

Foreword

A Seamless Ethic for Siblings All: The Hope of *Fratelli Tutti*

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I AM DELIGHTED TO contribute to this first global commentary on a papal encyclical. *Fratelli Tutti* has put forth a powerful vision of worldwide sisterhood and brotherhood, and I am so glad to see the truly global discussion taking place in these pages, provoked by the vision of Pope Francis.

Catholic social doctrine, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin wrote, is based on two inseparable truths about the human person:

Human life is both sacred and social. Because we esteem human life as sacred, we have a duty to protect and foster it at all stages of development, from conception to death, and in all circumstances. Because we acknowledge that human life is also social, we must develop the kind of societal environment that protects and fosters its development.¹

Appreciating the wisdom and relevance of this teaching, we continue his legacy. His second successor as archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Blase Cupich, has enriched Bernardin's ethical teaching with this explicit emphasis:

The Church is calling for a consistent ethic of solidarity that aims at making sure no one, from the first moment of life to

1. Bernardin, "Address for the National Consultation," 29.

natural death, from the wealthiest community to our poorest neighbourhoods, is excluded from the table of life.²

“I came so that they might have life,” declared Jesus, “and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, NABRE). Pope St. Paul VI used the expression “integral human development” to convey the idea of life in abundance, life to the full, the flourishing of human life in salvation history.³ “Integral” because the sacred and the social imply each other, and because the human and creation are completely interconnected (as *Laudato Si*’ spelled out). So, ours is a multifaceted mission on earth: to care for one another, for we are all sibling offspring of God, and to care for our common home. “Integral Human Development” is the name of the Vatican’s dicastery where I serve.

Please note: there are several related and even synonymous terms at work here—sacred, seamless, social, solidarity, consistent, inclusive, integral. Let them help us to pay closer attention, open our minds and hearts, broaden our horizons, and move us toward various relevant frontiers. In the background, I make use of the “see-judge-act” methodology that has become widespread in Catholic social analysis. First, understand the issues in their multifaceted complexity; next, affirm a resolution consistent with one’s values and principles; and then identify concrete paths forward to commit to.

Fratelli Tutti is our primary text of reference,⁴ seeking to render our church’s pastoral mission, solidarity, and ethics as inclusive as creation and redemption.

Common Origin / Common Dignity / Siblings All

“The Book of Job sees our origin in the one Creator as the basis of certain common rights: ‘Did not He who made me in the womb also make him [the slave]? And did not the same One fashion us [both] in the womb?’”⁵

St. John reflected: “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are” (1 John 3:1, NABRE).

From the Gospels, from the apostles, from the early writings of the church fathers to today’s encyclicals and exhortations, the church’s moral and social doctrine develops to protect human dignity and promote a more adequate understanding of the human person. It begins with fully

2. Winters, “Cupich.” Cf. Winters, “Cardinal Cupich Points.”

3. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 14–17.

4. Cf. Czerny and Barone, *Siblings All*.

5. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 58 (hereafter cited in text as *FT*), quoting Job 31:15; Job bases a slave’s claim to justice on creation common to both freeman and slave.

acknowledging that we are created by God, are children of God, and are made in the image and likeness of God.

In the Gospels, when he gives us the Lord's Prayer, Christ instructs us to address God with the familial word *abba*—a name even more intimate and informal than our word “father.” The Sermon on the Mount encourages us to regard each other as “children of God.” The Acts of the Apostles depicts the community of first Christians as sibling believers in a family wherein all was shared according to need. St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians continues in this vein, describing us as siblings in the family of God, united as a mystical body.

The recent *Document on Human Fraternity* opens with: “In the name of God, who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters, to fill the earth and make known the values of goodness, love and peace . . .”⁶ So we are born not in isolation but as siblings in God's family, not self-sufficient but with gifts and obligations, called to care and share but free to sin, members of one human family and indeed one mystical body.

A Flawed and Deteriorating Anthropology

But over and over humans have acted as if to deny our common origin, dignity, and siblinghood, and continue to do so. Tragically, unjustly, and acting contrary to life, the momentum of our age frustrates integral human development and neglects the divinely appointed role to care for our common home. We act against the sacredness of human life, and against solidarity with one another and with creation.

At its core, many of the contradictions that our present age poses for integral human development turn on erroneous understandings of the human person: flawed anthropology. For one hundred and thirty years, Catholic social teaching has been trying to correct this flawed and corrupted anthropology.

Let's go back to the first social encyclical. In *Rerum Novarum*, written in 1891, Pope Leo XIII referred to the various classes of society, foreseeing their being “united in the bonds of friendship, but also in those of sibling love” in an anticipation of *Fratelli Tutti*:

They will understand and feel that all men are children of the same common Father, who is God; that all have alike the same last end, which is God Himself, who alone can make either men or angels absolutely and perfectly happy; that each and all are

6. Francis and Al-Tayyeb, “Document on Human Fraternity.” Cf. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 285.

redeemed and made sons of God, by Jesus Christ, “the first-born among many brethren” (Rom 8:17); that the blessings of nature and the gifts of grace belong to the whole human race in common, and that from none except the unworthy is withheld the inheritance of the kingdom of Heaven.⁷

In 1931, in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope Pius XI called this corrupted understanding of the human person a “poisoned spring.”⁸ He meant the idea—associated with libertarians at that time and with today’s neoliberals—that the right ordering of economic life should be left to free market competition. For Pius, this represented an “evil individualistic spirit.”

In 1967, Pope St. Paul VI similarly addressed the problem in his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, and even more directly in his 1971 apostolic letter, *Octogesima Adveniens* in which he recalled that “at the very root of philosophical liberalism is an erroneous affirmation of the autonomy of the individual in his activity, his motivation and the exercise of his liberty.”⁹ While exalting economic efficiency to the point of dominating all other values, individual autonomy was attractive as a defense against totalitarian tendencies.

Pope St. John Paul II made the crucial point that, while private property is legitimate and valid, the right to it must always be subordinated to the universal destination of goods, the notion that the goods of the earth are given by God to all persons. Pope St. John Paul refers to this as a “social mortgage”:

It is necessary to state once more the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine: the goods of this world are originally meant for all. The right to private property is valid and necessary, but it does not nullify the value of this principle. Private property, in fact, is under a “social mortgage,” which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods.¹⁰

And indeed, in *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis returns to this theme, arguing that the right to private property should be considered a secondary natural right, subordinated to the universal destination of goods.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI also contributed to our understanding of Catholic social doctrine. He worried about the effects of globalization

7. Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 25.

8. Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 88.

9. Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 35.

10. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42.

on human bonds: “As society becomes ever more globalised, it makes us neighbours but does not make us siblings,”¹¹ he noted. He goes on to list some of the concrete problems of globalization:

The global market has stimulated first and foremost, on the part of rich countries, a search for areas in which to outsource production at low cost with a view to reducing the prices of many goods, increasing purchasing power and thus accelerating the rate of development in terms of greater availability of consumer goods for the domestic market. Consequently, the market has prompted new forms of competition between States as they seek to attract foreign businesses to set up production centres, by means of a variety of instruments, including favourable fiscal regimes and deregulation of the labour market. These processes have led to a downsizing of social security systems as the price to be paid for seeking greater competitive advantage in the global market, with consequent grave danger for the rights of workers, for fundamental human rights and for the solidarity associated with the traditional forms of the social State.¹²

Over time, as church, we grow into understanding human nature, leaving behind flawed anthropologies that were used to justify slavery, the oppression of women, etc. Catholic social teaching at its best is an honest effort to keep on improving our appreciation of our nature, setting misrecognitions aside. We seek to accompany society and its evolving political cultures in the same task: holding up a mirror, examining in the light of scriptures, calling to repentance, and trying again. It is therefore with considerable humility that we claim the church as an expert in humanity.¹³

Good Anthropology Comes First

This same concern with addressing flawed anthropology infuses *Fratelli Tutti*. The title of chapter 3, “Envisaging and Engendering an Open World,” expresses the goal of the encyclical’s thinking. The starting point is this anthropological affirmation that quotes *Gaudium et Spes*: “Human beings are so made that they cannot live, develop and find fulfilment except ‘in the sincere gift of self to others’” (FT 87).¹⁴

11. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 19.

12. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 25.

13. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 13—“esperta in umanità,” but the official English translation says, “The Church, which has long experience in human affairs . . .”

14. See also FT 111: “The human person, with his or her inalienable rights, is by

These words from *Gaudium et Spes*, comments John Paul II,

can be said to sum up the whole of Christian anthropology: that theory and practice, based on the Gospel, in which man discovers himself as belonging to Christ and discovers that in Christ he is raised to the status of a child of God, and so understands better his own dignity as man, precisely because he is the subject of God's approach and presence, the subject of the divine condescension, which contains the prospect and the very root of definitive glorification.¹⁵

Fratelli Tutti goes on to explicate how the “gift of self” is the path to fullness:

Nor can they fully know themselves apart from an encounter with other persons: “I communicate effectively with myself only insofar as I communicate with others.” No one can experience the true beauty of life without relating to others, without having real faces to love. This is part of the mystery of authentic human existence. “Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails.” (FT 87)¹⁶

“Authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension,” including the transcendent dimension, and the person cannot be sacrificed for the sake of attaining a particular good, whether this be economic or social, individual or collective.¹⁷

For Francis, self-giving, the continuous giving of self, is what grounds and orients integral human development. When does a person fully experience his or her dignity as a creature loved by God and acknowledged by humankind? This happens when a person reaches the existential point of freely and consciously opting for the gift of self to others and for others.¹⁸ This depends not only upon “external” conditions (the right to food, housing,

nature open to relationship. Implanted deep within us is the call to transcend ourselves through an encounter with others.”

15. John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 59.

16. In FT 87, Francis is quoting Gabriel Marcel, *Du refus à l'invocation*; see also Francis, “Angelus.”

17. Benedict XVI, “Educating Young People,” 3.

18. Similar points are emerging in Black theologies of struggle: dignity is not found in a static sense as apprehension but rather experienced and understood in the act of struggling against indignities others suffer and in the gift of self in solidarity. Cf. Lloyd, *Black Dignity*.

work, healthcare, education, social services, etc.) but also inner ones (personal maturity always seeking to get beyond narcissistic self-centeredness).

Because our present age militates against this Christian understanding of the human person, it therefore fails to promote authentic integral human development and instead pushes so many fake models, so many deformations, so much pessimism and “why bother?” Pope Francis takes sharp aim at the ideology in which self-interest and indifference are not only tolerated but justified and indeed imposed, solidarity is sidelined as optional, the common good reduced to an abstraction, and people deprived of their proper hope. To counter these tendencies, it is urgent for the church to proclaim to each one of us, that it is in making a gift of myself to others that the meaning of all that I am is at stake and becomes real.

“It Is Irsome When the Question of Ethics Is Raised” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 203)

In 2009, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict correctly interpreted the global financial crisis (we’re still living with the fallout) as a crisis of ethics. Four years later, a few months after becoming pope, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis robustly rejected the neoliberal claim that the free market alone can foster human flourishing:

In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime, all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.¹⁹

19. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 54.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis condemns a culture of relativism, which “drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects.”²⁰ He is deeply concerned with what he calls integral ecology, the idea that how we treat nature and our fellow human beings are interconnected.

Soon after, in possibly some of his strongest remarks delivered on the global economy, in a speech to popular movements in Bolivia in 2015, Pope Francis denounced the current economic system: “The first task is to put the economy at the service of peoples,” he says. “Human beings and nature must not be at the service of money. Let us say NO to an economy of exclusion and inequality, where money rules, rather than service. That economy kills. That economy excludes. That economy destroys Mother Earth.”²¹

This is a strong indictment. And once again, this exclusionary stance comes from a flawed anthropology. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis criticizes this disordered anthropology of individualism, which leads to a distortion of the idea of liberty. To quote the Holy Father: “Liberty becomes nothing more than a condition for living as we will, completely free to choose to whom or what we will belong, or simply to possess or exploit. This shallow understanding has little to do with the richness of a liberty directed above all to love” (*FT* 103). Moreover, “individualism does not make us more free, more equal, more fraternal. The mere sum of individual interests is not capable of generating a better world for the whole human family” (*FT* 105).

Taking direct aim at the neoliberal ideology, Francis declares:

The marketplace, by itself, cannot resolve every problem, however much we are asked to believe this dogma of neoliberal faith. Whatever the challenge, this impoverished and repetitive school of thought always offers the same recipes. Neoliberalism simply reproduces itself by resorting to the magic theories of “spillover” or “trickle”—without using the name—as the only solution to societal problems. There is little appreciation of the fact that the alleged “spillover” does not resolve the inequality that gives rise to new forms of violence threatening the fabric of society. (*FT* 168)

Succinctly bringing together all the dimensions:

The right of some to free enterprise or market freedom cannot supersede the rights of peoples and the dignity of the poor, or, for that matter, respect for the natural environment, for “if we

20. Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 123.

21. Francis, “Address to Second World Meeting.”