

Fraternity and Social Friendship

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EDITORIAL

A beaten-up man lies half-dead in a ditch – robbed, wounded and too weak to get back on his feet by himself. Passers-by perceive his fate, but they ignore him anyway. They have an important appointment, do not know what to do, do not feel responsible.

In his latest social encyclical, a genre that the Catholic Church has traditionally employed to propagate its social teachings, Pope Francis gives a central role to the story of the Good Samaritan, who takes care of the victim on the side of the highway. In doing so, he makes it clear how much the parable from Luke's gospel applies to our globalised age: No one can say today that they do not know about the wounds that have been left by our economies, social structures and ways of life. Workers in Bangladesh who sew clothes and shoes under inhumane conditions and for a starvation wage in textile factories that are in danger of collapsing. Children in the Congo who, instead of going to school, mine raw materials for smartphones and the automotive industry. Or small farmers in the Amazon who are being robbed of their land in order to create huge areas for growing feed for the meat industry.

Pope Francis addresses his encyclical to 'all people of good will' and thus makes the entire human family

responsible for ceasing to look the other way, for ceasing to ignore the misery we encounter every day and instead become caring Samaritans ourselves: Each and every one of us is called to bend down, to stop along our way, to perceive the wounds of those who are lying in the ditch, outcast from society. And not keep going along the old familiar paths – but instead take action.

The articles in this issue reflect on how to realise the „fraternity and social friendship“ proposed in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* within the different areas of societal life: How can social friendship be expressed in the field of environmental and development policy? What are the theological foundations of a „doctrine of fraternity“? How is the encyclical evaluated by those who are confronted with human suffering and brutal injustice on a daily basis? What role can the motif of fraternity play in efforts toward interreligious dialogue?

The articles as well as the cover picture of this volume – an illustration by the artist L. Antoinette Engelbrecht-Schnür – make clear the multi-layered ways in which *Fratelli tutti* can be read and the great potential this papal letter has for negotiating a fraternal future on a global scale.

The Editors

FRATELLI TUTTI IN THE SHADOW OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Wolfgang Sachs

Which of Pope Francis' countless appearances will posterity consider truly iconic? Probably neither his journey to the shipwrecked in Lampedusa nor his encounter with the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, although both are characteristic of the pontificate – rather, it will be his appearance in the deserted St. Peter's Square during the coronavirus pandemic. A single figure in white, alone, laboriously climbing the steps to St. Peter's Basilica, then offering the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing with the monstrosity – that image will be in the history books. This view undoubtedly thrives on contrast: the image of the Pope standing alone in the rain at nightfall in contrast to the image familiar to television viewers from all over the world where the Pope appears in St Peter's Square amidst the cheering of tens or hundreds of thousands under Bernini's colonnades. And then, in March 2020, a formidable showing of vulnerability that touched even non-believers.

However, the pandemic is obscuring awareness of another calamity. Far from the television cameras, Greta Thunberg bore unprepossessing witness to this calamity in August of 2018, holding her sign „School strike for climate“ all alone in front of the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm. She was 15 at the time, and, armed with considerable talents and stubbornness, she triggered the proverbial avalanche. At the latest since *Fridays for Future*, global warming (and the lack of resistance against it) has become a refrain all over the world. Greta's outrage before the United Nations Climate Summit („How dare you?“) generated huge media coverage, to the point where she ended up being nominated by the American magazine *Time* as „Person of the Year for 2019.“ But COVID-19 erased Greta from the collective memory. This was suppression of the

first degree, because it is already clear to all experts that the COVID-19 pandemic is only the prelude to an age of biospheric collisions arising from the shattered relationship of humankind with nature. This is also felt by the successful British author Ian McEwan: „Covid is our mass tutorial, our dress rehearsal for all the depredations as well as tragedies that the climate emergency could bring. We have had a taste of a planetary-scale disaster.“¹ The pandemic is a controllable tragedy, so to speak, with a few million dead to be sure, followed by vaccination on a global scale, leaving behind hardly any damage for the present generation. The collective destruction of the biosphere is a different matter. There will be no vaccination, the damage to future generations will be immeasurable, as will be the number of displaced persons and fatalities. The crisis in nature lurks behind COVID-19 and the Anthropocene looms after the pandemic. By his own admission, Pope Francis was surprised by the pandemic while writing the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. Does the encyclical nevertheless have something to say about the natural crisis that will define the 21st century? Can the message of universal fraternity be realised at all in the shadow of the Anthropocene?

The Anthropocene – A Concept with Abysses

Seldom does an interjection make history like this. At a 2000 conference on global change in Cuernavaca, Mexico, Paul J. Crutzen from Mainz, who had received the Nobel Prize for his work on the hole in the ozone layer, could no longer contain himself: „Stop using the word Holocene. We're not in the Holocene anymore. We're in the ... the ... the Anthropocene!“² At first there was stunned silence,

¹ MCEWAN (2021) - ² HORN/ BERGTHALLER (2019): 8.

then during the coffee break the term began to circulate, moving initially to professional circles, then in the last decade among a wide audience, from sociology to art. What did Crutzen mean? The history of the earth has entered a new epoch, in which humankind must now be considered a geological force, comparable to volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Human activity is shaping the Earth's surface and atmosphere on a large scale and permanently.³ It ranges from global warming and its consequences for flora, fauna, and human habitats, to the sealing of the earth's surfaces and the disruption of water cycles, the rapid dwindling of biodiversity, the polluting of air, soil and water with toxic substances, a rapidly growing human population, and resources being used to raise animals for meat. As the Global Footprint Network has determined⁴, the Earth's biosphere is currently overloaded by a factor of 1.7, so it is no wonder that nature, both locally and globally, is groaning at the strain. In view of this epochal shift, the conventional talk of an environmental crisis has been exposed as window dressing: It is not a question of the environment, but of nature under human influence; likewise, it is not a question of a temporary crisis, but rather of a geological era. What the term Anthropocene tells us, regardless of whether historical geology is able to accept it as a classification, is a disturbing warning: unless humankind drastically reduces its ecological footprint, we will gradually see the collapse of more and more life forms as we know them in the world.

When did the Anthropocene actually begin? This question has been a subject of debate from the beginning. Archaeologists, historians of the early modern period, and sociologists have arrived at different answers, each casting human history in a different light. At first, many blamed the Industrial Revolution, which led to the plundering of fossil resources and an increase in emissions. Then some authors pointed to colonial period which led to the spread of the plantation economy and massive deforestation. This did not give archaeologists

pause, who pointed out that, with humanity shifting to living on settlements, wild nature had been ruined in favour of the domestication of plant and animal life. In contrast, no one can deny that since about 1950 there has been an immense acceleration in the exploitation of nature. The Western and later international industrial system has crushed local and global ecosystems to such an extent that human influence is apparent everywhere on earth. However, one does not have to opt for any of the theories on the genealogy of the Anthropocene: there is truth in all of them.⁵ If the Anthropocene has been unfolding slowly only to pick up the pace in the present time, every theory has its place. In the 21st century, when planet Earth is being surveyed by satellites and its transformations are being monitored, people are becoming aware that they have become the driving force of evolution on Earth.

These human-induced changes to the planet are having a boomerang effect that could give rise to a gradual catastrophe. Never in human history have power and powerlessness been as inseparable as they are in the Anthropocene, a time when space travel and global warming, skyscrapers and species extinction, digital networking and urbanisation exist side-by-side, all caused by human attempts to control nature. In the technosphere, we are realising our power; in the biosphere, we are increasingly facing a countervailing power. It seems that the more deeply humans intervene in the Earth's system, the more we will have to deal with processes that are beyond our control. We have more power over nature and at the same time nature has more power over us.⁶ This leads to the paradoxical situation where the people of the 21st century are torn between an enormous human power and a far-reaching loss of control.⁷

From Laudato si' to Fratelli tutti

„We received the earth as a garden-home from the Creator,“ Pope Francis told a meeting of chief executives of the world's oil and gas giants at the

³ CRUTZEN (2002): 23. - ⁴ <https://www.footprintnetwork.org> - ⁵ HORN/ BERGTHALLER (2019): 40. - ⁶ HAMILTON (2017): 45. - ⁷ HORN/ BERGTHALLER (2019): 190.

Vatican in June 2018, „let us not pass it on to future generations as a wilderness.“⁸ He urged corporations to leave the fossil fuel business behind and invest in renewable energies instead. In his encyclical *Laudato si'*, the Pope spoke of the desecration of nature as well as the cry of the poor, a leitmotif for his pontificate in general. Who does not remember how, in a thoroughly self-critical manner, he moved away from the *dominium terrae* of Genesis 1? This idea suggests that humans are rulers and owners of nature, as Descartes finally postulated at the beginning of the modern era. The Pope, on the other hand, calls the earth, in the Franciscan spirit, mother and sister. He also draws attention to nature's counterpart, the technosphere. He disapproves of the imperative of cost efficiency that pervades technology and infrastructure, leaving little room for well-being, and not just that of human beings. The legendary growth in human power has remained without responsibility and foresight. Thus, *Laudato si'* is primarily about the human relationship with nature, where the relationship with the poor plays a secondary role.

In contrast, nature does not appear in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. The encyclical focuses entirely on seeing the relationship with others in the visionary horizon of a just and fraternal world. This stands in contrast to the „globalisation of indifference,“ as Pope Francis called it in Lampedusa, proposing instead a globalisation of fraternity. Consequently, it covers a wide range of issues, from the evils of a world closed-off from others such as the fear of migrants, the easy violation of human rights, and digital loneliness, to the principles of a hospitable world marked with human dignity, pursuit of the common good, and dialogue among cultures. So far, so good, but there is no sign of the crisis in nature. This is astonishing, since the talk of fraternity with all living beings could have been the common thread linking the two encyclicals. Nevertheless, *Fratelli tutti* tackles humankind's existential questions, with a central focus on the search going back to Cain and Abel for a society without violence and without discrimination, but instead shaped by solidarity and a

sense of community. In this way, the Pope's teaching document discusses what is happening on the front stage of history – oppression, the selfishness of the rich, migration. In contrast, the events on the backstage of history remain hidden – global warming, loss of biodiversity, urbanisation. What do these stages have in common? And what can a memorandum on the cohesion of global society contribute to the concept of the Anthropocene?

The downfall of the imperial mode of living

However, let us turn again to the Anthropocene. The epochal term „Anthropocene“ was coined by natural scientists with the help of macroscopic instruments such as earth observation and supercomputers. It is not surprising that human reality, with its cultures and conflicts, its passions and dreams, remains out of focus. Who brought us the Anthropocene? Was it humans in the distant past or those of the modern age? Does this mean all or part of humanity? As long as this re-mains so vague, we will not know to whom we should address the political and moral implications. We need to take into account three facts: Firstly, the number of the earth's inhabitants has been increasing rapidly, from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 7.8 billion at present. Secondly, since 1950, the formation of the Anthropocene has accelerated immensely. Nature has had to serve as a mine for coal, oil, gas, metals, minerals and fresh water; it has had to serve as a site for infrastructure, urbanisation and agricultural land; and it has had to endure vapours of all kinds, such as emissions, pesticides and nitrates. The earth has been buckling under the industrial way of life. And thirdly, there is the advance of global inequality, between the haves and have-nots, between owners and the displaced, between the powerful and the powerless. Economic inequality replicates itself in ecological inequality. As a result, half of humankind is feasting on nature, while the other half is forced to make do with crumbs. Roughly speaking, the „anthropos“ in the Anthropocene is synonymous with the global domination of the haves over the have-nots within the medium of nature exploitation.

⁸ POVOLEDO (2018)

Would some figures help? If we look at the world's population by income class and examine their share of CO₂ emissions, a huge gap emerges: In 2015, the smaller population making 50 % of the world's income caused a staggering 93 % of CO₂ emissions, while the poorer half accounted for only 7 %.⁹ What an enormous difference! If we take a look at the world map as to where the global upper and middle classes reside, the following picture emerges: of the global emissions of the middle/ high-income earners, 35.9% come from North America and Europe, 24.8% from China, 13.6% from the rest of Asia including India, 13.3% from the Middle East and Russia/ Central Asia, 3.5% from Latin America and 1.7% from Africa.¹⁰ In contrast, the other half of the world's population, the one at 7 %, is mostly found in India, China, Africa and Latin America. Thus, the division of the world is also reflected in climate emissions. Air travel, real estate, and steaks set the tone in the global upper class, while second-hand cars, washing machines, and air-conditioning are common in the middle class. And then there is the class of have-nots, who have to be content with standing on packed buses, malnutrition, and out-houses. Moreover, the top 10 % of the income pyramid emitted about half of global emissions in 2015, while the other half of emissions were distributed among the remaining 90 % of the world's population. What a huge discrepancy! Incidentally, the proportions have not changed since 1990, although emissions have increased by more than half during this period. This reflects the increasing polarisation of global society: traditional inequality between countries still exists, but has levelled out at the expense of rising inequality within countries. In the last 30 years, it was first and foremost the rising middle classes that drove up emissions in countries such as China, India, Indonesia, Russia and Turkey.

Overall, humanity's annual demand for materials, i.e., biomass, fossil resources, minerals, metals, increased from 7 tonnes per capita to 12 tonnes from 1970 to 2017.¹¹ Large-scale deforestation and

empty fishing grounds, oil platforms and gas pipelines, silver mines and open-pit lithium mining are examples of resource extractivism. And here, too, the rich take the lion's share: The material footprint (including domestic and foreign) of consumption in high-income countries is around 27 tonnes per capita, in middle-income countries 16 tonnes, and in low-income countries 2 tonnes.¹² Shifting the focus to transnational corporations trading in materials from the biosphere, the degree of concentration is striking: a full four corporations have an 84 % share of the global pesticide market, five are 90 % responsible for the palm oil market, ten corporations are mining for copper (50 %) and silver (36 %), ten others control 72 % of oil and 51 % of gas reserves.¹³ Of course, they have their headquarters in skyscrapers, mainly in North America, Europe, China and the Middle East.

If we look back over the last 70 years, we can say that the prevailing economic model is neither fair nor sustainable. On the contrary, it fuels social polarisation and invites a collision with nature. Therefore, this model is incapable of securing the global common good. Moreover, this disastrous economic model has given rise to an imperialistic way of life.¹⁴ Long rehearsed by habits and routines, cemented by law and by institutions, and exaggerated with claims and aspirations, the imperialistic way of life seeks to satisfy two requirements at one stroke: the gradual exploitation of human beings and nature and awareness of it. Often, the side effects of technology and economics accumulate to such an extent that they leave people and ecosystems on the scrap heap. Online commerce produces massive delivery traffic, dams often flood small-holder farms with water for the cities, the fashion industry often disregards the rights of working women, the housing market is far too expensive for slum dwellers, factory ships are emptying the oceans, pesticides leach the soil, energy emissions overheat the earth. Glorious achievements in technology and economics cannot be had without side-effects, which means that any attempt at

⁹ KARTHA et al. (2020): 6. Other researchers arrive at similar but different figures: HUBARECK et al. (2017) wealthy 85 %, the poor half 15 %, Chancel, PIKETTY (2015) wealthy 87 %, the poor half 13 %. - ¹⁰ KARTHA et al. (2020): 11. - ¹¹ IRP (2019): 27. - ¹² IRP (2019): 52. - ¹³ HORN/ BERGTHALLER (2019): 190. - ¹⁴ BRAND/ WISSEN (2017).

containing the side-effects would level out the accumulation of money. These events are by no means unknown, but they are easily pushed out of sight, because they usually happen far away or are postponed, and, on a social level, are happening to the lower classes. A German men's outfitter doesn't have to worry that cotton in Pakistan consumes a lot of water and pesticides, and that small farmers are being ruined from buying the seeds with debt money. And this even applies to the clearly demonstrable damage, for example, from global warming leading to droughts and tropical storms or from deforestation leading to the death of plants, insects and animals. Parsed into decisions with respect to choice of technology and cost efficiency, often via long and complex supply chains, the side-effects make themselves felt. They disproportionately affect the poor of this world, but the rich cannot escape this situation either. Through the power of practical constraints, the imperialistic way of life achieves what it tries to conceal: that some are living at the expense of others.

Ecology with a cosmopolitan intent

This much is clear when one reads his numerous messages, addresses and encyclicals: Pope Francis is not at all looking at the world from the perspective of progress and growth, but from the perspective of global inequality and the destruction of nature. This is why the Pope is promoting a concept of the world that is an alternative to both neoliberalism and statism¹⁵: fraternity. A biblical idea that came to prominence in the French Revolution, in the anti-feudal/democratic slogan *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. After 1848, it was replaced by the concept of solidarity, both by the labour movement and by Christian social teaching. A late echo can still be found in the European anthem with the Ode to Joy by Schiller, set to music by Beethoven („All men shall be brothers“).

However, the word „Geschwisterlichkeit“ (to be siblings, fraternity), which the German translation of

the encyclical likes to use, sounds rather awkward, but has an added semantic value. In comparison to „Solidarität“ (solidarity), fraternity possesses one characteristic from the outset: it establishes a relationship of kinship. Among siblings, whether they live near or far from each other, there is a certain indissoluble bond: they share the events and things of life; they are almost physically affected if one among them is not well. Furthermore, as soon as we call someone a brother or sister, even in a metaphorical sense, we profess to have common progenitors. When Francis of Assisi calls the stars, fire, water and the earth brother and sister in his *Canticle of the Sun*, he celebrates God the Father. Taken in a secular way of understanding it, this could mean making ourselves related to human and non-human beings in order to keep the family tree of life on earth green with health. Genetically, humans have much in common with other mammals; they participate, together with the animals, in the atmosphere created by plants that surrounds the earth, in the delicate layer of the biosphere, of which there is, as far as we know, no other example in the universe. So being related as siblings, fraternity, means caring for the natural foundations of life for human and non-human creatures.

„To care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves,“ the encyclical states. „Yet we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home. Such care does not interest those economic powers that demand quick profits.“¹⁶ The hidden yet obvious, impending negative consequences of the Anthropocene affect all people, especially in the Global South, along with animal and plant life everywhere on Earth. This is especially true for the poorer quarter of the world's population, who depend on free access to natural areas for their livelihoods, for whom savannahs, forest, water, arable land and also fish, game and cattle are means of immediate subsistence. Human rights, like food, clothing, shelter, medicine and even culture, are linked to intact ecosystems in subsistence economies. This

¹⁵ Fratelli tutti: 3. - ¹⁶ *ibid.* 17.

link between human rights and natural spaces is particularly close to Pope Francis' heart, which was most noticeably evident at the Amazon Synod in 2019, where he surrounded himself with indigenous people's representatives. It is obvious that he was also thinking of them when he quoted Francis of Assisi in the first section of the encyclical: „blessed all those who love their brother ,as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him.“¹⁷ This is not far from a cosmopolitan programme that runs from the Stoa through the Enlightenment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, according to which the world is a community of people, not an ensemble of states or clans, but a community in which all are entitled to justice, just as they themselves are owed justice.¹⁸

Of course, the rights of one cannot be had without the duties of the other. In the international debate, however, we often talk about human rights, but rarely about human duties. However, how can the universality of human rights ever be secured if it is not matched by a universality of human duties? Postulating not rights but their counterpart, universal duties, was the decisive move of Immanuel Kant's ethics. As is well known, the categorical imperative is: Act according to the maxim that you would wish all other rational people to follow, as if it were a universal law. In a Kantian perspective, injustice can therefore be defined as follows: Political and economic institutions are unjust if they are founded on principles that cannot be adopted by all nations. In the biting words of the encyclical: „While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights discarded or violated.“¹⁹ A glaring example of this is the unequal distribution of natural resources. They have been hoarded by the global middle and upper classes to such an extent that the poor do not possess the resources to develop on an equal footing. Worse still, the poorer half of the world's population must not be allowed to develop on an equal footing, because otherwise the planet's limits would be completely exceeded. Thus, sche-

matically speaking, the international distribution of resources becomes a zero-sum game where winning means others lose. Both unequal and limited – therein lies an explosive power that can express itself in conflicts and, in extreme cases, in wars over resources.

There is only one way out: an orderly withdrawal from the imperialistic way of life. And that is because it is not apparent how, for example, mass motorisation, air-conditioned family homes, or high meat consumption could be made accessible to all the world's inhabitants. Frugal prosperity is the order of the day, combining an economy that conserves resources with diverse lifestyles around the world. A task that will take the better part of a century to realise, in which a democratic people's movement, a transformation in technology, and moderation in the economy and way of life will surely be indispensable. First and foremost, a smaller ecological footprint will need to be accompanied by phasing-out and new development processes. For example, fossil energy, petrochemicals and automobiles will need to be phased out as renewable energies, soft mobility systems, regenerative agriculture and the restoration of natural areas are being developed. This would be nothing less than a declaration of war against the industrial civilisation of the middle and upper classes all over the world, as equally in the US as in Uruguay, in China as in Chile. And a revolution not only against those in power, but against a way of life, real or imagined, of large parts of the world's population. It will be painful and also inspiring. It will be full of conflict, and also galvanising. In any case, it is necessary to shift our way of gazing at the world: from the poor to the rich. For seventy years, development policy has sought to improve the living standards of the poor in the name of justice – with mixed results. It is now a matter of changing the lifestyles of the wealthy. Otherwise, there will be no prospect of justice in a finite world. Without setting limits on wealth, setting limits on poverty will not succeed.

¹⁷ Fratelli tutti: 1. - ¹⁸ Wuppertal Institut (2005): 137-139. - ¹⁹ Fratelli tutti: 23.

Hope against all hope

It seems that there is a need to resurrect an old Christian virtue that is indispensable in view of the coming situation: *spes contra spem* (*hope against all hope*). In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul addressed this motto to Abraham, who was longing for sons and grandchildren. At present, the aim is to create a future fit for grandchildren and to ensure the long-term habitability of the Earth. And here, too, the situation is by no means looking bright. In the history of the Earth, the Anthropocene is a catastrophe comparable to a meteorite impact leading to subsequent climate change. The Anthropocene was caused by industrialised humanity, but individual people have no control over it. No individual or nation has deliberately triggered ecological catastrophe, indeed, no individual or nation is causally responsible for the crisis of nature. Humankind as a whole, yes; individually, no. Nevertheless, the Anthropocene is forcing people to act. Will they be capable of emerging from this loss of control and regaining agency? That is the crucial question that will define the 21st century. In other words, it is a matter of bringing humanity's ecological footprint back into line with the regenerative capacity of the biosphere. This will affect the wealthier half of the world's population more than the poorer half, who, on the other hand, are entitled to a better life. However, at present, all likely trends with respect to nature or to the economy point in one ruinous direction. How can we have hope despite expectations to the contrary?

Expectations are based on forecasts, which in turn are based on probabilities. But history, both at the village level and globally, does not by any means progress only along linear paths, but is instead interspersed with many non-linear events. Examples abound: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the coronavirus pandemic, the Fridays for Future movement. These events have one common denominator: they have been unpredictable and momentous. Those who hope anticipate surprises; hope is predominantly based on the non-linear, chaotic

moments in history. That is why it is necessary to develop ethics under the conditions of uncertainty. In this sense, it is quite rational for ethical action to proceed within our own community and not to worry about what is going on in other communities and regions of the world.

There is no other way to understand Pope Francis deciding to recommend the Good Samaritan as a model for social and civic action²⁰ in world society. He says: „Social love is a force capable of inspiring new ways of approaching the problems of today's world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations and legal systems from within.“²¹ He is thus guided by hope and definitely not probability by choosing to rely on the innumerable initiatives and cultures that are swimming against the tide. This brings to mind those citizens' cooperatives that work for renewable energy, of the companies that take human rights along their supply chain seriously, of those lawyers who bring environmental lawsuits to court, or of the animal breeders who have moved on from factory farming. This is not to mention the numerous conflicts, especially in the global South: struggles against dams, against mines, against plantation cultivation, for agro-ecology, for car-free mobility, for a variety of social enterprises. Taken individually, each initiative is fragmentary and fleeting, but taken together they can be capable of echoing through society, especially during chaotic moments. What was it the eminent Czech human rights activist and future president Václav Havel said? „Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.“



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²⁰ SPADARO (2020): 9. - ²¹ Fratelli tutti: 183.

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WHAT DEVELOPMENT POLICY CAN LEARN FROM POPE FRANCIS

Jakob Siegel

Development policy is in crisis. Due to the ongoing postcolonial and environmental critique of development thinking, the development policy sector is scrambling to develop arguments and adaptation strategies to legitimise its continued existence. Pope Francis' latest encyclical can be read as a concrete alternative to the common narratives of perpetual, uniform, and science and technology-based development. This article briefly outlines the potential of the papal letter for the development policy debate by relating some core statements of the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* to current criticisms of the development discourse.

Criticism of development has basically been around since the early 1950s, as long as „the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas“¹ has been debated at the global policy level. The criticism that development actors face today is not new, but clearer and more substantive than ever before. On the one hand, development thinking is denounced by environmental activists, who identify a close link between the development paradigm and the (economic) growth imperative, and who emphasise the negative consequences this has for environment and climate. Nature in the dominant development concepts is conceived as a resource, which inevitably leads to its exploitation.² On the other hand, the criticism comes from the field of postcolonial studies. From this side, it is argued that development is nothing less than the continuation of colonial logic and contributes to the perpetuation of unequal and exploitative relations. The development discourse conceives of societal forms deviating from the euro-centric norm as „underdeveloped“ and thus as defective, deficient and inferior versions of the ego.³ Both the environmental and climate movement as well as the postcolonial dis-

course have recently gained significant power through such things as new forms of environmental activism and debates in the public policy sphere, for example on the restitution of art looted during the colonial period.

Sustainable development – a way out of the crisis?

Development policy initiatives are countering this criticism with new concepts and adaptations, such as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the current development guidelines of the United Nations. The eponymous keyword „sustainable,“ however, is not new in development discourse. Ever since the so-called Rio Conference of the United Nations in 1992, „sustainable development“ has been the guiding principle of international environmental and development policy and the source of hope for a way out of the ongoing crisis of development. However, the United Nations definition of sustainability as the „ability of future generations to meet their own needs“⁴ leaves quite a bit of room for interpretation. What kind of society do we want to pass on to future generations? Is environmental protection sustainable without consideration of social justice? Can the economy grow sustainably?⁵

Development is a normative term. It implies statements regarding a positive future and how society can successfully coexist. Thus, even those who criticise the development paradigm are not satisfied with the inclusion of sustainability. They say the term „sustainable development“ is already paradoxical in itself. Development, when conceived as progress and growth, is always associated with growing resource consumption and rising CO₂ emissions, which is why development in this form can never be described as sustainable.

¹ TRUMAN (1949). - ² MCMICHAEL (2019): 13–14. - ³ ZIAI (2013): 128. - ⁴ WCED (1987): 41. - ⁵ KOTHARI et al. (2019): xvii.

The utopian fraternity of all people

While debates about sustainable development concepts continue, Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli tutti* offers a vision for a political agenda that certainly seems to incorporate the critique of these very debates. He calls for a new world order not oriented towards individual interests but instead the common good of all, one where technology, economy and politics are subordinated to the „development of universal fraternity.“⁶ „It may seem naive and utopian,“ writes Francis, „yet we cannot renounce this lofty aim.“⁷ It is precisely this courage to seek a utopia that sets the Pope's letter apart from many other contributions.

Francis places the biblical story of the Good Samaritan at the centre of his letter on fraternity. It is worth noting that the Pope's interpretation here is not limited to the individual level of the parable, but is supplemented by a structural dimension, namely that of social and political charity. Francis no longer speaks only of fraternity on an interpersonal level, but makes it clear that a „dichotomy between private and public is not present or cannot be present from the point of view of Jesus' message“ and „that individual ethics and social ethics are inseparable.“⁸ This idea of a politically effective fraternity contains three aspects that people in the field of development may feel are particularly addressed to them: First, the plea to think about radically new forms of economic activity oriented towards the common good. Secondly, the demand for policymaking *with* and not *for* the poor, and thirdly, the need for a common new beginning that does not ignore the cultural diversity on earth.

Economies focused on the common good instead of unequal growth

„Such an economy kills,“ Francis already wrote in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*⁹, expressing the catastrophic consequences of the capitalist global economy for the environment and

social coexistence. Two years later, in his widely acclaimed social encyclical *Laudato sí*, the Pope primarily focused on the ecological dimensions of this way of doing business: the rapid extinction of species, the melting of the polar ice caps, the polluting of the world's oceans, and the accumulation of droughts and floods – all consequences of the narrative of perpetual economic growth and technological progress.

As is well known, the globalisation of capitalism is leading not only to an ecological crisis, but also to a deep social crisis that threatens the existence of many people: In many countries of the world, more than a third of the population suffers from hunger, in some it is even half.¹⁰ In India alone, nearly 190 million people were undernourished between 2017 and 2019.¹¹ The coronavirus pandemic has further exacerbated the situation in marginalised regions of the world. The Pope now elaborates on this perspective in *Fratelli tutti*, writing „only when our economic and social system no longer produces even a single victim, a single person cast aside, will we be able to celebrate the feast of universal fraternity.“¹²

In particular, the Pope addresses the injustice of global inequality. While many millions of people are suffering the consequences of extreme poverty today, a small part of the world's population is accumulating more and more wealth: in 2019, 2,153 billionaires together owned more than the 4.6 billion poorest people – in other words, far more than half of the world's population.¹³ Quoting St. John Chrysostom, Francis writes: „Not to share our wealth with the poor is to rob them and take away their livelihood. The riches we possess are not our own, but theirs as well.“¹⁴

We need to recognise today how closely the plight of the poor is linked to the culture of accumulation and consumption: People around the world suffer from the exploitative economies of global corporations, poor working conditions and unjust distribution of value creation – all to sustain the growth of the

⁶ *Fratelli tutti*: 9. - ⁷ *ibid.*: 190. - ⁸ NOTHELLE-WILDFEUER (2020): 4. - ⁹ *Evangelii Gaudium*: 53. - ¹⁰ Statista (2019). - ¹¹ Statista (2020). - ¹² *Fratelli tutti*: 110. - ¹³ COFFEY et al. (2020): 9. - ¹⁴ *Fratelli tutti*: 119.

big world economies. Very clearly positioning himself against the capitalist maxim of liberal markets, the Pope writes: „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 make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all.“¹⁵ According to Francis, designating created goods for the good of *all* in the Christian tradition even goes so far that there is no prior right to private property; rather, the „principle of the common use of created goods is the ‚first principle of the whole ethical and social order.“¹⁶ The right to private property could „only be considered a secondary natural right“ and this „has concrete consequences that ought to be reflected in the workings of society.“¹⁷

By formulating his ideas so clearly here, the Pope has gone far beyond what is discussed in most development policy forums. He is advocating a radical rethinking and calls for courage to leave old ways behind and look for new possibilities of equitable coexistence. Showing solidarity in this context means „thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combating the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money.“¹⁸ For the development policy debate, which is still largely determined by those who profit economically from global capitalism, this realisation is equally groundbreaking and without any alternative if there is serious interest in ending poverty and fighting global inequalities.

Policymaking with and not for the poor

„If the post-colonial criticism were taken seriously, we would no longer be able to continue working (in this way)¹⁹.“ This statement by Bischler et al. from almost 10 years ago in an article on the

„(Im)possibility of Geographic Development Research“ shows how severely the postcolonial critique has shaken the self-image of the entire development policy apparatus. Since then, many aid organisations have tried to respond to the criticism with such measures as increasingly using local project staff instead of sending „experts“ to the project countries.

Nevertheless, most development policy measures that finance projects in economically poor regions smack of paternalism. Francis gets to the heart of this postcolonial critique of the development discourse when he writes: „Certain economically prosperous countries tend to be proposed as cultural models for less developed countries; instead, each of those countries should be helped to grow in its own distinct way and to develop its capacity for innovation while respecting the values of its proper culture.“²⁰ Development is not something that concerns only the economically disadvantaged of this world. On the contrary, it is first and foremost the profiteers of globalisation who have to ask themselves how they must change in order to end oppression, inequality, and material as well as cultural marginalisation. Even an organisation like *Franziskaner Helfen*, which does not employ staff in the project countries but only finances local projects – but does so with specific ideas of what „good development“ is – must face this criticism and reflect again and again on the structures of its activity as an aid organisation.

In an interview published in the magazine „Franziskaner,“ Msgr. Pirmin Spiegel, director of the Misereor relief organisation, describes what such reflection may look like: „At Misereor, we are trying to learn from Latin America and empower people to become subjects in their own life stories. [...] This is a persistent challenge for a development cooperation organisation that supports projects with financial resources. How can we avoid patronising and paternalistic practices? How can we support people to be experts with respect to their

¹⁵ Fratelli tutti: 122. - ¹⁶ ibid. 120. - ¹⁷ ibid. 120. - ¹⁸ ibid. 116. - ¹⁹ BISCHLER et al. (2012). - ²⁰ Fratelli tutti: 51.

own lives and circumstances? This is a constant learning process involving continually reviewing what our own role is.²¹

To „empower people to become the subjects of their own life stories“ means promoting diversity and self-determination instead of propagating (economic) development according to the European model. Pope Francis describes this idea in his encyclical using the geometric shape of the polyhedron. Considered in this way, the polyhedron stands for a body in which „the value of each individual is respected, where ,the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts.“²² This also means that the „universal does not necessarily mean bland, uniform and standardized, based on a single prevailing cultural model, for this will ultimately lead to the loss of a rich palette of shades and colours, and result in utter monotony.“²³ „The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable.“²⁴

Development research is already making some initial attempts to find alternatives to the narrative of uniform world development. In the 2019 anthology „Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary“,²⁵ for example, the editors collect philosophies, spiritualities and ways of life from different regional and cultural contexts as alternatives to the universal development paradigm. For example, contributions from all five world religions are included, but the compilation also includes pieces from autonomy movements such as that of the Zapatista in Mexico or the smallholder initiative La Via Campesina, as well as local concepts of living together in solidarity such as the Transition movement in Europe, the French-speaking Convivialistes, the Buen Vivir originating from the Andean region, and the Moroccan Agdal. The representatives of this pluriversal discourse are not focused on a fundamental rejection of considerations for the improvement of human

living conditions. However, instead of grouping efforts of this kind under the term development, they emphasise the diversity of relevant ideas, initiatives and processes.

Pope Francis writes that the polyhedral understanding of a successful life and a good future can only be achieved if we take a step towards that which is experienced as foreign, and in doing so are also prepared to surrender part of our understanding of ourselves and the world. „No one,“ Francis says, „can possess the whole truth or satisfy his or her every desire, since that pretension would lead to nullifying others by denying their rights. A false notion of tolerance has to give way to a dialogic realism on the part of men and women who remain faithful to their own principles while recognising that others also have the right to do likewise.“²⁶

The radicalism of a new beginning

For a final point, let us return to the structural use of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. In Pope Francis' interpretation of social ethics, political activism becomes comprehensive love of neighbour. People, but also organisations, companies and political actors who work for the oppressed, exploited and neglected, take on the role of the Good Samaritan: „whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the ,field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity.“²⁷ Following this interpretation, the role of the robbers is also quite clear: those who put profit before human life, who accumulate at any price, who have little regard for human dignity in their production or supply chain – they rob people of their rights and livelihoods.

There is a third group in the parable: those who pass the wounded and half-dead man by the wayside without doing anything. Pope Francis refers to this last group of passers-by as the secret allies of the robbers: „Robbers usually find secret allies in

²¹ SPIEGEL (2020): 33. - ²² Fratelli tutti: 145 - ²³ ibid. 144. - ²⁴ ibid. 215. - ²⁵ ibid. 221. - ²⁶ ibid. 221. - ²⁷ ibid. 180.

those who pass by and look the other way. There is a certain interplay between those who manipulate and cheat society, and those who, while claiming to be detached and impartial critics, live off that system and its benefits.²⁸ What Francis shows here is that, also at the political level, this does not remain with the duality between the „evil robbers“ and the „merciful helpers,“ with the majority having nothing to do with the violent incident. No one who sees people suffering can escape responsibility for what happens in the world. Anyone who cannot be converted into a Samaritan and actively work to change the exploitative status quo is siding with the robbers – there is no in-between.

The political commitment called for here, Francis makes clear, does not contradict the Christian claim of universal love for all, quite the contrary: „We are called to love everyone, without exception; at the same time, loving an oppressor does not mean allowing him to keep oppressing us, or letting him think that what he does is acceptable. On the contrary, true love for an oppressor means seeking ways to make him cease his oppression; it means stripping him of a power that he does not know how to use, and that diminishes his own humanity and that of others.“²⁹ Francis makes it clear that the commitment to the marginalised must be a radical commitment that does not shrink from leaving the old behind and breaking new ground, because anyone “who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality.”³⁰

The political scope available to us for this is broad, since policy is not made exclusively in governments and ministries. Our everyday life is political: how we express ourselves, what we buy and what we do not buy, how we eat, or how we express ourselves publicly. There are different ways for everyone to speak out against exploitation and to find new ways to create a better future for all. Development organisations play an important role in this, because they are particularly familiar with the suffering of

the marginalised. They will fulfil this responsibility if they clearly identify mechanisms of exploitation and creatively work to overcome oppressive systems and strengthen the rights of those whose voices are not being heard.



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²⁸ *Fratelli tutti*: 75. - ²⁹ *ibid.*: 241. - ³⁰ *ibid.*: 7.

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THE ENCYCLICAL *FRATELLI TUTTI* FROM A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: A DOCTRINE OF FRATERNITY

Johannes B. Freyer ofm

On the occasion of his election, Pope Francis not only formally adopted the name of the founder of the Franciscan movement, he was also signalling an agenda with his name choice. The Franciscan inspiration of the Pope's agenda is not only evident in his specific commitment to the poor, but is also clear whenever he starts his encyclicals with quotations selected from the few writings left behind by the saint from Assisi. This is also true of his last encyclical, with the Italian translation *Fratelli tutti* of the original Latin *omnes fratres*. With these introductory words (also used as the title of the encyclical), the Pope quotes one of the twenty-eight exhortations of Saint Francis. In doing so, he makes use of two words, which, in the Latin vocabulary of the saint, are statistically among the most frequently used terms.¹ The term „omnes,“ used both as an adjective and as a noun, does not simply mean „all“ in the common Latin of the 12th and 13th centuries; rather, use of the word entails „all people“ or at least „all Christians.“ Francis often connects this „all“ with the term „fratres.“ We cannot hastily translate this word as „brothers“ either, because, in its time, the term generally meant a „sibling“ or a relative or relatives in general. The word was often also used to address fellow human beings as such. In a narrower sense, this meant fellow Christians and especially Franciscans who were not members of the clergy.² When he then puts both terms together as „omnes fratres“ (namely, *fratelli tutti* in the Italian translation), roughly translated into English as „all my fellow human beings,“ then it sounds almost redundant, or like an overemphasis. St Francis often used such overemphasis to shed light on what seemed important, essential and worthwhile to him. This is precisely

what Pope Francis is also about – highlighting something that is important to him.

He himself places this magisterial letter in the category of social encyclicals.³ In terms of ecclesiastical history, the genre of social encyclicals among the magisterial documents is more recent and does not include all that many teaching documents. An independent social doctrine was developed late in the Catholic Church and unfolded in the following encyclicals: 1. *Rerum novarum* 1891 by Pope Leo XIII on the workers' question in industrialisation; 2. *Quadragesimo Anno* 1931 by Pope Pius XI on the social order; 3. *Mater et Magistra* 1961 by Pope John XXIII on the order of societal life; 4. *Pacem in Terris* 1963 also by Pope John XXIII on world peace; 5. *Populorum Progressio* 1967 by Pope Paul VI on the progress of peoples and nations; 6. *Laborem exercens* 1981 by Pope John Paul II on work; 7. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* 1987 also by Pope John Paul II on the social question; 8. *Centesimus Annus* 1991 also by Pope John Paul II on the centenary of the first social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*; 9. *Caritas in Veritate* 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI on the economy and other social questions. Pope Francis has joined this track record with his writings *Evangelium Gaudium*, *Laudato si* and finally *Fratelli tutti*. With the latest encyclical, the Pope introduces the „doctrine of fraternity“ as a novum in the catalogue of magisterial topics, even if he explicitly states that he is not presenting an exhaustive treatment of this doctrine. Rather, he wants to initiate a multi-layered, interdisciplinary and inter-religious dialogue that will deepen this „doctrine of fraternity.“ Since, as is well known, everything in the Catholic Church has to

¹ ESSER (1989); GODET/ MAILLEUX (1976). - ² Cf. DU CANGE (1883-1887). - ³ *Fratelli tutti*: 6.

be based on tradition and completely new topics can hardly be developed without recourse to tradition, Pope Francis also feels bound to that tradition. A possible basis in the tradition of the Church is offered by the philosophical and theological schools and approaches based on Francis of Assisi, which, however, have been displaced in recent doctrine by neo-scholastic Thomism and must first be re-discovered and revived. To the eye influenced by Franciscan theology and philosophy, it is evident that there is Franciscan inspiration in Pope Francis' writings, but that he does not pursue a genuine theology from a Franciscan perspective, in that he interprets Francis of Assisi and his spirituality in Thomistic terms. A „doctrine of fraternity“ inspired by St Francis is nevertheless in line with the articulated Franciscan tradition, on the basis of which were developed early capitalist drafts of an ethics and morality of the market economy with the aim of the common good.

The Franciscan tradition understands fraternity based on the model of life left by Francis of Assisi himself.⁴ The fact that Francis followed the footsteps of the poor and humble Jesus Christ in accordance with the Gospels is closely linked to a way of living based on fraternity and an openness towards universal fraternity.⁵ Since Francis and the men and women who follow his way of life renounce material security and thus the trappings of capitalism, they have to rely on fraternal cohesion in order to live. This is certainly one of the basic existential experiences of the women and men who unite around him to live a life of „minoritas.“⁶ Trying to secure one's life solely on material and capitalist possessions only leads to discord, disputes, exploitation and inhuman behaviour, indeed, even war.⁷ Thus, „minoritas,“ the decision not to acquire anything, and a sincere fraternity that cares and shares for one another are like two sides of the same coin.⁸ In keeping with his religious life, Francis does not see

this vitally essential fraternity as a necessary evil, but as a gift from God that unfolds in the discipleship of the Gospel and bears fruit in mutual respect and love.⁹ The attitude of fraternity thus becomes a prerequisite for mutual appreciation, possible forgiveness of guilt, readiness for dialogue, and the facilitation of peace and justice.¹⁰

Francis' fraternity is not some detailed theological construct, but instead living in the Spirit of the Gospel. This is what led Pope Francis to consider a „doctrine of fraternity“ in his encyclical. Those who expect an initial, systematic unfolding of this doctrine will be disappointed when reading the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. Since the encyclical as a whole is not methodically structured, but rather resembles a collection of the Pope's important thoughts and concerns, it does not make it easy for the reader to identify the common thread. Instead, readers are invited to recognise aphorisms and building blocks of a „doctrine of fraternity“ and put them together to form a more unified picture.

This new reflection on fraternity is based on an anthropological, sociological, and social/theological-cum-biblical dimension. Anthropologically, the Pope sees fraternity as rooted in concrete love for fellow human beings, without which the value of life cannot be developed in all its fullness. To expand on this thought, he quotes himself: „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.“¹¹ In this way, the Pope is pointing out that, from an anthropological perspective, life needs a supporting and life-sustaining network of relationships. These life-promoting relationships are familial or fraternal in nature. The Bishop of Rome is aware that these relationships also have a

⁴ Cf. ARREGUI/ FREYER/ BRUNETTE (2002). - ⁵ Cf. Nbr 1,1; BR 1,1; Nbr 22,33; Son in: BERG/ LEHMANN/ FREYER (2014): 40-41, 70, 88, 94. - ⁶ Cf. Nbr 6,3 in: Berg/Lehmann/Freyer (2014): 73 - ⁷ Cf. Johannes von Perugia, Anfang oder Grundlegung des Ordens, 17,7-10 in: BERG/ LEHMANN/ FREYER (2014): 585. - ⁸ Cf. Nbr 9,10-11 in: BERG/ LEHMANN/ FREYER (2014): 78. - ⁹ Cf. Test 14 in: BERG/ LEHMANN/ FREYER (2014): 60. - ¹⁰ Cf. Test 23; Sammlung von Perugia 101,14-23; Jakob von Vitry, Historia Occidentalis, Kap. 32, 14 in: BERG/ LEHMANN/ FREYER (2014): 61, 1180, 1541. - ¹¹ Fratelli tutti: 88, the letter for the event „Economy of Francesco“ (May 1, 2019): L'Osservatore Romano (it.), vol. 159 (2019), no. 113 (12. Mai 2019), p. 8..

sociological context, something he also addresses contextually, making clear how not only the family in the narrower sense, but also the social environment shapes human life. „Nor can I reduce my life to relationships with a small group, even my own family; I cannot know myself apart from a broader network of relationships, including those that have preceded me and shaped my entire life.“¹²

Although the Pope does not undervalue the anthropological and sociological dimensions, he focuses more on the biblical and theological meaning of fraternity. The focus is on the interpretation and updated application of the biblical parable of the „Good Samaritan“ (Luke 10: 25-37). The Samaritan who rushes to the aid of the man who has been attacked and is lying by the side of the road, while the religious elite leave him lying unheeded, is presented, as it were, as the exemplary model of true fraternity. Following the parable, genuine fraternity becomes possible even between strangers via demonstration of spontaneous assistance. Men and women who embrace the fragility of others, even when they do not „belong,“ facilitate and renew community. This is precisely about helping people in need, without considering whether they belong to one’s own circle, culture or nationality. The fraternity that is intended here overcomes the existing boundaries.¹³ Unfortunately, the Pope laments, in the reality of the world „there are only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by; those who bend down to help and those who look the other way and hurry off.“¹⁴ In this, as in many other passages of the encyclical, it becomes clear that Pope Francis is not shying away from telling it like it is, and, conveniently or inconveniently, criticising negative social, political and economic excesses. Promoting fraternity and community also requires the „correctio fraterna,“ the fraternal rebuke, even if people do not want to hear that. From a biblical perspective, the Pope perceives an obligation to brotherliness and develops a biblical foundation

for the proposed doctrine of fraternity.¹⁵ This is seen not only as a blood relationship, but rather as a characteristic of being human, which becomes clear in the mutual recognition of the image of God. All human beings, regardless of gender, religion or skin colour, are created in the image of God. This divine likeness is the foundation of a dignified fraternity that is common to all, the basis of basic human rights that precede every social order.¹⁶ The Scriptures themselves testify to how seriously God takes this fraternity of human beings when God asks: „Where is your brother?“ (Gen 4:9). The Pope interprets this question of God in a special way with regard to the other who is weak and a stranger, and shows, on the basis of the biblical story of Israel, how love based in fraternity should prove itself precisely in behaviour towards the stranger, the refugee and the orphan.

In the New Testament, the question of living in fraternity intensifies and culminates in the commandment to love one’s neighbour. It is precisely this commandment, parallel to God asking „Where is your brother?,“ which provokes the lawyer to ask „Who is my neighbour?.“ And Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus himself teaches that we are all brothers and sisters and therefore the New Testament repeatedly sounds the emphatic call to fraternity.¹⁷ The doctrine of fraternity proposed in the encyclical finds its foundation here.¹⁸ Similar to the biblical texts regarding broken fraternity based on the archetype of Cain’s fratricide of Abel, which repeatedly exhort us to a renewed attitude of fraternity and focus on the aspect of reconciliation and on rehabilitation of destroyed fraternity, the Pope does not tire in repeatedly pointing out in this encyclical how the fraternity of human beings has been abused and often even killed by the neoliberal economy and global power politics. Nor does he shy away from naming the iniquities of religions and of the Christian Church itself in this context, when he writes: „I sometimes wonder why, in light of this, it took so long for

¹² Fratelli tutti: 89. - ¹³ Cf. *ibid.* 67, 81. - ¹⁴ *ibid.* 70. - ¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.* 56-62. - ¹⁶ Cf. Fratelli tutti: 124 with a quote from: Bishops’ Conference of the United States of America, *Open wide our Hearts: The enduring Call to Love. A Pastoral Letter against Racism* (November 2018). - ¹⁷ Cf. on the biblical foundation: MEDINA FILPO (2021): 13-20. - ¹⁸ Cf. Fratelli tutti: 61, 95.

the Church unequivocally to condemn slavery and various forms of violence. Today, with our developed spirituality and theology, we have no excuses. Still, there are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different. Faith, and the humanism it inspires, must maintain a critical sense in the face of these tendencies, and prompt an immediate response whenever they rear their head. For this reason, it is important that catechesis and preaching speak more directly and clearly about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters.¹⁹ This is precisely what Francis's agenda. Given actions and structures that are contemptuous of humanity and harmful to creation, he wants the doctrine of fraternity that will be further developed to initiate an alternative that promotes life and corresponds to the dignity of human beings and care for nature.

Building on the biblical outline and in view of the many wounds caused by misguided developments in politics, economics and the treatment of nature, he clarifies some aspects of a doctrine of fraternity that are important to him, taking up and continuing earlier Christian social teaching. Some cornerstones for this are building a welcoming culture, and enhancing the values of freedom and equality with a basic attitude deriving from brotherhood and sisterhood. Such a basic fraternal attitude strengthens the freedom to cultivate one's own possibilities, one's own culture, and one's own religion in community with others, including strangers, and thus overcome enmity and hatred, which often arise from a misunderstood individualism, setting up false us-versus-them dichotomies, and the egotism of groups. It promotes equality and justice in the recognition and appreciation of the other, thus bridging instances of marginalisation, the rifts

between peoples, and the expanding gap between the rich and poor. The recognition of such a universal peacemaking fraternity should not only shape the individual, but transform society and its structures. In doing so, Pope Francis is focused on a world that is increasingly determined by criteria of a neoliberal „free“ market that is only in it for the profit, and which has surrendered to the illusion of an „invisible hand“ that will fix everything for the better, but which has long since been under the control of a few who are pulling the strings in the background for their own enrichment and advantage. „Indeed, to claim economic freedom while real conditions bar many people from actual access to it, and while possibilities for employment continue to shrink, is to practise doublespeak.²⁰ Words like freedom, democracy or fraternity prove meaningless, for the fact is that ,only when our economic and social system no longer produces even a single victim, a single person cast aside, will we be able to celebrate the feast of universal fraternity.²¹ A truly human and fraternal society will be capable of ensuring in an efficient and stable way that each of its members is accompanied at every stage of life. Not only by providing for their basic needs, but by enabling them to give the best of themselves, even though their performance may be less than optimum, their pace slow or their efficiency limited.²² For the Pope, fraternity is a way to address the political, economic and environmental challenges. To this end, it is combined with social friendship such that both form two inseparable and equal poles within every society.²³ By „social friendship“ he understands true openness, which approaches the neighbour and takes care of them unselfishly and without appropriation. Social friendship corresponds on a social level to that active love which respects others and recognises their dignity. What is more, social friendship enables everyone to have a place of dignity in society and that promotes political, economic and cultural integration.²⁴ The interplay of fraternity and social friendship is also a basis for the cooperation of states and peoples who under-

¹⁹ Cf. Fratelli tutti: 86; and 9-53. - ²⁰ Cf. ibid.: 110, here the Pope quotes the encyclical *Laudato si*, (May 24, 2015), 129: AAS 107 (2015), 899. - ²¹ Cf. ibid. : 110, here the Pope quotes the letter on the event "Economy of Francesco" (May 1, 2019): *L'Osservatore Romano* (it.), vol. 159 (2019), no. 113 (12. May 2019), p. 8 - ²² ibid. 110. - ²³ Cf. Fratelli tutti: 142. - ²⁴ Cf. ibid.: 99; 151.

stand and behave as peaceful and mutually enriching neighbours. A fraternity understood in this way is open to differences, plurality, and species diversity as aspects that complement and enrich each other.²⁵ The motif of fraternity as linked to social friendship, which runs like a thread through this encyclical, is for the Pope also a prerequisite for dialogue between religions, whose common mission and contribution is to make this world more fraternal. Thus, in this encyclical addressed to all people of good will, he also feels inspired by great non-Catholic and non-Christian figures such as Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Ghandi and the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb.



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²⁵ Cf. *Fratelli tutti*: 215.

A COURT RULING AFTER GRANTING CHURCH ASYLUM TO TWO WOMEN FROM NIGERIA

A practical test for Pope Francis' social encyclical *Fratelli tutti*

Katharina Ganz osf

Raped, homeless, forced into prostitution – these words sum up the lives of two women from Nigeria who, in the end, saw fleeing into exile as their only way out.¹ They made it to Germany via Italy. When they realised that they would have to go through their asylum procedure in the country where they had entered the EU, they returned to Italy, where they lived unprotected on the streets and ended up in prostitution again, because they saw no other way to survive. At some point they managed to escape again and made their way to Germany. At the request of SOLWODI e.V., the Oberzell Franciscan Sisters took in the women in 2019 and 2020 and granted them church asylum. That is why Sister Juliana OSF, the human rights officer responsible for granting church asylum, had to go to court in Würzburg on 2 June. The judge found that she had intentionally, unlawfully and culpably “aided and abetted unauthorised residence” of foreigners in Germany. There had never been such a judgement before.

Part of the system as a nurse

As a nurse in the Würzburg asylum centre, Sister Juliana is not only close to the refugee issue, she is also part of the system. She continually comes into contact with the so-called Dublin procedure and possible repatriations. “I’m not questioning that in principle at all,” she emphasises. “However, in individual cases I see no other option than to act in the way that I have – to protect people from going back into prostitution or other inhumane living conditions.” Each individual case is carefully considered, and church asylum is only granted in severe cases of hardship. The authorities were informed at all times where the women were and in both cases a dossier was submitted as part of the

hardship case to the Federal Office for Migration for its review. That is why the congregation had refused to pay the €1,200 fine in order to avoid the court hearing. From the community’s point of view, decisions had only been made according to conscience, and always keeping in mind the individual who is in need. Sister Juliana had granted the young women from Nigeria church asylum out of deepest conviction, in order to have their asylum application examined in Germany instead of transferring them to Italy. “From our point of view, both women would have been in very great danger of becoming victims of human trafficking and forced prostitution again if they had returned to Italy.”

Antonia Werr: Human dignity as a motive for action

In her last words, immediately before the sentence was pronounced, Sister Juliana quoted from the statutes of the order’s founder, Antonia Werr, who started a private rescue home for women released from prison in 1855: “*Here, where human dignity has collapsed in ruins, where everything seems to be lost – this is where help is most needed. To be able to extend a helping hand to those who are struggling in the river of life, to restore the shattered wreckage of their divine image to its original purpose by carefully reassembling it, to reconcile them with a fate that is often more unhappy than deeply indebted – what a glorious, albeit very difficult task that would be!*”

From a Christian point of view, it is necessary to provide help – to extend a helping hand when the current European asylum law is not sufficiently guaranteeing that help. For Sister Juliana, it was clear: “It was my only choice.” The criminal judge who

¹ The article also contains material from reports by Anja Mayer, Public Relations Officer at Oberzell Monastery.

conducted the trial on the 2nd of June nevertheless saw the conduct of the Oberzell Franciscan as a clear breach of the law and to be an intentional, unlawful act. At the same time, he stressed that he might come to a different assessment from a moral point of view. However, he was not pronouncing justice in the name of God, but in the name of the people. He had some pointed words with respect to his incomprehension that such cases are ending up in court at all, and that society could not agree on another way of dealing with these humanitarian cases of hardship. That is why the criminal court judge imposed a warning with a conditional sentence in addition to a €500 fine: the fine of 30 days' pay of €20 each was suspended for two years on probation. The judgement also only pertains to one of the two prosecution cases. The other case was provisionally closed at the request of the public prosecutor's office because of open questions. It could be that Germany was already responsible for conducting the asylum procedure before the woman was admitted to church asylum.

Pope Francis: Human dignity is unconditional

Against the background of this currently challenging situation, Pope Francis' social encyclical reads like a document of encouragement for us Franciscan Sisters from Oberzell, although it does not deal with the specific case of church asylum.

In his second social encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, the Pope is concerned "that the equal dignity of every individual and of all human beings be truly recognised."² Examining reality leads him to the conclusion that "in practice" human rights probably "are not equal for all,"³ which is especially true for the poor, women and slaves. The basic idea of fraternity then implies "the necessity of recognising the individual, the identity of each and every individual, and not talking about a unified society."⁴ The Pope is guided by the vision that only "by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that

is open to all."⁵ "Universal fraternity and social friendship are thus two inseparable and equally vital poles in every society."⁶ Francis clearly states that "women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men,"⁷ and he states that "it is unacceptable that some have fewer rights by virtue of being women."⁸

Migration as a central topic

Francis opposes an economic liberalism that seeks to prevent migration at all costs and negates the reasons for fleeing: war, persecution and natural disasters.⁹ Of course, many also succumbed to unrealistic expectations and were blinded by promises, and additionally exploited by unscrupulous human traffickers, drug and arms cartels.¹⁰ Nonetheless, a xenophobic mentality is unacceptable in response to migration: "Migrants are not seen as entitled like others to participate in the life of society, and it is forgotten that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person. Hence, they ought to be 'agents in their own redemption'. No one will ever openly deny that they are human beings, yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human. For Christians, this way of thinking and acting is unacceptable, since it sets certain political preferences above deep convictions of our faith: the inalienable dignity of each human person regardless of origin, race or religion, and the supreme law of fraternal love."¹¹

In weighing the protection of one's own population against the admission of migrants, the Pope recommends to the countries of Europe in particular that they not forget the fraternal responsibility on which every civil society is founded.¹² Exclusionary, intolerant and racist attitudes can only be overcome through encountering each other.¹³ Instead of alienating people and depriving them of their roots, the task is to "foster a sense of belonging" and create "bonds of integration between generations and different communities."¹⁴

² NOTHELLE-WILDFEUER (2020). - ³ *Fratelli tutti*: 22. - ⁴ NOTHELLE-WILDFEUER (2020). - ⁵ *Fratelli tutti*: 94 - ⁶ *ibid.*: 142 - ⁷ *ibid.*: 23. - ⁸ *ibid.*: 121. - ⁹ *ibid.*: 37. - ¹⁰ *ibid.*: 38. - ¹¹ *ibid.*: 39. - ¹² *Cf. ibid.*: 40. - ¹³ *Cf. ibid.*: 41. - ¹⁴ *ibid.*: 53.

Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants

In Chapter 4 of his social encyclical, the Pope succinctly summarises an appropriate approach to migrants with four verbs: “welcome, protect, promote and integrate.”¹⁵ He calls for establishing humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable refugees and the free development of migrants in accordance with the equal dignity of all human beings, the right to family reunification and the promotion of migrant integration¹⁶, as well as support for countries of origin.¹⁷ In all of this, increased international cooperation is required, which ultimately paves the way “to develop a form of global governance with regard to movements of migration.”¹⁸ Pope Francis resolutely opposes any form of xenophobia. Instead, he advocates seeing migration as an opportunity to advance comprehensive human development through mutual exchange.¹⁹ There is a need for a world order that promotes the development of all peoples in solidarity, which ultimately “implies ‘creating wealth for all.’”²⁰ The Pope is critical of countries that only want to take in people who directly benefit their own economy.²¹ In fact, admitting migrants must be guided by altruism.²² The Pope’s demands for a Christian migration ethic, which is entirely in the tradition of the Catholic social teachings of his predecessors, can be summarised in three complementary options for action: “Eliminating the causes of flight, international migration policy (including legal entry options) and direct aid and protection for those in acute need.”²³

Pope Francis repeatedly uses the image of the polyhedron as an ideal societal image. Such a polygon has many sides, but together they form a unit. In this society, “differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations.”²⁴ Nobody is useless and expendable. Such a concept of fraternity removes the boundaries of solidarity practices based on belonging to one’s own family,

group or ethnicity.²⁵ It is a plea for a non-homogeneous society that sees others and strangers as enrichment and encounters people of other cultures with curiosity and openness.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is not only relevant for individual ethics

Theologically, the Pope justifies his social encyclical with the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan and derives from it the mandate to provide help and support to one’s neighbour irrespective of the person concerned, to overcome fatalism and indifference, and to “create a different culture, in which we resolve our conflicts and care for one another.”²⁶ In line with the Jewish tradition of caring for strangers and the Golden Rule (Mt 7:12) anchored in many religions, the proprium of a Christian ethic is to perceive suffering and to become a neighbour by actively turning to others.²⁷

But Pope Francis aptly identifies what modern societies lack despite all the progress: “we are still ‘illiterate’ when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies. We have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, ignoring situations until they affect us directly.”²⁸ In such phenomena of egoism and self-centeredness, the Pope sees “symptoms of an unhealthy society”²⁹ that can only be counteracted by creating a new “we”³⁰, “a new social bond.”³¹ With the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ called us not to ask “who is close enough to be our neighbour, but rather that we ourselves become neighbours to all,”³² and thus to approach the person in need “regardless of whether or not they belong to our social group.”³³ It took the Church a long time to condemn slavery and other forms of violence. Today there would be no excuse for that. In catechesis and in preaching, the Church must increasingly counter approaches that deny people (groups) their dignity or justify not helping “strangers.”³⁴

¹⁵ Fratelli tutti: 129. - ¹⁶ Cf. ibid.: 130. - ¹⁷ Cf. ibid.: 129. - ¹⁸ ibid. 132. - ¹⁹ Cf. ibid.: 133-136. - ²⁰ ibid. 138. - ²¹ Cf. ibid.: 139. - ²² Cf. ibid.: 140. - ²³ BECKA (2021): 23. - ²⁴ Fratelli tutti: 215. - ²⁵ Cf. KREUTZER (2011). - ²⁶ Fratelli tutti: 57. - ²⁷ KREUTZER (2011): 21. - ²⁸ Fratelli tutti: 64. - ²⁹ ibid. 65. - ³⁰ ibid. 17; cf. also HOSE (2016), ALT (2020). - ³¹ Fratelli tutti: 66. - ³² ibid. 80. - ³³ ibid. 81. - ³⁴ Ebd.: 86.

Weaknesses in the encyclical and in the Bavarian government

Anyone who followed the trial of Sister Juliana in the hall of the Würzburg District Court on the 2nd of June 2021 cannot help feeling that our society is far from sharing this humane and Christian attitude of universal fraternity and social friendship that is being presented by Pope Francis. Admittedly, the Pope's statements on social ethics are also weakened by the fact that they lack postulates for their application within the Church. Those who are looking for ecclesiological indications on how to protect the dignity of women in their own ranks will not find anything. Not a word about the sexualised violence against (religious) women in the ecclesiastical context, nor is there any word about their poor pay and exploitative working conditions in Vatican and clerical households. No word on the open questions with respect to the theology of the ecclesiastical office and the increasing need for justification regarding women being granted the same dignity as men in terms of the magisterium, but not the same rights. Not a word about the financial scandals of the Vatican Bank.

In Germany, it is also noteworthy that Bavaria is the only federal state thus far where the religious have been put on trial for following their faith and conscience in individual cases, seeing that granting church asylum was the last resort to protect the human rights of refugees. And when the case was about to be dropped, the senior public prosecutor's office pressed for a judge's decision. In his reasoning for the judgement, the judge gives more weight to Article 20 of the Basic Law, Germany's constitution, the principle of the rule of law, than to the freedom of faith and conscience from Article 4. Inevitably, we are led to ask ourselves: Should not the state protect this fundamental right rather than breaking it? And what does it mean when a criminal judge wants to make an example in the sense of "general prevention" by sentencing a nun? Does this not further criminalise people who see a humanitarian act as an ultima ratio to help other

people achieve their dignity and human rights, just because the state is unwilling or unable to enforce an asylum policy that conforms to human rights? What is the situation with universally applicable human rights if, more than 70 years after they were solemnly proclaimed, they cannot be realised in the concrete lives of individuals, but instead exploitation, deprivation of rights, and killing are the order of the day and the death of people – for example during the dangerous journey while fleeing across the Mediterranean – is condoned?³⁵

A plea for asylum legislation in line with human rights

Christian migration ethics is largely understood in terms of human rights and takes its starting point in the dignity that is inherent in every human being and that is superior to all action taken by the state.³⁶ According to this view, every human being is entitled to fundamental rights, regardless of whether they are citizens of the respective country they find themselves in. It is the task of the state to respect, protect and guarantee these rights of freedom and participation.³⁷ Although the right to asylum is not enshrined in human rights law, it is enshrined as a fundamental right in Article 16a of the constitution. The Christian social ethicist Michelle Becka counters positions that state immigration would lead to being overwhelmed and endanger the political order: "The political order seems to be less endangered by immigrants than by the defence against them."³⁸

The lawyer who defended Sister Juliana in the court case argued in a similar manner. In his plea for acquittal on 2 June, he criticised, among other things, that, at the Federal Office for Immigration and Refugees (BAMF), the so-called Dublin Department also reviews the submitted hardship cases, i.e., its own decisions, and that there is no other instance for this. Furthermore, he saw only two options in the case of forced deportation: "Either deport immediately or tolerate and thus legalise the residency." Since there had been no deportation attempt in the case under discussion, the young

³⁵ Cf. BECKA (2021). - ³⁶ Cf. BECKA (2018). - ³⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 348. - ³⁸ BECKA (2018): 349.

woman's residency had been tolerated. Thus, aiding and abetting an unauthorised residency was not even possible. Regardless of all this, Sister Juliana's decision was based on her freedom of faith and conscience, which is enshrined in the Basic Law. In conclusion, the lawyer quoted Claus Roxin, Europe's leading criminal law scholar: "Only a strong state can afford to spare deviants penalties, even if they violate criminal laws within certain tolerance limits. ... Human dignity is thereby rendered a service in a form that is a credit to any state."³⁹

Christian migration ethics does not see immigration as a threat, but as a mandate to act in solidarity. By joining together and offering their help, people strengthen the social fabric.⁴⁰ The call to become a neighbour to strangers does not stop at borders, but requires comprehensive efforts towards cross-border concepts of justice, as Pope Francis ultimately calls for with the concept of "political love"^{41, 42} The obligation to act in accordance with human rights confronts the state with the task of creating legal entry possibilities instead of increasingly sealing off Europe and shifting problems outside itself.

The EU: Free movement inside, closed to the outside world

In their essay "Europe at the Border," Michelle Becka and Johannes Ulrich impressively describe the ambiguity and dynamics of European border regimes.⁴³ With the agreement reached on 14 June 1985 in the Belgian town of Schengen, Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg abolished the borders between the European states. In addition to the freedom of goods and trade, the free movement of persons has also applied since then. At the same time, the "process of Europeanisation and the removal of internal boundaries (...)" was accompanied by being closed to the outside world.⁴⁴ This is the intent of the Dublin Regulation, according to which the countries responsible for processing asylum applications are those in which asylum seekers first enter the territory of the European Union. This created inequalities

and injustices: "It is obvious that this regulation puts the responsibility for asylum procedures on the countries in the south of Europe, while the countries that are not located at the EU's external borders (...) hardly have to expect any asylum applications. By this logic, the border states are even considered to have caused the asylum case."⁴⁵

The criminalisation of aid workers and organisations

In practice, "making borders" led to an overload of the system and to increasingly sophisticated strategies to further outsource and externalise border security. This is evidenced by the agreements with Morocco, Libya and "the most politically significant one with Turkey in May of 2016."⁴⁶ For one year, from October 2013 to October 2014, the Italian navel operation Mare Nostrum put sea rescue at the forefront. Germany and other European countries not located at the EU's external borders took in hundreds of thousands of refugees in the late summer of 2015. However, this humanisation and welcoming culture was short-lived. The discourse increasingly shifted towards the criminalisation of aid organisations and individuals. Helpers were increasingly defamed as "do-gooders." Sea rescuers were denied berths – like the Sea Watch 3, captained by Carola Rackete, in June 2019, and Sea Watch 4 last summer. Even the inhumane conditions in the Greek reception centres in autumn 2020 did not lead to a drastic turnaround and significant redistribution of refugees, although individual cities had agreed to take in particularly vulnerable asylum seekers, such as children. Instead of acting, Europe is locked into a "political impasse" and "is persisting (...) with its inaction."⁴⁷

Conclusion: Law versus justice

The EU's current migration policy is neither fair nor aligned with human rights standards. Duties and responsibilities are unevenly distributed within EU countries. Asylum seekers are being deprived of fundamental rights. That is why Michelle Becka is

³⁹ Quoted from transcript by Anja Mayer on the 2nd of June. - ⁴⁰ BECKA (2018): 350. - ⁴¹ Cf. Fratelli tutti: 18-192. - ⁴² BECKA (2018): 351. - ⁴³ BECKA/ ULRICH (2021). - ⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*: 53. - ⁴⁵ BECKA/ ULRICH (2021): 53. - ⁴⁶ *ibid.*: (2021): 54. - ⁴⁷ *ibid.*: 55.

taking a stand: “If it were clearly emphasised that justice must be the normative guiding principle for shaping migration, then fraternity and solidarity could also be better situated. For example, empathising with the situation of migrants could lead to greater willingness to seek more equitable norms and procedures for them in the first place.”⁴⁸

Becka and Ulrich see an approach to a solution in cities, municipalities, individuals and organisations networking horizontally and becoming socially engaged. “To prevent such initiatives from leading to further exclusions and marginalisations, their engagement must be organised in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. This can also ensure that they do not become mere stopgaps for a failed European policy, but are – in the best case – part of a new European vision.”⁴⁹

Great solidarity and support

Due to the coronavirus situation, only seven journalists and five other people were allowed to enter the courtroom during the public hearing. A dozen or so supporters remained in the foyer of the local court for three and a half hours to express their solidarity with Sister Juliana and the actions of our congregation. And it seemed bizarre that the members of the ecumenical asylum working group were not far from the cross that has been hanging in every public building since Bavarian Premier Markus Söder issued his decree in the spring of 2018. The numerous letters and donations received in Oberzell since the trial and sentencing of Sister Juliana to probation are a strong sign of solidarity. They are a testimony to living ecumenism and Christian action independent of church denominational ties. They could also send a signal to the hard-pressed church institutions that their actions are credible when they serve the unconditional protection of human dignity and when their protagonists do not shy away from accepting personal risks for the sake of their own convictions. The lawyer who, in addition to Sister Juliana, also represents the Missionary Benedictine Brother Abraham of Münsterschwarzach Abbey and the

Abess of Kirschletten Abbey in similar cases, has announced that he will appeal against the judgement of June 2nd.



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⁴⁸ BECKA (2021): 25. - ⁴⁹ BECKA/ ULRICH (2021): 56.

THOUGHTS ON THE ENCYCLICAL *FRATELLI TUTTI* FROM THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Kordian Merta ofm

When I read the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* here in the heart of Africa, where I have experienced the brutal injustice of the world almost daily for 32 years, I have mixed feelings: What is written there is naive and unrealistic. It is a beautiful dream, but, unfortunately, it has nothing to do with reality. A similar opinion can be had about the Gospel: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” – many pious wishes, but far from any reality. The Pope makes it clear in his encyclical that even if our situation seems hopeless, there is reason for hope. Drawing on the parable of the Good Samaritan, he reminds us that we are called to come closer to the other, no matter what religion we belong to, no matter what social status we have, no matter what country we live in – because that is how we become human. I want to tell a story about the hope of fraternity in the midst of violence and injustice.

In January 1990, three Franciscan brothers responded to the Vatican’s call to Obo, a town on the border with Sudan and the most remote mission in the Central African Republic. The journey from the capital of Bangui took five full days. The nearest petrol station was (and still is) 550 km from the city. I had the honour of being responsible for the Rafai mission for thirty years, which was then additionally entrusted to the brothers after one year. In my initial years at the parish, which is as big as Rwanda (about 25,000 km²), I was responsible for catechesis, the catechumenate, and administering the sacraments. On balance, these initial years were sad: nothing changed. Witch hunts were common. Men were persecuted because they were suspected of being “alligator people.” It became clear to me then that evangelisation and education would be very closely connected in this situation. However, school education in particular was in a state of constant decline until the last school finally closed.

At that time there was no internet. Our only connection to the outside world was the radio. We listened to Radio France International every day. To this day, I remember an event that was reported for several days: Somewhere in the world, a group of dolphins had been trapped in the ice pack. Time was of the essence, because the animals were unable to breathe in the ice. The only solution to save them was to break up the ice pack and cut a path for them to the open ocean. The whole world was holding its breath. Russian and American icebreakers were on their way, and every hour counted. At the last minute, the dolphins were saved and the world could breathe a sigh of relief. The world powers were celebrated for joining forces and spending millions on this campaign to free the dolphins. When it was all over, I realised that the campaign had left me with a strange feeling of bitterness that was hard to describe: What a pity that the children of Central Africa are not dolphins. Otherwise, we probably would have received pencils, notebooks and crayons for them. However, *Homo Sapiens Africanus* is far too common a species.

Children who are not going to school are being deprived of their rights. They are being robbed and left wounded like the man in the parable of the Good Samaritan. But who is the robber here? Who are the perpetrators on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho? And who might the Good Samaritan be? The parents? They have never been to school themselves. The state? It cannot even get the schools in the capital of Bangui to work properly. Then there are the NGOs. The bigger ones, like the Red Cross, have enormous resources at their disposal. The combined budgets of all the NGOs in Central Africa are larger than the state budget. The UN budget for Central Africa alone is in fact twice the size of the Central African state budget. However, the financially strong NGOs cannot finance long-term

projects because their projects have to be completed within the financial year. Education is an endless project. Despite the crisis, five schools were built in our community in 1995 with money from the World Bank. However, these schools remained closed because there was no money for teachers' salaries in the long term.

The following year, Franciscan sisters from the Democratic Republic of Congo came to us. They had experience in child education and youth education. Two weeks after their arrival, it was possible to open the first school. But very soon the sisters came to me and said, "We can't teach here, because these children don't understand a word of French." I replied, "These children have been waiting for this school for years. They can't wait any longer." Two weeks after the school opened, I met two seven-year-old girls at the market. For the first time I was greeted in French: "Bonsoir, ma sœur" ("Good evening, sister!"). Five years ago, one of these girls became the first Central African woman to graduate with a master's degree in business.

There were many Good Samaritans along the way. The first Samaritans were Manos Unidas and then Franziskaner Helfen (at that time still the Franciscan Mission Headquarters), which among other things helped to finance 19 classes and two more schools. Six years later, when the oldest pupils had finished primary school and were to enter the college (grammar school from form six to nine), two more Samaritans arrived from France, a young couple who had married only two months earlier. They worked as volunteers, and their knowledge, enthusiasm and giving of themselves managed to raise the level of teaching and to create an atmosphere that promoted educational success among the students. When another couple wanted to volunteer, we even considered building a new house for the volunteers – when the tragic fate of the region caught up with us.

The Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and its leader Joseph Kony arrived in the Central African Republic after fleeing Sudan and Congo. The horrific

stories that have since followed have been repeated many times over: 500 children were abducted between 2009 and 2013. Most were able to return home, while about 100 died of exhaustion or were murdered. During an attack on our mission, three siblings – two girls and a boy aged between 9 and 12 – were abducted. It was only in November 2020 that we learned that the boy had been killed and one of the sisters had died during childbirth at the age of 15. Only one sister survived. She is now allowed to visit her family, but without her children – as leverage to get her to return to the kidnapers.

The attack on our mission also had far-reaching consequences for the school: the volunteers had to leave, and some of the teachers wanted to be taken back to Bangui. However, the worst thing was the constant fear of being attacked again. There were often false alarms: a frightened mother picking up her child from class with trembling hands and a little later 600 screaming children running in all directions. Another time, a badly attached blackboard fell to the floor. The reaction was the same.

Three weeks after the attack, the village on the other side of the river was attacked. For three hours we could hear the noise of the battle: The residents defended themselves against the Kalashnikovs with homemade hunting shotguns. When the noise stopped, I crossed the river. The dead had to be buried quickly, because in the tropics the corpses swell after a short time due to the formation of decomposition gases. There were graves that had been dug quickly between the burnt houses and I went from one to the other. A mother did not want to part with her son. Her vocal cords no longer worked – her voice sounded like the hissing of a snake. Her son was 20. What can you do for people who have experienced something like this?

As if that were not enough, the Islamists seized power in Chad in 2013. With the pretext that the Central African people were dissatisfied, they also came to the Central African Republic, where they

founded the Seleka, an alliance of armed rebels. They distributed weapons to the Muslim part of the population (about 10-15%) and assured them that from now on they would rule the country. When the rebels arrived in 2014, people were shot at again. Our vehicles, which we had spent all our savings on, were stolen. For two years we had to make do with a Chinese motorbike. Despite all this, we managed to keep the school open. For one year, our secondary school was the only one within a radius of 700 km where it was possible to organise “le baccalauréat,” the final qualifying examination for graduation. The examination commission came especially for this purpose on a UN plane.

In the last elections in December 2020, something astonishing happened: the Muslim rebels allied with their biggest enemy, the Christian rebels, to try to seize power and overthrow the democratically elected government. Fortunately, they did not succeed, but this action made one thing very clear: the basis of violence and murder is not religion, but the pursuit of power. Religions have been and still are being manipulated to that end to this day.

Since the rebels have allied themselves, the return of Muslims to our region has once again become a possibility. In a village near Rafai, they even make up 50% of the population now. It is good that they are back among us. If we work and live in peace, then Muslim children will take the baccalaureate in our secondary school in 10 years' time, just as they did before the war.

In his encyclical, the Pope advocates the behaviour of the Good Samaritan, in order to become a model for our own relationships in today's world. Even if we feel that we are unable to do so, we must help everyone who needs our help. Thus, our schools around Rafai will never completely solve the deficit of school education in the Central African Republic. However, every child has the right to go to school, whether their parents are aware of it or not, whether they are rich or poor, regardless of what religion they belong to.

On this path, we experience again and again how others assist us as Good Samaritans. Our education project is continually being supported by various organisations, including, for the last few years, by a company from Germany. It is helping us by sponsoring scholarships for nine students. Our relationship is based on mutual trust. We do not have to present complex project plans. We do not have to stick to fixed deadlines. We do not have to keep overly accurate books. And we are allowed to adapt our goals to the students' needs. This method has also appealed to other Samaritans from Canada, so it could be that more students will soon receive scholarships.

There is only one university in the Central African Republic. It looks as if there was only one brick-layer available. This is a disastrous situation for the country. I believe that building a university would be the best help the Church could offer to the people of the Central African Republic. Is all of that just a dream? Therein lies the power of the Gospel. Everything that corresponds with the will of God is possible. Especially when we realise that we are *Fratelli tutti*.



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A MUSLIM COMMENTARY ON *FRATELLI TUTTI*

Gönül Yerli

I can still remember the feeling when, on a cool spring day in 2013, I saw white smoke rising from St. Peter's Basilica on the evening news, and then came the announcement: We have a Pope! Argentinian Jorge Mario Bergoglio was announced as the new head of the Catholic Church, the first time a non-European cardinal, a Latin American, had been elected pontiff. Then came the traditional loggia scene from St. Peter's Basilica: an old, simple man stepped in front of the cheering crowd. I said to my husband „he has nur (Arabic for „light“) on his face,“ which figuratively applies to people who walk on the path of God. Soon afterwards, the world was to learn that this Pope would not move into the papal apartments, but had chosen to stay in the comparatively simple Vatican guest house; that he would forego the Popemobile and prefer to use a not particularly exciting, small car to get around; that he was initiating a break in style, putting away the brocade and red slippers of his predecessor. All of those trappings were not on this Pope's programme. Instead, the chosen name of „Francis“ became the guiding principle. For the first time in church history, a Pope has dared to fashion a programme for a universal church in the 21st century in the name of the Little Poor Man of Assisi. From that point on, he was also „my Pope“ and „my hope.“

I am a Muslim in body and soul and I know about the theological position, at least of the Sunni doctrine, which rejects the institutional form of supreme authority, because God alone is the „greatest“ and „highest.“ The basis of any belief and also non-belief is borne by each individual, and so too is the responsibility for life and the environment. And yet, Islam has always needed role models in the form of prophets, most recently Muhammad – peace be upon him – who were sent to give „guidance“ and „admonition“ to humanity. That is now over 1400 years ago. We should be honest with ourselves in admitting that there have

been people over the course of these centuries whom we have looked up to, who have remained sources of inspiration for good to this day. Currently, the widespread perception of the Muslim world hurts. The images seen by the Western public seem to confirm the deductive patterns of thought regarding a regressive Islam, characterised by violence, the oppression of and discrimination against women, a lack of education, a weak economy, dictatorial regimes, theocracies, in short, a societal order from which there is little to learn. With the civil war in Syria, the tyranny of the so-called „I.S.,“ international extremism that uses the name of Islam, and, most recently, the debates about increasing Muslim antisemitism, there is no end to the horrifying news from the so-called „Islamic world.“ The Muslim world has a real problem in the sense of appearing credible. It almost sounds like sheer mockery to declare that Islam means peace and salvation for all people.

Of course, it tends to win you over when, under all these circumstances, the highest Christian authority in the world has taken inspiration from a Muslim in his call for fraternity and world peace. In fact, this is the first time a Pope has named a leading representative of Islam in an encyclical, referring to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayyeb. The meeting between the two spiritual leaders took place in Abu Dhabi at the end of 2019, and the „Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together“ signed at the meeting would be cited in *Fratelli tutti* a little later.

„My brother Pope Francis' message *Fratelli tutti* is an extension of the document on human fraternity,“ the Grand Imam tweeted after the encyclical was published. „It reveals a global reality of unstable positions and decisions. It is the vulnerable and marginalised who are paying the price.“ Pope Francis' letter on fraternity and social friendship is

explicitly addressed to all „people of good will and with a living conscience,“ Al-Tayyeb said. In doing so, he was giving humankind its conscience back. Both criticise the unjust distribution of natural resources worldwide, along with the misuse of religions to spread violence and hatred in the world. They are focused on the mutual influence of religions, which can only be found in dialogue and combined action. Because the „West can discover in the East remedies for those spiritual and religious maladies that are caused by a prevailing materialism. And the East can find in the West many elements that can help free it from weakness, division, conflict and scientific, technical and cultural decline.“

The date of the meeting was not a coincidence. The Pope's guiding figure, Francis of Assisi, met the Sultan of Egypt Malik al-Kamil in 1219 on the fringes of the Crusades. 800 years later, it was Pope Francis who would fly to Egypt in 2019 to commemorate this historic meeting. It is reported that it was this encounter that led the missionary Francis of Assisi to address a letter to the „rulers of nations.“ Impressed by the experience of the call to prayer in Islam, the saint proposed a common call to prayer for the faithful. There are striking similarities in his prayers of praise between the names of God and the 99 „Esma ul-Husna“, the „most beautiful names“ of God in Islam. At the time, Francis' attitude towards Islam embodied a clear antithesis to the generally polemical rhetoric in Europe towards Muslims that would eventually fuel the Crusades. His conduct was characterised by openness to and interest in the foreign culture and religion, in that these people also „offer praise and thanks to God“ and are loved by Him. St Francis saw Islam neither as heresy nor as sin, but as another form of worship that is to be respected and can even give meaning and strength to one's own faith. Almost a millennium had to pass before a similar approach to offering dialogue was evident on the Christian side. An important step in this process was Pope Paul VI's inaugural encyclical of 1964, in which he used the word „dialogue“ for the first time in a magisterial document and even declared dialogue to be an essential feature of the Church: „The Church must enter into

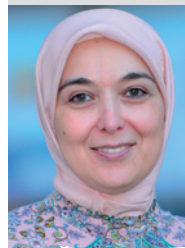
dialogue with the world that it lives in. The Church makes itself the word, the message, the dialogue.“ At the end of the Council came the „Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions“ (*Nostra Aetate*) of 1965. In fact, in this case the Catholic Church was formulating something that was novel in its history, establishing principles for its conduct with other religions. Now it will be Pope Francis' turn to fully unfold the legacy of the 2nd Vatican Council.

For a long time now, it has no longer been about respect and recognition of another faith's truth, but about how everyone, in a network of believers, can stand by the world community with all its crises. In this sense, the ecological wake-up call of *Laudato si'* is followed by the social encouragement of *Fratelli tutti*. This style is fuelled by many personal reflections and experiences. The experience of Latin America shines through in many areas. The encyclical is a powerful call to refrain from focusing on material and economic issues in seeking solutions for the global, societal crisis, but to instead reflect on a humane world view. In dialogue with traditions that have other experiences of faith, paths can be taken towards a world community in solidarity and fraternity – that is what the Pope is focusing on. In doing so, he formulates it in such clear and simple language, such that precisely that clarity and simplicity leave many of us asking: Is it that easy? Can respect for other religion be that simple? Can peace truly succeed? Can we have happiness without materialistic ownership? Can we save our creation with a „less is more!“ mentality? Even if the faith communities themselves repeatedly fall short of their imposed maxims or fall back into old patterns of behaviour, they are to be reminded of them again and again, and measured against them. This is precisely what Pope Francis is calling for. And yes, if religions are to stand for human values, for true selflessness, solidarity, charity, tolerance, mutual respect, non-violence, truth, forgiveness and mercy – to sum it up: if they are to teach „humanity,“ then they must credibly ally themselves in seeking this goal. Pope Francis points out that „indifference“ to the plight of others is a plague that destroys humanity. Most people are reluctant

to speak out against the suffering in society. He calls for benevolence, for seriously pursuing the well-being of others in solidarity, and for standing up for justice under all circumstances. Who was going to contradict him?

Globalisation continues to advance, accompanied by the corresponding pluralistic communities of ethnic, religious and cultural origin. Every day we interact with members of different faiths among our neighbours, colleagues, friends. We experience different facets of diverse belief systems in our daily lives. It would be unrealistic to believe that this situation can be reversed. We need to come together in the face of this new global situation. If we put the pandemic behind us, we will remember for many years to come how neither Easter nor Christmas nor the month of Ramadan could be celebrated in cherished fellowship and tradition. It has affected all people equally, those of any religion or those with no religious affiliation. It is precisely in crises that we must learn for the sake of the future and not close our eyes to undesirable developments, including within religions. Pope Francis clearly calls for this in his social encyclical.

For him, faith and politics are not opposites. A responsible believer stands in the middle of this world and must have the aspiration to help shape it. The potential for peace within religions is intrinsic to them, and means not only peace (Arabic: salam; Hebrew: shalom) between peoples, but also cosmic peace and the spiritual peace of each individual. That religions can bring peace is something they can demonstrate, at the latest now. In the common spiritual bond, as Pope Francis puts it at the end with „A prayer to the Creator,“ and in the energetic interaction of a true fraternity, it is always worth a try. If I did not know who the author of *Fratelli tutti* is, I would think it was a Muslim with a deep mind and reflective (theological) knowledge from Islamic sources. But it is the Pope who is also giving us Muslims courage and hope!



About the author:

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