Evangelical Poverty and the ‘Fraternal Franciscan Economy’ – New Aspects for a Reflected Business Education

Thomas Dienberg, Markus Warode

Abstract

Evangelical poverty is one of the basic characteristics of the Fraternal Franciscan Economy. It was and is always connected with the two other basic pillars of the Franciscan Spirituality: minoritas and fraternitas. For business especially (leadership) education these three aspects of the Franciscan Spirituality can show a different approach towards a new economy, based on humanity, respect, responsibility and love.

This paper discusses where the Franciscan philosophy could be a part of modern business education today. The focus is on the leader’s attitude, which is based on soft skills like the Franciscan values. But is it necessary to take the overall conditions of management action into consideration and to work out some starting points for a connection with the Franciscan tradition. The essential idea is that the interaction of capability, volition and permission on the base of personal skills can provide a basis for the Fraternal Franciscan approach.

1. Introduction

Evangelical poverty is one of the basic characteristics of the Franciscan Spirituality. It was and is always connected with the two other basic pillars of the Franciscan Spirituality: minoritas and fraternitas. For economy and business especially (leadership) education today these three aspects of the Franciscan Spirituality can show a different approach towards a new economy, based on humanity, respect, responsibility and love (to the other).

First let’s talk about the idea of ‘Being connected’. Being connected is the key term of the Franciscan Spirituality. It is at the core of the three major Franciscan values: poverty, being a minor and brotherhood.

Being connected means more than being related. It is a feeling of a deep emotional relationship with others, the inner urge to love the others and live a life of solidarity, compassion, connection and relationship. The document of the Franciscan Spirituality expressing this is for example the letter to a minister. Francis tells a minister what to do with a brother who causes trouble. True obedience of the Lord, love and mercy are the words used by St. Francis. His love towards the others is so deep that the power of the minister lays in the powerlessness, in forgiveness and mercy. The minister should use his power by letting be, by a power of connectedness and the question what does the other need. That is a way of poverty in relationship, in being connected. This shows that Franciscan poverty is not only about the abundance of positions or just about material poverty – it is about the other.

The Franciscan David Couturier describes minoritas in connection with poverty and
fraternity as a new economy of a social virtue of international compassion: „… the fraternal or relational economy rejects capitalism’s primary proposition that competition is the best response to protect and administer the scarce resources of a community."

In summary we could talk about three basic aspects of a new modern business education that place the individual being with his attitude and his abilities into the centre and thus delivers the base for a new approach to the development of competence; an approach that is focussed on community and sustainability.

2. Three Characteristics of Franciscan Spirituality

**Paupertas – Evangelical Poverty**

The actual Pope Francis does not get tired of asking for a church which is poor and which at the same time is a church for the poor. Francis of Assisi tried to live as a poor and with the poor. St. Francis also asked for this – and that is, until today, the thorn in the flesh of the Franciscan communities. It is so radical because it demands a change of the heart and attitude, a lived solidarity with the poor, not just running institutions or charity work.

The roots of this understanding of poverty lay in the Bible. The Bible is the source and the guide, the Bible is the measure and the supervisory authority. Therefore poverty according to St. Francis is related to the poverty Jesus Christ was living. The question in this aspect is: Are we nourishing, am I nourishing my daily life, my attitudes, my way of leading or running a business out of a biblical perspective?

The incarnation is for Francis not just a miracle, it is the source of life. There, God made himself totally dependent in a little child. He gave all men an indispensable dignity by becoming human. And he became poor, really poor. That is to be seen in every Eucharist, an act of kenosis and poverty. Therefore evangelical poverty is expression of the incarnation.

Living Evangelical poverty and transferring it to the modern world and the world of business means: being open and dispossessed of everything, not just regarding material things, but also regarding prejudices the judgment of people including their hidden skills / competences. It is a deep attitude of loving the others, constituting their dignity, their needs and their lives. Without love there is no real leadership possible. Respect is the logical consequence, but also participation and delegation, because being poor and following the poor Jesus Christ includes the capacity to let go, to let others developing their strength and capacities for the good of all. Poverty is not a value in itself, Evangelical poverty is.

**Minoritas - Serving instead of ruling**

Every time when Francis was asked who he and his companions are or what they are standing for he used to give two answers: The first one was that he said: We are simply those who try to live according to the Gospel. His second answer was: We are the lesser brothers, the

---

Friars Minor. Minoritas - being a lesser brother and sister - is about giving up the power and status connected with power and certain positions. Br. Agidius, one of the first companions of St. Francis, a simple farmer but full of wisdom, even said, that that means to lie at the feet of the world. No positions, no VIP's, no reputation or success to rest on – that is minoritas. It has to do with devotion and following Jesus Christ, living the ‘pro-existence’ he is showing in the washing of the feet of his disciples: full of tenderness, touching a very intimate and sensitive part of their body, forcing to trust him. This aspect goes hand in hand with poverty it is the logical consequence of the evangelical poverty. Therefore Francis calls the heads of the communities ‘minister’, the servant. Being a minister is a service for the community, not a position. It is the basic attitude for a re-defined position of leadership. Leadership is about serving and being for the others by addressing personnel and organizational aspects and also – according to the structures of the Franciscan leadership dimensions: leadership without taking one’s shoes is impossible. Being led by others, leading yourself and knowing that there is a source of life which is guiding you that means to live minoritas.

Fraternitas: being related

St. Francis did not start a religious order. That has never been his intention. But his radical change of life convinced many others that they had to do the same. They wanted to join him in renewing the church (es), being with the lepers and begging for food for their daily life. Very soon it was a community, a fraternity of men longing for peace, justice, longing for God. When Francis sent out the brothers for preaching, he never sent them alone, at least together with another one. Franciscan life, even when it is contemplative, is a life in community and fraternity. The rule for hermitages is a good example for this: Two brothers are responsible for those who want to contemplate for a while, they should be like Mary and Martha in the Gospel and care for the others like mothers do. Being connected in this sense is being with the others, openness and contemplation, in a culture of contemplation.

From this it follows that Franciscan life and Franciscan leadership is about family, relatives so to say about the whole organization and ‘being connected’. As a result of the discussion on secularization and its impacts on religious life, especially on Franciscan life, at the end the participants of a large symposium in Munich in 2013 were sure about one thing: The greatest challenge of the secularization for the lesser brothers and sisters is to offer the world and the people the possibility of being with them. Being with, that is the strategy of evangelization, of a life as a religious today, in the world, with the world and with its people, not by fleeing the world, living behind long and high walls, trying to live a contemplative life. That is only possible, for Franciscans, in the world and with the world, contemplating what is going on and offering hospitality and community in a world where individualism and pluralism are big issues.

3. Today’s requirements for an effective business education

When developing new modules or courses of study, there is one crucial question to be asked first: “What should students be able to do afterwards?” This implies a serious discussion with the actual perspective of learning and objective of the thematic field. The needs of students and the requirement of different stakeholders are to be considered. Exactly this integrative

thought is necessary if the three Franciscan characterizations presented in chapter two shall be implemented in business and leadership training. In addition, there is a further important question: Why should the Franciscan philosophy be a part of modern business education anyway?

Therefore, we need to take a look at the changes in business and especially the leadership world. Today leadership is no longer just a function that is defined by a professional education of the leader and a certain number of employees. The complexity of work, the amount of information required and the arrangement of relations are instead defined as the core areas of leadership today. Employees expect more and more to be involved in the decision-making process or even expect to receive a critical feedback for example. The well-being of the employees, social responsibility and sustainable behaviour are characteristics of a new level of leadership. Accordingly empathy, appreciation, authenticity, humility and a high level of social competence as the base of good leadership and management get more important and thus gain importance for the education of management and leadership. The focus is on the leader’s attitude and becomes the most important aspect for a new program of competence development, which is based on soft skills like the Franciscan values.

With regard to this leadership research has been discussing different theories that are assigned to the ethical dimension or the light side of leadership for some years. In principle, research assumes that at least in the long run only an ethical leadership and corresponding concepts can be a sustained and become a successful kind of leadership. Here an understanding of leadership is assumed that is fundamentally harmonious. There is usually no conflict between the leader’s responsibility for employees and success. In this context the Harvard-professor Barbara Kellermann defines the light side of leadership as follows: “We presume that to be a leader is to do good and to be good.” This integrates responsible behaviour (to do good) and special personal skills.

Concepts of the light side of leadership are inter alia the authentic, the spiritual, the shared or the servant leadership. The servant Leadership-concept according to Robert Greenleaf for example places the benefit of the people led over the self-interest of the leader. The servant leader supports the appreciation, the development of the people and the community which serves the individual and the welfare of the community. The challenge here is similar to the idea of the Franciscan approach: To transfer the soft and maybe even harmonious contents into the professional practice.

4. Franciscan Spirituality – the connection to business education

---

4 Jochanan Eynikel, Personal growth as a source of leadership, in: (vkw Denktank, No. 70/02, 2014).
It is important for a management education on the basis of Franciscan spirituality to get into a dialogue that allows developing a common goal. The continuation of the community (organization) on the basis of the own core values (profile of the organization) could possibly be such a goal. The idea of a new concept for a reflected business education of managers is to connect the value-reflected Franciscan behaviour with the demands of daily business in an integrative way. Here again “being connected” could provide orientation.

To come up with a practical approach, it is quite necessary to combine human thinking and behaviour with actions. Pope Francis emphasizes in his apostolic writing the lack of a reflected attitude in today’s (political) top level. He indicates that this lack of attitude leads to the loss of the ability to perceive different perspectives which are important for making sustainable and ethical decisions. The question thus arises as to how to sensitize to a value reflected attitude and transfer it to business doing? Or how is it possible to make Franciscan values a module of personnel competence?

The “Bochum model of competence” concerning the development of the ability to act might provide a framework for that connection. The core idea of the model is the integrative connection of capability, volition and permission. The model describes the interaction of the ability to act (capability), where it is understood as the ability to apply and automate routines alongside actual knowledge, and readiness to act (volition). Both aspects are closely tied to the personal characteristics of an individual, to the level on which even Franciscan spirituality with poverty, minority and fraternity can be represented as a component of action competence. For practical action competence, however, only a person’s organizational, technological and social integration (permission) decides to what extent the individual action competence actually comes to fruition. On this basis there is the idea to sensitize people for an attitude which considers human needs as well as the structures of daily business. At this point we have got a frame for the transfer of the fraternal Franciscan economy to business doing. The love to others, the willingness to help the other in his action, to support his potentials by calling his motivation in a positive sense of the Gospel and God are leadership skills which can influence the employability of the whole organization.

5. Resume

In all: Franciscan spirituality based on evangelical poverty with its two siblings, minoritas and fraternitas, is about following the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Therefore, not the success or wish to have success is the striving and driving issue, but to live with and in certain attitudes, to live a deep solidarity and to create a living community because of love. ‘Living evangelical poverty in fraternity and being a minor’ — that is the challenging title for a Franciscan lifestyle. Pope Francis has not just chosen the name Francis but by choosing the name he chose a program, this program — for himself and for the church. That is a radical shift with many of the traditions and usual way of thoughts in the church. It is also a radical attempt to take the Gospel and the Christian tradition seriously.

The three pillars of the Franciscan spirituality are closely connected to each other. If you talk about poverty and also about the connection between poverty and peace you have to talk about the minoritas, being lesser. It is in the middle between paupertas and fraternitas, it is the center. A new model of economy, the ‘fraternal economy’, could be, according to D. Couturier, a social virtue of international compassion. “The relational economy originates in a theology of abundance, in the Franciscan insight that God is good, all good, supremely good, all the time and to everyone.” The consequences are: transparency, equity, solidarity and austerity. A basic and ongoing conversion is necessary, towards a life with the poor, with the understanding of a deep connectedness, going hand in hand with responsibility, especially for the poorest of the poor. So this attitude can be used to connect to recent questions of managing acting. Especially leadership education is looking for more empathy, appreciation and further soft skills to manage the rising

---

field of complex, virtual and intercultural relationships in daily business. The main subject will be to transfer the meaningful Franciscan tradition into business doing.

But is it necessary to take the overall conditions of management action into consideration and to work out some starting points for a dialogue with the Franciscan contents. The model of competence with the interaction of capability, volition and permission on the base of personal skills and values can represent such a framework. For it is only with a lived (Franciscan) fraternal economy that one can profit in the long term!

Prof. P. Dr. Thomas Dienberg OFMCap

Born 1964 in Bocholt/Germany
Member of the Capuchin order, priest – for 15 years member of the province council
Responsible for formation since 1991
Doctorate in Theology of Spirituality (studied in Muenster, Nijmegen, Wien and St. Bonaventure/New York)
Master of Organizational Management (Ruhr-Universitaet Bochum)
Professor for Theology of Spirituality at Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Münster (PTH) since 2002
President of the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule (PTH) from 2002 - 2014
Visiting professor at the Antonianum/Rome, several teaching positions worldwide
Main subjects: Asceticism, Mysticism, Franciscan Spirituality, Spirituality and literature, Spirituality and Management

Markus Warode

Born 1976 in Bochum/Germany
Social Scientist (Diploma), Work Scientist (Diploma) (Ruhr Universitaet Bochum)
Business Coach, Consultant, Lecturer
Managing Director of the Institute for Church, Management and Spirituality at Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Münster (PTH)
Main subjects: Spirituality and Management, Franciscan Spirituality and Leadership, (Value based) Human Resource and Organizational Management