



DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

“CARITAS” IN THE ENCYCLICAL FRATELLI TUTTI

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In the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, when Pope Francis dwells on the concept of "charity", he starts from the most intimate and profound aspect of love, in the heart of the Church itself. The first Christian communities knew well the meaning of the word charity. In the face of the danger that the Church would give in to the temptation to close herself off and isolate herself, Saint Paul exhorts her rather to love with breadth, overflowing with love "among you and towards all". (1 Tess 3.12). Saint John does the same (*Fratelli tutti*, 62). This echoes Francis' insistent call in *Evangelii Gaudium* 23, "The intimacy of the Church with Jesus is an itinerant intimacy, and communion "is essentially a missionary communion". And also, "The evangelising community experiences that the Lord has taken the initiative, has preceded it in love (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), and for this reason it knows how to take the first step, it knows how to take the initiative without fear, to go out to meet, to seek out those far away and to arrive at the crossroads to invite the excluded" (EG, 24). In Francis, charity is much more than the feeling that moves a person to give alms. It is instead a force that radiates the very love of God.

Charity makes it possible for people's virtues and habits to build a life in common (FT, 91). Sustainability, therefore, depends on charity. And Francis exhorts us to remember the importance of the social dimension of evangelization: "His redemption has a social significance because "God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relationships between people" (EG, 178). The Gospel reveals "the intimate connection between evangelization and human promotion" (EG, 178), and "the indissoluble bond" (EG, 179) between accepting God's saving love and our love for those around us.

Love, made possible by God's grace, inspires our movement outside ourselves, on the other and towards others (FT, 93); and he quotes St. Thomas Aquinas stressing that what lies behind the word "charity" comes from the love for which a given person is pleasing (grateful) and therefore derives the pleasure of pouring some of that love and those gratifications towards it (free). But charity does not remain on an individual level. It necessarily opens up to the social dimension, and "implies an effective path of transformation of history that requires the incorporation of everything: institutions, law, technology, experience, professional contributions, scientific analysis, administrative procedures, and so on" (FT, 164). True charity encapsulates all these elements of attention to the other.

The Good Samaritan also needed an inn to take care of the wounded man. Charity must be able to use all available resources, including those from society. (FT, 165). It is clear that it is necessary to grow a greater "spirituality of fraternity" but, at the same time, that "there is not only one possible way out, one acceptable methodology, one economic recipe that can be applied equally for all". (FT, 165). This reminds

Laudato si': "today we cannot fail to recognise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach, which must integrate justice into discussions on the environment, in order to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (LS, 49).

This also brings a broader vision of political life. Francis writes: "we need a policy that thinks with a broad vision, and that takes a new integral approach, including the different aspects of the crisis in an interdisciplinary dialogue". (LS, 107 & FT, 177). Dwelling on the importance of a forward-looking political life, Francis calls to a kind of love that is inspired by God in the heart of the Christian community, and which can then move towards the other that is outside. In the LS, Francis presents 4 negative examples, in which a short-sighted political vision destroys the bonds of charity that God desires to be established between us. The false assumption about the infinite availability of the planet's goods, which leads to "squeezing" it to the limit and beyond the limit, without consequences (LS, 106); the "culture of waste", which considers as irrelevant everything that does not serve personal interests (LS, 122); the economies of scale that dominate the market and lead to the exploitation of workers (LS, 129); and the new biotechnologies that indiscriminately manipulate genetic material (LS, 131-136). The only force capable of reversing this course is charity, and God is the only one powerful enough to counteract this same course. The Church exists to manifest to the world the presence of God and the charity of God.

Says Francis: "Charity, with its universal dynamism, can build a new world because it is not a sterile feeling, but the best way to achieve effective paths of development for all". (FT, 183). Charity goes beyond irrelevant personal sentimentality, he says referring to Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, which states that the intimate relationship between charity and truth produces that universality capable of overcoming relativism and building community (FT, 184; cf. CV, 2-4). In this way, we come to understand the concrete reality and the universal dimension of charity as a driving force for development.

Francesco focuses on dimensions of charity that are often overlooked. It is an act of charity to help a poor and suffering person, but it is also an act of charity to help change the social conditions underlying that suffering (FT, 186). This last aspect of charity is at the heart of the spirit of politics and expresses a preferential love for the latter. "Only with a gaze whose horizon is transformed by charity, which leads it to grasp the dignity of the other, are the poor recognised and appreciated in their immense dignity, respected in their own style and culture, and therefore truly integrated into society. Such a gaze is the core of the authentic spirit of politics" (FT, 187).

In conclusion, John's theological statement, "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8), has a direct and complementary implication both for the person redeemed by Christ and for the identity of the Church as the Bride of Christ. Charity is at the heart of the Church's identity and holds the key to integral human development. The very purpose of religion itself is to spread in the world "the values of goodness, charity and peace" (FT, 285), and this is achieved through charity.