

Fratelli tutti.

When I first wrote about Pope Francis in 2013-14, it was on the ecumenical implications of his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, which I acknowledged as being simultaneously the testimony of a simple believer and the teaching of a great church leader, a point which Francis himself implicitly recognises in his self definition as exercising a ministry not *over* the Church but *within* and *amongst* all the faithful.

I do not know whether the Pope has ever read, let alone sung, any of the hymns of Charles Wesley but I am sure that he would endorse this couplet from Charles', 'Jesus the name high over all.

'The arms of love that compass me

Would all mankind embrace.¹

as indicative of his personal faith and the hope of the whole Church for all humankind. It is significant that he begins the encyclical *fratelli tutti* with an appeal to the one who is not just his own personal inspiration but is also widely acknowledged within the entire Christian world as the finest exemplar of all-consuming devotion to the teaching and example of Christ that there has ever been, a man who desired to embrace and serve all people in the name of Christ, most particularly 'the poorest, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters'². Francis emphasises that it is St Francis whose example inspires him to devote the encyclical on fraternity and social friendship'. It was St. Francis who 'proposed a way of life, marked by the flavour of the Gospel', who did not wage a war of words, aimed at imposing doctrine, but simply spread the love of God', moreover 'with an openness of heart, that knew no bounds and transcended differences of origin, nationality, colour or religion'³.

It is within this same openness to all that Francis addresses every human being and shows his deep regard for all the rest of us in the way that he also appeals to those who are *not* of his own immediate flock, in full communion with him. He appeals to the similarity of teaching of his separated brother, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople⁴. He concludes his message with the citation of a series of truths about God's will for humanity which he drew up together with a senior muslim cleric, the Grand Imam, al-Tayyebb⁵. He cites the examples of a saintly Hindu, Gandhi, of a Baptist minister, Martin Luther King, of a

¹ *Wesley's Hymns* (1780), no 37, *Singing the Faith* (2011), current British Methodist hymnal, no 357.

² *Fratelli Tutti*, paras 1-3 (henceforward cited as FT)

³ FT, paras 2,4. Francis particularly stresses St Francis advice to his disciples that if they are amongst 'Saracens and unbelievers' they are, without renouncing their own identity, 'not to engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake'

⁴ *Ibid.* Para 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, para 284.

courageous Anglican archbishop, Desmond Tutu⁶. He addresses all people of goodwill, including not just those of other faiths but even those who have, and would sometimes say that they can have no faith in God, but who, nevertheless, wish to see a better, juster and kinder world.

We see this particularly in the way he phrases his appeal in para 110

‘A truly human and fraternal society will be capable of enabling in an efficient and stable way that each of its members is accompanied at each stage of life. Not only in providing for their basic needs but by enabling them to give of their best, even though their performance may be less than optimum, their pace slow and their efficiency limited.’

Such would be a commonplace amongst so many who want a world that strains as hard as possible to see that no one’s contribution is belittled or ignored and none are excluded. Of course, at the same time as he makes this inclusive appeal, Francis does point to the Gospel values of *agathosune*, ‘attachment to and pursuit of the good’ and *benevolentia*, ‘which wills the good of others, ‘bespeaks a yearning for goodness, and a desire to fill the lives of others with what is beautiful, sublime and edifying’, values alike inherited from the early Christian world⁷.

Francis indicates a special role for all religious believers, based on a common acceptance by them all of the essential benevolence of God. ‘A journey of peace is possible between religions-its point of departure is God’s way and his love for everyone regardless of religion⁸. Like John Wesley, who was aware of his own very particular vocation to spread scriptural holiness across the land on both sides of the pond, he knew that God’s ‘mercy is over all His works’, a key theme of course in *Laudato Si*.

Francis is, however, no easily idealistic optimist. He goes straight from his introduction into an examination of the dark forces at work in the world that must be countered by all people with the moral and spiritual resources available to them. He begins with an examination of what he calls ‘myopic, extremist and aggressive nationalism’, which infects, in varying degrees, many in both Europe and North America, as well as having influence in India and other countries⁹.

One may add that that myopic nationalism is often supported by those who consider that, confronted with increasing unemployment and economic uncertainty, they are forgotten by the traditional elites of their country, the tragedy being that they often blame people or institutions which are far from the primary cause of their woes. Thus, in Britain, much of the demand for Brexit, the British break with the European Union, came from heavy industrial

⁶ Ibid, para

⁷ FT, para 112, for *agathosune* citing Galatians 5:22..

⁸ FT, para 281.

⁹ FT, para 11.

areas which had gone into decline, the decline being far more the effect of British government policies in the 1980's than anything directly related to the European Union, which, by contrast, had actually improved many of the rights of employed workers. Conservative governments refused before 1997 to accept these new rights¹⁰.

Francis also gives a devastating critique of globalisation, arguing that the opening up of the world has been co-opted to mean freedom to invest anywhere, regardless of the consequences and thus the implementation of a common cultural model justifying new forms of cultural colonisation; the result is a 'massified world that promotes individual rights and weakens the communitarian dimension of life'¹¹. He notes a weakening sense of history, to which I would add a specific reference to the way in which, at least in Britain, there is a growing attempt in some circles to promote a disputably nostalgic history of past British greatness, particularly in terms of our contribution to the war effort in 1940-1 when we stood alone¹².

Francis condemns the 'throwaway' society, particularly in the case of labour saving in industry which throws workers on to the scrap heap without ensuring adequately remunerated replacement employment. He deplores the way in which much modern politics has ceased to be about 'healthy debate' and is directed more by 'slick marketing techniques aimed at discrediting others.' He stresses that the urgent need, politically, for the setting of a common roadmap for the achievement of the common good. He points out that, in the last resort, 'to care for the world means to care for ourselves', a very central point already forcefully made in *Laudato Si*. Isolation and withdrawal into one's interests can never be the way to renewal; rather it is the way of encounter. 'Isolation no, encounter, yes. 'An individual and a *people* (my italics) are only creative and fruitful if they are able to develop a creative openness to others'.

I would add personally that that is the reason why, in the British referendum, I voted to remain in the European Union. It was not primarily a matter of economic judgement as to loss or gain on that front, but a cultural and spiritual one. We British need the stimulus of all that is best in the key European cultures; indeed many of my Belgian friends are sorry that they are losing the wisdom of the best British traditions from their common life with the rest of the remaining EU.

¹⁰ For a very good analysis of the social divisions of modern Britain and the way they can affect political attitudes, see Goodhart, David. *The Road to Somewhere* (2017) which analyses the difference between what he calls 'anywheres' and 'somewheres', the people whose advantageous situation educationally and otherwise allows them optimism about the future and those whose horizons are limited and see little hope for the future. The EU *social chapter* gave extra rights to workers. British governments opted out of it until 1997 when a Labour govt finally accepted it.

¹¹ FT, para 12. He notes a weakening sense of history.

¹² I.e. after the collapse of our European allies in June 1940 and before Soviet and US entry in the War in 1941.

Francis gives a devastating analysis of the digital age. He would not deny the benefits it has brought through allowing all internet users access to an unparalleled amount of information previously difficult of access but he fears other effects. ‘Digital media expose people to addiction, loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic personal relationships’. It is, sadly, too easily and effectively manipulated by economic interests and destructive forms of fanaticism’. Above all, it demands wisdom in interpretation, a quality not all surfers of the web possess!¹³

Francis concludes this chapter on a happier note. He is sure that that, if sufficiently wise and disciplined, we can ‘seek the truth in dialogue, in both relational conversation and passionate debate’. To do so calls for perseverance. It entails moments of silence and suffering, yet it can embrace the broader experience of individuals and peoples’. Finally, he insists that the process of building true fraternity ‘can only be taken by spirits that are free and open to authentic encounters.’¹⁴ Much of the rest of the encyclical is dedicated to expounding this statement.

Francis’ second chapter is devoted to an examination of the parable of the Good Samaritan, probably the best known of all the parables of Jesus and one that will have been taught to the youngest of children in all countries with a Christian past, even in this secular age. Francis poses acute questions from it, asking which of the characters in the story we resemble. Have we become like those who pass by, ‘ignoring situations till they affect us directly’?¹⁵ The parable calls us to decision. It is the moment of truth. ‘Will we bend down and touch and heal the wounds of others?’¹⁶ Each day we have to decide whether we are Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders. By his action, the Good Samaritan shows that the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others. Life calls us to interactions because we were created for love. Above all, Francis stresses that belief in and worship of God are not enough for a religious believer. We have to love in a way that is pleasing to God¹⁷.

All this chimes in with Francis’ earlier appeal to us all to dream for a better world and then speak and work for it. He calls all of us to work for the common good. He calls us to dream for it despite the many aspects of the world that all people of goodwill find distressing, the poverty gap, the ecological crisis, both of which have their roots in ideologies that put personal gain and so-called market forces before the common good.

Francis calls us all to what the Wesleyan theological tradition calls *responsible discipleship* in the face of all the manifold difficulties. Every day offers a new opportunity to advance.

¹³ FT, paras 43,44.

¹⁴ Ibid, para 50.

¹⁵ Ibid, para 64.

¹⁶ FT, para 70.

¹⁷ Ibid, para 74.

‘Difficulties that can seem overwhelming are opportunities for growth, not glum resignation leading to acquiescence’. He calls us to dream and then act. He is very insistent that it is the duty of each one of us. He states clearly that we should not leave everything to governments, ‘that would be childish’, not acting responsibly.

Whilst I was in the middle of my first preliminary skim through *Fratelli Tutti*, a Catholic priest friend, Fr. Nicholas Latham, drew my attention to a document issued in July by the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome, entitled ‘The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church’. Apparently, this was issued by the Congregation without any previous notification. What is clear is that the Congregation have been very deeply influenced by Pope Francis’ teaching and example and his call for all Christians to recognise that they are called to be missionary disciples and that they are all anointed by the Spirit to testify to Christ and to represent him in service both within and beyond the parish boundaries. All have particular gifts. Some may be called to particular forms of ministry within the local parish, others may witness more through their dedication in secular employment or other wider community activities. It is the job of all in the parish to encourage and pray for each other in their life of discipleship and witness, again a point that resonates deeply with the Methodist experience of the local congregation/parish¹⁸.

Reading this, I turned just a few hours ago to the teaching of my own particular church, British Methodism and discovered similar words in a late 1980’s document, ‘The Ministry of the Whole People of God’, where there is a strong stress on the ministry of layfolk both within their own congregation and beyond it, in the local (and sometimes wider) community¹⁹. I particularly noted the following as consistent both with Francis most recent call in *Fratelli tutti* and with the recent document on the parish.

‘In consultation with others a Christian may look for new or additional contexts where newly awakened gifts...can be employed in witnessing to Christ and serving either the well-being of society or the true harnessing of the natural order²⁰.

Neighbours, stress Francis are ‘without borders’. Indeed, they are anywhere in the world and the command ‘go and do likewise’ even applies to those at the greatest distance. We are called to set aside all differences and recognise the ‘universal dimension to the call to love’²¹.

The next two chapters, ‘Envisaging an Open World’ and ‘A Heart open to the World’, stress what Francis sees as the necessary prerequisites for an advance to a truly united and

¹⁸ See the hymns for the Society meeting and parting, as published in *Wesley’s Hymns* (1780), nos 478-539, many of which remain perennially popular in Methodism on both sides of the pond.

¹⁹ Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, vol 2 (2000), pp. 229-281.

²⁰ Ibid, p

²¹ FT paras 81,83.

peaceful world. Chapter 3 stresses the need for a love ever more open, a universal love that 'promotes every person without exception', that asserts the right of every person to a fair share in the gifts of the earth which are the Lord's and which he has designed for the benefit of all. The rights of property are to be modified in the light of the need of every person for land, employment and economic sufficiency. Here of course, Francis repeats much of the teaching already given in *Evangelii Gaudium*²². Individual rights must be ordered in the light of the greatest good of the whole. The virtue of *agathosune*, as commended by Paul in Galatians 5:22, is commended, uniting, as it does, a love of the good and the yearning desire to see it prevail²³.

A heart open to the world calls for the widest possible discovery of the gifts of each other, which gives to each person the chance to live and grow in appreciation of other cultures and gifts. Francis stresses that 'a healthy openness never threatens. He stresses his agreement with Imam al-Tayebb that East and West can learn from each other, the West as to the spiritual remedies the east can provide to help the West in the struggle against materialism and the West to help the East in its search to emerge from cultural, economic and technical decline²⁴. Francis stresses the gifts that immigrants can bring, both Jewish and Italian immigrants to his own Buenos Aires and Latino culture to the USA²⁵. He warns cultures against cultural sclerosis that may follow from closing both borders and minds to the gifts of others²⁶. At the same time, he celebrates the gifts of varied cultures even at the lowest, most local levels and talks of them as enriching elements, holding particular values from which others can learn. He stresses that 'global society is not the sum total of different countries, but rather the communion that exists amongst them', a communion that can bring 'a joyful realisation that no one people, no one culture individually can achieve everything without the need for fulfilment by others.

I would stress that, I, personally, can witness to this from my British appreciation of our nearest neighbours, the French, both at the wider secular level and at the church level. We British could learn a lot from the French experience of economic planning for the common good, in such matters as energy and transport²⁷. Similarly, I am edified by the intellectual theological energy of the French churches which could complement our British practical skills in diakonia. Both countries could benefit from a wider awareness of the differing strengths of our two languages, English in its adaptability and borrowing of vivid words and expressions, French in its classical elegance²⁸.

²² Ibid, paras 118,120.

²³ Ibid, para 112.

²⁴ Ibid, para 136.

²⁵ Ibid, para135.

²⁶ Ibid, para 134.

²⁷ In a relatively short period during a now politically derided fourth republic (1946-58) was transformed from a minor power in terms of heavy industry into ranking close to Britain and Germany industrially.

²⁸ A balance brilliantly illustrated by the first British scholar ever elected to the Academie Francaise, Sir Michael

In the next three chapters, Francis turns to the practicalities of transforming the social and political landscape, locally, nationally and globally. In 'A better kind of politics', he distinguishes first between populist politics that seeks to divide society into competing factions, blaming both sections of their own society plus immigrants and particular foreign groups for the misfortunes felt by their supporters, who, however, are frequently let down by them, and genuinely popular politics that seek the reconciliation of differing social classes and interests with the aim of building a society from which no one is excluded, particularly from meaningful employment as necessary to the dignity of every human being. He particularly attacks political decisions which result in increased unemployment, without provision for any suitable replacement in meaningful work²⁹.

Francis points out that to be part of a people is to be part of a shared identity, arising from social and cultural bonds. He argues that 'a loving people with a future is open to be mobilised, challenged, broadened and enriched by others'. As a British commentator, I would argue that in the 1940's Britain came as close to being such a society as any country ever has been, the people united first in war aims then in the determination for a welfare state-sadly, that common spirit across all classes has since largely been lost.

Francis argues that the biggest political issue of all is employment, employment that 'gives everyone the opportunity to mature the seed that God has placed in us, our initiative, talents and innate resources'³⁰. He argues that everything depends on us having, collectively, a change of heart in our attitudes to lifestyle so that an individualistic approach does not dominate. Education, upbringing, concern for others, a well-integrated view of life and spiritual growth-all are essential for quality human relationships. These are needed at all levels, local, national and international³¹.

Above all, 'politics must not be subject to the economy, nor the latter to the dictates of an efficiency driven paradigm of technocracy.'

Finally, in this chapter, he addresses some searching questions to politicians. They must love the common good. They must 'through sacrifice and patience, seek to build a polyhedral reality in which everyone has a place' and 'no one sees his neighbour in poverty'³². They must ask the painfully difficult question, 'what have I done to progress our people, what mark have I left on society? What mark did I leave on society, what good did I do in the

Edwards who gave his inaugural lecture on the complementary strengths of the two competing languages.

²⁹ FT, paras 154-162.

³⁰ FT, para 162.

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³² Ibid, para 190.

position entrusted to me? Their biggest concern must not be a change in the polls, rather the elimination of poverty and social exclusion³³.

The sixth chapter is entitled dialogue and friendship in society. Francis insists that true dialogue involves encounter, in which 'each one of us can learn something from others, no one is useless and none is expendable³⁴. We should be passionate about a culture of encounter, about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone³⁵.' In short, I would add that the concept of catholicity is central. To be a *catholic* person in the fullest sense involves not just seeking in one's personal religious quest the fullness of one's own church or spiritual tradition, it involves seeking the fullness of the whole breadth of human culture on a basis that respects the contribution of every person, every locality, every nation. It is, for the Christian, part of the fullness of loving God with all one's heart and mind and respecting and loving our neighbours as ourselves. Even for a humanist non-theist, it is the fulfilment of his or her concern for the human fulfilment of all people within this life. One can then have 'the trumpet voice on all the world to call' in celebration of life for all in this world³⁶.

I imagine Francis has in mind the great triumphs of dialogue in inter-church and inter-religious dialogue. These may seem to have had little effect in terms of full formal agreement, but they have had enormous effect in terms of improved understanding and relationships between the partners concerned. The many Christian denominations certainly understand each other far better than before Vatican II and realise how very much they have most of the basics in common, Francis himself acknowledging the progress virtually every time he meets a delegation from another Christian tradition³⁷. In this encyclical, he does two things. He calls for a juster and fairer world, but he also subtly sows the gospel seed as a *praeparatio evangelica* for all humankind.

In 'Paths of Renewed Encounter', Francis calls on us all to be proactive in seeking a society based on service to others and the pursuit of reconciliation and mutual development. He argues that 'true reconciliation is achieved proactively by forming a new society, based on service to others rather than the desire to dominate'.³⁸ He adds that 'looking to overcome our divisions presupposes a basic sense of belonging on the part of everyone, such a society 'benefits when everyone feels at home. He even dreams 'if only we could treat our political opponents or neighbours as if members of a family'³⁹. A short section argues we must begin with the concerns of the least, adding the sobering comment, 'without equal opportunities,

³³ FT, para 197.

³⁴ Ibid, para 215.

³⁵ Ibid, para 216.

³⁶ Quotation from Charles Wesley, hymn no 114, Methodist Hymn Book (1933)

³⁷ See e.g. the many instances mentioned in my 'The Ecumenism of Pope Francis'

³⁸ FT para 230, appropriately citing the South African bishops' conference.

³⁹ Ibid.

aggression finds fertile terrain for growth.⁴⁰ He commends the development of a community spirit of gentleness in handling all relationships, even those where a degree of admonishment is required—such a spirit would imitate that of the first Christian communities, as commended by St Paul⁴¹. He argues that the words of Christ in Matthew 10:34-36 about his bringing a sword and division do not encourage us to seek conflict, rather to endure it, lest deference to others who commit injustice distracts from our fidelity to the truth⁴².

He also tackles two problems that, up to his pontificate, previous popes had found difficult to address, those of the just war theory and the permissibility of the death penalty in extreme cases. He argues that, in the nuclear age, the just war thesis can scarcely be maintained since the evil to result from it would be disproportionate the chance of achieving any just result from it. The life, even of a murderer, is sacred and must be respected⁴³.

In his last chapter, *Religions at the service of fraternity in the world*, he points to the capacity of all religious believers, despite their differences, to contribute to the common search for peace and justice, based on their common convictions, including belief in the Fatherhood of God, their common desire ‘to serve him with a sincere heart’, things which give secure base for seeing each other as ‘travelling companions, truly brothers and sisters.’⁴⁴ He argues that ‘a journey of peace is possible between religions, its point of departure being that of God’s love for everyone, regardless of religion’⁴⁵.

Within this context, he makes a particular appeal to Christians to recover the full joy of living their faith.

‘If the music of the gospel ceases to sound in our ears, we lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation which has its source in the knowledge that we are forgiven and sent forth’⁴⁶.

He also asks for tolerance for Christians in countries where they are in a minority. I suspect he is thinking not just of Islam, but possibly also of Hinduism in India and even of Buddhism in a few countries⁴⁷.

⁴⁰ FT, paras 233ff.

⁴¹ Ibid, para 239.

⁴² Ibid, para 241, ‘true love for an oppressor means seeking ways to stop him’.

⁴³ Ibid, paras

⁴⁴ FT, paras 271,272,274.

⁴⁵ FT, para 282.

⁴⁶ FT, para 276.

⁴⁷ FT, para 279.

He ends of course with the magnificent list of ten agreed points which he and the Grand Imam al-Tayebb jointly commend at the head of which is the joint concern for justice for the poor.

Estimation and first impressions.

Pope Francis has given the whole of humanity much to ponder, indeed that it should ponder. Catholics, all Christians, all religious believers, agnostics and humanists, all are included in his appeal, bearing in mind that we are all in the same world, a world far more globalised and far more equally affected and threatened by common crises in human society and the natural environment. Francis has tried to address us all in terms which everyone can understand. He makes an appeal to values and desires that we have in common, despite any differences arising from varieties of belief or non-belief, social, racial and national background. He has rendered a service to all humankind and we should all be thankful for his leadership in these matters whether or not we are Catholics, Christians of other churches, who increasingly realise his value as a global spokesman for their faith, or simply people of goodwill, believers or not.

It is too early yet to say how much and how far Fratelli Tutti will be received across the world, but I will say a little, first about initial reception, then about possible reception within my own, Methodist, tradition in conformity with the approach taken by Wesley. Since writing the previous sentence, it has been confirmed that Joe Biden is President-elect of the USA. The good news is that, as only the second Catholic President, he affirms his own social conscience, stating that 'my Catholic truth drilled into me a core truth-that every person is equal in rights and dignity because we are all beloved children of God'. Furthermore, he said in 2015 that Pope Francis was 'the embodiment of the catholic social teaching I was raised with, the idea that everyone is entitled to dignity, that the poor should be given special preference, that you have an obligation to reach out and be inclusive'⁴⁸.

Encouraging statements, though no one should underestimate the difficulties that Biden might encounter within a deeply divided America, from lack of control of Congress, from a conservative Supreme Court which might try, as in the days of Roosevelt, to frustrate the initiatives of a radical President.

At a conference held in Rome just days after the publication of Fratelli Tutti, a young muslim scholar, Judge Mohammed Abdul Salaam, said

'As a young muslim scholar of Islamic law, I find myself, with much love and enthusiasm, in agreement with the Pope and I share every word he has written in the encyclical. I follow, with satisfaction and hope, all his proposals put forward in a spirit of concern for the rebirth of human fraternity'.

⁴⁸ The Guardian 10.11.2020.

Professor Anna Rowlands, Professor of Catholic Social Teaching at the University of Durham, England acclaims the encyclical.

‘The message Pope Francis wants us to hear is that we are made fully human by what takes us beyond ourselves. What makes this possible is a divine love, open to all, that births, bonds, bridges and endlessly renews. This love is the basis of Pope Francis’ call to us, with St Francis’ words of loving attention, *fratelli tutti*’.

Professor Andrea Riccardi.

‘The encyclical shows that we are all guardians of peace...We, normal people, cannot remain on the sidelines. The art of peace is *everybody’s task*. (my italics).

Cardinal Miguel Ayuso thanked Francis for his great contribution to inter-religious dialogue since the beginning of his pontificate...‘Fratelli tutti makes us all feel closer to the love of ...Christ and encourages us to place ourselves together, at the service of fraternity of this world’.

A little later, Bp. Richard Moth, Catholic bishops’ of England and Wales spokesman on social affairs, commented. ‘The way of dialogue and listening is the key to his theme of the common good and destiny of every person at every stage of life’... The Holy father calls us to look deeper to recognise the innate human dignity in every person and place this before other sometimes divisive considerations.’

Christine Allen (English secretary of Cafod).

‘Pope Francis is unflinching. Politics is failing the poor and it is shameful that political decisions are made that plunge them further into poverty of despair. The message is not just to Catholics, or people of other faiths. It is to everybody’.

‘It is a radical blueprint for a coronavirus world. Now is the time to change the framework of the economic systems through debt relief to the poorest countries, the reduction of inequality and investment in local, green sustainable economic development.’

These six speakers at two different events sum up the nub of the encyclical⁴⁹.

From my own Methodist perspective.

There are many similarities of spirit and style between Francis and John Wesley. Both stressed the joy of the Gospel, Wesley arguing that true happiness necessarily flowed from the pursuit of social holiness. Francis would surely approve Wesley’s dictum concerning the whole duty of humankind as gratitude towards God and benevolence to all his creatures, human and other. Both wanted their followers to be ‘missionary disciples’, both in witness

⁴⁹ All six quoted from the first page of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales website on 28 Oct 2020.

to their faith and practical forms of service. Both stress the injustice so often done to the poor, Wesley stating in 1753 that

‘so wickedly, so devilishly false is the common objection, ‘they are poor only because they are idle’. Wesley could say this from his frequent visiting of the poor and observance of how hard many of them worked despite dire poverty.⁵⁰

The Methodist historian John Walsh speaks of the almost Franciscan love of the poor that Wesley had, a love whose importance for Christians in general was also celebrated poetically by his younger brother, Charles, the hymnographer in such verses as these, the first stressing their receptivity to the Gospel, the second their importance as occupying Christ’s place in the service to which Christians are called.

‘The poor in every time and place

Thou dost, O God, approve

To mark with thy distinguished grace

To enrich with faith and love’. (based on Luke 4:26)

‘The poor to the rich I prefer

If with Thine eyes I see

To bear thy Spirit’s character

The poor are chose by thee.

The poor in very time and place

Thou dost, O God, approve

To mark with thy distinguished grace

To enrich with faith and love’ (based on Matt 26:11)⁵¹.

Meeks sums up Wesley’s approach and action. ‘Wesley understood visiting the poor as an essential means o grace. To be in Christ meant to take the form of Christ’s own life in and

⁵⁰ Wesley’s Journal, 9-10 Feb 1753, cited by Jennings T. Good News to the Poor, *John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics* (1990), p. 54.

⁵¹ Cited in ST Kimborough’s essay in Meeks, M. Douglas, *The Portion of the Poor* (1995)

with the poor...to be obedient to Christ's command to feed the sheep and serve the least of his brethren the poor⁵².

Wesley asserted that never since the end of the apostolic age had there been so much preaching to the poor as had characterised the work of himself and his preachers. He was personally tireless in visiting the poor and studying their needs⁵³. He was concerned not just with the poor converts to Methodism, but also with the non-Methodist poor, for whom he formed the Strangers' Friends Society⁵⁴. Religion, he asserted must begin, if it is not to be the pious form of worldliness, must begin where God begins, among the poor.⁵⁵ He insisted that his converts gave as generously as they could to those in greater need. They had to treat their goods as stewards not as absolute possessions. Wesley hoped that many of the problems of poverty could be dealt with if Christians acted conscientiously on their stewardship in giving of such wealth as was strictly surplus to their most basic needs⁵⁶. It was the greatest disappointment of his last few years that he saw wealth multiplying amongst many of his followers as they followed his advice to gain and save all they could but did not then go on to give.

A key difference between Wesley's approach and that of Francis lies in the very different social and political contexts, Wesley's one where an hierarchical pre-democratic society prevailed everywhere, at least until 1776, Francis' one where democracy prevails, at least over Europe and North America, and in which, massive changes in communications make the forming of a public opinion far easier. Even so, Wesley realised, to a greater extent than almost all of his contemporaries, how economies worsened the position of the poor. He believed that were not so much land set aside for horses for the gentry, and were more corn turned into bread rather than gin, the poor would be better provided for. He also held that more arable farming, rather than stock rearing, would provide more basic food for the poor⁵⁷. Francis has the advantage over Wesley of wider and far more instant communication to a globalised world, plus a far wider audience for his encyclicals than would have been provided pre-Vatican II, which had opened up so many areas of dialogue with both other Christian traditions and other religions and philosophies. However, if one substitutes Wesley's call for universal benevolence for Francis' call for fraternity, we find the same essential truths being held and the same practices commended. World Methodism discovers that we have a fourth key point of contact with the Roman Catholic tradition. Beyond the common stress on the interconnectedness of the Church and churches at every level, the emphases on the universal call to holiness and mission, there is also joined a common stress on the preference for the poor of every land.

⁵² Meeks, op cit, p.10.

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⁵⁵ Jennings, T. Good News to the Poor. John Wesley's Evangelical Ethics (1995), p.20.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp.130-6.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp.

Many on the nationalist right and some on the left deplore globalisation. Francis recognises the false form it can take in the universal elevation of particular concepts of political or economic orthodoxy above others. However, we should see globalisation as offering choices and possibilities, which Christians should judge in the light of the revelation of God's will in the teaching and example of Christ.

Jesus said 'the poor you have always with you', a statement that reflected his era and all others until the early twentieth century. Since then, certain epochs in certain countries, in particular Britain in the period 1945-79, have shown that overall productive capacity and appropriate economic and political strategies can be united so as to almost fully eradicate poverty. We have to choose the right options, with the starkest choice being between market economics and the world of mutual caring and communion so well spelt out by Pope Francis.

Consonance with progressive social thinking.

Since writing the first draft of this paper, I have noted the consonance of some current progressive secular political thinking with that of Francis. David Edgerton, author of one of the best histories of twentieth century Britain⁵⁸, calls, amidst what he regards as 'the maelstrom of Brexit' for the construction of a new national history of the twentieth century which dwells on the progressive positive achievements of the immediate post-war era and the period when there was greater equality, a sense of common purpose, an era of rising wages, strong trades unions and meaningful work, an era the memories of which should inspire the country to 'anti-elite politics' that 'takes back control'.

He also refers to the work of a group of European academics who have produced a document called *The Foundational Economy* advocating a move away from an individualistically consumerist economy to one that stresses investments in basic infrastructure serving the whole community; they stress the urgent need to improve pipelines for water, gas and other basic communal necessities plus investment in essential services, particularly health and education⁵⁹. It would be helpful both to this group and to Pope Francis to negotiate common propositions with which to challenge the world to seek a more equitable and stable economic system.

David Carter.

⁵⁸ Edgerton, D. *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation. A Twentieth Century History.*(2018)

⁵⁹ A summary of their approach can be easily googled under the title, *The Foundational Economy.* *Guardian* 1.1.2021 for Edgerton's comments.