

## ENCYCLICAL “FRATELLI TUTTI” IN THE AFRICAN AND MALAGASY CONTEXT

In fact, it is not an answer to the beautiful conference of Bishop VIRGIL BERCEA that I am offering you. I would rather continue my reflection to understand the SOS launched by the Pope because it is not a simple cry of distress but a real "last minute" bell sound ("are we already too late?" – it was said during the audiences of August, September until the publication of the Encyclical) however it should be noted that it is a cry uttered in a surge of faith, of hope, of charity in the Risen Jesus Conqueror of Evil. Indeed more than one still remember March 27, 2020 (recalled by Bishop Bercea) during which alone in the middle of St Peter's Square in the pouring rain, Pope Francis had presided over an "extraordinary moment of prayer". He urged the whole world, "Like the disciples of the gospel, we have been caught off guard by an unexpected and furious storm," he said at the time. We realize that we are in the same boat, all fragile and disoriented, but at the same time all important and necessary, all called to row together, all needing to comfort each other. In this boat ... we all find ourselves. "An image regularly taken from all over the world, but for me personally this extraordinary moment synthesizes what the Pope wants to convey in the Encyclical Fratelli Tutti.

This humble contribution to our study of the Encyclical was written during Easter week. In this time of crisis, this Easter atmosphere has a particular echo in what I am going to develop.

Indeed, in celebrating Easter, we are all called to move forward to live solidarity, social friendship, and fraternity. Easter is the “reconciliation accomplished in Christ Conqueror of evil”. Here we are reconciled with nature ..., reconciled among ourselves ... reconciled with the Trinity ... by the Redemption brought by Our Lord Jesus. It is normal that our behavior is no longer the same ... We are “sent” to work on the “site” to “rebuild” the “common home” through fraternity, solidarity, friendship, the fruit of the new Pentecost for a new start and not a start at 0. Everyone will have their place in this "new common home", in this "boat" thrown by this "storm" that is Covid 19. No one will be excluded .... This reminds us of what the Acts of the Apostles tell us at the beginning of the Church: “The multitude of believers had one heart and one soul. No one claimed ownership of what belonged to him, but between them everything was common”. (Acts 4:32)... This is the ideal towards which we must strive in faith, in hope and in charity, knowing that it is a work site that does not end immediately. Despite our limitations, with the grace of baptism, we are all called to become “architects and craftsmen” for the building up of the “family of God = Fratelli Tutti”.

This is the peculiarity of this Encyclical, despite a very current context that could have embraced it, it has a scope that goes beyond space and time.

### **What contributions can Africans and Malagasy offer, especially by working on Chapter 3 of the Encyclical?**

I will no longer come back to the very deep analyzes of Bishop Bercea. I prefer to start from the experiences and categories of Africa and Malagasy, especially Malagasy, which allow us to find more "concretely" the values developed in this chapter 3 of the Encyclical.

Indeed by this call from the Pope, we Africans and Malagasy, as Mgr Bercea concludes in his presentation by encouraging the baptized, especially from Africa "to take a great responsibility by becoming a leaven in the dough, by awakening the conscience of Europe. and Africa, "to animate processes that produce new dynamisms in society" (Pope Francis, Letter on Europe, October 22, 2020).

We are thus invited to contribute to this building up of the Family of God. This is what the First African Synod has already explored and which Pope St. John Paul II takes up strongly in several places in the Post Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. I note only n° 105: "The mandate that Jesus gave to the disciples at the time of ascending to heaven is addressed to the Church of God for all times and all places. The Church, Family of God in Africa must also bear witness to Christ by promoting justice and peace on the continent and in the world..."

#### **I) FIHAVANANA value of reconciliation and communion**

Surely each country, each nation in Africa has its own way of expressing the deep sense of family, of solidarity. Everyone across Africa recognizes that "a person exists because he is in communion with others (" I am because we are each other "). We in Madagascar have a value that can help us respond to the call of Pope Francis: FIHAVANANA.

At the outset, I must note two important points:

1) We must acknowledge that given the time allocated we will not be able to do an in-depth study. However, in this brief presentation of the Encyclical in the Malagasy context, we intend to bring out a few points that will help us move forward to live this "ideal", starting from "FIHAVANANA".

2) We find this ideal in the Encyclical and it is also without hesitation that I underline that it is the "dream" of the Malagasy FIHAVANANA whose primary objective is harmony, in particular social harmony. The "FIHAVANANA" wants to base the relations of society on the mode of "parenthood", to consider all its co-residents

at several scales as “parents” and to treat them as such. It is present at the heart of many spheres of daily life and it is the backbone of all Malagasy social relationships. It intervenes in family and religious rites, in ethnic and social relations, in economic relations, exchange and mutual aid and in the resolution of political conflicts....

### **A) FIHAVANANA: Malagasy particularity**

Considering all these multiple points, FIHAVANANA can be considered as a founding value of the Malagasy identity. Finally before ending this quick presentation I will take a term that one might think "contrary" to FIHAVANANA but which could help us to understand its meaning: the word "foreign" has no equivalent in the Malagasy language? Is it to emphasize that everyone is "FIHAVANANA" for a Malagasy, that is to say, no one is "foreign". Does this come from the fact that Madagascar is an island so everyone is called to form a "single family"? His "common home" is this island. A Malagasy, by its nature, "cultivates" links wherever it is ... If we want to extend our reflection: "is it not the" culture of links "that Pope Francis speaks of in his message of last 1st January and who is first for a culture of “integral charity”? In colorful but very symbolic language, any Malagasy knows this popular adage: “humanity is like the stalks of melons, very intertwined but if we look closely they have only one origin... and it must be said that it is not the trade which is first but FIHAVANANA ... ». Why do we take the example of commerce? Because it is the market the meeting place, place of FIHAVANANA, a social place. However, trade can disrupt harmony because trade is often managed by interest and not by solidarity....

All this leads us to present "FIHAVANANA" as a "tool" for reading the encyclical, especially in chapter 3.

### **B) FIHAVANANA: un-translatable concept...**

It is worth noting that all scholars recognize that the FIHAVANANA concept is un-translatable. Many linguistic, semantic or anthropological studies attest to this conclusion. Certainly we can start from its root "havana" which at the same time connotes the idea of parenthood, affinity and lineage which we spoke about above ... Despite this translation problem we can take advantage of its essential value, especially its link very close to the family and more particularly to the great human family. Indeed, the fundamental objective of FIHAVANANA by putting harmony at the center above all, is to preserve the aina, life at all costs (it is good to note that the word "life" is translated in both ways in Malagasy according to conception, but both are closely linked: life is translated by aina when we want to underline the “breath”, “the soul” and life is translated by “fiainana” when we especially want to emphasize the “manner”, the communion of life more exactly). FIHAVANANA is at the center of life and therefore unfolds within the family. This is why it is inconceivable for a Malagasy

to have a "life all alone in the middle of an island like Robinson Crusoe". A Malagasy considers this to be a real "hell". Exclusion is the worst punishment for a Malagasy.

In short, FIHAVANANA is in true symbiosis with the daily universe of a Malagasy.

## **II) FIHAVANANA and Fratelli Tutti**

### **A) Pope Francis and FIHAVANANA**

During his trip to Madagascar in September 2019, Pope Francis praised FIHAVANANA during his meeting with politicians at the Presidential Palace, as if he wanted to tell the assembly that you must seize this opportunity: " Having this "Malagasy particularity", FIHAVANANA, founding value of your identity, you are all invited to "build the society having as a base this fundamental value": "In the preamble of the Constitution of your Republic, you wanted to seal one of the fundamental values of Malagasy culture: "FIHAVANANA" which evokes the spirit of sharing, mutual aid and solidarity. It also includes the importance of family ties, friendship and kindness between people and towards nature. In this way, the "soul" of your people is revealed and these particular traits which distinguish it, constitute it and enable it to resist with courage and abnegation the multiple setbacks and difficulties with which it is confronted daily" (Speech to the authorities, to society civilian to the diplomatic corps Iavoloha September 7, 2019). He echoed the same idea to the young people gathered around him during the vigil: "all of us are important, all of us are necessary and no one can say: 'I don't need you'. "No one can say: I don't need you", or "you are not part of this project of love that the Father dreamed of when he created us... We are one big family" (Catechesis for young people at the evening of September 7, 2019). We find these points in the Encyclical. This is one of the reasons that prompted us to highlight this Malagasy "particularity"

### **A) The limits of FIHAVANANA**

Many researchers consider FIHAVANANA as a Malagasy philosophy of life (Fr. Rahazarizafy, sj). FIHAVANANA demands that "what happens to the other concerns me too" ... otherwise it is not "FIHAVANANA". In misfortune or in happiness, a Malagasy shares these moments with his family, his friends, his neighbors, his compatriots,... to put it simply: with everyone. .... The goal is to preserve life (aina) hence some "imperatives" of FIHAVANANA: sharing, mutual aid, and solidarity...

But it is good to note that FIHAVANANA has its limits and its setbacks because these imperatives which are sharing, mutual aid, solidarity are often "guided" by interest and not by gratuitousness ... especially in times of crisis ... It is necessary to do more in-depth analyzes to get a good grasp of these points. Unfortunately we will not be

able to do it but we can already feel the stake. This fundamental value requires a "conversion", "a radical change of behavior" to regain its "original" state so that it again becomes a real tool for building the Family of God. We must arrive at an "evangelized FIHAVANANA".

This is the goal of all inculturation, moreover: *"Inculturation has a double dimension: on the one hand," the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values (here FIHAVANANA) by integration into Christianity "and on the other hand, "the rooting of Christianity in various cultures" (Ecclesia in Africa n ° 59)*

### **III) EVANGELIZED FIHAVANANA, WAY TO FRATELLI TUTTI = FAMILY OF GOD FOR INTEGRAL CHARITY**

#### **A) "Dream of integral charity.... "**

In the conclusion of what we can call the "introduction" of the Encyclical to n ° 8, the Pope seems to suggest that we consider that following Laudato sì, who especially developed integral ecology, the Pope seems to us proposing "integral charity" without ever announcing the expression: *"I hope in this time that we are passing through, recognizing the dignity of each human person, we may all together revive a universal desire for humanity. All together: "Here is a very beautiful secret for dreaming and making our life a great adventure. No one can face life in isolation. [...] We need a community that supports us, helps us and where we help each other look ahead. How important it is to dream together! [...] Alone, we risk having mirages by which you see what is not; dreams are built together". Let us dream as one and the same humanity, as travelers sharing the same human flesh, as children of this same land which shelters us all, each with the richness of his faith or his convictions, each with his own voice, all brothers. "*

So that it is not a simple "dream" but a new beginning, a new beginning which requires a true "art", a true "architecture" (cf 231-232) which will lead us to peace, fruit of this "integral charity", of fraternity and social friendship, the Pope offers us many models (St Francis of Assisi, Bx Charles de Foucauld, Nelson Mandela... in particular in chapter 2 the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Then he addresses many themes ranging from creation to interreligious dialogue, including the problem of peace...

#### **B) The Good Samaritan and the "evangelized" FIHAVANANA**

Can we think that the Good Samaritan of chapter 2 is the ideal image of social friendship and brotherhood, therefore of integral charity?

FIHAVANANA, whose nature, essence and objective of opening up to others we have described very briefly, can this FIHAVANANA be a tool to build this "Fratelli Tutti"?

To do this it must be purified, "evangelized"? The comments given by the Pope on the Parable of the Good Samaritan allow us to grasp in daily life the path that we must take to arrive at this "integral charity". The Holy Father emphasizes to us that this is only possible in the requirements of self-giving, of service, of transparency. It must also be recognized that the Good Samaritan did not act alone. He needed the help of others, including the hotelier in La Parable. Precisely the lesson that we can draw from this Parable of the Good Samaritan is that "together", never alone, we will be able to build the "common home", "Fratelli tutti". Indeed, we have FIHAVANANA but it should be "evangelized" so that it becomes: fraternity and social friendship, "integral charity". FIHAVANANA must be "purified" of egocentricity, lies, jealousy, this Malagasy modesty that is henamaso, that is to say shame going as far as fear forcing you not to say the truth in front of a person so as not to hurt them. The aim is to protect harmony at all costs...

The "purified", "evangelized" *FIHAVANANA* is the fruit of the radical change of behavior, coming from Easter as St Paul emphasizes (1 Cor 5, 7): *Purify yourselves from the old leaven to be a new dough, since you are unleavened. Because our Passover, Christ, has been slain*". It is no longer the behavior, the attitude of the world, the "old leaven" that we follow even if we are of the world, the "new", the Christ who is our "FIHAVANANA", which makes us form Fratelli Tutti in "integral charity". It is besides the prayer of Christ in St John in ch, 17.

### **Conclusion**

In fact it is not a conclusion but an opening towards other debates, other horizons because surely questions arise: Is Fratelli Tutti in agreement with the values and the principles of FIHAVANANA? How can we make FIHAVANANA "evangelized"? This is the role of the Church...

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**✠ RAMAROSON Marc Benjamin, cm**