

The Vietnamese Đoàn Kết and Pope Francis's Solidarity: Connection and mutual enlightenment

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of *Đoàn Kết* (solidarity) within Vietnamese cultural and social frameworks and explores its resonance with the teachings of Pope Francis. It articulates Pope Francis's teaching on solidarity, emphasizing interconnectedness, compassion, and a preferential option for the marginalized, offers a transformative framework for enriching the Vietnamese culture of solidarity, enabling it to transcend familial and communal boundaries and address broader social challenges, while remaining rooted in Vietnam's deep-seated value of *Đoàn Kết* expressed in collective harmony and mutual support. The study examines key themes establishing the dynamic dialogue between local cultural practices and universal Catholic teachings by analyzing the Vietnamese concept and practice of *Đoàn Kết* in Vietnamese cultural and social contexts and the theological foundation of solidarity in Pope Francis' encyclicals and other documents. The significance of both perspectives can inform and enrich each other. The Vietnamese spirit of *Đoàn Kết* represents a national identity deeply rooted in history and culture. Yet, it is best understood in a broader, more inclusive global unity and social friendship. True solidarity, which embodies the essence of humanity, calls on individuals to live with love, respect, and interconnectedness. However, it must be firmly grounded in self-awareness and the values of local culture. Consequently, it suggests that the mutual enlightenment found in this connection offers a profound resource for addressing contemporary global challenges through a shared commitment to human dignity, peace, and social harmony.

Keywords: solidarity, fraternity, friendship, love, culture, Vietnam

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1. Introduction

The present Vietnamese nation and its identity were built and “rooted in an ancient, pre-Confucian oral culture” (McHale, 2004). It has been built and protected from many different foreign forces by different generations of dynasties and heroes. It is the result of acknowledging the importance of unity, standing together in one spirit of *Đoàn Kết*, which has been a fundamental aspect of social cohesion and is expressed uniquely through the encounter and acculturation with the surrounding cultures and worldviews. As insist by Lam (1987) that one of the characteristics that imbues the Vietnamese is the mindset of togetherness or unity. It is deeply rooted in historical, social, and ethical traditions and forms an integral part of national identity. This sense of solidarity, influenced by Confucian ethics, communal values, and a history of resilience, reflects a commitment to mutual support, family loyalty, and social harmony (McHale, 2004).

Pope Francis also emphasized solidarity as essential for addressing the world's pressing social and environmental crises. His papacy has brought renewed attention to issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental stewardship, advocating for a “culture of encounter” that transcends boundaries and calls for mutual understanding, compassion, and cooperation through encyclicals like *Fratelli Tutti*, and his other works. He advanced a vision of solidarity to unite people across cultures, beliefs, and socioeconomic backgrounds toward a social friendship and connection where human values are the central focus.

This essay seeks to deepen the understanding of the Vietnamese expression *Đoàn Kết*, as reflected in Pope Francis's theological reflections. It aims to show the connection and mutual enlightenment of Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* to the Vietnamese concept and practice of *Đoàn Kết*. The first section discusses the foundation of the Vietnamese *Đoàn Kết*. Such a spirit of solidarity is seen as a concrete attribute and expression of the Vietnamese people, whose history speaks of their intense desire to build and defend the nation. Section two covers Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti*. It promotes a universal brotherhood in which all human beings are brothers and sisters, part of a single family. Section three draws the vision of the mutual enlightenment of Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* and the Vietnamese expression of cultural and historical *Đoàn Kết*. Pope Francis implicitly draws on the relational nature of the Trinity as a model for human relationships and social structures. By emphasizing themes of fraternity, unity in diversity, love, and social friendship, the encyclical reflects the vision of a well-developed culture where people live in harmonious relationships grounded in the spirit of communion and love, respect human rights, and freedom. Both *đoàn kết* and Pope Francis's views of fraternity stress the importance of solidarity in addressing societal challenges, such as inequality, corruption, poverty, and ecological crises. By connecting Vietnamese cultural values with a global religious perspective, the essay shows that exploring this connection highlights specific Vietnamese social values, analyzes their alignment with or divergence from Pope Francis's teachings, and considers how each perspective can inform and enrich the other.

Significance and Implications of the Study - This study delves into the core foundation of human relationships, which underpin the fabric of any society. It highlights parallels between Vietnamese *đoàn kết* (solidarity) and Pope Francis's concept of fraternity, emphasizing universal themes of unity and mutual support. This fosters a deeper appreciation and understanding of how diverse cultural and religious traditions can align on shared values, bridging cultural divides. By examining how Vietnamese cultural values resonate with Catholic teachings, the study provides a foundation for constructive interfaith dialogue. It underscores the potential for diverse traditions to mutually enrich one another, contributing to global efforts for peace and collaboration.

On a global scale, it emphasizes the importance of relationality and unity within the human community, regardless of societal structure or geographical location. Additionally, it offers a renewed understanding of social

justice through the theological lens provided by Pope Francis, who emphasizes the inherent equality of all humans as creations of a single Creator. By employing the theological framework, the study addresses contemporary global issues such as inequality and social fragmentation through the principles of solidarity. It deepens the ecclesial practice of social friendship to foster unity and care among people, as advocated in *Fratelli Tutti*. This approach encourages a more substantial commitment to mutual care and unity within ecclesial and societal contexts.

The study roots solidarity from a theological perspective, fostering dialogue between different faiths and cultures to promote a shared global peace and solidarity vision. It also links theological insights with practical implications for political and economic systems. It calls for reevaluating structures that divide humanity and advocating for policies grounded in fraternity and the common good. Specifically, this study emphasizes the call for Vietnamese youth and existing young generation in different culture to become agents of social transformation by embracing a vision of authentic fraternity and solidarity. It highlights the need to resist modern cultural temptations such as isolation, consumerism, and superficial relationships. Instead, it fosters deep, compassionate connections rooted in justice and care for the abandoned and the least.

These significances cannot remain only at the level of knowledge; they must blossom into action and concrete educational practice. Pope Francis promotes a fraternal humanity, inviting everyone to step beyond their own boundaries and enter a vibrant communion of peoples with hearts of love, eyes of gentleness, generous and responsible hands, patient ears, and feet ready to serve those in need. His vision calls for care for the marginalized, the least, social outreach, and compassionate presence far beyond simply counting school hours. Therefore, young people must not only strive for academic excellence, but also grow in moral and civic consciousness. In a world of constant cultural exchange, students are called to live dialogue, live in companionship, and respect cultural identity while remaining grounded in their own faith. As for all, every young individual is encouraged to build a fraternal humanity based on a heart of love and a spirit of interfaith understanding, tolerance, acts of charity, and cooperation within a pluralistic society.

2. The concept of *Đoàn Kết* (solidarity) in Vietnamese society

The concept of *Đoàn Kết* (solidarity) lies at the heart of Vietnamese society, profoundly influencing its cultural, political, and historical development. It represents the outcome of nationalism that has endured since the inception of the earliest state. As David Marr puts it, "Group solidarity was the tough protective shell...[it is] paramount in times of great challenge" (Marr, 1981, p. 126). This spirit of unity has been fundamental to the nation's existence and self-determination. To achieve extraordinary success and leave a lasting impression of excellence and unity throughout all segments of society, it is essential to recognize the profound connection between community and national consciousness. These two elements engage in a dynamic relationship, continuously shaping our lives and viewpoints.

In the contemporary Vietnamese worldview, "community" (*Cộng đồng*) refers to "a collective of people living together, sharing similarities, and forming a cohesive unit within social life" (Center for Lexicography, 2020). At its core, Vietnamese community life is rooted in **communal living and mutual interdependence**, deeply influenced by religious and indigenous traditions. These traditions emphasize **relational harmony, social hierarchy, and moral duty**. The concept of **làng** (village) is emblematic of the fact that these rural Vietnamese villages historically functioned as administrative units and as **moral and social communities** where customs, kinship, and collective memory were tightly interwoven. This sense of collectivity is expressed in practices like *họ* (clan associations) and *bầu bạn* (close-knit friendships), as well as in value systems such as *ình làng nghĩa xóm* (neighborly love and obligation) and *báo hiếu* (filial piety). They reinforce social cohesion, encourage mutual aid, and uphold the moral expectations embedded in community life. In times of hardship, the spirit of solidarity and shared responsibility is particularly evident in traditional practices like *bắt nước* (communal irrigation) and *giúp việc làng* (village labor exchanges), which embody the Vietnamese ethos of cooperation over competition.

Community consciousness takes many forms and plays a vital role in Vietnamese culture. For example, during

the *Tết* holiday (Lunar New Year), families come together to honor their ancestors and celebrate unity, symbolizing the importance of familial bonds within the broader community. Furthermore, communal activities such as local festivals and cooperative farming practices showcase how unity fosters resilience against outside threats. Rooted in villages, the Vietnamese communal spirit has been shaped by their living conditions, with communal living and shared resources being central features, and it is integral to the nation's cultural identity.

When discussing village culture and cultural villages, Vu Dung (2009) and other researchers have emphasized key characteristics of Vietnam, including the strong sense of community, the self-governing nature reflected in village conventions (*hương ước*), and the distinctive customs, traditions, beliefs, and religious practices unique to each village. Every village had its own *hương ước*, which guided the behavior of its members and, in many cases, exerted a stronger influence than state laws, as expressed in the saying, "The king's law yields to village customs" (*Phép vua thua lệ làng*). The *hương ước* established the rights, responsibilities, obligations, and methods for resolving issues within the community. The enforcement of these conventions and the village's organizational structure fostered a sense of responsibility in each member toward their community, cultivating a collective consciousness and shared identity. Because of this shared identity, the Vietnamese tend to have a strong collective mindset. They are deeply attached to and immersed in community life. It is also the root of the democratic and egalitarian lifestyle commonly seen in the organizational principles of rural society, structured by residential areas, professions, and local associations (*giáp*). Although this can suppress individual identity, the Vietnamese rarely refer to themselves as "I" (*tôi*). Instead, they identify through social relationships. To one person, they are a younger sibling (*em*). To another, they are a niece or nephew (*cháu*). To someone else, they are an older brother or sister (*anh/chị*). They even prefer using the collective first-person pronoun "we" (*ta*), as in "we and you" (*ta với mình-chúng mình*).

Essential to the village is the communal house (*đình*). It (*đình*) serves as a venue for village meetings, celebrations, and religious ceremonies. Its intricate architecture and decorations reflect the village's history and heritage. These symbols embody the spiritual and cultural foundation of the Vietnamese, emphasizing communal unity and connectedness. It is more than an architectural structure because it is also a symbolic space that captures the community's administrative, cultural, spiritual, and emotional core. It is where crucial decisions shape the community's future. Imagine a gathering where village leaders convened to deliberate on essential matters like collecting taxes, resolving disputes, and serving justice. In fact, it often acted as a temporary holding area for individuals awaiting trial, demonstrating its pivotal role in upholding accountability and trust in the system of justice. One can say it is the epicenter of community engagement, vibrating with life during festivals, public celebrations, and communal feasts. Further, it is a dynamic hub dedicated to honoring local heroes and, at times, worshipping the village's revered guardian deity. This sacred venue pulsates with the ritual life of the community, serving as a vital link that intertwines governance, religion, and societal bonds within Vietnamese rural traditions. Indeed, the *đình* embodies collective memory and identity, often being the very first image conjured in the hearts and minds of individuals reminiscing about their native village. This makes it a powerful symbol of belonging, forging deep emotional connections to one's homeland.

Another significant representation of solidarity is the *banyan* tree nestled near the village entrance or alongside the communal house. This magnificent tree boasts a sprawling canopy of leaves that generously bestows shade from the relentless sun, creating a welcoming haven for weary travelers and villagers alike. As a cherished gathering point, it nurtures a profound sense of community, where locals gather to share captivating stories, exchange joyful pleasantries, and fortify their social bonds. Moreover, the *banyan* tree transcends its role as a mere physical marker. It becomes a symbolic gateway, an emblematic bridge that links villagers to their roots while reaching out to the expansive world beyond. It beckons passersby to pause, reflect, and immerse themselves in the rich cultural tapestry that defines this community, enriching their journeys beyond the village boundaries. Its presence serves as a poignant reminder that nestled within its expansive branches is a compelling story of connection, resilience, and community spirit that invites all to engage and participate in this vibrant narrative. Thus, it serves as a symbolic gateway, connecting the village to the outside world.

Community consciousness, therefore, is a vital element of everyday life. One prominent aspect is the mutual assistance individuals offer each other during difficult times, such as hardships and illnesses. This communal support is beautifully encapsulated in the Vietnamese proverb “lá lành đùm lá rách,” (“the good leaves protect the torn ones”) (Tran, 1996). It emphasizes the importance of caring for one another, particularly those who are vulnerable or facing challenges. Additionally, this sense of solidarity becomes particularly evident during significant life events, including weddings, funerals, and ancestral commemorations, where the community comes together to share joy and sorrow, reinforcing bonds and fostering a deep sense of belonging among its members.

Another important element deeply rooted in Vietnamese culture is the Vietnamese fables. The value of unity and solidarity has been cultivated and passed down through generations, vividly symbolized in the fable “**Câu chuyện bó đũa**” (“The Bundle of Chopsticks”), where a father teaches his sons that strength lies in togetherness. Individuals, like single chopsticks, are fragile when isolated but unbreakable when bound in unity. This lesson continues to resonate in modern Vietnamese education, where collectivism and peer learning reflect the enduring Confucian spirit of communal harmony (Ngoc, 2010). This emphasis on solidarity is deeply intertwined with Vietnam's Confucian, Buddhist, and indigenous heritage, which, since the country's independence from China, has shaped moral, familial, and social values emphasizing humanity (**ren**), righteousness (**yi**), propriety (**li**), loyalty (**zhong**), and filial piety (**xiao**) (Rozi, 2020). Consequently, Vietnamese society views harmony, order, and solidarity as essential for both personal virtue and national strength. From the family to the state, these Confucian ideals of interconnectedness have molded Vietnam's ethical, educational, and political life, ensuring that the spirit of unity remains a cornerstone of its cultural and moral identity.

All these are part and parcel of the historical experiences and life of the Vietnamese people, formed and developed over hundreds of years. The Vietnamese spirit of **đoàn kết** has been forged through centuries of struggle, grounded in a communal ethos and an enduring love for independence. Emerging from the agricultural village life that viewed all members as kin, this sense of togetherness evolved into a powerful national consciousness. Folk sayings such as “Bầu ơi thương lấy bí cùng...” (“Oh gourd, love the squash...”) and “Nhiều điều phủ lấy giá gương...” (“The red silk covers the mirror stand...”) capture this ethos of compassion, mutual care, and shared destiny. From these village values grew broader forms of solidarity among kin (**đồng tộc**), peers (**đồng niên**), professions (**đồng nghiệp**), and compatriots (**đồng bào**, literally “born from the same womb”) which became the moral foundation of Vietnam's national unity. This unity proved vital in the nation's long history of resistance, from ancient struggles against the Qin Dynasty to modern battles against colonial and imperial forces. Despite the century-long French colonization and the devastation of the Vietnam War, the unyielding drive for independence embodied in Ho Chi Minh's call that “nothing is more precious than independence and freedom” galvanized the people to overcome immense odds. Throughout four millennia, patriotism, self-reliance, and solidarity have remained Vietnam's defining moral forces. This deeply rooted **đoàn kết** spirit, cultivated from family to village to nation, has enabled the Vietnamese to endure hardship, preserve their identity, and continually rebuild their homeland. It remains the unbreakable bond uniting the people in their collective pursuit of peace, justice, and national prosperity.

Solidarity in Vietnam is not just a value. It is a way of life. It is expressed in everyday practices through strong ties within villages, families, and clans. It is symbolized by key elements of traditional village life, such as the communal house (*đình*), the banyan tree (*cây đa*), the fables, and Confucian teachings. The deep sense of community and shared responsibility is even embedded in folk literature, proverbs, and sayings. However, challenges emerge when human values, especially individual freedoms and rights, are neglected in the modern era. In some instances, such as limitations on religious practices, the spirit of solidarity is being undermined, exposing a tension between state control and genuine communal harmony.

3. The idea and key principles of solidarity in Pope Francis's teachings

This section aims to understand solidarity based on Pope Francis's teaching. In doing so, this essay identifies several principles of solidarity based on Pope Francis's encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, and other related works. Due to

the limited space, discussion on the biblical, historical, and other doctrinal perspectives is set aside.

In recent years, Pope Francis has frequently expressed that we are facing not just an era of change but a fundamental shift in epochs, stating, “We find ourselves living at a time when change is no longer linear, but epochal” (Francis, 2018). One of the central themes in Pope Francis’s teachings is fraternity or solidarity, which has its roots in early Christianity. To be sure, this study focuses only on some aspects of Pope Francis’s teachings where significant and thoughtful ideas on solidarity can be gleaned and articulated. He encourages us to see others not as competitors, threats, or obstacles but as partners and allies, regardless of their faith or beliefs.

The universal fraternity that Pope Francis articulates in some of his documents, especially *Fratelli Tutti*, demands a moral and social response. This response is solidarity, which proceeds from fraternity because fraternity provides the theological, ontological, and ethical foundations. If we are truly brothers and sisters, then we are relational beings whose flourishing is tied to one another. In this context, solidarity can be understood as fraternity in action because it is the social and political expression of the conviction that every person’s life is sacred and that society must be organized around the common good, “the good that is linked to living in society” (Benedict XVI, 2009). Solidarity, for Pope Francis, should be understood “more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity.” It “means thinking and acting in terms of community,” and “combating the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights”(Francis, 2020). With this, solidarity implies, in the view of Pope Francis, giving flesh to fraternity. Solidarity can be said as fraternity incarnated. Without solidarity, fraternity can be just an empty ideal disconnected from real-world structures and struggles. But without fraternity, solidarity can be just a plain activism, lacking the deep personalist grounding that sustains long-term commitment. As St. John Paul II tells us, solidarity “is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good...because we are all really responsible for all” (John Paul II, 1987).

Given this context, some key elements of Pope Francis’s thought on fraternity or solidarity are evident. This emphasis on fraternity recurs throughout his pontificate, appearing in papal messages, encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, and speeches. In his view, “fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother,” including the ones who are poor and migrants” (Francis, 2014). In this way, the “mosaic of fraternity” can be formed in a world of diversity. Thus, he finds it important to spread human fraternity as a certain program of world renewal (Francis, 2016).

3.1 *The Family Bond as the Social Dimension of Solidarity and Universal Brotherhood*

The family is the first school of fraternity, where shared life, diversity, and interdependence are learned. As Pope Francis affirms in *Amoris Laetitia*, “In the family, among siblings, human coexistence is learned... the family itself introduces fraternity into the world”(Francis, 2016). Through family life, such as marital, parental, and fraternal, individuals experience belonging, responsibility, and respect, values that extend to the larger human family. This familial model of love and coexistence shapes broader communities and reminds us that fraternity, rooted in God’s gift of family, must be nurtured through friendship, commitment, and mutual care. Pope Francis envisions a universal fraternity grounded in the dignity of every human being: “Let us dream, then, as a single human family... fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth” (Francis, 2020). His vision celebrates diversity while calling for solidarity, a global kinship that transcends borders, heals divisions, and promotes justice and peace. True fraternity, he insists, is practical and personal. It requires seeing others as brothers and sisters, rejecting indifference, and building a world where love, respect, and shared responsibility prevail.

Pope Francis teaches that societies flourish through openness to others and shared creativity. Inspired by St. Francis of Assisi, he calls for a “culture of encounter” marked by love that crosses all boundaries and resists nationalism, xenophobia, and exclusion. Authentic social friendship, he argues, is the foundation of universal openness and integral human development. Love, not individualism, is the measure of human greatness, for “love

impels us toward universal communion." Echoing Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, Francis reminds us that "to love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it"(Benedict XVI, 2009). In a fragmented digital age that breeds isolation and narcissism, Francis warns against becoming existential foreigners to one another. He urges a renewed commitment to solidarity that ensures every person's well-being, fosters human development, and promotes a vision of humanity as one family inhabiting a common home bound together by love, justice, and shared responsibility for the world.

3.2 *Love as the Foundation of Social Life*

Pope Francis grounds his call to universal fraternity in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which exemplifies compassion, inclusion, and care for others. He urges individuals to embrace co-responsibility in building communities through empathy and daily acts of kindness: "Each individual can act as an effective leaven by the way he or she lives each day" (Francis, 2020). Genuine change, he insists, begins with ordinary people who choose love over indifference. Francis views love as the force that deepens human existence by inviting people to transcend themselves and engage in relationships with others. This transformative love, rooted in charity, leads to universal fulfillment and solidarity. It challenges societies to move beyond self-interest and cultivate relationships based on justice, equality, and mutual respect.

Pope Francis also reimagines the social meaning of property and rights, teaching that all resources belong ultimately to the Creator and must serve the common good. He calls for the defense of the poor, the marginalized, and migrants, emphasizing welcome, protection, promotion, and integration. True fraternity begins locally but extends globally, linking local action to universal responsibility. For him, solidarity is not uniformity but a harmony of differences, like a polyhedron, where each facet retains its beauty while contributing to the whole. Only hearts open to love can transcend borders and divisions, enabling genuine encounter and reciprocal generosity. Through such openness, humanity becomes what it is meant to be: a single family united in dignity, diversity, and love (Francis, 2020).

Following the model of the Good Samaritan, Pope Francis embodies compassionate discipleship amid today's wounded world, marked by inequality, indifference, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. He calls for modern Good Samaritans. These are people of solidarity who share their time, resources, and compassion with those marginalized by social and economic systems. As one human family, we are urged to "think globally, act locally," cultivating a culture of encounter through listening and empathy rather than division. Only by embracing universal fraternity can humanity heal from isolation and indifference. In this sense, one can say that Pope Francis reinterprets the parable of the Good Samaritan as a mirror of our moral choices today. Each person embodies the potential to be an aggressor, bystander, or helper. The question "Who is my neighbor?" becomes a call to **become** neighbors to all, transcending boundaries of race, religion, and class. True love, therefore, breaks isolation and builds bridges through compassion and service. Social renewal begins with ordinary people who take responsibility for their communities, acting not out of hatred but fraternal concern. The Samaritan's encounter reveals that healing society starts with genuine contact with those who suffer, differ, or have been excluded (Francis, 2020). This awareness extends to systemic reform, where justice replaces indifference and resources are shared rather than hoarded. Like the Samaritan, we must stop, listen, and respond to become neighbors who restore human dignity and build a world grounded in peace and universal brotherhood.

3.3 *Inclusion not Exclusion: The Dangers of Individualism, Nationalism, and Xenophobia*

In contemporary society, emphasis increasingly shifts from the collective "We" to the autonomous "I." The ascendancy of individualism, most pronounced in affluent societies, has extended even into traditionally collectivist cultures, including regions of Asia. Although the degree of this transformation varies across contexts, the global trend toward self-centered values is evident. Parallel to this development is the rise of nationalism, a self-assertive affirmation of identity and sovereignty. It is pervasive yet elusive, "like air", shaping global politics, governance, and individual behavior while functioning as both a conservative and revolutionary force. His analysis

aligns with the observable resurgence of nationalist sentiment across the contemporary world.

This trajectory finds its culmination in globalization, which simultaneously unifies and fragments human life. As Pope Benedict XVI observes, “As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors, but does not make us brothers” (Benedict XVI, 2009). This critique exposes the moral limitations of globalization. While it diminishes physical and informational distance, it often fails to generate authentic solidarity, justice, or compassion. Individuals coexist in proximity yet remain indifferent, competitive, or even antagonistic. Brotherhood, by contrast, implies shared responsibility and moral concern. Globalization, therefore, fosters factual nearness without relational closeness. Francis identifies this moral deficit as a manifestation of “globalized indifference,” a dynamic increasingly evident in the persistence and intensification of discrimination worldwide. Data from the *World Justice Project* indicate that between 2021 and 2022, 70% of countries experienced worsening discrimination, continuing a pattern observed since 2015 (Discrimination Is Getting Worse Globally, 2023). Such exclusion manifests in varied forms such as violence against ethnic and religious minorities, racist movements, hate groups, and genocidal acts.

The interrelated phenomena of individualism, nationalism, and xenophobia have engendered a culture of separation and superiority, eroded the recognition of equal human dignity, and thereby enabled racism. Pope Francis likens racism to “a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding”(Francis, 2020). He condemns racism as a direct affront to the inalienable dignity bestowed on every human being by God. He also speaks of the “hidden exiles”, persons with disabilities, who are treated as foreign bodies in society”(Francis, 2020) often excluded from full participation. To overcome these divisions, he advocates sustained dialogue: “Together, we can seek the truth in dialogue, in relaxed conversation or in passionate debate... patiently embracing the broader experience of individuals and peoples”(Francis, 2020).

He also describes this condition as a “dark cloud” over the world, rooted in distorted habits of perception (Francis, 2020). Modern culture, shaped by media and consumerism, often dehumanizes the Other. He observes that people are no longer viewed as having intrinsic values to be cherished but rather as “not yet useful” (the poor, the unborn, the disabled) or “no longer needed” (the elderly). This utilitarian perspective underlies what he terms the throwaway culture, where even human beings are treated as disposable commodities. Hence, his invitation to adopt “God’s way of seeing” to “see with the heart” rather than the eyes represents a fundamental theological and ethical shift. “God’s love,” he insists, “is the same for everyone, regardless of religion” (Basanese & Huang, 2022). In a context where societies tend to “eliminate or ignore others,” *Fratelli Tutti* calls for a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that transcends rhetoric and finds expression in concrete action.

3.4 *Fostering Interrelatedness and Interdependence*

Human beings are inherently relational, and authentic human flourishing is impossible in isolation. Meaning and identity are discovered and deepened through relationships with others. In Christian theology, this relational dimension reflects the *imago Dei*, who is not an isolated, authoritarian being, but one whose very nature is communion. Pope Francis emphasizes this interdependence as central to human existence, insisting that global suffering or deprivation inevitably affects the whole of humanity. He articulates the need for a “universal consciousness” that fosters ecological responsibility and solidarity with the marginalized. According to Francis, human fulfillment is not achieved in isolation (Francis, 2020). Instead, it depends on mutual openness and shared responsibility within a global community. This theological vision is rooted in the conviction that individuals attain their full humanity through the “sincere gift of self to others”(Second Vatican Council, 1965).

3.5 *Fosters a Healthy Neighborhood in the World*

Pope Francis recalls the historic encounter between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malek al-Kamil at Damietta, Egypt, in 1219, which took on significant meaning as a moment of mutual respect, peacemaking, and fraternity. He draws a parallel between this event and his own meeting with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in

Abu Dhabi in 2019 (Francis & Al-Tayyeb, 2019).

The emphasis on interreligious dialogue and friendship across religious and cultural differences represents a fundamental aspect of Pope Francis's vision for global solidarity. Inspired by St. Francis of Assisi's commitment to universal fraternity, he extends this social teaching beyond the Christian community to include all people of goodwill. This inclusive approach aligns with the broader vision articulated in his other works and papal encyclicals, including Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*, which was similarly addressed not only to Catholics and all people of goodwill. By such action, Pope Francis emphasizes love as the essential foundation for building a "culture of encounter." It means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, and planning projects that include everyone (Francis, 2020). He speaks of the evils of apathy and individualism. These attitudes not only prevent us from the capacity for compassion as the ability to suffer with others in solidarity, but they also promote an individualism that creates separation and prohibits authentic relationships. What results is not only social division, but also tremendous suffering, which is felt most acutely by the poor and vulnerable.

3.6 *Fosters a Culture of Dialogue and Encounter*

Dialogue is a fundamental dimension of human existence and a vital process for sustaining relationships within any community. Yet, as Pope Francis emphasizes in *Fratelli Tutti*, authentic dialogue is more than the mere exchange of opinions. It is a sincere disposition of openness, humility, and commitment. True dialogue is an encounter that avoids "selfish indifference" and "violent protest" (Francis, 2020). It requires attentiveness, approaching, speaking, listening, and seeking to understand the other, to discern common ground rooted in shared humanity. For Francis, dialogue entails courage and truthfulness. It reconciles collective interests, social consensus, and objective truth, exposing how truth is often obscured in public discourse. Genuine dialogue thus becomes a moral act that reveals shared values and lays the foundation for a common ethical life. In a pluralistic world, it is the most effective means of discerning what must always be affirmed and respected, enriched by clear thinking, rational arguments, and the contributions of various perspectives and fields of knowledge. At both personal and political levels, the culture of encounter calls for "open, honest, and patient negotiation," and for leaders to "work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace" (Francis, 2020). Ultimately, dialogue becomes not merely a social tool but a moral vocation an invitation to see others with "the eyes of the heart." It calls humanity to rediscover shared dignity, transform conflict into understanding, and build communities where difference is not a threat but a gift.

In summary, the concept of fraternity has deep biblical roots, beginning with the creation of humanity in God's image and emphasizing the inherent dignity of each person. The commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" finds its fulfillment in Christ's teachings, particularly in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), which challenges barriers of exclusion and calls for universal solidarity. This foundational principle of fraternity was further developed through Church teachings, especially during the Second Vatican Council, which emphasized the Church's role in fostering unity and dialogue among all people. At its core, the Church's commitment focuses on human dignity, mutual respect, and social justice.

4. **The mutual enlightenment of Vietnamese Đoàn Kết and Pope Francis's universal solidarity**

This section shows the mutual enrichment between the Vietnamese *Đoàn Kết* and Pope Francis's concept of universal fraternity. Vietnam's tradition of solidarity, rooted in practical communal life and moral responsibility, offers profound lessons on the power of collective identity and mutual support in a broader sense, emphasizing that these values should be anchored in local traditions. The concept of patriotism also highlights a love that forms the foundation for extending care to others. The discussion then turns to key themes such as family values, social harmony, and community relations, illustrating how these principles can strengthen universal unity while remaining deeply rooted in Vietnamese traditions.

Vietnamese society exemplifies this dynamics through its collectivist orientation rooted in family, clan, and village life. According to Hofstede, collectivist cultures emphasize loyalty, interdependence, and respect for social hierarchy values that preserve harmony and order (Hofstede, 2001). Customary laws and village norms complement formal institutions, fostering moral discipline and communal responsibility. The village serves not only as a social unit but also as a moral and spiritual center that embodies shared identity. In this sense, *Đoàn Kết* reflects a broader philosophical insight, that is, true global solidarity arises from the moral integrity and mutual care cultivated within local communities.

Vietnamese solidarity is grounded in its local identity, regarded as a precious gift from God. This identity functions like leaven, small yet capable of transforming the whole, signifying that genuine unity begins with rooted, community-based values. In a world fragmented by individualism, the Vietnamese model emphasizes the formative power of local belonging as the foundation for broader human fraternity. Through its traditions and interpersonal relationships, village life embodies moral guidance, stability, and social cohesion. Rootedness in one's culture does not imply isolation. Rather, it provides a foundation for meaningful engagement with the wider world. Understanding one's moral and cultural background is essential for fostering both national solidarity and global fraternity. In traditional Vietnamese villages, close-knit structures where neighbors share meals, assist in daily work, and collaborate during house repairs or harvests exemplify the spirit of *ình làng nghĩa xóm* ("village love and neighborhood sentiment"). Such gestures, though ordinary, sustain a profound sense of mutual care and collective resilience, particularly in times of hardship. These communal practices mirror Pope Francis's vision of fraternity, where solidarity is lived concretely in everyday relationships. Genuine global solidarity begins in local contexts that cultivate empathy, respect, and mutual aid. A deep love for one's land and culture becomes the basis for openness to others, enabling authentic dialogue and cooperation across differences.

This value reflects a deeply embedded characteristic of defensive patriotism that defines Vietnam's worldview, centered on peace and the pursuit of happiness. It has become a defining feature of Vietnamese culture, emphasizing peaceful coexistence and harmony over aggression. Furthermore, rooted in a love for the homeland, it is not marked by conquest but by a spirit of protection and preservation. Grounded in this perspective, Vietnam contributes to regional stability in Southeast Asia and offers valuable insights into global peacebuilding efforts. This spirit of solidarity is inseparable from peace, the pivotal and essential element that nurtures connection and harmony among people. Moreover, it provides a model of national love that does not threaten others but fosters compassion, hospitality, peace, and healing. In a world fractured by violence, discrimination, and religious or racial persecution, realities that, as Pope Francis has noted, "have become so common as to constitute a real 'third world war' fought piecemeal" (Francis, 2015), where the thirst for peace is more urgent than ever.

Social harmony aligns with the Pope's call for dialogue, mutual respect, and peacemaking. In Vietnamese culture, it emphasizes balance, respect, and preserving relationships. This leads individuals to prioritize collective well-being over personal interests. Conflicts are resolved not through confrontation but through dialogue, compromise, and empathy. The saying "*Đĩ hoà vi quý*" (using a soft answer to turn away wrath) reflects this cultural ideal, promoting gentleness and understanding to maintain unity. This value fosters a sustainable society and resonates with Pope Francis's concept of universal fraternity, where people coexist in affection and dialogue despite differences. Vietnamese social harmony exemplifies how these values can be practiced locally, nurturing peace through patience, humility, and mutual responsibility.

Vietnam is a nation deeply rooted in a culture of solidarity and interconnectedness, particularly within its village-based communal life. The spirit of *Đoàn Kết* (solidarity) transcends mere political slogans. It is a reality reflected in everyday practices of mutual aid, neighborly care, and collective responsibility, all vital to Vietnam's social cohesion. In recent decades, Vietnam has become more actively engaged in global development, opening to economic partnerships and striving for national progress. However, within its communist political system, the country's governance model has often faced criticism for human rights violations, authoritarian practices, and restrictions on freedoms such as speech and religion. Indeed, injustice and oppression stem partly from a conservative political structure that resists critique, suppresses dissent, and disconnects the political center from

the voices of ordinary citizens.

For Vietnam to fully embody its ethical heritage and contribute meaningfully to global fraternity, it must safeguard its cultural values of solidarity and unity and remain open to self-examination, honest dialogue, and ongoing reform, always in the service of human dignity. Only then can Vietnam stand confidently in the global community, offering its voice while learning from the richness of others. For Vietnam to fully embody its noble aspirations, it must promote peace, respect the freedom of expression for all citizens, and uphold human rights in every facet of life. Pope Francis emphasizes the equal dignity of all people as members of one human family. He writes: "Each human being is sacred and inviolable... if we accept the great principle that there are rights born of our inalienable human dignity, we can rise to the challenge of seeing others as our brothers and sisters" (Francis, 2020). To build a future that is genuinely independent, free, and happy (*Độc lập – Tự do – Hạnh phúc*), Vietnam must move beyond fear, silence, and exclusion. These ideals should not just be slogans but should reflect real, just, and inclusive structures.

This vision resonates deeply with Pope Francis's appeal in *Fratelli Tutti* for a politics rooted in a "love that integrates and unites," a love that listens to the cries of the poor, the forgotten, and the excluded (Francis, 2020). Listening is not a threat to national unity. It is how fraternity becomes real in public life, and hope is sustained in the nation's heart. The art of listening to the Vietnamese people is the art of listening to the nation's soul. Vietnam is a nation woven from the voices of all its people, whether from the North or the South, whether Catholic or Buddhist. Every voice, whether echoing from the mountains, the river deltas, or the busy streets, contains a fragment of our collective identity. To truly listen is not merely to hear, but to honor, to understand, and to be transformed. Listening becomes a path toward national strength, not weakness, unity, not division. This vision resonates deeply with Pope Francis's call in *Fratelli Tutti* for a "culture of encounter," where listening becomes a sacred act, opening the heart to others. In Vietnamese tradition, shaped by Confucian respect for harmony and communal life, listening is not passive but an ethical duty. It affirms the speaker's dignity and weaves the community fabric more tightly.

Vietnam's openness to the world does not threaten its identity. Pope Francis (2020) says a "healthy openness never threatens one's identity" (para. 146). Welcoming new ideas does not mean copying them; it means blending them creatively with one's own traditions, producing something stronger and richer. This mindset rejects the refusal to accept anything new, which can hold a nation back. Instead, it promotes meaningful growth through exchange. This openness is vital for Vietnam today. As it becomes more globally connected, Vietnam does not abandon its roots. By engaging other cultures in a spirit of brotherhood and solidarity, it can evolve while keeping its unique identity alive. Francis notes, "Real cultural strength doesn't come from staying isolated and afraid of change. It comes from confidence, knowing who we are and being willing to learn from others" (Francis, 2020). Openness deepens identity rather than eroding it. Isolation, by contrast, weakens culture. True identity is alive, flexible, and open to growth, the foundation for thriving in today's world.

Vietnamese proverbs capture this wisdom well: "*Đi một ngày đàng, học một sàng khôn*" ("A day of traveling, learn a basketful of wisdom"). It reflects a deep cultural openness, emphasizing that growth and learning come through lived encounters, not just books or abstract thought. We flourish most fully in relational environments, for "no individual, culture, or people can achieve everything alone; fulfillment in life is only possible through others" (Francis, 2020). Hence, a genuine dialogue is not possessive or rigid. It is built on mutual respect, openness, and reciprocal listening. It creates space where differences are not threats but opportunities for understanding. Dialogical love and solidarity are liberating, affirming the dignity of the other and enabling authentic communion without domination or assimilation. This perspective offers Vietnam strength and direction today. Traditional values like *Đoàn Kết* (solidarity), *Tình Làng Nghĩa Xóm* (village affection), and familial loyalty remain deeply rooted. Dialogue enriches solidarity by honoring difference, building bridges, and revitalizing tradition through new perspectives. Most importantly, dialogical love transforms patriotism into global fraternity and turns solidarity from a defensive posture into a dynamic, welcoming embrace of humanity in a society shaped by resilience and collective strength.

5. The Converging Paths of Solidarity

Solidarity is the concrete path that emerges when the universal fraternity Pope Francis envisions becomes a lived reality. He calls for a renewed awareness that all people share a common dignity as members of one human family. Rooted in recognizing that each person is a brother or sister, fraternity is not sentimental idealism, but the foundation for authentic social action. From this foundation, diverse pathways converge toward solidarity, such as dialogue that seeks understanding, structures that promote justice, policies that defend the vulnerable, and personal encounters that awaken compassion. All these are unified by the conviction that no one can thrive in isolation, and that the well-being of each is bound to the well-being of all. In this light, **solidarity is not merely an ethical duty but a moral fruit of fraternity, where love for others takes institutional, cultural, and personal form.** In other words, fraternity gives solidarity its moral depth, while solidarity gives fraternity its transformative power.

As previously discussed, both the Vietnamese concept of *đoàn kết* and Pope Francis's notion of universal fraternity emphasize communal responsibility, mutual support, and the pursuit of the common good, pointing toward a shared ethical foundation across cultural, theological, and philosophical traditions. Firstly, in the matter of community building, the concept of *đoàn kết* (solidarity) is deeply embedded in Vietnamese culture. It is often expressed through well-known slogans such as "Unity is strength" (*Đoàn kết là sức mạnh*) and "The people are of one heart" (*Toàn dân một lòng*). This value has been forged throughout Vietnam's history of national defense, in the communal life of villages, and in the ethical education within families. Each individual is seen not as an isolated unit, but as an essential part of a larger collective. Pope Francis emphasizes a similar vision rooted in solidarity, affirming that humanity can only move toward a sustainable future if built upon communal bonds because "No one is saved alone" (Francis, 2020). From a Christian perspective, community is not limited by bloodline or nationality but is understood as a shared home for all children of God.

Secondly, Vietnamese culture reflects the practice of solidarity as more than superficial unity. It is about shared action. This spirit is evident in times of natural disaster, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as through storms, wars, and everyday village life, summarized by sayings like "neighbors support each other through dark times" (*tôi lừa tất đèn có nhau*) and "sharing rice, sharing clothes" (*chia cơm sẻ áo*). Similarly, in *Fratelli Tutti*, this spirit is elevated as a form of social charity. Pope Francis calls on us not only to assist others through personal generosity, but to build just systems that uphold mutual care and lift the vulnerable together. It results in humans not simply living next to one another, but living for one another, with love and responsibility. Thirdly, regarding the common good. Solidarity in the Vietnamese context has always been connected with a strong sense of community, neighborhood kinship, and a patriotic commitment to national service, placing collective interests above individual or partisan gain. This explains why in both political and moral discourse, the "collective interest" (*lợi ích tập thể*) is consistently prioritized. Likewise, *Fratelli Tutti* affirms that the common good must be the foundational goal of all political, economic, and cultural activity. Pope Francis writes: "A good society is one that serves the common good, creating the conditions for the full development of each person" (Francis, 2020, para. 182). In effect, it is a core ethical principle shared by both traditions, serving as the goal and means for true human development.

Fourthly, when reflecting on the aspiration and efforts to build peace, a value most cherished and universally longed for in a society marked by instability, we find a profound convergence between two intellectual traditions, Vietnamese cultural values and the teachings of Pope Francis on fraternity and solidarity. In Vietnamese tradition, peace is not merely understood as the absence of war, but as a state of social harmony built upon strong communal bonds, mutual respect, and the maintenance of balanced human relationships. The desire for peace has been cultivated and pursued through centuries of resistance against foreign invasions and civil conflict, embedded deeply in the national consciousness as a longing for unity. Likewise, in *Fratelli Tutti* and other writings, Pope Francis presents peace as a fundamental moral and spiritual commitment. He firmly rejects violence and war as legitimate means of resolving conflict, and instead calls for peace to be built through dialogue, justice, and forgiveness. He writes: "Peace is not merely the absence of war, but a tireless commitment... to recognize, protect

and restore the dignity of our brothers and sisters” (Francis, 2019). This meeting of two traditions, though arising from distinct cultural and historical backgrounds, converges on a key insight: that authentic peace cannot be imposed from above, but must be cultivated from the ground up, rooted in human relationships, solidarity, and a shared sense of responsibility for others. Peace is not an exercise of dominance, but the fruit of a genuine love of peace. Thus, Vietnamese communal ethics and Catholic social teaching affirm that peace is a living reality that requires not only just institutions but also cultural virtues, moral education, and spiritual depth. Together, they point toward the ideal of a harmonious society, where human beings find value in mutual connection and serving one another.

In sum, Pope Francis's vision of fraternity in *Fratelli Tutti* aligns with Vietnamese cultural values, especially the concept of *đoàn kết*, which emphasizes solidarity, unity, and collective responsibility. Rooted in Vietnam's history and Confucian teachings, Vietnamese culture values harmonious relationships, respect for elders, and social cohesion. These values echo Pope Francis's call for a culture of encounter and social friendship, built on mutual care, humility, and dialogue. His idea of fraternity reinforces Vietnam's moral commitment to communal living and mutual obligation. *Fratelli Tutti* affirms many traditional Vietnamese values, such as community, harmony, and collective responsibility, but it also critically expands them by challenging their limitations. Vietnamese solidarity often operates within the boundaries of family, ethnic groups, or national identity, which might be called “ingroup” solidarity. While this fosters strong communal ties, it can also risk excluding those who are different, especially the marginalized, minorities, or outsiders. Thus, Pope Francis does not dismiss Vietnamese values but enriches them by offering a more expansive and inclusive moral horizon. His teaching encourages the Vietnamese Church and society to retain the strength of *đoàn kết*, *hiếu*, and communal harmony while being open to a more radical, gospel-rooted vision of fraternity that welcomes the stranger, upholds justice for the marginalized, and builds peace beyond familiar bonds. In this way, *Fratelli Tutti* serves as both a mirror and a lamp reflecting the strengths of Vietnamese culture and illuminating new paths for ethical transformation in a globalized and fractured world.

6. Conclusion

In a time marked by fragmentation and a growing culture of individualism, the mutual illumination between the Vietnamese understanding of *Đoàn Kết* -solidarity and Pope Francis's vision of universal fraternity offers a compelling path forward. Rooted in centuries of communal life, Vietnam's spirit of solidarity, shaped by the village ethos of “*tình làng nghĩa xóm*,” patronage love, and filial piety, provides a living example of how relationships, care, and collective responsibility form the true foundation of human dignity. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis echoes this truth, reminding humanity that authentic freedom and fraternity are not achieved through isolation or competition, but through self-giving love, being outward with others in dialogue, and loving service to others. Pope Francis's call to become “neighbors without borders” and to care for the vulnerable resonates profoundly within the Vietnamese context. It urges young people to move beyond merely personal ambitions and technological convenience and to root their lives in concrete acts of love, solidarity, and compassion on a global scale. As Francis emphasizes, service is not transactional but transformative. It is a work of the heart that looks to the faces of others, touches their wounds, and senses their nearness. Thus, the mutual understanding of *Đoàn Kết* and universal fraternity offers Vietnamese youth a roadmap for the future: a life where success is measured not by individual achievement alone, but by the capacity to love, to build bridges, and to foster genuine human relationships. In a rapidly changing and globalized world, it is this enduring spirit of solidarity, faithful to cultural roots yet open to universal brotherhood, that will allow Vietnamese youth to thrive personally and contribute meaningfully to a more just, compassionate, and unified world.

AI declaration - Under the guidance and recommendation of the theological faculty of the Loyola School of Theology (Ateneo de Manila University), this study successfully completed its thesis defense on July 4, 2025, fulfilling the academic requirements of the institution. This preparation is a synthesis and selection of key sections from the full thesis initially researched and written the author, Ngo Dinh Van, with editorial support from Prof. Ben Carlo Necor Atim. Additionally, AI assistance was used solely to polish certain paragraphs, sometimes translate to English, to improve the clarity and flow of the text, without contributing to the content or substance of the research.

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