

# The Passion for Universal Fraternity

From its beginning, Pope Francis's mission has been marked by his conviction that fraternity is a gift every man and woman bear within themselves as human beings, as sons and daughters of the one Father. In keeping with this, Pope Bergoglio did not delay in conveying his convictions through documents and deeds, some of which are highly visible and significant. The Abu Dhabi document jointly signed with Muslims is ample proof of this. To appreciate its rich meaning, it's useful to touch upon three fundamental sources from which he draws his teaching.

His first source is St Ignatius and his teachings so rooted in the understanding *Deus semper maior* – God always surprises! At the heart of Christ is a God who, out of love, 'emptied' himself. Because of this, whoever follows Jesus has to be ready to empty him or herself out of love. 'We are called to this humility: to be "emptied."' Being emptied does not mean emptiness or insignificance. Rather, it comes from the awareness that Jesus Christ is at the center. It is about being men and women no longer centered on themselves. Only if one is centered in God, can he or she journey even to the farthest ends of the earth with awe.

Secondly, Francis's humanity is not that of a lone, autonomous, self-sufficient individual. Rather, he is a person who is alive because relationships are interwoven like the drumbeats of a march *travelled together with all God's faithful, with the whole of Christianity and beyond*. His constant focus is upon a Church turned outwards rather than a self-referential one. This means possessing the capability for wide-ranging relations, also at the level of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

Francis' third source can be found in what he calls *the connatural polarity of reality*. Noting how events occur, and following Romano Guardini, he's developed the idea that reality consists of divergent, and sometimes oppositional moments. Polar opposition, or bipolar tension, as he calls it, is a cross-reference between pairs which either remain together or tend to reciprocally exclude one another. The polarity between man and woman, I and we, theory and practice, spirituality and mission, announcement and witness, part and whole... are a few examples of this. In this way, the essential tensions of our lives provide an interpretive key to reality, the lens through which we look upon and meet the world, others, and oneself.

In this dynamic interplay between emptiness and fullness, solitude and communion, vulnerability and greatness, one discovers their own uniqueness within a network of relationships. Fraternity seems to facilitate an overcoming of opposites through mutual giving, thus safeguarding rather than destroying one another's positions. By living

fraternity in a spirit of reciprocity, each person can find his or herself while also ‘finding’ the other in his or her own diversity. Fraternity seems to be the only reality able to bring together freedom and equality, unity and difference. Before the law – and the economic marketplace – we are free and equal. But, before God we are all unique.

Starting from these roots, this *Ekklesia* issue focuses on multiple author reflections on the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, signed by Pope Francis and Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb last February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, in Abu Dhabi. The newness and importance of this text has prompted us to explore its historical background and contemporary relevance (A.M. Baggio), value its significance and new perspectives it offers (R. Moussalem) and consider the immediate context of today (R. Catalano). The document’s connection with the theology of Vatican II is of interest (P. Coda), along with the challenges and pathways it presents in the social science disciplines (S. Cataldi and M. Tancredi).

Along with these reflections, we’ve gathered experiences illustrating these principles being put into practice in various fields.

We gratefully acknowledge that all this does not derive only from the Catholic Church, but is patrimony of the Christian *oikumene*, as evidenced by the participation at Abu Dhabi of leaders from various Churches. We see this, for example, in the joint agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation to work on behalf of refugees and the disadvantaged that was signed on October 31, 2016, in Lund, Sweden. We also can’t forget the numerous Orthodox, Evangelical, and Anglican Christian communities along with Catholic ones, that are laboratories of joint collaboration in the work universal fraternity.

**The editors**