Democratic societies under the spell of the culture of fear: the perspective of Martha C. Nussbaum and Pope Francis

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Fear seems to be one of the typical features of modern life, emerging as a 'culture' and a perspective for interpreting life. After a brief discussion on Martha Nussbaum's perspective on the role of fear in our societies, this article analyses the vision of fear that emerges from Fratelli tutti *with reference to what Pope Francis calls the "culture of walls". Next, it addresses the idea and practice of fraternity in the encyclical: can it constitute an "antidote" to the culture of fear?*

Keywords: Fear, Fratelli tutti*, Fraternity, Nussbaum, Walls*

Introduction

The recent outbreak of war in Ukraine, the images of the devastations, the death, the exodus so far of some ten million people[1], as well the threat of a nuclear war have generated understandable feelings of anguish and impotence. With due differences, the spread of the pandemic with its dramatic health and social consequences raised similar questions and laid bare the vulnerability of the human condition. Not to mention the lurking threat of terrorism and the anxiety generated by the consequences of the climate crisis. In this perspective, it is no exaggeration to say that fear seems to be one of the typical features of modern life today[2].

There is no doubt that fear does not always have negative qualities and may be a natural survival response to threat. However, today it is not only associated with some major "collective" threats, but also with the ordinary fears of everyday life. In this sense, Zygmunt Bauman affirms that fear has been "personalised" and "privatised"[3]. The study of fear paradoxically reveals that although this is a basic emotion, widely shared in the animal kingdom, its effects on the life of people are characterized by great complexity. In fact, it is defined by sociologists such as Frank Furedi and Barry Glassner as a "culture" and a perspective to interpret life[4].

In a similar vein, the Norwegian philosopher Lars Svendsen states that fear has become "a culturally determined magnifying glass through which we consider the world"[5]. In this perspective, dangers are everywhere and there is no area of our life that is truly safe. This view is deliberately exaggerated, since there are of course *real* dangers we should be afraid of, but it helps to grasp the pervasiveness of fear today. In other words, the problem is not the fear itself, which is sometimes justified, but the fact that "we seem to see *everything* from a perspective of fear"[6].

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1 - Cfr. "Dix millions de personnes dont près de 3,5 millions de réfugiés ont fui leurs foyers en Ukraine, selon le HCR", Nations Unies (21.03.2022), accessed 28.03.2022, https://news.un.org/fr/story/2022/03/1116702.

2 - Cfr. D. Altheide, *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, 2nd ed., Rowman and Littlefield, London 2017; H. Bude, *Society of fear*, translated by J. Spengler, Polity Press, Cambridge 2018; F. Furedi, *How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the 21st Century*, Bloomsbury Continuum, London 2018; L. Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Fear*, Reaktion Books, London 2008.

3 - Cfr. Z. Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2006.

4 - Cfr. F. Furedi, *The Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation*, rev. ed., Continuum Press, London 2002; Id., *The Politics of Fear: Beyond Left and Right*, Continuum Press, London 2006; Id., *How Fear Works*; Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. Rev. ed., Basic Books, New York 2018.

5 - L. Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Fear*, cit., p. 12.

6 - *Ibid.*, p. 13.

According to the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, fear is a "asocial" and "narcissistic" emotion[7]. While compassion or sympathy encourage individuals to relate to others, fear isolates the human being. For fear "you need only yourself and a threatening world"[8]. In this sense, it is a self-centered emotion, focused solely on one's own well-being or on the one's one loves at best.

The emergence of fear is obviously not a new phenomenon. All ages have known different forms of fear, Svendsen states, "but what fear is changes"[9]. Fear of terrorism and climate change, for example, are current fears, while the fear of divine judgement is no longer dominant in the secularized West. Interestingly, the philosopher states that in a polarized society with no common moral references, fear becomes a unifying element and a "basic characteristic of our entire culture"[10].

The main objectives of this study are to better understand the impact of fear on our societies and then to see if the idea and practice of fraternity can be considered as a possible alternative to the culture of fear. The hypothesis is that relationality, and in particular its openness to the dimension of reciprocity, is essential to address fear in our democratic societies. The analysis will consist of three main steps. First, I will deal with Nussbaum's vision of the role of fear in our societies and the alternatives she offers to the "monarchy" of fear. Second, I will focus on the vision of fear that emerges from the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* with reference to what Pope Francis calls the "culture of walls". Finally, I will study the idea of fraternity in the encyclical to see if it constitutes an "antidote" to the culture of fear.

Fear, a "Monarchical" Emotion: Nussbaum's Philosophical Analysis and Possible Alternatives

Nussbaum is one of the leading contemporary philosophers and during her career she has focused not only on the conceptualization of justice, making an important contribution, together with Amartya Sen, to the debate on the so-called "capabilities approach"[11], but also on the nature and role of emotions in

7 - M.C. Nussbaum, *The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at our Political Crisis*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2018), pp. 28-29.

8 - L. Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Fear*, cit., p. 29.

9 - *Ibid.*, p. 17.

10 - *Ibid*, p. 19.

11 - See A. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999; M.C. Nussbaum, *Creating capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2011. According to this theory, a society can be considered just if its members have certain concrete *capabilities* such as, for example, living a life of a normal length, enjoying good health and adequate nutrition, not being subject to threats and violence, having the right to participate in political life, etc.

shaping a decent political society. Nussbaum argues that politics, and by extension all social life, is imbued with emotions that are crucial to reinforce and promote the core values of a society[12]. Understanding these emotions is thus important to shed light on the fundamental values of society and the vision of the future that they promote, as well as on the motivations that animate the commitment of citizens in society.

In her book *The Monarchy of Fear*, Nussbaum states that fear is a serious threat to democracy and that it "needs careful scrutiny and containment if it is not to turn poisonous"[13]. Inspired by Aristotle, she argues that fear arises from the awareness of a danger and the "feeling that you are powerless to ward it off"[14]. According to Nussbaum, fear is "an unusually primitive emotion"[15], since it is the first to emerge in human existence and is also the most widespread in the animal kingdom. It is rooted in the extreme dependence and vulnerability that characterize our early life and the consequent need to have others provide for our needs.

For Nussbaum, "overcoming fear – to the extent that we ever can – is a relational matter"[16]. Her constructive suggestions to contain fear are related to *hope*, *love*, and *faith*[17]. In this way, she proposes a "secular" version of the Christian doctrine of the theological virtues as an alternative to the culture of fear. She embraces with Kant a "practical hope"[18] in view of the goal of producing good actions inspired by the categorical principle. Inspired by Kant, Nussbaum argues that "good works need hope"[19], not a naive and submissive form of hope, but a hope that encourages commitment and action towards a concrete goal. Where a practical hope emerges, a hope that moves towards commitment and action, fear shrinks back[20]. Concerning "faith", the philosopher believes that we need to believe in the good outcome of our endeavors, as well as to experience trust in our relationships with others[21]. In a similar vein and with reference to love, Nussbaum highlights the importance to cultivate a realistic "love" for others that consists in acknowledging

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12 - M.C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2013, pp. 1-2.

13 - Id., *The Monarchy of Fear*, cit., p. 5.

14 - *Ibid.*, p. 24.

15 - Id., *Political Emotions*, cit., p. 320.

16 - Id., *The Monarchy of Fear*, cit., p. 35.

17 - *Ibid.*, pp. 202-207 and pp. 213-221.

18 - *Ibid.*, p. 206 and p. 208.

19 - *Ibid.*, p. 209.

20 - *Ibid.*, p. 205.

21 - *Ibid.*, pp. 213-215.

the humanity of each of our fellow human beings[22]. This means learning to distinguish the individuals from their actions, "saving" the formers and condemning the latter when necessary.

More specifically, Nussbaum proposes five practices to build a future of hope. The first is engagement with art as a way of humanization and fostering empathic openness to the other[23]. The second area concerns Socratic reasoning, "because it creates a world of listening" rather than fueling verbal duels[24]. The third area is that of religions because they place individuals in communities which, when animated by love and respect for others, help them to cultivate hope[25]. The fourth area in which human beings can embrace hope are protest movements that fight for justice in a non-violent way[26]. The fifth practice of hope consists of theories of justice that promote liberal democracy and in particular the capabilities approach[27]. In addition to these five schools of hope, Nussbaum mentions a sixth, namely a compulsory civil community service that would tackle individualism and the lack of a sense of the common good in (American) society[28].

Martha Nussbaum's analysis has the merit of exploring clearly and through an interdisciplinary approach the impact of fear on our society, proposing alternatives to the monarchy of fear. However, the six practices of hope proposed to counter fear, although stimulating, are sketched rather quickly and raise some doubts with regard to their concrete application. The call to create a culture of "practical hope", raises similar questions, especially among those who seem to have lost hope in their lives. In my opinion, an important role in this regard can be played by the family which is defined by Nussbaum as a "facilitating environment" to help children overcome their fears[29], but is not adequately analyzed for its "structural" contribution to counter fear within society. Admittedly, fear is part of our existence, and it would be illusory to think that it can be eliminated, but it can and should be managed. In any case, given this vision of fear, what does Pope Francis brings to this debate?

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22 - *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.
23 - *Ibid.*, pp. 221-226.
24 - *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.
25 - *Ibid.*, pp. 231-233.
26 - *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.
27 - *Ibid.*, p. 235.
28 - *Ibid.*, p. 241.
29 - *Ibid.*, p. 35 and pp. 38-40.

Pope Francis' View of Fear in *Fratelli Tutti*

How does the recent encyclical *Fratelli tutti* address the emotion of fear? The analysis consists of two main paragraphs. First, I will deal with the first chapter of *Fratelli tutti* entitled "Dark Clouds Over a Closed World" in which Pope Francis emphasize the main obstacles to the recognition of fraternity and social friendship. Second, I will address the vision of fear that emerges from the encyclical with reference to what Pope Francis calls the "culture of walls".

The "shadows" of today's world

In the first chapter of the encyclical[30], Pope Francis makes a diagnosis of the current situation, highlighting those obstacles that stand in the way of the recognition of fraternity and social friendship. The starting point of the reflection is the alarmed observation that history is "showing signs of a certain regression" (cfr. FT §11). The encyclical refers to a long series of phenomena, including the re-emergence of "ancient conflicts" that were thought to have been overcome, the spread of narrow-minded nationalism, the paradox of an increasingly globalized society that "makes us neighbors, but does not make us brothers" (§12), the growing social inequalities, the "new forms of cultural colonization" that tend to erase the roots and traditions of a people, the loss of meaning of terms such as "democracy, freedom, justice or unity" which, denatured and deformed, have been used as "tools for domination, as meaningless tags that can be used to justify any action" (§14). As Spadaro notes, Pope Francis "observes the world and has the general impression that a real schism is developing between the individual and the human community"[31]. Faced with the weakening of social ties, the temptation emerges to give in to an attitude of indifference, which is the fruit of an "illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat" (§30).

Euvé and Lasida argue that the "diagnosis" presented by Francis in the first chapter of the encyclical is "*sombre, inquiétant*", but it shows that the pope is not "*naïf*" about the current state of the world. At the same time, his critical view does

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30 - It is interesting to note that the title of the first chapter of *Fratelli tutti* in English is different from the Italian original version. The title in English speaks of "dark clouds over a closed world" while in Italian it refers to "the shadows of a closed world". Interestingly, the title in Italian expresses a causal relationship – the shadows are the expression of the closures present in society – which is absent in the English text. Furthermore, the shadow often delineates a dark, distorted, and misleading image.

31 - A. Spadaro, "*Fratelli tutti*. Una guida alla lettura" in «La Civiltà Cattolica» IV (17.10.2020), pp. 105-119, accessed 25.03.2022, https://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articolo/fratelli-tutti/.

not stem from a pessimistic view of humanity, which is in decay because it is distant from the Church and God, but from a closer look at recent developments within our societies. According to Pope Francis, these developments reflect a trend towards fragmentation and growing inequalities and outline what he calls "the globalization of indifference". Francis' analysis is deliberately devoid of nuances, Euvé and Lasida claim, since his aim is to stir people' consciousness[32].

The Covid-19 pandemic is in the background of *Fratelli Tutti* and has exposed "our false securities" (§7). As Katherine Marshall argues, "COVID is not the subject" of the encyclical, but the imperative to understand and address "the ills and strengths" that the pandemic has exposed "can be read as its principal and most urgent message"[33]. A *dual* narrative is present in the encyclical. On the one hand, the pandemic has highlighted the deep connection we have with others and brought the issue of care back to the heart of the political debate. On the other hand, however, the pandemic, in addition to its high costs in human lives, is also contributing to increased social inequalities and rising poverty. Therefore, Pope Francis states that this crisis has "only made it all the more urgent that we rethink our styles of life, our relationships, the organisation of our societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence" (§33). In other words, from the perspective of Francis, the current pandemic is an ethical call for fraternal *action* towards the entire human family.

Fear and the "culture of walls"

The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* does not present a systematic analysis of the emotion of fear, but it does offer some interesting insights on fear in relation to what Pope Francis calls "the temptation to build a culture of walls" (§27). In a lecture entitled "Human Fraternity in the Age of Walls", Massimo Faggioli argues that in this encyclical, and throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis is repeatedly stating the concept that "we live in a new age of walls"[34]. Compared to the past, the vari-

32 - F. Euvé – E. Lasida, "Fratelli tutti" in «Études» 12 (2020), pp. 69-80, here p. 72 (my translation), accessed 27.03.2022, https://www-cairn-info.kuleuven.e-bronnen.be/revue-etudes-2020-12-page-69.htm.

33 - K. Marshall, "*Fratelli Tutti* in the Time of COVID-19: Inspiration, Challenges, and Questions", in *Berkeley Forum: Fratelli Tutti and the Future of the Catholic Church*, Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, 26.10.2021, accessed 27.03.2022, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/fratelli-tutti-in-the-time-of-covid-19-inspiration-challenges-and-questions.

34 - M. Faggioli, "Human Fraternity in the Age of Walls: Pope Francis' Encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti'," *YouTube*, uploaded by the University of St. Thomas, 9.11.2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4HjdwXlwyo. Citing a study by Uri Friedman published in "The Atlantic" in 2016, Faggioli argues that "of the 51 fortified boundaries built between countries since the end of World War II, around

ety of walls has increased. There are physical, technological or symbolic walls, as in the case of "Brexit".

These walls are the consequence of several factors: the crisis of our globalised world, the traumatic effects of 9/11, the impact of the 2008 financial crisis, and the migration crisis. What walls do is not only create a physical separation from other people, but they also make invisible those on the other side, transforming them into "mythological beasts: their lives, their attitudes, their aspirations, all become figments of our imagination"[35]. Interestingly, Faggioli states that there are new types of invisible walls in our society which are the effect of the so-called "big sort"[36], that is, the tendency – even within the Church – to live in homogeneous communities of people who think like us and belong to the same social strata.

In several passages of the encyclical, Pope Francis uses the image of "walls" to describe the situation in the world today and to make a different proposal centred on the call to become brothers and sisters[37]. Francis mentions physical and even symbolic barriers, which are no less real and divisive for society. It is in this "context" that the encyclical refers to fear, which is both the *cause* of walls, insofar as they are built to defend against external threats, and their *effect*, since in a society fortified with defensive walls, closed towards the outside world, suspicion and fear of those who are beyond the barriers will tend to grow. This will inevitably lead to the creation of new walls to seek protection from what frightens us. In this way, a vicious circle is created between fear and walls, which poses serious risks to our civil coexistence. This process is clearly described by Pope Francis in paragraph 27 of the encyclical: "today too, outside the ancient town walls lies the abyss, the territory of the unknown, the wilderness. Whatever comes from there cannot be trusted, for it is unknown, unfamiliar, not part of the village. It is the territory of the "barbarian", from whom we must defend ourselves at all costs. As a result, new walls are erected for self-preservation".

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half were constructed between 2000 and 2014". See Uri Friedman, "A World of Walls" in *The Atlantic*, 19.05.2016, accessed 27.03.2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/05/donald-trump-wall-mexico/483156/.

35 - M. Faggioli, "Human Fraternity in the Age of Walls", cit.

36 - See B. Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded American is Tearing Us Apart*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston 2009.

37 - In the encyclical, the term "walls" is used 14 times, including 8 times in no. 27 alone, which is therefore crucial to understanding the concept of the "culture of walls". The term "barriers" is used 3 times by Pope Francis and refers to cultural and historical divisions. The term "border(s)" is used 10 times, including 5 section titles (in the Introduction and chapters I, II, III and IV) that group several paragraphs together. It indicates all those barriers that constitute obstacles to the call to universal brotherhood, such as cultural and religious differences, and borders between countries.

As Francis claims, in this age of ever new walls, the outside world tends to disappear, leaving "only 'my' world", and the others are depersonalised and otherized, since they are no longer considered as "human beings possessed of an inalienable dignity, they become only 'them'" (§27). We experience then "the temptation to build a culture of walls" that makes us literally prisoners of our own fears and insecurities, enclosed within the multiple walls we build "in the hearts" and "on the land, in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people" (§27). Therefore, Francis warns that "those who raise walls will end up as slaves within the very walls they have built" (§27).

As Faggioli carefully observes, *Fratelli tutti* also describes the "psychological and spiritual effects"[38] of walls and fear in society. For Francis, a world of walls is not only poorer in its isolation, but it is afflicted by a particular spiritual disease described in paragraph 146, namely the "'local' narcissism" that "is born of a certain insecurity and fear of the other that leads to rejection and the desire to erect walls for self-defence" (§146). To the image of the water in a pond that rots and becomes unhealthy if it remains stagnant, Pope Francis argues that "it is impossible to be 'local' in a healthy way without being sincerely open to the universal, (...) without openness to enrichment by other cultures, and without solidarity and concern for the tragedies affecting other peoples" (§146). A local culture permeated with fear and mistrust of others becomes sick.

As a concrete illustration of the culture of walls and fear, Pope Francis highlights in paragraph 39 the link between migration and fear. This leads to the emergence of a "xenophobic mentality" that delegitimises migrants who are considered as "less worthy, less important, less human" forgetting "that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person" (§39). In paragraph 41, the Pope affirms that doubts and fear towards migrants, although "understandable" because they are "part of our natural instinct of self-defence", are "primal reactions" to be overcome, as they are germs of intolerance and racism. In this sense, according to Kristin E. Heyer, "*Fratelli tutti*'s charge to develop 'antibodies' of social friendship remains vital, given the infectious forces that serve to exclude, exploit, and isolate"[39].

38 - M. Faggioli, "Human Fraternity in the Age of Walls", cit.

39 - K.E. Heyer, "Walls on the Land and in the Heart: *Fratelli Tutti* and Migration", in *Berkeley Forum: Fratelli Tutti and the Future of the Catholic Church*, Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, 26.10.2021, accessed 28.03.2022, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/walls-on-the-land-and-in-the-heart-fratelli-tutti-and-migration.

Fraternity: An Alternative to Fear?

The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* makes a broad appeal to universal fraternity and social friendship. As the theologian Piero Coda states, "from a Christian perspective, we – all of us, no one excluded, whether we like it or not – are brothers"[40]. Yet, outside of this perspective, as Luigino Bruni argues, the concept of fraternity presents a certain ambiguity "because there are many fraternities, and they are not all good or Christian"[41]. Throughout history there have always been people and communities that in the name of *their idea* of fraternity have discriminated against those who did not fit into that vision of fraternity. Therefore, Pope Francis' choice to propose the parable of the Good Samaritan as the theological and ethical reference of the encyclical is important because – although it does not address the dimension of reciprocity – it affirms that his vision of fraternity is centred on the *victim* as well as on the "*contrast between proximity and closeness*"[42]: the Samaritan became the victim's neighbour even though he was not the closest from a religious and cultural point of view.

The ethics of the Samaritan is therefore the ethics of fraternity which becomes proximity to others, whoever they may be. As Euvé and Lasida state, "the parable does not invite us to ask ourselves who is close to us, but *to become a neighbour to others* (*nous faire proches d'autrui*), to all people, beginning with the most suffering"[43].

In *Fratelli tutti* the "definition" of fraternity develops progressively, enriched by new elements that Pope Francis adds to his analysis. The first is love, which "impels us towards universal communion" and "requires growth in openness to accept others" (§95). As Grégoire Catta states, this love is not only expressed in "interpersonal relationships" but also extends to "social relationships, institutions, and structures that shape societies"[44]. Euvé and Lasida affirm that fraternity "must be-

40 - P. Coda, "Singolarità dell'agápe e/o universalità dell'amore" (2011), cited in B. Callebaut, *Religioni in dialogo e carisma dell'unità: Una lettura sociologica*, Città Nuova, Roma 2020, p. 6 (my translation).

41 - L. Bruni, "Sempre dalla parte della vittima" in *Avvenire*, 6.10.2020, accessed 28.03.2022, https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/sempre-dalla-parte-della-vittima-amando-le-umane-diversit (my translation).

42 - *Ibid*.

43 - F. Euvé – E. Lasida, "Fratelli tutti", cit., p. 73.

44 - G. Catta, "*Fratelli tutti*: proposition de lecture théologique d'une encyclique sociale", in «Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale» 2, no. 310 (2021), pp. 103-118, here p. 105, accessed 29.03.2022, https://www-cairn-info.kuleuven.e-bronnen.be/revue-d-ethique-et-de-theologie-morale-2021-2-page-103.htm (my translation).

come *political*" (doit se faire *politique*) by giving rise to a more fraternal society[45]. In relation to this, Francis states that when human beings "join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the 'field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity'" (§180).

Second, Catta carefully observes that *Fratelli tutti* embraces "all the great principles of the Church's social doctrine" as constitutive elements of the social dimension of Christian love and concrete ways of living fraternity[46]. Just to mention a few, the principle of the common good is recalled in the encyclical as the goal of political and economic action based on fraternity and social friendship (§154 and 179). Solidarity takes the form of "service" and "care" for people in need (§115). The principle of subsidiarity (§175), the principle of the universal destination of goods created for all (§120), as well as the preferential option for the poor are important elements in the encyclical.

Third, Pope Francis states that an essential element in achieving fraternity is the acknowledgement of the inalienable dignity and worth of every human person. "Unless this basic principle is upheld", Francis states, "there will be no future either for fraternity or for the survival of humanity" (§107). According to Catta, the respect of the human dignity is "the nodal point of the path of fraternity" proposed by the encyclical[47].

Fourth, fraternity is concretely built through dialogue, which is a fundamental dimension of the entire encyclical. Authentic dialogue is based on respect for the other's point of view, which "may include legitimate convictions and concerns" (§203). It aims to develop a "culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions" in the image of "a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity" (§215).

In this perspective, the concept of fraternity that Pope Francis proposes in *Fratelli Tutti* is not to be confused with some form of irenicism or unifying bond between like-minded people, nor with an abstract universalism. On the contrary, fraternity aims to foster the development of a culture of encounter, which requires that we put aside our fear to become neighbors of others, accepting their differences. It implies a desire to build bridges and to plan "a project that includes everyone" (§216). In this sense, fraternity is an alternative to the "culture of fear", which is characterized by closure and mistrust of those who are different, and the temptation to build ever new walls. As Anna Rowlands puts it, "our politics seeks

45 - F. Euvé – E. Lasida, "Fratelli tutti", cit., p. 74.

46 - G. Catta, "*Fratelli tutti*: proposition de lecture théologique d'une encyclique sociale", cit., pp. 105-106.

47 - *Ibid.*, p. 108.

perversely to build security through maximizing fear and distrust"[48]. However, as evidenced by *Fratelli tutti*, "we are called to something more than just a social contract – we are called to be a people who covenant with each other because there is a prior covenant that binds us together. A covenant is a reciprocal exchange of gifts and care"[49]. Therefore, the development of universal fraternity calls for the creation of an open and inclusive people in which, as Pope Francis states, without falling into syncretism or uniformity, "each of us can learn something from others, no one is useless and no one is expendable", and the peripheries, whatever they are, are included (§215).

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to verify whether the idea and practice of fraternity can be a valid alternative to the impact of fear in Western societies. In this regard, Nussbaum has analyzed the political impact of fear on our democracies, and its link to related emotions like envy, disgust, anger, and blame. Her analysis shows fear as a narcissistic emotion that can only be overcome – where possible – in a relational context open to reciprocity such as the family or democratic society. In *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis broadens the reflection by addressing the "culture of walls" to tackle the divisive effects of fear on our society. This culture makes people prisoners of their own fears and prevents the encounter with other cultures and people. Fear is both the *cause* of walls, since they are built for self-defence, and their *effect*, since in a fortified society suspicion and fear of strangers will tend to grow. This will inevitably lead to the creation of new walls to seek protection from what frightens us.

Both Nussbaum and Pope Francis are convinced that it is necessary to think of alternatives to counter the culture of fear. On one hand, Nussbaum proposes a "secular" version of the Christian doctrine of the theological virtues as an alternative to the culture of fear. On the other hand, Francis responds to the "culture of walls" with a "new culture", the "culture of encounter" centered on the idea of fraternity[50]. In other words, Francis seems to affirm that to counter the culture of fear, it is not enough to think only of isolated alternative strategies. On the contrary, it is

48 - A. Rowlands, "A Letter for Dark Times: Pope Francis on the Call for a New Politics", in *Berkeley Forum: Fratelli Tutti and the Future of the Catholic Church*, Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, 26.10.2021, accessed 29.03.2022, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/a-letter-for-dark-times-pope-francis-on-the-call-for-a-new-politics.

49 - *Ibid.*

50 - As remarked by Catta, the notion of culture is at the core of the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, which uses the terms "culture(s)" and "cultural" 119 times. Cfr. G. Catta, "*Fratelli tutti*: proposition de lecture théologique d'une encyclique sociale", cit., pp. 110-112.

necessary to develop a *different culture* capable of taking root in the convictions and lifestyles of the people and stimulating alternative strategies to fear. This is the appeal to which the encyclical seeks to respond.

The solutions proposed by Nussbaum present interesting affinities with the thinking of Pope Francis in the recent encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. *Firstly*, although from different perspectives, both emphasize the value of hope, faith, and love as guides for action. For both, hope expresses the realistic desire to achieve important things. For Nussbaum faith is understood in a "secular" way, as support for hope and trust in human relationships, while for Pope Francis it is also openness to a transcendental relationship with the heavenly Father that grounds the brotherhood of human beings on earth. Nussbaum conceives of love as linked mainly to interpersonal relationships, while Pope Francis also describes its political and social dimension. *Secondly*, they emphasize the importance of openness to others, starting with the family and one's own community, and opening to those who are different and foreign. *Thirdly*, both highlight the commitment to the common good: Pope Francis sees it as the goal society should strive for, while Nussbaum believes it can be pursued through compulsory national civil service for young people. *Fourthly*, both value the commitment to social justice as a concern for the poor and excluded. For Nussbaum it consists of the "capabilities approach", while for Francis, in the light of Catholic social thought, it is a "preferential option and love" aimed at recognizing the dignity of those in greatest need and enabling them to shape their own future.

The hypothesis undergirding this research was that relationality is essential to overcome fear in our democratic societies. This is explicitly recognised by Nussbaum who refers to family and democracy, as well as religious groups and nonviolent protest movements, as "facilitating environments" that diminish fear. Pope Francis sees human persons as relational beings who cannot "fully know themselves apart from an encounter with other persons" (cfr. FT §87). For Francis, life flourishes when there are fraternal bonds, communion, and fraternity, while, on the contrary, it disappears when we isolate ourselves, barricaded behind defensive walls. He therefore believes that the alternative to the exclusionary fear is a "culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions" in a "variegated unity" (§215).

In the light of the encyclical, fraternity requires that we put aside our fears to become neighbors of others, starting with the most vulnerable. Fraternity does not eliminate fear, which is part of existence, but it provides humanity with the necessary "antibodies" to prevent fear from becoming culture.

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