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#### **Main theme of the sixth number**

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#### **Main theme of the seventh number**

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## PARTNERS IN LOS ANGELES CATHOLIC EDUCATION: COHORT MEMBERS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE THREE PILLARS OF THEIR ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Francisco Ramos\*

**Abstract** The purported teacher shortage impacting the United States has forced Catholic school systems nationwide to find innovative ways of recruiting individuals for whom education was not their original career of choice. One of the most successful efforts in this regard has been the development of Catholic university/(Arch)diocese partnerships offering said individuals the opportunity to teach in Catholic schools while earning academic degrees in Education. Cohort members of the Partners in Los Angeles Catholic Education (PLACE)/Loyola Marymount University (LMU) partnership in Southern California participated in this study, which investigated their reasons for applying to PLACE as well as their opinions about the three pillars of the program (Professional Development, Intentional Community, and Ignatian Spirituality), during their two-year tenure in it. Participants singled out Intentional Community as the most appealing and supportive pillar of PLACE, emphasized the need for more Professional Development and training prior to their first teaching experience, and pleaded for more structure and guidance in their Spirituality sessions. Additional research on the benefits of shared community living and the need for adequate professional training seems necessary to improve the preparation of novice teachers in alternative certification programs.

**Keywords:** PLACE, Catholic teachers, alternative certification, novice teachers, community living

Voices alerting impending teaching shortages in the US have been widely publicized over the last decades (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Hussar, 1999). While some alarming calls

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have warned against a general shortfall resulting from a combination of low salaries, lack of adequate support for new teachers, the challenges of the job, misplacements in subject areas, or the increasing number of baby boomers approaching retirement (National Education Association, 1999; Quality Counts, 2000), more contained sources, on the other hand, have cautioned that the purported shortage appears to be circumscribed to specific subject specialists (Pennington & Trinidad, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016). Notwithstanding these contradictory standpoints, evidence of a certain decrease in the number of teacher preparation program candidates and graduates has pushed public and private systems nationwide to seek innovative solutions to boost the numbers of qualified educators who can teach the nearly 60 million K-12 students in their schools (Riser-Kositsky, 2020). One such solution has been the development of alternative routes to certification, aimed at attracting to the profession individuals for whom teaching was not their original career of choice (Scribner & Heinen, 2009).

While a large majority of these programs have been developed by the public school system, the Catholic system has successfully created their own (Tamir, 2014; Williby, 2004). The latter's most significant accomplishment in this regard has been the establishment of nationwide partnerships between Catholic (arch)dioceses and Catholic universities offering recent graduates in all fields of study the opportunity to teach in under-resourced Catholic schools while concurrently earning academic degrees in Education. The partnerships are clustered under the University Consortium for Catholic Education (UCCE), a mothership organization that "establishes and supports a collaborative cadre of Catholic colleges and universities as they design and implement graduate level teaching service programs for the purpose of supporting PK-12 Catholic education in the United States" (University Consortium for Catholic Education, 2020a).

The following pages address aspects of the purported teacher shortage in the United States and its impact on the Catholic school system; describe one specific UCCE partnership in Southern California, that between Loyola Marymount University (LMU) and Partners in Los Angeles Catholic Education (PLACE); analyze members of the most recent PLACE cohort's reasons for applying to the program as well as their opinions about its three pillars (Professional Development, Intentional Community, and Ignatian Spirituality); and finalize with some conclusions, recommendations, and implications for further research.

### **Teacher shortages in the US**

Warnings about teacher shortages in the United States have hit the headlines in recent decades. Some alerted about a general scarcity of educators (Hussar, 1999; National Education Association, 1999; Quality Counts, 2000; Shen, 1998; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016) while others rebated this argument under the premise that, "many who tell the teacher shortage story often consider teacher shortage data sources in isolation and tend to overgeneralize specific problems to the profession as a whole" (Pennington & Trinidad, 2019, p. 7). Among the latter,

Cowan et al. (2020) explain that the purported shortfall is due to the fact that schools and school districts only hire about 50% of teacher preparation program graduates despite a steady growth in graduation rates during the last three decades. Furthermore, for Cowan et al. (2020), while published data show a decline in the number of students enrolling in teacher preparation programs, or in the figures of college freshmen showing interest in majoring in education, the alleged shortage appears to be restricted to specific types of schools and subject areas, namely those serving disadvantaged students and/or located in rural settings among the former, and STEM and special education among the latter. Recent reports by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2020), Brock and Chatlain (2008), or Pennington and Trinidad (2019) add English as a Second Language and foreign language education to the latter list. Both analyses appeared to merge in Cross's (2017) thorough compendium of teacher shortage areas by state, as he identified bilingual education and English language acquisition, foreign language, Mathematics, reading specialists, Science, and Special Education as high-need areas in schools serving low-income students. Similar results can be found in this regard in a recent analysis of teacher turnover data in the National Center for Education Statistics' Schools and Staffing Surveys by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019).

Notwithstanding this ongoing controversy, a common recommendation for policy leaders in a majority of the aforementioned reports is the need to implement effective policies aimed at increasing the number of individuals attracted to, and retained, in the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Pennington & Trinidad, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016); for instance, establishing a national task force on teacher shortages to provide guidance based on existing research; implementing collaborative dialogues among affected parties about the issue and its potential solutions; examining current statewide data using rigorous studies providing real numbers, i.e., (bi)annual teacher supply-and-demand reports; and acting proactively by combining high-quality teacher shortage figures with coherent policies to attack the problem (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016).

### **Teacher shortages in Catholic schools**

The purported teacher shortfall has impacted both the public school system as well as its Catholic counterpart (Cimino, Haney, & Jacobs, 2000; Curtin, 2001; Przygocki, 2004). In his review of the research on teacher attrition and retention, Przygocki (2004) lists several factors contributing to this situation, namely an aging teaching force nearing retirement, increasing classroom sizes, work conditions, social and financial status, a decrease in the number of education majors, teacher training program graduates never becoming teachers or, if so, leaving the profession within the first five years, and what he describes as "erratic swings in the demand for entry-level teachers" (p. 525). To these, he also adds two unaccounted facts specifically affecting the recruiting and retaining of individuals by an already struggling Catholic system: The constant need for lay teachers as a result of a steady decrease in the numbers of religious community members in recent decades and lower financial compensation than their public school counterparts.

The noticeable decrease in religious vocations after 1960 made it necessary for Catholic schools to hire additional lay staff; this move resulted in an exponential increase in the figures of the latter, which reached ninety-five percent of the total teaching force in a majority of Catholic schools by the mid-1990s (Przygocki, 2004; Watzke, 2005). Differently from their religious counterparts, lay staff had the option of leaving their jobs upon the termination of their contracts, which continued to exacerbate the problem for Catholic school administrators, who felt compelled to find new replacements almost on an ongoing basis. In regards to the financial compensation aspect of the job, two contrasting views were apparent. On the one hand, Schuttloffel (2001) argues that the motivation to become a Catholic school teacher is rarely financial. In general, educators appear to be attracted to the Catholic school system for nonmaterial reasons, namely the spiritual component of the experience, commitment to the Catholic identity of the schools, higher rates of job satisfaction among private school than among public school teachers, or a combination of dedication, love of teaching, desire to teach in a quality environment, and consideration of teaching as a form of ministry (Bleich, 1984; Chubb & Moe, 1988; Groome, 1998; Guerra, 1991; Przygocki, 2004; Watzke, 2005). On the other hand, Curtin (2001) underlines Catholic schools' urge to offer competitive financial compensation and benefits to current and prospective teachers if they are intent on hiring and retaining qualified candidates. Unfortunately, existing salary differences between the public and the Catholic school systems, estimated by Curtin (2001) at around 37% in favor of public schools, make it difficult for Catholic schools to remain competitive in the field (Helm, 2001; O'Keefe & Traviss, 2000; Przygocki, 2004); overcoming the existing gap is therefore critical for a system in serious need of finding well-trained education professionals for its nearly 2,150,000 students (Cook & Engel, 2006; Riser-Kositsky, 2020).

Sidestepping the nonmaterial/financial conundrum, McNiff (2001) and Spring (2001) list various ways the Catholic system might be able to attract and retain qualified candidates: Using databases to reach out to potential educators, holding recruitment fairs, creating special programs for teacher interns and paraprofessionals, developing peer leadership and training sessions for current teachers, facilitating continuing education and off-site cohort experiences for current and future teachers, or preparing transitions to Catholic schools for retired public school teachers. Additional suggestions by Williby (2004) include hosting visitation programs; making teacher recruitment materials attractive and functional; providing explicit information about the selection process, the school calendar, salary, and benefits; providing testimonials by new teachers on their professional growth in Catholic schools or districts; or specifically remarking incentives that may increase schools' appeal. It was however the result of a combined effort by Catholic universities and (arch)dioceses nationwide starting two decades ago that resulted in a most ambitious plan to attract to the profession individuals for whom education was not their original career of choice. Following in the footsteps of similar efforts by the public school system, which had granted licenses through alternative certification programs to about 18% of its teachers in 2015-2016 (National Center for



Education Statistics, 2018), said universities and (arch)dioceses created their own alternative route to certification (University Consortium of Catholic Education, 2020b), an umbrella term describing a variety of programs run by universities, school districts, county offices of education, or private enterprises, designed to accelerate the credentialing process of future teachers (Mitchell & Romero, 2010; Scribner & Heinen, 2009). For Kennedy (2020), these programs are a viable solution to address teacher shortages, diversify the teacher force, and bolster teacher quality. Given the mission and values of Catholic education, the Catholic teacher education program with a specific must have a definite focus on the intentional mission in service to Catholic education (Watzke, 2005). This was the main objective of the Alliance for Catholic Education.

### **The Alliance for Catholic Education and the University Consortium for Catholic Education**

Since its foundation in 1993, the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) at the University of Notre Dame was committed to sustaining, strengthening, and transforming K-12 Catholic schools through innovative practices aimed at forming talent, expanding access, enhancing school vitality, and conducting research on school improvement (ACE, 2020). With this purpose in mind, it established a teacher education program and M.A. in Education based on Catholic identity and educational mission, and specifically oriented toward the needs and challenges of Catholic K-12 schools (Watzke, 2005). The program and the degree were sustained on the three pillars of professional teaching, community, and spirituality, and relied on widely recognized best practices, namely long-term professional development, field-based learning, content-specific pedagogy, and student assessment for improved teacher practice (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998).

Encouraged by ACE's initial effort and success, 14 Catholic universities and teacher programs nationwide officially formed the University Consortium for Catholic Education in 2005 (University Consortium for Catholic Education, 2020b), with the purpose of building and supporting “a collaborative cadre of Catholic colleges and universities as they design and implement graduate level teaching service programs for the purpose of supporting PK-12 Catholic education in the United States” (University Consortium for Catholic Education, 2020a). These university/program partnerships focused on the development of “teacher preparation programs that would support Catholic education by recruiting and training faith-filled, energetic men and women to serve as teachers in the Catholic schools across the nation” (University Consortium for Catholic Education, 2020b). One such Southern California partnership is the one formed by Loyola Marymount University (LMU) and Partners in Los Angeles Catholic Education (PLACE).

### **Partners in Los Angeles Catholic Education (PLACE)**

PLACE is a two-year service corps that assigns recent university graduates to teach in under-resourced K-12 Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Dioceses of Orange and

San Bernardino while completing academic coursework at LMU leading to an M.A. in Urban Education (embedding a California preliminary teaching credential) with a concentration on Language and Culture, Digital Technology, Literacy, or Policy and Administration.

PLACE applicants must possess a university degree, demonstrate a heart for service, have worked with young people, and show evidence of living their faith (PLACE, 2020a). Once accepted into the program, corps members (a.k.a. PLACers) must comply with pre-established requirements related to its three pillars: Professional Development, Intentional Community, and Ignatian Spirituality. The pillars require they complete their academic preparation at LMU, live in shared communities, and participate in meetings to deepen their faith. According to a former director of the program, PLACE may be described as a combination of Teach for America, the Peace Corps, and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (Ramos, 2012).

Intentional Community offers PLACers the opportunity to fulfil the Jesuit ideal of servicing others and to celebrate and deepen their faith, spirituality, and comradeship. Accordingly, PLACers live in eight remodeled convents, housing four to nine corps members each depending on capacity, located within the limits of the Los Angeles Archdiocese or the Diocese of San Bernardino. Assignments to the different communities are generally based on geographical reasons (proximity to assigned schools), professional affinities (similar subjects or grade levels taught), and personality types (based on application profiles and interviews during the selection process). Geography tends to rank first for the PLACE Director, given the impact of driving time in the Los Angeles area. Change requests are generally denied, as the administration of the program favors PLACers work together to resolve conflicts and grow as individuals. Summer and fall annual retreats, as well as so-called business meetings held every other month, pursue similar objectives of familiarizing first- and second-year PLACers with one another, with the meaning of the three pillars of PLACE, and with specific aspects of teaching in Catholic schools. The latter aspect is especially relevant for administrators given the lack of participants' prior preparation for working in Catholic schools, as well as their lack of knowledge of educational foundations, field-teaching experiences, and courses reflecting the history and traditions of Catholic education, something previously reported by the National Catholic Educational Association (1977) and Watzke (2002).

The number of candidates accepted into the program fluctuates yearly, depending on the size and quality of the applicant pool, yet cohorts tend to remain consistent within the 25-30 range. It is however the intention of the Director to increase these numbers in the future, given the demands of partner schools (A. Félix, personal communication, 11/4/2020). During its 20 years of operation, PLACE has accepted 448 graduates from 125 universities and 34 states nationwide, an outstanding 96% of whom have completed their two-year program commitment and approximately 78% of them remain in the profession as teachers, administrators, curriculum coaches, school site mentors, community support people, program retreat leaders, or alumni council representatives.

Given the consistency of the applicants' numbers and the high retention rate of alumni in education-related fields, it seems necessary to investigate some inherent characteristics of the program. The present project intended to do so by analyzing members of the most recent PLACE cohort's opinions about the following questions: What are the main reasons that make PLACE an attractive program for potential and current PLACERs? What are PLACERs' opinions about the three pillars of PLACE? What would PLACERs add to, or change in, PLACE?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Initial participants in this project were the 34 members, 29 female and five male, of the 2018-2020 PLACE cohort. Their ages ranged from 20 to 31, with an average of 23.09. One male participant left the program prior to his first school placement and so did two females toward the end of their first year in it; the number of participants was hence 31, averaging 23.12 years of age.

Twenty-eight participants held B.A. degrees in a variety of fields, namely Liberal Studies, English, Psychology, Biological Science, Earth Science, International Business, Economics, Philosophy, Marketing, English, Spanish, History, and Interior Design among them. Only four of them had minors or concentrations in Elementary Education in their respective Childhood and Adolescent Development, Liberal Studies, Linguistics, and Psychology degrees. The three remaining participants held degrees in Elementary Education, Early Childhood Education, and Elementary Education and Special Education respectively, and were licensed to teach in Louisiana, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, respectively. Notwithstanding the widespread lack of previous educational background, all 31 participants had worked with children in various capacities and educational settings prior to applying to PLACE as teachers, substitute teachers, teacher aides, volunteers, tutors, coaches, or catechists. Noticeably, 21 of them had combined experiences as, for instance, substitute teacher, tutor, and student teacher; teacher aide and tutor; volunteer and counselor; or teacher aide, tutor, and catechist.

Of the 19 participants placed in elementary schools, nine were assigned to teach in K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grades, seven in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades, and the remaining three were to teach various subjects in 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grades, respectively. Four and five participants respectively were to teach Science, Social Studies, English Language Arts, or Physical Education in 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade combinations. The last three participants were to provide Geometry and/or Algebra instruction in high school.

### **Instruments and Data collection**

Upon receiving the required university's IRB authorization to conduct the project<sup>1</sup>, the author and the PLACE Director contacted the members of the 2018-2020 PLACE cohort to request their participation in it. The initial design of the project called for participants to respond to four questionnaires administered at four different points in time during their PLACE tenure: July of

2018, a few days prior to their first school placements, and December of 2018, June of 2019, and June of 2020, toward the end of their first semester and first and second year in the classroom, respectively. The first questionnaire gathered background information about the participants and enquired on their main reasons for applying to PLACE. Questionnaires two, three, and four, for their part, intended to evaluate the impact of each pillar of PLACE (Professional Development, Intentional Community, and Ignatian Spirituality) on their personal/professional lives up to the date of their respective administration. The rationale for these four checkpoints was to identify potential variations in participants' opinions about the three pillars of PLACE during their two-year tenure in it. Some purposefully sampled participants (Patton, 2002), identified by the author as "information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas et al., 2015), were also to join him in either individual interviews or focus group sessions in June of 2020. These meetings would offer participants the opportunity to reflect on their PLACE tenure from a more encompassing angle, which included their confirming or reevaluating their original reasons for applying to PLACE, as well as potential suggestions for improving the program. Unfortunately, the sudden spread of the COVID-19 virus and the subsequent restrictions placed on schools, teachers, and students, forced the author to alter the final stage of the project substantially. Faced with the impossibility of conducting face-to-face gatherings, he emailed participants the fourth questionnaire at the end of June, 2020, and held the five individual meetings and two focus group sessions via Zoom in mid-July of the same year. He asked all participants to just refer to their pre-COVID-19 experiences when responding to the fourth questionnaire and during the interviews and focus groups to prevent the massive impact of the virus from tainting their responses. Unfortunately, only the 14 participants not personally or professionally impacted by the pandemic were able to return their responses to the fourth questionnaire and accept their participation in the meetings and focus groups. The author emailed them the topics for the latter one day in advance to give them time to reflect on their responses and facilitate their staying on topic once on camera.

### **Data analysis**

Participants' responses to the questionnaires and the videorecorded individual meetings and focus groups were content analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) by the author shortly after their respective date of completion or meeting. He color-coded the responses according to the order in which they were written or uttered. When more than one response was provided within the same sentence, for instance, "PLACE offers a great opportunity to get teaching experience while living in a community", he coded teaching experience as the first response, community living second. He then created separate Excel files to record participants' responses to each question, except when the same question was included in different questionnaires, meetings, or focus groups. In this case, he recorded the responses on the same file to facilitate comparisons and cross-referencing. He then clustered the findings under the following headings: Reasons for applying to PLACE; Opinions about the pillars; and Suggestions for the future.

## **Findings**

The first two subsections below, Reasons for applying to PLACE and Opinions about the pillars, present participants' responses to the questionnaires first, followed by selected comments during the individual interviews and focus group sessions. The third subsection, Suggestions for the program, summarizes responses to the similarly phrased question only included in the fourth questionnaire and discussed during the individual interviews and focus group sessions.

### **Reasons for applying to PLACE**

This question, included in the first questionnaire and posed as a discussion topic in the individual interviews and focus groups with a slight modification as "Would the same reasons apply now?", intended to explore participants' original reasons for applying to PLACE, as well as their confirmation or reevaluation of said reasons at the end of their participation in the program.

Twelve of the 31 respondents to the first questionnaire explained that they had applied to PLACE given their desire to become teachers in Catholic environments while 10 others specifically alluded to PLACE or its pillars. The remaining responses included the opportunity to earn an academic degree; living in a Catholic community; impacting students' lives; the potential for traveling; fighting stereotypes of first-generation students; or the absence of Math male teachers in secondary education. Just the two most frequent reasons are addressed next.

### ***Vocation***

Participants applying to PLACE because of a self-declared teaching vocation did so because of the opportunity to share their long-standing religious beliefs with students or because of what they considered a logical transition from their studying in Catholic schools to becoming teachers in the system. In either case, applying to a program donning a Spirituality pillar housed in a university institutionally committed to Catholicism seemed to them the most cogent step to fulfil their aspirations. While most participants in this group used expressions such as "to serve Christ" or "teach while also serving God" to reveal their strong desire to share their Catholic background and faith with their students, there were those who admitted the need for the incorporation of the principles of Catholicism into their own lives. One participant illustrated her own personal take on the issue when explaining that she had applied to PLACE because, "I longed for my religious integration of Catholicism, which I knew PLACE has".

### ***Acquaintance with PLACE and/or its pillars***

Eight of the 10 participants making specific references to PLACE or its pillars had learned about the program prior to submitting their applications either from acquaintances or as a result of their own research. Those in the former group had been mostly encouraged to apply by friends or colleagues who were also applicants themselves, by alumni, or by members of other programs for Catholic personnel at LMU, such as CAST<sup>2</sup>. One participant learned about PLACE unexpectedly,

upon realizing that some fellow teachers were already members of the program: “I had always known I wanted to help people, but never knew how to. PLACE had apparently been part of my life, with most of the teachers in my elementary school being PLACErs without my knowing”.

On the other hand, participants conducting their own research appeared to have been guided by their desire to find a program that met their personal, professional, and/or spiritual needs. Some in this group seemed to have initiated their search with just a vague idea of what they were looking for, stating for instance that, “I wanted to be part of a program that combined my lifelong dream of being a teacher with the aspect of intentional community”; others, in contrast, explained much more specifically how PLACE matched what they were looking for: “I fell in love with PLACE as soon as I researched the program. I have always wanted to become a teacher, and through this program I’ll be a part of a wonderful community, teach my faith, and earn a Master’s”. Among respondents alluding to any or all of the PLACE pillars, the Community Living/Professional Development amalgam was an attractive combination that would provide the necessary emotional and professional safety net they needed to start their endeavor: “I was eager to begin grad school, but I also wanted to begin my profession as an elementary school teacher... I also applied because I wanted to work/study/live alongside other individuals who shared a similar passion”. Notwithstanding isolated references to Professional Development, Community Living stood out as the pillar exerting the most appeal for applicants, due to its potential for the creation of support networks in their transition to a complex adventure. For a first-generation university student and first-time job seeker, for instance, it was essential to not feel alone in her first job experience: “I knew that the first year of teaching will be challenging, which is why I liked the intentional aspect of being in a community”. Surprisingly, only one participant named Spirituality as her reason for applying to the program, as she “had strayed from God for so long”.

Interestingly, not a single individual interview or focus group participant ascribed to their original responses when asked whether their original motifs for applying to PLACE still held on. Rather, they unanimously pointed to Community Living as the real reason for doing so, due to the sense of togetherness and comradeship generated by what was described as “having a family around” or having “other people in your shoes as friends and support”. The invaluable benefits of so-called “therapy sessions” in their shared living arrangements, during which community members opened up to each other and developed intense personal and professional relationships as a result, allowed participants to gain a deeper understanding of both selves and others. For one participant, the most important outcome of these emerging connections was that, “you got to see the person behind them, not just the student, the professional teacher, the PLACEr,... but actually the person who is learning and struggling... it humanizes people a lot”. Community Living was also consistently regarded as PLACE’s main selling point for future applicants.

The consistent presence and involvement of program administrators was also acknowledged in the interviews and focus groups as an additional strong component of PLACE. Comments lauded administrators' willingness to support participants once in the program, their contribution to the development of participants' community building skills, their hands-on approach to the resolution of potential sources of conflict, and their availability to intervene whenever circumstances demanded arbitration or mediation. Their constant engagement throughout the two years of the program made the experience more tolerable for all:

[Program administrators] were real. I met them and I understood what the program would be like... no matter how things ended up actually turning out, at least the C-18's<sup>3</sup> really understood and appreciated the level of work and care that was put into by the people that ran our program... I think as a cohort, it was really our experience of liking PLACE corps no matter how difficult it was because we knew that there were people who would be thinking about us.

### **Opinions about the pillars**

This subsection presents a summary of participants' opinions about the impact of each PLACE pillar on their personal/professional lives. The question was included in Questionnaires 2, 3, and 4, and posed as a discussion topic in the individual interviews and focus groups to allow PLACERs to elaborate on it in retrospect. The pillars are presented in the order in which they appear on the different pages of PLACE's website (i.e., PLACE, 2020a; PLACE, 2020b).

#### ***Professional Development***

Participants appeared to be unevenly divided between those who thought that the preparation received prior to entering the classroom did not suffice to overcome the challenges they faced on a daily basis and those who seemed content with said preparation. Based on sheer numbers, those ascribing to the first group overwhelmingly surpassed those in the second, as 18 of the 26 participants responding to the question in the second questionnaire, 22 of the 28 respondents to the third questionnaire, and 10 of the 14 respondents to the fourth questionnaire sided with the first view. In their comments, they noted existing deficiencies in various areas of their new trade, such as curriculum/lesson plan development, implementation of state-required academic standards, strategies for specific grade levels, handling students' behavioral issues, strengthening home-school relations, or knowledge of school financials. The following comment is representative of the widely acknowledged need for more and better preparation, something that did not seem feasible for some during just a short summer crash course:

To be honest, I did not feel prepared when I first started. In some ways, I actually wish the program was three years and the first year was mentorship in a real classroom. I think summer should be two months of real-world experience in a summer classroom with a mentor teacher.

On the other hand, those who felt sufficiently prepared made general references to the wide variety of resources compiled during their summer training, which they used later in their classrooms. Balancing both views, some participants attributed their professional frustrations to their novice teaching status, which deprived them from the necessary know-how to use the resources at hand effectively; for one such participant, the situation was bound to improve once they spent more time in the classroom: “I don't think there's anything more PLACE could have done. I think growth with classroom management and teaching comes with experience and remembering that students need structure”. A second participant, for her part, blamed her own initial attitude for some of her ensuing plights: “I felt that the preparation was well rounded if I had listened more openly!”.

The ongoing discrepancy on the issue remained present in the individual meetings and focus group sessions. Favorable comments toward the preparation received iterated the wide variety of resources compiled during the various training sessions and university courses attended, while criticisms focused on the need for a more practical slant in the content of presentations and summer and credential coursework. One participant provided a well-balanced analysis of the situation, as well as a few personal suggestions to overcome existing gaps in the professional preparation realm:

Lesson and unit plans [were helpful] because we did cover it, but it was very vague. Every school does have different expectations for them and the on-site support and LMU observer were very helpful, but I think some practice with standards, textbook resources, and planning would have been more helpful. Assessments too. Also, I felt unprepared to handle students with varying needs. Differentiation and more about special education/plans would be beneficial... I do believe more engaging and hands-on classes would have been amazing for us and less lecture-based only classes. Especially since we are in school for so long on Saturdays. Some of our classes talk about how to best engage students and improve learning, but we are learning all of this through lecture rather than experience.

### ***Intentional Community***

The following quote, uttered in one focus group, summarized the general agreement about the positive impact of Community Living on participants' personal and professional lives:

People who aren't teachers don't understand the realities of what it is like to be a teacher, and so to be able to come back home from a day that could have been the worst day or the best day... with fellow teachers and be able to talk about your day... those are people who understand what it's like whether they had that good of a day also and they could celebrate with you or they had just as bad of a day and you could cry together...

Interestingly, while references to Community Living were scarce in Questionnaires 2 and 3 given participants' escalating concerns about the quality of their professional preparation, all 14



participants completing the fourth questionnaire and a majority of those in the individual interviews and focus groups singled it out, as previously noted, as the most valuable PLACE pillar and best-selling component of PLACE. In fact, just two participants in the individual interviews and two more in the focus groups referred to Professional Development as the most relevant pillar in their career, although two of them did so hesitantly. The first one chose it over Community Living due to a few negative episodes in her community while the second one found it almost impossible to disentangle the combined effects of Community Living and Professional Development. For her, they both went hand in hand, yet she thought that program administrators favored the latter over the former, given it hence an extra push: “Community Living naturally unfolds, but they [PLACE administrators] put more into the Professional Development because part of the community is supporting a professional life”.

Community Living noticeably overshadowed the two other PLACE pillars during participants’ second year in the program, once their initial classroom predicaments became more limited in scope thanks to a combination of extended classroom experience and community support. The latter aspect gained increased recognition as participants learned to enjoy the benefits of “unplanned, unstructured time” with others whenever in need. Thus, for one participant, “all you needed to do was holler and, at any time, there were seven different people you could ask for help”. The growing sense of solidarity resulting from these meetings tightened bonds among community members, gave them the necessary reassurance on their teaching capabilities, and increased their self-confidence as educators:

Being surrounded by fellow first year teachers and also experienced teachers helped so much during my time in PLACE. I always felt like I had someone to go to with questions and was always receiving advice and resources. I am so grateful for this. I never felt alone and always felt like I was growing to be the best teacher I could be for my students.

Some additional unexpected outcomes resulting from these heart-to-heart sessions were, for instance, the decision by two local participants to forego visiting their families during annual celebrations as a show of camaraderie and companionship with the not-so-fortunate members of their respective communities. Both of them spoke of the guilt they would have experienced otherwise. Along these lines, another participant found it increasingly difficult to excuse her absences from mandatory community activities and meetings even when tempted to do so because of the potentially negative effects of her decision on other corps members:

In a way we get to know who can help others and we are kind of just growing... but it also makes it more difficult because, you know, you are living with the people that are going through this program with and you cannot really say no because how they would feel... you have to say yes to everything and when you say no, [you think] who are you are going to harm?

Overall, the time devoted to lauding the benefits of Community Living during the interviews and focus group sessions more than tripled that dedicated to the other pillars. It was during one of these sessions that a participant shared an aspect of the Community Living structure in PLACE that constituted a clear advantage over other UCCE programs. As she explained, “they [communities] are all within the same area. For example, two convents could be 10 minutes away from each other, while in other programs you are three states away”. Despite time-consuming driving distances in the Los Angeles area, the proximity of the convents to one another allowed her, and the rest of her cohort members in general, to participate in regularly scheduled program meetings, as well as to join unexpected or emergency gatherings with other participants on an as-needed basis. This was more difficult to accomplish in other programs due to the spread of the communities, which required corps members embark on long car or plane trips to attend in-person gatherings or join on-screen meetings with colleagues or administrators. These barriers prevented members from getting to know each other better and more deeply, and this tipped the scale in favor of PLACE as the program of choice for a second participant. For her, by not modeling their respective Community Living pillars after PLACE’s, other UCCE partnerships were depriving their corps members of a chance to:

Feel quite the level of relationship that we feel with each other for good or bad, because they are not actually living with each other and you can’t mimic that... like I feel more of a tie to the program than I would if it were just like a teacher education program I was taking classes through.

### ***Ignatian Spirituality***

Given the unanticipated demands of their jobs and the new responsibilities resulting from their joint living arrangements, it did not seem surprising that participants sidestepped Spirituality in favor of the two other pillars despite the former’s purported relevance in a Catholic-inspired program. Notwithstanding, several comments during the interviews and focus group meetings revealed participants’ acceptance of the pillar, yet offering significantly different interpretations of its meaning as well as how to abide by it. On the one hand, participants with a strong Catholic background associated Spirituality to praying together, attending mass, and deepening their Catholic faith, in compliance with the explanation posted on one page of the program’s website: “Program members live with one another in intentional community while exploring and strengthening shared values rooted in Catholicism” (PLACE, 2020b); on the other hand, non-Catholic participants or Catholic participants with not-so-strong Catholic backgrounds presented a more encompassing view of Spirituality as “a time for us to get together and reflect, to stop thinking about teaching for a moment... and then come back and see things differently”, more in line with another description posted on another page of the same website: “Program members live together in intentional communities supporting and mentoring one another, sharing their faith,

and growing spiritually in the Jesuit tradition of being ‘men and women with and for others’” (PLACE, 2020c). Conflicts subsequently surged between members of each faction on the correct interpretation of the implications of the term. For one participant in the first group, for instance, “the pillar was not community-aligned. Since everyone in the program is at different places in their spiritual life, sometimes the planned spiritual events can be a little fluffy and I don’t think there is that much structure in them”. Two more participants in the same group supported this view, thinking it urgent for community support personnel to monitor Spirituality nights more closely and provide specific guidance and structure to the meetings. For them, all participants had been informed of the relevance of the pillar as an inherent component of PLACE during their initial interviews and the summer retreat and were therefore aware that “PLACE calls itself a Catholic program and you sign up for it”. On the other hand, those in the second group argued that, since the program was not restricted to just Catholic applicants, all participants should be open to more lax interpretations of the term by current and future PLACERS of diverse ethnic, religious, cultural, or sexual backgrounds. One such participant believed that exposure to different points of view during Spirituality nights would open up participants’ minds to alternative ways of living in diverse societies and “make them [the talks] more substantial by analyzing them in depth” despite potential reservations by some.

### **Suggestions for the future**

This question was only included in the fourth questionnaire and discussed in the individual interviews and focus groups with the purpose of giving participants the opportunity to look back in retrospect to their two years in PLACE. Responses, clustered together according to their references to each PLACE pillar, are presented under the following headings: Community Living and PLACE, Preparation prior to teaching, and Dealing with Spirituality.

#### ***Community Living and PLACE***

Despite overwhelmingly laudatory comments about Community Living, a few suggestions were offered for program administrators to improve the pillar. Firstly, some participants proposed giving more weight to enrollment in similar M.A. concentrations and/or grade levels or subjects taught at the time of assigning future PLACERS to their respective communities. One supporter of this position, citing her own experience, explained that the arrangement would help establish fruitful professional relationships among PLACERS from the very beginning and throughout the length of their tenure: “Coming home to other people who understand all facets of the complexity of teaching made it possible to get through the two years”. Secondly, a few general comments wanted to make administrators aware of the enormous pressure participants were subject to while attempting to juggle the numerous commitments demanded by PLACE, namely attendance at community events, Masses, retreats, and business meetings; organizational responsibilities in their communities; and assignments and readings pertaining to their academic coursework; all the while performing successfully in the classroom. During their first year in the program, participants felt they were

“spread very thin” as they struggled to navigate many different scenarios. While frustrations derived from their inexperience receded during their second year, the academic rigor of their M.A. courses<sup>4</sup> resulted in skyrocketing stress levels. Given the Type A personality of so many participants, “meltdowns were therefore a not-so-uncommon occurrence” in the communities. These unfortunate episodes were more noticeable when responsibilities associated to the three PLACE pillars coincided simultaneously, which forced participants be torn between attempting to comply with all stated requirements or focus their energies on specific commitments to the detriment of others. Thus, as one participant explained, “Were some requirements had to be eliminated, it would not be PLACE... however, there were a lot of mandatory assignments, and attending PLACE events when in my mind I was thinking of homework or of other places...” Holding joint meetings with administrators to reevaluate what were deemed nonessential commitments was a potential solution to resolve this quandary. Hiring mental health specialists to help participants achieve a better personal/professional balance was another. A third suggestion called for a more proactive stand on the part of administrators toward schools demanding participants attend activities clashing with specific pillar requirements, such as Saturday back-to-back university courses, attendance to Mass, or participation in community meetings. For one participant, “PLACE needs to set the expectation with schools that PLACERs are not just regular teachers who are attending school on the weekends”. However, a few other participants felt that administrators were reticent to intervene to avoid straining relationships with partnership schools.

### ***Preparation prior to teaching***

Participants’ apprehension about their initial inadequacy to succeed in the classroom resulted from what one of them described as “the huge jump” from a month and a half of mostly theoretical instruction during the summer prior to their first teaching assignment to the realities of the job shortly afterward. Various focus group participants called for a more practical slant in the content of their summer and credential coursework to address this issue, which included explicit adaptations of the material learned in class to specific grades and subject areas, time to work on some of the most time-consuming state-required credential requirements, such as the Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs), or specific information on how to teach vulnerable populations, i.e., bilingual students or Students with Special Needs. Another common suggestion was the recruitment of veteran teachers or PLACE alumni currently working as school principals or administrators, curriculum supervisors, or academic counselors to provide mentorship and conduct practical workshops on much-needed areas, such as reading/teaching methods, implementation of grade level standards, ways to improve relationships with parents and administrators, or test score and data interpretation. This, in lieu of sporadic training sessions that made participants feel they were just being “spoken to”. Along these lines, one participant contributed a few suggestions she felt could make said preparation more applicable to their respective individual scenarios:

Give concrete examples, and show rather than just tell. Less theory, more demonstration of a real-classroom. I wanted a more practical focus: How real teachers organize their paper system, deal with difficult parents, and what content I should be teaching in Language Arts. What I struggled with the most in my first year of teaching was classroom management, the daily organization of teaching and the paper flow and small decisions of the day-to-day, and trying to keep up with a huge amount of grading in a fair and accurate manner. When we “practiced” classroom management in class, we practiced with each other, which I found relatively easy to do because obviously everyone in the class was an adult pretending to be a kid. However, real-life classes were a lot more difficult and unpredictable. I may have been able to ace a classroom management test, but that did not mean I actually knew what to do in real-life situations. I think it would have been helpful to also have “soft skills”, like examples of organizational methods and ways to set-up the paper system. I also think I would spend more time on content specific courses. For example, “How to teach students to write an essay”, or “Quick ways to organize feedback”, or “Examples of novels I’ve taught for middle school”, or “Examples of lesson ideas for this subject”. Any tangible resources or examples that could be sent for people to view would have been helpful, so PLACERs did not have to create their own resources or buy them. For example, for the content of the subjects, I came to a school that had no curriculum, which meant I spent all of my time trying to figure out what I was supposed to teach and what to do with it. It would have been nice to have someone show examples of real-life lesson plans and how they constructed their week. Perhaps we could make a curriculum map in summer to plan the lessons/materials. I also think that I would take away anything “fluffy” or political and really focus on practical and real-life concrete examples.

### ***Dealing with Spirituality***

As noted, discrepancies over the purpose and goals of Spirituality led those participants with the deepest Catholic beliefs to contest Catholic-in-name and non-Catholic participants’ commitment to the pillar. Those in the former group were noticeably more outspoken when voicing the need to “hold people to their commitments”, as they thought the latter considered Spirituality meetings just an opportunity to discuss a wider variety of themes, not necessarily related or constrained to Catholicism or the Catholic faith. For one of the most vocal critics of the latter, Spirituality would not become the vibrant component of community life she was expecting upon joining PLACE unless administrators gave it the push and recognition it deserved:

The expectation [ought] to not just be that people are open to Spirituality, but that they are seeking it... because when we got into community, everybody is open to the rules, and it was very uncomfortable not to live in a community where we value the same things at the end of the day.

### **Discussion**

A majority of participants acknowledged their familiarity with PLACE far in advance of filling out their applications, mostly as a result of conversations with friends, colleagues, or alumni, or of their

own research on alternative teaching programs for Catholic schools. The opportunity to share their faith, fulfil their teaching vocation, or complete the requirements for an academic degree and a teaching credential, all the while earning a salary were, in this order, the main reasons for their interest in the program. The two most frequently cited reasons, the wish to serve God or teach the Catholic faith, were consistent with research pointing to the Catholic identity and mission values of Catholic schools as the main forces attracting individuals to teach in the Catholic system (Caruso, 2002; Groome, 1998). However, shortly after their first contact with the classroom, participants began to experience the effects of their lack of adequate preparation, the increasing pressure to perform, and the continuous doubts about their professional capabilities. These deficiencies, consistent with previous research on the issue (Linek et al, 2012), eventually led them to substitute Community Living for the initial religious component of their choice as their preferred motivation for applying to PLACE. In offering the personal and professional support and mentoring needed to get a better handle of their new jobs, Community Living fulfilled its key program goals (PLACE, 2020c). The strengthened bonds among participants resulting from their community interactions was an essential ingredient in their overcoming their perceived inadequacies and becoming better professionals. In this regard, the internal setup of the communities and the latter's proximity to one another gained steady recognition as two critical constituents of PLACE. Frequent comments stressed the importance of being surrounded by colleagues of the same age, holding similar jobs, and in some cases teaching identical grades and subject areas, with whom to connect in search of information, company, and comfort and with whom to share frustrations, challenges, and also successes. Some UCCE programs spread their partnerships over various cities and even states (i.e., ACE, 2020; University of Dayton, 2020), and this made holding joint meetings with all corps members a complicated task; the proximity of participants' communities to one another and to LMU, where PLACE's administrative office was housed, was on the contrary an additional plus for PLACE. The arrangement facilitated participants' mobility between communities and fostered the development of closer personal and professional connections with other corps members and program administrators, as evidenced in participants' persistent use of words and phrases such as comradeship, camaraderie, or not feeling alone, which helped them fight the burning sensation of loneliness caused by the isolating nature of teaching (Marshall et al., 2007; Tahir et al., 2017). Along these lines, the benefits of Community Living were comparable to those of existing Living Learning Communities (LLCs)<sup>5</sup> established in some colleges nationwide. These accommodations have shown important benefits for students residing in them, namely boosting retention and degree completion rates, improving learning and interactions with faculty and others, and increasing students' engagement in and outside the classroom (Arensdorf & Naylor-Tincknell, 2016; Eidum et al., 2020). Save for natural differences between the two scenarios and potential difficulties for its implementation on a large scale, the model remains an innovative option for supporting novice teachers during their initial stages in the profession.

Despite participants' laudatory comments about Community Living as the stalwart of the program, two areas may require programs' administrators' direct intervention to maintain its status as such. Firstly, there did not seem to be clear policies regulating attendance to family gatherings; administrators may thereby consider drafting a document on attendance policies to such events to prevent what might be perceived as purely discretionary decisions otherwise. Secondly, administrators might also consider holding meetings with current and former PLACERs to review existing program requirements and reach satisfactory compromises on what might be considered non-essential tasks. Juggling their combined responsibilities as students in a degree program, as professionals in a demanding job, and as individuals fulfilling numerous community commitments increased participants' stress levels that lead to frequent mental breakdowns. Future PLACERs would certainly welcome the hiring of mental health counselors and specialists, as suggested, to provide immediate assistance on an ongoing as well as on as-needed basis. Any additional support in the area of wellbeing for both novice and veteran teachers makes the teaching experience easier to bear (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Turner & Theilking, 2019; Viac & Fraser, 2020).

In contrast to the almost unanimous recognition of Community Living as the undisputedly most valuable pillar of PLACE, both Professional Development and Spirituality were subject to more serious scrutiny. The former, for the apparent lack of participants' adequate preparation in critical areas of their practice, namely curriculum and lesson development or classroom management skills, and the criticized disconnect between the theoretical content of the summer training and credential coursework and its practical application to the classroom. Spirituality criticisms mostly referred for its part to specific claims for clarification of the pillar's role, meaning, and structure in a Catholic-oriented program.

Most participants voiced weaknesses in their professional preparation as early as the end of their first semester in PLACE. As soon as the realities of teaching sank in, they self-reported deficiencies in crucial areas such as classroom management skills, lesson development and delivery techniques, and implementation of content standards, that caused ongoing frustrations and doubts about their teaching abilities and their capacity to perform. In so doing, their narratives seemed to confirm existing distrust on the preparation of teachers in alternative certification programs expressed by critics of these programs (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Scherer, 2012).

In reality, these limitations, generally stretching the length of their first academic year, were not specifically pertinent to PLACE itself, as they were really related to the content of state-required credential coursework; this precluded PLACE administrators and course instructors from altering said content to make it more suitable and applicable to participants' specific teaching needs. Notwithstanding, participants felt instructors still had room for the introduction of a more functional slant in the coursework. Allowing time for small homogeneous and heterogeneous group work on practical tasks and research projects tailored to specific grades or subject areas and the inclusion of time-consuming credential requirements such as the edTPAs as course assignments to

curtail the number of after class hours dedicated to their completion were considered beneficial modifications for future PLACERs, who would also benefit from solid guidance and rapid and frequent feedback on their progress. Given that, in addition to a flexible curriculum, assistance from experts and support providers is another reason why teachers continue in the profession (Johnson, 2006), recruiting alumni to provide practical personal and professional advice to future PLACERs on some of the already noted areas of need also seemed a commonsensical suggestion. More than 80% of said alumni remain in education upon the completion of their PLACE tenure as teachers in Catholic and public schools, program leaders, school principals, alumni council representatives, instructional and curriculum coaches, school site mentors, or doctoral program graduates in educational administration or school policy (PLACE, 2020c; Ramos, 2012). Their broad range of experiences constitutes hence an invaluable asset in the prevention of potential failures by their novice colleagues; the PLACE motto, “Once a PLACER, always a PLACER” (Ramos, 2012, p. 9), ensures their availability to lend a hand.

Lastly, PLACE administrators may take into consideration participants’ suggestions to clarify the expectations for Spirituality in light of participants’ existing dissent about the meaning of the pillar. This issue demands their hasty intervention to avoid further controversies caused by discordant interpretations among participants of statements such as “living in faith-filled communities” or “sharing their faith and growing spiritually in the Jesuit tradition of being men and women with and for others” (PLACE, 2020c). Increasing their presence or that of community support personnel on Spirituality nights was a sensible idea, as they could provide the necessary guidance to ascertain a uniform understanding and application of the basic premises of the pillar in the communities. Including in the discussions some of the non-Catholic PLACERs’ requests and analyzing them from the standpoint of Catholic v. other religious or philosophical adscriptions may offer future PLACERs the opportunity to compare and contrast how these topics are contemplated by individuals holding different spirituality, moral, and ethic viewpoints, learn from and about those holding different opinions and experiences, respect alternative points of view, discuss the pros and cons of different societies’ values and lifestyles, and hone their own debating skills, all the while giving more weight to the pillar in their communities and in the program.

## **Conclusion**

Participants in the present project singled out Community Living as the most valuable pillar of PLACE and the most important contributor to the success of the program. Living in close communities surrounded by colleagues sharing similar experiences helped participants keep afloat while learning to navigate the different worlds of schools, academia, and shared living. Notwithstanding their initial struggles juggling their duties in these three different scenarios, being able to rely on others to cope with adversities and share successes resulted in the development of solid relationships that helped participants endure their novice teacher status. On the other hand, concerns about the extent of their professional preparation was the source of personal and



professional frustrations, more conspicuous during participants' first year in the program. Resorting to PLACE alumni for guidance and advice seemed a sensible solution to attenuate mistakes and self-perceptions of failure. The hiring of mental health specialists and conversations with program administrators on the relevance of some mandatory requirements were also valid requests to make the beginning stages of PLACE more tolerable. Lastly, administrators' and community personnel's more consistent involvement in Spirituality meetings might help lessen existing discrepancies among PLACERs regarding the meaning and significance of the term.

The findings of this project are limited to the opinions of the participants in it. Alumni and future PLACERs might hold different opinions about the program itself or its pillars as a result of their own personal/professional experiences in schools, in their communities, and/or with administrators. Members of other UCCE partnerships might also hold different opinions about their own programs and experiences as teachers in Catholic schools. It is also necessary to consider the impact of the COVID-19 virus upon the last stages of the study. The pandemic severely restricted the number of participants responding to the fourth questionnaire and participating in the individual meetings and focus groups; some of the original purposefully selected participants might have held different perspectives on the topics discussed. The virus also forced the author to hold the interviews and focus group sessions remotely instead of in-person; this modified format might have affected the interaction between the participants as well as the depth of their exchanges. Lastly, despite repeated requests for participants to just take into consideration their pre-COVID experiences, their extended home confinement, which limited their contact with students and other participants, as well as the impact of the virus on their lives might have tainted their responses.

In light of the findings of the study, it seems necessary to continue to explore future PLACERs' opinions about aspects related to the three pillars of PLACE besides those revealed here. Future research may revolve for example around issues such as how PLACERs' views about the structure and implementation of the three PLACE pillars compare across different cohorts or with members' of other UCCE programs, whether Community Living continues to be recognized as the most important pillar of PLACE, how teacher recruitment and retention rates in programs incorporating shared living opportunities compare with others not offering this arrangement, what potential modifications in the content of the summer courses or credential coursework might improve the professional preparation of future PLACERs, or how existing interpretations of "share their faith and grow spiritually in the Jesuit tradition of being 'men and women with and for others'" may still comply with Spirituality. In the present project, the availability of supportive colleagues built up the support network helping participants to overcome the ongoing challenges of their new jobs, providing evidence in so doing of the importance of a supportive environment for beginning teachers. Teaching is an isolating and challenging profession and any effort aimed at lessening frustrations is a worthy contribution in a field in which success is hard to achieve.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The project was part of a larger study on participants' potentially evolving opinions about teaching in general as well as their own teaching expectations throughout their PLACE tenure. Therefore, only those comments deemed relevant for the present project are discussed and analyzed subsequently.
- <sup>2</sup> Catholic Archdiocesan School Teachers (CAST) is a cohort program for full-time current K-12 Catholic teachers or administrators at LMU leading to an MA in Urban Education embedding a California Preliminary Teaching Credential.
- <sup>3</sup> Cohort 18
- <sup>4</sup> In PLACERs' 1+1 M.A./credential program, credential courses were completed in year 1, master courses in year 2
- <sup>5</sup> Groups of students "who live on the same floor of a residential hall and who share an interest in a common theme or major" (Arensdorf & Naylor-Tincknell, 2016, p. 1)

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## FRATELLI TUTTI AND THE EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM OF CARE

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**Abstract** This short essay on the connection between the *Fratelli Tutti* Encyclical, written by Pope Francis in 2020, and pedagogy is based on my involvement in the socio-educational project Arco Maior and the study about it I have been conducting for the past few years. This alternative educational scheme ([www.arcomaior.pt](http://www.arcomaior.pt)) welcomes teenagers who have left school without having completed mandatory education, following a long period during which they were increasingly neglected by the institution. The project takes place in Porto, Portugal, and it began in 2013. It has supported 400 students up to and including 2021/2022.

Thus, this document is anchored, on the one hand, in the Pope's beautiful and profound reflexion on love, «fraternity and social friendship», in which the systematic and paradigmatic reference to the Good Samaritan parable features prominently, a strong source of questioning and inspiration for those in the field of education concerned with each and every citizen we come across. On the other hand, it is anchored in the analysis I carried out, in 2020, of the Personal Files of 25 students who attended Arco Maior between 2013 and 2019 (Azevedo et al, 2020), looking to understand what schools had done to drive these students away, leaving them in a situation of extreme vulnerability and social exclusion.

This text aims at denouncing the selective and humiliating type of schooling of certain citizens and it intends to name some of the features of a fairer public education service and of a fairer school, which involve practices of recognition and the educational paradigm of care.

**Keywords** *Fratelli Tutti*, the care paradigm, recognition, school leaving, humiliation.

### Fallen by the side of the road

Pope Francis devotes this Encyclical to «fraternity and social friendship», inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi. From the beginning, the letter attributes great importance to the Good Samaritan parable. The document reads: «The parable shows us how a community can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of exclusion, and act instead as neighbours, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common

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good» (67). And it adds: «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» (68). And it concludes with: «It is the moment of truth. Will we bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others? Will we bend down and help another to get up? This is today's challenge, and we should not be afraid to face it» (70).

The socio-educational project Arco Maior was born out of a refusal of the principle that there is nothing to be done with these youngsters, who have left school and *failed to take advantage of the opportunity that was given to them* to attend public school, and that the best option is to move forward, pass them by and fail to truly see these citizens who have fallen into social exclusion, consigned to their poor neighbourhoods, where they remain invisible (Bernot-Caboche, 2016). In other words, we refuse to believe in indifference as the only possible choice.

These youngsters are usually poor, they come from families with low-paying and precarious jobs, such as cleaning staff, construction workers, masons, window washers, kitchen helpers, mechanics, locksmiths, waiters and shop assistants. In the case of mothers, 6 defined their occupation as «staying at home». In 12 of the 25 cases examined, there were reports of unemployment among the parents. The qualifications of the mothers are very low: only 3 mothers have more than 6 years of schooling and 11 have only completed the first four years of basic education. The family units live predominantly in social housing and are often, in 19 of the 25 cases, in situations which make the poverty framework even worse: cases of early pregnancy (2 cases), drug consumption and drug trade (5 cases), alcoholic parents (5 cases), separated parents, with either the mother or the father absent (8 cases), domestic violence (5 cases) and death of the parents (4 cases).

From early on, signs of misalignment between the school and the situation of each child reveal themselves (this takes place during the first four years of schooling, in 20 of 25 cases).

These signs are abundantly recorded by the schools and will be used throughout the years to label these children as «at-risk students» (at risk of academic failure, of leaving school, of absenteeism, of delinquency...) or as «special needs education» students. The school resorts to an impersonal treatment, placing them into categories related to failure and unruliness, marking them as inept and disqualifying them. Children grow older and the conflicts with schools grow increasingly violent and disruptive, like snowballs, reaching undignified proportions, both for the educators and the students: in other words, for the educational institution. Several people take part in this *educational process*, not just teachers, but also doctors, child psychiatrists and social workers. Everyone contributes to consolidating this way of looking at these children as «at-risk students», who lack family backups and who are responsible for their own failed situation. This casts a curtain that stops people from seeing each situation in its singularity, by painting an image of humiliation,

based on weakness, inability, unruliness and risks. These children are thus progressively excluded while still at school (internal exclusion). They are marked for dropping out of school through processes of humiliation and marginalization that push out precisely those who these educational institutions are unable and unwilling to integrate, teach and care for.

### **Reports of vulnerability and humiliation**

It is crucial that we question both this degraded view of educational equality and inclusion and the educational practices of exclusion that are founded on the silencing of the heterogeneous biographies of those progressively «made to be inferior, dismembered and denied» (Esteban, 2008). The other, the one who is different, faces the school and its rhetoric of inclusion in an environment characterised by a «denial of alterity» (ibidem, p.17) and by the reproduction of a hegemonic sociocultural model, which adopts a bureaucratic treatment of identity and difference and excludes the most fragile, vulnerable, sick and disoriented of youngsters.

We must, therefore, break the barriers of a predictable and unethical morality to reveal the concrete human suffering that lingers in our schools and which demands an answer, a different response.

According to Laguna (2020:17), «it is crucial that we recover and create reports of vulnerability in order to neutralise the monocultural neoliberal discourse which, appealing to the solidary principles of a universalist egalitarianism, ignores the particular historical suffering of individuals».

Let us look briefly at one of these «reports of vulnerability». Filipe was born in December of 2000. In 2006/2007, by the end of the first period of the first year of schooling, the teacher says the student *«does not know how to study, he is disorganised and he is not autonomous»*, and that he *«struggles to comply with the rules, in the classroom and outside of it»*. The following month, the teacher notes, in an individual report, that there is no nuclear family, that Filipe lives with his maternal grandparents and that his mother resides elsewhere with his younger brother. She then adds a sort of educational «identity card» regarding Filipe, a six-year-old, who has been at this educational institution for just four months: *«the student is immature, he has trouble expressing himself, his vocabulary is very poor and it is very difficult to have a conversation with him; he barely participates in class, he hasn't improved his writing and reading skills, he shows a deep and continuous lack of interest for activities that demand reading, writing or simply paying attention and focusing; he is constantly getting up and distracting his classmates, he reveals a significant lack of interest and unwillingness to learn, he has little autonomy; when it comes to artistic expression, he shows an interest in the activities; he gets along well with his classmates and the rest of the school staff, he is a gentle child, caring, and reveals no signs of aggressiveness. He loves to play during recess; he struggles severely with learning in all areas; he has trouble with assimilating and respecting the rules of the classroom and with performing the school work; he is disorganized and has yet to acquire*

*any work habits; above all, he is very immature, he lacks interest, he lacks the willingness to do anything, he has no ability to focus and has yet to acquire a sense of responsibility». The report ends like this: «For him, school remains «only» a playful space, in other words, a space where he can play, play, play».*

First, almost everything that the teacher mentions is related to difficulties, inabilities, bad behaviour, in other words, everything that will justify his inclusion in a special and separate category. In the midst of such misery, she mentions, almost in passing, his interest in artistic expression. Later, other characteristics are mentioned, like Filipe's good rapport with his classmates, the fact that he likes to play (how could it be otherwise?), that he is gentle, caring and that his behaviour lacks any signs of aggressiveness.

Conversely, those are the signs that Filipe's teacher manifests by looking at him in this way. The overwhelming weight of this child's inabilities, on top of a history of familiar negligence combined with a number of emotional problems, could not be more devastating, particularly as it takes place so early in the child's schooling. The child and student's individuality begins to fade when his schooling starts.

The school decides, at the end of his first year, that Filipe will be returning the following year «*as a first-year student again*». Thus, the child is immediately included in the unsuccessful and in need of special education category, and thus begins a schooling path which will be characterised by academic failure and increasing violence. By the time he is 13 he is still attending 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and his individual file is made up of 87 pages of reports of disruptive behaviour and subsequent punishments.

The humiliating practices are ongoing and prolonged in time: they will last for nine years. Following this «internal exclusion» (Millet & Thin, 2003, p. 41), school will steadily and gradually marginalise the student, promoting him to the «unteachable and creator of disorder» category (idibem, p.43), pushing him to leave school, which ends up happening when he is 15 and has only completed 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The curtain closes over the perfect scenario: the one the school does not want comes to be convinced that it is he who does not want school.

The analysis of those personal file reveals how an institution built on the principle of respect for individual and universal human rights ends up breaching fundamental rights by disqualifying the particular drama of each child and making it illegible and invisible. The institution is unable to exercise the «imperfect obligations» of hospitality, compassion, respect and solidarity. By abandoning the attention and care matrix (Noddings, 2005; Aranguren, 2021) and by adopting the administrative and technocratic matrix, the school abandons education as a means to pave the way for human development.



### **Attention and care**

Instead of doubling down on attention and care, in time schools develop and expand an institutional violence that ends badly. First, for each student who is marginalised and excluded, and then for the school itself, which loses a good portion of its moral authority. We must question, faced with every «report of vulnerability», how, under the weight of these «dark catalogues of misery» (Berridge et al., 2001:5), is a child supposed to lift herself up?

Violence is the opposite of attention, it represents the «abuse of the other, of the person that the other is in every single one of his or her dimensions: it represents violence directed at the body, at its social presence and at its intimate space» (Esquirol, 2008:50).

As we have seen every day in Arco Maior, only an attentive, caring and respectful focus is able to capture the potential and the weaknesses of of the person who inhabits each student. Simone Weil defines attention as a form of generosity; it leads us to forget about ourselves, we become detached from ourselves and it allows us to dive into the other. The philosopher argues that this exercise allows us to access that which is silent and invisible. Attention is what makes it possible to escape the law of gravity, avoid certainties and possession, and to access the whole instead of just the fragments (according to her, fragmentation is the essence of slavery).

By being close to the other who is looking at me, I can see his look «fall over me imperiously», as Esquirol puts it (208:51), following Levinas. The «ethics of the attentive and respectful way of looking» (Esquirol, 2008:85) triggers the «spiral of attention», which begins with someone pausing, paying attention and wishing to know, and is followed by a willingness to be amazed, an ability to ask questions instead of judging and a readiness to start a respectful and authentic dialogue and to create cracks that will allow us to take small new steps.

Armed with dogmatic procedures, laws and norms, in a morally irreproachable system of self-justifications, filled with preformatted and bureaucratic mechanisms, we can be easily detached from reality, as we immerse ourselves in artifice and moralism, condemning children and young people to an internal marginalization and to social and academic exclusion. Equipped with humility and a willingness to listen and to look attentively, inclined over the student from the moment he or she starts to lag behind and to reveal signs of disruption and stigmatization, educators can ascend the ladder of connection, co-building a relationship of trust and commitment with the student, in order to promote another way of accessing knowledge and development.

Noddings (2000) proposed an education founded on the ethics of care, which implies becoming less trivial and avoiding subalternity. The caring relationships provide a foundation for a pedagogical action that leads to students gaining trust, which in turn allows for dialogue and for the emergence

of work proposals appropriate to the potential and to the needs of each student. This makes it easier for students to progress and to develop and for teachers to know how to improve their practices.

Immerse in so many races towards prescriptions and implicated in many external measurements of results, reducing the number of skills children must learn, repeating preestablished techniques for the transmission of knowledge, organizing classes and groups of students in the same way, schools run the risk of becoming non-places (Augé, 1980) or anthropological wastelands where inequalities and inhumanities are reproduced.

In this regard, the Pope's thoughts on the «unique value of love» are very clear and inspiring. The spiritual stature of a person's life is measured by love, which in the end remains «the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's worth or lack thereof». «Yet some believers think that it consists of the imposition of their own ideologies upon everyone else, or of a violent defence of the truth, or of an impressive demonstration of strength» (92). And the Pope stipulates what this «experience of love» consists of: «A movement outwards towards another, whereby we consider the beloved as somehow united to ourselves. Our affection for others makes us freely desire to seek their good» (93). Love, then, «is more than just a series of benevolent actions. Those actions have their source in a union increasingly directed towards others, considering them of value, worthy, pleasing and beautiful apart from their physical or moral appearances. Our love for others, for who they are, moves us to seek the best for their lives» (94).

Indeed, this was not what Filipe found at school, despite the institution's claims concerning its democratic and inclusive nature. What was needed was an «acknowledgement of the worth of every human person, always and everywhere» (106), since everyone «has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally; a dignity based not on circumstances but on the intrinsic worth of their being» (107). Universal love needs to pervade universal schooling, just as particular love needs to pervade the particular schooling path of each citizen. This love reveals itself in the knowledge that we are responsible for the vulnerability of others, it manifests itself in action, in service, «which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. And service in great part means caring for vulnerability (...) Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, 'suffers' that closeness and tries to help them. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people» (115). «Love of neighbour is concrete and squanders none of the resources needed to bring about historical change that can benefit the poor and disadvantaged» (165). «Love takes first place: love must never be put at risk, and the greatest danger lies in failing to love» (92).

### **The educational paradigm of care**

Portuguese schools benefit from a significant apparatus of laws and regulations, ordered according to principles and norms morally based on equality, inclusion and academic success. This is an

important heritage that must be preserved and perfected. However, the Law is not enough, it must be supplemented by justice and by fraternal actions in the face of each situation. In fact, schools can suffer from an excess of morality and a startling lack of ethics (Aranguren, 2021), because, based on the norms, it is possible to step away from a student in need, to label him or her as different and involving him or her in a series of technical and administrative procedures that are unrelated to the child and which are never developed *with* the student, in an effort of recognition and assistance. The child is thus unable to take advantage of the mechanisms offered to her and she is blamed for her own failure.

The myth of meritocracy legitimises and deepens these exclusion practices, as each of these particularly vulnerable children is made to feel responsible for the life they are leading. The categories we impose on them confirm our own prejudices and ignore the ethical choice before us, when faced with a particular situation. As Sandel (2020) mentions, the obscure side of the meritocratic ideal is associated precisely to its most attractive promise: that each person can control their fate and become whatever he or she wishes, based on talent and effort. This denies the glaring inequality of opportunity and takes the arrogance of the individualistic, technocratic and authoritarian paradigm of learning institutions to new heights. The morality cloud that engulfs schools is, without a doubt, necessary, but it is also revealed to be terribly insufficient. Morality is founded on certainties, but ethics demands we get our hands dirty (Aranguren, 2021). The education of each student, beyond the abstract and universal ideals, lacks a deep ethical awakening that takes place when we meet face to face, every day.

The educational paradigm of care can be a key for opposing the bureaucratic and technocratic paradigm of labelling and disqualifying students by stripping them of their identity, by making them invisible in school and, thus, reproducing the original inequalities.

The educational paradigm of care is anchored in the politics of recognition, proximity, respect and assistance. This act of recognition constitutes a fundamental act in education. Aranguren (2021) describes it in four steps. The first has to do with recognising each other, each student as a person, as a unique being who deserves to be known and greeted by name. The student should know that I see him or her as a whole person. The second is to allow the student to emerge, by suspending

prejudices, judgements, demands or impositions. Then we wait and we welcome the person that he or she is, the one that shows up, instead of imposing the person we imagine them to be or the person we think they ought to be according to the educational canons. In order for the other to emerge I must abandon my expectations and even my certainties, because the other «is not the right piece of a system, he or she is a mystery standing before me» (p. 258). This step requires humility and an availability to forge a path together: students, teachers and families, whenever possible. The third step involves listening to the other, to what they have to say and to what they don't say, instead of

dumping on them all that I know and all that I think I know about them (which is always an act of vanity and arrogance) along with the paraphernalia of technical mechanisms. We must ask questions and listen, carefully and attentively. We must listen with respect, care and delight and avoid the superficiality of a consumerist approach. It is sacred: a human encounter at the highest level, face to face, between two freedoms (as Levinas put it). The «I» in every student we welcome will be able to grow soundly if it meets a «you» who recognises and embraces it, in its differences and characteristics, who makes up space for it to walk on and a road for it to travel, without transforming it into an object of teaching. The fourth step is the «I believe in you» credo, not only in what you say and do, but in you, in the person that you are, a being in the making, who I know can develop and emerge as a unique person, and become someone, no matter the departure point.

This is the door sill of the educational institution, this is the beginning, steeped in love, of a co-construction project of recognition and development. «Not to recognise is to make something invisible» (Aranguren, 2021, p. 265). It always involves labelling and judging in advance, reducing the other to something marginal and undeserving of care. This leads thousands of people to spend many important years of their lives being treated technically like just «some other student». To some, this is catastrophic, for all it is always incomprehensible and inhumane. This can only be understood under technocratic and competitive mandates, in light of the rules of the market and the way citizens are disciplined as workers and servants, made to stand in line, in light of the administrative control of citizen.

Without recognition there is no education, which is the same as saying that without actions inscribed in a culture of care there is no education. We get lost too often in trying to justify the need to invest in education, we spend too much time on institutions like the OECD, on the PISA rankings, the European Union recommendations, the advices from round tables, the inspiring UNESCO documents, when the most important factor is within reach, every day, in each gesture.

In education, the recognition is the principle of rebirth, as Aranguren (2021) highlights. The French verb *re-con-naître* is particularly felicitous: to be born again with. Through this encounter a new horizon of possibilities opens up, which had until that moment been denied or closed off. To paraphrase Leonard Cohen, a crack opens up so that the light can get in.

### **In conclusion**

In line with the teachings of the *Fratelli Tutti* Encyclical, the socio-educational project Arco Maior participates in this ethical awakening and in this practice of respectful proximity and recognition, with small groups of adolescents who have left schools, after the latter neglected them ([www.arcomaior.pt](http://www.arcomaior.pt)). We need to get our hands dirty every day; to recreate and reinvent educational environments (alternative educational arenas, as Te Riele (2006) suggests), able to recognise and promote each student's abilities, so that they can pull themselves up and make their own way.

There are no dead ends in education, for the simple reason that nothing is impossible in human relationships and fraternal love. We witness on a daily basis, in our pedagogical practices, with joy, in the midst of significant contradictions and conflicts, these excluded youngsters pulling themselves up, grabbing their tools and marching forward.

Despite our efforts, the differences, tensions, contradictions and paradoxes between inclusion and exclusion and around the quest for equity, equality of opportunity and social justice persist and will remain alive. The contradictory social mandates that hover over the mission of schools will not disappear. We must immerse ourselves in these tensions, contradictions and paradoxes, avoiding calculations, more or less bureaucratic concessions and technocratic subversions, which marginalise and exclude some children.

Indeed, there is no other option for educators in hospitable schools (Baptista, 2016): inspired by moral norms and acting like the Good Samaritan, they are compassionate, they abandon their route and get their hands dirty as they pick up the wounded, adopting ethical practices marked by attention, care and the recognition of others. These practices constitute the answer that is humanly irrefutable in the face of those who ask us to be responsible, starting with the most vulnerable, the poorer and the lost, who are marginalised and excluded within schools. These practices go to the heart of a democratic and fair school.

This is why collecting raw reports of situations of vulnerability and marginalisation taking place within schools that claim to be inclusive remains a political priority.

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## LA FRATERNIDAD Y SUS DEBILIDADES

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**Resumen** El discurso sobre la fraternidad, en los diferentes ámbitos de su aplicación de la política a la religión, suele utilizar la noción como si fuera de significación clara y unívoca. Sin embargo, se trata de una categoría cargada de significaciones diferentes, incluso problemáticas. El artículo parte de una breve crítica de la utilización abstracta y muy genérica de dicha categoría, para centrarse en el análisis de un número significativo de problemas de la relación fraternal concreta. Desde ese recorrido, se gana una noción de fraternidad a la vez abierta y concreta, que encuentra el hermano (la hermana) en cada humano vulnerable. Una pedagogía de la relación fraternal como relación abierta a cada humano, en la realidad concreta del cara a cara, es una pedagogía a camino de una verdadera fraternidad universal, más allá del globalismo abstracto o uniforme, y más allá del tribalismo cerrado.

### Palabras-

**-clave** Fraternidad, violencia, responsabilidad, vulnerabilidad, prójimo.


**Abstract** The discourse on fraternity, in the different fields of its application from politics to religion, often uses the notion as if it had a clear and univocal meaning. However, it is a category loaded with different, even problematic, meanings. The article starts with a brief critique of the abstract and very generic use of this category, and focuses on the analysis of a significant number of problems of the concrete fraternal relationship. From this recourse, a notion of fraternity that is both open and concrete, which finds the brother (sister) in every vulnerable human being, is gained. A pedagogy of the fraternal relationship as a relationship open to every human being, in the concrete reality of face to face, is a pedagogy on the way to a true universal fraternity, beyond abstract or uniform globalism, and beyond closed tribalism.

**Keywords** Fraternity, violence, responsibility, vulnerability, neighbour.

El asunto fundamental de la encíclica *Fratelli tutti* es, explícitamente, la universalidad de la fraternidad: “Las páginas siguientes no intentan resumir la doctrina sobre el amor fraterno, sino que se detienen en su dimensión universal, en su apertura a todos” (FT nº 6). Ahora bien, se ha

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vuelto habitual afirmar que, de los tres principios universales de la revolución francesa – igualdad, libertad, fraternidad – el último ha sido completamente olvidado en su realización pragmática y quizá incluso en la reflexión teórica. La razón de semejante olvido se coloca, frecuentemente, en el hecho de que la sociedad inaugurada por la revolución no reconoce un “padre” común. No discuto cierta validez esta justificación. Pero creo que la cuestión es más amplia y compleja. Hay otros problemas internos a la noción y la realidad de la fraternidad que habrían originado cierto fracaso en su aplicación universal. Creo que esos problemas siguen afectando al uso actual de la categoría, sea en ambiente político sea en otros ambientes, incluso en su significado pedagógico. A este nivel, es incuestionable el impacto de la encíclica en un programa de educación para la fraternidad, sea a escala interpersonal, sea a escala económica y política. Sin embargo, los problemas de la noción de fraternidad afectarán al sentido profundo de referido impacto.

En ese sentido, es mi intención presentar un breve trabajo de desconstrucción de diferentes significados de la fraternidad, en cuanto intento de hacer más claro lo que queremos decir cuando hablamos de fraternidad. Para ello, empezaré con un planteamiento más general de la cuestión, pasando enseguida a un breve análisis de ciertos problemas de su significación concreta, para terminar con una propuesta de comprensión de la fraternidad que posibilite eventualmente superar los problemas planteados anteriormente.

### **1. Fraternidad abstracta**

El problema inicial y más general de todos nuestros discursos sobre la fraternidad es el hecho de que la noción sea mayoritariamente empleada de forma abstracta. Por una parte, se utiliza frecuentemente como si fuera evidente y estuviera consensuado su significado, sin llegar a clarificar en qué sentidos se aplica. En realidad, se aplica normalmente en el sentido banal romántico de una convivencia armónica entre los humanos, deseablemente entre todos los humanos. Por otra parte, al hablar de una fraternidad universal, se amplía de tal manera su significado en cuanto relación inter-humana o incluso en cuanto modelo de sociedad, o incluso en cuanto utopía de una humanidad común, que el contenido real de lo común no llega nunca a ser concretado, haciendo que la noción de fraternidad quede en realidad vacía de contenido.

La cuestión de un posible vaciamiento de la noción de fraternidad debido a una abstracción sin contenido preciso creo que podría ser colocada en dos sentidos algo distintos, aunque relacionados.

1. El primero se relaciona con la posible reducción *formal* del concepto. En un sentido semejante al formalismo del primer imperativo categórico de Kant, la fraternidad universal podría entenderse simplemente como la universalización de una regla de acción. Aunque añadiendo algo al imperativo kantiano, podríamos formular la regla universal de la fraternidad de siguiente modo: “actúa siempre como si la fraternidad fuera la regla de actuación válida para todos los humanos”. En realidad, esta fórmula aparenta añadir contenido a la fórmula de Kant; sin embargo, al no definir



qué significa, concretamente, la fraternidad, no tiene mucho más contenido que la formulación kantiana, ya que la regla de la acción nos es más que el hecho de que cada uno pertenezca a una misma humanidad universal – o incluso a una única y misma realidad, más allá de lo humano.

Incluso por relación a la segunda formulación del imperativo kantiano, la idea abstracta de fraternidad mantiene su formalismo. Si la formuláramos del siguiente modo: “actúa siempre de tal manera que trates a los otros humanos como hermanos”, aparentemente lograríamos, como antes, colocar algún contenido en la formulación. Sin embargo, al mantener indefinido lo que significa concretamente ser hermano – ya que, en realidad, sus significados son más bien ambiguos – la formulación sería incluso más formal que la segunda formulación kantiana del imperativo, en la medida en que “tratar al otro humano como un fin y nunca como un medio” implica un contenido quizá más preciso que “tratar al otro humano como un hermano”, a no ser que definiéramos claramente lo que significa ser hermano. Pero eso es lo que queda en abierto, precisamente, cuando se habla de fraternidad en un sentido universal abstracto. En ese sentido, la fraternidad nada añadiría al concepto de humanidad o de realidad, los cuales en sí mismo son conceptos abstractos, todavía sin contenido concreto alguno. En este caso significaría una fraternidad en realidad no existente, ya que sería una fraternidad sin hermanos reales.

2. El intento de hacer real el principio abstracto de la fraternidad universal podrá resultar en un modelo de fraternidad *global*, en realidad idéntica a una fraternidad uniforme, ya que la concretización en una determinada forma hace de ella la única forma aceptable de la fraternidad. Paradójicamente, una fraternidad global uniforme jamás sería universal, sino tan solo la aplicación de una particularidad a la totalidad de las relaciones interhumanas. A propósito de esta problemática globalización, fruto de lo que denomina “maldición del Atlas”, Bruno Latour habla de nuestra celebración “de la ‘fraternidad humana’ y de la ‘unidad del mundo’ gracias a la construcción de un modelo reducido, un facsímil en miniatura” (Latour, 2015, p. 171). A su vez, esta reducción del universal a una forma particular, al ser transferida hacia la globalidad, anula su particularidad concreta, de lo que resulta otra forma de abstracción: la abstracción, por globalización de un contenido que deja de ser contenido concreto y particular, transformándose en pura forma que, uniformemente, tiene la pretensión de poder aplicarse en todo lugar, globalmente. Pero lo que es propio de todo lugar no es concretamente realizado en lugar específico alguno. Al no tener lugar particular, a no ser el no-lugar global, no tiene contenido verdaderamente concreto, sino que sigue en la abstracción de una fraternidad no real.

3. Además de la universalización sin contenido y de la globalización a través de un contenido uniforme sin lugar concreto, la abstracción de la fraternidad puede manifestarse en un sentido algo más sutil. La economía de la dádiva, presente en la gratuidad de la fraternidad, si no se encarna en dinámicas de relaciones interpersonales concretas, permanece como una posibilidad por decir *supra-ética*. Por una parte, al implicar cierto sacrificio de sí mismo, puede tener consecuencias equívocas; por otra parte, al no ser directamente moral (un mandamiento, una exigencia), puede

permanecer en lo “no-moral o incluso in-moral” (Ricoeur, p. 279). La superación misma de la ética como base de la justicia – incluso en su versión institucionalizada – implicaría que la fraternidad pudiera presentarse como una dimensión de la relación más allá de la justicia. Pero la superación de la justicia no estaría muy lejos de la destrucción de la justicia misma (Derrida, 1994, p. 267). Además, el estatuto supra-ético de la fraternidad podrá reducirla a pura utopía (Thiel, 2018, p. 5), que puede quizá alimentar el deseo de los humanos en su práctica de la existencia cotidiana, pero jamás hallará un lugar real en el cotidiano de la vida.

Ante los problemas colocados por la abstracción de la fraternidad, sea como puro formalismo, sea como uniformismo, sea como utopismo, se plantea la necesidad de concretar la noción, bien a través de la clarificación de sus diversos significados bien a través del análisis cuidadoso de sus variadas realizaciones cotidianas.

## **2. Niveles de concretización**

Precisamente en el nivel de sus diversos significados y de sus variadas aplicaciones cotidianas, la noción de fraternidad podría organizarse en tres campos, del más restringido al más amplio.

1. El punto de partida más elemental de la noción de fraternidad es, sin duda, su dimensión biológica. Fraternidad es la relación de hermanos que tienen un padre y/o una madre comunes. El significado de esta relación, además del origen común, puede centrarse en el hecho de que se trata de una relación predeterminada, como un dato no escogido libremente, como al envés sucede con la amistad. Además, con base en ese elemento no libre, hay cierta configuración gratuita de la relación, independientemente de su rentabilidad, y una dimensión de responsabilidad hacia el hermano, hasta la sustitución si fuera necesario.

Sin embargo, como es por demás conocido, la relación entre hermanos biológicos no está libre de problemas. Por una parte, habría que referir los problemas internos. El deseo mimético, según el paradigma del análisis propuesto por René Girard, conduce a conflictos muchas veces mortales. Hay, por lo tanto, gran proximidad entre la fratría y el fratricidio. Que el origen profundo de este conflicto esté en el miedo de que no haya lugar para más que uno (Pagazzi, 2008), o que esté en una relación problemática con el padre, muchas veces también culpado por el conflicto de los hermanos<sup>1</sup>, la verdad es que frecuentemente se puede hablar de una “diabolización de la fraternidad” (Hébert, 2018, 503-510) como expresión de la rivalidad, la envidia y los celos que se desarrollan en la relación entre hermanos.

Además de estos problemas internos a la relación familiar fraterna, hay los problemas propiamente externos, en la medida en que una fuerte relación interior a la fratría, aunque con sus dificultades, no pocas veces origina una oposición agresiva al exterior de la familia o del grupo de hermanos. La

fraternidad biológica implicaría, en este sentido, una exclusión de lo diferente o extraño al grupo de hermanos.

Esta exclusión puede ser interna a la familia, en la medida en que incluso las hermanas serían excluidas de cierto nivel de fraternidad. El concepto de fraternidad podría implicar, ya a este nivel primario, una exclusión de género, reduciendo la fraternidad a su configuración masculina (Forcades & Vila, 2018, p. 414-428).

Respecto a los problemas planteados por este primer nivel de la fraternidad, podrían formularse dos cuestiones, entre muchas otras: ¿Será la violencia de una fraternidad diabolizada más originaria que la relación de responsabilidad gratuita de una fraternidad simbolizada? O entonces, al nivel de la problemática de género, ¿serán las hermanas simple repetición de los hermanos, o habrá un lugar especial para ellas en la superación del conflicto de los hermanos? (Thiel, 2018, p. 6).

2. Sin embargo, la fraternidad biológica se expande a otros significados, siendo la primera aplicación metafórica precisamente la fraternidad de grupo, que puede revelarse una fraternidad tribal. A ese nivel, lo que funda una relación de hermanos ya no son los padres comunes sino un territorio, una etnia, una cultura, una lengua comunes. En este nivel nos hallamos ante una configuración situada entre el dato previo no libre (ya que no decidimos inicialmente nuestro grupo de pertenencia) y una elección de las relaciones que entablamos por alianza. Los aspectos positivos de esta modalidad de fraternidad son, sin duda, la fuerza de una identidad definida y asumida, así como los beneficios de la pertenencia a una comunidad<sup>2</sup>.

Sin embargo, hay muchos problemas asociados a esta modalidad de fraternidad, que son problemas a nivel personal, pero sobre todo a nivel socio-político y cultural. Por una parte, como en la fraternidad biológica, hay problemas internos, en la medida en que la proximidad de los vecinos provoca entre ellos conflictos semejantes a los que existen entre hermanos biológicos; por otra parte, y aquí quizá con un impacto más significativo, hay problemas en la relación externa, que son genéricamente los problemas de exclusión de lo diferente como extranjero, porque no pertenece a la comunidad de hermanos que forman el grupo cerrado en una identidad interpretada como propiedad (Esposito, 2002, p. 21ss).

Es debido a los problemas de exclusión provocados por este nivel de la fraternidad por lo que Enrique Dussel propone el concepto de solidaridad como superación de la fraternidad (Dussel, 2017; Derrida, 1994). Según él, la noción de solidaridad revela más capacidad de universalidad que la noción de fraternidad.

Por una parte, la fraternidad en sentido cerrado, como la interpreta Dussel, es problemática incluso en su dinámica interna, una vez que puede ignorar la justicia. “El ‘amigo’ en la fraternidad es el que vive la unidad en el todo (de la familia, de la comunidad política). En este sentido, la amistad es sin embargo ambigua: puede amar con amor de amistad (de mutua benevolencia) un miembro de una ‘banda de ladrones’, y luchar por el interés común de la banda.” (Dussel, 2018).

Por otra parte, provocando una dinámica de exclusión por concentración en el grupo de pertenencia y su identidad, provoca necesariamente la enemistad o la hostilidad y no puede ser, por lo tanto, universal, sin enemigos en sentido total. “Si no hay “enemigos” no hay sabiduría (que se recorta desde el ser frente al no-ser), ni ser-para-la-muerte, y ni siquiera fraternidad, porque ésta supone la unidad de la comunidad ante lo extranjero, lo otro, el enemigo (la hostilidad en la ontología es la otra cara de la fraternidad).” (*Ibidem*) Para que sea posible una superación de la hostilidad en una ontología cerrada, comprendida como totalidad, es necesario superar la idea de fraternidad como base de esa totalidad cerrada, abriéndola a una alteridad que rompe los límites predefinidos de la fratría tribal. “El que establece la relación de solidaridad, que tiene cordialidad con el miserable (miseri-cordia), supera la fraternidad de la amistad en el sistema y se arriesga a abrirse al ancho campo de la Alteridad que se origina por una ‘responsabilidad por el Otro’ pre-ontológica” (*Ibidem*).

La crítica propuesta por Dussel es semejante a la formulada por Derrida, aunque desde fundamentos filosóficos relativamente diferentes. La posición de Derrida, presentada sobre todo en su obra *Politiques de la amitié*, constituye precisamente el punto de partida del texto de Dussel.

Aunque el texto de Derrida sea sobre la amistad, en todas las variantes de sus significados y dramas, hay momentos en que Derrida es explícito en la crítica de aquella forma de amistad que llama fraternidad – con ello reduciendo naturalmente la noción de fraternidad a uno de sus significados. A ella contraponen precisamente una dimensión de la amistad – que según él coincide con su infinitización, que en realidad es su dimensión utópica, incondicionada e incondicional – que sería la única capaz de universalidad. “Esta amistad inconmensurable... ¿será la que nosotros intentamos aquí apartar de su adherencia fraternal, de su inclinación a tomar los aspectos económicos, genealógicos, etnocéntricos, androcéntricos de la fraternidad? O ¿será todavía una fraternidad, pero una fraternidad dividida en su concepto, una fraternidad conduciendo al infinito, más allá de toda figura literal del hermano, una fraternidad que no excluyera sea quien sea [quiconque]?... Así, la verdadera fraternidad, la fraternidad en sentido propio, sería la fraternidad universal, espiritual, simbólica, infinita, la fraternidad jurada, etc. y no la fraternidad en sentido estricto, la del hermano ‘natural’ (como si existiera), del hermano viril por oposición a la hermana, del hermano determinado, en esta familia, en esta nación, en esta lengua. Y lo que nosotros aquí afirmamos de la fraternité, como esquema dominante de la amistad, en ella lleva, como en todos los valores semánticos asociados, su desconcertante hipérbole” (Derrida, 1994, pp. 264-268).

3. El nivel de la hipérbole podría denominarse también el nivel ético (Rosa, 2018, pp. 45-57)<sup>3</sup> de la noción de fraternidad y es definido desde la exigencia ética – o supra-ética – de amar al hermano (biológico o no) como a sí mismo.

Positivamente, este nivel de la fraternidad manifiesta de forma más clara el carácter libre y de elección, que normalmente sucede tras un largo proceso, más allá de la sangre e incluso del grupo, que no eran elegidos o no completamente (solo el grupo de amigos puede ser elegido). Eso implica la transición de una fraternidad centrada biológica o étnicamente hacia sentimientos fraternales, como manifestación más larga de la fraternidad inter-humana.

Sin embargo, tampoco este nivel de la fraternidad está libre de problemas. En primer lugar, está el problema formal de que el mandamiento de amar al hermano como a sí mismo presupone el *sí mismo* como criterio de la actuación. Quedamos, por lo tanto, en el circuito de la mismidad como modelo de relación. El hermano seguiría siendo otro yo, que sería amado en función de su semejanza al sujeto del amor.

Además, como dimensión solamente moral, diferentemente de la igualdad y de la libertad, la fraternidad no tiene estatuto jurídico, ya que no puede ser exigida como un derecho (Cf. Theobald, 2016, p. 21). Quedaría solamente como obligación moral; pero incluso a este nivel, por su dimensión de gratuidad supra-moral, queda en un territorio socialmente problemático.

Ante todos los problemas colocados por la noción de fraternidad, aunque a todos los niveles con elementos muy positivos, avanza enseguida la propuesta de una relectura de la noción de fraternidad universal – y solo esta es pedagógicamente válida, según la *Fratelli tutti* – como proximidad, no en el sentido de proximidad en el espacio o en el tiempo, sino en el sentido del mandamiento de amar al prójimo formulado en la Escritura (Duque, 2021).

### **Conclusión: Fraternidad como proximidad**

Para una fraternidad a la vez verdaderamente universal y verdaderamente concreta o particular, la categoría primordial es la categoría del otro como rostro desnudo<sup>4</sup>. Ella representa, por una parte, la dimensión incondicional de la fraternidad y, por otra parte, su dimensión encarnada. El prójimo se presenta, por lo tanto, como categoría de la incondicionalidad, pero no de forma abstracta, sino en el cara-a-cara con sea quien sea (Esquirol, 2021, 19). La persona del otro es hermano aun antes de sus calidades y de sus pertenencias, lo que significa antes de sus propiedades individuales o de las propiedades comunes de su comunidad de pertenencia. El hermano universal sería el prójimo – no por su proximidad física, sino por su condición de otro expuesto, cara-a-cara. El amor a los enemigos estaría más cerca de este mandamiento que el amor al amigo o incluso al hermano en sentido limitado.

La única interpretación abierta y concreta de la fraternidad universal sería aquella que considera que cualquier uno o una que, independientemente de su estatuto definido por una pertenencia o otra característica, al exigir u ordenar mi cuidado, en cuanto vulnerable o pobre, es inmediatamente mi hermano o mi hermana. Lo que implica una fraternidad más allá de la propiedad – no como fraternía de lo propio, de la identidad, sino como capacidad de exposición a lo diferente, no propio. Superar la propiedad incluso del sí mismo; en ese sentido, solo el pobre (el que muere para sí mismo) es capaz de verdadera fraternidad.

La interpretación de la fraternidad desde esta noción de proximidad tiene efectos sobre los problemas enunciados más arriba. En el fondo, estaríamos ante dos paradigmas diferentes, quizá antagónicos de interpretación de la realidad, sobre todo de la realidad humana. El primero, que podríamos denominar incluso inmanentista, interpreta la relación inter-humana solamente desde su dinámica histórica conflictiva, expresada frecuentemente en mitos originarios de las culturas diversas. El eventual origen común de los humanos – representados en los hermanos – o no existe, siendo el proceso histórico simple desarrollo de tensiones, naturales o no; o será un padre problemático, que introduce desigualdades en las relaciones, provocando el inevitable enfrentamiento. Los humanos, o no son en realidad libres, ya que simplemente corresponden a una dinámica naturalmente violenta, o son fuertemente influenciados, por el padre injusto, hacia una relación de violencia. La fraternidad sería necesariamente – por necesidad natural o por necesidad histórica – diabólica en su constitución misma.

El otro paradigma, el de una fraternidad positiva o simbólica – por oposición a la diabólica – representaría la dinámica de relación de responsabilidad gratuita de cada humano hacia otro humano, sea quien sea<sup>5</sup>. Sin embargo, la condición de posibilidad de su positividad se halla en su origen mismo. El padre común no es el padre problemático, ni porque provoca la relación violenta entre hermanos, eventualmente a través de una preferencia desequilibrada; ni porque en su autoridad no permite la libertad de sus hijos, lo que provocaría la idea de que la liberación de la fraternidad diabólica solo sería posible a través de la muerte del padre, a la que corresponde eventualmente el intento moderno, sin que de ello haya resultado una clara superación de la violencia. El padre común correspondería antes a la llamada ética: “Donde está tu hermano?” (Gn 4, 9). El padre común no es el padre imaginado, en el deseo mimético de los hijos, como padre que origina la injusticia entre hermanos, al amar a unos más que a otros; el verdadero padre común se manifiesta en la interpelación hacia la responsabilidad hacia el otro (hermano). Eso transforma la dinámica de la responsabilidad en respuesta a una interpelación originaria – trascendente, no inmiscuida en las dinámicas inmanentes equívocas – hacia una obligación ante el otro, haciendo de él un hermano.

Pero lo que determina el contenido concreto de la fraternidad es la responsabilidad ética incondicional y abierta (no abstracta), es el núcleo de una verdadera fraternidad universal cotidiana

y concreta. Es un evento dinámico, jamás pre-definido, una vez que cualquiera es hermano de cualquiera – pero siempre en una situación particular. No se trata ni simplemente un hecho de naturaleza, biológico, ni simplemente un hecho de elección, según la voluntad arbitraria de cada uno. Es una exigencia de respuesta en responsabilidad, presente en la presencia de otro humano cara-a-cara ante mí. Relación asimétrica, no en el sentido del conflicto provocado por el resentimiento del deseo mimético o por el privilegio parental, sino más bien en la asimetría de la responsabilidad.

Esta noción de fraternidad coincide con el mandamiento de amar al prójimo como extranjero, formulado en el libro del Levítico (Lv 19, 18) y confirmado en la narrativa evangélica del Samaritano (Lc 10, 25-37); y coincide con el mandamiento aún más radical de amar a los enemigos, porque en realidad son hermanos. Solo en este sentido muy concreto y cotidiano, en la relación particular del cara-a-cara, la fraternidad es verdaderamente universal, abierta, sin ser abstracta. Una fraternidad así es la propuesta de la *Fratelli tutti*. Como propuesta es un desafío para la humanidad, cristiana o no; son los desafíos de este talante los que justifican verdaderamente la actividad educativa.

Una vez que la fraternidad profunda, verdaderamente universal y verdaderamente encarnada o concreta, no es ni un hecho natural adquirido o predeterminado por una necesidad, ni un hecho de deliberación simplemente individualista, sino más bien un proceso dinámico de exposición interpersonal a la vez libre e incondicionada, es evidente la necesidad de una educación orientada hacia la práctica concreta de la fraternidad abierta. No se trata, sin embargo, de una educación estrictamente “cristiana” – ni tampoco “católica” – aunque se pueda tomar este tópico educativo como el elemento nuclear de dicha educación, sea en las familias cristianas sea en instituciones educativas católicas. Pero el programa es, por su naturaleza – lo que queda muy claro en la encíclica – para toda la humanidad, ya que un futuro más humano solo será posible con el desarrollo de la fraternidad universal y concreta, sea al nivel de las relaciones personales sea al nivel de las instituciones que dan cuerpo a variadas dimensiones de la humanidad, como la economía y la política (la denominada “amistad social” – o mejor dicho, “fraternidad social”). En ese sentido, además de una educación para la igualdad y para la libertad, se nos plantea el gran desafío de una educación para la fraternidad abierta. Si el programa de la revolución francesa quizá no haya llegado, en la práctica, tan lejos, los problemas actuales de la humanidad y de la tierra revelan la urgente necesidad de una gran inversión en la educación para la fraternidad, en el sentido más profundo aquí presentado.

## Notas

- <sup>1</sup> Que esa culpa sea real o imaginada por los hijos, el resultado es idéntico. Ver André Wénin, “La fraternité, projet éthique. Histoire des frères dans la Genèse”, in *Le défi de la fraternité*, Ed. por Marie-Jo Thiel et Marc Feix (Wien: LIT Verlag, 2018), 189-206.
- <sup>2</sup> Aspecto muy valorado por la Encíclica, en el entorno de una Teología del Pueblo.

- <sup>3</sup> Rosa llama a este nivel el significado de la fraternidad como virtud.
- <sup>4</sup> Me inspiro, evidentemente, en la obra de Emmanuel Levinas.
- <sup>5</sup> O incluso hacia el no humano, como en el desarrollo metafórico de la noción de fraternidad por parte de San Francisco de Assis, hasta su expresión como *Fratelli tutti* (incluyendo los animales y la tierra).

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## FRATELLI TUTTI AND THE DIALOGIC SPIRIT OF CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION: A REFLECTION ON CHRISTIAN HUMANISM AND ONLINE LEARNING

Anna Blackman\* and Leonardo Franchi\*\*

**Abstract** Online and blended learning is now commonplace in educational institutions throughout the world. Alongside its potential for breaking down barriers, a dependence on online approaches runs the risk of dehumanising the educational process. In his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis addresses the need for the Church and society to develop a sense of fraternity and solidarity that keeps the human person at the centre of the educational process. The role of the Catholic university in the construction of human fraternity today, is to question how this mission can be addressed in a digitized culture. By utilizing Christian Humanism as a foundation stone for institutional and curricular reform, a fraternal and dialogic spirit of encounter can be sustained.

**Keywords** Christian Humanism, Blended Learning, Fraternity, Online Learning

### Introduction


This essay will explore the possibilities which Christian Humanism offers for the promotion of an authentic spirit of collegiality and dialogue in Catholic Higher Education. It begins with a brief exploration of what Christian Humanism could mean in this context, drawing on the words of Pope Francis in the launch address for the *Global Compact on Education*. The authors then turn to reflect on what this means for online learning. After reflecting on Pope Francis' assessment of digital technology, some thought is given to how online learning is not simply a challenge to authentic education but is an invitation to reflect on what we do and how we do it. This leads to further discussion of how Christian Humanism could facilitate authentic dialogue in an online environment. Finally, the authors reflect on the opportunities and challenges this creates for Catholic Higher Education.

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### **Catholic Higher Education and Christian Humanism**

Catholic universities are part of a global network (International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU)) which offers a range of support measures to their mission. The official record of IFCU reminds us that “The true sense of IFCU’s mission is to constantly reinvent in a spirit of continuity and openness that combines fond memories and future aspirations” (Jarton 2016, p. 9). This is, rightly, a challenge and encouragement to those with an interest in the development of Catholic Higher Education.

It is important to remember that both words, “Catholic” and “university” must work *in dialogue* with each other if the “Catholic university” is to make a meaningful contribution to the world of education and the life of the Church. A Catholic university, therefore, must first be a very good *university*: this is where it becomes a place of “encounter” owing to the excellent educational, cultural and pastoral experiences it should offer all people. Its Catholic identity in turn offers a profound educational vision which is grounded in the tenets of Christian Humanism and is part of, not separate from, wider academic life.

It is important to begin with a crucial question: what do we mean by Christian Humanism? Some prior reflection on wider cultural and educational ideas will help to frame the discussion to come. Much of contemporary educational thinking emphasises the importance of outcomes related to the world of STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (Johnson et al., 2020). Of course, these four domains are powerful forces which shape the way we live today and have, without doubt, brought multiple benefits to the human condition in medicine, travel, communication and transport, to give just four examples. Any advances in educational practice will be powered by technology and a global vision of education which in turn will rely heavily on the border-opening possibilities offered by the vibrant communications technology which the pandemic has now made the currency *du jour*.

In such an exciting blue-chip field, there is a danger that calls to reflect on Christian Humanism could seem like little more than a transitory indulgence for the intellectual benefit of the few, not the many. That would be a mistake as it is the tradition of Christian Humanism which offers the intellectual, cultural, and pastoral foundations necessary for an authentic appreciation of both *fraternity* and the Catholic university’s role in the construction of a common home on this planet.

In *Fratelli tutti* (henceforth FT) Pope Francis offers some wide-ranging reflections on the topic of human fraternity in a world too often plagued by so-called “culture wars”. His personal Christian inspiration compels him to reach out to others (“people of good will”) in the hope of fostering dialogue and fraternity (Pope Francis, 2020a). A similar way of thinking is discovered in his video message for the launch of the *Global Compact on Education* in 2020 which is, in fact, an invitation to open our minds to the new pedagogical horizons offered by “Christian Humanism”:

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we want to commit ourselves courageously to developing an educational plan within our respective countries, investing our best energies and introducing creative and transformative processes in cooperation with civil society. In this, our point of reference should be the social doctrine that, inspired by the revealed word of God and Christian Humanism provides a solid basis and a vital resource for discerning the paths to follow in the present emergency (Pope Francis, 2020b).

Careful study of the language of the *Global Compact* is instructive: it does not make big claims for Catholic education's particular charisms and seems to refer more to the life of the school than to the life of the university. Nonetheless, it is possible to draw on the ideas contained therein and apply, as appropriate, to the university. Pope Francis's articulation of a "Catholic" vision of education exemplifies how this vision is a means to dialogue with others. The Church's multiple educational traditions are part of its outward-facing mission: the nature of the human person—created in the image and likeness of God but wounded by Original Sin— demands, therefore, the presentation of an educational "philosophy", or set of underpinning principles, which is intentionally "fraternal" and not, at the outset, explicitly rooted in the language and thought forms of religion. This is not to ignore the importance of religion and the centrality of Truth, but to acknowledge that the search for a shared educational language seems to be one way to open the doors of dialogue. In line with this way of acting, education becomes a process of "encounter" with the other.

Things become more complex when we consider the reference by Pope Francis to "Christian Humanism" and its place in a thematic chain which includes "social doctrine" and the "revealed word of God". To what is he alluding? Is this a suggestion that the eirenic language of the *Global Compact* is, perhaps, little more than a mirage and that it is, in fact, another means of evangelisation? A deeper discussion of the range and shades of meaning of Christian Humanism vis-a-vis evangelisation would require a much longer study but a satisfactory starting-point comes from Jens Zimmerman:

Religious ideas about human nature, especially Christian ones, and their further development through the process of secularization are deeply embedded in our cultural narrative, and have shaped our collective understanding of human dignity, human rights and social responsibility. Hence, one important reason for reflecting on the idea of humanism in general, and on Christian Humanism in particular, is the need for self-understanding (Zimmerman, 2017, Introduction).

Zimmerman's definition aligns Christian Humanism with "human dignity, human rights and social responsibility", all of which are part of the discourse around human fraternity found in FT. The academy is where critical exploration of the impact of secularization on religious identity and

practice, especially in education, should be found. In so doing, the Catholic university can lead the way in clearing new ground and asking fresh questions on the nature of the human person.

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI, addressing a global convention of university teachers in Rome, sought to articulate a similar vision for universities, using the term “new humanism”, to distinguish the ideals of Christian Humanism from those who place (secular) humanism in opposition to religious culture:

The present crisis, however, has less to do with modernity’s insistence on the centrality of man and his concerns, than with the problems raised by a “humanism” that claims to build a *regnum hominis* detached from its necessary ontological foundation. A false dichotomy between theism and authentic humanism, taken to the extreme of positing an irreconcilable conflict between divine law and human freedom, has led to a situation in which humanity, for all its economic and technical advances, feels deeply threatened (Pope Benedict XVI, 2007).

Pope Benedict is, it seems, offering a philosophical rationale for Christian Humanism, which he terms “authentic humanism”, owing to its grounding in the Incarnation and Christian understanding of the human person. In this way of thinking, he follows Pope John Paul II’s mention of “authentic humanism” in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (Pope John Paul II, 1979).

To make firm links between Christian Humanism and education today is not without its challenges. In the world of Higher Education, even in the network of Catholic universities, is there sufficient space for collegial reflection on the possibilities offered by Christian Humanism for addressing issues such as: performativity, a results-driven culture, and the myriad issues around secularism? Furthermore, is there an additional risk that the use of the *language* of Christian Humanism could be seen as “old-fashioned” and, potentially, a barrier to shared understanding of education? These important questions, instead of being blocks to progress, offer opportunities for deeper thinking on how the rise of “new communications technology” could be a suitable vehicle for the promotion of Christian Humanism as the foundation stone of a refreshed understanding of contemporary Catholic Higher Education.

### **Refreshing the Mission to Educate**

What is the Catholic mission to educate? There are multiple ways in which we can define education per se: to add “Catholic” to the debate makes things even more complex. We can, however, make the claim that the Church is a body which has education, broadly understood, in its DNA. History shows us the many forms this has taken. One expression of the Church’s educational mission was the creation of the universities of medieval and Renaissance Europe (Young, 2019). These communities of scholars were, we could argue, a gift of the Church to culture, and while the nature, shape, and aims of the university have, rightly, evolved over time, the current global network of

Catholic universities has a duty to preserve for the new generations the spirit of the original *universitas*, duly updated to address the needs of the present age.

The prevalence of digital technology and the widespread post-COVID adoption of online/blended learning, necessitates a reappraisal of how the Church understands its educational mission. As Pope Francis notes in the post-Synodal exhortation to young people, *Christus Vivit*, “It is no longer merely a question of “using” instruments of communication, but of living in a highly digitalized culture” (Pope Francis, 2019, 86). However, a systematic analysis of how to utilize digital resources in the mission to educate is somewhat lacking, despite some initial guidance on “distance learning” from the Holy See in 2021 (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2021). Even if the Church has been quite successful in transferring its “offline” content and teachings on to an accessible digital platform, it has not been so successful in thinking about innovative ways to engage a new generation with this teaching. Is it the case that the Church is too focused on the limitations of technology, rather than its opportunities?

Pope Francis remains somewhat cautionary in his outlook on technology’s role in education. Indeed, in *FT*, he devotes an entire section to what he terms “the illusion of communication”, characterized by “shameless aggression” and “information without wisdom” (Pope Francis, 2020, 42-50). This has particularly problematic ramifications for education. In *Christus Vivit*, he notes at length the dangers of manipulation of knowledge, the spread of falsities, lack of dialogue, and the loss of objectivity:

It should not be forgotten that “there are huge economic interests operating in the digital world, capable of exercising forms of control as subtle as they are invasive, creating mechanisms for the manipulation of consciences and of the democratic process. The way many platforms work often ends up favouring encounter between persons who think alike, shielding them from debate. These closed circuits facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate. The proliferation of fake news is the expression of a culture that has lost its sense of truth and bends the facts to suit particular interests (Pope Francis, 2019, 89).

For Francis, digital communication can even hinder authentic encounter with the other. He speaks of the digital environment as “blocking authentic interpersonal relationships” by fostering “one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence” (Pope Francis, 2019, 88). This also hinders our encounter with truth and knowledge as through increased isolation comes “gradual loss of contact with concrete reality” (Pope Francis, 2019, 88).

What Francis extrapolates here is that although the digital world might appear to give us unlimited access to knowledge, often it functions as an echo chamber in which we selectively engage with others who share our views and can easily shield us from those who have different visions and philosophies. Here “Respect for others disintegrates [...] as we dismiss, ignore or keep others

distant”, making the skills of debate and dialogue null and void (Pope Francis, 42). The danger here is that we lose grip on reality, by only selectively engaging with certain voices and points of view (Pope Francis a, 2020, 47).

However, when set within the context of Francis’ wider vision of Christian Humanism, his caution and hesitancy towards the digital becomes somewhat understandable. At the heart of this, lies the importance of the dignity and sanctity of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God (International Theological Commission, 2004). Whether this dignity is respected and realised serves as the litmus test by which all educational praxis must be judged. And whilst the digital realm presents significant challenges to this, it is possible for educators to utilize digital communication in a way that aligns with Pope Francis’ vision of Christian Humanism and thus advance the mission of Catholic education.

### **Christian Humanism in a Digitized Culture**

The concerns that Pope Francis has about encounter and connection within the digital realm are inherently linked to his concerns over digital acquisition of knowledge. He cautions how the “flood of information at our fingertips does not make for greater wisdom”, and “is not the way to mature in the encounter with the truth”. Rather, for Francis, “Together, we can seek the truth in dialogue” (Pope Francis a, 2020, 50). Here Francis is speaking here of an ethics of encounter that includes a) an encounter with the truth and b) encounter with each other as intertwined pursuits. The question then is if the pursuit of truth is a shared endeavour that involves encounter, how do we enact this in the online environment?

Though it may be more difficult to build community through digital communication, as it lacks “the physical gestures, facial expressions, moments of silence, body language”, (Pope Francis a, 2020, 43) this is not to say that this form of communication needs to be shunned. Rather, it must be used in a way that keeps central the protection of human dignity and the desire for authentic encounter with the other. For Francis, successful communication in interpersonal encounters is marked by the “ability to sit down and listen” which is “paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives” (F Pope Francis a, 2020, 48). The key here is listening to the other; constant communication, does not mean effective communication if we fail to sincerely hear. Importantly, communication in the online environment must be one of dialogical encounter which breaks free of a self-imposed exile behind the screen.

Despite Francis’ caution, he acknowledges that digital communication can present us with distinct opportunities to build such means of encounter, if used appropriately. In *Christus Vivit* he describes how the “web and social networks have created a new way to communicate and bond” (Pope Francis, 2019, 87) and in his 2014 *Message for World Communications Day* he speaks even more

enthusiastically of how the internet provides us with “immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity” which is “truly good, a gift from God”. As the pandemic has shown us, the mission to educate could easily have come to a standstill if it were not for the existence of digital technologies.

If we approach digital technology as “a gift from God”, as Francis does, this immediately changes the way we utilize it. We can compare this to how when the Earth is seen as a gift, we acknowledge the need to protect and care for it, rather than see it as a site for human conquest. In this manner, the purpose of digital communication becomes not a selfish, isolated pursuit, but rather one of engagement and living *fraternity*. It becomes a resource that God provides to help us flourish as human beings. However, for this to be fully realised, the digital realm must be used in service of the human person, rather than subjugating the human person to a technocratic logic.

What Pope Francis is challenging here is not the use of digital technology, but rather the dominance of a technocratic mentality, which makes the “method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm” (Pope Francis, 2015, 107). Essentially this is a reductionist vision that neglects the richness of the human person, placing it at odds with the holistic approach that Catholic education so carefully cultivates. Importantly, where these two approaches differ is that the first sees the human actor as purely rational and independent, whereas the second sees the human person as rational, spiritual, and importantly *relational*, created by God for relationship. For Pope Francis, this is key to how we can appropriately use digital communication, placing it at the service of the person, the human family, and the mission to spread the Gospel: this is the heart of Catholic education. The inherently relational and social nature of the person found in the vision of Christian Humanism, demands an appropriate pedagogical vision.

### **Catholic Education in the Online Classroom**

When applied to Catholic Higher Education, Pope Francis’ language of encounter can help guide us in thinking about an appropriate “Catholic pedagogy” for use in the classroom. Rather than a hinderance, the shift to online/blended learning that Covid has necessitated, presents us with an opportunity to reflect on our current praxis, and how this can more accurately reflect the approach of Christian Humanism. Indeed, there are many ways in which this new technological turn can enhance the mission of Catholic Higher Education. We now know, for example, that the web can break down accessibility barriers, allowing intercontinental educational initiatives to take place at the click of a mouse. The possibilities offered to us through technologies such as lecture capture, or asynchronous learning, also give increased access to students with caring responsibilities or other learning needs (Nordmann et al. 2020). The world of universities is now more accessible, and our Catholic institutions have taken advantage of technology to connect scholars and students in a way that would not have been common in the recent past.

Furthermore, the use of new technologies gives room to explore the dialogical nature of education. A core feature of online and asynchronous praxis is an emphasis on “student ownership” of learning. Some have suggested, though not uncontroversially, that educators should move away from the “banking model” of education in which the educator imparts knowledge, and, in its place, develop models that require students to be active participants in their own learning (Friere, 1993). By using the language of encounter, Pope Francis reminds us that the Catholic vision of education is always dialogical: the communication of knowledge demands encounter and exchange. In many ways, this runs counter-cultural to the ever-dominant paradigm of seeing higher education in economic terms, as a product for purchase. A timely reappraisal of this logic of commodification is much needed.

However, the endeavour to create a socially just online classroom in Catholic institutions is not without its difficulties. We could mention, for example, issues of equity of access to technology, or the inability to replicate practical components of learning in a virtual environment. There are also serious health issues that may result from requiring students and staff to spend long hours seated at screens. Such concerns require ongoing watchfulness if we are to be faithful to the need to offer integral care for our students.

### **Concluding Remarks**

To continue to develop provision and enhance the spirit of dialogue in Catholic Higher Education, the following questions will offer opportunities for both national and international conversations, leading in time to concrete resolutions:

1. To what extent does dialogical online learning help or hinder the mission of Catholic Higher Education today. Is it possible to embed authentic opportunities for “encounter” in the pedagogy of online/blended learning methods?
2. Is it reasonable to repropose the aims of Catholic Higher Education to make them increasingly open to institutional cross-border cooperation? What could this mean for the sacramentality of learning and study as a pathway to the divine (Sullivan, 2018)?
3. In pedagogical terms, how can the Catholic educational tradition act as a site of inspiration for other forms of education – or do we even see this as a possibility? What can Catholic Education learn from wider research which will help Catholic institutions to develop and enhance their provision?

In moving this debate forward, we do so in the knowledge that the educational world post-COVID is now seen in very different tones. Perhaps this presents a unique opportunity to recover the ideals of Christian Humanism, some of which had fallen victim to a technocratic mentality, and invite Catholic universities to make new online partnerships, develop joint qualifications and collaborate in initiatives for the promotion of human fraternity. We finish with some words of *Gaudium et Spes* (1965, 31) which seem especially relevant for the mission of Catholic Higher Education today:



Above all the education of youth from every social background has to be undertaken, so that there can be produced not only men and women of refined talents, but those great-souled persons who are so desperately required by our times.

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## FRATERNITY AND SUPEREROGATION. SOME PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS ON THE ENCYCLICAL “FRATELLI TUTTI”

Stefano Biancu\*

**Abstract** Pope Francis’ encyclical “Fratelli tutti” proposes the so-called parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) as the paradigm of a fraternity understood as a social friendship (see *Fratelli tutti*, n. 56-86). The Samaritan’s attitude is traditionally considered the emblem of “supererogation”. This is a technical term which indicates those actions and attitudes which, while being morally good, are however not strictly required. This area of actions and attitudes has long been considered beyond ethics and beyond the call of duty which is typical of modern citizenship. This paper aims to show that supererogation can be considered an ethical phenomenon and the core of a new form of citizenship.

**Keywords** Fraternity, Supererogation, Ethics, Duty, Citizenship


Pope Francis’ encyclical “Fratelli tutti” proposes the so-called parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) as the paradigm of a fraternity understood as a social friendship (see *Fratelli tutti*, n. 56-86). This proposal is of interest to the moral philosopher for at least a couple of reasons.

The first reason is that the Samaritan's attitude is presented as a moral example which is not only valid for Christians, but for everyone, regardless of their religious beliefs. The second reason is that that attitude is considered valid, not only in the private sphere of interpersonal relationships, but also as a paradigm of a new form of citizenship.

These statements are not obvious at all. The Samaritan’s attitude is traditionally considered the emblem of “supererogation”. This is a technical term which indicates those actions and attitudes which, while being morally good, are however not strictly required. This area of actions and attitudes has long been considered beyond ethics and beyond the call of duty which is typical of modern citizenship.

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## 1. The notion of Supererogation

The history of the concept of supererogation (Heyd, 1982; Janiaud, 2007) has its origins precisely in the parable of the Good Samaritan and, in particular, in the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Christian Bible dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In the instructions the Samaritan gives the innkeeper so that he takes care, in his absence, of the unfortunate pilgrim, the Vulgata reads: "Curam illius habe, et, quodcumque *supererogaveris*, ego, cum rediero, reddam tibi" (Lk 10:35). The Latin verb "*supererogaveris*" is translated, in the current versions of the biblical text, by the periphrasis "whatever more you spend". Supererogation has therefore to do with a "surplus" and, in particular, with an additional cost, an extra expense. This is why the attitude of the Samaritan has traditionally become the emblem of supererogation.

Starting from the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church have introduced the term into the technical language of theology, referring it to actions recommended by spiritual tradition, but contrary to natural inclinations, such as fast and chastity (Dentsoras, 2014, p. 351-372). But it is only with Thomas Aquinas that the term became relevant (Witschen, 2004, pp. 27-40). According to Aquinas, a good moral action can be either commanded or advised. That is, it can be the object of either an obligation (the sphere of "*praecepta*") or a recommendation (the sphere of "*consilia*", such as chastity, poverty, obedience). This second category includes supererogatory actions, i.e. actions which, while being morally positive, are beyond the call of duty. According to Aquinas, counsels are morally superior to commandments. If the latter concern what is good, the former concern a better good. Aquinas' perspective on supererogation became canonical, remaining substantially unchanged for a few centuries, at least until Luther and the other Reformers (Konrad, 2005, pp. 119-140). In their eyes, supererogatory actions took the shape of human claims to obtain salvation thanks to one's own merits.

In the following centuries, the notion of supererogation lost its relevance and centrality, both in theology and philosophy, at least until 1958, when the British philosopher James Urmson published his short essay *Saints and Heroes* (Urmson, 1969, pp. 60-73). Urmson's thesis goes as follows: moral philosophy has traditionally disregarded two types of actions, the saintly and the heroic ones. Such actions would not fall in the commonly accepted classification, according to which moral actions would be divided into (1) morally right obligatory actions, (2) morally wrong prohibited actions, (3) morally neutral permitted actions. Saintly and heroic actions do not fit in this classification as long as they are morally good actions which are not obligatory, not due nor demandable. More precisely, although they may be perceived as mandatory from a first person perspective (i.e. by the subject at the moment of deliberation), they are not so from a third person perspective (i.e. from the point of view of an external observer). According to Urmson, compared to the "basic moral duties", those actions would represent "the higher flights of morality". Following Urmson's pioneering article, a huge debate has opened up in Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy about

the concept of supererogation: about its definition, about the taxonomy of supererogatory actions and attitudes, about the paradoxes inherent in the notion (Archer, 2018; Cowley, 2015; Heyd, 2016).

What is interesting for us is that the encyclical “Fratelli tutti” places supererogatory attitudes and acts – of which the Good Samaritan is a moral example – as a paradigm not only of ethics, but of a new form of citizenship. What can the moral philosopher say about this claim?

## **2. Rethinking the notion of duty**

As I have tried to show elsewhere (Biancu, 2020, pp. 25-39) taking the notion of supererogation seriously requires to rethink the notion of duty. In particular, I think it is necessary to distinguish at least three different levels of the experience of duty.

A first experience of duty is situated at a legal level: my duty corresponds either to the respect of the right of another person or to what is established by a law. This kind of duty is intended to protect freedom and human rights, which are supposed to be an original human feature, as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts it, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (article 1). By setting boundaries and limitations, legal duties aim at protecting everybody's original freedom and rights.

A second experience of duty is situated at an ethical level. A form of responsibility comes up at each encounter between humans. Not only I am responsible for my own actions (which I might be asked to justify), but I am somehow responsible for the other's life and destiny (Levinas, 1961; Waldenfelds, 1997; Waldenfelds, 2002). An implicit call for love is present in each human encounter and I have to respond as suitably as possible to this call.

A third experience of duty is situated at an anthropological level. At this level, the idea according to which all human beings are born free is an abstraction (Ferry, 2004, p. 201). Humans are born able to be free, but they actually need to become free. Freedom has its own genealogy and conditions, and love is one of these conditions. Not only I need to be free in order to love someone, but I also need to receive and give love in order to become free. Only if I act out of love – love for myself and for others – I can truly be free.

Supererogation is beyond the call of duty at a legal level, i.e. beyond what the moral agent might be required to do by either a law or the respect of a third person's rights. At this level, no one has the right to bother me by asking me to love them (i.e. to forgive, to be generous, to give my life for someone...).

But supererogation is not beyond the call of duty at an ethical level: I have to respond as suitably as I can to the call for love of my neighbour, since both their and my destiny depends on my

response. This is what Jaspers called a “metaphysical” responsibility, based on an original solidarity among humans (Jaspers, 1946, p. 11).

Supererogation is not beyond the call of duty on an anthropological level either. At this level, duty is what I actually need in order to become free, to actually become a subject. Something is due to the extent that it is a condition of my subjectivity and liberty. I become subject by freely and suitably responding to someone who in some way bothers me by asking me for love.

According to a very traditional view, supererogation is beyond the call of duty and (therefore) beyond ethics. The implicit presupposition of this view is that duty has in itself a legal shape: it corresponds to the respect of a third person's right or to what is established by a law. But we need to enlarge our understanding of duty, by seeing it also as a necessary condition of possibility (of freedom, of subjectivity, of humanity...). Being one of these conditions of possibility, supererogation exceeds the mere legal understanding of duty, but not duty itself. It therefore becomes in all respects, an ethical phenomenon.

In other words: supererogation can be considered as a "maximum" if compared to the "minimum" which cannot and must not be missing – i.e. the area of what is demanded either by a law or by the respect of a third person's rights. Since it is one of the conditions of freedom and subjectivity, this “maximum” is nevertheless somehow “necessary” – the liberal State needs citizens who are truly free human subjects.

By contributing to create truly human and free subjects, the supererogatory attitude of the Good Samaritan – a fraternity understood as a social friendship – fulfils those premises on which the liberal State lives without being able to guarantee them by itself (Böckenförde, 1976, cit. *Recht, Staat, Freiheit*, 2006, p.112 «Der freiheitliche, säkularisierte Staat lebt von Voraussetzungen, die er selbst nicht garantieren kann»). With good reason, it can be thus considered an ethical phenomenon and the core of a new form of citizenship.

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## THE END OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS? A COMMENT ON SECTIONS 13-14 FROM THE ENCYCLICAL FRATELLI TUTTI<sup>1</sup>

Giuseppe Tognon\*

**Abstract** In §§ 13 and 14, the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* deals with the crisis of historical consciousness and the serious consequences of the contemporary ideology of the ‘end of history’. The claim to “build everything from scratch” is a sign of the crisis of modernity and destroys the possibility of building the future. Contemporary man seems to want to do the opposite of what the historian does and what the Church proposes in the conviction that the time of Salvation cannot be only chronological. The attempt to “possess” time and to translate it into something material, into a prize, hides the fear of believing, which arises from the feeling of our fragility. Historical knowledge and historical awareness are not the same thing, but both are necessary for faith and human coexistence. Knowing the facts of others and ordering one’s own is indispensable for judging reality and provides good arguments for the demand for justice, which is always a comparative evaluation based on the awareness that if life is a divine gift, historical research is a precious human gift for orienting us in time.

**Keywords** Historical awareness, Historical knowledge, Time, Salvation, Justice

The Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* is rich in suggestions. The text works on a “rhizomatic” basis, that corresponds to its inspiring principles, i.e. *fraternity and social friendship*. The ultimate goal of these principles is extending to all human beings the grace of a bond that projects the light of Salvation on human history. Pope Francis tells us that it’s only by going beyond *genos* and blood ties that we will be able to open doors to the Christian revolution. Doors will also open up to a form of paternity and maternity that engages all men of good will in the quest for justice and in the safeguard of creation. Blood and cultural ties are just the tools through which individuals and groups contribute to the species survival. Nonetheless, they do not exhaust the human “generating power” and, above all, they can’t be put forward as the bedrock of the Church, a spiritual community that lives inside history, precisely to guide it and also to witness that history itself will be ultimately overpassed.

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Nevertheless, fraternity can be the new world frontier only if we start from the awareness that humanity is going through some hard times and if we are able to compare present and past. It is clear that every age had their difficulties. But the current period is characterized exactly by the refusal to look at models from the past, as it was always done before, for thousands of years. Our age rejects what a great Catholic historian, Henri-Irenée Marrou, called the “sadness” of the job of the historian, facing all the time human weaknesses and miseries. Globalization has masked identities that close off to defend what they are without understanding how and why they are that way. It makes many peoples captive of dictators and adventurers. It generates some absurd forms of inequality and injustice.

Against a naive use of the idea of fraternity, typical of simplistic revolutionary ideologies; and against an unscrupulous, phony use of democracy, the fraternity the Encyclical puts forth is founded on the historical consciousness that, not only religions, but also humanity itself, are at risk. Besides, those who seek fraternity are exactly the people who are not “naturally” siblings and know they are not. So, fraternity is a civil virtue that requires maturity and awareness, especially from those who have the possibility to judge and act without depending on despair. The practice of fraternity is a paramount challenge for the rich ones and the wise ones. A strong historical consciousness of personal and collective experience is the indispensable premise of a staunch practice of fraternity. Historical knowledge of the past teaches us that fraternity is always difficult, all the more so if we want to extend it to humankind. But historical consciousness suggests to us that the past will not influence the future, unless we allow it to last. Past and future are projections of men on time. They exist because they are filled with meanings that men share. Historians document the past and build up historical knowledge, but historical knowledge rises when people head to the future in light of a faith.

### **The end of history and the deconstruction of meanings.**

In sections 13 and 14, the Encyclical deals with the crisis of historical consciousness and the serious consequences of the «end of history» ideology. In the text, «deconstructionism» is mentioned, i.e. the claim to «create everything starting from zero». The term, typical of Derrida's philosophy, belongs to the vocabulary of structuralism from the seventies of the nineteenth century, but it originated from Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophies. Deconstruction was a strategy to read texts without claiming to explain their full sense; conversely, it tried to seize their contradictions, that prevented from giving a univocal sense to what was expressed. Every sign and every judgement can't be extrapolated from the symbolic universe people are experiencing. This way, the scope of reading and writing would become enormously wide; to the point that every transcendentality of “logos” and every metaphysical claim to give an order to things and words – based on permanent, ontological structures – would become impossible. In the Encyclical, the reference to deconstruction serves the purpose of criticizing the claim to deny value to Tradition, which is the translation of Revelation in history.



### **Time and theology.**

For thousands of years, the Catholic Church has been adopting the formula of Tradition to interlace Kingdom of God and Kingdom of men. Notwithstanding, as is known, the theological interpretation the Church has given of time presents quite a lot of interpretive difficulties. It also clashes against the modern epistemology of history. The theology of time refuses both the analytical philosophy of history and every form of absolute historicism. It does not disdain the translation of time in history, but it attributes to history a wordly feature, that differentiates it from the salvific significance it has in God's plan. Since when the process of secularization imposed itself on the European scenario, at least from the eighteenth century, the study of history has changed direction and method. It has abandoned the moralistic and documentary trait to welcome the hermeneutical, reconstructive trait, has opened the door to a sophisticated reflection about the so-called Sciences of Mind – the *Geisteswissenschaften* W. Dilthey talked about in his 1883 *Einleitung* – and, on the bounce, to a tight confrontation between a positivistic conception and a hermeneutics of facts. With Schleiermacher, hermeneutics aspires to go beyond the study of single texts and single events to become the doctrine of understanding in general and of all forms of communication. Men understand each other and build discourses. Discourses lead to choices, even very different from one another, because all individuals feel, following the hermeneutical doctrine, like they have some unity in mankind.

### **Chronology and Salvation. The figures of time.**

Christian theology on history has some roots that are much older than the roots put forward by modern philosophy. The biblical idea of history is not progressive but dialogic. It stems from the conviction that there is a «pact» between a God-person and its People. Thus, historicism is the dimension in which the dialogue between the Savior and the entire humanity gets fulfilled, without any chronological, still less any cultural, exclusion. It is questionable if the coming of Christ is actually the fulfillment of History. But, although in the difference between Jewish and Christian vision, Christian theology can't overlook the acknowledgement of that event. In *The City of God*, Augustine led the way: in history, before and after are neither chronological nor topological, but salvific because they are separate from sin and grace. From a theological standpoint, Christian history contains the value of a personal and collective conversion, that transforms the interpretation of facts into soul-searching on human weakness and into a glorification of the Divine. In this perspective there surely were stretches and sophistries, most of the time caused by the difficulty to combine divine attributes, omnipotence and omniscience, with human freedom. The heated debates on predestination and the different types of grace men can have available are the most relevant examples of the difficult relationship between faith and history, that brought about some fierce disputes. In the same way, the theory of Theodicy, i.e. of God's justification before the court of human reason, is for sure at the basis of all modern philosophies of history. All in all,

Christian theologians' worry has always been to fight against the ancients' determinism, but also against the moderns' relativism. Bossuet, sixteenth century's great apologist, talked about the Christians drama of holding tight in their hands the chain of faith's two ends: the way leading them to God and, at the same time, the certainty of their inner freedom.

The main figurative models of time were two. The Eastern, and partly Greek, model of time as a circle, and the Jewish-Christian model of time as a line. On one side, we had a «nonhistorical» model, meaning that the sense of history was out of it; on the other side, we had a linear eschatological model, which inspired the modern idea of progress but couldn't explain the Cross inconsistency, and above all the insertion of sin and guilt in the world. Beside these two main figures, many variants were born. Despite this, it is not possible to state that, before individual conscience, the issue of personal salvation has ever been sorted out. The unrest it brings about in those who believe is not different than the unrest it brings about in those who do not believe. This is because they both have in common the problem of death and of its assumption in the scope of collective life. Death and salvation are mediated by the presence of time, whose absence is valid for the two of them. Plenitude does not reside in time just as the end is not caused by dying in time. On a philosophical level, the relationship with time forms is one of the most complex, also because time in itself is nothing, it affects every single thing and, mostly, it fills and swells our conscience. Imperceptible substance that guarantees a huge success to watches, but that directly leaves marks not only on bodies and minds, but also on social relationships and all things produced by men. Manufactured goods are thrown into time to try to absorb it and stop its flow, just like sponges uselessly thrown into the sea to drain it.

These are topics that have impassioned those who have developed their own world vision beyond chronology or the fleeting moment iteration and who have sought in the «reduction» of time to thought (to *idea*) the key to an authentic consideration for reality. Examples of this are all the philosophies founded on the concept of intellectual experience, phenomenology in particular, which is central in contemporary thinking.

### **Historical consciousness and political dimension of time.**

In *Fratelli tutti* thought, the end of historical consciousness is not mentioned referring to the relationship between epistemology and theology. This is no theoretical matter. It is rather seen as a political and educational matter regarding the loss of that collective ethos, residing at the basis of communal historical consciousness. Therefore, deconstruction is the way to blow the whistle on the loss of collective memory lying at the foundation of democratic rebirth after two world wars. The whistleblowing does not only regard political models and government forms, but also and especially the crisis involving all educational agencies. These agencies have the responsibility to build bridges between generations. Without these educational agencies, even the Church would not have any room for a catechesis measuring up to today's challenges. Social friendship can't replace

faith, but there is no efficient Announcement unless it translates into a social vision living up to Salvation's contents. Hence, multiple are the hints the Encyclical provides to reflect on the problem of the relationship between memory and history. The most relevant of these hints is about a proper consideration of what time is to men's life and humanity's destiny.

### **The attempt to own time.**

In spite of contemporary thinking about temporality, the consideration we normally have of time is very naive and chiefly altered by a fake awareness of time "lack". Men are always very jealous of their time. They perceive it as some kind of possession and fear it can be taken away from them. To the point that, through the instruments of power and several work forms, men try to take over as much time as they can, even other people's time, to increase their self-assurance and to stand out. In one of his stories (*Aleph*), Borges wrote that «all things happen to everyone always and exactly *now*. Centuries and centuries, but it is only in the present moment that facts occur. Countless men in the skies, on the land and on the seas, but all that comes about for real is only what comes about to me».

The sociologist H. Rosa examined the fact that modern life is subjected to a continuous acceleration (cfr. *Alienation and Acceleration. Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*, NSU Press, Aarhus 2010). If the tools allowing us to save time have by now reached an exceptionally high level of development, thanks to production and communication technologies, the predominant feeling in affluent societies is that people do not have enough time to make their dreams come true or to satisfy what is imposed on them from social models. On average, people live longer than in the past, yet they suffer time lack, as if the time they live was not meaningful in itself. Rather than proceeding to a critical review of what is in their power and meeting true human nature face-to-face, they react by bending to the chase of something that runs away, raging against the bodies and the room each one takes up, not to lose positions in the success race. Nowadays, it is clear that the majority of men have at their disposal much more time than their predecessors, although we complain about working too much and badly. Twelve working hours are way fewer than the hours worked by our ancestors, who could never sleep, if not with one eye open. Still, we feel like we lack time and, especially, we are led to believe that time flow stops if we fill it more and, above all, if we exchange it for things. Bulimics eat not only a lot, but also fast. While anorexics not only eat very little, but also rarely and badly.

The way to «inhabit» time and to sanctify it is a crucial challenge, particularly to those who believe, provided that it is not possible to exchange the perspective of Salvation for the perspective of worldly prosperity. For these reasons, the matters of time and history are suited to a "Catholic" reflection, founded on a theology which does not turn prosperity into the sign of divine benevolence, but which turns fraternity into the sign of human responsibility. We come back, even though in a different way, to some theological and political cruxes already tackled in other epochs. And this is

a further proof of the relevance a historical consciousness holds in the picture of the construction of a community spirit.

### **The immaterial substance of time.**

The time which is in our mind is never pure. It is produced thanks to what we have learned, what we do or how we act. Every civilization has its specific manner to represent it in space and society. Every civilization differentiates external and internal time. We can enrich our experience of time precisely by working on the distinction between these two ‘rooms’ of time, fostering our inner time and wading in on environmental time, in our working and relational life.

Time is all pushed out of us, and time and ourselves try to compete in a race, to see who will survive. Meritocracy is, for instance, one of the most dangerous forms of competition between talents and time. It is among the most powerful ideologies, which nudge to consider people's existence the only possible life and to consider peer recognition, here and now, the only thing that counts. It focuses on life lived, not on life hoped for, and it turns any other assessment down. In particular, it turns historical assessment down, which widens perspectives up, compares facts, drives to judgments exceeding the immediate emotional and psychological dimension, sets free from anxieties, teaches to live. Thus, merit is not a dimension covering only the materiality of things or economic relations among people: it is no coincidence that it is a prominent topic in the educational field. Educating is a complete anthropological act, integrated in a human life which, at its first occurrence, at its birth, does not know and does not claim any recognition nor prize. This is because human life already finds recognition and prize in living itself, and because from an animal viewpoint, all experiences have equal value. To men, the *meaning* of what they live is intelligible only in a global analysis of human relationships, of a *sense*. This is because, to recall the famous definition of M. Mauss in *The Gift* (1923), living is a “total social fact”.

The gift can't be translated into a market value (even though it passes through things, it uses up space and time), because it resides, first of all, in men's just being there, in life, then in the community people feel like they are a part of. Thus, but only ultimately and not always, it resides in the explicit compresence of donor and giver, one before the other. Educating equals to reciprocating, that is, it equals to a giving and a taking, whose right, the justification, does not depend on the way, let alone on the reason why, people give and take. This justification rather depends on the trust people put in life and on the freedom, they arrange themselves with in space and time. Only human beings are reciprocal, not the concepts or the money, which is a ‘material concept’.

### **The mistakes of memory without history.**

Historical culture is necessary to fine-tune peoples' policies and strategic choices, but a mighty willingness to always and only decide in the present often leads to make a banal use of history, that identifies it with memory. But memory is something very different from history, also because it is

prone to a deformed use, in virtue of a series of physical, psychic and social conditions that are not easily controllable. Studies on the mistakes of memory, or on the distorted use of collective memory pieces unhampered from a healthy historical knowledge, are under everyone's eyes. It is enough to see how the reference to the *Shoah* or the extermination gets trivialized, to designate phenomena having nothing in common with that tragic historic event. Language draws from memory without knowing how the elements to remember settled in there.

A society centered on the present prefers science and technology that often feed the atheism of historical knowledge. By translating every life dimension into the present and into what you know; and by neglecting things you can't give a rational explanation for, you end up glorifying the gamble. This way, entire pieces of society are thrown into the hands of unscrupulous players, as it often happens in the financial sector.

Every time we insist on the idea that, for what is best, there is no limit, and that the best demands all efforts to benefit from it (money, information, relationships...) and not to safeguard it, overrunning each limit becomes the only possible aim. Those who push to take success to higher and higher levels also show they have serious issues in the relationship with that form of excellence, the genius, they place out of the daily world. Genius, instead, represents an acceleration of what could be reached through the contribution of many. It is therefore expression of the return of time to society, of a possible gift to humanity. It does not imply the lack of effort, conversely it implies the transformation of this effort into some further creativity, which burns tiredness just like fire burns log. In *Letter to the peasants on poverty and peace*, the French writer J. Giono (1895-1970) wrote: «Sowing wheat has become an act of war. And please, do not think the act of war is the transformation made by chemistry on wheat. No, the act of war is when a man owns six hundred thousand kilos of wheat, while they only need six hundred to eat. It is when they do not give away what is superfluous. You will tell me that six hundred thousand kilos of wheat demand a lot of effort, so it is not right to donate such a big effort. The truth is, it is not right that people even make that effort! Peace is the quality of advised men».

The perspective to exclude history from the use of time and to exclude memory from history is typical of competitions, that are founded on the present and exclude any form of reward other than visible prizes. A competition can't be transferred, it can be either done or put off. While memory and recollections follow different mind paths and they need an inner space.

### **Knowledge and historical consciousness as human liberation.**

Historical knowledge is a tremendous antidote against the temptations of owning time through the consumption of all that has offered us, without scrutinizing how and why it is there. And without historical knowledge there can't be any historical consciousness. One is sister to the other, because the crux of historical consciousness lies in the experience of recognizing the past without becoming its prisoner, but rather by contemplating it. Where should we look for inspiration to fight against

the temptation to own time neglecting history? Positive inspiration comes to us right from the study of how the first Greek historians invented the job of the historian in a moment of human history in which the world of Gods got in touch with the *polis*, i.e. the world of men where men became the main players of their destiny and created the laws. Herodotus (484-430 BC), - the first of the great historians of ancient times, he who created the term *demos-kratia* (power to the people)-, had an idea of history as being dominated by Fate. Men did not have any opportunity to choose and they bore their destiny within, just like a genetic code. But, right because of this, with the awareness that not even Xerxes, the great Persian emperor, could ever change fate, Herodotus wanted to demonstrate that fate makes use of men. And also, that the encounter of destiny with men's passions, ambitions and intellect makes it somehow human. Herodotus tried this way to collect information, to tell all that had been seen. He provided detailed descriptions of characters, laws, attitudes, gazing at the main players' faces, at the details of the mighty and at the vastness of empires. By doing this, he «anthropomorphized» destiny and found out that the bases of history were human multiplicity and the variety among men in considering time and space. He wanted «men's endeavors not to be forgotten» and created one of the most powerful excuses so that men, not only God, begun writing Books. To hand down and not to forget. But what were men supposed not to forget, if everything was ruled by fate? Herodotus developed a deep sense of beginning. Just like all great Greek thinkers, he was charmed by the problem of not forgetting origins to go up the river of events and understand why all things changed without ever changing and why each man, great or little, had to die.

Nowadays we are assisting at the return to a fatalistic vision of History: what has been has been. The idea of an end of History witnesses that we are not able to consider its essential quality, which is just being the gift men offer themselves. Historians try to document the past in light of the present, of their needs, of emerging interests, of the drive to know human events. By doing so, they pay homage to men's stories and they fight against illusions or useless pretensions. They give back, in historical form, what time allowed men to build and live. They open up perspectives on how it could have been and how it could be. The refusal to foster, to nourish a historical consciousness through history study and history teaching kills posterity, instead. That is, it kills the ambition to survive and to be able to accept ourselves in our finitude, it demeans the expectation for a different and better life, which went along with the needy for thousands of years. Contemporary men seem to wish to do the opposite of what historians do. In broad terms, we could say that collective memory is a thought that translates into a fact, while the reading of what even the Gospel calls the «signs of time», i.e. the sense of history and our being its children, leads us to a voluntary submission to the humanity inside us in view of a deeper good, which is the keeping of men's spiritual life.

History, men's typical, symbolic invention, is the translation into narrative form of human mind's projection skill, of that specific desire of men to grasp the measure for their lives. Knowing other

people's facts and putting in order own's facts generates the need for justice and provides sound arguments to politics.

## Notes

### <sup>1</sup> *The end of historical consciousness*

§13. As a result, there is a growing loss of the sense of history, which leads to even further breakup. A kind of “deconstructionism”, whereby human freedom claims to create everything starting from zero, is making headway in today’s culture. The one thing it leaves in its wake is the drive to limitless consumption and expressions of empty individualism. Concern about this led me to offer the young some advice. «If someone tells young people to ignore their history, to reject the experiences of their elders, to look down on the past and to look forward to a future that he himself holds out, doesn’t it then become easy to draw them along so that they only do what he tells them? He needs the young to be shallow, uprooted and distrustful, so that they can trust only in his promises and act according to his plans. That is how various ideologies operate: they destroy (or deconstruct) all differences so that they can reign unopposed. To do so, however, they need young people who have no use for history, who spurn the spiritual and human riches inherited from past generations and are ignorant of everything that came before them» (Esort. ap. postsin. *Christus vivit* (25 marzo 2019), 181.

§14. These are the new forms of cultural colonization. Let us not forget that «peoples that abandon their tradition and, either from a craze to mimic others or to foment violence, or from unpardonable negligence or apathy, allow others to rob their very soul, end up losing not only their spiritual identity but also their moral consistency and, in the end, their intellectual, economic and political independence» (Card. Raúl Silva Henríquez, S.D.B., *Omelia al Te Deum a Santiago del Chile* (18 settembre 1974). One effective way to weaken historical consciousness, critical thinking, the struggle for justice and the processes of integration is to empty great words of their meaning or to manipulate them. Nowadays, what do certain words like democracy, freedom, justice or unity really mean? They have been bent and shaped to serve as tools for domination, as meaningless tags that can be used to justify any action.

## UNE EDUCATION A LA FRATERNITE

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**Résumé** Quand nous évoquons la formation et le développement de l'enfant en éducation, nous ne devons pas limiter notre réflexion seulement à la formation didactique et au développement des connaissances acquises, mais l'élargir pour l'étendre à la formation et au développement de la personne elle-même. La mission de l'éducation ne serait pas uniquement didactique, mais aussi et surtout sociale et éthique. Pour mieux cerner cette mission d'humanisation, nous nous focaliserons sur l'encyclique *Fratelli Tutti* consacrée « à la fraternité et à l'amitié sociale ». Dans quelle mesure l'éducation pourrait-elle inculquer les dimensions de la fraternité chez les apprenants ? Nous entamerons une approche de la fraternité dans sa dimension éthique et sociale afin d'en analyser le côté socio-éthico-éducatif.

**Mots-clés** Education, éthique, fraternité, citoyens, reconnaissance, estime de soi, respect, responsabilité, équité, inclusion, charité

**Abstract** When we evoke the formation and development of the child in education, we should not only limit our reflection to didactic training and the development of acquired knowledge, but broaden it to extend it to the formation and development of the person herself. The mission of education is not only didactic, but also and above all social and ethical. To better understand this mission of humanization, we will focus on the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* devoted "to fraternity and social friendship". To what extent could education instill dimensions of brotherhood in learners? We will analyze an approach to fraternity in its ethical and social dimension in order to analyze its socio-ethical-educational side.

**Keywords** Education, Ethics, Fraternity, Citizens, Recognition, Self-esteem, Respect, Responsibility, Equity, Inclusion, Charity

Si nous nous penchons sur la définition de l'éducation, nous retrouvons, selon Le Robert, que c'est la « mise en œuvre des moyens propres à assurer la formation et le développement d'un être humain ». Or, quand nous parlons de formation et de développement, nous ne devons pas limiter notre réflexion seulement à la formation didactique et au développement des connaissances

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acquises, mais l'élargir pour l'étendre à la formation et au développement de la personne elle-même. La mission de l'éducation ne serait pas uniquement didactique, mais aussi et surtout sociale et éthique.

Qu'entend-on par éthique? Elle exprime un optatif d'action, elle dit ce qu'il est possible et souhaitable de faire. Elle questionne la pratique et les valeurs, elle cherche des solutions à la conquête du mieux. Avec l'éthique, le sujet réfléchit, questionne et dialogue ; il cherche encore et toujours. Cette conception de l'éthique doit s'appliquer dans toute institution éducative, scolaire ou universitaire, d'autant plus que toute institution éducative se veut et se doit d'être juste, en laissant chaque élève vivre des expériences de reconnaissance personnelle et sociale, qui lui permettent de développer un rapport à soi qui demeure intègre. (Nasr, 2010) Partant de cette conception, l'institution devient synonyme d'humanisation.

Pour mieux cerner cette dimension d'humanisation, nous nous focaliserons sur l'encyclique *Fratelli Tutti* consacrée « à la fraternité et à l'amitié sociale ». Dans quelle mesure l'éducation pourrait-elle inculquer les dimensions de la fraternité chez les apprenants?

Avant d'entamer notre analyse afin de tenter d'esquisser une réponse à cette problématique, il s'avère nécessaire de cerner la notion de fraternité. Nous prendrons comme définition de référence celle du Larousse : ce terme dérive du latin *fraternitas*, qui désigne les relations entre frères, entre peuples, et signifie le « lien de solidarité et d'amitié entre des êtres humains, entre les membres d'une société ». La fraternité ne se limite donc pas aux membres d'une même famille, mais s'étend à tous les membres de la société. Elle s'apparente aux relations de solidarité et d'amitié sociale. Vu son côté éthico-social, on pourrait désormais analyser son côté éducatif.

Le but de toute institution éducative qui va au-delà de la transmission des connaissances, vise à former des citoyens capables de vivre éthiquement et avec justice. Et par justice, nous entendons, conformément à la théorie philosophique de Paul Ricœur, une justice de reconnaissance. Or, nous vivons dans des sociétés de plus en plus matérialistes, individualistes et égoïstes où ce ne sont que la compétitivité et l'aspiration au pouvoir et à la force qui dominent. Et les institutions éducatives qui évoluent à l'image de nos sociétés, s'en inquiètent et réclament un besoin d'éthique de plus en plus nécessaire et urgent. «Que signifient aujourd'hui des termes comme démocratie, liberté, justice, unité ? Ils ont été dénaturés et déformés pour être utilisés comme des instruments de domination, comme des titres privés de contenu pouvant servir à justifier n'importe quelle action.» (*Fratelli Tutti*)

Ainsi, et comme tentative de rectification de cette situation déviante, seule l'éducation pourrait être la solution. Chaque individu, et dans notre contexte, l'enfant plus spécifiquement, doit être institué afin d'accéder à l'humanité, car l'institution scolaire représente le point d'articulation de tout individu à sa société, et par là, à l'espèce humaine. L'institution scolaire ne décrit pas une situation,

mais prescrit un comportement ; elle n'évalue pas l'être mais promet un devoir-être. Elle est, par nature, une règle d'action sociale se présentant dans un lieu pluriel, marqué par la multitude et la pluralité des enfants et des adultes. C'est le premier lieu où l'enfant rencontre l'autre qui lui est étranger, mais avec qui il partage cette institution. Il s'agit d'une nouvelle sorte de rencontre avec l'autre, d'une nouvelle forme d'intersubjectivité. Et c'est à partir de là que devraient se définir les contours de cette relation intersubjective.

Pour être capable de respecter l'autre et de considérer son point de vue, l'apprenant doit vivre des situations de reconnaissance de la part de l'éducateur, comme par exemple que celui-ci prenne en considération ses réponses, ses idées et ses points de vue. L'apprentissage du respect de l'autre débute avec un enseignant qui s'estime et qui respecte ses apprenants pour les mener à s'estimer eux-mêmes et à respecter tout autrui. L'estime vise la personne en tant que représentée comme fin en elle-même, existant par elle-même. Par conséquent, ce que j'estime, c'est l'idée de l'humain dans ma personne et dans la personne d'autrui. Je recherche mon estime à travers celle que me portera autrui, je m'estime comme étant le toi de l'autre, c'est-à-dire en seconde personne. Ainsi, l'estime de soi est dans une certaine mesure inséparable de l'opinion d'autrui. Le propre désir d'être reconnu renvoie à cette dépendance vis-à-vis d'autrui et de son opinion. Ainsi, l'estime de soi devient un phénomène aussi bien réflexif que relationnel. D'où l'importance primordiale que doit accorder l'enseignant à sa façon de considérer sa relation à ses élèves, à sa façon de leur parler, de juger leurs actions sans pour autant les juger eux-mêmes. En effet, le soi de chaque élève est digne d'estime, non à cause de ses accomplissements, mais essentiellement pour ses capacités, et il est toujours capable de bien ou de mieux faire. Par conséquent, estime de soi et respect de l'autre sont indissociables. (Nasr, 2010)

Nous affirmons sans cesse que l'institution éducative vise à former des citoyens responsables, mais responsables de qui ? D'une façon générale, je suis responsable d'autrui, et plus particulièrement du vulnérable, du fragile. L'encyclique *Fratelli Tutti* pointe du doigt cette idée de la fragilité et de la vulnérabilité : « Prenons soin de la fragilité de chaque homme, de chaque femme, de chaque enfant et de chaque personne âgée, par cette attitude solidaire et attentive, l'attitude de proximité du bon Samaritain. » En éducation, la première image de la responsabilité est incarnée par l'éducateur responsable de l'élève, de chaque enfant qu'il doit guider pour que celui-ci devienne un sujet responsable, c'est-à-dire un être essentiellement capable de s'estimer et de se valoriser lui-même, capable d'agir intentionnellement, selon des raisons réfléchies, de lier ses actes aux événements du monde et de pouvoir évaluer les buts de ses actions. Mais elle doit être élargie à l'apprentissage de la responsabilité de chacun vis-à-vis de l'autre. Cet apprentissage ne s'inculque que dans et par l'action éducative concrète dans des activités et des projets où c'est l'apprenant qui doit être responsable d'une autre personne. Il peut s'agir ici, à titre d'exemple, de travaux de groupe en équipe, où il prendrait en charge d'autres membres du groupe, notamment les plus vulnérables. De plus, pour qu'ils soient réussis, ces travaux de groupe nécessitent une entraide et un dialogue.

Dans cette forme d'éducation éthique, le dialogue revêt une importance primordiale, vu qu'il représente la première sortie de la violence vers un échange rationnel d'arguments pour aboutir à un consensus. « Le dialogue social authentique suppose la capacité de respecter le point de vue de l'autre en acceptant la possibilité qu'il contienne quelque conviction ou intérêt légitime. De par son identité, l'autre a quelque chose à apporter. » (*Fratelli Tutti*)

Le respect de soi et de l'autre implique une reconnaissance qui conjugue le sentiment de la singularité et la conscience de l'égalité des hommes. Et pour que cette reconnaissance puisse s'accomplir, elle doit être associée à une éducation équitable. Or, l'équité en éducation signifie que le système éducatif fournit les mêmes chances d'apprendre à tous les élèves, c'est-à-dire que l'enseignant ne se comporte pas avec eux comme une masse homogène, mais comme des personnalités distinctes, ayant chacune ses potentialités propres et qui la distinguent des autres. Accepter cette hétérogénéité et la considérer comme une richesse permet à chacun de se reconnaître comme personne distincte des autres, mais non marginalisée à cause de ses différences, lesquelles peuvent être des distinctions physiques, des compétences éducatives et intellectuelles, ... En effet, « la marginalisation, [...], prend des formes déplorables que nous croyions dépassées, telles que le racisme qui se cache et réapparaît sans cesse. » (*Fratelli Tutti*) Un apprenant marginalisé risque de reproduire un schéma discriminatoire par la suite, vu qu'il n'a pas été estimé et n'a pas appris à s'apprécier. C'est ainsi que se dévoile l'importance d'une éducation inclusive comme une des formes de l'éducation équitable.

Vivre dans une classe inclusive est la porte d'entrée vers la possibilité de vivre dans une société. Toute société est par définition hétérogène et inclusive. Et c'est une priorité capitale que d'éduquer à cette juste reconnaissance de tout autre, plus particulièrement de l'autre différent. Cette éducation ne se fait pas par la parole, mais elle s'éprouve en actes concrets, par des projets éducatifs bien ciblés. Il peut s'agir de travaux de groupes, de discussion thématique sur des dilemmes et des problématiques bien visées, comme il peut être aussi question de projets coopératifs et de projets humanitaires à échelle humaine concrète et des résultats tangibles, ... L'objectif de toutes ces approches éducatives réside dans l'entraide, la collaboration, le soutien entre les membres d'un même groupe. En effet, pour qu'une équipe mène à bon port son projet, il est essentiel de s'entraider, mais aussi de communiquer ensemble à travers l'écoute, la compréhension de l'argument de l'autre comme un point de vue qui mérite d'être entendu et la réflexion pour trouver la meilleure solution. Or une bonne communication est la clé de réussite de toute relation interpersonnelle, de surcroît une relation fraternelle, et humaine. Plus la communication devient paisible, surtout en cas de dilemmes ou de différends, plus les multiples divergences seront acceptées. Éduquer à une bonne communication débute par un échange juste entre l'enseignant et ses élèves : un modèle qui se transmettrait aux élèves entre eux. « Reconnaître chaque être humain comme un frère ou une sœur et chercher une amitié sociale qui intègre tout le monde ne sont pas de simples utopies. Cela exige

la décision et la capacité de trouver les voies efficaces qui les rendent réellement possibles. Tout engagement dans ce sens devient un exercice suprême de la charité. » (*Fratelli Tutti*)

La charité, dans ce contexte, doit être prise dans le sens de *l'agapé*, ou l'amour du prochain, la bienveillance, la bonne volonté, la considération et le respect, en d'autres termes au sens de l'attention portée à l'autre et de l'engagement vis-à-vis du prochain, qui n'est autre que toute personne avec qui je partage le même cadre social. « Cette charité politique suppose qu'on ait développé un sentiment social qui dépasse toute mentalité individualiste. » (*Fratelli Tutti*) Ainsi, en éduquant les enfants à cette ouverture à l'autre, qu'il soit semblable ou différent, je suis en train d'instaurer les bases d'une relation de sollicitude sociale envers l'autre, une sollicitude qui exige l'estime de soi comme base pour s'ouvrir à l'autre et se soucier de lui. « Les actions jaillissent d'une union qui fait tendre de plus en plus vers l'autre, le considérant précieux, digne, agréable et beau, au-delà des apparences physiques ou morales. L'amour de l'autre pour lui-même nous amène à rechercher le meilleur pour sa vie. Ce n'est qu'en cultivant ce genre de relations que nous rendrons possibles une amitié sociale inclusive et une fraternité ouverte à tous. » (*Fratelli Tutti*) Et il est primordial de cultiver la graine de ces relations dès l'enfance pour qu'elle puisse fructifier plus tard dans une société plus juste.

En effet, la charité comme sentiment altruiste n'est pas toujours innée chez l'enfant, elle doit être cultivée. Il s'agit d'éduquer à la charité et à la fraternité, en allant contre la tendance de la compétitivité individualiste. Nous nous retrouvons face à un des rôles capitaux de l'enseignant. Le système éducatif risque d'être, dans certains cas, un système renfermé sur lui-même, ne valorisant que la réussite personnelle. Or, même s'il n'est point question de déprécier toute réussite personnelle fondée sur un travail sérieux et sur des efforts louables, un bon système éducatif se doit d'être juste, en d'autres termes de reconnaître chacun selon ses valeurs en premier lieu, ensuite selon ses capacités et de travailler à les développer, non pas dans un cadre individualiste, mais dans un contexte collaboratif et humain. Une juste reconnaissance selon le mérite aura une répercussion positive sur la relation entre les élèves eux-mêmes, et entre ceux-ci et leurs enseignants. « Une société humaine et fraternelle est capable de veiller de manière efficace et stable à ce que chacun soit accompagné au cours de sa vie, non seulement pour subvenir à ses besoins fondamentaux, mais aussi pour pouvoir donner le meilleur de lui-même, même si son rendement n'est pas le meilleur, même s'il est lent, même si son efficacité n'est pas exceptionnelle. » (*Fratelli Tutti*) Ainsi, l'éducation ne formera pas des individus, mais des citoyens qui se reconnaîtront comme frères d'une même société, voire d'une même humanité.

En somme, l'élève doit apprendre à vivre avec les autres, à partager ce monde avec tout un chacun autour de lui ; à pouvoir intégrer un milieu social hétérogène, et faire corps avec un groupe de pairs appartenant à une même tranche d'âge. Ainsi sa reconnaissance ne sera plus pareille à celle à laquelle il était habitué dans son milieu familial. Elle devra désormais se gagner par son agir et

son faire, grâce à ses compétences. La socialisation sera alors, non seulement adaptation des élèves à des normes existantes, à un univers social, mais aussi inscription de l'être-ensemble à l'intérieur de chaque élève, un être-ensemble créé virtuellement. Cet élève est un individu qu'il faut aider à grandir, et à devenir à la fois acteur de ses propres apprentissages et un agent responsable de ses actes. Or éduquer à la responsabilité, c'est éduquer à la fraternité et à la charité sociale et politique, lesquelles ne peuvent être exercées que par un être responsable. Ces deux concepts ne se réalisent pas dans un projet éducatif, mais dans une action éducative, dans la pratique et point dans la théorie. Ils impliquent l'acceptation de la différence, l'entraide, la reconnaissance, le partage de la vie quotidienne, en se découvrant une humanité commune, en faisant l'expérience de la vie d'équipe. L'éducation à la fraternité est aussi bien une éducation à l'acceptation de soi, à la reconnaissance de soi et à l'estime de soi, qu'une éducation à la vie en communauté, au respect de l'autre, la sollicitude envers autrui. « Le travail d'éducation, le développement des habitudes solidaires, la capacité de penser la vie humaine plus intégralement et la profondeur spirituelle sont nécessaires pour assurer la qualité des relations humaines, de telle manière que ce soit la société elle-même qui réagisse face à ses inégalités, à ses déviations, aux abus des pouvoirs économiques, technologiques, politiques ou médiatiques. [...] Alors que nous voyons toutes sortes d'intolérances fondamentalistes détériorer les relations entre les personnes, les groupes et les peuples, vivons et enseignons la valeur du respect, l'amour capable d'assumer toute différence, la priorité de la dignité de tout être humain sur ses idées, ses sentiments, ses pratiques, voire sur ses péchés, quels qu'ils soient! » (*Fratelli Tutti*)

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