

## Prologue: Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti* and a World Order in Fragments

Massimo FAGGIOLI ♦

**Keywords:** De-Europeanization, globalization, localization, the Benedict Option, global church, western cultural triumphalism

**關鍵詞：**去歐洲化、全球化、本土化、本篤選項、全球教會、西方文化勝利主義

One of the most remarkable sections of *Fratelli Tutti* is on social conflict: Francis talks about the roots of social conflicts not separately from the call to social friendship. This speaks volume to churches and countries where social inequality and racial injustice have built, over generations, walls that segregate in ways that are more subtle than they used to be. It is important to note here that in *Fratelli Tutti* the Christian imperative of forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be used to silence the need for justice. In light of the Church's well-known prudence against movements of radical social change – again, especially in countries like the USA – Francis' message is not in favor of the *status quo*.

---

♦ The author is a professor of Theology and Religious Studies, Villanova University, USA.

Francis' approach to intra-ecclesial issues deserve subordinate attention. For Pope Francis, the Church is called to bring in the world a radical quest for justice and equality – a quest that has not yet found audience and legitimacy in the institutional church. However, there is no question that Francis' social message begins from a vision of the Church as inclusive. The shift of the Church's social sensitivity from doctrine to practices / lifestyles leads to a corresponding centering of ethics on the plural and collective dimension. Francis is for an inclusive, non-exclusionary church – and not only with regard to LGBT and divorced and remarried Catholics. Francis rejects the automatic application of political polarization to the ecclesial community. This pontificate has redefined previous geo-political Catholic alignments and has disavowed a purely doctrinal religion that dismisses the call to fraternity.

Given the international situation of fragmentation of the international order and growing risks of conflict, this theme of fraternity has become even more important today than it was at the beginning of Francis' pontificate in 2013. The strongest sections in *Fratelli Tutti* in terms of the political vision are about populism and nationalism, the social responsibility of property, war, death penalty and vindictiveness of justice systems. In this sense it is a document talking to the USA and US Catholicism more than to others. But implicitly it addresses the whole global community of nations and states, international organizations, and religious traditions in a world order in fragments.

The particular nature of the document as addressing the one human family implies a strong interreligious spirit, and an encouragement addressed in a special way towards Christianity itself: Pope Francis is not timid about the need for the Church to counter the calls to an ethno-nationalistic understanding of Christianity. The decisive commitment that Francis makes in the name of religions is to contribute to the realization of one of the founders of the dream of modernity, that of *fraternity*. It is a telling reversal compared to the complicated memories of the French Revolution, with its *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, as the ultimate nightmare for the Catholic Church in modernity. The current “de-Europeanization” of Catholicism goes through also a re-reading of the age of the revolutions with the eyes of a non-European Catholic like Jorge Mario Bergoglio.

*Fratelli Tutti* casts a light on Pope Francis' political culture and political theology. Jorge Mario Bergoglio is a Catholic born and raised in the middle of the twentieth century, who came of age as a Jesuit in the golden era of post-World War II internationalism. This was the golden era of the nation-state, as well as a time when Catholics made intellectual and political contributions to the rebuilding of their states. *Fratelli Tutti* defies the historical and ideological trauma, for Catholics especially, of the French Revolution and applies some of the political values of political modernity, coming from the age of the revolutions, to our globalized world. In the current crisis of globalization, made even more clear by the Russian invasion of Ukraine launched

on 24 February 2022, Pope Francis explores new ways for an ecclesial and magisterial reception of key values of political modernity. *Fratelli Tutti* is not shy about addressing and naming social and political issues: nationalism, populism, colonization, and slavery. It offers a proposal on how to build human fraternity: social love, political love, subsidiarity, solidarity, and citizenship.

When he talks about state, government, international organizations, and the role of the Church in the world, Francis sees, in a pragmatic and non-ideological way, in nation-states an indispensable actor which has an enormous responsibility in caring for the global common good, eliminating hunger and poverty, and defending fundamental human rights: nation-states have built walls and enforced policies of social separation, but for Francis the state can also be an agent of social integration.

Francis is also very far from the rhetoric of U.S.-based Catholic neo-integralists who emphasize the victimhood of the Church at the hands of the nation-state. The Pope's pragmatically positive view of the nation-state comes not just from his political realism, but it also has theological roots. Francis still echoes that fundamental assumption of Vatican II: the Church and the modern nation-state can and must cooperate for the common good. Francis' view of the nation-state is very distant from the political ecclesiology of radical orthodoxy – and even more removed from retreat plans

like “the Benedict option”.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, this positive appreciation of the role of the state must be seen together with Francis’ emphasis on mercy: the work of charity is part of the essence of the church and cannot be outsourced or absorbed by the social services of the state.<sup>2</sup>

This is a very clear message to the ideologues of “majoritarianism” and in favor of respect of minorities in “civilizational states” where religion (and sometimes also Christianity) is used as an instrument of government but also of political and social exclusion. This is integral part of Francis’ understanding of a healthy and positive “*laïcité*” – a constructive distinction between church and state which presumes the free exercise of religious liberty, not just for the Catholic Church but for all churches and religious groups.<sup>3</sup>

Francis’ critique of globalization is not about a return to pre-modern political doctrines, but about a different proposal for the relationship between politics and the economy. Francis identifies the walls of exclusion in the world of today as the fruit of an economic and financial

---

1 I am referring here to Rod Dreher’s bestseller, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017). About this, see Massimo Faggioli, “‘The Benedict Option’ and the Debate on ‘Post-Christian America’,” in *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, XXXVIII/3 (2017), pp. 175-186.

2 On this, see Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), pp. 185-205.

3 See Dominique Wolton, *Pape François, Politique et société* (Paris: L’Observatoire, 2017). English trans.: Dominique Wolton, *Politics and Society: The Path to Change* (London: Bluebird, 2018).

model that have taken precedence over politics. The modern paradigm of globalization seems to have resolved itself into a consumerist individualism that measures everything and every relationship on the basis of the advantages that it can derive exclusively from it, jeopardizing the fundamental bonds that hold human society together. Francis embodies the strong civil passion of the Church for the bond that holds us together as a humanity common to all, and for the underlying cohesion and stability of a plural and multiform social fabric. *Fratelli Tutti* is an urgent appeal addressed not only to Catholicism, but more broadly to the entire human community: it is the proposal of a new architecture of the world and of human relations.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio is a Jesuit of the post-Vatican II Society of Jesus, in which the shift inaugurated by the council was matched by a change in the Society's leadership towards a *global* religious order, not just in its personnel but in its theological orientation and relation to local cultures. One of the typical antinomies and tensions within the culture and theology of the Jesuits is the polar tension between Catholic universality and local inculturation of the gospel message. This tension is rephrased as being between globalization and localization and takes shape in the image of the Church as a polyhedron, where the tension between local and universal is not resolved in favor of one or the other, but is kept in tension.<sup>4</sup>

---

4 See Massimo Borghesi, *Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Una biografia*

Francis' understanding of his role as Bishop of Rome means a new relationship between the local and the universal in his ministry: a more visible papal ministry in the city of Rome itself, more present in the global world, and a different kind of relationship with Italy and Western Europe. In a time when globalization effectively means more connections among urban giants and fewer connections with the peripheries, Francis' engagement with the Church in places far removed from Europe and his attention to those particular locales has conversely led to a renewed pastoral attention to the city of Rome.

In a global Church, in which a new emphasis on the local dimension often means the Church is at risk of being overwhelmed by idiosyncratic political and cultural narratives, Francis' missionary ecclesiology implies a repositioning on the global map and in local communities – not only a geographical repositioning but also a new posture towards the issue of local and universal.

Francis is a global Pope: the first non-European and non-Mediterranean Pope, whose cultural and political roots are in Latin America. This is the background of his invitation to critically reconsider a model of life and consumption that he sees as self-destructive not only for the environment but also for communities and societies. In Francis it is visible

---

*intellettuale* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2017). English trans.: *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019).

the critique of Western cultural triumphalism as a creed or religious faith that looks forward to the eventual acceptance, willingly or not, of Western-style, American-led liberal democracy. Pope Francis' idea of the social and political embodiment of the Christian message and of Catholic social tradition is not identified with progressive faith in Western civilization; his worldview is close to the post-colonial and post-western one of Pankaj Mishra and far from the neo-imperialist one of Niall Ferguson's western supremacism or of Thomas Friedman's "flat world" of the free market.<sup>5</sup> This also means a clear distance between Francis and the "Anglobalized" world – not only from neo-imperial Anglobalization but also from the populism and nationalism of Trumpism and Brexit.

Francis' critique of the Western model has become more arduous and, at the same time, more timely than at the time of the publication of the encyclical, given the situation the Catholic Church and especially Vatican diplomacy started to face, once again, in both Europe and Asia in 2022. It is now necessary to begin a second phase of reception of *Fratelli Tutti*, and this special issue of *Tripod* a very encouraging sign of this new process of reflection on one of Pope Francis' major documents.

---

5 Cf. Pankaj Mishra, *Bland Fanatics: Liberals, Race and Empire* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020); Mishra, "Flailing States," *London Review of Books* 42:14, 16 July 2020; Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, "The Liberal Establishment Is 'a Stranger to Self-Examination,'" *The Nation*, 23 November 2020.