

VERDAD Y VIDA

REVISTA FRANCISCANA DE PENSAMIENTO

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**ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF THE
FRANCISCAN FAMILY**

**SOSTENIBILIDAD ECONÓMICA DE LA FAMILIA
FRANCISCANA**

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RESUMEN:

Este trabajo examina la sostenibilidad económica de la familia franciscana, tratando de identificar los valores que deben inspirar las decisiones de los frailes en este ámbito, para que puedan ser fieles a su carisma y misión. El análisis se centra en los frailes de la primera Orden (OFM, OFMcap, OFMconv). La primera parte del artículo presenta algunos de los desafíos sociales actuales que obligan a los franciscanos a revisar su sostenibilidad económica. La segunda parte estudia cómo iluminar la situación actual a la luz del carisma franciscano. La tercera parte indica algunas pautas para poner en práctica la dimensión económica de la vida franciscana

PALABRAS CLAVE: Economía, sostenibilidad, familia franciscana, valores, desafíos.

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the economic sustainability of the Franciscan family, trying to identify the values that should inspire the friars' decisions in this realm, so that they can be faithful to their charism and mission. The analysis focuses on the friars of the first Order (OFM, OFMcap, OFMconv). The first part of the paper presents some of the current social challenges that compel the Franciscans to review their economic sustainability. The second part studies how to illuminate the current situation in the light of the Franciscan charism. The third part indicates some guidelines to put into practice the economic dimension of Franciscan life.

KEYWORDS: Economics, sustainability, Franciscan family, values, challenges.

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This article examines the economic sustainability of the Franciscan family. It tries to identify the values that should inspire the friars' decisions in this realm, so that they can be faithful to their charism and mission. The study focuses on the friars of the first Franciscan Order (OFM, OFMcap, OFMconv).

The first part of the article presents some current challenges that force them to review their economic sustainability. The second part analyzes the current situation in the light of the life and teachings of Francis of Assisi. The third part indicates some guidelines on how to put economics at the service of the mission.

1. A CHANGING ECONOMIC SITUATION

The Franciscan vision of the economy is based on four fundamental principles: freedom, gratuitousness, fraternity, and the common good.¹ Well founded on these ethical guidelines, the Franciscan management of economic goods can become a prophetic sign today.

The dominant economic system makes a clear-cut separation between the logic of efficiency and the logic of gift, privileging the speculative-financial activities over labor and reducing everything to merchandise.² In this context, the economic choices of the Franciscans must contradict the current fetishism of money and the reduction of man to a selfish, calculating, and predictable being. (*homo oeconomicus*) Even man himself is often reduced to a merchandise, ready “to be used and then discarded.”³

1.1. Less young friars working as employees

The decreasing number of friars⁴ and their growing average age, mainly in Western countries, force the Franciscan Order to review its economic

1 Cf. M. CARBAJO NÚÑEZ, *A free and fraternal economy. The Franciscan perspective*, Tau, Phoenix 2017. The Italian version of this article will be published on *Credere Oggi* 228 (218)

2 Cf. S. ZAMAGNI, «El comportamiento económico en una sociedad en transformación», in Congregación para los Institutos de vida consagrada y las sociedades de vida apostólica, *La gestión de los bienes eclesiales... Actas del Simposio Internacional*, Roma, March 8-9, 2014, LEV, Vatican City 2015, 154-178.

3 POPE FRANCIS, «Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*», Nov. 24, 2013, [EG], n. 53, in AAS 105 (2013) 1019-1137.

4 On Dec. 31, 2016, the OFM friars, including novices, were 13,302 (1,223 less than Dec. 31, 2009). Cf. *Acta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum [AOFM]* 1 (2009) 117; 1 (2017) 57. From 1995 to 2005, the solemnly professed fell by about 25%. Cf. *AOFM* 3 (2016) 376.

On Dec. 31, 2015 the OFMcap friars, including novices, were 10,572 (172 less than in 2007). www.ofmcap.org and *Analecta OFM Cap*, 123/1-2 (2007) 107-142.

The OFMconv friars were 4,024 at the end of 2016 (351 less than in 2009). Cf. *Fraternus Nuntius* 2 (2018) 72; 1 (2010) 38.

From 1970 to 2015, the OFM friars decreased by 65% and OFMcap friars by 40% in the USA. S. SORDO PALACIOS – T.P. GAUNT – M.L. GAUTIER, «Population trends among religious institutes of men», CARA, *Special report*, Georgetown Univ., Washington DC 2015, 1-2.

sustainability.⁵ “There are Provinces where the majority are senior friars.”⁶ The small number of young friars is compelling Franciscans to leave places of worship, parishes, hospitals, schools, friaries.

It is worth noting that, according to a survey carried out by the OFM General Curia in 2015, only 18% of the friars consider that working for a living is important for their vocation and mission. Besides, the economy of the Franciscan Provinces is too often “focused on (personal) well-being rather than solidarity and communion.”⁷ Actually, 26% of the friars “consider the lifestyle of the Order too bourgeois” and 47% demand “a more explicit commitment to a simpler and supportive lifestyle.” (*ILChap*, 72)

1.2. Growing dependence on rents and investments

The traditional sustainability regime, based on labor, is changing to another based on rents and capital investment: renting buildings, friaries turned into hotels, income from tourism.⁸ “There are religious provinces or Congregations that already rely more on profits and interest on their investments than on the income or salaries the religious receive for their work. This is a new way of acquiring money and resources that may have important consequences.”⁹

Living on the proceeds of property income and investment is a luxury that few people can afford in our society, so it clearly contradicts the Franciscan vocation to be poor and minor. Anyway, some of these resources “could be acceptable if they were directed toward solidarity with the poor, pastoral work, and mission.” (*AFE*, 19)

Sometimes, the friars try to justify the growing accumulation of capital by appealing to the probable economic taxes that an increasingly secularized society might impose on the patrimony of religious Orders and on their places

5 In 2015, 36% of all OFM^{Cap} friars worldwide were over 60 years old, with a average age of over 63 in some conferences (CENOC 69.4, CECOC 66.4, NAPCC 64.8, CIMPCAP 63). Cf. UFFICIO DI STATISTICA OFM^{Cap}, *Statistiche*, Roma 2015, also online: www.ofmcap.org.

6 GENERAL CURIA OFM, *Going to the peripheries with the joy of the Gospel. Fratres et Minores in Nostra Aetate*. Document of the General Chapter OFM, [*Chap15*], Assisi 2015, n. 4, also online: www.ofm.org.

7 GENERAL CURIA OFM, *Instrumentum laboris for the 2015 General Chapter*, [*ILChap*], n. 100, in *AOFM* 3 (2014) 399-411, here 407.

8 GENERAL CURIA OFM, *Franciscan management of finances. A formation aid from the General Definitorium*, [*AFE*], Rome 2014, 19, also published in *AOFM* 2 (2014) 209-228, here 214.

9 UNION OF GENERAL SUPERIORS [USG], *Economy and mission in the Consecrated life today*, [*EVC*], Document of the 60th USG Assembly, Part 3, §19, Il Calamo, Roma 2002.