings to turn back, to change their ways, to surrender their own agenda in the face of God’s demands, to leave behind their idols and return to the God who made them.

Into such a religious and cultural situation Jesus of Nazareth was born. From the beginning of his life, he was steeped in the history of his people, and the call of the prophets rang in his ears. His first recorded words were: “This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the gospel!” (Mk. 1:15).

Jesus was a reformer, a new prophetic voice in the spiritual desert that was the Israel of that historic moment. Clearly he intended that people should change, that a time of personal and social transformation was at hand. The language of conversion was fundamental to all his teaching and example. The language of conversion continued in the writings of the New Testament and on into the life of the early Church.

EARLY CHURCH AND CONVERSION OF LIFE

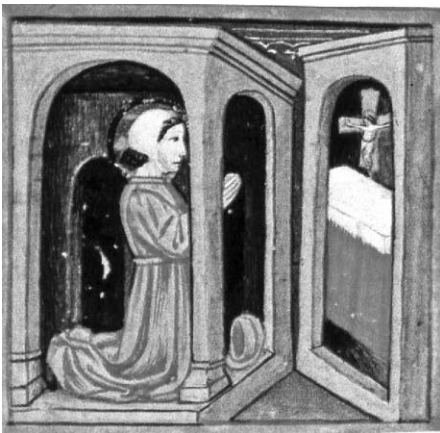
Jesus’ death and resurrection held enormous power for his followers, a power they experienced in their own lives through the sacramental act of Baptism/Confirmation. This sacrament was a public manifestation of personal conversion of life. Persons who submitted to baptism and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands were expected to live in a way very different from the way they had lived before and from the way others in the society were living. Thus conversion of life was both personal and social. It had the effect of a counter-cultural movement.

However, the social pressures of the culture often proved stronger than the personal conversion of the Christian. Those who sinned seriously and publicly after baptism needed a way to turn back again to a life of faithfulness. In order that they might be reconciled with the faith community, the Church gradually developed for them severe and

publicly humiliating disciplines. These often lasted for years, sometimes for a lifetime. Eventually, these practices even constituted a recognized “way of life” in the community. Public penitents were set apart by distinct clothing, by personal austerity, and by social restrictions.

This penitential way of life was prescribed by the Church for those who wished to return to the community after serious transgressions. Other members of the Christian community, however, wanting to live their Christian lives more intensely, began to practice the penitential way of life voluntarily. Eventually this way of living became recognized by Church authorities as an “order.”

It had its own regulations, obligations, and privileges. It was open to clergy and laity, to married and single people, to women and men. Some of those who practiced it began living together in communities. Some remained at home in their own families. Some became hermits and lived in solitary situations. Some lived alone in cells attached to a church. Some were part of a larger, loosely connected group and others were not.



FRANCISCAN PENITENTIAL LIFE

When Saint Francis of Assisi was born in Assisi, Italy, in 1182, his whole society considered itself part of “Christendom.” It was steeped in the Christian culture, both religiously and politically. The Christian religion, whether properly understood or distorted by ignorance and superstition, affected all aspects of the people’s lives. Ideas of sin and

salvation permeated their everyday thinking no matter what their social class or level of education.

During Francis’ day, the penitential life was enjoying new popularity. It met the need of many devout people to live more intensely and publicly what they called the *vita apostolica* — life that closely imitated that of Jesus Christ and his first followers. By that time, penitents constituted a fairly clear class of persons within the Church — a class that was recognized in legal documents.¹ Gregory VII, the great reformer of the late eleventh century, describes the motivations of the penitential culture as “a love of solitude and of poverty, of prayer and of detachment, which cause one to use things in a manner whereby he does not become a slave to them.”² The penitential life was certainly a characteristic aspect of medieval society.

It is not surprising then that Francis should have embraced a way of life that was already familiar in his society. It is clear from the legal action brought against him by his father that he had entered formally upon a way of life regulated and protected by the Church (LMj 2:4).³ The judgment before the Bishop of Assisi was an ecclesial action because the defendant claimed and was granted ecclesiastical status as a penitent. According to **Lino Temperini**: “The first thing to be said is that Saint Francis began his own conversion as a Penitent and this neither can nor should be ignored.”⁴ And **Cajetan Esser** corroborates this:

It is clearly evident that for Francis “doing penance” in the spirit of the Gospel was the God-given beginning of his new life, that he expected his followers to have this as their basic attitude, and that he desired its preservation for all time. With this beginning of his God-centered life, Francis became an integral part of the penitential movement of his day and was, to a certain extent, its culmination. . . . “Doing penance” was for him the way to the Kingdom of God, which he then wanted to proclaim to all.⁵

It seems that Francis’ life took this turn around 1207 or 1208. Dressed in hermit’s clothing, Francis dedicated himself to restoring old churches and to a life of prayer, fasting, and penitential practice. By 1209 a small group of men had associated themselves with him, so that what had begun as a hermit style of penitential life became, in fact, a community of *conversi* (penitents).



This process was not unusual at the time. Penitents tended to gather, especially around charismatic figures. Unfortunately, many of these groups, through a too-enthusiastic energy, made themselves suspect to Church authority, especially when their words as well as their life-styles became critical of the clergy and hierarchy or when they began to promote heretical ideas.

Francis, aware that his small group was quite vulnerable and wanting to demonstrate an obedient attitude, decided to seek papal approval and protection. He and his first brothers went to Rome around 1209 to seek an audience with Innocent III, a young and energetic pope. Innocent was inclined to take a benevolent attitude towards penitential groups in general. He saw in them a possible means for promoting his own political and spiritual agenda for the Church, provided he could control them and keep them free of the heresies that plagued the West at the time.

Innocent received Francis and his little band kindly and gave them oral approval to live their life of public penitence and to preach penance to others: “Go with the Lord, brothers, and as the Lord will see fit to inspire you, preach penance to all” (1Cel. 33).

Therefore, the new brotherhood received the same kind of approval that was given to other similar penitential

groups of the time — permission to live their lives as formal penitents and to preach penance to others under certain circumstances and with certain restrictions. In exchange, the brothers promised obedience, respect, and loyalty to the pope.



It seems clear then that Francis and his first followers thought of themselves as belonging to an accepted way of life in the Church called the “penitential life.” Even later, when the Order was well-established in its own right and the process of clericalization well-advanced, we find Brother Giles reflecting on the friars martyred in Morocco as an example of the penitential life: “If we had not the example of the fathers who have gone before us, perhaps we should not be in the state of penance in which we are.”⁶

A strong attraction on the part of the laity for a more intense and authentic religious life after the values of the Gospel was “in the air” at the time. It took a variety of forms, from individual lives of austerity to full-blown communitarian programs or “orders.” This movement tended to go off in many directions, sometimes heretical, often disobedient and threatening to Church authority. Pope Innocent III tried to harness this spiritual energy for the welfare of the Church. At the same time, Francis of Assisi set in motion a way of living the Gospels that could be done in an orthodox way by anyone in any walk of life.

For Francis himself this way of life required what he called “leaving the world” (Test 3). He desired a total renunciation of entanglements with worldly affairs, material possessions, and domestic responsibilities. His own personal attractiveness soon drew to him like-minded individuals. With

them he formed a new kind of religious way of life, one that eventually became recognized and approved as an order in its own right. *In* this order, Francis was a member. *To* this order, Francis was the founder — the original and central charismatic figure whose creative vision shaped it and gave it energy. Its freshness, authenticity, and orthodoxy attracted great numbers of persons ripe for such a spiritual adventure. The order grew rapidly. Friars alive with this new spirit traveled the roadways of Europe preaching penance as they had been taught and authorized.



A FRANCISCAN THIRD ORDER

Naturally this energy expanded and connected with similar currents in the lives of devout Christian people hungering for just such a message. Many of them were already practicing to some extent the penitential life. However, not everyone could abandon their responsibilities to pursue the same lifestyle as the friars. In the *Anonymous of Perugia* we read that the people explicitly requested a way of life compatible with the married state or a secular lifestyle:

And we, what are we to do? We cannot stay with you. So tell us what we can do to save our souls. . . . Married men said: “We have wives who will not permit us to send them away. Teach us, therefore, the way that we can take more securely.” The brothers founded an order for them, called the Order of Penitents, and had it approved by the Supreme Pontiff (AP 9:41).

Thomas of Celano says:

Through his [Francis’s] spreading message, the Church of Christ is being renewed in both sexes according to his form, rule, and teaching, and there is victory for the triple army of those being saved. Furthermore, to all he gave a norm of life, and to those of every rank he sincerely pointed out the way of salvation (1Cel 37).

Another biographer, Julian of Speyer, later described the new development:

[Francis] provided a plan of salvation to persons of every state and condition, age and sex, giving them all a rule of life. Today, the church rejoices that his felicitous leadership of both sexes has brought about a threefold army of those who are to be saved. . . . He founded three Orders, the first of which he prized above all others by profession and habit, and which, as he has written in its Rule he called the Order of Lesser Brothers. The second Order, the Order of the Poor Ladies and virgins of the Lord, . . . likewise took its fruitful origin from him. The Third, also an order of considerable perfection, is called the Order of Penitents, which profitably brings together clerics and laity, virgins, unmarried and married persons of both sexes (LJS 4:23).

In 1230, just four years after Francis’ death, we find in a bull of Gregory IX (*Cum dilecti filii*) the designation: “Brothers of the Third Order of St. Francis.” And eight years later the same pope, writing to Agnes of Prague says: “Blessed Francis instituted three Orders which are described as the Order of Minor Brothers, that of Enclosed Sisters, and that of the College of Penitents.”⁷ Bonaventure, too, writes,

A great number of people bound themselves by new laws of penance according to the rule which they received from the man of God. Christ’s servant decided to name this way of life the Order of the Brothers of Penance. . . . This way of life admits clerics and lay, virgins and married of both sexes (LMj 4:6).

Contemporary with Bonaventure's *Life of Francis*, we find as well an outside source attesting to Francis' role in establishing three Orders. According to the *Legenda Monacensis S. Francisci* (1263-1282), written by a Benedictine from the Monastery of Oberaltacch: "Three Orders were instituted in the Church; the first was named the Friars Minor . . . ; the second was called the Poor Ladies . . . ; the third was called Penitents, which had members of both sexes."⁸

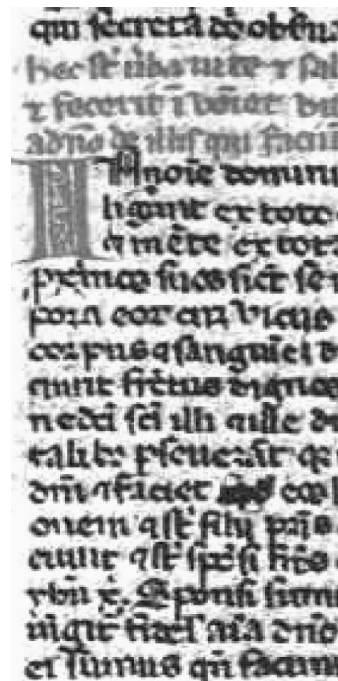
So the question arises: did Francis "found" the Third Order? There does not seem to be much doubt that because of what Francis did there developed a new way for the laity to live the traditional penitential life — a way that was thoroughly imbued with the spirit reflected in Francis and his first followers. **Meersseman** observes:

It is clear that in the expression: Saint Francis, founder of the order of Penitence, the words founder and order do not mean the same thing as in the expression: Saint Francis, founder of the order of the Minors. Certainly, Saint Francis and his first companions gave a thrust to . . . the penitential state among the laity, but Saint Francis did not invent this state which existed before him and which he himself embraced before founding the order of the Minors.⁹

Raffaele Pazzelli basically agrees with this view. He acknowledges that Francis benefited very much personally from the penitential movement and gifted the movement with his own "vision of God, of creatures and of life itself." When others shared that vision with him and lived it out in the penitential state, then the movement itself became "Franciscan."¹⁰

Francis and his early friars were then instrumental in revivifying and giving new impetus to an ordered way of living the Christian life that had existed for centuries and that

already enjoyed canonical status in the Church. What historians now call the "penitential movement of the thirteenth century" is likely the direct result of the "renewal" work of the friars, the time of it corresponding to the rapid increase in the number of itinerant preachers who identified with Francis' new way of life. "It is a historical fact [that] around 1215 in the urban centers of Italy we note a sudden increase in the number of penitents, even among married persons."¹¹



It was probably just around 1215 that Francis composed a letter or exhortation addressed to "All the Faithful." This document, discovered by Paul Sabatier in Volterra, Italy, around 1900, has been considered the earlier version (or "Recensio prior") of the later *Letter to All the Faithful* (also called *Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*). This latter document in turn is considered to be the forerunner to the Rule of the Third Order.¹² Esser observes that "both documents . . . show in their own uniqueness that Francis was deeply concerned about the Brothers and Sisters of Penance and followed their development with greater sympathy than some historians are still willing to admit."¹³

The two versions of the *Letter to All the Faithful* outline a penitential program

of life and were probably Francis' way of responding to the laity's supplication for a "form of life" for themselves. The first version is very simple, made up of two parts. The first part describes the blessedness of those who do penance. The second part describes the desolation of those who do not do penance. It does not so much prescribe what people must do as describe what gospel living looks like. Francis does not assert any kind of authority on his own part, but relies on the authority of the Scriptural sources he uses. He claims that these are "spirit and life" (1LrF 2:21).

The second version, written in 1221, is much more developed and shows a strong influence of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). In this longer letter, Francis teaches the incarnational and sacramental doctrine of the Council and emphasizes the importance of remaining orthodox Catholics. He describes the penitential life as an ideal way to live as authentic Christians, but always in the context of the Church, its teachings, and its sacramental practice. Even here, Francis is not authoritarian: "I, brother Francis, your lesser servant, with a wish to kiss your feet, beg and implore you in the love that is God, to receive, to put into practice, and to observe, as you should, these words and the others of our Lord Jesus Christ with humility and love" (2LrF 87).¹⁴

In this same year, 1221, there appears a document that seems to be a juridical expression of the directives given by Francis in the *Letter to the Faithful*. This is known as the *Memoriale propositi* and is thought to be the fruit of the combined efforts of Francis and Cardinal Hugolino to give the rapidly growing penitential movement a form in keeping with Church law.¹⁵ Thus, the rule of the Third Order seems to have followed the same general development pattern as the rule of the friars. Francis composed a simple form of life for the friars in 1209, weaving together significant Gospel passages. In 1221, enriched by the experience of living the life and influenced by the directives of Lateran IV, Francis and his brothers developed the rule greatly. In 1223, this version of the rule became transformed

into a juridical document, which, while preserving the basic content of the earlier version, lost much of the original spirit in the interests of meeting canonical standards.

So it was with the rule for the penitents. Between 1215 and 1221, Francis composed two versions of a document addressing “all the faithful” attempting to describe his vision of the blessedness of a life of penance and the woe of a life of impenitence. Late in 1221, this letter was transformed into a quite dry juridical document. **John Moorman** observes that

the content of the *Memoriale propositi* is very pedestrian and unheroic. . . . All that the Rule does is to set a standard of life, devout, simple, and disciplined. As such it seems a curious document to put before those who were inspired by the spirit of renunciation and adventure which was so vital to S. Francis and to those who followed him. Moreover . . . neither Francis nor the First Order is mentioned anywhere, and the Rule might have applied to any association of God-fearing people who wanted to live simply.¹⁶

Nevertheless, this document had the necessary canonical credentials and would serve as the model from which would later be developed a clearly “Third Order” rule.¹⁷

Having launched then a newly revitalized penitential life among the laity, Francis and the friars continued to accompany their sisters and brothers in this new way of life. By the end of the thirteenth century the Franciscan Third Order was known throughout the Christian world, and by the end of the fourteenth century a great number of people were Franciscan tertiaries. “It is very probable that practically every convent of Friars Minor located in a city or locality of any importance had the direction of a fraternity.”¹⁸

In 1289, the Franciscan Pope, Nicolas IV, in the bull *Supra montem*, for the first time gave papal approval to a rule

specifically designated for the “Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Penance” whose “founder” was St. Francis. By this time, while there were still other ways of living the penitential life, the Franciscan way was dominant.

Clearly Francis was a driving force in a movement that was to have a tremendous impact on the lives of great numbers of people down through the centuries. The time was ripe for him, for his gifts, for his vision, for his energy. Francis was a Friar Minor, a Lesser Brother, whose fraternity would grow great and serve the vast purposes of the universal Church.

At the same time, Francis had his spiritual roots in the ancient penitential order of the Church. This would determine to a great extent his fundamental vision of the Christian life. Beyond his brotherhood he would extend that vision to the whole people of God, inviting them to the sweetness of the converted life, the life of the “children of the heavenly Father whose works they do” and the life of the “spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1LrF 1:7).



CONVERSION OF LIFE TODAY

In revising the Third Order rules for our own times, hard work went into the study of the historical roots of the Third Order itself and into examining the contemporary experience of those who today profess this way of life. Scholars of

the Third Order uncovered its roots in the Church’s ancient order of penitents. The fruits of their research have revitalized the notion of “penance” as the fundamental charism of the Franciscan Third Order, both Secular and Regular, and have caused Third Order Franciscans to re-examine the very meaning of a penitential way of life in and for our own times. In the 1982 Rule of the Third Order Regular we read:

The brothers and sisters of this order are to persevere in true faith and penance. They wish to live this evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty and of humility. Therefore, let them abstain from all evil and persevere to the end in doing good because God the Son himself will come again in glory and will say to all who acknowledge, adore and serve him in sincere repentance: “Come blessed of my Father.”

The commentary that accompanies this text asserts that faithfulness to the gospels requires that we do penance always, that *metanoia* is central to the Order’s spirituality, and that penance, as a root value of the tradition, bears fruit in poverty, minority, and contemplation. “**This article,**” states the commentary, “**is the charism statement of the Third Order Regular.**”¹⁹

There seems little doubt, then, that the *Franciscan Third Order, Regular and Secular*, finds its historical roots in the ancient penitential movement or “order of penitents,” which in turn finds its roots in the biblical concept of *metanoia*. The more practical issue seems to be: how does a Christian layperson or vowed religious understand the concept of “penance” today? As it is used in the rule, it seems to point simply to that turning of life toward God that is the fundamental act of becoming, being, and remaining a Christian — a follower of the gospel way of Jesus Christ.

Francis and Clare spoke of their conversion in terms of a profound awakening in their lives that compelled them to “leave the world.” This language, of course, was and is symbolic for turning

away from the values of a materialistic, selfish, and violent society. In their lives it meant something very concrete and practical — a complete separation from the dehumanizing values espoused by their society and an intense focus on God and the things of God. It meant for them practicing radical forms of poverty, a life of contemplative prayer, personal asceticism, and humble service of others.

Today, in examining the concept of “penance,” one is immediately faced with a host of images that can seem quite negative. The extreme asceticism of Francis, Clare, and their early followers may seem strange and even intimidating to twenty-first-century Christians. The disciplines of the ancient order of penitents that required the wearing of distinctive clothing, prescribed fasting, continence, regulations about bearing arms, taking oaths, and participating in social and political activities can seem archaic. At the same time, some of these practices were and are today authentic expressions of a way of life that calls us to turn away from the values of a materialistic and greedy society.

- Contemporary fascination with Eastern types of spirituality, for example, can lead us to a new appreciation of fasting and living simply, perhaps even austerely.
- New awareness about health and environmental problems directs us to use the things of the earth sparingly and deny ourselves many luxuries and conveniences, though they might be easily available.
- Violence in our societies leads us to “dis-arm” ourselves by refusing to have weapons in our homes or to take on military roles.

To focus on external practices, however, may be to miss the point. Penance understood as conversion of life aims at that profound turning around that changes us in the very core of our being. It is more than an experience of a changed attitude toward social values. Theologian **Bernard Lonergan** offers us a helpful description:

Conversion . . . is a radical transformation on which follows, on all levels of living, an interlocked series of changes and developments. What hitherto was unnoticed becomes vivid and present. What had been of no concern becomes a matter of high import. So great a change in one’s apprehensions and one’s values accompanies no less a change in oneself, in one’s relations to other persons, and in one’s relation to God.²⁰



This accords well with the kind of experience to which Francis testifies:

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world (Test 1-3).

Clearly Francis’ conversion was the beginning of what Lonergan describes as the experience “on which follows, on all levels of living, an inter-locked series of changes and developments.” Such a notion of the life of penance points to it as a process, a process rooted in a dynamic relational life. In this sense one never arrives at some kind of finish line, but lives daily the life of turning, renewing over and over the fundamental choice to be faithful. This was true for Francis and for the movement he set in motion.

For the Christian person the experience of conversion is ideally celebrated in the sacrament of Baptism. Experience proves, however, that after this graced moment there follow many other moments when the choice must be made again from ever-new vantage points. From time immemorial there have been Christian people in all walks of life who desired to live this way more intensely and more publicly and to receive the support of a community of like-minded persons.

The historical reality is that innumerable persons wanted to do this after the charismatic example of Francis of Assisi. Twenty-first-century Christians still feel the attraction of this beautiful charism and continue to “run after” this poor little man of Assisi (LFI 10). We who follow the Third Order search our own lives and experiences for ways to express in our times what Francis and his followers expressed so well in theirs. The Rule of Life assists us to recognize and to receive our rootedness in the Church’s ancient order of “penance,” which after all is only a sincere and heartfelt effort to live the gospel life, to surrender ourselves completely to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, to share in his life, passion, death, and resurrection in such a way that our very lives announce and celebrate God’s mercy in our own time and place.



The San Damiano Crucifix as it hangs today in the Basilica of Santa Chiara, Assisi

END NOTES

- ¹ Around the middle of the previous century, the jurist Gratian had described the penitents as enjoying the privileges of the clergy. In defense of the penitents' right to claim exemption from military service, Gratian asserted that juridically "the penitents lived under ecclesiastical authority." See Gillis G. Meersseman, OP, as quoted by Raffaele Pazzelli, TOR, "The Origins of the Franciscan Penitential Movement," *Assisi Congress on Formation* (Greensburg, PA: Chas. M. Henry Printing Co., 1979), 133, 135.
- ² As quoted by Andrea Erba, "An Historical-Anthropological Perspective of the Penitential Life in the Early Middle Ages," *The Assisi Congress on Formation* (Greensburg, PA: Chas. M. Henry Printing Co., 1979), 103.
- ³ All references to the writings of Francis and to the early biographical sources are from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap., Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv., and William Short, OFM, 3 volumes (New York: New City Press, 1999, 2000, 2001).
- ⁴ Lino Temperini, TOR, "Penitential Spirituality in the Franciscan Sources," *The Assisi Congress on Formation* (Greensburg, PA: Chas. M. Henry Printing Co., 1979), 185.
- ⁵ Cajetan Esser, OFM, *Origins of the Franciscan Order* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1970), 206-207.
- ⁶ *The Golden Sayings of the Blessed Brother Giles of Assisi*, trans. and ed. Paschal Robinson, OFM (Philadelphia: The Dolphin Press, 1906), 74-75.
- ⁷ As quoted by Jeanne Glisky, SFP, "An Investigation of the Origins and Development of Third Order Franciscan Communities of Women," thesis (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1976), 54.
- ⁸ As quoted by Glisky, "An Investigation of the Origins and Development of Third Order Franciscan Communities of Women," 60.
- ⁹ Gillis G. Meersseman, *Dossier de l'ordre de la pénitence au XIIIe siècle* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1961), 37 (Translation mine.)
- ¹⁰ Pazzelli, "The Origins of the Franciscan Penitential Movement," 131.
- ¹¹ Meersseman as quoted by Raffaele Pazzelli, TOR, *St. Francis and the Third Order, the Franciscan and pre-Franciscan Penitential Movement* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 102.
- ¹² P. Fredegand, OMC, "Le Tiers-Ordre de Saint François d'Assise," part 1, *Etudes Franciscaines* 33 (1921): 368.
- ¹³ Cajetan Esser, as quoted by Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 106.
- ¹⁴ Contemporary scholarship still debates the order of the two versions of the *Letter to the Faithful*. For another interpretation, see *History of the Third Order Regular: A Source book*, ed. Margaret Carney, OSF, Jean François Godet, and Suzanne Kush, cssf (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2008), 39-40, especially note 3.
- ¹⁵ Bernard of Besse in his *Liber de Laudibus* says: "In composing the rules and form of life of these Brethren, the Lord Pope Gregory of holy memory, then placed in a lower rank of dignity, and bound by the closest ties of familiarity with the Blessed Francis, supplied what was wanting to the holy man in the science of composition." As quoted by Oswald Staniforth, OSFC, "The Third Order of Saint Francis," three lectures delivered at the Franciscan summer School, Oxford, August, 1928 (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd, 1929), 19.
- ¹⁶ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 43.
- ¹⁷ Staniforth, "The Third Order of Saint Francis," 22.
- ¹⁸ P. Fredegand, OMC, "Le Tiers-Ordre de Saint François d'Assise," part 2, *Etudes Franciscaines* 34 (1922): 372. (Translation mine.)
- ¹⁹ *The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis*, 15.
- ²⁰ Bernard Lonergan, SJ, "Theology in Its New Context," in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York: Alba House, 1978), 13.

Study Guide

Biblical Grounding

1. What are some fundamental qualities or characters of the human being according to our Judeo-Christian religious tradition? What are some implications of these qualities for our relationship with God, with one another, with the world/cosmos?
2. In what sense can the books of the Hebrew Scriptures be considered "lesson books" for conversion of life?
3. How can Jesus be considered a "reformer"?
4. How can the writings of the Christian Scriptures be considered calls to conversion?

Early Church and Conversion of Life

5. How is the "death/resurrection" experience of Jesus a model for our experience of life in this world? How does Baptism connect with this experience?
6. How did the early Church bring public sinners back into communion with the Church?
7. How did the "penitential way of life" prescribed for public sinners in the early Church become a voluntary way of life for some Christians who had not publicly fallen away?

A Franciscan Third Order

8. How did the growth of Francis' First Order (Friars Minor) affect the people to whom the brothers preached penance?
9. Describe the three forms of religious life that grew out of Francis' original brotherhood.
10. How does *Francis' First Letter to the Faithful* (also called *Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*) differ from his *Second Letter to the Faithful* (also called *Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*)? How do we account for these differences?
11. What is the "Memoriale propositi" and what purpose did it serve? What were its strengths and weaknesses?
12. What was the special significance of the Third Order Rule approved by Pope Nicholas IV in 1289?

Conversion of Life Today

13. Which article of the 1982 Rule constitutes the "charism statement" of the Third Order Regular and why is this so?
14. Why is it difficult for Christians to use the language of "penitence" today? What words for this experience might work better today?
15. Describe some "penitential" practices that can and do work for Christians today.
16. Beyond practices, how can the language of "conversion of life" be meaningful for Christians today and even for people of other religious traditions?

SOURCE: “The Franciscan Third Order and The Penitential Tradition” in *The CORD*, 61.2 (Apr/June): 169-173. Also in *Resource Manual for the Study of the Third Order Regular Rule*. Ed. Kathleen Moffatt OSF for the International Franciscan Conference, TOR, Rome Italy, www.ifc-tor.org, 2013. Pp.17-29. This article was abridged by Elise Saggau OSF who is also the author.



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ART: *Legenda Maior di S.Bonaventura: miniature dal codice pergameneo del 1457. Roma Museo Francescano, inv.nr 1266.*
Woodcut: Artestampa di Gastone Vignati, Assisi.

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