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## Called to “Witness:” The Invitation of *Fratelli Tutti*

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**Abstract:** On October 3, 2020, Pope Francis issued the encyclical named *Fratelli Tutti* (*We Are All Brothers*) to urge the humanity to promote a universal aspiration toward fraternity and social friendship. In the final chapter of the encyclical, Pope Francis repeatedly appeals us to bear witness to God (Cf. FT § 274 § 276 § 280) and thereby to contribute to the formation of the universal friendship and solidarity. After one year, from 25 to 28 April 2021, Indian theological Association (ITA) discussed the theme “Credibility and Witness” in their 43<sup>rd</sup> annual conference. Earlier in the mission documents we oft found the repeated presence of the term ‘witness’. Therefore, the present article “Witness in *Fratelli Tutti*”

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tries to explore the role of witness in the encyclical FT while initiating a universal home of peace and love. Does witnessing life (of Christian) play a significant role to initiate a common home?

**Keywords:** Witness, Fraternity, Creation Theology, Evangelization, *Fratelli Tutti*.

## Introduction

The latest encyclical of Pope Francis, namely *Fratelli Tutti* (*We Are All Brothers*), aims to promote fraternity and universal friendship. FT borrows the title of the “Admonitions 6” of Saint Francis of Assisi to address the brothers and sisters in our world to propose “a way of life marked by the flavor of the Gospel” (FT § 1, Assisi 2021). After analyzing this encyclical, we understand the role of ‘witness’ in bringing fraternity in this world. The term “witness” explicitly appears in many places in this documents (Cf. FT § 274 § 276 § 280).<sup>1</sup> The usage of ‘a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel’ points out that the encyclical demands a witnessing attitude from the People of God. In this sense, the encyclical is an urge to the People of God to bear witness to the love of God and thereby hold on to the universal friendship without any discrimination.

This article is an attempt to analyse the role of witness in forming universal friendship. The first part of the article describes the notion of “witness” and its characteristics.

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<sup>1</sup> “[O]ur *witness* to God benefits our societies” (FT, § 274); “[A] family among families, this is the Church, open to bearing *witness* in today’s world, open to faith hope and love for the Lord” (FT, § 276); “It is also urgent to continue to bear *witness* to the journey of encounter between the different Christian confessions” (FT, § 280). The emphases are not part of the original text.

Afterwards, we come across a theology behind both fraternity and witness. Then, we will analyse the role of witness in forming a fraternal society on the basis of the encyclical FT. Different kinds of witness will be introduced here with the references from the encyclical FT. How does ‘witnessing life’ help in forming a universal brotherhood or “common home”? is the question that we address in this article.

## 1. What Is Witness?

Witness is ‘the first means of evangelization’ (Cf. EN § 41, RM §§ 42-43). It is one among many other methods of evangelization such as proclamation, inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, etc. The earliest mission documents used the term “witness” from a religious point of view where it means ‘an evidence of a person’s strong religious beliefs that they show by what they say and do in public’ (Witness 2021). Though we have a number of methods for proclaiming the Good News, ‘witness’ is a much appreciated method for initiating the process of evangelization. Indian Theological Association (ITA) recently had discussed the theme “Credibility and Witness” in its 43<sup>rd</sup> annual conference. This is an indication that witness has still the priority among different methods of evangelization along with the proclamation. In the final chapter of FT, namely “Religions at the Service of Fraternity in Our World”, one could find out explicit references of ‘witness’ and its practical role in building a common home. This section will reveal the features of the method of witness in evangelization on the basis of the Church documents.

### a. Witness: First Means of Evangelization

The apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), explains the importance of the witness of life. Pope Paul VI writes:

It is often said nowadays that the present century thirsts for authenticity. Especially in regard to young people it is said that they have a horror of the artificial or false and that they

are searching above all for truth and honesty. These “signs of the times” should find us vigilant. Either tacitly or aloud- but always forcefully- we are being asked: Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? *The witness of life* has become more than ever an essential condition for real effectiveness in preaching (EN § 76, Emphasis added).

The Pope invite all of us to reflect on the authenticity of the lives that we live. By realizing ‘the signs of his time’, he asked the faithful to lead a witnessing life<sup>2</sup> because it has an important role in the mission of the Church.<sup>3</sup> It is the primary means of evangelization. It is an essential condition for effective proclamation.

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<sup>2</sup> The Greek verb used for witnessing is *martureo*, which means ‘to bear witness’ or ‘to be witness for something’. The verb *martureo* is found in 76 times in the Bible- 43 times in the Gospel of John and his Epistles, 4 times in the book of Revelation, 2 times in Synoptic Gospels, 11 times in the Acts of the Apostles and the rest in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, witness is often used for legal testimony (Cf. Num 35:30; Deut 19:15, 18) or for something one has experienced or entrusted to one to testify. Cf. Namitha 2000: 109.

<sup>3</sup> Christian witness is a witness to Christ who is the witness par excellence (Cf. Rev 1: 5, 3: 4). Christ is the model of all Christian witnesses. While living among people a radical Christian challenges other people with fundamental questions of the heart. Through the charity extended to all strata of people without discrimination, a Christian witness becomes more concrete and effective. Cf. Jerman 2008: 98-120.

Pope Paul VI writes again, “[F]or the Church, *the first means of evangelization* is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one’s neighbour with limitless zeal” (EN § 41, Emphasis added. RM § 42). Here explicitly Pope mentions that witness of life is “the first means of evangelization” (RM § 42). This witnessing life makes possible communion with God and neighbour. Paul VI also mentions in his address to the Members of the *Consilium de Laicis*, “Modern man listens more willingly to bear witness than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Paul VI 1974). This statement also conveys the same emphasis as the other statements in EN. The new generation does not listen to a person if s/he does not live morally. In that sense, if the evangelizer do not witness Christ, her/his proclamation will become fruitless.<sup>4</sup> Along with these documents, the decree of Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes* (AG), mentions that life witnessing is “an obligation” (Cf. AG §11) for all Christians and is presented as the first means of evangelization. All these statements give importance to life-witnessing.

In FT, Pope Francis quotes, “if the music of the Gospel ceases to sound in our homes, our public squares, our workplaces, our political and financial life, then we will no longer hear the strains that challenge us to defend the dignity of every man and woman” (FT § 277).<sup>5</sup> If the Gospel values do not live in us or in our own

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<sup>4</sup> “*The witness of life* is the only solid foundation of all whatever we do to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Through our celebration of Eucharist, we participate in the empowering memorial of Jesus’ death and resurrection. This mystery constantly calls us to die to ourselves and enables to live for others in truth, love and justice.” Cf. CBCI Consultation on Mission 1997: 274-304. The emphasis in the text is not part of the original text.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from *Ecumenical Prayer Service*, Riga, Latvia (24 September 2018): *L’Osservatore Romano*, (24-25 September 2018), 8; available from <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/september/documents/papa->

circles, we do not have any credibility to demand it from others. Our indifference to the ills and evils is a hindrance for forming a common home of peace and solidarity. Our witnessing lives, on the other hand, motivate others to follow the acts of solidarity and love. Gradually, justice, peace and love will appear in the society. So, witness is primary means of spreading Christian values.

### **b. Witness: A Silent Proclamation**

In *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA), a decree on the apostolate of the laity promulgated on 1965, Pope Paul VI writes, “The *witness of a Christian* life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God” (AA § 6, Emphasis added). This text reminds us the “great power” of witness. Without any help of the modern communication media, a Christian can proclaim the Gospel of God silently. It is just through his/her life. Every single moment is a moment of evangelization in one’s life, if one bear witness to Christ through one’s life. No need of a fixed audience here. No need of formalities here. Simply one lives the Christian values through one’s own life.<sup>6</sup>

Life-witnessing is an economic and practical evangelization method. It does not cost financially anything to live Christian values. Even in different lands, where evangelization is publicly prohibited, this method can be adapted for bearing witness to Christ. In that sense, it is very much practical.

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[francesco\\_20180924\\_incontroecumenico-riga-lettonia.html](http://francesco_20180924_incontroecumenico-riga-lettonia.html); accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021; internet.

<sup>6</sup> Here I do not neglect the role of the proclamation in the act of evangelization. But in a situation where people already knew Christ and have experienced the presence of His community (the Church), more than the proclamation the life-witnessing is necessary. This will bring more result in the evangelization.

How does it work as a method of evangelization? “Through this *wordless witness* [life-witnessing] these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst?” (EN § 21, Emphasis added). These irresistible question help people to realize the worth of the Christian values and thereby the source of it, i.e., Christ. The encyclical FT is a social encyclical with lots of practical suggestions for forming a universal brotherhood. Pope Francis motivates the People of God to share the love of Christ to the poor and the afflicted through different ways understanding their struggles in the society. Dialogues (FT § 203 § 271), political pressurization for peace (FT § 258-260), social reformation (FT § 233-234), charitable works (FT §116), etc. are some ways. Here we bear witness to the Christian values. Such witness is a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective method of evangelization. So, it is primarily by her life and conduct that the Church evangelizes the world and form a common home.

### **c. Witness: A Pre-Requisite for Other Methods**

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), there are passages which speak about the importance of witness of life. In CCC § 2044, we read, “The fidelity of the baptized is a primordial condition for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church’s mission in the world. In order that the message of salvation can show the power of its truth and radiance before men, it must be authenticated by *the witness of the life* of Christians” (CCC § 2044, Emphasis added). Here in this section, the witness of life is considered as “the primordial condition”. In another document, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), we read, “The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission” (RM § 42). Without pointing out some witnessing lives, how can one speak about “the Kingdom” values? Even before the proclamation of Jesus, He bore witness to God. At least we know more clearly from the scriptures that throughout His life, Jesus practised the

values which He preached. Because of this accompaniment of witnessing life, His proclamation was acceptable to the people. Like this each Christian has to live the values while proclaiming it.

If we take other different methods of evangelization, the witness of life has a primary role. For example, inter-religious dialogue is one of the methods of evangelization. But without any witnessing of Christian lives, how could we go for such a method? It is said that “Dialogue is not merely an exchange of ideas and views, but a specific mode of being and a way of life” (CBCI Consultation on Mission 1997: 296). Each dialogue has to be an exchange of witnessing lives. In FT, Pope Francis urges to involve in dialogue with the people who have different perspective of worldviews. Here he also demands us to bear witness to the love of the Father of all, before we engage in a dialogue with them (Cf. FT §169).<sup>7</sup> An inter-religious dialogue becomes unsuccessful without a witnessing life. Inculturation is another method. Will it fulfil its aim without the witness of life? Will proclamation be a successful without witness of life? All these methods depend on the witness of life. So, we call life-witnessing a primordial condition for all other mission methods.

#### **d. Witness: The Imitation of the Divine Master**

Each Christian is a missionary in this world. He/she bears witness to Jesus Christ through life. Pope John Paul II, in one of his apostolic exhortations, motivates the people in Asia to lead a witnessing life. He writes, “Every situation is an opportunity for Christians to show forth the power which the truth of Christ has become in their lives. Therefore,

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<sup>7</sup> Pope writes here “we must move beyond the idea of social policies as being for the poor but which are never with the poor” (FT, § 169).



inspired by the many missionaries who bore heroic witness to God's love among the peoples of the continent in the past, the Church in Asia tries now to witness with no less zeal to Jesus Christ and his Gospel" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, henceforth abridged as EA § 24). Each single moment in one's (Christian's) life is an occasion to witness Christ. With much enthusiasm, each Christian has to bear witness to Christ in their different situations. Here one has to follow the example of missionaries who lived before us and Jesus, the source of life-witnessing. In this sense, life-witnessing is an imitation of the divine master, Jesus.

How do Christians bear witness to Christ? In *the Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 2046 one reads, "By living with the mind of Christ, Christians *hasten the coming of the Reign of God*, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace. They do not, for all that, abandon their earthly tasks; faithful to their master, they fulfil them with uprightness, patience, and love" (CCC § 2046). This text illustrates that by imitating Christ in words and deeds, one can bear witness to Him. In their living situation, they have to be like "another Christ." The qualities of Jesus become qualities of each Christian here. The "Kingdom" values such as uprightness, patience, love, *etc.*, becomes values of each person who bear witness. Through one's life witness, each Christian makes the presence of "Kingdom" nearer. One has to follow the laws of Christ. The law of Christ is nothing but the law of love. Each Christian has to love his neighbors and God. This would be the ultimate principle even to witness Christ.

Another passage of *the Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 2471, explains the witnessing model of Jesus as a perfect model before us and it also motivates us to bear witness courageously. The text states, "Before Pilate, Christ proclaims that he "has come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." The Christian is not to "be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord." In situations that require witness to the faith, the Christian must profess it without equivocation, after the example of St. Paul before his judges. We must keep "a clear conscience toward God and toward men"

(*Ibid.* § 2471). St. Paul and all other martyrs<sup>8</sup> of the Church bore witness to God through their courageous life-witnessing in difficult situations. All these models are centered on the life-witnessing model of Christ on the Cross at Calvary. Here in Jesus's crucifixion, one sees the culmination and source of life-witnessing. All other life-witnessing models participate in this model of Christ. By quoting three New Testament texts, namely, Jn 18: 37; 2 Tim 1:8 and Acts 24:16, the CCC explain that the mission of Christ and that of each Christian is the same, namely, to bear witness. In FT, Pope Francis urges us to follow the model of Christ to forgive others (Mt. 18: 22-35, FT § 238), to help the needy (FT § 81), to practice gratuitous love (FT § 139, Mt 5: 45; 6: 34; Mt 10:8), etc. Christ bore witness to God and the Christians bear witness to God through Christ, the Son of God. Each Christian has to imitate his/her Divine Master.

#### **e. Witness: A Language of Evangelization**

Language is the medium of communication. If we are not competent enough in the language with which we communicate, our conversation may fail to achieve its goal. Like this, in the field of evangelization a Christian uses a language of life. It is through one's life, which is the medium for evangelization, that one communicates Christian values to others. In *Ad Gentes* (AG) one reads, "All Christians by the example of their lives have an obligation to manifest the new man which they put on in baptism" (AG § 11). Through

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017 at the time of General Audience preached that "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1) strengthen us to bear witness. Here he speaks of the lives of saints and their companionship with us. Cf. *General Audience*; available from [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170621\\_udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170621_udienza-generale.html); accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021; internet.

our lives, we bear witness to Christ whom we put on in baptism. That means, the medium of life has an important role in fulfilling our obligation which we received through our baptism.

If we have a good language competence we can communicate well; if not, our communication may bring the opposite effect. Similarly if the life of a Christian, the medium of evangelization, is not of a good model, the witnessing that the person brings in his community is something opposite to what Jesus wants. “The presence of Christians among other religious groups should be one that is animated by that love with which we are loved by God” (AG § 12). This “competent” language of evangelization, i.e. witness of life, communicates the loving and self-giving nature of God to others. In *Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 2472, one reads,

The duty of Christians to take part in the life of the Church impels them to act as witnesses of the Gospel and of the obligations that flow from it. This witness is a transmission of the faith in words and deeds. Witness is an act of justice that establishes the truth or makes it known. All Christians by the example of their lives and the witness of their word, wherever they live, have an obligation to manifest the new man which they have put on in Baptism and to reveal the power of the Holy Spirit by whom they were strengthened at Confirmation (CCC § 2472, Witness 2018).

As the text explains, the faith is transmitted through our words and deeds. Through our good deeds and words, we are supposed to convey the message of Jesus to all people. This is the mission of each Christian which s/he receives by the sacrament of baptism. In FT, Pope writes, “We want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity [...] to build bridges, to break down

walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation” (FT § 276).<sup>9</sup> Pope here emphasizes that the language of evangelization is love and charity. Doing charity to the poor and the needy is an act of witness which spreads the message of the Good News.

#### **f. Witness: The Method of Methods**

When we say that one bears witness to God through one’s life, all the activities that s/he does are included by that expression. For example, one’s proclamation, his/her activities connected with inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, other social activities, *etc.*, are included by the expression of life-witnessing. That means, life-witnessing is a wide concept which includes all other methods of evangelization. A man, who bears witness, cannot avoid other methods. The other methods of evangelization become parts of life-witnessing. Could we think witness of life as a separate method excluding all other methods of evangelization? It is not possible because of the interconnectedness of the witness of life with other methods. Our proclamation and our interaction with different religious and social groups are part of our lives. So, we cannot avoid such elements in our method of life-witnessing.

The emphasis in the previous sections is the essential role of the life-witnessing in the process of evangelization. Though some of the texts from documents mention “the permanent priority” (RM § 44) of the proclamation, the life-witnessing is also described as “the first means of evangelization” (EN § 41) and “the first and irreplaceable form of mission” (RM § 42) in some other texts in the documents. This shows that

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted from *Homily*, Santiago de Cuba (22 September 2015); available from [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150922\\_cuba-omelia-santiago.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150922_cuba-omelia-santiago.html); accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021; internet.

the church documents find it difficult to give a status to the life-witnessing lesser than the proclamation. Both EN and RM described the life-witnessing before they describe about the proclamation.<sup>10</sup> This shows the priority of life-witnessing in evangelization. Without negating the role of the proclamation, the present discussion tries to find out the importance of the life-witnessing.

## 2. Theology Behind Fraternity and Witness

In the encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reveals the theology behind the call for fraternity that he demands. He considers the whole world as a ‘common home’. He writes, “Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers 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, Emphasis added). The whole world is considered as a single community where the members of it shares everything together. This was the same experience the first Christian communities lived. They had concern for their fellow beings and lived as a family. The other encyclical of Pope Francis, namely *Laudato Si’*, also reminds us that we are part of a ‘common home’ (Cf. LS §13). Here Pope Francis urges us to

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<sup>10</sup> “[I]t is appropriate first of all to emphasize the following point: for the Church, *the first means of evangelization* is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbour with limitless zeal” (EN, § 41). “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is *the first and irreplaceable form of mission*: Christ, whose mission we continue, is the “witness” *par excellence* (Rv 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Church along her way and associates her with the witness he gives to Christ (cf. Jn 15:26-27)” (RM, § 42). The emphases added.

protect the creation of God from all kinds of misuse and pollution. A theology of creation is noticeable here. The conviction that God has created everything (Cf. Col 1: 16) from nothingness and we the human beings were created in the image likeness of God to be the crown of His creation (Cf. Gen 1:26) helps Pope Francis to hold such a view on the protection of creation. Without considering religion, culture, language, etc., one has to treat others as their brothers and sisters.

The creation theology is based on the revelation that all creatures of the world are created by the heavenly father. Pope Francis in FT points out the loving care of the heavenly father. God is love and those who abide in this love abide in him. Those who live a life in fellowship and love and concern for others live in God (Cf. FT § 4).<sup>11</sup> The realization that we are the children of a loving God (Cf. Mt 11:25), motivates the people in the world to live in fraternity. The single fatherhood of all creation brings unity and solidarity in the world (Cf. FT §§ 272-274). Basing on this creation theology and theology of love, one realizes his/her proper role in the salvation history. As children of God we are not only the beneficiaries; but are caretakers of the creation. Pope Francis writes in LS, “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and

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<sup>11</sup> With the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb Pope Francis declares, “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters.” *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, Abu Dhabi (4 February 2019); *L'Osservatore Romano*, (4-5 February 2019), 6; available from [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travel/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190204\\_documento-fratellanza-umana.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travel/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html); accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021; internet.

talents” (LS §14). The father of the common home instructs us, His children, to take care of His creations (Cf. Gen 1: 28). The creation theology motivates us to protect this universe where we live.

In the encyclical FT, Pope Francis narrates the example of St. Francis of Assisi who lived the fraternal love. At the time of Crusades, St. Francis took the pain to visit Sultan Malik-el-Kamil, in Egypt, travelling a long distance and neglecting the differences of language, culture and religion. This event demonstrates the grandeur of his love towards his fellow beings without considering the differences they had. Following the model of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis also visited some of the religious leaders and together with these leaders he declared his will to join for universal brotherhood. In this encyclical, he dreams a world which would be led by the cooperative commitment of the members of it.

What Pope Francis describes as the theological basis for his teaching on fraternity, is also the basis of evangelization and witness. What would be the role of witness in bringing fraternity that Pope Francis urges to do? I assume that the witnessing life of the people of God would make the vision of Pope Francis closer. The Trinitarian love inspires the people of God to lead a fraternal and witnessing life. In the mission documents of Catholic Church, we realize that God, the Father, is the foundation of mission (Cf. AG § 2). The ‘*abba* experience’ of Jesus (Cf. Mt 11: 27) motivates him to bear witness to the heavenly Father. Kavunkal writes, “The basis of Jesus’ mission is his experience of God as his *abba*” (Kavunkal 1986: 8-15). Jesus says, “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, *to bear witness to the truth*” (Jn. 18:37). The mission of Jesus is continued with the help of the Holy Spirit (Cf. Jn. 20:21-23). So the intimate relation with the Trinity is much needed for living a witnessing life. The realization of the ‘paternal relation with God’ motivate people to bear witness. Lack of such conviction causes the counter-witnessing responses from their part. So the

Trinitarian and creation theology promote both fraternity and witnessing attitudes in the people.

### 3. Different Kinds of Witness in FT

In the encyclical FT, Pope Francis uses the word “witness” in different sense. In some places it gets a secular meaning and rest of the places it gets a religious connotation as in the mission documents like *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), etc. Some texts from FT are taken here for much analysis. Witness is classified into different varieties according to the way it is done. For example, we call it ‘individual type’ or ‘communal type’ based on the number of witness. Here we analyse the encyclical FT and find out the role of different witness-types in bringing fraternity in the world.

#### a. Individual Witness

There are individuals in our Church who witness Christ through their own life. There are many examples. The disciples of Jesus after the Pentecost experience gave witness to Christ courageously. Afterwards there were many missionaries and the saints of the Church who spread the Good News around the world. Eminent personalities like St. Teresa of Calcutta,<sup>12</sup> St. Oscar Romero<sup>13</sup> the Archbishop of El Salvador, *etc.*, are some of the saints of our times who bore witness to Christ. Like them, many missionaries went to

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<sup>12</sup> Mother Theresa incarnated God’s love and could see God’s presence in all the poor and the afflicted. She started a new community as ‘Missionaries of Charity’, which is an embodiment of God’s love. She received Noble Peace Prize in 1979. Her witnessing life has influenced many people. Cf. Schroeder 2008: 86.

<sup>13</sup> Oscar Roero was the fourth Archbishop of San Salvador who was assassinated while offering Mass.



different corners of the world and preached and lived the Word of God.

In the encyclical FT, Pope Francis motivates the people of God to follow the attitude of the Samaritan man who saved the man assaulted by thieves on the wayside. He was not legally bound to do such an act of love. Though he had his own plan for that day, he stood back with the injured man and cared him. The chapter second of this encyclical gives an account of this parable and different practical suggestions (FT §§ 56- 86). The witness of the Samaritan can be included in the individual type of witness. Though he was a pagan, he bore witness to love of God through his timely deeds. The priest and the Levite who passed-by the injured man showed a kind of indifference. Their attitudes show that “belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God” (FT §73). To act like the Samaritan one has to experience the love of God and then one has to be ready to share this love of God to the fellow being. More than polished words or being at the safe distance, the abandoned and the poor around us expect our compassionate involvement for helping them. This approach will make us authentic children of God. When we open our hearts to our brothers and sisters, we will have authentic openness to God (Cf. FT § 74). Nothing creates a barrier to this individual type of witness. Even the people who belong to other religions can bear witness to their common Father. Pope Francis dreams such an attitudes of concern and love from all people on the earth.

Roger P. Schroeder writes, “The most witnessing is done by ordinary baptized Christians in their daily life at home, in their neighbourhood, at work and in social situation” (Schroeder 2008: 113). In this sense, everyone in the Church is called to live the Christian values and by that way bear witness to Christ. The new law of love is very important in this respect. Many forms of injustice exists in our world. Some live in opulence and others live in poor conditions. Their fundamental rights are even discarded (FT § 22). In some places women, children, people in

different caste system, etc., are going through lot of difficulties. They were considered as slaves and useless part of the society. Human trafficking, sexual abuse, kidnapping for the sake of selling their organs, etc. are common in some places (FT § 24). In such situation, individual witness can bring lots of changes. If we consider the poor and the needy of the society and if we respect them, we actually witness to God's love and also give a model to the people live among them. In this sense, the witnessing life is not that which is only bounded to priests or missionaries; rather it is demanded from each members of the community. No one is excluded from such kind of witness. Women and children also share the missionary role of the Church through their witnessing-life.

The encyclical FT inspires us to practice certain values in our life. Gratuitous<sup>14</sup> love (FT §§ 92-94 § 139), charity (FT §§164-166), kindness (FT §§ 222-224), peace (FT §§ 228-230), forgiveness (FT §§ 240-243) etc. are values which are supposed to be practiced by a person who seeks universal friendship. These are the values which Jesus, the son of God, practiced in his life. The one who bears witness to a common Father also practices such values and through his/her life motivates others to practice them. For this, dialogue between persons is needed (FT §§ 203-205). The interaction between them will help each one of them to practice such virtues.

### **b. Communal Witness**

Through the authentic life activities, many people bear witness to Christ at a parish or diocesan or state or country level. In the early Christian community such kinds of communal witness were very visible. Roger P. Schroeder

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<sup>14</sup> “The ability to do some things simply because they are good in themselves, without concern for personal gain or recompense” (FT, § 139)

writes, “Early Christian communities, in cities around the Mediterranean, reached out to help the sick and those in need.”<sup>15</sup> Along with their personal life-witnessing, together with other members, they bore witness to Christ. In the present situation, the parish communities, pious associations, and other organizations within the Church organize certain community activities to witness Christ. The Eucharistic celebration and the fellowship within the Church is very important in this respect. Catholic *Ashramas* also witness Christ through their communitarian life.<sup>16</sup> These religious communities come forward with some social programmes to teach Christian values and to bring social changes.

Pope Francis writes, “A kind of “deconstructionism”, whereby human freedom claims to create everything starting from zero, is making headway in today’s culture” (FT §13). This kind of deconstructionism end up in the spiritual identity and moral consistency of an individual and groups (Cf. FT § 14). If we are not aware of our history we do not realize the worth of the Church. Pope writes, We need to “keep alive the flame of collective conscience, bearing witness to succeeding generations to the horror of what happened”, because that witness “awakens and preserves the memory of the victims, so that the conscience of humanity may rise up in the face of every desire for dominance and destruction” (FT § 249).<sup>17</sup> Each society has their own history

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<sup>15</sup> Schroeder 2008: 114. So, some theologians call the local congregation as “hermeneutic of the gospel.” Cf. Bevans and Schroeder 1994: 354.

<sup>16</sup> *Ashram* life as a movement started in Indian Church only since 1921 with the foundation of the Christukula Ashram in Tirupathur, South India by Dr. Jesudasan and Dr. Paton. *Ashrams* are engaged in social uplift programmes, personal services, contemplation, etc. Cf. Karokaran 1978: 187-194.

<sup>17</sup> *Message for the 2020 World Day of Peace* (8 December 2019), 2: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 December 2019, 8; available from [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco\\_20191208\\_](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20191208_)

which has to be communicated to the future generation to realize the uniqueness of that community. Common witness is the result of such realization. The historical consciousness of a Christian country enables it to stand with the poor and the migrants because they know their past that they suffered a lot and exiled in Egypt. The church community can stand together to pressurize the government to take steps against racial or religious persecution and other social issues.

The Catholic community should live authentically. It is their authentic presentation of Christ through their lives that make them a separate community. Hans Raun Iversen writes, “We are in serious need of a new appreciation of “Christ in us” as a basic concept in missiology, for sociological as well as theological reasons. [...] Churches and congregational life are beginning to look much more like a process where Christ is being presented and re-presented to people in all sort of ways rather than a static situation in which specific people “are in Christ” good as his very Church” (Iversen 2010: 193-194). Iversen preferred “Christ in us” rather than “we in Christ”. “Christ in us” expression implies the authenticity that is required from the members of the Church. It also reveals the importance of bearing witness to Christ through life-witnessing. Through the authentic way of living, the communities can bring the message of Christ to the world.

### **c. Universal Witness**

There are many institutions in the Church to bear witness to Christ in this world. Roger P. Schroeder writes, “The Church-sponsored institutions like hospitals, schools, orphanages, and social service centers with authentic leaders witness Christian values” (Schroeder 2008: 114). These institutions bear witness to Christ’s saving action, concern

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accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021; internet.

and love towards the poor and the marginalized. These institutions though they are not directly involved with religious matters, through their service to humanity make the values of Christ visible to the secular world too. Hospitals, schools, orphanages, *etc.*, are such institutions where one can witness Christ among people from other religions. Pope Francis writes, “The believers of the different religions know that our witness to God benefits our societies” (FT § 274). At the Covid-19 pandemic time, we realized that “no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together” (FT § 32). During this period, our institutions could serve all kinds of people. At the beginning of the pandemic, doctors and nurses were serving the Covid-19 patients at the risk of their own lives.<sup>18</sup> In this way they could bear witness to the love of the universal Father.

Pope Francis in FT warns us about “the destructive forms of fanaticism” (FT §46), “hostility, insults, abuse, defamation and verbal violence” (FT § 44), “concupiscence” (FT § 166), *etc.* Most of these issues are related with people’s perverted view on other people and religions. If these people can experience the love of God through the institutions of another religion that may change their attitudes towards these religions. For example, the people from other religion experience Christian values when they come into our institutions and interact with the members of these institutions. People who work in these institutions also belongs to different religions. By inspiring them to stand for values, the Christian directors of this institutions bring a new message to them. In this way, the other religious members also cooperate with the mission of Church. The members of these institutions and the directors through their authentic and loving activities bear

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. [\*Extraordinary Moment of Prayer in Time of Epidemic\*](#) (27 March 2020): *L’Osservatore Romano*, (29 March 2020), 10; available from [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200327\\_omelia-epidemia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_omelia-epidemia.html); accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> Nov 2021; internet.

witness to the kingdom values. The Church works for the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity. She is “open to bear witness in today’s world, open to faith, hope and love for the Lord [...]. A home with open doors” (FT § 276).

#### **d. Common Witness**

There are many Christian churches and denominations in this world. These denominations and small churches have different distinctive natures. Still they come together to witness Christ.<sup>19</sup> There would be areas where these different denominations can work together and bring changes to the society. For example, a movement named ‘Common Witness’ in the United States works for justice and service-oriented projects. Churches witness together when they pray together, work together for justice, offer common counter cultural witness, participate in theological education, *etc.* This kind of common witness has some ecumenical tones. Instead of quarrelling with each other, these denominations can bear witness to Christ if they are ready to work together for some social purposes, for some ecumenical prayers, and dialogues.

For bearing witness to the common Father, there should be unity among different confessions. Pope Francis prays to God for strengthening unity among different denominations by the grace of the Holy Spirit (Cf. 1 Cor 12:13) (Cf. FT § 280). Pope Francis writes, “Courage and generosity are needed in order freely to establish shared goals” (FT §174).

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<sup>19</sup> Now the most serious obstacle to the evangelization is the scandalous separation of Christian communities. Their unity in mission will be an eloquent witness to the gospel’s power to unite and reconcile salve and free, male and female rich and the poor. Cf. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, 356.

We should be ready to cooperate with these denomination for the wellbeing of the afflicted and downtrodden. Pope Francis writes, “we already have the duty to offer common witness to the love of God for all people by working together in the service of humanity” (*Ibid*). The usage of “common witness” occurs in this text very explicitly.

## Conclusion

The article “Witness in *Fratelle Tutti*, reveals the role of ‘witness’ in bringing fraternity in the world. The theology behind the urge for universal fraternity and witness is theology of love and creation. The realization of people as the creation of a common Father motivates them to work together for the common good. A peaceful and just world is possible through this cooperative work of people of all kinds. The cooperative work of people of all kinds have to be promoted through the active participation of Christians. It is not for the conversion of other people into Christianity that they participate in it. A Christian participates in this project of fraternity gratuitously. The way he/she lives or bears witness to God makes lots of changes in the attitudes of other people. Different kinds of witness are the ways helpful to bring the Christian values in the different life circles. In this way, witnessing life of a Christian gradually forms a common home of peace and solidarity.

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