

Fratelli Tutti and the Preaching of the Good News

The solutions that Francis offers to achieve the new humanity that he envisages are inadequate, for they are devoid, for the most part, of the transforming power of the Gospel.

October 23, 2020 Fr. Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM., Cap. Essay, Features 21
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Pope Francis leaves at the conclusion of his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Oct. 21, 2020. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

In his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis addresses the entire world. He passionately exhorts it to embrace “fraternity and social friendship” (2). In his opening chapter, Francis provides a comprehensive litany of all the ways – personal, familial, racial, national, political, economic, and religious – in which the world is torn by strife, hatred and injustice. **Francis rightly recognizes that the world has lost its aspiration for universal fraternity and social friendship.**

To alleviate all of the evils that he delineates, Francis states his foundational principle: **“Social friendship and universal fraternity necessarily call for an acknowledgement of the worth of every human person, always and everywhere”** (106). Francis beautifully and insightfully illustrates this foundational principle by employing Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. All of humankind is bludgeoned by evil and injustice, and everyone is called upon to come lovingly to the aid of one another. Only by the entire world assuming the mind of the Good Samaritan will universal fraternity and social friendship be obtained.

Thus, Francis calls upon all social, political, judicial, and economic institutions to foster and implement a respect for the worth of every human being and to do so after the manner of the Good Samaritan.

Moreover, **Francis believes that all religions are to play a key role within this recreation of the social order, one that is truly fraternal in nature.** In accord, then, with the document on human fraternity that he and the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb issued in Abu Dhabi (February, 2019), Francis reiterates that “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them together as brothers and sisters” (5). Thus, different religions, “based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society” (271). Moreover, “as believers, we are convinced that, without an openness to the Father of all, there will be no solid and stable reasons for an appeal to fraternity” (272). Francis “calls for an alternative way of thinking. Without an attempt to enter into that way of thinking, what I am saying here will sound wildly unrealistic. On the other hand, if we accept the great principle that there are rights born of our inalienable human dignity, we can rise to the challenge of envisaging a new humanity” (127).

One can neither fault Francis' sincere and heartfelt desire to rid the world of all that sows divisions among peoples, nor can one question his attempt to address the whole of humankind within his encyclical. The problematic issues that he addresses are universal, and it will take a worldwide effort to alleviate them. However, **the solutions that Francis offers to achieve the new humanity that he envisages, the actual transformation of men and women, are inadequate, for they are devoid, for the most part, of the transforming power of the Gospel. Only in Christ does one become a new creation, for the old order of sin and death has passed away (1 Cor. 5:17).**

Francis justifiably wants all men and women of good will to embrace his appeal for universal fraternity and social friendship, yet **his proposal is “unrealistic” for it lacks the very God-given basis for universal fraternity and social friendship – Jesus Christ. What is absent, though its presence is so evidently needed, is the call for evangelization – the making of all peoples and nations one in Christ Jesus, and so brothers and sisters to one another.** Other religions may interpret such a Christian claim as elitist, especially in the light of Francis' desire to employ them in his global effort to foster universal fraternity. Yet, without the call to conversion to Jesus Christ, his endeavor will ultimately fail.

Below I offer some examples of Francis' unsatisfactory approach, as well as suggestions that would authentically further his desired goal.

First, Francis finds the source and chief exemplar for social living within the Trinity itself, for the persons of the Trinity live in loving communion with one another (85). Francis prays that the “Trinity of love” would “pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love” (287). What Francis declares and prays is exceedingly important. However, he does not elaborate on how the Trinity pours out the “torrent of fraternal love.” The Trinity is not only

the source and exemplar of “social friendship,” but the Trinity also acts within the world so as to take humankind within its own “fraternity” of love. These divine actions, initially enacted in relation to the Jewish people and later fulfilled in Jesus Christ for all of humankind, subsume human beings into the very life of the Trinity. These Trinitarian actions are the “torrent” of love which makes possible “fraternal love” here on earth. **Because of these Trinitarian actions, human beings are empowered to create, in love, a proper social order, one that is founded upon the dignity of each individual. In the light of the Trinity and the actions it performs, we must examine the manner in which Francis speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

Second, Francis references “the Father” five times. God is our “common Father” (46), who cares for all of humankind, and who summons us to be as merciful as he is merciful (60). All religions are to be open to the Father, for, as creator of all human beings, he is the source of fraternity and social friendship among all peoples (272). Thus, Francis prays:

Lord, Father of our human family, you created all human beings equal in dignity: pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter, dialogue, justice and peace. Move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world, a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war. (287)

Francis is correct in stating that the Father, as creator, is the Father of all, and thus the Father of all believers of whatever religion. However, the Father desires a deeper relationship with humankind other than that of his simply being its creator. **The Father desires that all men and women become his adopted sons and daughters so as to participate in the very sonship of his eternal Son. Only in sharing in the sonship of his Son are human beings able to cry out in the Spirit, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal.4:6). He has**

made such a relationship possible through his incarnate Son, Jesus.

Moreover, only by being transformed into the likeness of Jesus, the Son, through the Holy Spirit, are human beings capable of fostering the true fraternity that the Father and Pope Francis himself so much desires. Without such a “recreation,” fraternity and social friendship will remain a “dream.” Thus, God’s fatherhood founded upon his being creator of all human beings is not adequate to achieve the goals that Francis wishes to achieve within global society.

Third, the above brings to the fore Jesus – who he is and what he does. Within the encyclical, the name “Jesus” appears 33 times, the term “Christ” 5 times, and “Jesus Christ” once. **The encyclical, however, never refers to Jesus as the Son of God.** Most references to “Jesus” are found within quotations from the New Testament – 17 of which occur within Francis’ exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and 12 of which occur when Francis further references Jesus’ moral exhortations. Of the remaining four references, two are in relation to Mary. She is “the mother of Jesus,” and she cares “not only for Jesus but also for the rest of her children.” Francis also speaks of Christians drinking from the well-spring of “the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” and lastly Francis prays that our love would reflect “the actions of Jesus, in his family of Nazareth.”

Evident in the above delineations is that **Jesus is primarily seen as a moral teacher and the premier exemplar of his own teaching.** Although speaking from a Christian perspective, Francis believes that Jesus’ teaching and example would be in fundamental accord with the moral teaching of other religions, and so together all religions are able to promote universal fraternity among all peoples.

Doubtlessly, Jesus is the perfect exemplar of all the virtues that would further fraternity among all people and nations, yet

more is needed than Jesus' good example and ethical doctrine. Despite the fact that Francis enumerates a host of evils that afflict the world order, the term "sin" is only mentioned once within his encyclical, and that is in reference to the Church's "own experience of grace and sin" (278). Why is there a seeming reluctance to speak of sin? Francis does speak of the Christian tradition's concept of "concupiscence," which "has been present from the beginning of humanity," but he does not refer to it as a "sinful" inclination, but rather he terms it a "human inclination." This human inclination, Francis states, "can be overcome with the help of God" (166).

Again, why is there a seeming reluctance to speak of "concupiscence" as an effect of humankind's primordial sin? I would suggest that to speak of humankind's fall from its original God-created goodness and its subsequent history of sin would necessitate **the need to address the issue of reconciliation with God, as well as the need for humankind to be recreated. To do so, however, would demand that one move from Francis' paradigm of God as Creator-Father of humankind to God as Savior-Father of humankind.**

This distinctively Christian paradigm would encompass the Judeo-Christian tradition, a tradition that culminates in the Father lovingly sending his only begotten Son into the world so that whoever believes in him might have eternal life (Jn. 3:16). **Jesus, as the Father's incarnate Son, would, through his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, free humankind from sin and death, and recreate it anew through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To offer the good news of Jesus Christ and to exhort the world to believe in him would, however, once again suggest a remedy for the world's evils and provide a means for securing universal fraternity that exceeds the means of merely social, political, judicial and economic institutions.**

Moreover, it would exceed the expectations and beliefs of those religions which fall outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. **Thus, the good news of Jesus Christ falls outside of what Francis hopes to achieve in his desire to elicit the support of the whole world in his call for universal fraternity and social friendship. Nonetheless, the price he pays is dire, for without Jesus, universal friendship is unachievable.** Tellingly, perhaps, the “cross” is mentioned only once in the encyclical and that in reference to Mary standing beneath it (278). **Francis does speak of Jesus shedding his blood in love for all, but does not speak of its saving benefits** (85). Thus, Jesus tends to become merely a model for our own love for one another. Jesus is only once referred to as “Savior,” and that within a quote from John Chrysostom (74).

What Francis forgets is that the Father, from before the foundation of the world, has chosen us in Christ to be holy and blameless, and to be adopted sons in his Son, Christ Jesus. Francis ignores the Father’s eternal plan that all those who believe are to be united to, summed up in, his Son, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3-10). The Father’s plan is that in Jesus alone is found true universal fraternity and authentic social friendship. Such an understanding, which Francis could have employed to great benefit, is marvelously expressed in St. Paul’s teaching on the body of Christ. Concerning ecumenism, Francis does speak, in accordance with 1 Cor. 12:13, of all Christians being baptized in one Spirit into one body (280).

However, he does not develop this understanding to further his desire for universal fraternity. All those who live in Christ become one in him, and they all contribute, in love, according to their individual gifts and graces, to the wellbeing of the whole body. **The body of Christ, with Jesus as head, is the supreme and ultimate expression of universal friendship lived in love.** Moreover, the encyclical fails to mention the Eucharist. This sacrament enacts the fullest expression and

nurtures, on earth, the closest bond of universal fraternity, for the participants, as one, partake of, and so are united to, the risen Lord Jesus. This fraternal communion in Christ is the good news that a divided world needs to hear.

Fourth, what role, then, does the Holy Spirit play within Francis' encyclical? The "Holy Spirit" is referenced three times and "the Spirit" once, which was just noted. Francis twice speaks of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In the first instance he focuses on "goodness," a fruit that seeks "what is best for others" or "wills the good of others" (112). In the second reference, Francis emphasizes "kindness," which "describes an attitude that is gentle, pleasant and supportive" (223).

What Francis states is true, but **what is absent is that one can bear the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of love, only if one is attached to the vine that is Jesus Christ (Jn.15:1-9). It is only by abiding in Christ, being nourished on the Spirit of Christ, that one can bear fully all of the Spirit's fruit. Those who are not grafted onto Christ through the Holy Spirit, and so become a new creation in him, are prone to commit the deeds of the flesh – "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like" (Gal. 5:19-21). These works of the flesh, unlike the fruit of the Spirit, are the very deeds that war against fraternity and universal friendship. Again, living in communion with Christ through the indwelling Spirit is essential to attain the goals that Francis so wishes to achieve.**

While the grace of Christ is accessible to all, it needs to be noted that, as exemplified in the above, **Francis at times seems to want to attribute to non-Christians the saving benefits that accrue only to Christians.** (This can also be seen in Francis' exposition of Thomas Aquinas' understanding of grace, see 91-94). Moreover, Francis speaks of the Church as "wanting to

give birth to a new world, where all are brothers and sisters” (278). However, **the only new world that the Church can give birth to is one that is born anew in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Without the Gospel, no new world is possible.** The reason Francis may make these explicitly Christian statements is that he instinctively realizes that what God, as creator, has given to humankind is insufficient to achieve his intended goal of universal fraternity and social friendship. Thus, he has to “smuggle in” the saving benefits that come to Christians through the saving work of Jesus.

In his final prayer, Francis prays that the Holy Spirit would come “to show us your beauty, reflected in all the peoples of the world, so that we may discover anew that all are important and all are necessary, different faces of the one humanity that God so loves” (287). The Holy Spirit does need to enlighten our hearts and minds to see the beauty in all men and women, but in so doing he must also interiorly empower us to freely love them, and such a Spirit-filled empowerment is only fully accessible to those who abide in Christ. As noted above, while Francis is addressing the whole world and particularly other religions, he again, nonetheless, speaks of the need of the Holy Spirit, a theological truth that is foreign to religions outside the Judeo-Christian tradition.

I would, in conclusion, like to make a **fifth** point. Within his encyclical, Francis ardently endeavors to encourage all men and women of good will to take up the challenge of promoting a common friendship among all peoples. This is a noble cause, but within Francis’ encyclical it appears to be only a this-worldly enterprise. **Too often, within his encyclical, it appears that Francis perceives religion as a tool to further a this-world agenda, one that solely contributes to a compassionate, benevolent and just social order. Francis’ encyclical possesses no eschatology. There are no references to the resurrection.**

Because the encyclical contains no eschatology, even its this-world perspective is deprived of hope. No one can really take seriously the thought that the world will ever achieve global fraternity and universal friendship. Even Christians realize that what the Gospel proclaims concerning all being one in Christ in communion with the Holy Spirit, and so adopted sons and daughters of the Father, **will only find its fulfillment when Jesus returns in glory at the end of time.** In this world, it is precisely this eschatology, this transcendent divine end, that brings hope to faith and endurance to love.

Pope Francis has a great love of St. Francis. For Francis the Pope, Francis the Saint embodies all that his encyclical declares – a love, mercy, gentleness and kindness for all, especially for the most impoverished, downtrodden and marginalized. St. Francis' friendship was universal. **Pope Francis' encyclical would be much pastoral and would be much more liberating if only he, like St. Francis, had offered to an impoverished world the Good News of Jesus Christ, for in him alone is found the riches of salvation – heavenly friendship.**