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Francis influence 'gaining through social media'

by Thomas C. Fox

The Francis Chronicles

Tom Watson, a *Forbes* magazine contributor who focuses on technology and social change, is the latest commentator to wake up to the Pope Francis phenom.

Under the headline "Social Media Star: Peace, Love and a New Understanding," he writes:

"Pope Francis -- or @pontifex to his Twitter followers -- has quickly become a social media phenomenon, adding five million followers since his installation six months ago. He is gaining more than 4,000 followers a day and knocking at the door of three million followers for his English language feed alone. He's got more than eight million total on Twitter, tweeting in Latin, German, Polish, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian and Arabic."

He notes that Francis' tweets get retweeted on an average of 22,000 times, then continues:

"That 22,000 retweets (across all the languages) for every short message the Pope sends out tends to get the social marketers and cause campaigners attention. That's the kind of engagement with a wide audience of influencers that can help change opinion. Of course, the Pope's widely reported remarks on gay people and atheists -- and even the possibility of priests marrying -- have shaken up the public perception of the modern Papacy, no small feat for a 78-year-old Jesuit. Unquestionably, Francis is a rising star on social media ? especially among the politically active, social cause crowd. And the Pope's own Syrian 'intervention' was both widely shared and obviously influential."

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