

VERDAD Y VIDA

REVISTA FRANCISCANA DE PENSAMIENTO

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CURRENT RELEVANCE OF THE FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE

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SUMMARY:

This article presents the relevance of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition in addressing today's ethical challenges. This study completes our previous historical analysis on the Franciscan contribution to the process of rationalization that, according to Max Weber, is the key to Modernity. In the last decades, the Franciscan approach has acquired a renewed relevance, as the post-conciliar ecclesiastical Magisterium has clearly recognized, because it fits well with the type of horizontal, intuitive and interactive communication that predominates in our digital culture. In the last part, the study focuses on some of the Franciscan values that are especially relevant today.

KEY WORDS: Franciscanism, Magisterium, ecology, evangelization, individualization.

SUMARIO:

En este artículo se analiza la relevancia de la perspectiva franciscana al abordar los actuales desafíos éticos y sociales. Se desarrolla así ulteriormente el análisis histórico que hemos realizado sobre la contribución franciscana al proceso de racionalización en ámbitos como la economía, epistemología, política, etnografía, etc. El carisma franciscano sigue teniendo hoy una sorprendente actualidad, tal como reconoce el Magisterio eclesiástico post-conciliar, pues encaja bien con el tipo de comunicación horizontal, intuitiva e interactiva que predomina en la era digital. En la última parte, se presentan algunos valores franciscanos que hoy resultan especialmente significativos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Franciscanismo, Magisterio, ecología, evangelización, individualización.

* * *

This article presents the current relevance of the Franciscan intellectual tradition in addressing the ethical challenges of our globalized world. This study completes the historical analysis that we have previously carried out on the Franciscan contribution to the process of rationalization¹. According to Max Weber, that process is the key to modernity and was greatly fostered by the Protestant Reformation, something that has never been “observed to the same extent among Catholics”². Contradicting these affirmations, we showed the remarkable contribution that, during the XIII-XVI centuries, the Franciscans realized to the formation of modern culture in many fields: economy, epistemology, politics, ethnography, etc. We will now assert that the Franciscan contribution keeps being relevant today and therefore should be studied and developed.

The first part focus on the renewed relevance that, in the last decades, the Franciscan perspective has acquired, as recognized by post-conciliar Magisterium. In fact, it tunes well with the type of horizontal, intuitive and interactive communication that predominates in our digital culture (second part). The third part presents some of the Franciscan values that are especially important in our networked and secularized society.

1. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, A UNIVERSAL MODEL OF REFERENCE

Francis meditated constantly on “the humility of the Incarnation.”³ With this expression, Celano sums up the life and spirituality of the Little Poor Man of Assisi. Imitating the Incarnate Word, Francis considers himself “ignorant and stupid”⁴ and wants to be “subject and submissive to everyone in the world.”⁵ All the same, he gave rise to a rich philosophical-theological tradition and today remains a universal model of reference.

¹ Cfr. M. CARBAJO NÚÑEZ, “The Franciscan contribution to the process of rationalization and the thesis of Max Weber,” in *Verdad y Vida* 270 (2017).

² M. WEBER, *The Protestant ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Dover, Mineola NY 2003, 41.

³ T. DE CELANO, “The Life of Saint Francis,” [=ICel], n. 84, in R.J. Amstrong – J.A.W. Hermann – W.J. Short, ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, [=FAED], 3 vol., NCP, New York 1999, I, 171-308, here 254.

⁴ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, “A Letter to the entire Order,” [=CrO], n. 39 & 52 (FAED I, 116- 121), here 119; cfr. O. SCHMUCKI, “‘Soy ignorante e idiota’ (CrO 39). El grado de formación escolar de San Francisco de Asís,” in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* 9/31 (1982) 89-106.

⁵ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, “A Salutation to Virtues,” n. 14 (FAED I, 164-165), here 165; ID, “The Testament,” [=Test], n. 19 (FAED I, 124-127), here 125.

1.1. Some testimonies about Francis' importance today

The philosopher Max Scheler (1874-1928) considers Francis as "one of the greatest sculptors of soul and spirit in European history:"

"Never again in the history of the West have the emotional forces of sympathy regained the pattern we find in St. Francis. Nor do we ever encounter such a simultaneous and complete integration of their activity in Religion, Love, Social Endeavor, Art, and Knowledge."⁶

Ozanan adds that Francis was able to live religion as poetry and poetry as religion⁷. G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) highlights the current relevance not only of Francis, but also of the Franciscan spirit:

"St. Francis walked the world like the Pardon of God. I mean that his appearance marked the moment when men could be reconciled not only to God but to nature and, most difficult of all, to themselves. [...] It was such an amnesty and reconciliation that the freshness of the Franciscan spirit brought to all the world."⁸

Time magazine, in 1992, declared him one of the greatest and most influential men in the second millennium.⁹ Likewise, the historian Arnold Toynbee expressed his admiration for him and emphasized his importance for today's humanity and for the environment:

"To maintain a habitable biosphere for the next two thousand years, we and our descendants will have to forget the example of Pedro Bernardone (the father of St. Francis) –a successful textile businessman in the thirteenth century, who pursued his own material wellbeing.– and instead begin to follow the example of his son, St. Francis, the best of all men who have lived in the West."¹⁰

⁶ M. SCHELER, *The nature of sympathy*, Transaction, London 2008, 93 & 87.

⁷ "François d'Assise paraît comme l'Orphée du moyen âge, domptant la férocité des bêtes et la dureté des hommes." F. OZANAM, *Les Poètes Franciscains en Italie au XIIIe siècle*, Vitte, Paris 71913, 64.

⁸ G.K. CHESTERTON, *St. Francis of Assisi*, Doubleday, New York 1957, 143-144.

⁹ Cfr. *Time Magazine* 140/27 (Oct. 15, 1992). Also in Internet: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,976745,00.html>

¹⁰ A. TOYNBEE, in *ABC newspaper*, Madrid (Dec 14, 1972), 10-11, quoted in M. Hathaway – L. Boff, *El Tao de la liberación: una ecología de la transformación*, Trotta, Madrid 2014, 403 (*The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation*, Orbis, Maryknoll NY 2009).