

Turning Toward the Common Good, Here and Now

Rules of Fraternal Living in *Fratelli Tutti*

By Krijn Pansters

The COVID-19 crisis has completely thrown me back to myself. Amid waves of compassion with struggling entrepreneurs and small business owners, I am grieving the loss of our little dog. Instead of driving to university campuses and flying to conferences, I am teaching online and editing translations of medieval treatises called “On the Soul” (*De anima*) or “On the Interior House” (*De domo interiori*). My focus and activity have totally shifted from international networking and global socializing to local politics and community service. My presentations and papers have transformed into blog posts. I am looking forward not to the next academic achievement but to becoming a father – the little girl will be born before Christmas. In this transformational and smallness-seeking state of mind, I am reading the new papal encyclical on fraternity and social friendship. And while I am moved by its strong spiritual and moral appeal, its great appreciation of possibilities and the powers of charity, its total commitment to the common good, paradoxically I shift right back into interiorizing and self-reflecting mode and ask myself: “what would I do?” Here are what I believe to be seven useful rules of *fraternal living*, here and now, in my own, non-activist life, and according to my own interpretation, as I have been fortunate to find in *Fratelli tutti*:

1. Nourish goodness in your heart and find that such goodness leads to a peaceful conscience and to profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties and misunderstandings (243).

Sincerely try to be a good person and you will be a happy person even in circumstances that are not so good. First, *see the greater good which will benefit us all* (111; 145; 215). This requires a personal conversion from self-centeredness and self-satisfaction to a commitment to the common good (22; 63; 114). Then, *let yourself foster what is good and place yourself at its service* (77; 154; 205). Practice goodness by serving the good each day. Finally, always strive to exert yourself in doing good works, for *it is truly noble to place our hope in the hidden power of the seeds of goodness we sow* (54; 196; prayer). In this way, accumulate in your life good qualities, good works, good manners, good ways, good thoughts, good actions, good occupations, good examples, good customs, good practices, good deeds, and good things.

2. Make known the values of goodness, love and peace (285).

Become a virtuous person, someone whose attitudes are revealed in actions. Aim to *achieve great things, things that fill your heart and lift your spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love* (55). Continuously *strive for excellence and what is best for others, their growth in maturity and health, the cultivation of values and not simply material wellbeing* (112). Become, therefore, an individual who *remembers goodness* (249) and who *has the ability to do some things simply because they are good in themselves* (139). *Be called to practice love in your daily interpersonal relationships* (193), pouring love from your heart (194) and into your hands and work (197). *Act as an effective leaven [for peace] by the way you live your life each day* (231). In this virtue-cultivating way, learn to *be yourself a neighbour to others* (81).

3. Be committed to living and teaching the value of respect for others, a love capable of welcoming differences, and the priority of the dignity of every human being over his or her ideas, opinions, practices and even sins (191).

Like everyone, you have the possibility to teach by example, in word and in deed. If teaching is also your profession, you have additional opportunities and responsibilities: stimulating young people on their path to knowledge and mental and spiritual health, facilitating their progress in life, making it possible for them to *shape their own future* (187), and helping them to *mature in the moral values that foster integral human development* (112). As a teacher, you *should be conscious that your responsibility extends also to the moral, spiritual and social aspects of life* (114). In this role, especially, you are able to *hand on the values of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity* (114), *promote the value of love for one's neighbour* (151), and *share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love* (271). In doing these, honor *the dignity of each human person* (8, 22, 86), no matter how different.



4. Approach others, not to draw them into your own life, but to help them become ever more fully themselves (4).

Approach others: do not remain in your own small world but go outside to meet people (3; 169; 216). Find inspiration and true happiness in the marketplace. Do not *ignore others* (6; 42; 64): see where you can learn from them and when you can serve and support them. *Not to draw them into your own life:* do not prioritize your own convictions and customs by imposing yourself or wielding power (4; 202; 273) but let yourself be drawn into experiencing the lives of others. Do not be afraid to *listen with an open heart* and be inspired (48; 190; 261). Express your views and explain your wishes in the awareness and the terms of a common commitment (5; 232; 245). *Help them become ever more fully themselves:* assume the divine task of supporting others in their search for spiritual and existential fulfilment (68; 87; 150). Find great happiness in their finding ultimate happiness.

5. Care for the needs of every man and woman, young and old, with the same fraternal spirit of care and closeness that marked the Good Samaritan (79).

Show yourself to be a champion of justice by *giving to each his own* (171). Give to every human being whom you meet what is, in every instance and without exception, truly due: goodness, love, and peace. Give back to every human

being what might unduly and unjustly have been taken from her: care and closeness. Care for the people you encounter. Try to be close to the ones that you come close to. People in your daily life, at work, on the marketplace, online, *on the roadside, bruised and abandoned* (101): ask yourself *who needs your help* (101). *Turn at last to the injured man* (76). *Care for others with closeness and concern* (19), *care for one another* (57), *care for someone who is hurting* (70), *care for the needs of every man and woman* (79), *care for our common home* (117) and *care for the smallest, the weakest, the poorest* (194). Finally, take care of yourself (17).

6. Promote truthfulness, aside from personal interest (202).

Being *frank and open about your belief* (203), dedicate yourself to the *honest pursuit of the whole truth* (205). *No one can possess the whole truth* (221), but everyone can make a *patient effort to seek truth and justice* (58, 207, 226). Truth is shared justice, a commitment to universality with charity (184). Every moment of each day, therefore, do your best to *keep your attention focused, penetrate to the heart of matters, and recognize what is essential to give meaning to your life* (50). Find your truth *aside from personal interest*. Then, speak truthfully. As you are made to desire, seek, and love the truths of faith and morals, furthermore, seek a *more comprehensive and integral knowledge of reality* (204). *Transcend immediate concerns and grasp certain truths that are unchanging, as true now as in the past* (208,

211, 273). Realize and rest assured that God is the highest Truth and all Truth.

7. Be open to faith, hope, and love (276).

Do not make the big mistake of *closing in on yourself* (39), but make the beautiful effort to transcend yourself. *In a spirit of openness to everyone* (190), remain open to other people, to other ideas as well as to the gifts of grace that are coming your way. Be faithful: *seek God with a sincere heart, provided it is never sullied by ideological or self-serving aims* (74, 185, 274). Be hopeful: *long for a life of fulfillment, desire great things, and open up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile* (30, 55, 196). Be loving: *consider others of great value and let them become pleasing to you* (89, 93, 94). *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself* (56). Like Francis of Assisi, *let your fidelity to your Lord be commensurate with your love for your brothers and sisters* (3).

From the comfort of my own home, let me *delay a little* and conclude. From interior contemplation must come exterior construction: from within, from the ground up, in the most sincere and effective way, one must strive towards integral human development and equal dignity, through the cultivation of kindness and love, *through actions that further the common good* (22).



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