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FRATERNITY, FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND POLITICS IN THE LIGHT OF THE ENCYCLICAL *FRATELLI TUTTI*

Summary: Based on the dignity and intrinsic sociability of the human person, this article asserts the importance of fraternity and family relationships in social life and politics. Too many dreams about political integration have been shattered lately, while new walls of aggressive nationalism and isolationism are being built. In this situation, people everywhere feel the need for good politics and for “a healthy injection of family spirit.” (*AL* 183) However, there can be no universal fraternity without good politics “built upon respect for law and frank dialogue between individuals.” (*FT* 196)

Keywords: fraternity, politics, familial relationships, *Fratelli tutti*, populism.

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This article** studies the importance of fraternity and family relationships in social life and politics. Pope Francis recognizes that, in our world, many dreams about political integration have been shattered lately while new walls of aggressive nationalism and isolationism have been built. (*FT* 10) In this situation, people everywhere feel the need for good politics and “a healthy injection of family spirit”. (*AL* 183)

The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* takes up this need and invites all to promote fraternity and social friendship in our technological and globalized society that

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** Index of initials used in this article: AAS = Acta Apostolicae Sedis; *AL* = *Amoris Laetitia*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation; CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church; CV = Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, Encyclical letter; DFH = Francis; Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, Document on Human Fraternity. For world peace and living together; *FT* = *Fratelli tutti*. Encyclical letter; *InsJp2* = Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II; *LS* = *Laudato si'*. Encyclical letter; PL = Patrologia latina; PUA = Pontificia Università Antonianum; PUL = Pontificia Università Lateranense; OR = L'Osservatore Romano.

“makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers”. (*CV* 19)¹ We must overcome the current libertarian ideology, which relegates the affectionate “I-you” relationships to the private sphere. “Politics too must make room for a tender love of others” (*FT* 194) and not be subordinated to economics.

We have been created in the image of the Trinitarian God and so we are intrinsically social beings. Therefore, to develop fully, we need to go beyond ourselves in love, both at personal and social levels. In fact, social friendship is essential for us to achieve a “healthy and open” community life. Without it, we cannot “experience the true beauty of life”. (*FT* 87)

The first part of this article analyzes the Christian concept of fraternity, putting it in relation to other contrasting perspectives. In the second part, we will focus on the fraternal and disinterested relationships that must characterize our relationships at all levels. In the third part, we will focus on good politics according to *Fratelli tutti*².

1. The concept of fraternity

The Enlightenment and many political theories of today have difficulty reconciling fraternity with the principle of individual autonomy³. The French Revolution initially included the word “fraternity” in its motto (“Liberty, equality, fraternity”) to indicate that human beings are equal in dignity, regardless of their lineage or place of origin, as all of them share a common nature. However, the revolutionaries were not capable of establishing firm foundations for a true universalism that could counteract the latent confrontation among social groups. As a result, this concept was soon left aside, “up to the point of its deletion from the political-economic lexicon”. (Francis, 2017, p. 7) The French revolution conceives brotherhood “as coming from this world, from the similar heredity and nature of all”. (Ratzinger, 1993², part one, 1.4 – Ratzinger, 2005, p. 25–26) Nevertheless, it “differentiated drastically and bloodily between the inner fraternal circle of the revolutionaries and the outer circle of the nonrevolutionaries”. (Ratzinger, 1993², part one, 1.4 – Ratzinger, 2005, p. 25–26)

¹ Pope Francis’ last encyclicals develop the theme of family relationships from complementary perspectives. The human family that *Fratelli tutti* presents is part of the cosmic family promoted by the encyclical *Laudato si’*, because in the common house, we are all related (*FT*) and “everything is related”. (*LS* 142)

² The author has developed these topics further in: Carbajo, 2021a – 2021b.

³ “Un illuminista come Kant vedrebbe la fraternità come un concetto ‘paternalista’, che ferisce il principio dell’autonomia del soggetto, nella misura in cui per riconoscerci tutti fratelli dovremmo riconoscere un Dio padre, e quindi un’autorità superiore”. (Tosi, 2010, p. 535)

Before the French Revolution, this term, with its variations (brotherhood, sisterhood, fraternity), had already been used in the Middle Ages to identify religious and charitable groups. Some associations of craftsmen were also called “confraternities”. (Cf. Eisenbichler, 2019 – Grazzini, 2006) Today, it is still widely used by student associations⁴, religious Orders (cf. Chinazzi, 2010 – Borobio, 2003)⁵ and Masonic groups (cf. Hall, 1978, Ciuffoletti – Moravia, 2010), among others. It is, therefore, a complex concept with many different connotations and often without the universal dimension that it seems to indicate.

Liberalism and Marxism (and their economic models: capitalism and socialism-communism) exclude a real and universal fraternity because they are based on a negative anthropological concept. (John Paul II, 1998, n. 13, p. 1106 – John Paul II, 1998, n. 2–3, p. 874) Marxism coincides with liberalism in relegating gratuitousness to the private sphere, while in the public field the State plans everything. This leads easily to a depersonalizing and paternalist social assistance. At the same time, Marxism divides humanity “into two totally antithetical groups, capital and proletariat, and their embattled dialectic constitutes history (...). Brotherhood toward some involves enmity toward others”. (Ratzinger, 1993, part one, 1.4. – Ratzinger, 2005, p. 26) Fraternity is considered incompatible with the inevitable class struggle and, therefore, it is postponed for the post-revolutionary future, when society will be run by the proletariat. In the meantime, it would only be possible “between ‘comrades’ who share the same exploited and oppressed class condition”⁶.

Self-interest is justified by liberalism as an egalitarian force and brought to economic practice by capitalism⁷. In the economic field, everybody would always act in a logical and self-interested way, and therefore economists could predict human behavior accurately. For example, in trying to construct a rational mechanics of economic behavior, the influential “*Theory of General Economic Equilibrium*” focuses on the “*homo oeconomicus*,” a selfish, utilitarian, predictable individual, so conditioned by economic motivations that he is incapable of establishing fraternal relations in the public sphere. (Ingrao – Israel, 2006, p. 33 – Scitovsky, 2007, p. 23)

The Catholic anthropological conception presents human beings as intrinsically social because they have been created in the image of the Trinitarian

⁴ University student organizations identified as “fraternities” are widespread in the U.S.A. and also in other countries, such as Germany. (Cf. Torbenson – Parks, 2009)

⁵ In Italy: <http://www.confraternite.it/> (access: Dec. 2, 2020).

⁶ “Un marxista definirebbe la fraternità come un concetto che camuffa/nasconde le divisioni irriducibili fra le classi antagoniste. [Nel presente, la fraternità sarebbe possibile soltanto] fra ‘compagni’ che condividono la stessa condizione di classe sfruttata e oppressa, o nella futura società comunista”. (Tosi, 2010, p. 535)

⁷ We use the word “interest” to refer to “selfish interest”.

God. The heavenly Father has created all of us and, therefore, we all are sisters and brothers. Moreover, through baptism, we become God's children fully in the Spirit. Since God is love, only through self-giving relationships we can fully develop our own nature.⁸ Thus, fraternity is seen from a Trinitarian and Christological perspective, going beyond the usual way of understanding it in our society.

The Trinitarian God always pushes us towards fraternity, even when we reject him and cause division among ourselves. The tower of Babel narrative (Gen 11,1-9) is a symbol of human rebellion against God, but it can also be seen as the beginning of the rich diversity of languages and cultures. God transforms that human sin into a blessing, helping us to go back to that unity in diversity that is himself. (Cf. Marty 1990)

1.1. Fraternity and solidarity

Christian fraternity presupposes an attitude of gratuitousness and self-donation. Every human being is seen as a divine gift that must be appreciated in his uniqueness and helped to become oneself fully. "No one is useless and no one is expendable". (FT 215) In this perspective, fraternity goes far beyond the principle of solidarity. A society may have reached a good level of solidarity without ever becoming fraternal. "Fraternity constitutes, at the same time, the complement and the exaltation of the principle of solidarity. Indeed, while solidarity is the principle of social planning that allows the unequal to become equal; fraternity is what allows the equal to be different people. Fraternity allows people who are equal in their essence, dignity, freedom, and their fundamental rights to participate differently in the common good". (Francis, 2017, p. 7)

To underline the fact that every human being is unique and deserves to be treated with respect and attentive care, Pope Benedict preferred to use the expression "principle of fraternity" rather than "principle of solidarity" in chapter 3 of his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*. Pope Francis extensively uses the expression "fraternity" which appears forty-four times in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, twice as many times as the word "solidarity." It is also explicitly placed in relation to the Franciscan tradition, an idea already advanced by some authors⁹.

Pope Francis invites all to initiate processes that can "contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity", (FT 8) so that we can move together toward "a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family". (FT 127) This implies that we must extend to

⁸ "Everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it". (CV 2)

⁹ "È stata la scuola di pensiero francescana a dare alla parola fraternità il significato che essa ha poi conservato nel corso del tempo". (Zamagni, 2007, p. 6)

public and international life the affectionate relationships that we usually attribute to an ideal family life. Our relationship with Sister Mother Earth must also be of this type.

1.2. A theological concept

Christian fraternity expresses “the inalienable dignity of each human person, regardless of origin, race or religion”, (*FT* 39) because we have all been created by the same heavenly Father. Being based on a transcendent vision, it goes beyond other closed and elitist concepts such as, for example, the one proposed by liberal Freemasonry¹⁰. It also overcomes the concept suggested by the Stoics and the Enlightenment that reduces it to a simple social theory. Rather than linking it to a social contract, which regulates the freedom and equality of all, the Christian perspective appeals to a prior covenant that binds us together. “Reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity. This originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, teaching us through the Son what fraternal charity is”. (*CV* 19)

God the Father has freely called us into existence. Therefore, Christian fraternity is not the fruit of a negotiation (*do ut des*), but rather an expression of gratuitousness and reciprocity, self-giving and care.¹¹ It has a transcendent basis and is understood “from above”, from the openness to the Creator.

The Catholic church affirms that all of us have been created by the same heavenly Father and, through baptism, we become God’s children fully in the Spirit¹². Therefore, fraternity gives meaning to freedom and equality, not the other way around. Having experienced God’s loving care for all, the believer embraces universal fraternity and sorority joyfully. Sooner or later he/she may also verify that, in fact, we share the same nature, belong to the same species, are united by common interests and depend on each other, but that verification will not be the main reason for the feeling of being a brother or sister of all.

¹⁰ “We must also remember that liberalism, the heir of the Enlightenment ideology, also created in freemasonry its own highly differentiated inner fraternal group”. (Ratzinger, 1993, part one, 1.4 – Ratzinger, 2005, p. 26)

¹¹ “La *fraternità* è un concetto tipicamente cristiano (...). La parola *fratellanza* invece viene introdotta nel lessico popolare dopo la Rivoluzione Francese. Quindi sono due concetti diversi. Mentre la *fraternità* presuppone una comune origine, la *fratellanza* si basa piuttosto su un comune sentire”. (Zamagni, quoted in Maussier [ed.], 2020, p. 301)

¹² Through the baptism we become fully God’s children in Christ, reinforcing our natural belonging to the Creator of all. (Cf. *CCC* nn. 537, 1250, 1265, 1270, 1996, 1997)

2. Family love and social love

From the Christian perspective, every human action must be an expression of charity. Even politics must be an act of charity through the pursuit of justice. Therefore, the selfless and loving relationships that people enjoy in good family life should also be extended to the public realm.

In our times, however, economies have been built mainly on profit, while politics has been related to corruption, domination and greed. Liberals generally assume that familial relationships must not have a place in the public sphere because they generate emotional dependencies that hinder the efficiency and proper functioning of the economic machinery. Smith, Malthus, Keynes, and many other economists consider that those free, friendly, and non-instrumental relationships, together with ethical values and religious beliefs, should be relegated to the private realm. Therefore, the economist only needs to analyze and foster the extrinsic motivations (utility, interest)¹³. Notwithstanding, these authors also recognize that to function well, the market must be embedded within fair and effective institutions (political sphere) that rely on relationships of trust generated in the private sphere.

In stark contrast to this mentality, the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* includes family relations at the core of public life, stating that “charity is at the heart of every healthy and open society”. (*FT* 184) From its very title, the encyclical unites the concepts of fraternity and social friendship, thus indicating that taking responsibility for the well-being of people in the social, economic, and political realms is an important part of charity. *Amoris laetitia* asserts that “the family itself introduces fraternity into the world [because it gives us the] initial experience of fraternity”. (*AL* 194)

2.1. The desire for true love

In our individualistic society, our innate desire for true love often degenerates into shallow and competitive relationships. Rather than create communion, we simply try to draw attention to ourselves. The illusion of having many friends online may hide a disturbing inability to cultivate familial and deep relationships. “We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: «everything is disposable»”. (*AL* 39)

Pope Francis invites us to accompany and strengthen the “desire for true love” (*AL* 294) that nests in our hearts and that manifests itself, particularly in the parental family. *Amoris laetitia* insists on its importance not only for the

¹³ “Le motivazioni estrinseche (la massimizzazione del profitto o dell’utilità) rafforzano comunque e sempre quelle intrinseche”. (Zamagni, 2007, p. 55)

family but also for the entire society. “Social love, as a reflection of the Trinity, is what truly unifies the spiritual meaning of the family and its mission to others, for it makes present the kerygma in all its communal imperatives. The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world”. (*AL* 324)

Benedict XVI had already affirmed that “charity is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine”. (*CV* 2) It is not only the principle of micro-relations in the private sphere, “but also of social, economic and political” relationships. (*CV* 2)

2.2. Social love

The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* organizes the whole discourse around fraternal love and insists on its importance in politics. Love cannot be reduced to paternalism or self-centered realization. (*FT* 182) It is social and political because “it calls for an effective process of historical change that embraces everything”. (*FT* 164) Indeed, love is the human potential that most influences society. “The principal energy that moves the human soul, he said, is love. Human nature, in its deepest essence, consists of loving. Ultimately, a single task is entrusted to every human being: to learn to like and to love, sincerely, authentically and freely”¹⁴.

Unfortunately, “instances of a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism are on the rise”. (*FT* 11) We are becoming increasingly aggressive because “other persons come to be viewed simply as obstacles”. (*FT* 222)

Family relationships are also essential in the economic sphere (cf. Carbajo, 2021c) since they encourage collaboration and enhance productivity. Benedict XVI taught that “the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity”. (*CV* 36) In fact, love is the main force and destiny of integral human development. (*FT* 169) “The many economic entities that draw their origin from religious and lay initiatives demonstrate that this is concretely possible”. (*CV* 37)

3. Politics of tenderness

Fraternity and family relationships should inform “a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good”, (*FT* 154) inclusive (*FT* 190),

¹⁴ William of Saint-Thierry, *De Natura et dignitate amoris*, 1 (*PL* 184, 379), quoted in: Benedict XVI, 2009b, p. 1.

fruitful, and shaped by charity. (FT 180) When embedded in social love, politics becomes constitutive of our being Christians.

In the face of the dangerous abuses related to populism, the Pope reminds us that “politics too must make room for a tender love of others” (FT 194) and must help us to seek together points of encounter based on a legitimate and enriching diversity. We need to recover gentleness in human relations and also in the political sphere. In other words, we need to promote fraternity and family relationships in the public realm.

3.1. One of the highest forms of charity

Good politics places the human person at the center, serves the common good, and is based on social friendship. It relies on “the reserves of goodness present in human hearts”, (FT 196) seeks dialogue, and creates “processes of encounter”. (217) Everyone must be given “a chance to contribute”. (FT 162)

We need to renew our political engagement and revalue politics as public service, so that people who are capable, honest, and generous can feel moved to dedicate themselves to it. The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* invites us to see politics as “a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good”. (FT 180)

The Pope recalls popular leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, the Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi, who truly inspire, unite, and interpret the feelings of people, (FT 159) promote the common good, and protect the Earth, each in his own sphere of action.

3.2. Populism

Unfortunately, “today, in many countries, hyperbole, extremism and polarization have become political tools” (FT 15) instead of focusing on discussing long-term projects that favor society and respect different cultures. (FT 155) Confrontation is directly sought to manipulate people and disqualify political adversaries. “Lack of concern for the vulnerable can hide behind a populism that exploits them demagogically for its own purposes, or a liberalism that serves the economic interests of the powerful”. (FT 155)

Populism reduces politics to “slick marketing techniques” (FT 15), forgets the common good, and maximizes confrontation, fear, and distrust. Populist politicians degrade people to a mass that they can captivate and instrumentalize to perpetuate themselves in power and satisfy their own selfish interests. Thus, they annul the notion of people, manipulate culture, and endanger democracy. “At other times, they seek popularity by appealing to the basest and most selfish inclinations of certain sectors of the population”. (FT 159)

Conclusion

Based on the dignity and intrinsic sociability of the human person, this article has asserted the urgent need for good politics, dialogue, and “a healthy injection of family spirit”. (AL 183) We must embrace a culture of encounter that fosters fraternity and family relationships at all levels. This implies “a change of heart, attitudes and lifestyles”. (FT 166)

Life “is the art of encounter”. (FT 215) We must “be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone”. (FT 216) The Pope reminds us that “the right attitude is neither a forced uniformity nor a conciliatory syncretism”. (Francis, 2019, p. 8) Dialogue must be encouraged, considering the specific identity of each person, community, religion, and culture. We also need good politics “built upon respect for law and frank dialogue between individuals”. (FT 196)

Fratelli tutti “takes up and develops some of the great themes” (FT 5) raised in the document on Human Fraternity (DFH) signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. (FT 285) For example, that “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters”. (FT 5) The role of faith is also mentioned, which “leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved”. (DFH, preface)

The openness to universal fraternity should not be confused with the false universalism of those who do not love their own people or do not accept their own roots. It is also unacceptable to promote homogenization to obtain particularistic benefits. The Pope reminds us that “each of us is fully a person when we are part of a people; at the same time, there are no peoples without respect for the individuality of each person”. (FT 182)

At the beginning of the first chapter, *Fratelli tutti* indicates some great social dreams that have been broken due to a lack of collaboration. The encyclical wants to inspire “a new vision of fraternity and social friendship” (FT 6) and invites all to participate in it. “Let us dream, then, as a single human family, (...) each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all”. (FT 8)

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Braterstwo, relacje rodzinne i polityka w świetle encykliki *Fratelli tutti*

Streszczenie: Opierając się na godności i nieodłącznej relacyjnej naturze osoby ludzkiej, autor ten podkreśla znaczenie relacji braterskich i rodzinnych w życiu społecznym i polityce. Zbyt wiele marzeń o integracji politycznej zostało ostatnio zburzonych, budując w zamian nowe mury agre-

sywnego nacjonalizmu i izolacjonizmu. W tej sytuacji ludzie na całym świecie odczuwają potrzebę dobrej polityki i „potężnego zastrzyku ducha rodzinnego” (AL 183). W rzeczywistości nie może być powszechnego braterstwa bez dobrej polityki, która „opiera się na prawie i na lojalnym dialogu między stronami” (FT 196).

Słowa kluczowe: braterstwo, polityka, relacje rodzinne, *Fratelli tutti*, populizm.

