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Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

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Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti.
On Fraternity and Social Friendship

2.2

Texts extracted from Volume 2 of the Uniservitate Collection:
Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

Uniservitate Collection

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Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church / Andres Peregalli... [et al.] ; coordinación general de María Nieves Tapia.- 1a ed.- Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires : CLAYSS, 2021.
Libro digital, PDF - (Uniservitate ; 2)

Archivo Digital: descarga y online

Traducción de: Karina Marconi ; Cecilia Mata.

ISBN 978-987-4487-22-3

1. Trabajo Solidario. 2. Pedagogía. 3. Doctrina Social de la Iglesia. I. Peregalli, Andres. II. Tapia, María Nieves, coord. III. Marconi, Karina, trad. IV. Mata, Cecilia, trad.

CDD 261.51

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2. Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti. On Fraternity and Social Friendship 15

Cardinal Mario Aurelio Poli

Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Primate of Argentina



Mario Aurelio Poli, Cardinal

I was born in (Buenos Aires), in the Monte Castro neighbourhood. We were five in my beloved family, with my father Mario Mariano, lathe operator, Italian, my mother, Josefina Felisa, dressmaker, Argentinian, and my siblings, Silvio and Ana. The Christian education that I received at home and in the Catholic scout movement, was completed with primary school in a State school: "Martín Fierro". Then I shared my youth with many friends, among them Jews and Muslims, at the Parish Institute "San Pedro Apóstol," while we were in high school; it was an unforgettable experience sharing different creeds. After a year as an Agronomy student, I decided to go to the

School of Social Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA in its acronym in Spanish), where I got my degree as a Social Worker (1967-1970). Sharing my course with mostly women taught me to value and appreciate them and learn many things from them. When I was twenty years old, I was called to serve in the Argentine Army, in the Communications Battalion 601; a human experience different from the previous ones, but just as profitable in knowledge and earning a few friends. In 1971, I entered the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Buenos Aires. Filled with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in that school of virtue, mercifulness and fraternity, with really good priests, eight blessed years went by, which were illuminated by human, spiritual, pastoral and intellectual training, the latter one in the School of Theology of the Argentine Catholic University (UCA in its acronym in Spanish), where I have also been a teacher over thirty years in the chairs of Church History and Patrology.

On 25th November, 1978, I was ordained a priest by Cardinal Juan Carlos Aramburu and after a year as a vicar in San Cayetano, in the Liniers neighbourhood, I was assigned as a trainer of the Seminary. For twelve years, I was in charge of various communities in the Major Seminar and in 1992 I was appointed by Cardinal Antonio Quarracino as Principal of the San José Vocational Institute (Introductory Propaedeutic course). In February 2002, Pope John Paul II appointed me as Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires. The ordination was celebrated in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Cathedral and was presided over by Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, on 20th April, 2002. A week later, I was appointed to the Flores Vicariate until 2008 when Pope Benedict XVI honoured me by appointing me as bishop to the diocese of Santa Rosa in the province of La Pampa. In March 2013, I was preaching the Novena in the San José de Rancul parish church, in the northwest of the province, when the Apostolic Nuncio called me in to announce that the newly elected Pope appointed me as Archbishop of Buenos Aires. Pope Francis himself added me to the cardinal body during the consistory of 22nd February, 2014, under the title of Cardinal Priest of St. Robert Bellarmine. After three years, I proposed the dream of a Synod to my brother bishops, who first met in 2017 and we are about to celebrate the Synodal Assembly in the coming months of 2021, if it is our Father's loving plan.

I chose Solomon's prayer as my motto: «Give me, Lord, a heart that listens» 1Re 3,9.

2. THE TEACHINGS OF POPE FRANCIS: FRATERNAL LOVE AND THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER¹

Cardinal Mario Aurelio Poli

Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Primate of Argentina

*“Those who do not love a brother or sister
whom they have seen,
cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 Jn 4, 20).*

FT 61

To introduce the encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, of the Holy Father Francis, I will try, based on a careful reading, to go over some documents and catechesis of the already extensive teaching of the Holy Father, the constant aspiration for a more fraternal world, his social projection and the necessary building of bridges of understanding, based on one of his most insistent proposals in his teaching: “the culture of encounter.” As in the magisterium of the Pontiff, the actions go hand in hand with his teachings, I will observe the synodal and missionary style, characteristic of these eight years in the Chair of Saint Peter.

The dominant theme in the encyclical letter is fraternal love in its universal dimension, excluding no one, which must be projected in society in terms of social friendship.

Reading his writings and entering into his way of understanding humanity from the perspective of faith, is an exercise that invites us to dream of him, and at the same time, to yearn, desire, imagine, think and materialize the aspiration of a Church that responds every day to its mission and not give in to the utopia of a world where fraternal love restores the dignity deserved by everyone with whom we share our common home.

The first words reveal the sources of inspiration for this encyclical letter. The Pope claims that Saint Francis of Assisi, «the saint of fraternal love», has enlightened him to write the encyclical *Laudato si'* and also the one that concerns us, on fraternity and social friendship. What is astonishing is that the surprising *Wisdom of the poor one*—the title of the first essay on Saint Francis by Eloi Leclerc, OFM—has been the inspiring source of so many subjects that aspire to a more humane and fraternal world². Indeed, in the *Rule* that he left to his brothers and in *The Canticle of Creatures*, the Pope discovers the essential

1 This text corresponds to the participation of Cardinal Poli in the International Seminar on the encyclical letter of Pope Francis “Fratelli Tutti”: “Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti. On fraternity and social friendship”, carried out at the Catholic University of Argentina, Buenos Aires, on 10th May, 2021. <https://youtu.be/R6xbjV6oc60>

2 The Pope quotes *Exile and Tenderness*, by the same author.

words for an open fraternity, capable of relating to the created things, feeling himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, and even calling death itself a sister.

Saint Francis, *il povero di Asissi*, «he became a father to all and inspired the vision of a fraternal society» (FT 4).

This main idea, present from the beginning of his pontifical magisterium, is included in the memorable encyclical letter written in four hands, *Lumen Fidei*, which completed Pope Benedict's teaching on the theological virtues that underpin the Christian life as of Baptism³. It is here where Pope Francis describes the social dimension of faith lived in the family and outlines his cherished longing for a more fraternal society: «Absorbed and deepened in the family, faith becomes a light capable of illumining all our relationships in society. As an experience of the mercy of God the Father, it sets us on the path of brotherhood. Modernity sought to build a universal brotherhood based on equality, yet we gradually came to realize that this brotherhood, lacking a reference to a common Father as its ultimate foundation, cannot endure. We need to return to the true basis of brotherhood»⁴. This was taught in June 2013.

That year in November, the Pope gave us *Evangelii Gaudium* where the concepts of *fraternity, fraternal love and the culture of encounter* link and sustain the proclamation of the Gospel in today's society. He warned us: «Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love»⁵... «How dangerous and harmful this is, for it makes us lose our amazement, our excitement and our zeal for living the Gospel of fraternity and justice!»⁶. And, reflecting on the process of consolidation of a society, he indicated the need for «a slow and arduous effort calling for a desire for integration and a willingness to achieve this through the growth of a peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter»⁷.

Since then the pastoral magisterium of the Supreme Pontiff has brought to light the most sensitive challenges to the Church and the human community. This is how he echoed themes such as the family, the care of creation, children and young people, refugees, immigrants, the elderly discarded by insensitive societies: they are the faces of an unworthy poverty, which is scandalously growing in many parts of the world, a wound of humanity expressed in figures in statistics, while making the suffering of millions of people invisible. Many of these causes are heard and taken up by the Pope in a magisterium that at times reaches an unquestionable projection like *Laudato si'*, the thought and orientations of

3 See *Lumen Fidei* 7.

4 *Lumen Fidei* 54. Compare *Fratelli Tutti* 219 and 272.

5 EG, 101.

6 EG, 179.

7 EG, 220.

which occupy the agenda of international forums, universities, and continues to awaken adherence in many intellectual, pastoral, popular movements and academic environments.

Precisely, in the encyclical letter on the common home—May 2015—after describing the state of the blue planet due to two centuries of devastating policies, the consequences of which are suffered mainly by the poor, Francis, to start a common change strategy, proposes a new contemplative look on the world and the necessary fraternal relationship, which is present in all the cultures of the world with different nuances: «If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs»⁸.

Francis affirms that caring for the common home “is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion. Jesus reminded us that we have God as our common Father and that this makes us brothers and sisters. Fraternal love can only be gratuitous; it can never be a means of repaying others for what they have done or will do for us. That is why it is possible to love our enemies»⁹.

In the context of the second stage of the Synod on the Family -October 2015- on the occasion of half a century since Saint Paul VI created the Episcopal Synods¹⁰, Pope Francis delivered a «historic» speech on the exercise of synodality in the life of the Church, and that is where he predicted: «It is precisely this path of ‘synodality’ which God expects of the Church of the third millennium»¹¹. «A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing”». It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7) ... «The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which “shares also in Christ’s prophetic office”, according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet.¹²” [What touches everyone, must be treated by everyone].

I witnessed that teaching, pope Francis has practiced it through hours and days of listening in the Synod Hall, attending hundreds of presentations from all over the world.

8 Laudato si´ 11

9 Laudato si´ 228

10 Apostolic Letter *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, promulgated *Motu Proprio* of Pope Paul VI, by which the Synod of Bishops for the Universal Church is constituted (September 15, 1965).

11 Ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops. Speech of the Holy Father Francis. Paul VI Audience Hall. Saturday (17th October, 2015).

12 Ibidem.

Then, when he finishes his speech, he imagines the projection of ecclesial synodality on humanity: «A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. Is 11:12) ... As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.»¹³. Here I cannot help saying what this renewal of the doctrine of synodality meant for the particular Churches, further enriched by the contribution of the International Theological Commission: *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church* (2018).

Amoris Laetitia is the result of this synodal listening, and Francis sees in the family institution the mirror of Trinitarian love¹⁴, where the values and virtues that define a person's entire life are cultivated:

«Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life» (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1657)¹⁵...«Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope».

«Your spiritual growth is expressed above all by your growth in fraternal, generous and merciful love. (...) How wonderful it would be to experience this 'ecstasy' of coming out of ourselves and seeking the good of others, even to the sacrifice of our lives» ... «If fraternal love is the «new commandment», «the fullness of the Law» and our best way of showing our love for God, then it has to have a primary place in every project of youth formation and growth to maturity.»

With a colloquial and youthful language, Francis addressed young people with the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*: «Your spiritual growth is expressed above all by your growth in fraternal, generous and merciful love. (...) How wonderful it would be to experience this 'ecstasy' of coming out of ourselves and seeking the good of others, even to the sacrifice of our lives»¹⁶ ... «If fraternal love is the «new commandment»

(Jn 13:34), «the fullness of the Law» (Rm 13:10) and our best way of showing our love for

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Cfr. AL, 172.

¹⁵ AL, 86.

¹⁶ *Christus vivit*, 163.

God, then it has to have a primary place in every project of youth formation and growth to maturity.”¹⁷

In one of the catechesis entitled: «Healing the world», the Pope advocated that: «... the creativity of the Holy Spirit encourage us to generate new forms of familiar hospitality, fruitful fraternity and universal solidarity ¹⁸.»

The encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, in tune with the great social documents of the Church and bearing a distinct synodal style, shows its ecumenical and interreligious openness when it declares that «who has spoken forcefully of our need to care for creation. In this case, I have felt particularly encouraged by the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb». When reading the Abu Dhabi document, *on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, of February 2019, it should be taken into account as a source of immediate inspiration. I believe that all of us have been touched by such joint declaration that draws on Abrahamic roots and shines itself as a light of hope for the great human family: «In the name of human fraternity that embraces all human beings, unites them and renders them equal. In the name of this fraternity torn apart by policies of extremism and division, by systems of unrestrained profit or by hateful ideological tendencies that manipulate the actions and the future of men and women». The Pope himself states that the encyclical letter resumes and develops the great issues raised in that document that they signed together.

Finally, I focus on the last chapter of *Fratelli Tutti*, where Francis, after admitting that «without an openness to the Father of all, there will be no solid and stable reasons for an appeal to fraternity»¹⁹, recognizes and assumes the valuable contribution of knowledge of people, such as the ancestral wisdom of so many creeds in the world because «often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women»²⁰. At the same time, it is affirmed in the Christian tradition that has guided his reflection, and for a reason: «“if the music of the Gospel ceases to resonate in our very being, we will lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that has its source in our knowledge that we have been forgiven and sent forth. If the music of the Gospel ceases to sound in our homes, our public squares, our workplaces, our political and financial life, then we will no longer hear the strains that challenge us to defend the dignity of every man and woman». Others drink from other sources. For us the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From it, there arises, “for Christian thought and for the action of the Church, the primacy given to relationship, to

17 Idem, 215.

18 Public audience on 2nd September, 2020, at the San Damaso courtyard.

19 FT 272.

20 FT 277.

the encounter with the sacred mystery of the other, to universal communion with the entire human family, as a vocation of all”»²¹.

«I offer this social Encyclical as a modest contribution to continued reflection, in the hope that in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words».

capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words»²².

«It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity»²³.

If we want to join his dreams and desires, let us listen to his intention once again: «I offer this social Encyclical as a modest contribution to continued reflection, in the hope that in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove

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Uniservitate is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning in Catholic Higher Education. It aims to generate a systemic change in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs), through the institutionalisation of service-learning (SL) as a tool to achieve its mission of an integral education and formation of agents of change committed to their community.

***“We will not change the world,
if we do not change education”***

Pope Francis

2 Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

We are pleased to present the book *Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church*, a polyhedral text, born in different parts of the world, an expression of different voices and an invitation to reflect on Higher Education in view of a greater commitment to the universal human family. Its intention is to contribute to the generation of Higher Education Institutions (university and non-university, Catholic and non-confessional) capable of networking and generating life, of learning and generating meaning in their being and from their knowledge and doing, for others and with others, and not only cloisters that live for themselves. It is a text with a plural, global and diverse perspective, which opens up dialogue and builds bridges that contribute to achieving a more fraternal society.

Uniservitate is an initiative led by Porticus, with the general coordination of the Latin American Center for Service-learning (CLAYSS)

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PORTICUS

ISBN 978-987-4487-22-3



9 789874 4487223

Published in October 2021
ISBN 978-987-4487-22-3

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