

CTK Discussion of Fratelli Tutti, Chapters 1-4

With Jim Briggs

How would you summarize the intent of the encyclical and the message Francis is trying to send in FT?

Timely, critical, inspirational (aspirational). An example of “thought leadership” in advancing the CST. A work of deep reflection and discernment. Recognizes the importance of the moment and the need for a change of heart and action sooner rather than later. Observation of trends that are a cause of some concern that he wants to call to our attention; offers a vision for how we can reverse these negative trends and restore hope in our future –inspirational/aspirational. In short, his message is that we are one big human family sharing the planet together and all in the same boat. So its time to start viewing our relationship with one another – individually and globally – in a new way. How we become a neighbor, brother, sister to everyone who needs us.

(SLIDE #1) PA 8: It is my desire that, in this our time, **by acknowledging the dignity of each human person**, we can contribute to the **rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women.** . . Dreams are built together. Let us dream, then, as **a single human family**, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, 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.**

To whom is the encyclical addressed?

Everyone -- Catholics and Christians of course, but his message is universal, intended for all people because it will take all people to realize his vision, his “universal aspiration.”

How does the timing of Pope Francis’ message relate to the United States, especially given the recent presidential election?

While certainly there is resonance between what Francis talks about and our current situation in the US with our national crises and divisions, it should not be taken as directed to the US alone. The trends he criticizes are present in many nations throughout the world. That being said, I have to say that the words of President-Elect Biden regarding the need for national unity, the importance of

respectful dialog, and a re-engagement with the global community are very consistent with what Francis is saying in Fratelli Tutti. It gives me great hope!

How is the encyclical laid out/developed in the introduction and the chapters of the encyclical?

In the Introduction, Francis talks about how he came to the need to write such a document, his reasons for doing so. He connects his desire for a universal social friendship and fraternal love to St. Francis:

PA 1. Of the counsels St. Francis offered, I would like to select the one in which he calls for **a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance**, and declares blessed all those who love their brother “as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him”.^[2] **In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.**

*He also references the **Document on Human Fraternity** which he authored with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in February of 2019 as an inspirational influence which he references multiple times in the encyclical.*

He follows the Introduction with eight chapters in which he lays out the issues and challenges (mostly socio-economic) he sees in our contemporary world and also proposes a path forward in terms of how to address these issues and meet these challenges, including his vision for a more open, engaged, and inclusive world view. More on this as we go chapter by chapter through the encyclical.

Tonight, we will be focusing on the first four chapters of the encyclical and next week we will talk about the last four chapters. Is this a reasonable way to divide up our discussion?

Yes, especially given the length of the encyclical. Again, 8 chapters, 45,000 words, 122 citations/footnotes. It is a substantive document covering a variety of topics that takes some time to read. So it is good that we are breaking up the discussion into two sessions.

So, let’s start with Chapter One, entitled *Dark Clouds Over a Cold World*. This chapter lays out the context of the encyclical and points out some of the trends

that are of concern to the Pope and which motivated him to write the encyclical. What are some of these trends and concerns pointed out by Pope Francis?

Extreme nationalism; political polarization; human rights violations, including racism, slavery and trafficking; emphasis on self-preservation and individualism; social media; COVID; and loss of a sense of belonging to the larger human family. Let me try and capture the essence of what he is saying by sharing some of his words:

PA 11: Ancient conflicts thought long buried are breaking out anew, while instances of a myopic, **extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism** are on the rise. In some countries, a concept of popular and national unity influenced by various ideologies is **creating new forms of selfishness and a loss of the social sense** under the guise of defending national interests. . . ~~Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day. It is not possible to settle for what was achieved in the past and complacently enjoy it, as if we could somehow disregard the fact that many of our brothers and sisters still endure situations that cry out for our attention".~~[8]

What I love about Francis is that he is a straight talker and does not mince words or pull punches. He tells it as he sees it.

[PA 15: Today, in many countries, hyperbole, **extremism and polarization** have become political tools. Employing a strategy of ridicule, suspicion and relentless criticism, in a variety of ways, one denies the right of others to exist or to have an opinion. Their share of the truth and their values are rejected and, as a result, the life of society is impoverished and subjected to the hubris of the powerful.

PA 22: It frequently becomes clear that, in practice, **human rights** are not equal for all. Respect for those rights "is the preliminary condition for a country's social and economic development. When the dignity of the human person is respected, and his or her rights recognized and guaranteed, creativity and interdependence thrive, and the creativity of the human personality is released **through actions that further the common good".**[18]

These trends he talks about can be summed up in his concern that we are losing our sense of belonging to a single human family. Here's what he says about that:

(SLIDE #2) PA 30: In today's world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable, and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat. . .

Despite the dark, gloomy picture Francis paints of our world, at the end of this first chapter, he calls all of us to a "renewed hope."

(SLIDE #3) PA 55: I invite everyone to **renewed hope**, for hope "speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can **open us up to grand ideals** that make life more beautiful and worthwhile".[52] Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope.

So, Chapter One provides an overview of the world's challenges and ends with an invitation to renewed hope. Where does Francis go from there in Chapter Two, which is entitled *Stranger on the Road*?

Stranger on the Road is a reference to the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This is a very clever transition from a litany of the world's ills to the way Francis proposes addressing those ills – through a renewed sense of our all being part of the world community and each one of us in that community – brothers and sisters all, as he says – and through living lives of loving kindness, compassion, and mercy. To help us understand what is asked of us, he goes to the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Brief summary of the parable. Robbers who beat and leave a man to suffer on the side of the road, priests and religious types who step to the other side so they don't have to walk by him. Then comes the foreigner, the Samaritan – a total stranger who gives his tenderness, money, and time to care for the wounded person.

We usually and correctly take this as an individual call to love and feel compassion for our neighbor, even the stranger. Francis takes it to a new level of a global call.

[PA 68: The parable . . . speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: **we were created for a fulfillment that can only be found in love**. We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity.]

Francis says this about the parable:

(SLIDE #4) PA 66: Jesus' parable summons us to rediscover our vocation as citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond. This summons is ever

new, yet it is grounded in a fundamental law of our being: **we are called to direct society to the pursuit of the common good** and, with this purpose in mind, to persevere in consolidating its political and social order, its fabric of relations, its human goals. . .

How does Pope Francis relate the Parable of the Good Samaritan to what he terms our “call to fraternal love across boundaries?”

Individual responsibility -> global/societal responsibility

[PA 77: Each day offers us **a new opportunity, a new possibility**. We should not expect everything from those who govern us, for that would be childish. We have the space we need for **co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes**. **Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies**. Today we have **a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity**, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment. Like the chance traveler in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be **a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen**.]

Chapter Three is entitled *Envisioning an Open World*. What would you say are some of the key points of this chapter?

A call to expand our view of our relationship with others including those different from us – a more universal connection to those not just around the corner but around the world

PA 87: **No one can experience the true beauty of life without relating to others**, without having real faces to love. This is part of the mystery of authentic human existence. “Life exists where there is **bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity**. On the contrary, there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails”.[64]

PA 110: A truly human and fraternal society will be capable of ensuring in an efficient and stable way that each of its members is accompanied at every stage of life. Not only by providing for their basic needs, but by enabling them to give the best of themselves, even though their performance may be less than optimum, their pace slow or their efficiency limited.

In opening up the meaning of the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* in Chapter Two and in *Envisioning an Open World* in Chapter Three, Francis makes

some connections to key elements of Catholic Social Teaching. Which elements are these?

Basic dignity of every human person – his fundamental premise, mentioned countless times as the foundation of Catholic social thought

PA 106: Social friendship and universal fraternity necessarily call for an acknowledgement of **the worth of every human person, always and everywhere**. If each individual is of such great worth, it must be stated clearly and firmly **that “the mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity”.**^[81] This is a basic principle of social life that tends to be ignored in a variety of ways by those who sense that it does not fit into their worldview or serve their purposes.

(SLIDE #5) PA 118: The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of color, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all. As a community, **we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development.**

This last line leads us to another key element of CST:

A focus on the common good not just our own individual good. Common good connotes a sense of community and the well-being of the entire community leaving no one behind. It is very much connected to another dimension of CST: Solidarity.

Solidarity.

Here I am simply going to let Francis speak for himself:

(SLIDE #6) PA 116: Solidarity is a word that is not always well received; in certain situations, it has become a dirty word, a word that dare not be said. Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. **It means thinking and acting in terms of community.** It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money...

Where does Chapter Four, entitled *A Heart Open to the World*, take us?

In this chapter, Francis opens up for us his vision of a world family/community based on an openness of heart to which he calls us all. This moves us beyond a narrow nationalism to a broader more global perspective:

(SLIDE #7) PA 141: The true worth of the different countries of our world is measured by their **ability to think not simply as a country but also as part of the larger human family**. . .

PA 142: It should be kept in mind that “an **innate tension exists between globalization and localization**. We need to pay attention to the global so as to avoid narrowness and banality. Yet we also need to look to the local, which keeps our feet on the ground. . .

PA 149: For a healthy relationship between love of one’s native land and a sound sense of belonging to our larger human family, it is helpful to keep in mind that **global society is not the sum total of different countries, but rather the communion that exists among them**.

NEXT WEEK:

Francis’ vision and advice on a path forward – how we need to approach and foster his idea of social friendship and fraternity:

Chapter 5: A Better Kind of Politics

Chapter 6: Dialog and Friendship in Society

Chapter 7: Paths of Renewed Encounter

Chapter 8: Religions at the Service of Fraternity in Our World