

On Fraternity and Social Amity

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This is the axis of the third encyclical of Pope Francis of Assisi, which he signed in the city of Assisi on the third of last October, which His Holiness composed under the influence of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together which he jointly signed with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb, in the city of Abu Dhabi. In fact, this Pope's new Encyclical represents a human call emanating from the helm of the Catholic Church that is addressed to the human race which beckons humans to recognize that God created all people and rendered them equal in rights and duties and in human dignity, whilst also averring that religions, irrespective of their particular apostles and the principles to which their followers adhere, advocate a life of sound fraternal existence built on the imperative of dealing with the individual on the basis of respecting his humanity, accepting the other and coexistence.

Brotherhood and social amity are anchored in the avoidance of all forms of aggression and strife, and fraternal living with persons who do not share the same beliefs, and are the same principles advocated by St. Francis of Assisi during his visit to Al-Malek al-Kamil, the sultan of Egypt in the year 1219 in the Egyptian city of Damietta. On my part I partook last year, with my brethren from among the adherents of diverse religions, in small Assisi, in the celebration marking the passing of eight hundred years since this visit, and in the course of which we deliberated on the ethics of human solidarity and the importance of dialogue between the adherents of different religions and cultures.

Human brotherhood rests on human foundations with religious and spiritual dimensions, for the love of the individual for his fellow brother must defy geographical and locational foundations, and such love should be spontaneous and free from being marred by material and individual interests. Such love should transcend narrow human worldly interests in a manner magnifying human values, and offering succor and help to marginalized societal groups represented by the indigent, the destitute, the sick and the physically handicapped. And here is manifested the wisdom and perceptiveness of Pope Francis, as indicated by Dr. Nayla Tabbara in her commentary on the Encyclical, namely that it is not solely addressed to the West, but rather the Encyclical also concerns us as easterners, given that Pope Francis advocated through this message for us to possess sufficient courage to provide a voice to those who are exposed to discrimination and marginalization, based on the premise that the world was created for the sake of all, and that all of us as humans are born on this planet equally endowed with human dignity.

Brotherhood and social amity stand in divergent contrast with the condition of human animosity witnessed by the world today, for my fraternity with my neighbor and next of kin does not permit me in any case whatsoever to impose on him a particular creed or obligation which is not harmonious with his principles and beliefs, but rather social amity is manifested in expressing the love of God and His message which is built on peace and human respect, alongside the necessity of treating an individual based on his unique particularity only irrespective of his religion or origin or ideas and beliefs. Thus the human brotherhood which Pope Francis believes in, and which he endeavors to instill in the followers of the Church primarily, and among all of humanity may contribute to the establishment of a fraternal society which guarantees for the

individual to live in amity and respect with the members of his race. And this will in turn contribute to a condition where every member of society actualizes the reason and justification for his religious and spiritual existence, and develops his social relations, and practices his principles and political ideas.

No two persons would disagree that a strong and stable society cannot exist without solid brotherhood and friendship which would produce solace and inner happiness in the existence of people, which would be a countervailing force to the penchant of each individual for dominating others, and would nurture the desire within each individual to live in harmony and peace with the other, whereby an individual would become one among others, rather than being separate and uniquely distinct from others. The Prophetic Hadith states: [A man follows the religion of his friend; so each one should consider whom he makes his friend]; and another Hadith states: [A believer is the mirror of his brother..]. And in the same context the traditionist Sheikh Abdullah Al-Harari emphasizes the meaning by saying “Choose for yourself a righteous friend”, and “Those who desire advancement should accompany and associate with the fine among people.”

Differences between people in endowments and spiritual capacity should not stand in the way of achieving equality with the other as the pivot of fraternal relationships and human solidarity. Actually, human societies are in need today of beginning to accept harmonious and peaceful coexistence, without the need for all to be the same.

The challenges faced by our world today, in terms of the spread of hatred and intolerance, call for genuine love as a prelude to bolster brotherhood and social amity. In reality, love is more than mere inner feelings which manipulate emotions and tickle feelings, but is

rather a tool and a means which spur the loving person to seek human justice and peace, for all of us were created from Adam, and are the repository of spiritual and religious dispensations which call upon us to accept one another as brothers and sisters, as bearers of revealed religions which call for respecting the individual and considering him as the foundation of social relations.

The hateful and racist practices of some constitute a threatening danger which cannot be ignored or denied, for such human behaviors spur the marginalization of the other, discrimination and exclusion, in a manner that makes all of us face a substantial challenge, irrespective of our creeds and beliefs. Actually, there is no alternative to common collective action effectuating the genuine meaning of human empathy, and to strive for unifying the human ranks in a manner contributing to achieving daily justice and peace. Thus national laws and man-made constitutions must be the foundation for promoting human brotherhood, and this through laying down the values of citizenship and its concept built on the notion of diversity, and promoting freedom of religion and belief within the framework of the rule of law, which should operate as the canopy in whose shadow the members of society stand, and which endeavors to reward those that love their fellow men, and to sanction those who harbor ill-intentions and evil towards their fellow men and the society in which they live.

The spread of the Corona pandemic, which shook the world, with its strong and weak states, indubitably proves that brotherhood and human amity are of the essence in facing the threats to the human race. Hence, the wars witnessed by the world today are not any more confined to the battles of the individual against another individual, but rather encompass the battles of the individual in facing nature. Thus, Covid-19 will not be the last pandemic threatening human existence insofar as its health and daily bread, given that the living

environment is rife with threats and calamities which imperil human existence, unless confronted by common and perseverant action in the exploratory medical domain primarily, and thence in the therapeutic curative field.

It has been categorically and infallibly proven that the human being cannot live in isolation and face nature on his own with its threats and calamities, for joint action by countries is the first line of defense to safeguard human life and physical soundness. Actually, those rights have been consecrated by natural law through constitutional mechanisms that are established for the individual upon his birth and his acquisition of human rights in society, and hence are not amenable to bargaining or diminution. And for the governments of the world to guarantee those human rights to their subjects (citizens) they must inevitably magnify the shared human features, and transcend differences between them, in a manner contributing to bolstering social amity between the countries of the world at the level of both the rulers and the governed. In the process, human cooperation and solidarity would be the stronger shield to confront the challenges and unfriendly outputs of nature and general health. Hence, just as technology contributed to making easier the daily life of the individual and narrowed the distances between nations, it has concurrently produced pandemics and unprecedented diseases which the world has heretofore not known, and was not prepared to confront and withstand.

The time has come for us to acknowledge in this age the right of each individual to human dignity, and to render this principle a universal right that is inalienable and non-negotiable, whereby this right is the basic guarantor and impellor in the process of solidifying human brotherhood and amity between all, particularly since life, with its challenges and concerns, cannot be faced individually and in isolation. Thus human unity is a source of strength while division

between nations leads to weakness. In reality our belonging is to a single humanity, and sharing basic principles related to our human existence necessitates for the sons and daughters of planet earth to join together to protect their environment and climate, and their natural resources so that they remain shared entitlements bequeathed from one generation to the other, in a manner fostering sustainable development as a human right recognized by the global human rights regime.

Our existence today, and our testimony to the woes and tragedies of this age, necessarily impels us to strive as brothers in humanity to protect the coming generations, and to avert their exposure to the same dangers and calamities which the human race has suffered from in these very days.

How needful we are today and everywhere, and particularly in the region of the Middle East, the cradle of the three Abrahamic faiths, to promulgate a new social charter which provides the oppressed with genuine support and human solidarity between all. Indeed, multiple interpretations of political dimensions and personal interests of religious beliefs have contributed to spreading hatred and marginalizing the other and harboring apprehension, and hence the errant belief in the necessity of perpetrating violence against others. Accordingly, it is the common responsibility of religious leaders today to call to fraternal love, which will become the cornerstone of an edifice of human social fraternity that is entrenched and firm, and which will endure and continue.

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