

# FRATERNITY IN THE ENCYCLICAL *FRATELLI TUTTI* Franciscan roots

FRATERNIDADE NA ENCÍCLICA *FRATELLI TUTTI*

Raíces franciscanas

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**Abstract:** This article studies the subject of fraternity in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*\*\* and explores its Franciscan roots. The Pope asserts that “it was the evangelical witness of St. Francis, with his school of thought, that gave this term the meaning it then preserved over the centuries.” The key to understand it is found in the encounter with the needy (leper, wounded), which brings to light the dignity of each human person and the need for social friendship in order to achieve a “healthy and open” community life.

**Keywords:** Fraternity; Social friendship; Dialogue; Francis of Assisi; Franciscanism.

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\*\* Index of initials used in this article: **Adm** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, Admonitions; **CISAM** = Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo; **CV** = BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, Encyclical letter; **DFH** = FRANCIS; AL-AZHAR AHMAD AL-TAYYEB, Document on Human Fraternity. For world peace and living together; **EG** = *Evangelii gaudium*, Encyclical letter; **ER** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, The Earlier Rule; **FAED** = AMSTRONG; HERMANN; SHORT (Ed.). *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*; **FT** = Encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti*; **GS** = SECOND VATICAN, Apostolic Constitution *Gaudium et spes*; **LFI** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, The Little Flowers of Saint Pope Francis; **LMj** = BONAVENTURE, The Major Legend; **LMn** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, A Letter to a Minister; **Lord** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, A Letter to the entire Order; **LR** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, The Later Rule; **LS** = Encyclical letter *Laudato si*; **L3C** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, The Legend of the Three Companions; **Ofp** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, The Office of the Passion; **PUA** = Pontificia Università Antonianum; **PUL** = Pontificia Università Lateranense; **QA** = FRANCIS, *Querida Amazonia*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation; **Test** = FRANCIS OF ASSISI, The Testament; **2Cel** = CELANO, T. of, The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul.

**Síntese:** O presente artigo estuda o tema da fraternidade na encíclica *Fratelli tutti* e evidencia alguns pontos de contato com a perspectiva franciscana. O Papa afirma que “foi o testemunho evangélico de São Francisco, com sua escola de pensamento, que deu ao termo fraternidade o significado que este conservou no decorrer dos séculos”. O artigo explora estas raízes franciscanas. A chave de leitura encontra-se no encontro com o necessitado (leproso, ferido), que evidencia a dignidade de toda pessoa humana e a necessidade da amizade para alcançar uma vida social “sadia e aberta”.

**Palavras-chave:** Fraternidade; Amizade social; Diálogo; Francosco de Assis; Franciscanismo.

This article studies the theme of fraternity in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*<sup>1</sup> and indicates some points of encounter with the Franciscan perspective.

The Pope explicitly recognizes that his last two encyclicals have been inspired by Francis of Assisi, who “felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh” (*FT* 2). The Pope also mentions that “it was the evangelical witness of St. Francis, with his school of thought, that gave this term [fraternity] the meaning it then preserved over the centuries”.<sup>2</sup> We will try to explore these Franciscan roots.

The concept of fraternity is complex and can be used at various levels (interpersonal, ecclesial, universal, cosmic) and with different meanings. This term, with its variations (brotherhood, sisterhood, fraternity), was commonly used in the Middle Ages to refer to religious groups that were devoted to pious and charitable activities. Some associations of craftsmen and other professionals were also called “confraternities”.<sup>3</sup> Today it is still used to refer, for example, to student associations<sup>4</sup> and

1. FRANCIS, *Fratelli tutti*. Encyclical letter on fraternity and social friendship [*FT*]. In the body of the text, the quotations of the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* will be indicated with just the numbers in parentheses. A version of this article will be published in the Italian language: CARBAJO NÚÑEZ, La fraternità nell'enciclica *Fratelli tutti*.

2. FRANCIS, Fraternity as the governing principle of the economic order, n. 1, p. 7. The Merriam Webster dictionary gives this definition of “fraternity”: “A group of people associated or formally organized for a common purpose, interest, or pleasure”. Cf. <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fraternity>>. Access: Dec. 2, 2020.

3. Cf. EISENBICHLER, *A companion to medieval and early modern confraternities*; GRAZZINI, *Confraternite e società cittadina nel Medioevo italiano*.

4. University student organizations identified as “fraternities” are widespread in the U.S.A. and also in other countries, such as Germany. Cf. TORBENSON; PARKS, *Brothers and sisters*.

other religious<sup>5</sup> or masonic groups.<sup>6</sup> In the Catholic church and, more specifically, among the Franciscans, it is usually applied to an entire religious Order<sup>7</sup> and to each of its provinces or local communities.

The French revolution coined the motto: “Liberty, equality, fraternity.” Fraternity is thus associated to our common nature, to equality of rights and to an apparent universalism, but it does not overcome the dynamics of separation and tribal confrontation. The post-revolutionary order soon abandoned this term, “up to the point of its deletion from the political-economic lexicon”<sup>8</sup>

The French revolution conceives brotherhood “as coming from this world, from the similar heredity and nature of all”. Nevertheless, it “differentiated drastically and bloodily between the inner fraternal circle of the revolutionaries and the outer circle of the nonrevolutionaries”.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Marxism excludes egalitarian fraternity in the present and divides humanity “into two totally antithetical groups, capital and proletariat, and their embattled dialectic constitutes history [...]. Brotherhood toward some involves enmity toward others”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, class struggle is inevitable in order to advance towards a future egalitarian society.

The last encyclicals of Pope Francis develop this theme from complementary perspectives. The human fraternity presented by *FT* is part of the cosmic fraternity promoted by the encyclical *Laudato si*.<sup>11</sup> In the common house, we are all related (*FT*) and “everything is related” (*LS* 92). The two encyclicals invite us to hear “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (*LS* 38), although the *LS* focuses on the first and the *FT* on the second. Both cries are inseparable, and we cannot listen to one without paying attention to the other.

The first part of this article asserts that Francis of Assisi and the encyclical *FT* present fraternity from a Trinitarian and Christological perspecti-

5. Cf. CHINAZZI, *Le confraternite*. BOROBIO, *Hermandades y cofradías*.

6. Cf. HALL, *Masonic orders of fraternity*; CIUFFOLETTI; MORAVIA, *La massoneria*.

7. “The Order of Friars Minor, founded by St. Francis of Assisi, is a fraternity” – ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR, General Constitutions, art. 1. In: ID., *The Rule, the General Constitutions, The General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor*, p. 21.

8. FRANCIS, Fraternity as the governing principle of the economic order, p. 7.

9. RATZINGER, *The meaning of Christian brotherhood*, part one, 1.4.

10. *Idem*.

11. FRANCIS, *Laudato si*. Encyclical letter.