

AFCU “Deepening Franciscan Identity: Teaching Care for Creation”

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Category: Theology, Economics, and Care for Creation

1. **Course Title:** RLST 105: Franciscan Goals for Today

Description: This course appeals to the life and writings of Francis and select friars in medieval Europe, along with contemporary theorists, to reflect on current world issues in order to develop attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, virtuous responses to global concerns – especially the 8 U.N. Millennium Development Goals: 1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2. To achieve universal primary education; 3. To promote gender equality and empower women; 4. To reduce child mortality; 5. To improve maternal health; 6. To combat HIV-AIDS and other diseases; 7. To ensure environmental sustainability; To develop a global partnership for development.

2. **Learning Activity Title:** A Franciscan Approach to Economics and Ecology

Objective: To recognize that Francis and friars’ teachings about fraternity, sorority, and solidarity ground development economics and ecology.

3. **Foundational Franciscan Theme:** Care for Ourselves; Care for Others; Care for Creation

Theme Presentation Explication: Francis and the friars teach us to overcome self-centeredness and develop an appropriate relationship of belonging and attachment to other people and creation. This learning activity requires that the student integrate material from the first 11 weeks of the class, including the following texts.

- The *Admonitions* and *Canticle of the Creatures*. (In this section, I rely on the interpretations of the *Admonitions* and *Canticle* presented in: 2001. Edith van den Goorbergh, O.S.C and Theodore Zweerman, O.F.M. *Respectfully Yours: Signed and Sealed, Francis of Assisi. Aspects of His Authorship and Focuses of His Spirituality*, New York: The Franciscan Institute.)
- 2012. Keith Douglass Warner, O.F.M., “Retrieving Franciscan Philosophy for Social Engagement,” *The Cord*, 62.4.
- Pope Benedict XVI, *Fighting Poverty to Build Peace*,” Message of his holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the celebration of the World Day Of Peace, 1 January 2009.
- 2009. Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- 2005. Jeffrey Sachs. *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Time*. Penguin Press.
- 2008. Jeffrey Sachs. *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*. Penguin Press.

Students integrate the texts (above) in the following ways.

The *Admonitions* and *Canticle of the Creatures*: In an age known for penitence and detachment, Francis transcended the simplistic opposition between attachment to and

detachment from the world. Francis affirmed detachment; in the *Admonitions*, he offers a program for overcoming self-appropriation through fraternity. Francis affirmed ordinate attachment; in the *Canticle*, he teaches us how to live in fraternity and sorority with other people and creation. Francis developed a clear, sacramental sense of God's activity in and through creation. Francis does not lose himself in space or in the vastness of the created world. He becomes so intimate and familiar with the wonders of creation that he embraces them as "brother" and "sister," that is, members of one family.

"Retrieving Franciscan Philosophy for Social Engagement": Warner asserts that Francis challenged the monastic model. The world was Francis' monastery. Friars, in medieval Europe, gave witness to God's love by their practical works through their service to the poor and marginalized. The Franciscan model of service to the poor and marginalized can become a paradigm for development economics. Warner puts forward 3 historic examples of Franciscans in medieval Europe embracing the business world.

1st historic example: Friar Peter Olivi (1248-1298) – Olivi developed "Price Theory" – the justification for why an item should cost what it does. Like an artisan using his skill, merchants provide a service to the community by determining the fair market price of a product. Olivi "developed a positive assessment of the merchant in society, and contributed to the broader evolution of thinking about business and entrepreneurship in medieval Europe."

2nd historic example: Bernardino de Siena (1380-1444) – Bernardino also worked with businessmen to develop fair prices. Further, he provided practical moral guidance to 3 types of businesses: 1. Emerging industries that process raw materials into usable goods; 2. Import/export businesses that move products from one area to another, undertaking expense and risk; 3. Retail businesses preserve and store goods, and then sell them in appropriate quantities to individual consumers.

- Recall from Jeffrey Sachs, in *The End of Poverty*, and Pope Benedict, in "Fighting Poverty to Build Peace," that one of the main reasons for extreme poverty is falling commodities prices (grain, fruits, vegetables, precious metals). Franciscans call for fair pricing and equal opportunities of access to the world market, without exclusion or marginalization.

3rd historic example: Friars established the 1st Micro-credit Institutions – "Montes Pietas" [Mountains of Piety] – to alleviate poverty and abolish moneylending at exorbitant rates. In contrast to money-lenders at the time, friars offered small loans to the poor at minimal interest - 4% and 12%. The loans were established through donations for initial capital and secured by personal possessions functioning as collateral. Pope Leo X gave formal approval to the Franciscan position at Lateran Council V in 1515. Further, the friars established social contracts (compacts) to benefit the commonwealth, forging reciprocal relationships based on mutual consent.

- Recall, from Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, that microfinance

organizations, such as the Grameen Bank and Kiva, are vehicles out of extreme poverty for many women in the developing world.

- Recall Jeffrey Sachs' model for ending extreme poverty in *The End of Poverty* and his assertions about environmental concern in *Common Wealth*. Note that extreme poverty is linked to terrorism and war.
- Recall Pope Benedict's teaching about wealth creation versus assistance in "Fighting Poverty to Build Peace." The right approach to ending poverty in the medium and long term is "investing in the formation of people and developing a specific and well-integrated culture of enterprise. In a modern economy, the value of assets is utterly dependent on the capacity to generate revenue in the present and the future. Wealth creation therefore becomes an inescapable duty, which must be kept in mind if the fight against material poverty is to be effective in the long term. Policies which place too much emphasis on assistance underlie many of the failures in providing aid to poor countries." (Pope Benedict, "Fighting Poverty to Build Peace")
- Francis and the Franciscans, through their vow of poverty, invite us to take what John Rawls called an "original position": "I" will live among the poorest and weakest. From this position I will advocate for particular laws and programs to determine what is fair and just.

4. **Assessment Strategy:** First, students are quizzed on the reading materials. The questions assess levels of integration, including, defining, identifying, and evaluating. Second, students must demonstrate that they have integrated Franciscan values during their service-learning projects. The 3 components of the service-learning paper and presentation are:
- a. (1 page; 1 minute) Give an objective description of the 10 hours of service. (Answer the following questions: What did you do? With whom did you work? What did it mean to you? Since your service must be connected to your major, what did you learn about your choice of major?)
 - b. (7 pages; 8 minutes) Present research on a developing country, that is, a country where the people live on less than \$2 per day. (Research the health care available in the country, the GDP, environmental conditions, literacy and mortality rates, etc. Then compare and contrast working in your profession in the U.S. and your developing country.)
 - c. (3 pages; 3 minutes) Relate values to the research and service. (Explicate ways that the values you've integrated from course readings, especially those from Francis and the medieval friars, relate to your research and service.)