

# Fraternity. A Proposal from Religions to States to Overcome the Covid-19 Emergency

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## 1. Introduction

A world day of fasting and prayer was held on May 14, 2020 to free humanity from the Coronavirus pandemic. The day was organized by the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity, an interreligious organization founded in the United Arab Emirates, that has among its members representatives of the three Abrahamic religions, as well as representatives of international cultural institutions. In the heart of Abu Dhabi, the Committee has created a little town of the dialogue, the Abrahamic Family House, where it was built a synagogue, a church, a mosque and a cultural center, the one next to each other.

The Higher Committee was founded after the Pope Francis' apostolic journey to the United Arab Emirates<sup>1</sup>. For the first time in history, a Catholic Pope has gone to the Arabian Peninsula, that is the cradle of the Islamic religion;

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<sup>1</sup> Journey of 3-5 February 2019

## RELIGION, LAW AND COVID-19 EMERGENCY

it was an extraordinary event and, as the Pope himself said, it occurred on the eighth centenary of the meeting between St. Francis of Assisi and the sultan al-Malik al-Kamil<sup>2</sup>.

Pope Francis attended the interreligious meeting organized, during the Global Conference of Human Fraternity, by the Muslim Council of Elders, an important organization of Sunni Islam. As we can read on the [website](#) of the same organization, the Muslim Council of Elders was founded on July 2014, and it aims to promote the peace within Islamic communities. According to its site, “The Council unites Muslim scholars, experts and dignitaries who are known for their wisdom, sense of justice, independence and moderateness”; they are engaged in the solution of conflicts and in spreading the values of the tolerance. The President of the Council of Elders is Ahmed Al-Tayyib, the great imam of the Al-Azhar University of Cairo<sup>3</sup>; in the past he had already met Pope Francis. During his apostolic journey to Egypt, on 28 April 2017, the Pope was present to an “international peace conference” organized by Al-Tayyib at the University of al-Azhar<sup>4</sup>, and the Great Imam has been received three times in Rome by the Pope.

### 2. Freedom, equality and fraternity in the Abu Dhabi Declaration

The Abu Dhabi meeting ended with the signing of an important document on [Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together](#); the document is remarkable also from a juridical point of view, since it is based around the three

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<sup>2</sup> See Francis, [Interreligious Meeting. Address of His Holiness](#), 4 February 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Azhar University is the most important religious and cultural institution of Sunni Islam. The Great Imam is considered to be the most important Sunni religious leader and his doctrinal authority is universally recognized.

<sup>4</sup> See the text [here](#).

## RELIGION, LAW AND COVID-19 EMERGENCY

principles, freedom, equality and fraternity, that are the basis of the modern idea of democracy.

It recalls that “each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, of thought, of expression and of action”. In particular, religious freedom means dialogue, respect for the other’s faith and for his places of worship, condemnation of religious terrorism<sup>5</sup>. Freedom is also defined as the freedom to be different.

Equality is described like a consequence of God’s willing; to obtain the equality it is necessary to bridge the gap of gender, wealth, age and it is “crucial to establish in our societies the concept of full citizenship and reject the discriminatory use of the term minorities”.

The Declaration remind us that the principles of freedom and equality are internationally recognized, but they will be really achieved only thanks to the principle of fraternity. The fraternity, in fact, “embraces all human beings, unites them and renders them equal” and free.

In this document, therefore, it acquires a central dimension a principle that constitutes, together with freedom and equality, the slogan of the French Revolution, the event that marked the separation of the state from religion: fraternity. Of course, from the historical point of view, the *fraternité* of revolutionaries is something very different from the fraternity of religions, but perhaps it is precisely the difficulty of giving a content to this principle that has made it marginal in the juridical debate. For example, the principle of fraternity is in the art. 2 of the French Constitution, but only recently, a sentence of the Constitutional Council of 6 July 2018<sup>6</sup>, has recognized it as a principle having full constitutional value<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> About the right of religious freedom according to the Abrahamic religions, see A. Fuccillo, *The “Charter of the new alliance of virtue” facing the Covid-19 emergency*, 11 may 2020, in *Diresom.net*.

<sup>6</sup> Decision n. 717/718, 6 july 2018, available [here](#).

<sup>7</sup> See G. Canivet, *La fraternité dans le droit constitutionnel français*.

## RELIGION, LAW AND COVID-19 EMERGENCY

### 3. Fraternity/solidarity to get off the Covid-19 emergency

With the Abu Dhabi Declaration, the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam show to governments, and politics in general, a vision of society that is rebuilt starting from the principle of fraternity, a principle that has at the same time a religious and a secular meaning.

The same principle is proposed again to politics in pandemic times, and it is pointed out as the foundation for the reconstruction. On March 30, the Catholic Pontifical Academy for Life published a document with the title *[Pandemic and Universal Brotherhood](#)*; in it we read a reflection on the meaning of freedoms and rights. The first ones, during the emergency, turned out to be “intertwined and overlapped, for better or for worse”, but also the rights are interdependent and there is “no right that does not have a resultant corresponding duty”. The pandemic has clearly showed this interdependence but, the document notes, the interdependence does not automatically turn into solidarity. This occurs also in the relationships between the states, that can’t confront the pandemic by reasoning in terms of exclusive defense of the national interest, since a global threat requires global responses. “An emergency like that of Covid-19 is overcome with, above all, the antibodies of solidarity”.

In the same days, the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity proposed a day of prayer, fasting and charity, in order that the world will be freed from the pandemic, becoming more fraternal. The day was celebrated on 14 May 2020 and it was, obviously, a religious celebration, but it was also an event with a political meaning. Pope Francis, in the homily of the morning mass of May 14, said that the Coronavirus pandemic is not the only pandemic that affects the world, since there are others such as the hunger pandemic or the war pandemic; [according to the Pope](#), only thanks to fraternity humanity will be able to overcome the pandemics.

## RELIGION, LAW AND COVID-19 EMERGENCY

During the pandemic, religions reminded politics of the value of fraternity, the revolutionary principle that underlies modern democracies. In the Italian Constitution, it can be identified in the political, economic and social solidarity referred to in the art. 2. This rule, in fact, recognizes and guarantees the fundamental rights, but it also requires the fulfillment of the mandatory duties of solidarity<sup>8</sup>. It is precisely the necessity to fulfill these duties that justified the compression of fundamental rights imposed by the government to face the epidemic emergency. But it is the same solidarity that, after the first phase, the cd. lockdown, must be the basis to go beyond the emergency and to plan the future.

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<sup>8</sup> See F. Giuffrè, *Alle radici dell'ordinamento: la solidarietà tra identità e integrazione*, in *Rivista dell'Associazione Italiana dei Costituzionalisti*, n. 3/2019.