

# VERDAD Y VIDA

REVISTA FRANCISCANA DE PENSAMIENTO

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ARTICULADO Y CELEBRADO  
EN VARIOS CENTENARIOS

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# VERDAD Y VIDA

## REVISTA FRANCISCANA DE PENSAMIENTO

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## **FRATERNITY AND MOTHER EARTH. BROTHERS & SISTERS ALL IN THE COMMON HOME**

**MARTÍN CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper studies the concept of fraternity in the light of the Magisterium of Pope Francis. In the first part, it focuses on some of its meanings that are reductive and insufficient. Then, it presents the characteristics that Pope Francis assigns to it (2<sup>nd</sup> part) and how he applies it to our relationship with Sister Mother Earth (3<sup>rd</sup> part). Contradicting the current “undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm,” the pope teaches that fraternity is unity in diversity. The model is the “many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity.”

KEYWORDS: Fraternity, Mother earth, Pope Francis, Solidarity, Ecology

### **SOMMARIO:**

Questo articolo studia il concetto di fraternità alla luce del Magistero di Papa Francesco. Nella prima parte, ne presenta alcuni significati che risultano riduttivi e insufficienti. Poi analizza le caratteristiche con cui Papa Francesco lo usa (2<sup>a</sup> parte) e come lo applica al nostro rapporto con sorella madre terra (3<sup>a</sup> parte). Contraddicendo l'attuale paradigma tecnocratico, omogeneo e unidimensionale, il Papa insegna che la fraternità è unità nella diversità. Il modello è il poliedro, “che ha molte facce, moltissimi lati, ma tutti compongono un'unità ricca di sfumature.”

PAROLE CHIAVE: Fraternità, Madre Terra, Papa Francesco, Solidarietà, Ecologia

### **SUMARIO:**

Este artículo estudia el concepto de fraternidad a la luz del Magisterio de papa Francisco. En la primera parte, presenta algunas acepciones que resultan reductivas e insuficientes. Después, analiza las características que el Papa Francisco le asigna (2<sup>a</sup> parte) y cómo lo aplica a nuestra relación con la hermana madre tierra (3<sup>a</sup> parte). Contradiendo el actual paradigma tecnocrático, homogéneo y unidimensional, el papa enseña que la fraternidad es unidad en la diversidad. El modelo es el poliedro, “que refleja la confluencia de todas las parcialidades que en él conservan su originalidad.”

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fraternidad, Madre tierra, Pope Francis, Solidaridad, Ecología

The concept of fraternity is complex and demanding because it is often used at different levels (interpersonal, ecclesial, universal, cosmic) and with different meanings. This article analyzes it in the light of the magisterium of Pope Francis, paying special attention to his last two encyclicals: *Fratelli tutti*<sup>1</sup> and *Laudato si'*.<sup>2</sup> The first, focused “on fraternity and social friendship,” continues the reflection that *LS* had made on “care for our common house.”

The human fraternity proposed by *FT* is part of the cosmic fraternity promoted by *LS*. Both encyclicals invite us to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (*LS* 38), although *LS* focuses on the first and *FT* on the second. These cries are inseparable, and we cannot listen to one without paying attention to the other.

The first part of this article studies some meanings of the concept of fraternity that are reductive and insufficient. The second part presents the characteristics that Pope Francis assigns to it. The third part analyzes how he applies it to our relationship with Sister Mother Earth.<sup>3</sup>

The Pope teaches that fraternity is unity in diversity. “Disagreements may well give rise to conflicts, but uniformity proves stifling and leads to cultural decay” (*FT* 191). The model is the polyhedron, “which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness.”<sup>4</sup> The image of the mosaic is also appropriate, since each of its elements contributes to the beauty of the whole without losing its peculiar characteristics.

## 1. REDUCTIVE VERSIONS OF FRATERNITY

The term fraternity, with its variants (brotherhood, sisterhood, fraternity), has been widely used throughout history. In the Middle Ages it was applied to religious groups engaged in devotional and charitable activities. Some groups of artisans and professionals were called “confraternities.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> POPE FRANCIS, «*Fratelli tutti*. Encyclical letter», [*FT*], (Oct. 3, 2020), *LEV*, Vatican City 2020. Here we reproduce some of the ideas we have developed widely in our book: CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ M., *The universal fraternity. Franciscan roots of Fratelli tutti*, TAU, Phoenix (AZ) 2023.

<sup>2</sup> POPE FRANCIS, «*Laudato si'*. Encyclical letter», [*LS*], (May 24, 2015), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, [*AAS*], 107 (2015) 847-945.

<sup>3</sup> Italian version of this article: CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ M., «Fraternità e Madre Terra. Tutti fratelli e sorelle nella casa comune» jn *Studia Moralia* 61/2 (2023)

<sup>4</sup> POPE FRANCIS, «*Evangelii gaudium*. Esortazione apostolica» (Nov. 24, 2013), [*EG*], n. 236, in *AAS* 105 (2013) 1019-1137.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. EISENBICHLER Konrad, *A companion to medieval and early modern confraternities*, Brill, Leiden 2019.

Today it is used to refer, for example, to student associations<sup>6</sup> and other religious<sup>7</sup> and masonic groups.<sup>8</sup> Within the Catholic Church, it is usually applied to an entire religious congregation<sup>9</sup> and to each of its provinces or local communities.

The Christian vision of fraternity integrates the respect for the individuality of each person with the openness to diversity and universality. In contrast to it, there are other reductive visions that lead to domination or to the enclosure in small groups. For example, Plato reduced it to the national level in the face of foreign “barbarians”; Xenophon to those united by ties of friendship in the face of “enemies.” The ethical obligations within these fraternal groups were different from those of “the others.” The Stoic cosmopolitanism of ancient Greece affirms the fraternity of all human beings, but its conception of divinity remains natural-philosophical, without ever arriving at a personal God.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.1. A fraternity “from below”

Many conceptions of fraternity have not achieved the universalism they intended. One of the best-known examples is that of the French revolution, which included it in its motto (“Liberty, equality, fraternity”), but soon left it aside, “up to the point of its deletion from the political-economic lexicon.”<sup>11</sup> It was not easy to maintain a concept that contradicted the centralizing tendency of the State and the dynamics of confrontation that the revolution had generated. In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville explained why this concept was uncomfortable:

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<sup>6</sup> College student organizations that identify themselves as “fraternities” are widespread in the United States and also in other countries, such as Germany. Cf. TORBENSON Craig L. – PARKS Gregory, *Brothers and sisters: diversity in college fraternities and sororities*, Fairleigh Dickinson UP, Madison (NJ) 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. CHINAZZI Paolo, *Le confraternite. Storia, evoluzione, diritto*, Ed. Univ. Romane, Roma 2010; BOROBIO Dionisio, *Hermandades y cofradías: entre pasado y futuro*, Centre de Pastoral Litúrgica, Barcelona 2003. In Italy: <http://www.confraternite.it/> (access: Dec 2, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. HALL Manly P., *Masonic orders of fraternity. The adepts in the western esoteric tradition*, Philosophical Research Society, Los Angeles (CA) 1978; CIUFFOLETTI Zeffiro - MORAVIA Sergio, *La massoneria: la storia, gli uomini, le idee*, Mondadori, Milano 2010.

<sup>9</sup> “The Order of Friars Minor, founded by St. Francis of Assisi, is a fraternity.” OFM, «General Constitutions», [CCGG], art. 1, in Id., *Rule, General Constitutions and General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor*, General Curia OFM, Rome 2010.

<sup>10</sup> RATZINGER Joseph, *La fraternità cristiana*, Queriniana, Brescia 2003, 11-12, 23, 61.

<sup>11</sup> POPE FRANCIS, «“Fraternity as the governing principle of the economic order.” Message to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences» (April 24, 2017), n. 1, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, [OR], 99 (April 29, 2017) 7.