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Being-with the Other: Critical Reflections in the Light of *Fratelli Tutti*

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Abstract: All relationships are castrated by abiding self-interest. Face to face relationships being mediated by teletechnologies, we have entered what Gilles Deleuze has described as societies of control. Capitalist leaven is unfortunately embedded in what we called friendship. Given this condition of humanity, the encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti* of Pope Francis is a welcome light in the dark atmosphere marked by hate and fear of the other. In the light of the encyclical, we consider the challenge to build borderless

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friendship through our answerability to the other. Jesus being the model of answerability to the Other, we consider the challenge to measure up to the measureless standard of His love.

Keywords: *Fratelli Tutti*, Answerable, Friendship, Good Samaritan, Other, Jesus Christ, Measureless.

All relationships are castrated by abiding self-interest. Face to face relationships being mediated by teletechnologies, we have entered what Gilles Deleuze has described as societies of control (Deleuze 2021). Capitalist leaven is unfortunately embedded in what we call friendship. Given this condition of humanity, the encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti* of Pope Francis is a welcome light in the dark atmosphere marked by hate and fear of the other. Heeding to the clarion call in the encyclical, this study attempts to study the politics of friendship in the light of the world of French thinker, Jacques Derrida and try do understand why Pope Francis is trying to reclaim the nobility of friendship. The first part of the study examines the call for a borderless friendship and explores new modes of belonging in the light imperative to be answerable to the Other. The next section tries to critically consider the complexities of the imperative of answerability to the other from the point of view of ‘answerability to’ and ‘answerability before’ and propose Jesus as our Model to the imperative of answerability to the Other. The final section examines the imperative of our faith to measure up to the measureless standard of the love of Jesus.

1. Borderless Friendship and Answerability to the Other

For a long time, human relations are under siege. Religious people have often concentrated more on the vertical, human-God relations while neglecting the inter-human as well human-cosmos relations. After Modernity, self-interest has become central in both politics and economics in our society (Conju. 2015). This has corrupted all human relations. We can notice how we give concessions to the ideals of inter-human sympathy, fairness and

love. Even Philosopher Immanuel Kant dismissed friendship in favour of abstract rational impartial rules of justice (Van Impe 2021). This is completely different from the manner in which Aristotle treated friendship as an ethical bond that holds together a city while's its decay becomes the harbinger of civil war or tyranny.¹ Unfortunately, modern philosophy privatized friendship and ethical life in general and left room only for self-interest to dictate the public domain. Fortunately, thinkers like Jacques Derrida (2005) and Maurice Blanchot (1997) tried to bring the discussion on friendship back into the mainstream. We can also notice how Pope Francis also tried to bring friendship to the centre stage with his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (Francis 2020) and called us to reclaim the nobility of friendship and political acts.²

In the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, while challenging us to open ourselves to the stranger (FT 56), we are faced with the curvature of the social space that is marked by` walls of egoism, suspicion, indifference and hate (dark clouds) (FT 9-55). The Pope invites us to embrace borderless friendship amides walls of separation that closes us and our world (FT 3-8). The call to new forms of social friendship echoed in *Fratelli Tutti* indicates that friendship is never given in the present. It always remains in the promise. Its discourse is one of prayer and commitment that makes us open to new modes of belonging together. Friendship, therefore, enters the performativity of prayer³ where the modern self for itself turns into the Levinasian self that is answerable to the Other

¹ Aristotle teaches about friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Mulgan 2021.

² Hope completely abandon the conflictual model of politics that construes the political around friend and enemy. Mehring 2020.

³ Following Derrida John D. Caputo thinks that Friendship has a structure of prayer. See Caputo 2021.

(Murray 2021). This answerability to the Other is the ethical basis of friendship. The principle of answerability is universal as well as singular. As universal, it is 'answerability before' a law, nation, tradition, political community, faith community or tradition etc. This means we are answerable before the tribunal that represents or stands for the Other who is a singular Other. As singular, on the other hand, it stands for the imperative of the singular Other whom we face in a face to face mode. This imperative triggers a singular encounter that enables us 'to be answerable to' the singular Other. This is a characteristic of double affirmation or yes of Derrida (Sant 2017).

The Other is unnamed and unnameable both in Levinas and Derrida.⁴ Levinas teaches that this answerability occurs in the singular encounter with the other (Veling 2021). It asserts the absolute singularity and irreducibility of the other. Derrida teaches that this 'singular answerability to' the other easily dissolves in 'the answerability before' the one that represents the Other, the law or the political community (nation) that becomes the ultimate tribunal and therefore, our moral response then gets reduced to justice alone where justice is interpreted as being in accordance to the law (Dallymar 2005). The story of the good Samaritan, introduced by Pope Francis for our reflection in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* embodies the passage of the singular answerability dissolving into an 'answerability before' a law or tradition in the response of the Jewish priest and the Levite who ignore the ailing stranger and move to keep the law while we can also see how Jesus transgresses it through the good Samaritan who is the chief character in the parable. The good Samaritan remains submerged into the singularity of the encounter. He stays with the imperative that calls him to answerability to the wounded stranger and does not jump to the universal deduction that enables us to jump from the mode of being 'answerable to' to the mode of being 'answerable before'. This jump from 'being answerable to' through a singular encounter that stays in the moral realm

⁴ The other is irreducible. See Willians 2021.

moves to the mode of 'being answerable before' the law or tribunal (Dallymar 2005). This also means that the singular moral response of love dies into justice that remains only in the realm of law and tradition. We need justice seasoned with love and mercy which is lived in the warmth of friendship/being-with. It requires a new affirmative politics that takes not the only the responsibility of the human family but also of each human person.

We can see how Jesus in public ministry transgresses the imperative of 'being answerable before' the law, and tradition and clearly chooses 'being answerable to' the person who is sick, afflicted by the devil, considered a sinner by society etc. He clearly transgresses the imperative that calls us to 'be answerable before' and embraces 'being answerable to' the singular call of the suffering Other. This is why Pope Francis challenges us to give up our excesses of individualism, consumerism, nationalism etc. His message is very important at this time of covid-19 as we can all be only safe by making each human being singularly safe. Only by converting ourselves to the culture of care that lives in friendly bonds, we can save ourselves and the world. In fact, paradoxically we have no choice but to get out of the traps of modernity and choose 'to be answerable to' and not 'answerable before'. In fact, we become 'answerable before' by 'being answerable to'.

It is by reaching out to the stranger that the Good Samaritan truly became just. It is by giving a singular response of love to the call of the other through the singular encounter that we can truly become just. This face to face bonding of friendship is the true way of being with the other. It is the way of being-with. Therefore, being answerable to the Other remains at the heart of friendship. This does not mean that we are thrown between the binary of 'being answerable to' and 'being answerable before' or we have to choose between love

(friendship) or justice. In fact, we become just through love. In the same way, we become 'answerable before' God, law, tradition, nation etc., only by being answerable to the suffering Other. We live the generality of law only by living it in a singular encounter. This means love/friendship and justice belong together. Being-with, therefore, challenges us to be answerable to the Other of our being-with. It is only through 'being answerable to' the Other of our being-with that we can become truly 'answerable before' God, law, tradition, nation etc.

2. Between 'Answering to and Answering Before'

Friendship lives in the coming. It mainly has its life breathe in the future. This makes way for growth in friendship. Pope Francis also does not look at friendship as simply given. It is both a gift and a task. We have to grow in friendship. He invites us to grow in forms of social friendships. The Holy Father opens the horizon of the growth of friendship. Here we do not just have to look at friendship as closeness, reciprocity, and commitment. Such a way of thinking friendship will put friendship on trial before the tribunal and castrate all friendship as it will find it wanting in terms of its already universally established forms. This puncturing of friendship introduces what Jacques Lacan calls lack or 'object a' (Kirshner 2021) which will then let the friendship grow. But lack produces a desire to satisfy oneself. Therefore, such a friendship is self-seeking and not self-giving. Christian friendship finds itself by giving itself. This means friendship that calls us to be faithful before the already set moulds of the ideality of friendship is a hidden egology in the Levinasian sense. Hence, following Derrida, we have the challenge to embrace the friendship in the becoming in its dynamically lived sense. Hence we may have to recognize the boundaries of separateness, distance, caution and vulnerabilities associated with the becoming or the making of friendship. This takes us to think of friendship not from the point of answerability before the universal ideal of friendship but from the point of the flesh and blood friendship living in the singular encounter. This means friendship

opens several ways of belonging to the friend (s) and does not simply close on to a set point which itself becomes a haunting ideal that calls the lived friendship to its criterion of justice.

This is why Derrida's thinking of friendship is impossible (Fernandez 2021). It opens us to the absolute horizons where we do not have any expectations from friends nor any closures or fixed destinies for friends to move. This means the promise of friendship in the Derridian sense is that there is no promise. Derrida takes us beyond our familiar either-or structure of thought and opens the playground for friendship to flower. This means he brings friendship to be answerable to the singular encounter with the Other. This, therefore, indicates that friendship to him is not answerable before the tribunal of the already set essence of friendship. He enables us to remain open to the coming of friendship by dynamically responding to the imperative of the singular Other. Therefore, friendship to Derrida (if we can say this) is brought under the tribunal of answerability to the call of the Other. This call of the Other is a moral call in the Levinasian sense. Therefore, this openness cannot mean that anything goes as friendship. The friendship that we are thinking of here is a moral bonding that awaits the coming of the good, true, love and just in the very becoming of friendship.

In the spirit of opening all closures, Derrida interrogates friendship as a fraternity. Friendship to him has no model. Fraternity genders friendship (Devere 2005). Hence, Derrida tries to dissociate all traces of gender, race, caste etc., from understanding friendship. To him, friendship lives and breathes in the becoming of friendship and hence cannot become closed. It opens itself to all its becoming possibilities in as much it responds to the ethical imperative of the Other in the Levinasian sense. Thus friendship stays beyond understanding, beyond comparison and beyond definition but

not beyond love. The measure of real love is to love without measure. Hence there is no one model of being friends. There are several models of being friends and each is unique, singular and incomparable. Each human person has a unique capacity for friendship. This means friendship to him is democratic. There are no boundaries to be friends.

We can trace a similar democratic spirit of social friendship in Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, although it remains closed within our Christic horizon. Christic horizon is not a closed horizon. To some of us, it being catholic remains open to profoundly loving and emancipative forms of friendship. The word *Fratelli* could be said to be androcentric but it is not patriarchal and does not fraternize in a sense of male privilege but remains sufficiently open to include women into its embrace. Derrida does accept this openness as he points out that brotherhood comes from common parenthood. He thus underlines that there is a mother in the brother that open the notion to include women. Like always, he does not close its meaning to only inclusive semantics but stays open to those who may still find traces of male privilege in our male-dominated world. We too have to remain open to this possibility. Otherwise, we run the risk of invisibilizing women in our society running contrary to our Christian call. Therefore it is important that we become sensitive that although fraternization is inclusive of women, it can still neutralize the difference and uniqueness of women. Besides, fraternization of friendship may still exclude friendship between women and women and man and women. Thus, like the measure of love which is to love without measure, we may have to agree that we may have to live friendship measured up against its measurelessness.

We can find God in Jesus Christ the benchmark of this outpouring of love that stays beyond measure. We therefore as Christians are challenged to become the love that is measured up against its own measurelessness. Maybe we may have to grant that it is immeasurable divine silence that becomes the measure of our

love and friendship. We can trace that divine silence has become both audible, visible and palpable in Jesus Christ. We do find the sound, sense and vision of this measureless measure in the self-emptying kenosis in the mystery of incarnation, mission, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is why 'being answerable to' is an invitation to love without measure while 'being answerable before' is love that is truncated and cannot live up to the measure of Jesus Christ that certainly measures up to its own measurelessness. Hence, the paradox is that we have the challenge that calls us 'to be answerable to' by 'becoming answerable before' the measure of Jesus Christ that is sacramentally present in the mystery of the Church.

3. Measuring up to Measurelessness of Love

How can we measure the immeasurable? The fact that we can love, we can receive and give love without measure point out that we live a love that is immeasurable. True love is to love without measure. This means love exceeds and transgresses all our measures. Love cannot be calculated, measured and be plain careful. Love is excess and beyond all measures. Love cannot follow the calculus of exchange. It does not belong to the market. It belongs to the absolute horizon where we do the impossible. The horizon of the possible is measurable and is closed. Such a closed horizon closes us. Therefore, the language of love cannot reflect the language of business and economics. Love cannot be an investment. True love loves without attaching any strings. Love calls us to be 'answerable to'. It is not so much 'answerable before' any given ideal of love. But this does not mean that anything can go as love. Love cannot harm the loved one. If it does, it cannot be love.

Love transgresses the economic model of exchange. Love follows an excessive model. It is the element of excess that gives power to the initial act of loving regardless of the

consequences. It belongs to the order that makes us ‘answerable to’ and not ‘answerable before’. Love that belongs to order that makes us ‘answerable to’ is an original and abundant gift and can be both extravagant and reciprocal. Our love is only ‘answerable before’ the excessive love of God. Perhaps it is in this meeting or comingling of being ‘answerable to and answerable before’ that there is a meeting point of the model of excess and the model of exchange.

One may raise the question that asks: can excess be exchanged? Excess cannot be exchanged. It produces excess. God gives us so that we give what we receive to others. God, therefore, gives through our giving. Our giving continues God’s giving. God’s giving produces its own economy of giving. Love being excessive is also one that produces its own economy of love where there is mutuality as well as simply loving without receiving. This means love does not have to be only reciprocal but carries its own impossibility. It carries its own reverse engineering when love fails to be love. This occurs when love fails to keep its promise and becomes unacceptable. Love is so precious that it carries its own impossibility within it. This is why love remains always in the coming, always in the promise. We are always in danger of transgressing as well as exceeding the algorithm of love (if there is any such a thing). Therefore, love embeds its own deconstruction within it. There is thus, dynamism and indeterminacy in love and stands beyond what Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence.

Love is an ethic of excess. Like love, friendship belongs to the ethic of excess. It calls us to be excessively responsible. We may find similar echoes of excessive responsibility in the encyclical letter of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*. There is an unconditional come or future anterior affirmation in friendship since there are only Christic openings or overflows. This is the excessive responsibility that calls us to continuously transform the becoming of friendship so that it always remains saturated into Christic modes of being human in the world. The Christic

dynamism in our friendship offers us room to continuously grow and exceed our previous levels of friendships. Christic modes of friendship can only exceed and have to exceed as we are called 'be answerable before' an inexhaustible measure of an unmeasurable model of Christ's Love lived on a daily basis by being 'answerable to ' the call of Christ in the Other (creation and human).

This indicates that there is a double responsibility. The first is the one that calls us to be 'answerable to' Christ in the Other while the other is the one that calls to be 'to be answerable before' our Lord Jesus Christ. Our 'answerability to' overflows simultaneously into our 'answerability before' but we have the challenge to remain in what Levinas calls ethical saying and not merely the ethical said. The ethical said summons our ethical saying challenging us to live up to measure Christ's Love. To us, the ethical saying is imbued in the ethical said We do tilt towards the an-archy of the dynamism of 'answerability to' but we do not turn away from arche of our 'answerability before' Christ and His Church. We have the challenge to let the singularity of our ethical 'answerability' to Christ in the Other be soaked into our collective/ universal 'answerability before' Jesus Christ and His Church. The imperative of 'answerability to' the Other in Jesus Christ and the 'answerability before' Jesus and the Church has to be based on what the Pope calls the principle of capacity to love. It is through this principle of capacity to love that we can envisage an open world which leads us to go outside of ourselves with a heart open to the whole and find fuller existence in the Other. This means we need a better politics that renders no one useless and expendable. To build a world built on the spirit of friendship, the Holy Father exhorts us to eliminate war and nuclear arms and calls for the establishment of a global fund for the elimination of hunger with the money invested in the weapons (FT 225-286).

Conclusion

Our study examined the challenge to the politics of friendship in today's world. We have discovered that we all are drawn by the imperative of our answerability to the Other. We have to combine our 'answerability to' and 'answerability before' as we responds to this call of the other. Jesus being our model of our 'answerability to' the Other, we have the challenge to measure up to the measureless standard of his love.

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QUOTES FROM FRATELLI TUTTI

“Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing 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” (FT 8)

“Instances of racism continue to shame us, for they show that our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive as we think” (FT 20).

“True, a worldwide tragedy like the Covid-19 pandemic momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person’s problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together” (FT 32)

“We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes. Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies. 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” (FT 77)

“Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others” (FT 115)