

***Fratelli tutti* in the context of Syro Malabar Church**

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Your Excellency Mar Joseph Kallaragatt, Adv Biju Parayanilam, Global president AKCC, Fr Geo Kadavi, Mr. Benny Mathew my beloved brothers in Christ. First of all let me congratulate the office bearers of Akcc global committee for selecting the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* of our beloved Pope Francis.

While discussing the relevance of the document *Fratelli Tutti* in the cotemporary world, we should remember that this document cannot be received independently by disregarding the earlier social doctrines of the church. It is really a continuation of the revolutionary attempt of Pope Leo XIII through the encyclical *Rerum Noverum*(1891). In what sense we call the attempt of Pope Leo as revolutionary? It was really a call for pastoral conversion of the priests and for personal conversion of laymen. In the words of John Paul II, “In Pope Leo XIII's time such a concept of the Church's right and duty [the duty to intervene in social life] was far from being commonly admitted. Indeed, a two-fold approach prevailed: one directed to this world and this life, to which faith ought to remain extraneous; the other directed towards a purely other-worldly salvation, which neither enlightens nor directs existence on earth” (*Centesimus Annus*,para 5,1991).

The division of human life into spiritual and temporal is an age-old problem in the church and it prevails even now. The problem can be vivified by analyzing the single Commandment Given by our Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples and handed to us by our Mother Church. The single commandment is “Love each other as I loved you”. This commandment is a summary statement of Ten Commandments. Ten Commandments are actually a revised statement of Hammurabi’s Law. It is not simply an adaptation but an addition is seen in it. It has two parts. First part is the duty of man towards God and second part is man’s duty towards his neighbors. In other words, first part is spiritual and second part is social or ethical. This blending is the contribution of Jews.

Jesus revealed the relationship between the spiritual realm and temporal realm in more realistic fashion. He says that, all commandments can be summarized into

two commandments. Love your God and love your neighbor as you love yourself. This statement has three parts (1) Love God (spirituality) (2) Love yourself (morality) and (3) Love your neighbor (ethics). When we define what is Church it does not include the third part the ethical dimension of Christian life. Just analyze *Lumen Gentium*, it does not speak about the mission of the church in this world. Fortunately, the document *Church in the modern world* speaks about the role of the church in modern world. Both the documents could not be integrated into one is the real theoretical issue in the Church.

Actually, the social doctrines of the church developed by our popes are an attempt to rectify this lacuna in the understanding of the church about her vocation. From where does the gap between the spiritual and ethical begin? There may be various reasons for that division. Actually, the division begins from our very existence. Second Vatican council says that man is internally divided (*Church in the Modern World*). One of the outcomes of the above division is reflected in understanding our vocation to love.

There is only one vocation for a Christian that is vocation for loving. This vocation is reflected in the call of Jesus to St Peter: “Do you love me”? Thrice Jesus asked the same question. This question is for all humanity. Pope Benedict XVI has written two documents just to define Love, one is *Deus Caritas est* and second one is *Caritas in Veritate*. Pope Francis extended the definition of love developed by Pope Benedict XVI in his first Document *Lumen Fidei*, and a continuation to that He wrote the present document *Fratelli tutti*.

The term love in New Testament is used with a specific meaning. The Greek term for love is Agape. In Latin language it is translated as Caritas and in English it is translated as Love. Jesus says that “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John15:13).In the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* Benedict XVI defines this as maximum love. Three terms are coined in that encyclical to define love.(1) Maximum love (2)Minimum love (3)less than minimum love. Minimum love is obeying the dictates of law or doing Justice or work to rule. Maximum love loves up to sacrificing one’s own life and this is above minimum love. The third is below the

minimum love that is doing injustice. Thus, he combined justice and love and says that no one can love by doing injustice and doing justice is only minimum love.

St Paul in his first letter to Corinthians categorically stated that love is the supreme activity. But while translating the verse 1 cori 13:13 King James version used the term charity instead of Love. And in Malayalam we translated it as *upavi*. The term charity circumscribed the meaning of Caritas from agape or maximum love into alms giving.

Christians in general are satisfied by giving some portion of their wealth to the poor and think that they have fulfilled the commandment love. Karl Marx raised criticism against Christians about the above stated behavior of alms giving, in his manifesto. Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas est* accepts that the accusation is partially true (*Deus Caritas est*,26). In the second part of the encyclical *Deus Caritas* he explains that the meaning of love includes our commitment in political life. While giving direct help to our brothers in need is only a partial fulfillment of our vocation to love. Church was too slow to integrate ethical part of love in definition of Love. **In the words of Pope Benedict XVI “It must be admitted that the Church’s leadership was slow to realize that the issue of the just ordering of society needed to be approached in a new way”.** (*Deus Caritas est*,27)

In the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* he says that the participation in the socio political is part of Love or Caritas. Love is defined as the participation in the building up of city. **The participation in the building up of city is defined as the institutional path of charity or love** (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 6 and 7, Pope Francis, *Lumen Fides*, 4th chapter). Pope Francis further enhanced the ethical dimension of the meaning of love in more detail in *Lumen Fidei*. In the words of Pope Francis “Precisely because it is linked to love (cf. *Gal 5:6*), the light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice, law and peace. Faith is born of an encounter with God’s primordial love, wherein the meaning and goodness of our life become evident; our life is illumined to the extent that it enters into the space opened by that love, to the extent that it becomes, in other words, a path and praxis leading to the fullness of love. The light of faith is capable of enhancing the richness of human relations, their ability to endure, to be trustworthy, to enrich our life together. Faith does not draw us away from the world or prove irrelevant to the

concrete concerns of the men and women of our time. Without a love which is trustworthy, nothing could truly keep men and women united. Human unity would be conceivable only on the basis of utility, on a calculus of conflicting interests or on fear, but not on the goodness of living together, not on the joy which the mere presence of others can give. Faith makes us appreciate the architecture of human relationships because it grasps their ultimate foundation and definitive destiny in God, in his love, and thus sheds light on the art of building; as such it becomes a service to the common good. **Faith is truly a good for everyone; it is a common good. Its light does not simply brighten the interior of the Church, nor does it serve solely to build an eternal city in the hereafter; it helps us build our societies in such a way that they can journey towards a future of hope.** The Letter to the Hebrews offers an example in this regard when it names, among the men and women of faith, Samuel and David, whose faith enabled them to "administer justice" (*Heb* 11:33). This expression refers to their justice in governance, to that wisdom which brings peace to the people (cf. *1 Sam* 12:3-5; *2 Sam* 8:15). The hands of faith are raised up to heaven, even as they go about building in charity a city based on relationships in which the love of God is laid as a foundation" (Pope Francis, *Lumen fidei*,51).

Social and Political Charity

The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* is to be read in the above narrated context of the evolution of the social doctrines of the Church. Introduction and first chapter of the document are narrating the real problems faced by humanity in the contemporary world. Interestingly the second chapter of the book defines Love in new perspective as a continuation of earlier attempts of Benedict XVI.

Border less neighborhood

Pope says that the meaning of the phrase "Love your neighbor" in Old Testament and in New Testament has entirely different meanings. In the Jewish context the neighbor is the persons in Jewish community. For them the kingdom of God is Israel and it has boundaries. But for Christ His kingdom has no boundaries and neighbor means entire universe. Jesus is proposing for universal brotherhood. Pope says that neighborhood is a border less term in the New Testament.

Pope Francis says “In today’s world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat. This illusion, unmindful of the great fraternal values, leads to “a sort of cynicism. For that is the temptation we face if we go down the road of disenchantment and disappointment... Isolation and withdrawal into one’s own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes. Culture clash, no; culture of encounter, yes”.

HE continues “In this world that races ahead, yet lacks a shared roadmap, we increasingly sense that the gap between concern for one’s personal well-being and the prosperity of the larger human family seems to be stretching to the point of complete division between individuals and human community... It is one thing to feel forced to live together, but something entirely different to value the richness and beauty of those seeds of common life that need to be sought out and cultivated”. Technology is constantly advancing, yet “how wonderful it would be if the growth of scientific and technological innovation could come with more equality and social inclusion. How wonderful would it be, even as we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters who orbit around us”.

Is there any relevance for the above definition in the context of Syro Malabar Church? Are our Parishes and Dioceses are giving undue importance to the territory? The term pastoral conversion means the changes envisaged in the attitude church leaders. We consider parish in the territorial sense than as the kingdom of God. When we hear the term Church four meanings come in to our mind. (1) Hierarchy (Administrative structure) (2) Church building and its boundaries (territorial structure) (3) The organizational structure of the church and (4) Our mission or establishing the kingdom of God. Where is our priority? Let us here what Pope John Paul II says in this regard. “It is necessary that, in the light of the faith, all discover the true meaning of the parish; that is, the very mystery of the church is present and work, even if at times it might be scattered over vast territories or almost not to be found in crowded and chaotic modern sections of societies. **The parish is not principally a structure, a territory or a building,**

but rather the family of God, a fellowship a fire with a unifying spirit.”(John Paul II, *Go in Peace*, 94, St Pauls,Mumbai,2009)

Division among people

Pope says that divide and rule is now become the political agenda of almost all nations. “Our own days, however, seem to be showing signs of a certain regression. Ancient conflicts thought long buried are breaking out anew, while instances of a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism are on the rise. In some countries, a concept of popular and national unity influenced by various ideologies is creating new forms of selfishness and a loss of the social sense under the guise of defending national interests”. In India and in Europe the division is now more prominent. Islam phobia (Pope is not mentioning this term) is growing and that makes a huge divide all over world. This is very relevant in the Syro Malabar context. Majority of our migrants are in Gulf countries and are living peacefully with Muslims in these countries. They have given us legitimate freedom in many Arabian countries. But in Kerala due to some extremist views are quarrelling each other and that may lead to a religious divide in future. This encyclical exhorts the urgent need for a dialogue with these communities. The visit of Francis Assisi should be continued here in Kerala context. It is not to be treated as a failure instead it is an expression of love showed by Christ in the cross.

The need for participation in political life

Earlier I mentioned the need for the pastoral conversion or the conversion of priests. Political conversion of laymen should be the top priority of syro Malabar church in Kerala. The first decades of twentieth century witnessed participation of lay Christians from the syro Malabar Church is seen in the political field. The formation of Catholic Congress was for political emancipation of the people of Kerala. Our fore fathers showed social and political charity 100 years ago. Many of our lay Christians take leadership in freedom struggle and in the formation of Kerala state. Now we are eating the fruits of the efforts of our ancestors. Pope reminds us that “ Once more we are being reminded that “each new generation must take up the struggles and attainments of past generations, while setting its sights even higher. This is the path. Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day. It is

not possible to settle for what was achieved in the past and complacently enjoy it, as if we could somehow disregard the fact that many of our brothers and sisters still endure situations that cry out for our attention”

What next?

I have no personal plans for the future of the Church. Let us think together. One thing is necessary. We should at least aware of the problems in its totality. The attempts of the Global committee through heart links is an opening to think further. We should at least aware of things. We cannot expect any change in society without a revolutionary change in theory. When the theory grips the consciousness of the mass society will transcend. Popes have shown many ways during the last 130 years. Let us try our best.