Opinion



by NCR Staff

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The Vatican recently announced that Pope Francis will sign a new papal encyclical Oct. 3, entitled "*Fratelli tutti*" in Italian or "Brothers and Sisters All." Prominent Catholic women across the globe are raising objections to the title because it uses the Italian masculine plural to address the world's population. NCR columnist Phyllis Zagano calls the title an "embarrassment," writing that the Vatican should hire some women editors. And Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese writes that the message of the encyclical could be derailed by its seemingly sexist title. Letters to the editor that follow have been edited for length and clarity.

If Pope Francis wanted to say, "Brothers and sisters all," why didn't he? There's a perfectly good Italian word for sisters, *sorelle*.

What preacher of any sensitivity today addresses a congregation as "dear brethren?" The contents of the encyclical will probably be very good, but it will have a much smaller audience if it appears to be addressed only to one half of the human race.

FRANCIS McDONAGH

London



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Regarding the possible ignoring or dismissal of Pope Francis' soon to be published encyclical due to the non-inclusive term "brothers" — why can't the Vatican simply learn how to deliver their worthwhile message in truly inclusive ways?

What is their problem with being aware and sensitive to the appropriate usage of inclusive words so the message is not deemed irrelevant? How tone deaf can they be? Is this that difficult?

Learn how to use the appropriate words to get across a good and valid message for people of this present age in this culture!

(Fr.) PAUL ROSSI

San Mateo, California

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"Human fraternity" is hardly inclusive? Wake up in the name of peace!

CELESTE DAGMAR

Lakewood, Ohio

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I can't believe it. Calling the newest encyclical "Brothers all." What are the males in the Vatican missing and thinking?

For their information, there are more than males and brothers in the church. I wish the Vatican would hire a good public relations firm to advise them on how best to spread the good news to all people.

MARK SCANNELL

Minneapolis, Minnesota

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I grew up thinking that "man" was generic, like "human," and I felt sorry for males because they did not have a self-identifying word like "woman" which never included anything but females. But that thinking has proved over time to be less than satisfactory.

"Brothers and sisters" is often cumbersome. "Siblings" is not as familial for intangible reasons. A proper alternative may need to be substituted depending on the context.

"Brothers all" — perhaps could become "one family" or "one community"?

Nothing is simple. Often evolution rather than a quick change brings a wiser, more lasting solution.

JULIE A. S. WILLIAMSON

Miami Shores, Florida

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In response to Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's article about the title of the new encyclical, it is already creating ruffled feathers among forward thinking common good advocates that I work with here in Canada.

Such an easy change to make language more inclusive. It's time the Vatican stopped dodging the gender issue and be up front in all their communications about their intentions to be inclusive.

AGNES RICHARD

Toronto, Ontario

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Get a clue, Pope Francis! Naming an encyclical "*Fratelli tutti*," which translates as "Brothers all" is tone- deaf. It is really unfathomable and unforgivable that in the 21st century a pope would write an encyclical that appears to be addressed to men only.

We are not all brothers — some of us are sisters! Using the name "*Fratelli tutti*" for his encyclical reinforces the idea that the church was created by and for men only.

If Jesus was sent only to redeem men, the church would have gone out of existence after one generation since women would have had no reason to become members of

an organization that considered them to be irredeemable.

How long, Lord, do we have to wait for your message to be heard in the way that you intended it to be heard — salvation for all?

DEIRDRE O'NEAL

Naperville, Illinois

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With reference to the comment on the title of Pope Francis' upcoming encyclical, isn't it time somebody said loud and clear that English is the only language (as far as I know) where grammatical and biological gender coincide? Even in languages with three genders, like German and Russian, grammar and biology don't match precisely.

In Italian, everything from the sun and moon to your table and chair are either "he" or "she" so it is not as necessary as in the English version that the Italian should address "brothers and sisters." That is good English, but let's not force other languages into an English straitjacket.

Incidentally, I have done most of my work for the past 50 years in one of the world's many languages that do not have grammatical gender. I haven't noticed that making people any less sexist. The honorific plural is most often used in speaking to or about your mother (as is also done in Russian), but that doesn't seem to do the trick either.

No one grammatical rule fits all seven billion of us. Neither do particular rules about when you shake hands, bow, kiss or hug.

Can we be less culturally chauvinist and more open to the next person we meet?

(Fr.) BRIAN MACGARRY, SJ

Harare, Zimbabwe

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What is so difficult about using the word family instead of brothers? We did that for the hymn "Let There Be Peace on Earth." "Brothers all are we" became simply "Family all are we."

We continue to give only lip service to inclusiveness.

Elinor Metz

Rockville, Maryland

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