

CHURCH AND FRATERNITY IN FRANCISCO'S THOUGHT: NOTES FROM FRATELLI TUTTI

IGREJA E FRATERNIDADE NO PENSAMENTO DE FRANCISCO: NOTAS A PARTIR DA *FRATELLI TUTTI*

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Encíclica *Fratelli Tutti*. Além disso, pretende-se contribuir com as notas apresentadas, para o reconhecimento em perspectiva de continuidade os ensinamentos do Papa Francisco, contemplado não como um Papa “fundador” de uma nova Igreja, ou de uma eclesiologia, mas Sucessor do Apóstolo Pedro, ou seja, um continuador do Magistério já enunciado e iniciado sobretudo pelo *corpus* da Doutrina Social da Igreja, em especial no Concílio Vaticano II. Para dar cabo a esta investigação, será feita análise da Encíclica

Abstract: This article aims to present some notes that make it possible to verify how Pope Francis understands the paths that the Church must take, as well as his exhortation to fraternity. In particular, the research will address Pope Francis' thinking on these two topics, since the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*. In addition, it is intended to contribute with the notes presented, to the recognition in perspective of continuity the teachings of Pope Francis, contemplated not as a Pope "founder" of a new Church, or of an ecclesiology, but Successor of the Apostle Peter, that is, a continuator of the Magisterium already enunciated and initiated above all by the corpus of the Social Doctrine of the Church, especially in the Second Vatican Council. In order to carry out this investigation, the Encyclical in question will be analyzed, bringing out some of the principles of the text, relying on some other documents that make up the social teaching of the Church. The method adopted will be deductive. As for the methodology, this will be a literature review, in the form of an article. In this sense, it is possible to note that the Church presented by Pope Francis is a Church of 'presence' and 'dialogue' - which proposes a dialogue with all people of good will -, these terms being fundamental to understand his social writings as the result of a concern of the Church, not only of the Pontiff, since the Second Vatican Council.

Keywords: Presence. Dialogue. Social friendship. Pope Francis. Fraternity.

Resumo: O presente artigo tem como objetivo apresentar algumas notas que possibilitem verificar como o Papa Francisco compreende os caminhos que a Igreja deve percorrer, bem como sua exortação à fraternidade. De maneira particular, a pesquisa abordará o pensamento do Papa Francisco acerca desses dois temas, desde a Carta

em questão, fazendo emergir alguns dos princípios do texto, apoiando-se em alguns outros documentos que compõem o ensino social da Igreja. O método adotado será de caráter dedutivo. Quanto à metodologia, esta será de revisão bibliográfica, na forma de um artigo. Nesse sentido, é possível notar que a Igreja apresentada pelo Papa Francisco é uma Igreja da 'presença' e do 'diálogo' - que se propõe a um diálogo com todas as pessoas de boa vontade -, sendo estes termos fundamentais para entender seus escritos sociais como fruto de uma preocupação da Igreja, não somente do Pontífice, desde o Concílio Vaticano II.

Palavras-chave: Presença. Diálogo. Amizade social. Papa Francisco. Fraternidade.

1. Introduction

Contemporary society is undergoing multiple transformations at a rapid pace, which causes apprehension for some people. These changes have a significant impact on the mentality of young people, who will be the future adults, shaping their perspectives and influencing their beliefs and values.

In this context, the Church, inserted in temporal reality, realizes the need to remain in constant dialogue with current times. This means that she must remain faithful to the fundamental truths of Revelation, which are irrefutable and irreformable. At the same time, the Church needs to understand the dynamics and grammars of the present time and, using rational elements, enter into dialogue with contemporary society. The aim is to build bridges so that the Gospel is understood and lived by people, becoming relevant and meaningful in their lives.

Pope Francis proposes a "Church of presence and dialogue", reviving the "Agenda of the Council", which emphasizes preaching the Gospel to all people, considering their existential dimension and avoiding reducing it to just one element. From the beginning of his pontificate, the Pope has used terms such as reform, welcome, leaving the Church, non-judgment, presence, closeness, among others. This approach is influenced by the "Theology of the People" and highlights a Church in constant mission, capable of dialoguing with all realities and excluding no one.

Pope Francis' Encyclical Letters and Exhortations reflect these concerns and his pastoral program. Among them is the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, which emphasizes the importance of fraternal relationships and of a Church that does not remain oblivious to the realities of the world, such as war, division, hunger, misery and injustice.

This research aims to elucidate Pope Francis' conception of the Church and relationships of fraternity, especially in the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*. To this end, a bibliographical review and the deductive method were used. The aim of this article is to offer explanatory notes to

facilitate understanding of Pope Francis' thinking and his vision of the Church and Christian fraternity, particularly in the light of the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*.

With the aim of exploring Pope Francis' conception of the Church and fraternal relationships, this article is structured around four different topics. Firstly, the notion of Christian fraternity will be addressed, looking for signs that allow for a better conceptualization. Next, Pope Francis' vision of contemporary challenges will be analyzed from the perspective offered by the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*. In addition, a rapprochement will be established between *Fratelli Tutti* and the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et Spes*), highlighting points of connection and mutual influence. Finally, Francis' approach to the Church, based on the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, will be presented, highlighting the focus on mission and the Church's active and compassionate presence amid the challenges of the contemporary world.

2. The Christian notion of fraternity: steps towards a conceptualization

When approaching the subject of fraternity, the notion is often associated by many as a “revolutionary ideal”. However, it must be said that fraternity does not have its origins in the French Revolution or modernity, but rather as a fundamental core of Christianity. Tanzella-Nitti (2016) comments that the desire for unity is perceived as essential to Christianity, although it is not empirically observed, but intrinsic to the Christian faith.

In the passage from Luke 10,25-37, a coroner asks Jesus how to obtain eternal life, and Jesus makes him realize what he already knows, because he's just trying to test him. The coroner, trying to justify himself, asks: “And who is my neighbor?”. Through a parable, Jesus explains that the neighbor is anyone who needs care, and the best action is the one who, when faced with someone who has fallen, is able to show mercy.

In Christianity, fraternity is not an idea separate from bonds, because its existence requires the presence of brothers and sisters. Belief in a Father God implies that those who recognize themselves as God's creatures consider themselves sons and daughters and therefore brothers and sisters. By loving their neighbor (cf. Lk 10,27), Christians reflect the love they have received from God: “The Father and the Son, loving one another, meet again in the Spirit, united and distinct. In the same way, the Christian, losing himself for love of others, has the risen Jesus in his midst and, in his Spirit, finds himself united and distinct” (MANCUSO; PACÔMIO, 2003, p. 316).

In this sense, Christian fraternity is based on the love received from God, which manifests itself in the way Christians care for their neighbors and recognize them as brothers and sisters in the common faith. In order to understand Christian fraternity, it is also essential to reflect on everyone's conception of God. Every culture and people have a unique understanding of what it means to be a brother or sister. The idea of fraternity presupposes the existence of a common Father, because without this figure, the question is how anyone could consider the other as brother or sister. Christians cannot be “self-created”, because this notion seems incompatible and outside the categories of human understanding.

Pope Francis, in the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, when addressing the idea of a “common origin”, refers to God as the “Lord and Father of Humanity”. This God is understood as a common Father, because everyone has an origin and a belief in the idea of creation. The Judeo-Christian God is therefore considered the Lord and Father of humanity, an idea present in the work of creation itself and also mentioned in Malachi 2,10, when the prophet asks: “Is not the Father of us all one? Has not the same God created us?”.

As Ratzinger (2004) points out, the Christian fraternity has God as its only foundation. This fraternity is based on faith in God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is Father to the extent that we are adopted as children in the Son, Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit we can invoke him with a filial heart, as “abba”. In this context, the Christian's condition is that of a child in relation to God, accepting him as Father, and it is also fraternal, because Christians consider others as brothers and sisters, all sons and daughters of the same Father.

Thus, by professing Christianity, Christians have a bond of union through Baptism. However, the Christian faith is not limited to a “chosen people”, but extends to all those who accept the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Christian faith does not allow for any kind of discrimination, since faith and Baptism are enough for someone to be considered a Christian and a brother or sister. Paul emphasizes this perspective in his exhortation to the Galatians, stating that all are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus and that, through Baptism into Christ, all are clothed with Christ. There is no distinction between Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus. Therefore, if you are Christ's, you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3,27-29). In this vision, Christian fraternity is based on faith in Christ and mutual acceptance as brothers and sisters in God.

Having clarified this basic and elementary assumption about the understanding of Christian fraternity, a relevant question arises: why does Pope Francis write an Encyclical reinforcing that we are all brothers and sisters? The answer to this question can be found in the

fact that, through this exhortation to fraternity, the Pontiff reaffirms that all of humanity is considered the “People of God” on the move (COMBLIN, 2002; LA PENNA, 1988). Another objection that may arise is whether this writing is more like a political discourse than a spiritual orientation. To answer this objection, it is opportune and necessary to recall the theology of baptism, since the prophetic attitude, especially through the defense of the dignity of the human person, is intrinsically linked to baptism, in which the faithful participate in the one priesthood of Christ (Rev 1,6; 5,9-10; 1 Pet 2,5, 9; LUMEN GENTIUM LG, n.10).

The Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* is a text of great impact, written by Francis as Pope and Catholic Christian. In addressing the theme of “fraternity”, it is important to emphasize that, from a Christian perspective, fraternity goes beyond a sociological dimension and finds its roots in the Trinitarian mystery. Relationships of fraternity and communion reflect the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the perfect model of union and fraternal love (LADARIA, 2004; MATEO SECO, 2016). In other words, Christian fraternity is ontologically grounded in the mystery of the Holy Trinity and is therefore an earthly expression of Trinitarian life.

It is essential to recognize that not all peoples share the same understanding of fraternity as Christians. Throughout history, different cultures and philosophers have given different meanings to the concept of brotherhood. For example, Plato defined a compatriot as a brother, while Xenophon considered a brother to be a friend, excluding those who do not share this friendship. In the Old Testament, the idea of brotherhood often referred to those who professed the same religion, i.e., those who were part of God's chosen people. For an Israelite, the notion of brotherhood was linked to his religious identity and belonging to the chosen people.

From this perspective, the question arises of how to speak of a common and universal Father for all, considering the restricted understanding of brotherhood within the people of Israel and how it is possible to tell an Israelite that everyone is a brother if the concept of a common God is inconceivable to them. Jesus, in the New Testament, reframes many notions of Judaism, including the very idea of “brotherhood”. He reformulates the concept, broadening it and transcending religious boundaries. It is important to note that the current understanding of the term “brotherhood” may not be entirely applicable to the context of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus, since many Jewish believers broke the brotherhood over issues of purity or impurity established by the law. Thus, the notion of brotherhood among the Jews was not only related to the bond with God, but was also influenced by other considerations.

In addressing the theme of fraternity, Francis starts from a fundamental assumption: the belief that everyone is a son and daughter of the same Father, a “common Father”, understood in different ways by different peoples. This awareness of the plurality of understandings of fraternity leads the Pope to look at it from the perspective of friendship and social charity. Although it may seem like a new topic due to Francis' popularity, the concern for fraternity has been addressed before, including by Pius XII in his encyclical *Summi Pontificatus* (n. 27), which emphasizes the law of charity and human solidarity as the basis for coexistence between all men, regardless of their origins or peoples.

Solidarity, as a way of living fraternity, is the path proposed by Christianity to resolve conflicts and build a more just society (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1940). This effort must be constant and guided by dialog, because for the Christian, the other is not just a stranger or an object, but a brother or sister, all sons and daughters of a common Father. For Christians, fraternity is intrinsically linked to the notion of divine paternity, making an exclusivist view that restricts fraternity only to members of a particular faith unacceptable, as Ratzinger (2004) points out.

Christian fraternity requires an attitude that goes beyond exclusivism and individualism on the part of Catholics, since they are also called to get involved in the great human issues as members of the Church of God, gathered in Jesus Christ (RATZINGER, 2004). True fraternity must be lived in a spirit of dialog open to all, seeking to promote solidarity and justice in order to build a more fraternal and harmonious coexistence between all human beings.

This notion of Christian fraternity is based on love, which originates in the Father himself, because “God is love” (1 John 4,8). It is through the power and experience of this love that social transformation takes place, the fruit of personal changes and meaningful encounters. The path of love is accessible to all, and the effort to establish universal fraternity is valid and necessary (*Gaudium et Spes*, 38). Moreover, this love must not be limited to great actions alone, but must be lived out in the everyday situations of life, in daily interactions and relationships. Therefore, Christian fraternity is a concrete expression of love that seeks to transform society, valuing every moment and opportunity to exercise love and promote fraternity among all.

3. Francis' vision of contemporary challenges: a look from Fratelli Tutti

In writing the Encyclical Letter, Francis demonstrates a genuine concern for contemporary challenges that can compromise the dignity of the human person. This concern for

the well-being of the People is a significant theological category for the Pope, influenced by the so-called 'Theology of the People', which has shaped his thinking since his days as Archbishop of Buenos Aires (SCANNONE, 2017). This same theological approach continues to be present in his papal magisterium, as evidenced by his proposal for an “outgoing Church” (EVANGELII GAUDIUM, 20 ff) that confronts the challenges and problems facing the world.

Francis highlights the worrying trend of growing selfish nationalism in many nations, where national interests are prioritized to the detriment of human well-being (FT 11). This ideological instrumentalization of peoples is a reality in which the poor and marginalized are treated as mere objects. The Pope harshly criticizes the claim to use populism as a key to interpreting social reality, as this ignores the legitimacy of the concept of people and can undermine democracies and civil liberties. This attempt to eliminate the category of people from the discourse could even threaten the very meaning of democracy, which is the government of the people (FT 157) (LUCIANI, 2021, p.12). In this context, Francis warns against the ideologization of the political option for the poor, highlighting the need for a broader and more authentic approach to protect the dignity and rights of all people.

Francis does not criticize development per se, recognizing that it is part of human nature to cultivate and care for the environment in which we live, the “Common Home” (cf. LAUDATO SI). However, he expresses concern about the instrumentalization, lack of values and inadequate orientation in our contemporary culture, which emphasizes individual interests to the detriment of the community dimension of existence (FT 12). The Pope urges that all forms of development and political systems consider the human being, avoiding ideologization. In a meeting in Paraguay, he highlighted how the ideologies of the last century have always ended in dictatorships, because they think for the people, but don't allow the people to think (FRANCISCO, Viaje Apostólico a Paraguay, 11 de julio de 2015).

Furthermore, Francis points to a loss of historical significance and a disregard for the elderly, who possess a wealth of life experience and knowledge. In a general audience, he expressed his concern about the lack of space and proper respect for the elderly in our constantly ageing society (FRANCESCO, Udienza Generale, Aula Paolo VI, Mercoledì, 23 febbraio 2022). The theme of the elderly is addressed in the Bible, emphasizing the importance of caring for the elderly with respect and consideration for their fragility and dignity (cf. Jas 1,27; Psalm 146,9; Is 1,23; 1 Tim 5,3-7; Deut 24,17; Zechariah 7,10). Francis emphasizes the need to revive these biblical principles in order to guarantee adequate and respectful care for the elderly in our contemporary societies.

Both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis emphasize the importance of caring for widows, the elderly and fundamental issues such as the defense of life and the dignity of the human person. This is especially relevant in a context of cultural transformation in the West, where important issues are being neglected and a throwaway culture is becoming increasingly evident. Pope Francis identifies a phenomenon of “deconstructionism”, where human freedom seeks to recreate everything from scratch, forgetting history and its roots (FT 13).

It is not correct to say that Pope Francis is breaking new ground by addressing these issues, since similar messages have been conveyed by Benedict XVI and other pontiffs on visits to institutions that care for the elderly. A lack of historical awareness and adherence to ideologies can make people vulnerable to manipulative proposals that seek to nullify the spiritual and human richness handed down from generation to generation (Christus Vivit, 181).

In this scenario permeated by ideologies, the absence of a common Christian project is evident. The moral integrity of others is often ignored in the pursuit of victory, and politics is reduced to ephemeral marketing recipes, where the main objective is the destruction of others (FT 15). This reality jeopardizes the search for the common good and the development of long-term projects for the benefit of all. Francis' exhortation is therefore a call to reflect on the importance of recovering Christian values and the notion of fraternity in a context marked by cultural challenges and changes.

In these environments, a selfish attitude is perceived, leading to the belief that life is limited to individual interests, abandoning the elderly to painful loneliness and suggesting that everything ends with us (FT 19). The falling birth rate in some European countries is an example of this worrying scenario, affecting society as a whole and generating various problems (Speech by Pope Francis at the inauguration of the General States of Birth, May 14, 2021). The prioritization of the economy and personal well-being often excludes the reality of children as a blessing from God and a participation in the work of creation, but presents them as something expensive, resulting in societies that devalue the generosity of the family with children (FT 19).

Another problem pointed out by Francis is the imbalance of economic rules, which may be effective for financial growth, but do not prioritize integral human development, generating different forms of poverty (FT 21). This reality is corroborated by Benedict XVI, who highlights the increase in inequalities even with the growth of global wealth, indicating that some areas live with consumerist overdevelopment, while others face situations of misery (Caritas in Veritatis, 22).

Despite the historical struggles against slavery, unfortunately this practice still persists in various regions of the world, often in a veiled form, as does trafficking in human beings (FT 21).

Pope Francis draws attention to these social and economic problems, seeking to raise awareness and exhort society to promote solidarity, respect for human dignity and the valuing of human beings in all their stages and conditions. His messages point to the need for a change of mentality and concrete actions to face these challenges and build a more just, fraternal and humane society.

Pope Francis, in a ceremony with religious leaders, denounced the serious reality of contemporary slavery, which occurs covertly in various activities, such as prostitution, human trafficking, forced labor, mutilation, the sale of organs and other forms of exploitation (FRANCISCO, 2014). He emphasizes that this problem is not just an ecclesial issue, but an urgent challenge that requires joint efforts and dialogue from all of humanity. Francis invites political leaders and ordinary people to get involved in defending human life and dignity, spiritual values and working together to eradicate slavery from the world.

Another aspect highlighted in the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* is the growing isolation and closure of people, which makes it difficult to solve problems and build a just and peaceful society (FT 30). The Pope warns that selfishness and a lack of belonging to the same humanity can lead to conflicts and wars. He emphasizes the importance of a fraternity that respects and values differences, seeking a common destiny for all.

The theme of welcoming migrants is also addressed, and Francis argues that everyone has the same intrinsic dignity, regardless of their origin or condition (FT 39). He points out that Christianity, since its beginnings, has welcomed and preached the Gospel to other peoples, incorporating elements from other cultures and religions. Welcoming is a fundamental part of Christian identity, which transcends borders and cultures.

Pope Francis' message in *Fratelli Tutti* is an exhortation to solidarity, dialogue and the valorization of human dignity in all its manifestations. He calls us to overcome isolation, selfishness and the instrumentalization of people, and to work together in search of a more fraternal, just and welcoming world. The Encyclical reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters in the same humanity, and that it is the responsibility of each one of us to contribute to building a better world for everyone.

Pope Francis' invitation is that, as human beings, everyone can be fulfilled by going out of themselves and turning towards others. This encounter with others, mediated through dialogue, transforms us, frees us from individualism and encourages us to cultivate kindness. Mutual acceptance then emerges as a way of life and relationship, in contrast to the indifference that prevails in today's society. This attitude, to which we are all called, can be seen very clearly in Jesus'

episode with the Samaritan (cf. Lk 10,25-37) and manifested in small everyday actions, such as asking permission, apologizing and expressing gratitude (MARTÍNEZ, 2021).

Despite the development of the means of communication and globalization, humanity still lives in a context marked by exclusions and distancing. Globalized society makes us neighbors, but not truly brothers and sisters (CARITAS IN VERITATE, 19). Faced with this scenario, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of dialogue and welcome as fundamental tools for overcoming indifference and building a fraternal society.

Dialogue allows us to connect with others, get to know their experiences and perspectives, which helps us to better understand the needs and aspirations of each individual. Through mutual acceptance, it is possible to transcend barriers and prejudices, creating deeper bonds of empathy and solidarity. This approach leads us to overcome obstacles and work together to promote social justice and inclusion.

In short, Pope Francis invites us to practice the art of dialog and welcome, so that we can build a more fraternal society, in which everyone feels valued and respected in their uniqueness. Through these attitudes, we can break down the barriers of indifference and become truly brothers and sisters, working together to achieve a more just and supportive world.

4. Approximation between Fratelli Tutti and the Second Vatican Council (Gaudium Et Spes)

Pope Francis' Fratelli Tutti shows a remarkable connection with the Second Vatican Council, especially with the document Gaudium et Spes - GS. By analyzing the Pope's thinking and his concerns in the encyclical, it is possible to see that he dialogues with contemporary socio-cultural and religious elements in a similar way to what was proposed by the Council. Francis' main concern is how the Church can relate to and dialog with today's world, in the face of the various problems that arise and that can threaten human dignity, just as the Second Vatican Council had proposed.

In his documents, the Pope takes up the agenda of the Second Vatican Council, addressing different aspects of the Council's teachings. Surprisingly, he does so in a way that rescues the relevance and significance of the Second Vatican Council, which some thought was outdated and far removed from contemporary challenges. Among the problems pointed out by theologians such as Humes (2005) are the radical anthropocentrism, subjectivism, rationalism and immanentism that have marked humanity and directly affected the Church's evangelization.

Pope Francis thus aligns himself with the ideals of the Second Vatican Council in addressing these issues, reinforcing the need for a Church that is attentive and committed to the world in which it lives, capable of dialoguing with contemporary socio-cultural realities and facing the challenges that arise, without ever losing sight of the dignity of the human person and fundamental Christian values. His message resonates with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in its search for a Church in constant dialogue with the world, open to understanding the needs and desires of humanity and committed to offering concrete responses that are consistent with the message of the Gospel.

The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* addresses the social transformations resulting from advances in science and technology, which have taken humanity from a static to a dynamic and evolving perspective. These changes have had a particular impact on young people, who are experiencing a transformation of mentality, questioning values that were previously considered non-negotiable and wanting to participate as quickly as possible in social life.

Faced with contemporary society, the Church faces the challenge of preserving and defending the dignity of the human person, as human relationships are often relegated to the background and relativism gains strength. The Council Fathers understood that today's world needs wisdom to humanize humanity's new discoveries, and they feared that the fate of the world would be threatened if wise people did not emerge.

Thus, the central concern of the Council Fathers involved various issues: atheism, especially modern atheism, and its influence on young people; the Church's position in relation to this phenomenon; the social responsibility of the human community; the role of the Church in the face of social change; the Church's contribution to the human community; the importance of marriage; economic development based on evangelical principles; the need for everyone to collaborate in political life; the fear of new wars and the search for international cooperation to avoid them.

In short, *Gaudium et Spes* reflects the concern of the Council Fathers to understand the challenges of a society in constant transformation, seeking to offer Christian guidelines and principles that can guide humanity towards a more just, supportive and fraternal future.

Faced with the current context, Francis, in his Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, asks the world how Christians and all people of good will should behave (FT 198). The invitation to dialog, already an urgent concern among the Synod Fathers, is transformed here into a concrete proposal for the search for fraternity. "Persevering and courageous dialogue does not make the news as disagreements and conflicts; and yet, in a discreet way, but much more than we can imagine, it

helps the world to live better” (FT 198). There is no set path, with all the steps already established in Francis' proposal, but he starts from the idea that “the good, such as love, justice and solidarity, cannot be achieved once and for all; they have to be won every day” (FT 11).

In the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council Fathers were already drawing attention to some of the problems that we face today, in different and more mature ways. Among the problems listed by the Council Fathers, it is worth highlighting the strong concern with the evolution and domination of technology (GS 15), psychological (GS 7), moral and religious (GS 7), the dignity of the human person (GS 15), atheism (GS 19), the “perversion” of youth (GS 20), the need for social responsibility and participation (GS 31), the Church's concern for marriage (GS 47-52), economic development (GS 64-67), the role of the political community (GS 74-75), the danger of war (GS 79-82) and the need for international cooperation (GS 86).

Thus, both *Gaudium et Spes* and *Fratelli Tutti* share a concern for the challenges of a constantly evolving society, seeking to guide the faithful and people of good will towards a more fraternal and just coexistence. Both documents reflect the Church's vision of social and human issues, with the aim of promoting the common good and peace in humanity.

Thus, when analyzing the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, it is important to understand that it is based on the Second Vatican Council. The proposals for universal fraternity presented by Pope Francis come as a response to contemporary challenges that already concerned the Church during the same Council, but which are now presented with new nuances, such as issues related to artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies (WOLFF; TREVISAN, 2021, p.112).

The theme of fraternity is presented as a way of overcoming discrimination and persecution between human beings, something that had already been highlighted by the Second Vatican Council in its documents (*NOSTRA AETATE*, n. 5). Pope Francis is not proposing a “new Church”, but rather an updated and contextualized reading of the conciliar proposals, seeking to deepen and update the Gospel in the light of the challenges and realities of the contemporary world (FALASCA, 2020).

It is important to note that the exhortation to fraternity is nothing new in Francis' pontificate. Shortly after his election, he already emphasized the importance of praying for world fraternity (*Benedizione Apostolica “Urbi Et Orbi”*, *Primo Saluto Del Santo Padre Francesco*, March 13, 2013). For this reason, the search for universal fraternity and social friendship has been a constant in his pontificate, reflecting the ongoing need for dialogue with the contemporary world and the incarnation of Gospel values in the midst of the diverse cultures and realities of our time. It is therefore possible to understand that *Fratelli Tutti* is a continuation of the process of renewal

begun by the Second Vatican Council, which continues to inspire and guide the Church in its mission to promote fraternity and the common good amid the challenges of today's society.

5. The Church envisioned by Francis starting from *Fratelli Tutti*

Influenced by the “Theology of the People”, as Scannone (2017) mentions, Francis' approach proposes a “Church going forth” (EG 20ff). The Pope is able to discern the signs of the times, interpret them and suggest ways of intervening in the light of the Gospel. In this sense, Francis, as mentioned above, follows the “Agenda of the Second Vatican Council”. Decius (2018, p. 14) observes that “the pope of the end of the world was expressing himself in a discourse woven in a new way with classical concepts, as well as woven in a new way with renewed concepts and even in a new way with new concepts”. To speak of Francis' own ecclesiology seems inappropriate; instead, he takes up Vatican II's “Ecclesiology of the People of God”. According to Wolff (2021), since the beginning of Francis' pontificate, the worldwide Catholic Church has experienced expectations of reform, renewal and change.

There are interesting traits in Pope Francis' thinking that point to three fundamental anchors in his ecclesiological understanding. The first anchor refers to the conciliar documents and the renewal of the Church in the face of current challenges. According to Kasper (2015, p. 56), what Francis proposes “is not a new Church, but a new way of seeing the Church, which must lead to a new ecclesial model”. In this context, on December 22, 2016, in his address to the Roman Curia, he explains the reasons why reforms and renewal are necessary: “To make her [the Church] conform to the Good News that must be proclaimed with joy and courage to all, especially to the poor, the least and the excluded; to conform to the signs of our time and to all that man has accomplished of good, in order to better meet the needs of the men and women we are called to serve” (FRANCISCO, 2016).

In this way, Francis' ecclesiological understanding is driven by his connection with the Second Vatican Council and his commitment to renewing the Church to adapt to the challenges and demands of contemporary society.

An important aspect for understanding Francis' thinking is his background in Latin America, which exerted a significant influence on his outlook. His experience in the region exposed him to the context of poverty, misery, wars, dictatorships and other urgent situations that required immediate responses. Conferences held in Latin America, such as Medellín in 1968 and Aparecida

in 2007, also had an impact on shaping his vision, rereading the Second Vatican Council in the light of the Latin American reality.

His identity as a Jesuit is another matrix from which Francis draws. This affiliation highlights his Christological perspective, with Jesus Christ as the central axis of his reflection, underpinning his spirituality. The Ignatian method, characteristic of the Jesuits, although not explicitly addressed by Francis, provides the basis for his approach and way of acting. This method of seeing-judging-acting and the principles of discerning the signs of the times and spiritual discernment are fundamental to his thinking (PASSOS, 2018, p. 56).

Those who approach Francis' thought recognize the depth of his words, expressed directly or metaphorically, which spring authentically from his person. On the other hand, some may be frightened or reject his colloquial approach, interpreting it as lacking conceptual rigor. In addition, there are those who consider his originality to be close to a heterodox stance, breaking with papal tradition and desacralizing the sacred function (PASSOS, 2018, p. 13-14).

In short, understanding Francis' thinking requires an appreciation of his Latin American roots, his Jesuit identity and the Ignatian method underlying his ideas. His innovative approach can be seen as a creative response to the challenges of the contemporary world, and his words have generated different perceptions among those who follow him. Contextualizing his message is essential for a full appreciation of his proposals and teachings.

The Church, according to Francis' vision, is a Church of presence and dialog, a continuation of the original essence proposed by Jesus and highlighted by the Second Vatican Council. In exhorting the "Church going forth", the Pope invites pastoral workers to embark on a journey of theological conversion, becoming true "ministers of dialogue". This call is not an innovation of the Pontiff, but an intrinsic characteristic of Christianity since the missionary mandate. Christianity was born as an acultural religion, predisposed to walk towards the other and evangelize, establishing a fruitful and respectful dialogue (RATZINGER, 2003).

The idea of dialog is revived in its etymological sense, as it implies respectful interaction with other cultures and religions, without denying the fundamental truths of Revelation held by the Roman Catholic Church (cf. DECLARATION DOMINUS IESUS, 2000). Dialogue, in this context, requires the use of reason to verify whether beliefs have credibility and meaning (TANZELLA-NITTI, 2016).

A relevant parable to reflect on the importance of presence and dialog is that of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10,25-37. In this parable, a lawyer asks Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what the law says and the young man replies that you have to love God and your

neighbor. Asking who his neighbor is, Jesus tells the story of a man who was robbed and left by the side of the road. Both a priest and a Levite, who should be examples of piety, pass by the man without helping him. However, a Samaritan, considered a foreigner by the Jews of the time, took pity on the man, tended to his wounds and took him to an inn to receive care (Lk 10,29-37).

This parable emphasizes the importance of care, compassion and the attitude of being there for others, regardless of their origin or culture. Pope Francis uses this story as an invitation for the Church to also be present in people's lives, cultivating dialogue and solidarity, acting as a true Good Samaritan in a world marked by challenges and adversity.

The parable of the Good Samaritan, commented on by Francis in *Fratelli tutti*, becomes an illuminating icon of the fundamental choice that humanity must make in order to rebuild the world. Faced with suffering and the wounds of life, the answer is to be like the Good Samaritan, showing compassion and solidarity (FT 67). It is interesting to note that, in the parable, religious people, such as a priest and a Levite, pass by the needy without helping him, revealing that believing in God and worshipping him is no guarantee of acting according to his will (FT 74).

In this context, Francis invites all people of good will to look at others as brothers and sisters, to promote social friendship and to cultivate mutual care. At the same time, in a subtle way, he urges the Church, the clergy and religious to rethink their pastoral work, encouraging them to be a loving, supportive and caring Church. This exhortation is in line with his call in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he invites the Church to go out and offer the life of Jesus Christ to everyone. The Pope prefers a Church that is imperfect, but active and committed to the mission of bringing Christ's message to the world, rather than a Church that is closed in on itself and trapped in its securities (EG 49).

This perspective challenges the Church to free itself from the structures that make it self-sufficient and to open itself up to welcoming those who hunger for hope and meaning. Francis emphasizes the importance of being more concerned with bringing the light and consolation of Jesus Christ to those in need than with the fear of making mistakes or facing obstacles (EG 49).

Ultimately, Francis' thinking emphasizes the need for a Church that is open to the world, that practices social friendship and compassion, and that is always willing to go out to meet others, making a difference in the lives of those who need it most.

In the parable of Lk 10,25-37, Francis highlights three possible ways of dealing with a neighbor in need. The first is the way of the priest who, despite seeing the fallen man, passes by indifferently, without taking an interest in the situation. The second is that of the Levite, who passes by without taking the time to help, revealing a “disembodied” spirituality, concerned only

with the spiritual dimension. Finally, the ideal path is that of the Samaritan, who stops, cares and devotes his time to the stranger in need (FT 63).

This attitude of the Samaritan reflects the essence of social friendship, a fundamental axis for understanding the notion of fraternity in the Encyclical. Social friendship, rooted in solidarity, is an antidote to the growing devaluation of life in contemporary times (MATOS AND SEPARAVICH, 2022, p.3). The question “Who is my neighbor?” leads us to reflect on who is next to us, as a neighbor, migrant, poor or helpless, and urges us to express the Gospel not just with words, but with concrete actions of witness to the neighbor within our reach.

Social friendship, understood as social and political love, implies social and political change in order to effectively spread the Gospel (MATOS AND SEPARAVICH, 2022, p.8). To this end, it is necessary to foster a “Church of subjects”, in which lay protagonism is valued, inviting a personal encounter with Jesus Christ as a concrete person and not as an abstract idea (ROUTHIER, 2016, p.239).

In this way, the Church proposed by Francis is a Church of presence, care and dialogue, which dedicates itself to others, being a true “field hospital” in the midst of life's wounds, and which promotes an incarnate spirituality, where faith becomes life and action. This vision is aligned with the essence of the Gospel and the Second Vatican Council, and is a constant invitation to all members of the Church to be true missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

6. Conclusion

Reflecting on Universal Brotherhood is an essential task for leaders, whether spiritual or temporal, who represent institutions that have existed for centuries and whose fundamental principle is to unite around the same Father. This common union implies seeing each other as brothers and sisters, with fraternal ties that bind us together. Faced with the challenges of the arms race, indifference and other problems, Pope Francis, through his Encyclical Letter, invites us to reflect on “Universal Fraternity”. He believes that if humanity, and especially Christians, cannot live as brothers and sisters, but remain isolated, survival will be threatened.

There is a loss of historical meaning and a weakening of relationships, resulting in the questioning of ethical parameters which, in many cases, are relativized in this new millennium. With this, the Pope does not aim to interfere directly in national politics, but to exhort everyone, especially world leaders, to value fraternity and social charity, based on dialogue and respect for

human dignity. These ethical principles, rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, are valid for all realities and are essential, since it is naturally human reason.

Fraternity is a central pillar of Christianity, and the concern for peace has been addressed in various pontificates, maturing over time. Pope Francis is not proposing a “new” ecclesiology, but is building his approach on the basis of the Second Vatican Council, continuing the concerns already expressed in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and other documents.

In the ecclesial sphere, Pope Francis defends the model of the Church as the “People of God”, which is incarnated in concrete reality, always ready to go out to meet those who are far away. He urges the renewal of structures, prioritizing revealed content over bureaucratic structures, which must be at the service of the evangelizing mission.

The Pope's invitation in the Encyclical Letter is to identify others as brothers and sisters and to promote dialogue, building bridges and welcoming those in difficulty. It is a call to live the Gospel through active presence in all realities and circumstances. The preaching of the Gospel must not be mere rhetoric, but must be reflected in the care and attention given to those in need. Fraternity and charity must be lived out in all actions and relationships, making Christianity authentic and consistent with the message of Jesus Christ.

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