

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

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RECIBIDO: 29/06/2023

ACEPTADO: 10/07/2023

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 (2nd part) and how he applies it to our relationship with Sister Mother Earth (3rd 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^a parte) e come lo applica al nostro rapporto con sorella madre terra (3^a 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^a parte) y cómo lo aplica a nuestra relación con la hermana madre tierra (3^a 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*¹ and *Laudato si'*.² 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.³

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.”⁴ 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.”⁵

¹ 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.

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

³ 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)

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

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

Today it is used to refer, for example, to student associations⁶ and other religious⁷ and masonic groups.⁸ Within the Catholic Church, it is usually applied to an entire religious congregation⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.”¹¹ 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:

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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).

⁸ 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.

⁹ “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.

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

¹¹ 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.

“Despotism, by its very nature suspicious, sees the isolation of men as the best guarantee of its own permanence. So, it usually does all it can to isolate them. Of all the vices of the human heart egoism is that which suits it best. A despot will lightly forgive his subjects for not loving him, provided they do not love one another. He does not ask them to assist him in governing the state; it is enough that they do not aspire to govern it themselves.”¹²

The Enlightenment, which inspired the French revolution, wanted to overcome ignorance with the light of reason. Its concept of fraternity was elaborated by applying rational reflection to the verifiable fact that all human beings share a common nature and, therefore, should be guaranteed equal rights.

The French revolution conceives brotherhood “as coming from this world, from the similar heredity and nature of all. [...] The reestablishment and the continuing respect for natural equality – the original brotherhood of all men – was the aim of the French Revolution.” Nevertheless, it “differentiated drastically and bloodily between the inner fraternal circle of the revolutionaries and the outer circle of the nonrevolutionaries.”¹³

It is a fraternity conceived “from below” that, in practice, fails to overcome the dynamics of separation and tribal confrontation. It lacks a transcendent element that unites all and allows group interests to be overcome. “When the king-father was killed, the Jacobin revolutionaries will have to renounce the very idea of fraternity.”¹⁴

1.2. Marxism

The idea of a single God, father of all humanity, disappears completely in Marxism. Without an element that unites all, any attempt to build an egalitarian fraternity in the present is abandoned. Humanity is divided “into two totally antithetical groups, capital and proletariat, and their embattled dialectic constitutes history [...]. Brotherhood toward some involves enmity toward others.”¹⁵

¹² TOCQUEVILLE Alexis DE, *Democracy in America*, Perennial Classics, New York 2000, 509.

¹³ RATZINGER Joseph, *The meaning of Christian brotherhood*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1993, part one, 1.4 (Id., *La fraternità cristiana*, Queriniana, Brescia 2005, 25-26).

¹⁴ “Quando il padre-re viene ucciso, i rivoluzionari giacobini dovranno rinunciare [...] all’idea stessa di fraternità.” BAGGIO Antonio Maria (ed.), *Il principio dimenticato. La fraternità nella riflessione politologica contemporanea*, Città Nuova, Roma 2007, 35.

¹⁵ RATZINGER Joseph, *The meaning of Christian brotherhood*, part one, 1.4. (Id., *La fraternità cristiana*, 26).

Class struggle is inevitable to advance towards a future egalitarian society, overcoming historical alienation. Indeed, Marxism says we must “assist original nature to be victorious over the subsequent misdealings of history.” Thus, “people of the present are sacrificed to the Moloch of the future.”¹⁶

2. FRATERNITY IN THE LIGHT OF POPE FRANCIS' MAGISTERIUM

Marking the differences with the meanings “from below,” Pope Francis affirms that a fraternity, “lacking a reference to a common Father as its ultimate foundation, cannot endure.”¹⁷ This transcendent and personal dimension clearly distinguishes it from the rational conception of the Stoics and the Enlightened, which reduced it to a social theory and a simple human project. In the Christian vision, fraternity is part of God’s plan and, therefore, “the history of faith has been from the beginning a history of brotherhood” (*LF* 54).

Joseph Ratzinger had already stated that Christian fraternity is linked to a transcendent vision and thus it is clearly distinguished from the idea of a closed and elitist brotherhood reserved for the initiates that we find, for example, in liberal Freemasonry.¹⁸

2.1. Trinitarian and Christological foundation

Christian brotherhood has a Trinitarian and Christological foundation; that is, it is understood “from above,” from the openness to the Father of everything that exists. As Creator, He is the father of all humans and all creatures (cf. *LS* 89). This fatherhood is mediated by the Son:¹⁹ “All things came to be through him” (Jn 1:3). Baptism inserts us into a deeper filial relationship, for “we are freed from sin and reborn” as adopted sons of God the Father and “members

¹⁶ BENEDICT XVI, «*Deus caritas est*. Encyclical letter» (Dec 25, 2005), [*DCE*], 31b, in *AAS* 98 (2006) 217-252.

¹⁷ POPE FRANCIS, «*Lumen fidei*. Encyclical letter» (May 29, 2013), [*LF*], 54, in *AAS* 195 (2013) 555-596.

¹⁸ “We must also remember that liberalism, the heir of the Enlightenment ideology, also created in freemasonry its own highly differentiated inner fraternal group.” RATZINGER J., *The meaning of Christian brotherhood*, part one, 1.4 (Id., *La fraternità cristiana*, 26).

¹⁹ “The fatherhood of God is a fatherhood mediated by the Son and including brotherly union in the Son.” RATZINGER J., *The meaning of Christian brotherhood*, Ignatius, San Francisco 2003, 44. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal 3:28.

of Christ” by the power of the Spirit.²⁰ In fact, “«in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body» (1Cor 12:13), in which each member has his or her distinctive contribution to make” (FT 280).

For believers, universal fraternity is not the result of reasoning or of having verified that we share the same nature and belong to the same species. It is a question of faith: we believe that, in Christ, we are children of the Father through the power of the Spirit. From this derives the equal dignity of all and the call to participate in a single project of love.

“For us the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From it, there arises, «for Christian thought and for the action of the Church, the primacy given to relationship, to the encounter with the sacred mystery of the other, to universal communion with the entire human family, as a vocation of all»” (FT 277).

FT invites to build the culture of fraternity, which is a gift and a task, a divine grace that requires conversion and effort. The Holy Spirit, with the plurality of his gifts, enriches unity by reconciling differences and generating in us “the same attitude in Christ.”²¹ Indeed, “Diversity must always be reconciled by the help of the Holy Spirit; he alone can raise up diversity, plurality and multiplicity while at the same time bringing about unity” (EG 131).

It is a fraternity based on self-giving, equality, and reciprocity. The experience of divine gratuitousness leads us to abandon all pretensions of superiority or privilege. “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give” (Mt 10:8). All that we are and all that we have is a gift that we must generously put at the service of others. Indeed, fraternal subjects do not limit themselves to giving things but graciously donate themselves.

2.2. Fraternity goes beyond the concept of solidarity

The word solidarity has been widely used by Catholic Social Teaching, with a richness of content similar to fraternity. That word has also been used by many ideologies, for example, Marxism. Thus, it has been loaded with connotations that may make it inappropriate to express certain ideas. In fact, Pope Benedict, in chapter 3 of his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, had already preferred the expression “principle of fraternity” rather than “principle of solidarity.” He thus

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [CCC], n. 1213, LEV, Vatican City 2019.

²¹ Phil 2:5. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Gal 5:22-23.

emphasized that the other is not just an individual among many others, but a brother or sister whom I appreciate in his/her uniqueness.

Following in this line, Pope Francis uses the word “fraternity” forty-four times in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, twice as much as “solidarity.” This encyclical insists on the individuality and uniqueness of each being and therefore links fraternity “to new concepts that replace peace with peacemakers, development with co-workers, and respect for rights with attention to the needs of each neighbor, be it a person, a people or a community.”²²

Fraternity allows unity in diversity; being equal, without renouncing to be different. In other words, it avoids individualism while respecting the individuality of each concrete subject.²³ Before writing *FT*, the pope had already explained the difference between fraternity and solidarity:

“Fraternity constitutes, at the same time, the complement and the exaltation of the principle of solidarity. Indeed, while solidarity is the principle of social planning that allows the unequal to become equal; fraternity is what allows the equal to be different people. Fraternity allows people who are equal in their essence, dignity, freedom, and their fundamental rights to participate differently in the common good.”²⁴

Fraternity therefore goes far beyond solidarity. A society can comply with solidarity without being fraternal. Solidarity is aimed at restoring equality and justice among all, but it can be separated from the gratuitousness of love, reducing itself to philanthropy or paternalism. The needy are helped, but they are not recognized as brothers or sisters whom I appreciate in their personal uniqueness. A fundamental aspect of the fully human relationship is thus nullified, because, as Benedict XVI said, nothing material or formal is “capable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person - every person - needs: namely, loving personal concern” (*DCE* 28).

The fraternal relationship implies an exchange of relational goods that prevents anyone from feeling superior if he is the one who gives the most, or inferior if he only receives. Relational goods compensate for the potential mismatch between the material goods exchanged. All feel listened to and affectionately welcomed as persons of equal dignity, without dependencies or paternalism.

²² PAROLIN P., «Speech at the conference on the encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti*» (Oct. 4, 2020), in *OR* 229 (Oct. 5, 2020) 5 & 8, here 8.

²³ An explanation of this difference: CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ Martín, *Ecología franciscana. Raíces de la Laudato si'*, Ed. Franciscana Arantzazu, Oñati 2016, 147-149 (Id., *Sister Mother Earth. Franciscan Roots of the Laudato si'*, Tau Publishing, Phoenix, AZ, 2017).

²⁴ POPE FRANCIS «Fraternity as the governing principle of the economic order,» 7.

2.3. Gratuitousness, reciprocity, and universality

Christian fraternity is an expression of gratuitousness and reciprocity.²⁵ It is not based on a social contract, which regulates the freedom and equality of all, but on faith in God the Father. *FT* proposes the Good Samaritan as an example of the kind of free relations that make fraternity possible. Earlier, Benedict XVI had recalled that without the gratuitousness of love, neither fraternity nor justice can be achieved.²⁶

“Reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity. This originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, teaching us through the Son what fraternal charity is” (CV 19).

Christian fraternity enhances the individuality of the concrete person while remaining open to universality. It is always at the service of all,²⁷ even if it is lived in small groups, in local communities. It does not create closed groups that are opposed to “the others.” It is not confined to the private sphere, but must permeate all levels: family, social, political, economic.

Indeed, good politics is based on social friendship,²⁸ relies on “the reserves of goodness present in human hearts” (*FT* 196) and, therefore, seeks dialogue and consensus. Also, in ordinary economic activity, “the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity” (CV 36).

²⁵ “La *fraternità* è un concetto tipicamente cristiano, ampiamente sviluppato dalla Scuola di pensiero francescana [...]. La parola *fratellanza* invece viene introdotta nel lessico popolare dopo la Rivoluzione Francese. Quindi sono due concetti diversi. Mentre la fraternità presuppone una comune origine, la fratellanza si basa piuttosto su un comune sentire.” ZAMAGNI Stefano, quoted in MAUSSIER Barbara (ed.), *Il mondo in divenire, Un dibattito aggiornato sulle previsioni di Jacques Attali*, Armando editore, Roma 2020, 301.

²⁶ BENEDICT XVI, «*Caritas in veritate*. Encyclical letter» (June 29, 2009), 38, in AAS 101 (2009) 641-709.

²⁷ “La delimitazione della fratellanza cristiana limitata non mira a creare un circolo esoterico fino a sé stesso, ma avviene al servizio del tutto. La comunità cristiana fraterna non è contro, bensì a favore del tutto.” RATZINGER J., *La fraternità cristiana*, Queriniana, Brescia 2005, 85, 86, 94.

²⁸ “Por eso surgieron en las ciudades los parentescos, las fraternías, los sacrificios públicos y las diversiones de la vida en común. Todo es obra de la amistad, pues la elección de la vida común supone la amistad.” ARISTOTLE, *La Política*, III 13, 1280b, in *Aristotle II*, (translated by M. García Valdés), Gredos, Madrid 2011, 107 (Id., *Politics*, Focus, Newburyport, MA, 2012).

The exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* affirms that “the family itself introduces fraternity into the world” because it gives us the “initial experience of fraternity.”²⁹ By strengthening these family relations, we can contribute to “the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity” (FT 8) so that we can move forward together towards “a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family” (FT 127).

2.4. Unity in Diversity and Polar Opposition

More than a program or a point of arrival, fraternity is a continuous process of conversion and of affectionate openness to diversity. It is generated by initiating “processes of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences” (FT 217).

Pope Francis explains fraternity using the dialectic of contrast or polar opposition proposed by Romano Guardini.³⁰ This dialectic is not synonymous with contradiction between elements that exclude each other without any possibility of reaching a synthesis. In polar opposition, the elements condition each other, complement each other, and integrate into a unity that does not cancel out the difference.³¹ Appealing to this dynamism, the Pope affirms the need to embrace the culture of encounter, which seeks unity without renouncing difference; that is, seeking unity in diversity.

We need to maintain the right dynamism between multiple polarities, for example, between universal-particular (FT 142), global-local (FT 143), difference-complementarity, essence-existence. “Unity is greater than conflict” (LS 198), but this should not lead “to opt for a kind of syncretism, or for the absorption of one into the other, but rather for a resolution which takes place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides” (EG 228; FT 245). We must avoid any kind of excluding contradiction.

²⁹ POPE FRANCIS, «*Amoris Laetitia*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation» (March 19, 2016), [AL], 194, in AAS 108/4 (April 1, 2016) 311-446.

³⁰ We have explained this dialectic in: CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ Martín, *La fraternidad universal. Raíces franciscanas de Fratelli tutti*, Efarantzazu, Vitoria-Gasteiz 2022, 151-175 (Id., *The universal fraternity*).

³¹ “Tutta l’estensione della vita umana sembra dominata dal dato di fatto degli opposti. [...] Probabilmente non soltanto nella vita umana; essi stanno, forse, alla base di ogni realtà viva e forse d’ogni realtà concreta.” GUARDINI Romano, *L’opposizione polare. Saggio per una filosofia del concreto vivente*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2007, 29.

“Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity.”³² However, today prevails a model of globalization that “consciously aims at a one-dimensional uniformity and seeks to eliminate all differences and traditions in a superficial quest for unity” (FT 100). Contradicting this homogenizing tendency, we must open ourselves joyfully to the encounter “with those outside one’s own circle” (FT 90), since “our own cultural identity is strengthened and enriched as a result of dialogue with those unlike ourselves.”³³

3. FRATERNITY WITH SISTER MOTHER EARTH

The relationship with nature is inseparable from the other three fundamental relationships of the human being: with God, with others, and with himself. Cosmic fraternity demands the harmonious development of these four relationships. However, Western culture has defended the unhindered use and even abuse of nature and of our own body.

Modernity has considered that the “irrational” world has only an instrumental value, depending on our needs. Progress consists in mastering it and “humanizing” it. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) defends the dictatorial empire of man through science and technology.³⁴ They aim at “enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire.”³⁵ René Descartes (1596-1650) confirms that we must use reason and science “to become like masters and possessors of nature.”³⁶ The Enlightenment sees the world in a functionalist and utilitarian mode. It is not a communion of subjects but just a bunch of objects,³⁷ described in mathematical and geometric terms. Thus, the complete and absolute lordship of man is justified.

This despotic and irresponsible anthropocentrism has been based on the thesis of the human exception, which postulates an ontic rupture between man and other creatures; that is, “a radical separation between human beings

³² MARCEL Gabriel, *Du refus à l’invocation*, NRF, Paris 1940, 50; quoted in FT 87.

³³ FT 148; POPE FRANCIS, «*Querida Amazonia*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation» (Feb. 2, 2020), [QA], 37, LEV, Vatican City 2020; “I communicate effectively with myself only insofar as I communicate with others.” FT 87.

³⁴ BACON Francis, *Novum Organum*, Globus, Madrid 2013.

³⁵ BACON Francis – CAMPANELLA Tomasso, *The new Atlantis of Francis Bacon & The city of the sun by Tomasso Campanella*, Dover, Mineola NY 2003, 31.

³⁶ DESCARTES René, *Discurso del método*, Edaf, Madrid 1982, 93; cf. VIVIEN Franck-Dominique, *Economía y ecología*, Abya-Yala, Quito 2002², 45; LABERTHONNIÈRE Lucien, *Études sur Descartes*, II, Vrin, Paris 1935, 288-289.

³⁷ “The world around us become an ‘it’ rather than a ‘thou’.” BERRY Thomas, *The great work. Our way into the future*, Bell Tower, New York 1999, 16-17.

and other forms of life,”³⁸ which would belong to another order of being.³⁹ H. Bergson states that this thesis is “the architrave of modern philosophy, at least from the Copernican revolution onwards.”⁴⁰

3.1. Despotic dominion or egalitarianism instead of fraternity

The despotic domination over nature has its opposite extreme in the egalitarianism of some neo-pagan or pantheistic movements that present nature as sacred and as “an untouchable taboo.” (CV 48). While despotic anthropocentrism reduces it to a formless object, “completely open to manipulation” (LS 106), egalitarianism ignores the specificity of the human being and the value of diversity. In both cases, unity in diversity is nullified and thus the foundations of an authentic cosmic fraternity are destroyed.

Indeed, the anthropocentrism of Western philosophy has reduced nature to a bunch of machines that we can reprogram or eliminate at our convenience. No intrinsic value is recognized for them. This justifies the technocratic ideology (CV 14), which submits everything to the wonders of technology and finance (CV 68).

At the opposite extreme are the non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, which eliminate “the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings, since the biosphere is considered a biotic unity of undifferentiated value.”⁴¹ Deep ecology is the most radical position, because it abolishes any difference.⁴² Others indicate some criteria for identifying beings that have intrinsic value and equal dignity. For Peter Singer what counts is the ability to experience pleasure and pain;⁴³ for biocentric theories the simple fact

³⁸ SCHAEFFER Jean Marie, *El fin de la excepción humana*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Buenos Aires 2009, 24. We have explained this thesis in our book: CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ Martín, “*Todo está conectado*” *Ecología integral y comunicación en la era digital*, Paulinas, Lima 2019, 28-34 & 126-129 (Id., *Everything is Connected. Integral ecology and communication in the Digital Age*, TAU, Phoenix, AZ, 2021).

³⁹ Cf. CARBAJO NÚÑEZ M., «Franciscan Spirituality and Integral ecology. Relational bases vs the Throwaway culture,» in *Islamochristiana* 43 (2017) 59-78.

⁴⁰ BERGSON Henri, *Introduzione alla metafisica*, Orthotes, Napoli 2012, 12 [my translation].

⁴¹ JOHN PAUL II, «Address to the participants in the Congress on Environment and Health» (March 24, 1997), n.5, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II XX/1* (1997) 520-523.

⁴² CAPRA Fritjof, *The web of life. A new synthesis of mind and matter*, Flamingo, London 1997.

⁴³ SINGER Peter, *Liberación animal: el clásico definitivo del movimiento animalista*, Santillana, Madrid 2011; cf. REGAN Tom, *I diritti degli animali*, Garzanti, Milano 1990, 206. “Todos los mamíferos de más de un año serían sujetos de una vida (en sentido biográfico) y tendrían valor intrínseco.” SALT Henry S., *Los derechos de los animales*, Catarata, Madrid 1999, 22.

of living.⁴⁴ Holistic theories give priority to everything that tends “to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.”⁴⁵

“In a given ecosystem, preserving a beneficial bacterium may have greater ethical value than preserving the life of a whole population of mammals, birds or fish. Some critical scholars have reported the danger of an “eco-fascism,” which discards the good of individuals to preserve the good of the whole, whether it be a given ecosystem or the entire biosphere.”⁴⁶

The Christian vision goes beyond both extremes. On the one hand, it underlines the ontological and axiological difference that exists between human beings and other creatures. Nature must not be divinized or “place it above the dignity of the human person himself.”⁴⁷ The earth is a mother, but it is also a sister, a creature. At the same time, it recognizes that all beings have intrinsic value and are part, with us, of a biological and metaphysical unity. It therefore excludes any purely utilitarian use. In this line, John Paul II affirms that, when man ignores not only the biological laws but also the moral ones, “nature rebels against him and no longer recognizes him as its «master»” (SRS 30).

3.2. A cosmic fraternity that respects the individuality of each being

Cosmic fraternity demands respect for the individuality of each being. Therefore, we need to overcome the current technocratic paradigm, “homogeneous and one-dimensional,”⁴⁸ which blocks our ability to speak “the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world” (LS 11).

“In the process we have become autistic. We have lost our capacity for communication with the natural world in its inner life, its spirit mode. We find ourselves illiterate as

⁴⁴ “None is superior to another.” TAYLOR Paul W., *Respect for Nature: a theory of environmental ethics*, Princeton UP, Princeton (N.J.) 2011, 155.

⁴⁵ LEOPOLD Aldo, *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2001, 189

⁴⁶ HERRERA IBÁÑEZ Alejandro, «Ética y ecología», in VILLORO Luis (ed.), *Los linderos de la ética*, Siglo XXI, México (D.F.) 2000, 134-151, here 150.

⁴⁷ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, [CDSI], n. 463, LEV, Vatican City 2005.

⁴⁸ LS 106. R. Guardini had criticized the technocratic paradigm, particularly in his works: GUARDINI Romano, *The end of the modern world* ISI, Wilmington 1998 (original 1950); Id., *El poder: un intento de orientación*, Cristiandad, Madrid 1982 (original 1951).

regards the languages of the natural world. We do not hear the voices of the trees, the rivers, the birds, the mountains, the animals, or the insects.”⁴⁹

We must foster fraternal relationships in the common home, feeling part of the great cosmic family. To do this, we must overcome Darwinism, which sees nature as a battlefield, in which only the strongest prevail: “Eating or being eaten.” In the Christian vision, however, the entire creation “is conceived of to create the place of encounter between God and his creature.”⁵⁰ It is a home for dialogue and listening, because “everything is related” (*LS*) and we are all related (*FT*).

“In a pluralistic society, dialogue is the best way to realize what ought always to be affirmed and respected apart from any ephemeral consensus. Such dialogue needs to be enriched and illumined by clear thinking, rational arguments, a variety of perspectives and the contribution of different fields of knowledge and points of view” (*FT* 211).

This Christian vision is in tune with recent studies that confirm that, both at the physical and biological levels, interdependence and interaction are more decisive than the struggle.⁵¹ Plants are a clear example of the predominance of symbiosis and collaboration.⁵² Also in the animal kingdom, the species that are best adapted to the environment “are not the most aggressive ones, but those most capable of collaborating with others.”⁵³ Everything is related and everything is interdependent.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ BERRY Thomas, «The Emerging Ecozoic Period», in LASZLO Ervin - COMBS Allan - BERRY Thomas (ed.), *Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism*, Inner Traditions, Rochester (VT) 2011, 9-15, here 12.

⁵⁰ BENEDICT XVI, «Address at the opening of the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops» (Oct. 6, 2008), in *Ecclesia* 3436 (2008) 26.

⁵¹ “Love is the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces. [...] The physical structure of the universe is love.” THEILARD DE CHARDIN Pierre, *Human energy*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York 1969, 32 & 72.

⁵² COCCIA Emanuele, *The life of plants. A metaphysics of mixture*, Polity, Medford (MA) 2019.

⁵³ “Le specie più adatte non sono le più aggressive bensì le più solidali. [...] Al cuore di ogni vita starebbe una fraternità o sororità originaria.” MORIN Edgar, *La fraternità perché? Resistere alla crudeltà del mondo*, AVE, Roma 2020, 19 & 28.

⁵⁴ “Reality is nonlocal [...]. Nature is not composed of material substances but rather deeply entangled fields of energy; the nature of the universe is undivided wholeness.” DELIO Ilia, *Re-Enchanting the Earth: Why AI Needs Religion*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll (NY) 2020, c. 1.

“God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other” (CCC 340).

Francis of Assisi is universally recognized as a model in his relationship of brotherhood and reciprocity with all creatures. He cares for them as sisters and, at the same time, recognizes that he needs their help. By joining in their song, he overcomes his own unworthiness, for “no human is worthy to mention Your name.”⁵⁵ Indeed, “all of us, wretches and sinners, are not worthy to pronounce Your name,”⁵⁶ whereas “all creatures under heaven serve, know, and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature, better than you.”⁵⁷ Thus, “*with*” all creatures (*CtC* 3) and “*through*” them (*CtC* 5-9), Francis praises the Creator.

CONCLUSION

Modernity considers that society must be founded on the social contract, which would guarantee freedom and equality on the condition that fraternity and social friendship would be relegated to the private sphere, together with Religion and ethics. In the public realm, the individual must follow practical reason (*etsi Deus non daretur*) and thus «cooperate without sacrifice» (Hume), in a rational and methodical way, having justice as the only reference. Such commercial and impersonal relations would make mature and authentic sociability possible in public life.

Contradicting this mentality, the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* affirms that “fraternity and friendship” must be present not only in the private sphere, but also in the public realm. Indeed, “charity is at the heart of every healthy and open society” (*FT* 184).

Fraternity is built by enhancing “the rich gifts and uniqueness of each person and each people” (*FT* 100), as if it were a polyhedron or a mosaic where each element contributes to the beauty of the whole while preserving its own characteristics. Individuality, collaboration, and mutual respect are favored instead of individualism.

⁵⁵ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «The Canticle of the Creatures» [*CtC*], 2, in ARMSTRONG R.J. -HELLMANN J.A.W. - SHORT W.J., ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early documents*, 3 vol., New City Press, New York 2001 [*FAED*], I, 113-114.

⁵⁶ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «The Earlier Rule», [*ER*], 23,5 (*FAED* I, 63-86).

⁵⁷ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «Admonitions», [*Adm*], 5,2 (*FAED* I, 128-137).

Fraternity must be extended to Sister Mother Earth and to all creatures, for in the common home “everything is connected” (LS 91). To do this, we need to overcome the despotic anthropocentrism and the egalitarian biocentrism, which impede unity in diversity. Both are expressions of the current technocratic paradigm, “homogeneous and one-dimensional” (LS 106), which makes fraternal relationship impossible because it forgets that every being is important and that everything is related.

In the great cosmic family, nothing is superficial or accessory. Pope Francis wants to inspire “a new vision of fraternity and social friendship” (FT 6), open to all human beings and all creatures. Let us dream together, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all” (FT 8).

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