

CARTHAGINENSIA

Revista de Estudios e Investigación
Instituto Teológico de Murcia O.F.M.
ISSN: 0213-4381 e-ISSN: 2605-3012

Volumen XXXIX
Enero-Junio 2023
Número 75

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**THE LORD GAVE ME BROTHERS AND SISTERS
FRANCIS OF ASSISI, INSPIRER OF THE ENCYCLICAL *FRATELLI TUTTI***

EL SEÑOR ME DIO HERMANOS Y HERMANAS
FRANCISCO DE ASÍS, INSPIRADOR DE LA ENCÍCLICA *FRATELLI TUTTI*

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Recibido 25 de abril de 2022 / Aceptado 3 de septiembre de 2022

Abstract: This article presents Francis of Assisi as an inspiring model of the universal fraternity proposed by the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. The Pope asserts that “it was the evangelical witness of St. Francis, with his school of thought, that gave the term fraternity the meaning it then preserved over the centuries.” Universal fraternity requires the harmonious development of our four fundamental relationships, something which is evident in both Francis of Assisi (part 1) and the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (part 2). Inspired by Saint Francis, the Pope invites us to welcome all human beings as brothers and sisters and thus to dream together “as a single human family.”

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

Resumen: Este artículo presenta a Francisco de Asís como modelo e inspirador de la fraternidad universal que propone la encíclica *Fratelli tutti*. El Papa enseña que “fue el testimonio evangélico de san Francisco, con su escuela de pensamiento, quien dio al término fraternidad el significado que ha conservado a lo largo de los siglos.” La fraternidad universal exige el desarrollo armónico de las cuatro relaciones fundamentales del ser humano, algo que resulta evidente tanto en San Francisco (1ª parte) como en la encíclica *Fratelli tutti* (2ª parte). Inspirándose en el santo de Asís, el Papa invita a acoger a todos los seres humanos como hermanos y hermanas para soñar juntos “como una única humanidad.”

Palabras clave: Fraternidad; Amistad social; Diálogo; Francisco de Asís; *Fratelli tutti*.

This article presents Francis of Assisi as the model and inspirer of the universal fraternity proposed by the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*.¹ Pope Francis teaches 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.”² At the same time, he affirms that his last two encyclicals are 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.”³

Universal fraternity requires the harmonious development of our four fundamental relationships, something that is evident in St. Francis. By paying attention to each of these four relationships, the first part of the article shows how he opens himself to universal fraternity and privileges fraternal relationships over any other institutional aspects of his way of life. The second part will indicate some points of convergence between his vision and the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*.⁴

1. Universal fraternity according to Francis of Assisi

Francis of Assisi wants his friars to treat each other as equals and, at the same time, he appreciates the uniqueness of each one of them. In this line, the principle of fraternity is today associated with the equality of all human beings in dignity and rights, but each one with his own richness and individuality.

The little poor man of Assisi privileges fraternal relationships over any other institutional aspect of his way of life.⁵ In fact, the word “brother”

¹ POPE FRANCIS «*Fratelli tutti*. Encyclical letter on fraternity and social friendship,» [FT], (Oct. 3, 2020), LEV, Vatican City 2020. In the body of the text, the quotations of the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* will be indicated with just the numbers in parentheses.

² POPE FRANCIS «Fraternity as the governing principle of the economic order. Message to the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences,» (April 24, 2017), n. 1, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, [OR], 99 (April 29, 2017) 7.

³ FT2; cf. POPE FRANCIS, «*Laudato si'*. Encyclical letter» (May 24, 2015), [LS], in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, [AAS], 107 (2015) 847-945.

⁴ We have studied this topic in CARBAJO NÚÑEZ M., «Fraternity in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. Franciscan roots,» in *Revista eclesialística brasileira* 81/319 (2021) 295-319.

⁵ On fraternity in St. Francis: URIBE F., «La fraternidad en la forma de vida propuesta por Francisco de Asís,» in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo*, [SelFran], 32 (2003) 236-249; DOYLE E., *St. Francis and the Song of Brotherhood and Sisterhood*, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure (NY) 1997.

(*frater*) appears 179 times in his writings, second only to the word “Lord” (*Dominus*). He completely avoids the word *communitas*⁶ and, instead, he uses the term “*fraternitas*,” although his natural aversion to abstract terms leads him to use it only ten times. Moreover, he always refers it to the Order⁷ and does not offer a definition of it.

1.1. A theological concept: all is grace

Benedict XVI affirms that St. Francis’ being “a man of peace, tolerance, and dialogue, is ever born from his experience of God-Love.”⁸ Francis himself, reviewing his life in the testament, recognizes that, in his vocational journey, everything has been a divine gift. When he was still driven by a worldly logic and dreaming of becoming a knight, he experienced God’s gratuitous love in ways and moments completely unexpected. The Lord revealed to him that he should observe the holy Gospel, granted him “to begin doing penance,” taught him to be merciful, enabled him to perceive his presence in the poor and the lepers, granted him faith in churches and priests, revealed to him the greeting of peace, made him love Lady Poverty as a liberating path to universal fraternity.

Having experienced the divine gratuitousness, Francis becomes a universal brother and recognizes all people and all creatures as a divine gift. He asks his followers to be “Lesser Brothers,” for “you have but one Father in heaven” and, in Christ, “all of you are brothers” (*ER* 22,33-34). This fraternity is the fruit of the action of the “Spirit of the Lord” (*ER* 10,8) that

⁶ The word “*communitas*” does not appear in the writings of St. Francis, despite being a term widely used in medieval monastic life. ODOARDI G., «Il S. Francesco della Comunità nei sec. XIV e XV,» in GIEBEN S., (ed.) *Francesco d’Assisi nella storia: Secoli XIII-XV*, vol 1, Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Roma 1983, 123-159, here 124.

⁷ Cf. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «The Later Rule,» [*LR*], 8,1; 9,2; 12,3, in ARMSTRONG R.J. - HELLMANN J.A.W. - SHORT W.J., (ed.), *Francis of Assisi: Early documents*, 3 vol., New City Press, New York 2001, [*FAED*], here vol. I, 99-106; Id., «The Earlier Rule,» [*ER*], n. 5,4; 18,2; 19,2 (*FAED* I, 63-86); Id., «A Letter to the entire Order,» [*LOrd*], n. 2 (*FAED* I, 116-121).

⁸ BENEDICT XVI, «Address at the square in front of the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels,» (June 17, 2007), in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, LEV, Vatican city III/1 (2007) 1139-1146, here 1145.