

2022 AUSCP Assembly: Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv

I am most grateful for this opportunity to address this organization of priests whose members have provided me with a great deal of inspiration as well as support in my ministry. When I served in the Diocese of Toledo and found myself “on alien soil” as far as the operative ecclesiology there, I was relieved to encounter a group of priests, all slightly older than myself, with vision, energy and deep love for the people of God. They were inspired by the hope unleashed at the Second Vatican Council, were transformed by enacting its agenda and formed by that breath of fresh air that John XXIII let into the Church. With years of experience of servant leadership, pastoral collaboration, partnership in ministry with women, valued ecumenical and interfaith relationships, and a commitment to a multicultural church unafraid to work for racial justice, these priests were unwilling to be leashed to the communion rail, confined to the sacristy or engage in the neo-clericalism arising in their ranks. I was impressed that they would talk about real issues that matter, were unafraid of taking on the controversial and unwilling to allow Vatican II to become an historical event less notable or relevant than the Synod of Pistoia. It is a pleasure to speak to you because you have modeled a church that listens as well as teaches, one that is not afraid to become bruised and dirty from being in the streets, you have taught local communities to discern the path forward together and have gone to the peripheries even before a pope named Francis emerged from the conclave of 2013.

We gather now, a full nine years into the Francis pontificate, emerging from an as yet unfinished global pandemic, having witnessed a domestic attack on our U.S. capitol led by an outvoted president, watching daily indiscriminate bombings in Ukraine as dead bodies pile up on their roadsides while the most economically and militarily powerful coalitions on the globe basically watch from the sidelines, we have seen fourth graders decapitated and gruesomely mutilated by an assault rifle in their classroom only weeks after African Americans were gunned down in a grocery store and in a year that has seen more episodes of mass shootings in our country than the days in the year so far. We are on the verge of seeing Roe v. Wade be overturned after decades of working for this. This means we are likely to see the end of a constitutional protection for the destruction of the lives of the unborn-- but with no assurance that we are at all prepared for the births of more unwanted and unloved children in our violent and hostile world. We can only hope that we are ready to step up as a community committed to the common good.

Our church is currently led by a pontiff who is willing to get down and kiss the feet of warring leaders in Africa as he begs for peace, who drops into the Russian embassy against all protocol to condemn their unjust aggression and plead for the victims on the day the assaults begin, who led the world in prayer and reflection when it was brought to a halt by the coronavirus, who brings refugees into the Vatican and chooses cardinals from overlooked peripheries, who sends handwritten notes to a nun expelled from her community for working with the LGBT community and who exemplifies the mercy of God in all that he says and does. And the “leadership” of the church in the United States whispers a condemnation of gun violence, issues conscientious objection credentials to those wanting to avoid a life-saving vaccine, debates for a year about whether or not to prevent the second Catholic president in our history, a mass-going president, from receiving the eucharist, cannot bring itself to utter the three critical words “black lives matter” and is fine with protecting legal

discrimination against transgendered youth and LGBT persons. But, we are in the midst of a national Eucharistic revival- so hang on, we're coming back!

Remember the phrase regularly posed by Joan Rivers? "Can we talk?" Is that not what Pope Francis is saying to the universal Church as he expands the concept of the synod to be all inclusive throughout the universal church? Can we talk? ...and, maybe more importantly, can we listen? A lot of good and important talking and a lot of deep listening happens in these annual assemblies. Thank you! You are not afraid to engage even the topics you are told are off the table. Your courage even surprises me sometimes: "let's propose a new Eucharistic prayer; the bishops will love that!"

Throughout our country and the world, synodal gatherings are happening and the hope of renewal is being reborn. Whenever I hear the "agists" lament that it is only the gray-haired that come to gatherings like this one, or Pax Christi events, or social justice efforts, I only look with admiration and think of John XXIII or our 85 year old pontiff, *Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.* (Joel 2:28) Pope Francis even wrote a book titled *Let Us Dream*, very much a complementary document to the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. As a Christian, he must be a person of hope who can never just accept things as they are. Like Christ himself, Pope Francis pleads for humanity to discover that our universal fraternity has to be awakened for our survival, we have to repent from nearly universal fratricide.

When Pope Francis signed the encyclical at the tomb of Francis of Assisi on the vigil of his feast in 2020, it was in the midst of a simple mass celebrated with social distancing and only a single concelebrant. He tells us that originally he intended to write an encyclical about the role of world religions today, but the pandemic seemed to require that he expand the topic. In *Fratelli Tutti* Francis simply preaches the gospel while reading the signs of the times. It is very much a call to conversion, as is the gospel, with the clear recognition that we, the human family, cannot simply continue on in the same way. "For a real and lasting peace," he says, "will only be possible on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the human family." [127]. The call to conversion is from the globalization of indifference, a term Francis first used on the island of Lampedusa while celebrating mass on an altar fashioned from a wrecked ship on which migrants fleeing Afrida perished. It is also a conversion from the "technocratic paradigm", phrase used frequently in the earlier encyclical *Laudato Si*, which allows the market economy to dominate and take priority over human flourishing. "Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing in the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all." [8]

There is more than an echo of Francis' previous encyclical *Laudato Si* in this reflection. Francis once again embraces the vision of his namesake who recognized the interconnectedness of all creation as expressed in the earlier encyclical and is here complemented by the even greater interconnectedness of all humanity made in the image and likeness of God. "Francis (of Assisi) felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh." [2] The pope sees the unfolding pandemic as a real missed opportunity for humanity to discover this interdependence and recognizes that the failure to do so now does not bode well for the impending climate catastrophe which all of humanity will need to work together in order to prevent. Drawing

on scripture and tradition, Pope Francis proposes ways to overcome this globalization of indifference. First of all, we cannot underestimate the power of any encounter; some encounters point the way for transformation. The pope refers to Saint Francis himself as a man without borders and highlights the powerful visit of Francis to the Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Egypt at the time of the Crusades. Unarmed, but traveling with violent crusaders, Francis approached the Muslim leader as both a man of faith and as a brother. Their unlikely meeting was an encounter that did not result in religious conversions or martyrdom, but an occasion in which they saw each other as brothers and offered each other respect. The pope says that this encounter proposes a new vision of fraternity and social friendship, themes elaborated upon in the encyclical. As Francis of Assisi chose to spread the love of God rather than wage a war of words, he provides us with the essence of a model to follow today.

We should remember that this encyclical was received in the United States during a time of great tension brought on not only by the pandemic but by a presidential election unlike any other. Francis was by no means focused on the US alone, but he was certainly not unaware of the depravity of the political shenanigans of that election. The fifth chapter of the encyclical is titled “A new kind of politics” in which the pope makes it a point to contrast current forms and expressions of populism with what it is to be truly “popular”, or of the people. Rather than genuinely arising from the hopes and aspirations of the population, what has today been labeled as “populism” is really a new form of polarization and with the purpose of turning people against each other. What connection does this populism have with the people? the pope asks. He argues that this kind of populism exploits culture politically while it appeals to the basest and most selfish inclinations of people. This is a version of populism that prefers the short-term advantage over the long view. For Francis, the “people” are of most importance; he even describes the “people” as a mythic category: “to be part of a people is to be part of shared identity arising from social and cultural bonds.” [158] Much has been written about the theological influences of Francis, and it is the Argentinean articulation of a theology of the people, a strand of contextual or liberation theology, that Francis brings with him to the Chair of Peter.

Because of his genuine concern for “popular” issues, that is, the issues of the people, Francis has launched what he calls the world gathering of popular movements. These gatherings have brought together community organizers and the popular agents that he calls the artisans of humanity and social poets who organize the impoverished and allow them to be agents in their own development. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development, much maligned by our dear friends from the Lepanto Institute who are probably looming around us, is the best example we have of the organization of these popular movements in the U.S. In these world gatherings, including one which took place in Modesto, California, the pope has proposed that the whole world work on the attainability for all of what in Spanish can be expressed as the three ‘t’s: tierra, techo y trabajo (land, housing and work). These are the fundamental rights that too many on the planet lack, and Francis is willing to listen to and work with all of those who are promoting these goals. But even prior to the three t’s, elimination of hunger has to come first.

When Francis introduces the chapter on politics, he asks whether we understand politics as something noble or something dirty. If our reaction to even the word “politics” is one of distaste or disgust, it is understandable given the current state of affairs. But, as I like to remind those who

regularly accuse me of being too political, if we do not resolve things politically, how should we resolve them? By force? It used to be that when put that way, the choice was fairly obvious: politics may be messy, but it is better than “might makes right”. Now I am not so sure. I can’t help but agree with Father Bryan Massingale when he says that January 6, 2021 revealed that some Americans are more comfortable with a white dictator than with a democracy that gives full rights to people of all races. Within our American democracy, which we are hopefully learning that we cannot take for granted, politics should involve the give and take of negotiated agreements favored by the majority while maintaining respect and the rights of the minority. This is how you create policies for the common good; the “winner takes all” approach only breeds resentment and sets up an eventual backlash. But of course the church needs to have a voice in the political sphere, why would we want to stay out of the formation of policies that will either help or harm people? Interestingly, it is often the same people in our pews and sometimes even in our pulpits who consider the issues of racism and migration too political to be mentioned in church but do not consider abortion to be a political issue and want it talked about even more.

Pope Francis reminds us that politics is meant to be at the service of the common good, and when understood that way, it is a noble vocation. Social, political and economic participation promotes integral human development. The pope introduces the concepts of political charity, which is love of neighbor on a social or institutional level. Collective organization to promote fraternity and justice is political charity. And charity is the synthesis of the divine law. More than mere sentiment, charity is capable of building a new world. Working towards the recognition of universal fraternity is an exercise in charity. Organizing society to eliminate poverty is charity. The pope gives the example of someone helping an elderly person to get across a river as an act of love, an act of charity. Organizing the resources to build a bridge for many people to cross the river is political charity-oriented to the common good. Of course, the pope advocates a preferential love for those in greatest need, but he explains that such preferential love requires truly seeing the poor and honoring their dignity, not reducing poor people to passivity. The virtue of subsidiarity, involving people in their own development, is critical here. It is a key criterion for funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development mentioned before. Involving a wide variety of voices is the way to ensure the common good, even when it complicates things, “disagreements may well give rise to conflicts, but uniformity proves stifling and leads to cultural decay.” [191]

Pope Francis also insists that we recognize how fruitfulness is more important than ultimate results. He says we may only partially achieve our great goals, but we help many in the process through love. We are sowing seeds now. “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 neighbors, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good.” [67] Seeing another possible opening for a more fraternal world, the pope recognizes the decline of nation states in the 21st century. While this seems to be anathema in the United States, the pope cites how commerce and technology are able to operate globally, but when facing global issues like migration and climate change, national sovereignty makes it very difficult. As we often said at the border, goods and products can cross easily, but not the people who make them. Francis sees the need for enhancing the role of international organizations and for the United Nations itself to be reformed in order to become a true “family of nations”. Noting even the shortcomings of the United Nations, he says that it is still the best international organization we have and the issues can be resolved. [173] Now

more than ever there is a need for increased multi-lateral agreements and these should take precedence over bilateral agreements.

It doesn't require a lot of imagination to realize how far we are from this vision of politics for the common good. Even as the encyclical was being signed, we in the United States could watch almost hourly examples of its opposite in the rhetoric and behavior of the presidential campaign. Early in the encyclical, Francis says, "the best way to dominate and gain control over people is to spread despair and discouragement, even under the guise of defending certain values... hyperbole, extremism and polarization have become political tools." [15] Can we think of examples of this? Not too hard, is it? He further says, "one effective way to weaken historical consciousness, critical thinking, the struggle for justice, and the process of integration is to empty great words of their meaning or manipulate them." [11]

The opening chapter of the encyclical does not exhibit the joy that has been characteristic of the pope's whole ministry and especially of his apostolic exhortations. Titled "Dark Clouds on the Horizon", it visually recalls the iconic moment when the pope stood nearly alone in a dark, dreary and wet Saint Peter's Square and, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, spoke of the apostles' experience of Jesus asleep in their storm-tossed boat. In that opening chapter, the pope lamented how nations were taking steps which were in effect backing away from the promise of greater unity and integration and noted how nationalism is on the rise. He fears a globalization that promotes limitless consumption and empty individualism rather than greater unity; one that disregards history and tradition. "Ancient conflicts thought long buried are breaking out anew, while instances of a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism are on the rise." [11] He sees new forms of colonization- cultural colonization- while words like democracy, freedom, justice and unity are emptied of their meaning. "Liberty, equality and fraternity can remain lofty ideals unless they apply to everyone. Encounter cannot take place only between the holders of economic, political or academic power. Genuine social encounter calls for a dialogue that engages the culture shaped by the majority of the population." [219] Instead of holding healthy debates on the issues that affect everyone, the powerful resort to marketing techniques designed to discredit the other. We have engaged in a permanent state of conflict in which the aim is to eliminate one's opponent rather than convince them. How many church leaders were willing to call this out when in so many pulpits the insistence on the falsely called "pro-life" agenda was presented as the only consideration for Catholics in the election?

At a gathering of bishops, theologians and journalists at Loyola University in Chicago this past March, Therese Lysaught built on the work of Massimo Borghesi who contrasts the "Field Hospital" ecclesiology of Pope Francis with the neo-conservative understanding of the Church which is very influential in the U.S. She cited his description of "Catho-capitalism" and how it functions as an apology for economic neo-liberalism (neo-conservatism). Lysaught is a professor at the Neiswanger Institute for Bioethics and Healthcare Leadership with a PhD in Religion and Theological Ethics from Duke and an MA in theology from Notre Dame. She demonstrated how the so-called culture wars have become largely co-extensive with the field of bioethics and how so-called "religious traditionalists" have taken on the rhetoric of the "anti-woke". One only has to look to a recent speech that the President of the USCCB gave to a Catholic organization in Spain for a vivid example of this. Lysaught deconstructs much of the argumentation that passes as pro-life, not

on the abortion question per-se, and demonstrates how its proponents engage the rhetorical violence of war tactics: dehumanization of the opponent, deception and manipulation of facts and data, emotivism, vice, and the targeting of people (even non-combatants). She developed this within a suggestive reflection on what she labeled the first bioethics controversy: when Jesus healed a man's arm on the Sabbath. When she unveils the neo-conservative/neo-liberal economic interests of the opponents of Pope Francis, she illustrates what Pope Francis means when he says, "radical individualism is a virus that is extremely difficult to eliminate, for it is clever. It makes us believe that everything consists in giving free reign to our own ambitions, as if by pursuing ever greater ambitions and creating safety nets we would somehow be promoting the common good." [105] And, "if a society is governed primarily by the criteria of market freedom and efficiency, there is no place for a disabled person, someone born in dire poverty, those lacking a good education or with little access to health care. Fraternity will remain just another vague ideal." [109]

In this encyclical and elsewhere, Pope Francis insists that economic rules which are very effective for growth are not necessarily so effective for integral human development. This has been a concern of the Church since *Gaudium et Spes* was promulgated at the Council. What we see, says the Holy Father, is greater inequality; the poor, disabled, unborn and elderly treated as though they are disposable; and a third world war being fought piecemeal (a concept which links Ukraine and Uvalde in the present moment). "We think we can ensure stability and peace through a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust" [26]. So we build walls, we continue on the path of globalization "without a shared roadmap" and fail to sense that we are all in the same boat, we are all in this together. "Those who raise walls," Pope Francis says, "will end up as slaves behind the very walls they have built. They are left without horizons, for they lack interchange with others." [27]

Specifically looking at the context of the pandemic, the Holy Father says, "Covid 19 exposed false securities... For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations is denying reality." [7] Seems like there is a lot of denial going on.

Digital connectivity can be necessary so that certain populations are not left behind, but it is insufficient for building community. The pope notes how everyone's lives are now under constant surveillance, but we don't know people any better as a result! Social aggression is far more acceptable in the digital world than in real encounters and the digital world makes it easy and profitable to spread ideologies not rooted in reality, information without knowledge or wisdom, and fanaticism. "Even in Catholic media, limits can be overstepped, defamation and slander can become commonplace, and all ethical standards and respect for the good name of others can be abandoned." [46] "We gorged ourselves on networking", he wryly observes, "and lost the taste of fraternity... prisoners of a virtual reality, we lost the taste and flavor of the truly real." [33]

It is in this context that Pope Francis presents a path forward, in the section which has probably become the centerpiece of the encyclical: his reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan. In his reflection on the well-known Lucan story, Francis sees the exemplification of someone serving the common good by an act of charity. Of course, he reminds the reader of the cultural context of the parable and the unthinkability of employing a despised Samaritan as the hero of the tale. In order to

recapture even a modicum of the shock value of the original telling, it would be necessary to replace the Samaritan with someone from within a despised category of humanity today; and unfortunately we have many from which to choose. For many in the Church, that would be a transgendered person. For others among us, it might be a person who identifies as pro-choice. For too many it could be an undocumented immigrant, even a documented refugee with dark skin or who is non-Christian, a Muslim, an atheist, a Democrat or a Republican, ironically even a Jew! Very recently in a talk on this parable, I heard a venerable monk-theologian regretfully say that had his grandfather been beaten up on the road and left for dead and a black man approached him and tried to do what the Good Samaritan did, his grandfather would have been horrified enough to prefer to die rather than accept such help. A Samaritan hero was outright offensive to Jesus' audience and certainly unthinkable.

Our familiarity works against us if we try to find fresh meaning from the parable. It is so well known even in our secular culture that we have "Good Samaritan" laws. The phrase has worked its way into the vernacular as a standard description of one who goes out of his or her way to help another, especially a stranger. Most of the people who could easily tell you the gist of the story would probably not remember that the parable was Jesus' response to a lawyer's question asking "who is my neighbor?" That question was in response to the lawyer answering his own question when in good rabbinical fashion, Jesus turned his prior question about how to gain eternal life back on him. Consistent with what must be a long standing legal method, the lawyer asked a question when he already had the answer: love God above everything else and love your neighbor as yourself, he could promptly and correctly reply. But, "wanting to justify himself," Saint Luke says, he wants to know who is his neighbor. He wants to know the limits of his responsibility. Therein lies the contemporary essence of the parable's lesson in an age of globalization- through social media and modern means of communication, I can know about suffering all over the world. But who am I required to love as a neighbor? Are we not all like the lawyer posing the question: how can I possibly give to every homeless person who begs, or to every charity that appeals, or to every drug addict or victim, etc.? "Jesus asks us not to decide who is close enough to be our neighbor, but that we become neighbors to all." [80] The pope tells us that "today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment." We have a great opportunity.....

True to his Ignatian spirituality, Francis invites us to visualize the story from the perspective of the various characters who play a role. We assume the traveler from Jerusalem to Jericho was innocent and victimized: how many travelers, migrants, refugees are victimized- beaten up and robbed of their rights and dignity, left for dead because their right to life is not acknowledged? The robbery takes place before the parable begins, but it shouldn't escape our close attention. Who are the highway brigands that prey on the innocent in an age of migration, of human trafficking, of selling drugs to desperate people- both the dealer on the street or Big Pharma getting people hooked on pain killers? And who lets them get away with what they do? We assume that "back then", in a time of greater innocence or less crime (isn't that always how the past is presented?) that the man beaten up on the road was an exceptional sight; maybe. But today he isn't alone.

We know that the priest and the Levite pass by at a distance. And we know some of the pious justifications proposed- the need to keep themselves ritually pure, the taboo of contact with blood-

but the parable leaves that to our imagination. Pope Francis suggests that like too many of us, they were simply too busy and perhaps too self-important to get involved, or even to get close, or to get their hands dirty. These were people with important social positions whose calendars were full and who were hurrying towards their next appointment. But they are also people, Francis proposes, who lost sight of the common good. None of us wants to have our plans interrupted. How easy it is to ignore the weak and vulnerable, to pass by or look the other way, to avoid all together- rushing by, we can even pretend not to notice. But are we even disturbed by suffering? In most if not all of the places we live, is it not easy enough to plan our lives in such a way that we can almost always avoid seeing the poor, the homeless, the beaten up and suffering? And what happens if they suddenly become visible, like the homeless in Los Angeles or San Francisco? It becomes a major inconvenience for the onlookers, which then gets more attention than the actual plight of the homeless in the first place. “How wonderful it would be,” the pope muses, “even as we discover far away planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters who orbit around us.” [31] The pope reminds us in our busyness, that “life is not simply time that passes, but a time for interactions.” [68]

The pope refers us to God’s response to the question of the murderous Cain; am I my brother’s keeper? Yes, we have responsibility toward one another, responsibility that was expanded infinitely by the incarnation. God becomes neighbor to us, even a brother to us, and the greatest chasm between Creator and creature is bridged. There are now no boundaries or limits as to who is my neighbor. Yet we still have that primordial instinct to divide the world into us and them: Jews and Gentiles, good guys and bad guys, males and females, citizens and foreigners, black and white, gay and straight, legal and illegal, etc. The way to rebuild our wounded world is to follow the example of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan was the foreigner, a despised foreigner, the object of prejudice and disdain who probably would have experienced rejection by the very person he assisted. He was the one with no rights in the society, but who contributed to the common good. And he couldn’t do it alone.

For all the times I have read the parable, and preached on the parable, it was only reading this encyclical that I ever considered the innkeeper at all. But he cooperates, collaborates, even if it is a business proposition; he is engaged in the care of the beaten up man and invited to do so by a despised but generous Samaritan who hands him a blank check. The real differences in the world, Pope Francis says, are not between races, ethnicities, religions or other categories but between those who care and those who don’t. How do we keep ourselves from becoming a society of those who don’t care? Who is beaten up on the roadside today and who looks the other way? And a most poignant follow-up question, does the practice of religion make a difference?

Because of his tremendous interest in migrants and refugees, it is not surprising that Francis emphasizes the foreignness of the Good Samaritan, but it is not a stretch to do so. Too many people see migrants as lacking basic human rights or as somehow less than human. “Still there are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different.” [86]

For the healing of the world, the conviction that all people are brothers and sisters needs to be embodied in real ways. Chapters 3 and 4 of the encyclical express a vision which is hopeful and a

contrast to the dark clouds on the horizon; they speak of how to form hearts that are open to the whole world and which embrace this vision. Our approach to the immigrant must be, as the pope has also taught in other places, to welcome, protect, promote and integrate. They are part of our journey forward. He suggests we discontinue the pejorative terminology of “minorities” and recognize that all migrants have something to contribute. To recognize the reciprocal gifts of immigration, we need to rediscover the concept of gratuitousness. Not everything has to be utilitarian, or be economically advantageous. Some things we must do because they are good, not because of the reward that they bring. God gives the example by allowing the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the good and the bad.

Exiles can be found even in their own country. “Every brother or sister in need, when ignored by the society in which I live, becomes an existential foreigner, even though born in the same country. They may be citizens with full rights, yet they are treated as foreigners in their own country. Racism,” the pope reminds us, “is a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding and lurks in waiting.” [97] He also refers to the disabled as existential foreigners in their homeland and insists that even if market freedom and efficiency do not know how to care for the disabled or the person in dire poverty, this does not justify their living with less dignity. Pursuing the common good includes pursuing the moral good, willing the good for others. The moral virtue of solidarity requires thinking and acting in terms of community, it applies to our use of resources and to our care of our common home. Francis quotes Pope Benedict XVI saying, “we need to attain a global juridical, political and economic order which can increase and give direction to international cooperation for the development of all peoples in solidarity.” [*Caritas in veritate*, 700]. “Let us admit”, says Francis, for all the progress we have made, we are still “illiterate” when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies.” [64]

As we have seen, in the third and fourth chapters of the encyclical Francis discusses envisioning a more open world and the necessity of having a heart open to the whole world. The discussion of politics for the common good developed in chapter 5. Chapter 6 gives directions for the art of dialogue and cultivating friendship and Chapter 7 is entitled “Paths of Renewed Encounter” talking about the need for healing in relationships and overcoming differences without pretending that they are not there. Given the frequent mention of the polarization of church and society that dominates any contemporary reading of the signs of the times, these two chapters should be of particular interest to the U.S. church—and now the synod on synodality provides us with the structure to do so. I am disappointed that the synod is not being met in our country with the appropriate enthusiasm or even openness; this in itself is a sign of the ongoing opposition to the magisterium of Pope Francis and a fear of where it might be leading. Warning alarms have already been sounded about the German synodal path, with some of our American bishops warning the German bishops about the dangerous direction they are heading. God forbid the Germans should actually listen to and report on what the people of God are saying, particularly when it comes to the role of women and the church’s approach to homosexuality. Francis himself has indicated on more than one occasion that he is not where the German bishops are, saying most recently that there is already one good Evangelical church in Germany, they don’t need another! (13 June conversation with *Civiltà Cattolica* and other Jesuit publications)

When Francis convened the Amazon Synod, he was very much open to the discussion of the ordination of women to the diaconate and of the ordination of *virii probati* (married men) to some form of the priesthood. When he did not act on the majority recommendations in those regards coming from the synod, it is important to note that he did not close the door to them, but said that he did not believe the time was ripe to act because everyone left the synod with the same views with which they entered and a synod is not a parliament with a majority vote. There was also limited attention given to the discussions on appropriate enculturation in the Amazon and the importance of the world paying attention to the Amazon region's role in the care for our common home. Cf. Christopher Lamb, (<https://www.chicagocatholic.com/vatican/-/article/2020/03/04/responding-to-amazon-synod-pope-francis-avoids-either-or->)

Dialogue involves and requires the ability to respect and find legitimacy in the other's point of view. The differences that emerge offer possibilities for creative solutions and are essential to dialogue. The feverish exchange of opinions on social networks cannot substitute for dialogue. Instead it is a frequent theme of Pope Francis that a culture of encounter is needed and this involves integrating differences for the formation of social peace. The simple formulation that Francis offers, which would do us well to invoke in various current debates- is that people "have a right to be themselves" and to be different. The consensus that dialogue seeks is not relativism; relativism allows another to impose "truth". "No one can possess the whole truth or satisfy his or her every desire, since that pretension would lead to nullifying others by denying their rights." The dialogic realism the pope proposes requires that each remain faithful to their own principles respecting that others have the right to do so as well. *Chrestotes*, "kindness", is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that frees us from cruelty and anxiety while it facilitates the quest for consensus and opens new paths.

Why does this seem so difficult for us?

At the same Loyola University Conference I referred to earlier, the Villanova theology professor and prolific author Massimo Faggioli suggested that the resistance to synodality and to the overall magisterium of Pope Francis relates to a failure to fully implement and opposition to the Second Vatican Council. He suggests that Vatican II, in the aftermath of World War II and with a new millennium on the horizon, held reconciliation as even more important than reform or *ressourcement*. Vatican II was a call for unity: among the whole human family, reaching out to non-Christians and non-believers, incorporating non-Catholic Christians, and among fellow Catholics. Faggioli notes that Vatican II took history seriously and cannot be considered a failed council; it achieved a consensus between papal magisterium and the *sensus fidelium*. Because it was a truly a council of the global church, its reception differs geographically. Overall, he traces three historical periods of reception of the council: the honeymoon immediately after the council (lasted through the 1970s), then the divorce (Roman centralization beginning in the 1980s)- a period of interruption in the reception of the council. Ironically, Francis, the first pope in decades to not be biographically connected to the council, is leading the church in implementing the council letter and spirit while striving to regain some of the hope and enthusiasm with which the Council was celebrated. Francis is trying to bring about the post-divorce reconciliation, the third period.

Faggioli is disturbed by two trends in the U.S. Church that do not aid in the reception of the council or Francis' magisterium: 1) the increasing chasm between academic theology and the institutional Church and 2) a neo-conservative ideologization of Catholicism. So there are two poles of rejection

of Vatican II: it is too modern for some to be Catholic, and it is too Catholic for others to be modern. Chew on that for a moment.

Some manifestations of this lack of reception according to Faggioli, each of which could be its own thesis or talk, include: the liturgical debate becoming part of post-modern identity politics and culture wars; an ecclesial imagination surprised or puzzled by the call to synodality—“walking together” having to fight against “walking out” or the new mentality “extra ecclesiam, sola salus”; the loss of the theology of *Dei Verbum*: revelation is sacramental, open to growth in understanding different from both intellectualism and doctrinalism; the reduction of religion to notions and ethics; the embrace of economic and social libertarianism (e.g. Covid responses); the reduction of the conciliar doctrine of religious liberty to freedom for the Church like medieval Christendom; a politically partisan kind of ecumenism- having more in common with fundamental and non-denominational churches than mainstream Protestant, for example; and the clash between democracy and authoritarianism.

In proposing “Paths of Renewed Encounter”, Pope Francis discusses the need for the healing of open wounds in many parts of the world. He talks about the importance of cultivating a penitential memory and the need to speak the “stark, clear truth.”[226] I am not convinced that the Church in the US, much less society at large, has even attempted this regarding slavery or the treatment of Native American populations. The Holy Father reminds us that truth is an inseparable companion of justice and mercy and is needed to break the cycle of violence [227]. “Social forgiveness,” he teaches, can never be demanded and forgetting is never the answer. The Shoah, atomic bombings, persecutions, the slave trade, genocides... we can’t just turn the page on these [248]. It is possible to forgive without forgetting [250], in fact it is necessary. Revenge will never bring satisfaction to victims in the way that breaking the vicious cycle of violence can. [251] Calling for forgiveness does not mean renouncing our own rights or permitting corruption to continue. Authentic reconciliation does not flee from conflict but is achieved in conflict [244] through dialogue and negotiation. Punishment should not be vindictive [266]; not even a murderer loses their personal dignity [269] and so the death penalty is inadmissible. [265]. War is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment [257], the risks are always greater than the supposed benefits [258] and every war leaves the world worse than it was before [261].

Peace that is more than the absence of war is hard work and an ongoing process. Different institutions of society can contribute to the “architecture of peace” [231]. Without equal opportunities for all, different forms of aggression and conflict will find fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode. [235] It is hard work within the Church as well. I often find myself at an impasse, because something may clearly need to be addressed (e.g. systemic racism), but to do so brings on accusations of contributing to the polarization. The Holy Father helpfully reminds us that, “there is no need to place in opposition the interests of society, consensus and the reality of objective truth. These three realities can be harmonized whenever, through dialogue, people are unafraid to get to the heart of an issue.’ [212]

Thank you, AUSCP, for being willing to dialogue and for the desire to get to the heart of an issue. You have already embarked on the synodal path, may it bear fruit and may future generations of pastors and pastoral agents be willing to follow that path and continue on the way together.