

Stephen Bevens, SVD\*

### BUILDING SOLIDARITY: THE VISION OF *FRATELLI TUTTI*

*This article highlights solidarity as a central feature in FT. It is what fraternity and social friendship aim at. They build on the fundamental dignity of every human being and human rights. Through different practices and attitudes, the goal of solidarity in society could be achieved. This may not be very new, but it is seen as radical and hopefully will heal a wounded world.*

In paragraph 2 of *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis sets out the theme of his encyclical. It is, he says, a reflection on “fraternity and social friendship.” What these ideas might mean, however, could be also expressed in another word that appears prominently in the document—solidarity. Perhaps it is more abstract, and yet it has a long history in Catholic Social Teaching and the Magisterium as well, going back to *Gaudium et spes* in Vatican II (32), the teaching of John XXIII and, of course, John Paul II.<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis has used it in his own teaching from the beginning of his papal ministry. The term appears, for example, 19 times in *Evangelii gaudium* and in various talks that he has given through the years. Here in *Fratelli tutti* it appears 24 times in the text, and there is a short section that focuses on the idea in paragraphs 114 to 117.

As Francis explains it, solidarity is “a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion ...” (114). As a virtue, it “means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity” (116). Francis goes on to speak of it in terms of the common good, in terms of opposition to the structures that dehumanize women and men, and commitment to care of the earth (116-17). “It means thinking and acting in terms of community” (116). Giving an example from ecological commitment, Francis commends people who, although they “enjoy a surplus of water

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\* Stephen Bevens, SVD, comes from the USA and teaches at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He has published widely. Among his latest publications: *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); and, together with Robin Ryan (eds.), *Priesthood in Religious Life: Searching for New Ways Forward* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2018).

<sup>1</sup> See Fred Kammer, SJ, Catholic Social Thought and Solidarity: *JustSouth Quarterly* (Summer, 2013) 3. Available online at <http://www.loyno.edu/jsri/catholic-social-thought-and-solidarity>

... choose to conserve it for the sake of the greater human family.” This “allows them to look beyond themselves and the group to which they belong. How marvelously human!” (117) In the same way it is recognizing “the rights of all people, even those born beyond our own borders” (117).

The basis of solidarity is what Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, in a brief commentary on the encyclical in the journal *Commonweal*, calls a “philosophical anthropology that sees us as realizing more fully our humanity through contact and exchange with people and cultures beyond our original comfort zone.”<sup>2</sup> Francis calls this the “law of *ekstasis*” (88), and states it in various ways throughout the document. “Let us realize that as our minds and hearts narrow, the less capable we become of understanding the world around us” (147; see also 8, 87, 111). Solidarity is what makes us human. In a departure from the usual sources quoted in a papal document, Francis quotes a popular song by the Brazilian poet Vinicius de Moraes: “Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter” (215). Solidarity creates sister/brotherhood and social friendship.

How does one achieve the virtue of solidarity? What does the conversion to solidarity entail? Throughout the encyclical, Francis offers a number of what I would call “building blocks” toward solidarity. These are practices and attitudes that help us develop into the kind of people like the Good Samaritan in Jesus’ famous parable, the parable Francis reflects on at length in Chapter Two. “By his actions, the Good Samaritan showed that ‘the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions’” (66, quoting a talk to a 2017 TED [Technology, Entertainment, Design] Conference). What I would like to offer in this essay is to name and reflect briefly on these “building blocks” as they appear in the encyclical.

### ***Foundations***

Two basic building blocks form a strong foundation on which to place the rest. The first of these is the recognition of the fundamental dignity of every human being, a recognition that anchors the whole structure of Catholic Social Teaching, and appears in many other places in Francis’s thought.<sup>3</sup> When human dignity is respected,

<sup>2</sup> Charles Taylor, in: *Freedom & Equality Aren’t Enough: A Symposium on “Fratelli Tutti”*: *Commonweal* 147 (11.2020) 21.

<sup>3</sup> See Stephen Bevans, SVD, Pope Francis: Mission, Migration, and Christian Spirituality: *Studi Emigrazione* 218 (2020) 267-294, 270-72.

Francis writes, human beings begin creatively to perform “actions that further the common good” (22). Quoting *Evangelii gaudium* in 106, Francis insists that “The mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity” (EG 190). The imperative to recognize human dignity is repeated in 127, 133, 213, and 233, and in his discussion of the death penalty toward the end of the encyclical, Francis affirms the human dignity of “even a murderer.” “If I do not deny that dignity to the worst of criminals, I will not deny it to anyone. I will give everyone the possibility of sharing this planet with me, despite all our differences” (269).

Closely connected with affirming human dignity is the second foundational building block of solidarity: the affirmation of basic human rights (22), and in particular the rights of women (23). In this section Francis focuses on issues about which he has voiced his concern in previous years, namely human slavery and human trafficking. Francis minces no words here: “A perversion that exceeds all limits when it subjugates women and then forces them to abort. An abomination that goes to the length of kidnapping persons for the sake of selling their organs. Trafficking in persons and other forms of enslavement are a worldwide problem that needs to be taken seriously by humanity as a whole” (24). Solidarity is built on deep respect for the mystery and dignity of the human person, but it is also built upon the sense of outrage that emerges as people recognize that this dignity is being shamefully and violently sinned against.

Sadly, the power of Francis’ articulation of this second foundational building block is somewhat compromised by the exclusive language of his title. “Would it have killed the Vatican to be more inclusive?” exclaims William Cavanaugh in *Commonweal*.<sup>4</sup> Toward the end of his introduction to the Orbis Books edition of the encyclical, Daniel Horan faults Francis for not mentioning any women in the text, even when “some of the most visible, inspirational and powerful models of peace-making, reconciliation, and solidarity have been women.” Horan mentions Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee, Tawakkol Karman, and Malala Yousafai—all Nobel Prize winners.<sup>5</sup>

The foundation for solidarity, nevertheless, is strong. On the values of human dignity and human basic rights is built a framework of practices and attitudes that, as they are exercised and cultivated, build up

<sup>4</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, Freedom and Equality Aren’t Enough: *Commonweal* 147 (11.2020) 22.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel P. Horan, “Introduction,” in: *Fratelli Tutti*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2020, v-xxxii, xxx.

the structure of solidarity among the peoples of the world that can make them truly brothers and sisters.

### *Practices*

A first practice is the commitment to *working for justice*. “In today’s world,” Francis laments, “the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia” (30). The fact is, however, that we are all connected, we really “are all in the same boat” (30). The problem is, of course, as several thinkers have pointed out, while we might indeed be in the same boat, not all are in the same class. Some luxuriate in first class, others suffer in steerage. Francis, however, does acknowledge this disparity implicitly. He points to a heightened sense of individualism that has taken over much of human consciousness, particular in the Global North. Quoting a letter that he wrote to the president of the Pontifical Academy for Life in January 2019, Francis notes that “the gap between concern for one’s personal well-being and the prosperity of the larger human family seems to be stretching to the point of complete division between individuals and human community ... It is one thing to feel forced to live together, but something different to value the richness and beauty of those seeds of common life that need to be sought out and cultivated” (31).<sup>6</sup>

A second building block is another familiar practice that Francis has often called for: the development of a “*culture of encounter*.”<sup>7</sup> Quoting once more his message to the TED Conference in 2017, Francis exclaims: “How wonderful would it be, even as we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters who orbit around us” (31). Later in the encyclical the practice comes up again. To develop a “*culture of encounter*” means being “passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life” (216). “Building bridges,” not a “*culture of walls*” (27)! Francis calls for women and men to imitate his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi. Francis not only heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, those who were sick, and the voice of nature itself (48). Imitating him would commit people to “sit down and listen to others,” having a

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Humana communitas*, Letter to the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life on the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Its Founding, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190106\\_lettera-accademia-vita.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190106_lettera-accademia-vita.html), 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Bevens, Pope Francis, 275-77.

“welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives” (48).

Francis offers a third building block in the practices of *listening and dialogue*. These practices help us avoid what Francis calls “parallel monologues” (200)—often what happens on social media. Recently a friend of mine spoke of the need to “listen to hear” rather than “listen to answer.”<sup>8</sup> This “calls for perseverance; it entails moments of silence and suffering, yet it can patiently embrace the broader experience of individuals and peoples” (50). “If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue. . . . Unlike disagreement and conflict, persistent and courageous dialogue does not make headlines, but quietly helps the world to live much better than we imagine” (198). Authentic listening and dialogue are, in many ways, ascetical practices, and can lead us as well to seeing and paying attention to the strangers we meet on life’s road (see Chapter Two).

Fourth, there is the *practice of inclusion*, especially those who are suffering and poor. “The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project” (69). Inclusion is a practice that pays attention to those whose voices and wisdom are often ignored. It is a practice that asks in every gathering, every planning session, with every pastoral decision, “Who is missing? Who is absent from the table?”

We can speak, in the fifth place, of the building block of *co-responsibility*, taking “an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies” (77). Francis advises that we begin at the local levels, expanding gradually to include the entire world, “with the same care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man’s injuries” (78). Like the Samaritan who enlisted the help of the innkeeper to care for the wounded stranger, we cannot change the world by ourselves. However, as we work with people our witness and our power become stronger and stronger. Quoting one of his favorite principles, Francis insists here that “the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts” (78).

A sixth practice is that of “*becoming a neighbor*.” For people of Jesus’ time, writes Francis, “neighbors” were people close to us, people *like* us, of the same town, the same religion, the same culture, and the same basic outlook on life. Jesus, however, “himself a Jew, completely transforms this approach. He asks us not to decide who is close enough

<sup>8</sup> Mary Ziegler, reflection on the scripture readings on the Fourth Sunday of the Year at a Zoom prayer service of the St. Giles Family Mass Community, January 31, 2021.

to be our neighbour, but rather that we ourselves become neighbours to all” (80). Neighbors, in other words, are not those around us as much as who we must become ourselves. It is a *proactive* stance, something to be constantly worked at, rooted in listening, dialogue, paying attention. “I should no longer say that I have neighbours to help, but that I must myself be a neighbour to others” (81).<sup>9</sup>

Francis, seventh, briefly mentions the practice of effective “*catechesis and preaching*” that “will speak more directly and clearly about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters” (86). Although he doesn’t dwell on it here, *effective* catechesis and preaching means recognizing the importance of concrete contexts—culture, people’s social locations (e.g., gender, class, education), events that are taking place in a particular time or place, and the currents of change that transform people and situations.<sup>10</sup> Adequate catechesis is the particular tasks of parents of families and of educators. They, together with their pastors, need to be skilled communicators (see 114).

Toward the end of the encyclical Francis offers the eighth and ninth building blocks in terms of the practices of *kindness* and *memory*. In a world of “consumerist individualism” we can treat others as mere annoyances as we strive to fulfill great and greater needs. In this context, but particularly in times of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, “we are tempted to think in terms of the old saying ‘every man for himself.’ Yet even then, we can choose to cultivate kindness. Those who do so become stars shining in the midst of darkness” (222). Francis repeats his advice that kindness needs to be *cultivated* (224). It seems like something small—smiling, avoiding harsh language, speaking words of comfort and consolation (223-24). But such small acts add up in significance. Kindness “is no artificial bourgeois virtue. Precisely because it entails esteem and respect for others, once kindness becomes a culture within society it transforms lifestyles, relationships and the ways ideas are discussed and compared. Kindness facilitates the quest for consensus; it opens new paths where hostility and conflict would burn all bridges” (224).

Finally, there is the practice of memory. Reconciliation and forgiveness are acts of solidarity, but one must always remember—the victims of the *Shoah*, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of the slave trade,

<sup>9</sup> The official Vatican translation on the Vatican website and published by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana uses British spelling. Hence “neighbour.”

<sup>10</sup> See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2002, 5-6.

past and present (246-54). As Francis said in his message for the 2019 World Day of Peace, we must “keep alive the flame of collective conscience, bearing witness to succeeding generations to the horror of what happened” (249). Solidarity is built not only in the present, but with a living connection to the past, especially the past of suffering.

### *Attitudes*

One can discern a basic attitude of *trust and openness* to the other as an essential building block of solidarity. Such trust and openness require courage. Speaking in the context of migration, Francis expresses this attitude as not fearing the other, especially the stranger, the migrant. Fear may be our natural instinct, Francis says, but—echoing his anthropology of *ekstasis*—he writes that “an individual and a people are only fruitful and productive if they are able to develop a creative openness to others.” Our fears make us “intolerant, closed and perhaps even—without realizing it—racist. In this way fear deprives us of the desire and ability to encounter the other” (41).<sup>11</sup>

Francis does not use the terms as such, but another attitude that calls for cultivation is that of “involvement” or “*responsibility*.” Negatively once more, this would be the opposite of an attitude of indifference. “Someone is assaulted on our streets, and many hurry off as if they did not notice. People hit someone with their car and then flee the scene. Their only desire is to avoid problems; it does not matter that, through their fault, another person could die” (65). Indifference is precisely the sin of the priest and the Levite. “The nervous indifference that makes them pass to the other side of the road—whether innocently or not, whether the result of disdain or mere distraction—makes the priest and the Levite a sad reflection of the growing gulf between ourselves and the world around us” (73). Indifference is in many ways the direct opposite of solidarity. A willingness to be involved and responsible for our sisters and brothers, therefore, leads us to the practice of solidarity.

Ultimately, solidarity can only be achieved through *faith*. Francis understands faith as a vision, a way of seeing. It recognizes “Christ himself in each of our abandoned or excluded brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25:40.45). Faith has untold power to inspire and sustain our respect for others, for believers come to know that God loves every man and woman with infinite love and ‘thereby confers infinite dignity’ upon all

<sup>11</sup> Here Francis is quoting his 2019 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-05/pope-francis-message-world-day-migrants-refugees-full-text.html>

humanity” (85). The eyes of faith see the world in a totally different way than those without the vision. Without cultivating the vision of faith, Francis says, what he is proposing in his encyclical “will sound wildly unrealistic. On the other hand, if we accept the great principle that there are rights born of our inalienable human dignity, we can rise to the challenge of envisaging a new humanity” (127). In the end, this vision of a new humanity is what *Fratelli tutti* is all about. It is a vision of solidarity with all humanity, and all of creation.

U.S. American theologian William Cavanaugh, quoted earlier, writes of a friend who “wondered how a document that is so full of truisms could also be so radical. Pope Francis’s latest encyclical breaks little new ground, but the ground upon which we all stand has shifted to such an extent that ‘fraternal love sounds both outdated and revolutionary.’”<sup>12</sup> The building blocks that Francis offers for the virtue of solidarity are simple, often-cited practices and attitudes. But that does not make them easy, or superficial. If women and men, of every culture, of every religion, of every social class, take these practices seriously, Francis’ utopian vision of solidarity in might well become a reality, and heal a wounded world.

#### ABSTRACTS

Der Artikel hebt die Solidarität als zentrales Merkmal von FT hervor. Sie ist das, was Geschwisterlichkeit und soziale Freundschaft anstreben. Sie bauen auf der grundlegenden Würde jedes Menschen und den Menschenrechten auf. Durch verschiedene Praktiken und Einstellungen kann das Ziel der Solidarität in der Gesellschaft erreicht werden. Dies mag nicht sehr neu sein, aber es wird als radikal angesehen und wird hoffentlich eine verwundete Welt heilen.

Este artículo destaca la solidaridad como característica central del FT. Es lo que pretende la fraternidad y la amistad social. Se basan en la dignidad fundamental de todo ser humano y en los derechos humanos. A través de diferentes prácticas y actitudes, el objetivo de la solidaridad en la sociedad podría alcanzarse. Puede que esto no sea muy nuevo, pero se considera radical y se espera que sane un mundo herido.

Cet article souligne la solidarité comme trait central de FT. C’est ce vers quoi tendent la fraternité et l’estime sociale. Elles s’appuient sur la dignité fondamentale de tout être humain et sur les droits humains. C’est à travers différentes pratiques et attitudes que l’objectif de la solidarité dans la société pourrait être atteint. Ce n’est peut-être pas très nouveau, mais c’est considéré comme radical et porteur d’espoir pour la guérison d’un monde blessé.

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<sup>12</sup> Cavanaugh, *Freedom and Equality Aren’t Enough*, 22.