

Martín Carbajo Núñez, OFM*

Pontifical University *Antonianum*, Rome (Italy)

Alfonsian Academy (Pontifical Lateran University) Rome (Italy)

FST – San Diego University, CA (USA)

FRATERNITY, FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND POLITICS IN THE LIGHT OF THE ENCYCLICAL *FRATELLI TUTTI*

Summary: Based on the dignity and intrinsic sociability of the human person, this article asserts the importance of fraternity and family relationships in social life and politics. Too many dreams about political integration have been shattered lately, while new walls of aggressive nationalism and isolationism are being built. In this situation, people everywhere feel the need for good politics and for “a healthy injection of family spirit.” (*AL* 183) However, there can be no universal fraternity without good politics “built upon respect for law and frank dialogue between individuals.” (*FT* 196)

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This article** studies the importance of fraternity and family relationships in social life and politics. Pope Francis recognizes that, in our world, many dreams about political integration have been shattered lately while new walls of aggressive nationalism and isolationism have been built. (*FT* 10) In this situation, people everywhere feel the need for good politics and “a healthy injection of family spirit”. (*AL* 183)

The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* takes up this need and invites all to promote fraternity and social friendship in our technological and globalized society that

* Address: Prof. dr. Martín Cabajo Núñez OFM, ORCID: 0000-0002-2814-5688; e-mail: mcarbajon@gmail.com

** Index of initials used in this article: AAS = Acta Apostolicae Sedis; *AL* = *Amoris Laetitia*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation; CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church; 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; *FT* = *Fratelli tutti*. Encyclical letter; *InsJp2* = Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II; *LS* = *Laudato si'*. Encyclical letter; PL = Patrologia latina; PUA = Pontificia Università Antonianum; PUL = Pontificia Università Lateranense; OR = L'Osservatore Romano.

“makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers”. (*CV* 19)¹ We must overcome the current libertarian ideology, which relegates the affectionate “I-you” relationships to the private sphere. “Politics too must make room for a tender love of others” (*FT* 194) and not be subordinated to economics.

We have been created in the image of the Trinitarian God and so we are intrinsically social beings. Therefore, to develop fully, we need to go beyond ourselves in love, both at personal and social levels. In fact, social friendship is essential for us to achieve a “healthy and open” community life. Without it, we cannot “experience the true beauty of life”. (*FT* 87)

The first part of this article analyzes the Christian concept of fraternity, putting it in relation to other contrasting perspectives. In the second part, we will focus on the fraternal and disinterested relationships that must characterize our relationships at all levels. In the third part, we will focus on good politics according to *Fratelli tutti*².

1. The concept of fraternity

The Enlightenment and many political theories of today have difficulty reconciling fraternity with the principle of individual autonomy³. The French Revolution initially included the word “fraternity” in its motto (“Liberty, equality, fraternity”) to indicate that human beings are equal in dignity, regardless of their lineage or place of origin, as all of them share a common nature. However, the revolutionaries were not capable of establishing firm foundations for a true universalism that could counteract the latent confrontation among social groups. As a result, this concept was soon left aside, “up to the point of its deletion from the political-economic lexicon”. (Francis, 2017, p. 7) The French revolution conceives brotherhood “as coming from this world, from the similar heredity and nature of all”. (Ratzinger, 1993², part one, 1.4 – Ratzinger, 2005, p. 25–26) Nevertheless, it “differentiated drastically and bloodily between the inner fraternal circle of the revolutionaries and the outer circle of the nonrevolutionaries”. (Ratzinger, 1993², part one, 1.4 – Ratzinger, 2005, p. 25–26)

¹ Pope Francis’ last encyclicals develop the theme of family relationships from complementary perspectives. The human family that *Fratelli tutti* presents is part of the cosmic family promoted by the encyclical *Laudato si’*, because in the common house, we are all related (*FT*) and “everything is related”. (*LS* 142)

² The author has developed these topics further in: Carbajo, 2021a – 2021b.

³ “Un illuminista come Kant vedrebbe la fraternità come un concetto ‘paternalista’, che ferisce il principio dell’autonomia del soggetto, nella misura in cui per riconoscerci tutti fratelli dovremmo riconoscere un Dio padre, e quindi un’autorità superiore”. (Tosi, 2010, p. 535)

Before the French Revolution, this term, with its variations (brotherhood, sisterhood, fraternity), had already been used in the Middle Ages to identify religious and charitable groups. Some associations of craftsmen were also called “confraternities”. (Cf. Eisenbichler, 2019 – Grazzini, 2006) Today, it is still widely used by student associations⁴, religious Orders (cf. Chinazzi, 2010 – Borobio, 2003)⁵ and Masonic groups (cf. Hall, 1978, Ciuffoletti – Moravia, 2010), among others. It is, therefore, a complex concept with many different connotations and often without the universal dimension that it seems to indicate.

Liberalism and Marxism (and their economic models: capitalism and socialism-communism) exclude a real and universal fraternity because they are based on a negative anthropological concept. (John Paul II, 1998, n. 13, p. 1106 – John Paul II, 1998, n. 2–3, p. 874) Marxism coincides with liberalism in relegating gratuitousness to the private sphere, while in the public field the State plans everything. This leads easily to a depersonalizing and paternalist social assistance. At the same time, Marxism divides humanity “into two totally antithetical groups, capital and proletariat, and their embattled dialectic constitutes history (...). Brotherhood toward some involves enmity toward others”. (Ratzinger, 1993, part one, 1.4. – Ratzinger, 2005, p. 26) Fraternity is considered incompatible with the inevitable class struggle and, therefore, it is postponed for the post-revolutionary future, when society will be run by the proletariat. In the meantime, it would only be possible “between ‘comrades’ who share the same exploited and oppressed class condition”⁶.

Self-interest is justified by liberalism as an egalitarian force and brought to economic practice by capitalism⁷. In the economic field, everybody would always act in a logical and self-interested way, and therefore economists could predict human behavior accurately. For example, in trying to construct a rational mechanics of economic behavior, the influential “*Theory of General Economic Equilibrium*” focuses on the “*homo oeconomicus*,” a selfish, utilitarian, predictable individual, so conditioned by economic motivations that he is incapable of establishing fraternal relations in the public sphere. (Ingrao – Israel, 2006, p. 33 – Scitovsky, 2007, p. 23)

The Catholic anthropological conception presents human beings as intrinsically social because they have been created in the image of the Trinitarian

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, 2009)

⁵ In Italy: <http://www.confraternite.it/> (access: Dec. 2, 2020).

⁶ “Un marxista definirebbe la fraternità come un concetto che camuffa/nasconde le divisioni irriducibili fra le classi antagoniste. [Nel presente, la fraternità sarebbe possibile soltanto] fra ‘compagni’ che condividono la stessa condizione di classe sfruttata e oppressa, o nella futura società comunista”. (Tosi, 2010, p. 535)

⁷ We use the word “interest” to refer to “selfish interest”.