

Chapter 5

A Better Kind of Politics



Credit: Shutterstock

A Word about Inclusive Language

The announcement that the Holy Father was going to Assisi to sign a new encyclical on social relationships caused some people to applaud. When we learned that the encyclical would be known as *Fratelli Tutti*, much of that applause died out. Didn't using the masculine noun show that the Catholic Church is still out of touch with today's realities? In fact, Church language is not known for keeping up with the times. As we go forward, we Franciscans share a deep concern about inclusive language and the role of women in the Church while also sharing the urgent plea of this letter from Pope Francis.

This document would once have been called "an encyclical of the Holy Father Francis on fraternity and social friendship." Somewhere down the line people started referring to papal documents, such as encyclicals, bulls, etc., by their incipit, the first two or three words of the document itself, making it easier to remember and discuss them.

Every word has a denotation, a precise definition, which we can find in dictionaries; however, it also has a connotation, a commonly accepted meaning, even some emotional impact.

For this reason, the same word can evoke feelings of joy and security in one person while causing someone else to feel threatened or repulsed. In any conversation or dialogue, both parties need not only to listen to the words, but also to delve into what the other is saying. I personally find it encouraging that the English translators of this encyclical show some sensitivity to the issue by leaving the incipit in Italian.

Basically, the Holy Father is encouraging all of us to discover what Francis did after that fateful day when he stripped himself and said, "Now I can truly say, 'Our Father.'" If we are all children of one father, we are then all brothers and sisters.

Sr. Nancy Celaschi, OSF

How to Use This Guide

1. This guide can be used with small or large groups and for personal reflection.
2. Feel free to share with others the URL where you found the guide. You are free to print it for others who prefer a printed text. This guide is **free**.
3. This guide serves as an overview to the chapter featured but cannot in the space available do justice to the richness of each chapter.

This is a cooperative venture of several Franciscan organizations listed on the reverse side. Feel free to duplicate and share this page.

Margaret Carney, OSF and Pat McCloskey, OFM coordinated this study guide series.

Summary of Chapter 5

Pope Francis says some terms used politically have lost their true meaning and move us toward intense polarization. For example, “popular,” “populist,” and “liberal” are used to place individuals, groups, and governments into categories that exclude and tend to misconstrue what is meant by “people.” Pope Francis states, “To be part of a people is to be part of a shared identity arising from social and cultural bonds” (158). Exploiting these bonds appeals to the worst in us, undermining institutions and the law.

“People” is a living dynamic, open to growth because differences are welcomed. The current political system fails for the most part to see this and address the underlying issues. Some liberal approaches tend toward individualism and deny a freedom not noted in a shared narrative.

Because of transnational economics, the financial sectors tend to win out over the political. Pope Francis calls for a reform of the United Nations, economic institutions, and international finance, that will place legal and enforceable limits, preventing both power being co-opted by a select few nations and cultural impositions or restrictions based on ideological differences.

Political Love and Charity

Pope Francis warns against politics totally subject to the economy and an economy dependent upon a technocracy. Neither the marketplace nor technology can solve every problem. We need to work toward a political order that has social charity as its soul. We need politics that looks to the common good in the long term, uses an interdisciplinary approach, reforms and coordinates institutions, and replicates best practices. Our current crises cannot be solved piecemeal or with quick fixes. “Only a healthy politics, involving the most diverse sectors and skills, is capable of overseeing this process” (179).

When we seek and work toward social fraternity and social justice for all, for a social and political order with social charity as its soul, this is charity at its most vast: political charity. This love, this charity, is found not only in our personal relationships, but also in the social, economic, and political realms.

Michelle Balek, OSF

Quotes from Chapter 5

- *Everything, then, depends on our ability to see the need for a change of heart, attitudes, and lifestyles. Otherwise, political propaganda, the media and the shapers of public opinion will continue to promote an individualistic and uncritical culture subservient to unregulated economic interests and societal institutions at the service of those who already enjoy too much power (166).*
- *We need a model of social, political and economic participation “that can include popular movements and invigorate local, national and international governing structures with that torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny” (169).*
- *Good politics will seek ways of building communities at every level of social life, in order to recalibrate and reorient globalization and thus avoid its disruptive effects (182).*

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. How might you, like St. Francis in his time, make room for the tender love of others, near or far – a love that “draws near and becomes real”?
2. Pope Francis asks: “How much love am I putting into my work? What am I doing for the progress of our people? What real bonds am I creating? What positive forces am I unleashing?”
3. How much social peace am I sowing?

Author



Michelle Balek, OSF is a Dubuque Franciscan sister. She currently ministers as a member of the congregation's Charism Team, coordinating the Franciscan Common Venture volunteer service program.

Thanks to

- ✓ Andy Tretow from Franciscan Pilgrimage Program for the graphic design of this series.
- ✓ John Cella, OFM (Franciscan Pilgrimage Program) for donating Andy's time and talent for this study guide series.
- ✓ Lisa Biedenbach for assistance with editing and proofreading.

Our writers:

Nancy Celaschi, OSF
Caryn Crook, OSF
Bill Hugo, OFM Cap.
Mary Esther Stewart, OFS
Michelle Balek, OSF
Charlie McCarthy, OFM Conv.
Margaret Magee, OSF
Jim Puglisi, SA

- ✓ All those who have agreed to host this study guide series on the websites listed below—and elsewhere.
- ✓ All those who are working to produce a Spanish edition of this study guide series.

This is a cooperative venture of several Franciscan organizations listed below.

Feel free to duplicate and share this page.

*
*

This study guide series is posted at

https://franciscanmissionservice.org	https://franciscanaction.org
https://franciscanpilgrimages.com	https://secularfranciscansusa.org
https://franciscancollegesuniversities.org	https://franfed.org

info@franciscanmedia.org