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The Tau Cross

A Symbol of Identification & Unity for the 21st century.

A. THE TAU AS A FRANCISCAN SYMBOL

The early biographies of Francis tell us that he used the Tau very often as an expression of his devotion to the Cross of Jesus. We have copies of some of his letters in which he made the sign of the Tau in his own hand. On the wall of the little chapel of St. Mary Magdalen at Fonte Colombo the usual design used by the Poverello traced in red is to be found.

2. The source of Francis' devotion to this sign can be traced to the Bible, especially in Ezechiel 9:4 "Go through the city trace the sign of the Tau.. " This passage, often commented upon by the Fathers and a familiar theme of medieval preaching was well known to the faithful. St. Bonaventure in his *Legenda Major* 4-9:1079 sees the connection between this text from the prophet Ezechiel and the mission of Francis: ..."according to the text of the prophet, in signing the *Tau* on those men who cry and weep as a sign of their sincere conversion to Christ."

St. Francis adopted the sign of the Tau especially because the very shape of the letter is the same as that of the Cross and so was a reminder to him of his Crucified Lord. Whereas the Catari or Albigensians refused to use the sign of the Cross considering this material symbol as unworthy to represent the redemptive work of God, Francis honored and embraced it as representing God's love for us.

Another connection of Francis with the sign of the Tau is his service to the lepers and the Brothers of St. Anthony the Hermit who administered the lazzaretos. Their patron is often pictured as having a staff surmounted by a Tau and on their habit was sewn the emblem of the Tau. The Tau of the Antonians, servants of the lepers, reminded Francis of that special moment in his conversion when he embraced the leper and he was devoted to that symbol of the "love of Christ, who willed to be considered a leper for our sake." (*Fior 25:1857*)

It is interesting to note that at least some of our earliest hermitages or small friaries of "St. Anthony" were originally dedicated to this St. Anthony and not to the Saint "of Padua" (e.g. Sant'Antonio del Busseto, Massa Martana, XIV century).

St. Francis was present at the IV Lateran Council called by Pope Innocent III who had verbally approved the Rule of the Order. On November 11, 1215 this Pope opened the Council with a discourse which surely found an echo in the heart of Francis. The second part of this talk comments on the above mentioned passage from Ezechiel:

The Tau is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and has the form of a cross as was presented to us before the placard written by Pilate was placed upon it. The person who bears on his forehead the sign of the Tau shows in his way of life the splendor of the Cross-, who bears the Tau has crucified the flesh with its vices and sins; who bears the Tau affirms by this: in nothing else do I wish to glory except in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ Who bears the Tau will find mercy, in this sign of a life converted and renewed in Christ Therefore, be ye champions of the Tau and of the Cross!

This appeal of Pope Innocent a dramatic call for a general mobilization of Christendom for a Crusade of conversion and penance profoundly influenced the spirituality of Francis. Obedient to the call of the pope he signed himself with the Tau of penance. It would be his favourite symbol reminding him and his friars of their vocation to preach penance and conversion to Christ. This would be the Crusade of St. Francis, a crusade not of armed soldiers to recover Jerusalem, but a crusade of penitent men from Assisi to preach to everyone: "Do penance Be converted and bring forth fruits worthy of penance."

In my role as a Light Bringer in service to Sananda Jesus, I was guided several years ago to start wearing the Tau symbol for protection against 'entity attack' from others. Following my recent visit to the tomb of Holy Father Francis in Assisi, I sensed that by wearing this sacred symbol was more to do with not being afraid to stand out as one in Divine Service to God and more importantly to live the simplicity of Saint Francis in one's daily spiritual life, regardless of religious beliefs, etc.

The Tau symbol has attracted much interest from across the world and none more so that when I was working by the Red Sea in January 2008. several of the hotel staff were attracted to the simplicity and beauty of the Tau symbol or cross and wanted to know what it represented. When I explained that it represented unification and peace for the whole family of God, regardless of religious persuasion, they asked me how they could get the cross to wear. Upon my return to the UK, I sent several Tau crosses to the staff who now wear them with pride. The Tau symbol generates not only intense interest from others, but what it does do is that it sends out a powerful message to those who are willing to acknowledge its simplicity and the energy that is released from wearing it creates a sense of inward peace that emanates to those who are drawn to it.

The time spent kneeling before the Tomb of Saint Francis I knew that my life's work was to continue to embrace 'religious diversity' and empower all to unite as one loving spiritual family to come and share in God's love around the same table of Love and Light , praising the same God/Dess without all the dogma. I believe that Saint Francis and his followers have left us a tangible expression of their love for God, Mother Nature and the Animal kingdom in this symbol of love, simplicity and peace releasing a healing energy all of its own to those whose needs are great.

Brother Sean TC

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