



Twelve Themes from *Fratelli Tutti*

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October 4, 2020

Introduction

Fratelli Tutti is a powerful expression of faith in a time of doubt, a call to hope in a time of fear, and a challenge to love in at time of anger and division.

Pope Francis' letter is a combination of Franciscan themes and Jesuit discernment, shaped by Argentinian pastoral experience and traditional Catholic social teaching.

The encyclical affirms and applies the principles of Catholic social teaching to the “new things” of 2020: a global pandemic, an economic crisis, political polarization, and social isolation and exclusion.

Pope Francis insists that those who are poor or vulnerable, those who live with disabilities or discrimination, and immigrants and refugees, are not issues or problems, but sisters and brothers, part of one human family.

Fratelli Tutti is a universal message, but it has particular implications for the United States a month before an election. Pope Francis calls us to practice “political charity” at a time of anger, division, and loss, and to pursue the common good and measure our choices by how they touch the “least of these.” He urges us to move beyond personal, ideological, economic, and political isolation to encounter the lives and hopes of others, especially those who have been excluded.

In this letter, Pope Francis asks us to extend “fraternity” from our own families to a suffering world and to expand “friendship” from the personal to the political and global. It is a call to conversion, to think and act anew, not to a political program or ideological agenda. In his words, the letter is a “modest contribution to continued reflection” on “a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words.”

Pope Francis is the world's pastor who stood alone in St. Peter's Square in March 2020 and told us to keep the faith and not lose hope in a global pandemic. In this powerful letter, he now challenges us to respond with love, fraternity, and friendship in a divided and hurting world.

Twelve Themes from Fratelli Tutti

Here are twelve preliminary themes from *Fratelli Tutti*, using the [language of the encyclical](#):

- 1. This letter is addressed to everyone:** women and men; Catholics and people of every faith and no faith; women and men of every nation, race, and ethnicity; rich and poor, powerful and powerless; every member of the human family. In the first sentence and throughout, the letter refers to “brothers and sisters”:

“FRATELLI TUTTI”. With these words, Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel (#1).

- 2. Francis makes Jesus story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) the centerpiece of the letter, suggesting it is the parable for our time:**

...[W]e are still “illiterate” when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable.... We have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, ignoring situations until they affect us directly (#64).

We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity (#68).

The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project. Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders.... All of us have in ourselves something of the wounded man, something of the robber, something of the passers-by, and something of the Good Samaritan (#69).

- 3. Pope Francis responds to the pandemic and the divisions in the world by calling us to overcome isolation and interference with a sense of belonging, encounter and solidarity:**

In today’s world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat.... Isolation and withdrawal into one’s own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes. Culture clash, no; culture of encounter, yes” (#30).

The notion of “every man for himself” will rapidly degenerate into a free-for-all that would prove worse than any pandemic (#36).

Solidarity is a word that is not always well received; in certain situations, it has become a dirty word, a word that dare not be said. Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It 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 combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights (#116).

4. In this new encyclical, Francis renews his warnings against a “throwaway culture:”

Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, “persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ – like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ – like the elderly (#18).

No one is useless and no one is expendable (#215).

5. Pope Francis lifts up racism as an enduring and recurring evil:

...[A] readiness to discard others finds expression in vicious attitudes that we thought long past, such as racism, which retreats underground only to keep re-emerging. Instances of racism continue to shame us, for they show that our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive as we think (#20).

6. Francis once again warns against walls, physical, moral and spiritual, that deny human dignity and divide the human family. He addresses immigration and refugees, directly, clearly and powerfully as a test of faith and justice:

[N]ew walls are erected for self-preservation, the outside world ceases to exist and leaves only “my” world, to the point that others, no longer considered human beings possessed of an inalienable dignity, become only “them”. Once more, we encounter “the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land, in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people (#27).

“...in some host countries, migration causes fear and alarm, often fomented and exploited for political purposes. This can lead to a xenophobic mentality, as people close in on themselves, and it needs to be addressed decisively”. 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. ...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 (#39).

Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate (#129).

For those who are not recent arrivals and already participate in the fabric of society, it is important to apply the concept of “citizenship”, which “is based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice (#131).

Latino culture is “a ferment of values and possibilities that can greatly enrich the United States”, for “intense immigration always ends up influencing and transforming the culture of a place.... Immigrants, if they are helped to integrate, are a blessing, a source of enrichment and new gift that encourages a society to grow” (#135).

7. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis calls for a better kind of politics and warns against destructive populism:

...when [people] 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”. This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity. Once more, I appeal for a renewed appreciation of politics as “a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good” (#180).

...politics is something more noble than posturing, marketing and media spin. These sow nothing but division, conflict and a bleak cynicism incapable of mobilizing people to pursue a common goal (#197).

“Popular” leaders, those capable of interpreting the feelings and cultural dynamics of a people... can become the basis of an enduring vision of transformation and growth that would also include making room for others in the pursuit of the common good. But this can degenerate into an unhealthy “populism” when individuals are able to exploit politically a people’s culture, under whatever ideological banner, for their own personal advantage or continuing grip on power. Or when, at other times, they seek popularity by appealing to the basest and most selfish inclinations of certain sectors of the population. This becomes all the more serious when, whether in cruder or more subtle forms, it leads to the usurpation of institutions and laws (#159).

The Church, while respecting the autonomy of political life, does not restrict her mission to the private sphere. On the contrary, “she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines” in the building of a better world or fail to “reawaken the spiritual energy” that can contribute to the betterment of society. It is true that religious ministers must not engage in the party politics that are the proper domain of the laity, but neither can they renounce the political dimension of life itself, which involves a constant attention to the common good and a concern for integral human development (#276).

8. In this encyclical, Pope Francis warns against the human costs of our digital world:

Digital relationships, which do not demand the slow and gradual cultivation of friendships, stable interaction or the building of a consensus that matures over time, have the appearance of sociability. Yet they do not really build community; instead, they tend to disguise and expand the very individualism that finds expression in xenophobia and in contempt for the vulnerable. Digital connectivity is not enough to build bridges. It is not capable of uniting humanity (#42).

We should also recognize that destructive forms of fanaticism are at times found among religious believers, including Christians; they too “can be caught up in networks of verbal violence through the internet and the various forms of digital communication. Even in Catholic media, limits can be overstepped, defamation and slander can become commonplace, and all ethical standards and respect for the good name of others can be abandoned” (#46).

9. In the letter, Pope Francis offers particular warnings for Christians:

...belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God. A believer may be untrue to everything that his faith demands of him, and yet think he is close to God and better than others. The guarantee of an authentic openness to God, on the other hand, is a way of practising the faith that helps open our hearts to our brothers and sisters (#74).

[T]here 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 (#86).

The spiritual stature of a person’s life is measured by love, which in the end remains “the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life’s worth or lack thereof”. Yet some believers think that it consists in the imposition of their own ideologies upon everyone else, or in a violent defence of the truth, or in impressive demonstrations of strength. All of us, as believers, need to recognize that love takes first place.... (#92).

10. The encyclical does not fit the ideological or cultural framework of right and left. Pope Francis strongly warns that fraternity, friendship, and solidarity cannot be built on ethical relativism or a world without moral truth:

[W]e have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good.... Every society needs to ensure that values are passed on; otherwise, what is handed down are selfishness, violence, corruption in its various forms, indifference and, ultimately, a life closed to transcendence and entrenched in individual interests (#113).

The solution is not relativism. Under the guise of tolerance, relativism ultimately leaves the interpretation of moral values to those in power, to be defined as they see fit (#206).

If society is to have a future, it must respect the truth of our human dignity and submit to that truth (#207).

Good and evil no longer exist in themselves; there is only a calculus of benefits and burdens. As a result of the displacement of moral reasoning, the law is no longer seen as reflecting a fundamental notion of justice but as mirroring notions currently in vogue (#210).

11. The letter addresses two major threats to life: war and the death penalty, challenging the use of violence to redress wrongs, renouncing war and reaffirming Catholic teaching opposing the death penalty:

*We can no longer think of **war** as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a “just war”. Never again war! (#260).*

We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable a stability is based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples. International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power In this context, the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative (#262).

*There is yet another way to eliminate others, one aimed not at countries but at individuals. It is the **death penalty**. Saint John Paul II stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice. There can be no stepping back from this position. Today we state clearly that “the death penalty is inadmissible” and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide (#263).*

12. The letter addresses the obligation of religious communities to respect others, renounce violence, support religious freedom and to work together in fraternity and friendship:

The Church esteems the ways in which God works in other religions, and “rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions (#277).

We Christians ask that, in those countries where we are a minority, we be guaranteed freedom, even as we ourselves promote that freedom for non-Christians in places where they are a minority. One fundamental human right must not be forgotten in the journey towards fraternity and peace. It is religious freedom for believers of all religions (#279).

“...religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings...” (#285).

Francis offers two prayers, one to the Creator and an ecumenical Prayer for Christians to conclude his letter which invites all God’s children to:

...dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all (#8).

Other Topics

In this encyclical, Pope Francis is clear in calling for the *recognition that all people are our brothers and sisters and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone*. The Pope is also clear about what he is against:

- *myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism... and “new forms of selfishness and a loss of the social sense under the guise of defending national interests” (#11).*
- *“countries, hyperbole, extremism and polarization” as “political tools” (#12).*
- *“being politically correct or ideologically fashionable” (#76).*
- *“local narcissism” (#146) and “petty provincialism” (#139).*
- *“closed groups and self-absorbed couples” (#89).*
- *“authoritarian and abstract universalism” (#100).*
- *“radical individualism” (#105).*
- *“irresponsible populism” (#161).*
- *“soulless pragmatism” (#187).*
- *“declarationist nominalism” (#188).*
- *“media’s noisy potpourri of facts and opinions” (#201).*
- *“slick marketing techniques primarily aimed at discrediting others....craven exchange of charges and counter-charges ... a permanent state of disagreement and confrontation” (#15).*

This sweeping 286 paragraph-encyclical covers other significant challenges facing the Church and world. Among other major areas of reflection are:

- *“Societies worldwide [are] still far from reflecting clearly that **women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men**. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story” (#23).*
- *“**Trafficking** in persons and other contemporary forms of enslavement are a worldwide problem that needs to be taken seriously by humanity as a whole....” (#24).*

- *Care for creation and “our common home”* (#117).
- *Neoliberalism* and “spillover” or “trickle” economics (#168).
- *The role and limitations of the marketplace* (#168).
- *Integral human development* “that goes beyond ‘the idea of social policies being a policy **for** the poor, but never **with** the poor and never **of** the poor, much less part of a project that reunites peoples” (#169).
- *Reform and affirmation of the United Nations* (#173).
- *Social role of property and business* (#206).
- *Lessons of the Shoah* (# 247) and the bombing of *Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (#248).
- *A dignified life through work.* “the finest help we can give to the poor, the best path to a life of dignity” (#162).
- “...there is **no one solution**, no single acceptable methodology, no economic recipe that can be applied indiscriminately to all” (#165).
- “A healthy relationship between **love of one’s native land and a sound sense of belonging to our larger human family**” (#149).
- *Forgiveness, personal, social, global* (#241).
- “The effective elimination of **hunger**” as a “foremost and imperative goal” (#189).
- “Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word “**dialogue**”” (#198).
- “**Kindness** facilitates the quest for consensus; it opens new paths where hostility and conflict would burn all bridges” (#224).
- “...the need for a **change of heart, attitudes and lifestyles**” (#166).