

**IMPORTANCE OF *FRATELLI TUTTI* IN INDIA.
BRIDGING AND MOVING BEYOND DIVISIVE BOUNDARIES**
*LA IMPORTANCIA DE LA FRATELLI TUTTI EN LA INDIA.
CONSTRUIR PUENTES Y SUPERAR LAS FRONTERAS DIVISORIAS*

Dra. Evelyn Monteiro*
Facultad de Teología Jnana-Deepa,
Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, India
srevelynm@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

We are all connected: my acts or lack, thereof impact the life of the “other”. The world today is afflicted with acute xenophobia and conflicts. Most people worldwide are caught in the whirlpool of greed and indifference towards others. On discerning the world-system, Pope Francis presented to humanity two illuminating, but closely related social encyclicals: *Laudato si'* (2015) and *Fratelli tutti* (2020). Broadly speaking, *Fratelli tutti* appeals to interreligious cooperation and popular forms of social consensus as the best path to social friendship, equality, and peace. We are not naturally born as brothers and sisters, rather we must learn to become so every day. Only together can we mend the garment of humanity.

* Dra. Evelyn Monteiro is a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod. She holds a doctorate in Theology from Centre Sèvres, Jesuit Faculty of Theology, Paris. She was professor of Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Theology, Jnana-Deepa, Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, India, for many years and currently is visiting professor at this institute and at several other theologates in India and abroad. She is the author of *Church and Culture. Communion in Pluralism* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge - ISPCK, 2004), has edited several books and published many articles. She is the co-founder of Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), an association of Asian Catholic Women Theologians.

Pluralism is India's most appreciated characteristic, along with the freedom to believe and practice the religion of one's choice. These characteristics constitute the most significant experiences of the Indian citizenry in this largest secular democracy. The article reflects on the reception of *Fratelli tutti* in pluralistic India that is today threatened and disfigured by stark and growing social inequalities and indifference. It is also infected by the virus of fascist ideology that is birthing a society of fear and hatred. It explores the relevance of the encyclical in the life and mission of the Church in India that is challenged to move forward and search for concrete ways to promote a culture of care and establish communities of fraternity in the Church and society.

Keywords: India, pluralism, Hindu fundamentalism, inequalities, human dignity, prophetic call, interconnectedness of humanity, mission, care, social friendship, fraternity, Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*.

RESUMEN

Todos estamos conectados: tanto lo que hago como lo que dejo de hacer afecta la vida del "otro". El mundo está hoy sacudido por una grave xenofobia y por importantes conflictos. La mayoría de la humanidad se encuentra atrapada en el torbellino de la codicia y de la indiferencia hacia los demás. Con la intención de discernir acerca del sistema mundial, el papa Francisco presentó a la humanidad dos encíclicas sociales clarividentes y estrechamente relacionadas entre sí: Laudato si' (2015) y Fratelli tutti (2020). En términos generales, Fratelli tutti apela a la cooperación interreligiosa y a formas populares de consenso social como el mejor camino hacia la igualdad y la paz. No nacemos naturalmente hermanos o hermanas, sino que cada día debemos aprender a serlo. Solo juntos podemos remendar el desgarramiento de la humanidad.

El pluralismo es la característica más apreciada de la India, junto con la libertad de creer y de practicar la religión que cada uno desee escoger, lo que constituye la experiencia más significativa de la ciudadanía india en la mayor democracia del mundo. Nuestro artículo reflexiona sobre la recepción de Fratelli tutti en esta India plural, hoy amenazada y desfigurada por la indiferencia y las duras desigualdades sociales que no dejan de aumentar. India sufre también el virus de la ideología fascista que engendra una sociedad donde abunda el miedo y el odio. Nos adentramos aquí en la relevancia de esta encíclica para la vida y la misión de

la Iglesia en India, que tiene el desafío de avanzar y de buscar formas concretas de promover una cultura del cuidado, así como de formar comunidades de fraternidad en la Iglesia y la sociedad.

Palabras clave: *India, pluralismo, fundamentalismo hindú, desigualdades, dignidad humana, llamada profética, interconexión de la humanidad, misión, cuidado, amistad social, fraternidad, papa Francisco, Fratelli tutti.*

The world is afflicted with acute xenophobia and conflicts. Most people worldwide are still struggling for survival and many others are caught in the whirlpool of greed and indifference towards others. On discerning the world-system, Pope Francis presented to humanity two illuminating and closely related social encyclicals well appreciated in the world: *Laudato si'* (LS) (2015) and *Fratelli tutti* (FT) (2020); the first on the “interconnectedness” of the world and the other on human “friendship”. Both encyclicals are rooted in the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church but take it to a new direction. Broadly speaking, *Fratelli tutti* appeals to interreligious cooperation and popular forms of social consensus as the best path to deal with exploitative power, use of material resources and capital.

This article is an attempt to reflect on the reception of *Fratelli tutti* in India, a pluralistic nation in all senses. Though this pluralism is enriching, it is often threatened and disfigured by watertight divisions and infected by the virus of fascist ideology. It is not unrealistic to think that such a scenario might turn pandemic. The first part discusses the socio-political divisive forces plaguing the Indian society. The second reflects on the theological possibilities of fashioning a more humane and egalitarian society and finally the article explores the relevance of *Fratelli tutti* to the Church in India in order to move forward and become a sign of God's Reign of fraternity and social friendship amidst stark social inequalities, fear, and hatred.

1. The Indian Pluralism: Wealth and Contradictions

The pluralistic landscape of India is richly endowed with varied cultures, ethnic groups, languages, environments, historical legacies, political systems, religions, and myriad forms of religious folk traditions. Pluralism is India's most prized characteristic together with freedom to believe and practise a religion of one's choice. These characteristics constitute the most significant experiences of the Indian citizenry in this largest secular democracy. However, the scenario has drastically changed.

1.1. *Religious Freedom: A Drastic Downturn*

India's tolerant and non-violent multi-cultural and religious ethos is undergoing severe interruptions, sometimes in the direction of formation of conflicting identities. The growth of militant Hindu nationalism and state authoritarianism have taken centre stage in this secular democracy. The national government is patronised by the extreme right-wing Hindu organization clustered under the popular term "Hindutva". It uses and misuses its parliamentary majority to trample upon our fundamental rights all in the name of development. Fundamentalism is taking new and more undemocratic forms: manipulation of educational institutions and curricula, anti-conversion laws and forced re-conversion to Hinduism, attempts to re-write the Constitution and pluralist histories, desecration and destruction of Churches, orchestrated attacks against Christians and mob lynching of Muslims are only some examples.¹

The 2020 International Religious Freedom Report observed that religious freedom conditions in India experienced a drastic decline.²

¹ Joseph Victor Edwin, "International Day of Human Fraternity", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, no. 85 (2021): 3-8.

² USCIRF, *2020 Annual Report, Religious Freedom Conditions in India*, access on December 10th, 2021, <https://www.uscifr.gov>; *India 2020 International Religious Freedom Report*, access on December 10th, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov>.

1.2. Democracy in India is in Stormy Waters

Democracy as an institution that has made India progress and must be preserved at any cost has now come under a dictator-like political leadership. Some Indian journalists dared to state: “India’s democracy is on a path of steep decline”; “India is contemplating the death of democracy”, which well-portray the sad state of affairs in India.

Important members of the present government who are far-right nationalists behave as autocratic leaders with disdain towards democratic and inclusive principles upheld by the Constitution. The right to citizenship of millions of Indians is thrown into doubt by the parliamentary enactment of the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Moreover, free speech is curtailed, the media is tamed, protests are banned or restricted, party defections are the order of the day, the State patronizes one religion or one language, majoritarianism is passed off as culture, judiciary is constrained by the government. Arrests, imprisonment and even assassination of intellectuals, writers and human rights activists have become a new normal. The most talked about case is that of the imprisoned, late Fr. Stan Swamy S.J., who supported and stood with the exploited tribes for an inclusive India.

Democracy, like an infected patient, is gasping for breath in Indian. The poor cannot breathe, migrants cannot breathe, farmers cannot breathe, religious minorities cannot breathe, marginalized women cannot breathe... Indian citizens cannot breathe democracy. To add insult to injury, Covid-19 has been (mis)used as a cover up by the government to pass several draconian bills without consultation: bills on education, agriculture, labour, etc. The single greatest threat to India’s democratic traditions is the politics of communal polarisation, exclusion and hate that is eroding the secular fabric of the country.³

³ Indian Theological Association, “Wither India? Theological Concerns”, Indian Theological Association Statement of 42nd ITA Meeting, 28 April 2019, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 83/12. December 2019, 23.

1.3. The Unjust Inequality and Indifference in India

The root cause of India's wide range of inequalities is the gross insensitivity of those who guide our socio-economic and political systems. The exploitative neo-liberal capitalist order is terrorism against all of humanity, says Pope Francis. Teaming up with race, caste, patriarchy, anthropocentrism and religions, neo-capitalism has infiltrated and invaded India and is birthing a dehumanizing society.

Furthermore, digital revolution and cyberspace are impacting postmodern Indians beyond recognition today. The world of co-thinking and relationships that Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., foresaw seems to be emerging in ways totally unforeseen. Technological advancement is a double-edged sword: it unites and benefits humanity, but it also creates tensions in human relations and in God-human relationship.

a) The Scandalous Economic Divide

While the growth of India's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) has enabled the wealthy to amass their riches unscrupulously, it does not seem to have resolved the issue of massive poverty in the country. The trickle-down-economic policy has widened the economic gap and the phenomenon of urban poverty with its sprawling slums has become complex and severely pervasive. And now, with the pandemic, millions of poor and daily wage earners have lost jobs and livelihood due to the lockdown and the consequent economic slump. The cry of those who live at the margins of life, extremely deprived of the most basic needs to live a life worthy of humans is deafening.⁴

b) The Outrageous Gender Gap

Indian women, irrespective of religion, caste, culture, and ethnicity are the most victimized and underprivileged. Due to the powerful overarching

⁴ About the huge economic gap in Latin America, specifically in Mexico, cf. José Sols Lucia, "La encíclica *Fratelli tutti* como horizonte de esperanza para la crisis de fraternidad en México", in this dossier.

patriarchal system in India, girls and women face systemic and structural discrimination in all spheres of life. They are denied basic literacy and higher education opportunities, just wages, fair representation in governance and decision-making positions and equal dignity and status at home and in public life.⁵ Rising religious fundamentalism and politicisation of culture and religion further subjugate and subdue them.

It is an indisputable fact that Indian women find themselves at a crucial juncture. More and more urban women are gaining visibility in the public space by exercising their political agency and for their contribution to knowledge making organizational growth in many public sectors. However, many women do not find themselves safe and free to exercise their human agency. The vanishing girls drive through female foeticide, domestic violence, sexual atrocities and rape, kidnapping and trafficking is a common feature. The pandemic has also caused a lot of frustration in homes with reports of increased cases of abuse of women and domestic violence to which children are the most vulnerable. The gender gap in ownership of property is another critical contributor to the unjust gender divide in economic well-being, social status, and empowerment.

The prevailing social patriarchal culture has also wedged the Church in India. This is evident in the presence of gender insensitivity and discrimination within the Church. Though often side-lined in the life and mission of the Church, women are awakening as agents of post-conciliar renewal. However, resistance towards this new awakening is quite manifest in the clericalized Church. Women are not generally consulted or justly represented in Parish or Diocesan commissions and bodies.

c) Take our Land and we Become Nobody

Neo-capitalism and the globalized and digitalised world have spread new forms of cultural colonization. Indigenous peoples today are losing their history and ancient traditions and end up robbed of their very soul, losing not only their spiritual identity, but moral integrity as well (FT, 14).

⁵ CBCI Commission for Women, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India*, New Delhi, 2010, 2-4.

The indigenous communities with enormous ethnic diversity among themselves constitute a sizeable portion of the Indian population. Land is their home, their mother and an integral part of their identity and lives. Today they are being dispossessed of their land and identity, due to widespread public developmental projects like illegal mining by corporates and deforestation that compel them to migrate to cities in search of a livelihood. Ironically, this “tribal cleansing” is being hailed as progress.⁶

d) *Exodus of Migrants*

In the face of calamities like war, persecution, natural catastrophes, communal clash, or a pandemic, it is the poor and vulnerable who are targeted, victimised, and displaced. In such deplorable times, respect for human dignity and a caring attitude are on a downslide worldwide (FT, 37, 39). This was glaringly evident in India when thousands of migrant labourers walked hundreds of miles in the scorching sun to their home villages to escape the uncertainty of the Covid-19 lockdown.

Labour migration or labour export, an acute concern in India, can be labelled as the “invisible power” that boosts the informal economy of the country. India has the highest internal migration in the world. There is no comprehensive database available on the actual number of internal migrants, which favours the government to shirk its responsibility in times of crisis.⁷ A distressing factor is the social composition of the migrants which makes them easy prey to the predators. A trend of the twenty-first century is the rise of migration of “increasingly younger, mobile and feminized workforce” from the subaltern and marginalized communities,⁸ but not from the upper caste or class. Migrants often want to escape from the burden of feudalism and casteism.

⁶ Evelyn Monteiro, “Mission in Asia-Oceania as Prophetic Dialogue”, in *Dalla Maximum Illud alla Evangelii gaudium. Sull'urgenza della trasformazione missionaria della Chiesa*, ed. Fabrizio Meroni and Leonardo Sileo (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2021), 241.

⁷ India currently has 65 million interstate migrants, of whom 33% are daily wage workers, not counting 12 to 18 million street vendors. P. Sainath, “The Migrant and the Moral Economy of the Elite”, *India Today*, June 8th, 2020, 22.

⁸ An Action Aid Survey shows that 15% of the migrants are Scheduled Tribes, 39% are Scheduled Castes and 28% belong to other backward classes. Joseph Xavier, *Walking with the Migrants Beyond COVID-19 Pandemic* (Bangalore: Indian Social Institute, 2020), 17-18.

The patriarchal and caste systems are the root causes of socio-economic injustices and gender discrimination. These systems have survived unscathed and continue to find support in the socio-religious principles held by traditional Hinduism. The present-day Hindutva government agencies have also played the winning patriarchal-caste card to deprive certain groups of their rights like education and jobs. The many social stigmas attached to their caste or tribe name and place of origin enlist them among the discriminated “others”.

2. Time for Change: Fashion a More Humane Society

The above context must awaken our mission conscience and consciousness in a new way. With rampant flow of internal migration, our societal and ecclesial communities are no longer homogeneous groups of one language, culture, ethnicity, or religion. We are rapidly moving towards anomie that is infected by the virus of indifference. And now the unprecedented and ongoing global outbreak of Covid-19 has dramatically revealed the interconnectedness of our world and society: no one is safe until everyone is safe.

Pope Francis discerned the present-day crisis and proposed that caring for each other is the only way out of this imbroglio. *Fratelli tutti* plays the *Samaritanus Bonus*⁹ and reaffirms the Church’s perennial teaching that human life is a sacred and inviolable gift. It is a timely document that encompasses the whole world; transcends every human barrier and boundary; rises above the dividing factors and embraces everyone. Way back in 1933, Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, whom Pope Francis mentioned in *Fratelli tutti*, had also written a book titled *All Men Are Brothers*.

The Church in India can no longer be complacent with offering mere palliative care to the people through its many pious practices and devotions and charitable and developmental ministries. The “ever ancient, ever new”

⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Samaritanus bonus. Letter on the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life”, September 22nd, 2020, access on June 30th, 2021, <https://press.vatican.va>.

vision-mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 4:16-18) spells out the values of the new society of freedom, fellowship, and justice that He came to establish. The well-known Indian exegete George Soares-Prabhu gives a synthetic view of Jesus' Kingdom mission:

The vision of Jesus indicates not the goal but the way. It does not present us with a static prefabricated model to be imitated, but invites us to a continual refashioning of societal structures in an attempt to realize as completely as possible in our times the values of the Kingdom. The vision of Jesus summons us [...] to a ceaseless creativity that will produce in every age new blueprint for a society ever more consonant with the Gospel vision of man [and woman] [...] Jesus' vision of a new society stands before us as an unfinished task, summoning us to permanent revolution.¹⁰

The biblical fundamentals of the culture of care are the creation story in Genesis that presents God as Creator and one who cares for his creatures; the Old Testament prophets who insistently demanded "justice for the poor, who in their vulnerability and powerlessness, cry out and are heard by God who watches over them" (Am 2:6-8; Is 8); Jesus' ministry of compassion to the sick, hungry, blind, women, poor... Jesus is the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is the Good Samaritan who stoops to help and look after the injured man. His death on the cross is the ultimate proof of his compassion for human beings. The early Christians were role models of caring communities by pooling and sharing their resources, leaving no one among them in need.¹¹

Our mission is to establish Kingdom communities which Pope Francis concisely articulates in *Fratelli tutti*, as communities of social friendship where all are brothers and sisters. This prophetic vision for our world that is ravaged by biased and contentious systems of inequality of the

¹⁰ George Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New society", in *The Indian Church in the Struggle of a New Society*, ed. D. S. Amalorpavadas (Bangalore: National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Center, 1981), 607.

¹¹ Pope Francis, "A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace", 54th World Day of Peace, January 1st, 2021 (Vatican City, 2021), access on December 10th, 2021, <http://www.vatican.va>.

contemporary globalized era of technological advance and artificial intelligence (we are not undermining the good side of it, though), is timely and imperative for our Indian context.

3. Way Forward: Need for Creative Openness and Action

“Love creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves and towards others” (FT, 88). Like Saint John Paul II, who called families to a mission beyond their own good (*Familiaris consortio*, 1981) and Benedict XVI, who proclaimed charity the virtue for both personal and social relations (*Caritas in veritate*, 2009), Pope Francis roots self-gift in relationships with family and friends.¹² He insists it must go further “to reach those who [...] I do not naturally consider a part of my circle of interests” (FT, 97).

Fratelli tutti is anchored by a persistent and prophetic call to look beyond the self and the world we see in front of us —beyond our regions, caste, linguistic group, and nation to all the peoples with whom we share a common human nature and a common home—. We need to carve out a way forward towards global social friendship with creative openness.

3.1. Humanization of our Societal Communities

When we see Hindu fundamentalists unleash unbridled attacks on minority religious groups (Christians, Muslims, Dalit Buddhists) and notice a surge of Hindu extremism, casteism and xenophobia, but prefer to shut our eyes and hearts, we become complicit to them and convey that we do not care for the needy.

The dire need of the times is the humanization of our society. Human beings cannot survive as “isolated islands”. Against the attempts at creating cultural and religious isolation in our country, “dialogue will make the elements that are seemingly a barrier or a wall, a bridge of relationship. Identity and dialogue are not enemies. Our own cultural and religious

¹² Julie Hanlon Rubio, “Seeing Beyond Walls in Fratelli tutti: Can Catholics Preach What They Cannot Do?”, *Fratelli tutti* / Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, October 26th, 2020, access on June 29th, 2021, <https://fore.yale.edu>.

identities are strengthened and enriched as a result of dialogue with those unlike ourselves”.¹³

Dialogue will enable us to create a culture of care which is the *sine qua non* to build a bond of social friendship among all peoples. Pope Francis calls for a common, supportive, and inclusive commitment to protect and promote the dignity and good of all, a willingness to show compassion and to spread mutual respect and acceptance (FT, 22). Taking a cue from the Pope’s plea, the Church in India will have to come out with concrete steps to address the growing moral policing of citizens by the fundamentalists and the culture of indifference that dehumanizes everybody and destroys the planet. A careful discipleship reading of the Pope’s prophetic message will enable us to think of constructive ways to promote the dignity and rights of each person for the common good.

3.2. Break Down our Walled Hearts

Pope Francis touches on a raw nerve when he writes: “Some people are hesitant and fearful with regard to migrants”, which is a natural instinct of self-defence (FT, 41). No matter where, local people usually have a lot of suspicion and misgivings about outsiders who are taken for “invaders” and unwelcomed by the locals as in the case of migrant labourers or refugees. The migrant issue is trivialized or domesticated in the Indian society and evokes a passive and silent response. We need a radical change of mindset to usher in a fundamental social change.

We are all migrants to or from this planet, however we cannot forget that the fate and struggles of the real migrants today could be ours one day! Migrants are part of the societal fabric and contribute to the wellbeing of the society and not usurpers who have nothing to offer. They deserve “social, economic and political justice” mandated for all citizens by our Constitution.

Pope Francis affirmed at Bangkok in 2019 that migration is one of the principal moral issues facing our humanity today and this crisis

¹³ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India xxxiv Plenary Assembly, “Dialogue: Path to Truth and Charity (Final Statement), Bengaluru, 13-19 February 2020”, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, no. 84 (2020), 63.

cannot be ignored.¹⁴ He challenges not only the market ethos dominating migration policies, but also its desensitizing effects. Due to widespread internal migration, India has innumerable faceless migrants who are deprived of their identity. Effacement of face can be tantamount to denial of responsibility. Religions can become promoters and guarantors of solidarity with migrants. The Church needs to take proactive measures to awaken our dormant conscience to this urgent concern, to welcome, promote, and integrate the migrants in our ecclesial communities and society. To incarnate this moral imperative requires a daring *metanoia*, a “change of heart, attitudes, and lifestyles” (FT, 166). For Christians, the truth is the person of Jesus Christ whose teaching is reflected most radiantly in his approach towards those whom society shuns and disregards the most and who are his closest friends in the Gospels.

3.3. *Social Change Includes and Engages Women*

Fratelli tutti evokes a new vision of “fraternity and social friendship that call for an acknowledgment of the worth of every human person” (FT, 106). It is meant specifically to address the universal scope of “fraternal love”, “brothers and sisters all”.

Women are essential game changers as well. Nevertheless, women’s agency and empowerment are usually romanticized and politically subordinated. Omission of women’s contribution, expertise, and experience in *Fratelli tutti* is glaringly obvious. No women are cited even among the 292 footnote sources! Catholic Social Teaching Doctrine needs a much sharper “gender lens” to define who bears the brunt of ecological harms, armed conflict, and structural injustice and violence.

Though *Fratelli tutti* explicitly affirms women’s dignity and rights and acknowledges that it is “unacceptable that some have fewer rights by virtue of being women” (FT, 121), as much as the Indian caste-ridden society, the Indian Church is also far from acknowledging and accepting that women possess the same dignity and rights as men. Culturally, Indian girls and women are groomed to endure silently in cases of unjust and cruel

¹⁴ Pope Francis, “Response to migration is sign of character”, *Catholic News Service*, November 21st, 2019, Bangkok, access on December 10th, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news>.

treatment at the home and work front and in public places. Due to their silent forbearance even in situations like domestic violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation at the workplace, molestation, and rape, etc., women are often stereotyped as spiritually stronger, forgiving, and tolerant and able to keep the family going even in the most stressful and shameful situations.

Jesus broke the rules of the Jewish patriarchal culture to liberate women from male constructs and violence and even included them as his partners in His mission. The Samaritan woman, the prostitute, and the woman “caught in the act of adultery” represent the stand that Jesus took towards deconstructing stereotyped patriarchal inscriptions. Without engaging women, the most crucial partners, “papal social teaching will fail the test of its own “common good” and “social friendship” rhetoric, and lose out on a critical opportunity to turn its aspirations into reality in the Church’s concrete activities”¹⁵

The Church in India is still very reluctant to attend to the structural causes of gendered exclusion and male appropriation of clerical power within and outside its walls. The Church’s call to others to look beyond borders is hampered by its inability to take risks when it comes to women (FT, 186). The Catholic Bishops Conference in India (CBCI) has drawn out a Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India in 2010 for the empowerment of women and gender just structures in the Church and society. Sadly, the Policy is neither known to the People of God nor implemented. Women continue to serve the Church in subservient roles and are not fairly and actively engaged and integrated in the life and mission of the Church.

The most promising part of the encyclical is the final section calling for the world’s religions to act together to defend justice and build social friendship (FT, 271-287). Perhaps it is time for more social action and less social talk. The Indian Church and society would stand to gain to listen to *Fratelli tutti*’s call to “love beyond!” Confronting walls “in the heart” as well as “on the land” remains an urgent task for the Church ad intra, as well as ad extra. The Church needs to plan and negotiate strategically a blueprint for

¹⁵ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Social Friendship Includes Women, but Social Change Must Engage Women”, *Fratelli tutti* / Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, October 26th, 2020, access on June 29th, 2021, <https://fore.yale.edu>.

upholding the rights of girls and women: denounce unjust and oppressive practices, promote respectful gender relationships, and empower and engage women as equal disciple-partners in the parishes, institutions and organizations run by the dioceses and religious congregations.

3.4. *Call for a New Politics*

Pope Francis offers a critical assessment of today's political reality and invites us to develop a critical reading of the signs of our times by focusing on structures and their power dynamics. Jesus' incarnation and his love-commandment confirm we should examine what is happening to our sisters and brothers across the globe.

He laments the fact that the twenty-first century "is witnessing a weakening of the power of nation-states, chiefly because the economic and financial sectors, being transnational, tend to prevail over the political"¹⁶ (FT, 172). In contemporary times, concepts such as *democracy* and *unity* have been "bent and shaped to serve as tools for domination, as meaningless tags that can be used to justify any action" (FT, 14). Pope Francis yearns deeply for the divides of today's world to be overcome by a recognition of fraternity and dreams of "a better kind of politics, that is one truly at the service of the common good" (FT, 154).

The politics we are now witnessing is a manipulation of the ideal of being "a people" into a local narcissism very evident in India with its growing Hindu nationalism that is controlled by the dominant caste and class. Our polity seeks perversely to build security through maximizing fear and distrust of the "other". There is a blunt refusal by the powers that be to include those of other religions, castes and ethnicities, minority or majority, in the communal search for solutions simply because they are regarded as a perennial problem.

The most important task in India is to actively promote democracy that is constitutional, electoral, and substantive. This is crucial because our Republic itself is in danger. It is being pushed towards fascism. Pope Francis courageously urges us to renew our political engagement, caring

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 2009, no. 67.

for the most vulnerable and respecting different cultures (FT, 176-182), something that is so wanting in India, in spite of the wealth in cultural diversity. India is in dire need of credible political leaders who truly inspire unity in diversity to lead us and stimulate political solutions that promote personal and social empowerment of all, particularly the most marginalized and not those with petty interests to further their own narcissistic image.

4. Tangible Means to Implement the Church's Mission-plan

Pope Francis is convinced that the mission of the Church is to be a facilitator and instrument of fraternity in the world. Drawing from the Church's social teachings, he underlines the importance of care as promotion of dignity and rights of the human person and protection of creation for the common good as everything is interconnected.

In the context of artificial intelligence and digital revolution that is rapidly invading India there are serious fears that the new generation will suffer from de-linked relationships and robotic effects. Unlike the most advanced and "intelligent" technological machines, only humans have an embodied consciousness which accompanies all their acts of thinking, feeling, acting and non-programmed communication and relationships.¹⁷

It is hoped that *Fratelli tutti* inspires a new generation of lives with some profound illumination. Its strength is in its constructive and open-ended vision for the future. The fundamentals of human life are the "inalienable dignity of each human person regardless of origin, race or religion, and the supreme law of fraternal love" (FT, 39). This is not a utopian ideal. Rather it guides us to examine our personal and social lives and points to what humankind needs to strive for.

The Catholic Church provides a plethora of services to the wider community, especially in education, health services and social justice concerns. Commitment to liberate the oppressed and marginalized and empowering them with a new sense of identity, dignity and self-respect

¹⁷ Christopher Schwoebel, "The Gods of the Fourth Industrial Evolution. Philosophies and Religions in the Age of Deep Learning", *Philosophy - Thought - Culture* 27, no. 6: 267-290, access on June 30th, 2021, <https://www.earticle.net>.

receive great attention. Inter-religious dialogue has been ongoing in dialogue centres and meetings. Today the Church is called to re-imagine and recreate our Christian mission-presence and focus.

4.1. Teach the Ethics of Care: A Vital Human Value

A spirit of fraternity and social friendship are foundational to root out the many divisive boundaries and establish an equitable society in the pluralistic context of India. To ensure a more humane future, Pope Francis urges us to forge the compass of care and sharing in a variety of interrelated contexts through the process of education.¹⁸

Equipped with this compass, every citizen, every person of goodwill can become a prophetic witness and agent of the culture of care to overcome the many existing socio-cultural and economic inequalities plaguing India. The moral sensibilities and responsibilities of the human person need to be awakened and schooled in families, parishes, and educational institutions. Ethics need to be taught, as once Socrates affirmed that it is a branch of knowledge that teaches people what one ought to do.

The seed for the culture of care is sown in families and nurtured in educational institutions. This move can fructify through a well-planned strategy to create widespread consciousness and meaningful involvement on the part of the family and every educational and social institution, and through them, the many people whom we encounter.

How can this moral responsibility be restored in the Church? Preaching and catechesis to children and youth are important mechanisms for communicating the clarity of the social meaning of existence, the inalienable dignity of each person, the spirituality for loving and accepting all as brothers and sisters (FT, 86).

Persistent atrocities against the vulnerable groups speak volumes about the ethical deficiency in our culture. Ethical apathy is hidden sinfulness. Failure to care and love the forgotten “other” is the forgotten sin hounding our society.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, “Message for the 2016 World Day of Peace”, December 8th, 2015, no. 6, access on December 10th, 2021, <https://www.vatican.va>.

The highly institutionalized and clericalized Church in India needs a radical transformation in its structures and functioning and become more human-centred. A Kingdom mission-centred rather than a sacramentalized ministry-centred Church will restore the human and spiritual face of the Church as envisioned by Christ. We are challenged to become Spirit-filled missionary disciples in the post-pandemic times for “I am mission on this earth” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 2013, 273). We are branded by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, and healing. A skilled reading of the signs of our uncertain times will enable us to focus on and transform structures and their power dynamics and become agents of compassionate care to all the faceless people of God within and outside the Church. This is the prophetic dream of Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium* and *Fratelli tutti*.

It is the responsibility of every member of the Church —bishops, priests, religious women, and laity— to adhere to the Pope’s clarion call for a culture of care and radiate the warmth of God’s love and joy of the risen Lord and enable humanity to move beyond dividing borders on the path of social friendship between individuals, communities, peoples, and nations.

4.2. Engage Religion and Faith Leaders

Religious ethos known as *Dharma* has a great influence on the lives of Indian people of all walks of life. Engaging religion and faith leaders in defining the moral framework is very essential. According to Klaus Schwab, “faith is the most powerful force guiding societal and economic interactions, and it is the source of moral and ethical guidance for individuals and communities”.¹⁹

The significant document in 2019 on “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” is a historic landmark in Christian-Muslim relations.²⁰ Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb point out

¹⁹ Klaus Schwab, “Welcoming Faith in the Fourth Industrial Revolution” (Washington: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University, 2016), access on June 29th, 2021, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu>.

²⁰ It is imperative that we double our efforts to spread the message of good neighbourliness based

that in times of growing polarization, interreligious dialogue unlocks the hearts and minds of people and motivates them towards actions that build peace. Drawing deeply from one's faith convictions along with all people of good will, we ought to work together with a discerned determination for peace and equality of all without excluding anyone.

Religions cannot renounce the urgent task of building bridges between peoples and cultures. The time has come when religions in India should more actively exert themselves, with courage and audacity to help the human family deepen the capacity for reconciliation and carve out concrete paths of harmony and peace in our divided country and world.

Religious leadership at this point of time is to initiate, create and sustain a movement for respectful understanding and acceptance between people of different faiths, cultures and castes for true faith seeks attitudinal conversion and peace founded on equality and justice. Muslim as well as Christian institutions, especially centres of religious studies in India, must take a lead in organizing days of study and reflection on the Human Fraternity Document and draw up concrete action plans to implement it. People of diverse religious faiths as well as people who do not necessarily follow a particular faith tradition must be included as well. Parishes and educational institutions could also organize "fraternal gatherings" among people of different religions, cultures, and ideologies to promote neighbourhood communities of solidarity for "there is no alternative: we will either build the future together or there will not be a future", says Pope Francis.

5. Conclusion

We are all connected: my acts or lack, thereof impact the life of the "other". Only together can we mend the garment of humanity, we can change the game! Let us dream together as co-travellers for "we need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead" (FT, 8). Love is taking responsibility for others. It is caring for others.

on our common humanity, a message shared by all faith traditions. The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed February 4th as the International Day of Human Fraternity.

Hopefully the lessons from the painful and uncertain time of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown will not be soon forgotten as well as the selfless services of thousands of doctors, nurses, public servants, people of goodwill who sacrificed their time, energy and even lives for the “other”. These are great examples of caring interconnectedness of humanity.

Fratelli tutti is not a project that can be implemented and soon accomplished. It is a light for the path that humanity must make step by step as it moves forward. We are not naturally born as brothers and sisters, rather we must learn to become so every day!

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