

## INDIVIDUALISM HAS FAILED, FRATERNITY WILL SAVE US

**From the "common home" to be guarded and protected (theme of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*) to *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis's gaze extends to "all of us" who inhabit this world, our common home.** The encyclical represents a large, varied, complex diptych, rich in themes, dominated and enriched by some key expressions: we live in a world "without a common route"; the pandemic has highlighted and aggravated injustices and inequalities. "In today's world, the feelings of belonging to the same mankind are weakening, while the dream of building justice and peace together seems a utopia of other times. We see how comfortable, cold and globalized indifference dominates, the daughter of a profound disillusionment that lies behind the deception of an illusion: believing that we can be omnipotent and forget that we are all in the same boat " (par. 30).

In *Laudato Si'* one of the key expressions was: "Everything is connected". From a conceptual point of view, Pope Francis has developed the term "ecology" not in the generic meaning of some "green" concern, but in the deeper meaning of a complex system that finds an explanation in the relationship of the individual parts to each other and to the all. In *Fratelli Tutti* the view is extended to the theme of fraternity: what is distant concerns us. The gaze of fraternity is never shortsighted. It is evangelical and human, but also far more realistic than many "scientific" or "concrete" political ideologies. The encyclical underlines that everyone is the guardian of justice and peace: they are not accomplished by themselves - perhaps through the market - once and for all: they must be cultivated over and over again, individually and collectively. There is a specific task of institutions in building and supporting justice and peace within nations and among peoples. Nobody can be a mere spectator. The craftsmanship of peace is everyone's task: we must be more daring against war; if so many can make war, many more must work as peacemakers. Hence the definitive condemnation of war as an instrument of government and order, both at a national and international level. Including the 'economic' wars, often disguised and hidden, but not less violent. In this reading key, the use of the death penalty is also overcome, because it legitimizes the presumption of being able to be the absolute masters of the life of other people (which is the supreme crime) and prejudicially takes away from life the time of its due redemption (which 'must' be requested and made possible).

To the denunciation of individualism and fragmentation, subservient to a vision of priority of individual interests, the Pope

counterposes a strong affirmation of the primacy of fraternity, universal fraternity, which concerns all peoples. And here it is developed one of the fruitful analyzes of the text: the examination of what "popular" really means as opposed to "populism". Calling someone a "populist" today means devaluing and manipulating a concept - that of "people" - which is at the basis of the concept of democracy itself, "government of the people" in its etymology. Populism "changes into someone's ability to attract consensus in order to politically exploit the culture of the people, under any ideological sign, at the service of their personal project and their stay in power. Other times it aims to accumulate popularity by fomenting the lower and selfish inclinations of certain sectors of the population. This is aggravated when it becomes, in gross or subtle forms, a subjugation of institutions and of legality" (paragraph 159). An attitude already known - and criticized - under the name of "demagogy": which currently returns in an aggravated form, no longer just an excess of rhetorical and communicative artifice, but a real political and institutional ideology.

In the vision of Pope Francis, inspired to the Argentine "theology of the people", "the category of people, in which a positive evaluation of community and cultural ties is intrinsic, is usually rejected by individualistic liberal visions, in which society is considered a mere sum of coexisting interests. They speak of respect for freedoms, but without the root of a common narrative "(paragraph 163). And the "popular movements", to the extent that they aggregate large and marginalized sectors around concrete political proposals, can give that extra soul to traditional politics and international organizations, inviting us to abandon the logic of fragmentation and the division of power. In a few words: it is a way out of the logic of "waste" that would condemn billions of human beings to marginalization and insignificance. "The world society has serious structural shortcomings that cannot be solved by merely occasional patches or quick fixes. There are things that need to be changed with a fundamental resetting and major transformations" (paragraph 179).

Therefore "everyone is fully a person when they belong to a people, and at the same time there is no true people without respect for each person. People and person are correlative terms. However, today there is an attempt to reduce people to individuals, easily dominated by powers that aim at interests of pure manipulation and outright corruption. Good politics seeks ways of building communities at the different levels of social life, in order to rebalance and reorient globalization to avoid its disintegrating effects" (paragraph 182).

Here we find the concrete and qualifying aspects of the text - one for all: the need to globalize the most essential human rights - starting with the solution to the problem of hunger in the world.

But what is the foundation of Pope Francis' vision? First of all, the extension to the couplet from the encyclical *Laudato Si'* to *Fratelli Tutti*, putting St. Francis at the center with his vision of the cosmos and humanity based on the Gospel message. And as a solid foundation we find the repetition of the parable of the Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke: the other - anyone - is my neighbor. The 'scandal' is that the Samaritan - the excluded, the worshipper of idols for the pious Jews - is the only one who stops and comes to the aid of the man attacked and abandoned in the street by brigands. Today according to that model, the Catholic Church reaffirms the universal duty to take care of one another. To "get close" to others, starting with the "half dead", the weakest. It is not surprising to witness the scandal of worldly powers and interests: even within religions and within Christianity itself. Pope Francis' response is equally direct and punctual: the evangelical appeal must be vigorously accepted, exemplary and publicly from all religious worlds: starting with those of the great historical religions. On this objective, the encyclical displays the strong signs of this convergence. Pope Francis wrote at the beginning of it that he received inspiration from Patriarch Bartholomew on environmental issues - having as a model the Abu Dhabi Declaration (February 2019) on Universal Brotherhood.

The final picture represents a universal - not generic - and renewed call for dialogue to unite and build, which makes all social actors converge and ally - from the media, no longer divisive, to politicians, economic and financial organizations, international organizations - aware that not only everything is connected but above all: what is far away concerns us and therefore everything concerns us.

The encyclical is enriched with a series of dazzling ideas to read carefully, especially with regard to the decisive rehabilitation of politics from its business and propaganda degradation: "politics is nobler than appearances, marketing, various forms of media make-up. All this sows nothing but division, enmity and a bleak skepticism unable to appeal to a common project. Thinking about the future, on certain days the questions must be: "What's the point? What am I really aiming to?" Because, after a few years, reflecting on one's own past, the questions will not be: "How many approved me? How many voted for me? How many had a positive image of me?". The questions, perhaps painful, will be: "How much love did I put into my work? What progress did I bring to the people? What imprint did I leave in

the life of society? What real bonds did I build? What positive forces did I unleash? How much social peace did I sow? What was my contribution in the place that was entrusted to me? " (paragraph 197).

For Pope Francis, the Church is "going out" not just in a manner of speaking, but to indicate the practical paths of a peace founded on dialogue, on the recognition and acceptance of the other, on the profound conviction of the right of each and every one to inhabit the planet to live a dignified life, to ensure that the closeness between men and women is not a condemnation to tolerate or destroy one another, but the fruitful way of a common adventure for a better future, following the will of the Creator.

Central to that "fraternal" and at the same time realistic and possible vision of the global world is the condemnation of the drama of war – whether it comes from near or far - with its sequence of suffering: destruction of the human and natural environment, death, refugees, legacy of pain and hatred, terrorism, weapons of all kinds, cruelty. The meaning of the appeal to stop war, as well as the clear rejection of the death penalty - reaffirmed by the recent Magisterium – is intended to awaken us from collective addiction to the logic of conflict. The media themselves are not strangers to this kind of logic, even in the Catholic world, when they design a world of contrasts perhaps constructed and raised for hidden interests, the result of which is to aggravate polarizations and divisions. Through the culture of brotherhood, Pope Francis calls each of us to love the other people, the other nation as our own, building relationships, rules and institutions, abandoning the mirage of resorting to force, isolation, closed visions, selfish and biased actions since "the mere sum of individual interests is unable to produce a better world for all mankind" (paragraph 105).

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia

President – Pontifical Academy for Life –

Published by Il Riformista – p. 1/6 October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020

Original text: Italian.

Translation by Leonardo Stefanucci. Revised by Fabrizio Mastrofini