



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter 'Fratelli tutti' and COMECE

Social-Economic Affairs

While renewing his appeal against a *"throwaway culture"* (n. 188) announced five years earlier in *Laudato Si'*, the new Encyclical invites all Christians and people of good will to *"recognize that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone"* (n. 180). This call for fraternity is proposed also in political terms.

Each person should be considered *"not only as individuals or private persons, but also in the social dimension that unites them"* (n. 182). This implies that politicians must overcome any individualistic mentality in order to serve the common good and *"put human dignity back at the centre"* (n. 168). Pope Francis also insists that *"politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy"* (n. 177).

External Action

In the light of the many regional conflicts and instabilities, we need to overcome this *"world war fought piecemeal"* (n.25), the Pope says, by moving away from *"a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust"* (n.26)

The true path to a lasting peace will only be possible *"on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family"* (n.127)

In this regard, Pope Francis calls for a reform of international organisations and economic institutions by better integrating the needs and initiatives of local communities into their actions in view of developing a genuine *"universal fraternity"* (n.9) and allowing a *"renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society"* (n.233).

Fundamental Rights

The text underlines that human rights are still *"insufficiently universal"* and *"not equal for all"*, wondering whether *"...the equal dignity of all human beings, solemnly proclaimed seventy years ago, is truly recognized, respected, protected and promoted in every situation"* (n. 22). COMECE strongly supports the universal, inviolable, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent, interrelated nature of human rights. For the Pope, without cultivation of fraternity *"Liberty becomes nothing more than a condition for living as we will, completely free to choose to whom or what we will belong"* (n. 103) and equality cannot be achieved through mere abstract proclamations (n. 104). In its actions, COMECE promotes protection from discrimination for all, including on grounds of religion, regardless of belonging to *"majority"* or *"minority"* denominations.

Education & Culture

Pope Francis states that solidarity is fruit of the commitment of families, teachers and communicators, whose responsibility extends to the moral, social and spiritual aspects of life, and whose actions foster openness to the world and a healthy universal integration (n. 114). The encyclical letter calls for a “culture of encounter” and action towards inclusive and constructive dialogue among all cultural components of society (n. 216-217).

In the same spirit of the encyclical, the European project should focus on solidarity, encounter and dialogue among all peoples and generations through education and cultural exchange.

Ethics

While calling for “*an ethics of international relations*” (n. 126) to tackle inequalities between individuals and countries, Pope Francis also rejects the idea of a “*throwaway world*” (n. 18), where “*persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ – like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ – like the elderly*”.

In the new Encyclical, Pope Francis also refers (n. 19) to topics on which COMECE is working, demography and the elderly people, stating that “*a decline in the birthrate, which leads to the aging of the population, together with the relegation of the elderly to a sad and lonely existence, is a subtle way of stating that it is all about us, that our individual concerns are the only thing that matters [that] what is thrown away are not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves*”.

Ecology and Sustainability

If the Encyclical Letter ‘Laudato Si’ is a general description of the common house, the Earth, and its inhabitants, its limits, its difficulties and the challenges it faces, the Encyclical Letter ‘Fratelli tutti’ is the house rules attempting to shape the coexistence of all inhabitants and the relations between them.

Pope Francis proposes a series of attitudes and virtues that should be used also at the political level. Acknowledging the difficulties politicians face, Pope Francis goes so far as to speak of “political love”: “*If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity*» (n. 186).

The encyclical distinguishes between politics that only serves the own search for power and politics that connects love with hope. “*Authentic political life, built upon respect for law and frank dialogue between individuals, is constantly renewed whenever there is a realization that every woman and man, and every new generation, brings the promise of new relational, intellectual, cultural and spiritual energies*” (n. 196).

In recent years COMECE has made the principles of “integral ecology” - which is based on the encyclical letter ‘Laudato Si’ and links the social with the ecological dimension, and the «ecological conversion», necessary to transform our economic and political system - the starting point and criterion for the evaluation of political measures in the fields of sustainability, ecology, climate protection and other areas.

The publication of the new Encyclical further spells out this “conversion” in its various dimensions and marks the appropriate moment to analyse and assess in more detail the proposals for a European Green Deal presented by the European Commission.

Migration & Asylum / Freedom of Religion

In the new document, Pope Francis reiterates the primary right of persons and families to remain in their home country in safety and dignity. When this is no possible, people should be granted the right to migrate to a country where they can live and prosper.

In view of the recently adopted EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, COMECE will continue encouraging the EU and its Member States to act in concrete solidarity and responsibility towards migrants and refugees.

Regarding Freedom on Religion, the Holy Father emphasizes that *“a journey of peace is possible between religions”*, having violence *“no basis in our fundamental religious convictions, but only in their distortion”*. Moreover, *“religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood”*, but on the contrary to be instrumental for fraternal love and peace.