

Article

Caring for the Common Home and Calling for a Diverse Future: Pope Francis and Byung-Chul Han in Dialogue

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Abstract: The first few decades of the twenty-first century have posed various challenges to humankind such as the worldwide impact of the changing patterns of globalization processes, economic crises, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the specter of deglobalization illustrate. The unknown and unpredictable future is a reason for utmost concern for the contemporary society that Byung-Chul Han characterizes as an “achievement society”—one that is dominated by “excessive positivity” and that has evolved into a “doping society”. This “palliative society” is such because it is unable to cope with pain, and it is marked by a kind of permanent analgesia that prevents urgent reforms from taking place. In this essay, I examine how Pope Francis’s encyclical letters *Laudato Si’* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020)—by calling for an integral ecology (which connects environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and ethical issues), social friendship, solidarity, and the common good—instill hope in the burnout society that Han reflects upon, urge action toward, and encourage changes to overcome in the current environmental and human crisis, as well as to building a diverse future that is not palliative.

Keywords: common home; Pope Francis; Byung-Chul Han; *Laudato Si’*; *Fratelli Tutti*; *The Burnout Society*; *The Palliative Society*



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Awe constitutes a rupture with the ordinary and humdrum setting in which we operate and in relation to which we have become indifferent. However, we only need this instant of grace to intuit the possibility of a deeper and more prodigious relationship with the real.¹

(José Tolentino Mendonça, “Return to Awe”)
If you can see, look. If you can look, observe.²
(José Saramago, *Blindness*)

1. Introduction³

The first few decades of the twenty-first century have posed innumerable questions and challenges to humankind about the present and the future, thus generating high levels of anxiety and fear that are closely related to the unpredictability of the future and the threats that challenge human beings’ survival on earth. Anxiety and fear are also characteristic of a period that is marked by a myriad of changes in a diversity of fields that suggest a paradigmatic change in the project of modernity at the turn of the twentieth century into the new millennium. These changes, however, have not been abrupt. In fact, scientists have not ceased warning that life on Earth has been increasingly in jeopardy due to environmental degradation. The pandemic has brought new economic, societal, and political challenges, and it has disrupted consolidated globalization processes that were called into question when the planet was put to a halt. It is unclear, however, whether the world has learned or unlearned the lessons taught by COVID-19⁴. Moreover, the unpredictability of the future revolves around multiple concerns, such as the future of peace and stability in Europe when war has returned to the continent after decades of peace, thus reviving the specter of a nuclear conflict⁵; the controversy over whether artificial

intelligence represents a huge scientific development or a threat to humankind; and the reality of space tourism even when the globalization of poverty contributes to the existence of more than eight hundred million hungry people in the world—the truth is that the list of anxieties and threats seems to be endless.

This essay attempts to bring together, as well as put into dialogue, the texts of two renowned observers and thinkers of our time: Pope Francis's encyclical letters *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis 2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (Pope Francis 2020a), and the philosopher Byung-Chul Han's books *The Burnout Society* (Han [2010] 2015) and *The Palliative Society. Pain Today* (Han [2020] 2021). Pope Francis is undeniably one of the most important, influential, and controversial world leaders currently, and he is one of the most acute critical voices speaking against egoistic ways of living, which are characterized by the prevalence of one's views and uncompassionate attitude toward the Other and toward the planet, which has been ruthlessly exploited. Han is a South Korean-born philosopher interested in the current state of modernity and its evils, and he has focused his attention on topics such as society's alienation, individual narcissism, and the effects of the preponderance of the digital order on people's lives, among others. Though averse to intense social interaction and to interviews, he has gained media visibility in recent years due to his prolific production of short philosophy books. Written in relatively simple language, his books have reached a large readership, thus consolidating his reputation as "a contemporary thinker acutely aware of the cultural forces that degrade our humanity and hinder our flourishing"⁶. Both thinkers, notwithstanding the diverse nature of their texts, demonstrate a true and genuine preoccupation with the future of the planet, of human beings, and of the non-human world. The selection of my corpus results from the fact that all the texts under analysis thoroughly diagnose the evils of twenty-first century society from different perspectives and call readers to action in various ways, with a view to building a diverse future that is anchored on a culture that rests on responsibility, ethics, justice, solidarity, and fraternity. Even if at diverse levels, all these texts have a programmatic dimension that displays a common preoccupation: to care for what Pope Francis has called "our common home"⁷.

Before moving on with my reflection, it is important to clarify what led me to focus on these authors and these texts. My interest in the "common home" started with the publication of the *Laudato Si'* encyclical in 2015, in which Pope Francis not only warns about the deplorable state of the planet and its attendant environmental, social, cultural, and economic implications, but also calls for a cultural revolution with a view to caring for the planet. This interest increased after participating in the research project "'Common Home and New Ways of Living Interculturally': Public theology and ecology of culture in pandemic times" at Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon.⁸ In April 2023, Byung-Chul Han came to Lisbon to deliver one of the conferences commemorating the 50th anniversary of FCH,⁹ titled "The Spirit of Hope". In this lecture, the German–Korean philosopher emphasized how his confessed spirituality, as well as his cultivation of meditation and of a contemplative life have shaped his thought. He also shared with the audience some aspects of his personal daily life and confessed that, in the evenings, he liked to wander unnoticed around Berlin neighborhoods collecting magnolias, his favorite flowers. The contemplation of the beauty of magnolias at his home had, according to his account, the power to inspire him and to fill him with wonder. The image of a philosopher waiting for darkness to fall so that he could collect blooming magnolias from Berlin streets reminded me of how unique, and thrilling the experience of awe can be, and how the frenetic rhythm of contemporary life that has been imposed on us has increasingly deprived us of it. To define awe, I refer back to the first epigraph I selected for this essay, taken from a chronicle written by the poet Tolentino Mendonça, entitled "Turning to awe" (Mendonça 2022):

Awe constitutes a rupture with the ordinary and routine humdrum setting in which we operate and in relation to which we have become indifferent. However, we only need this instant of grace to intuit the possibility of a deeper and more prodigious relationship with the real.

My interest in the common home intensified during and because of the pandemic, when the unimaginable happened and the whole world was brought to a halt. Believers and non-believers did not remain indifferent to the image of Pope Francis in a completely empty Vatican City on 27 March 2020, when he held an isolated service to pray for the end of the pandemic, for those who were seriously ill or had lost their lives, and for humanity as the pandemic touched us all.¹⁰ Although it is obvious that special prayer during a rainy evening in the Lent of 2020 was primarily a religious event, I prefer not to evoke it from a religious perspective, which explains why I do not intend to discuss the references to God or to the Bible in the prayer.¹¹ I opt to envisage the empty Saint Peter's Square of that evening as the microcosm of a sick planet, and the solitary old man in white habit as a sage who, by inviting people to join him regardless of faith, ethnicity, nationality, or social status, drew their attention to the fragile condition of one's existence and urged the community to care for the common home. When attempting to characterize Pope Francis's evening prayer, I associate it with a moment of awe due to its exceptionality and symbolism. In fact, the event enables me to reflect on awe as a feeling in its semantic richness of wonder, dread, terror, astonishment and bewilderment. According to the [Merriam-Webster Dictionary \(n.d.\)](#), awe derives from the Middle English "aw", "awe", "ahe", evoking ideas of terror, dread, extreme reverence, veneration, something to be feared, danger and, through successive borrowings from other languages, including Greek, the notions of pain and distress.¹² When people saw Pope Francis crossing Saint Peter's Square alone, they were not thrilled. Despite being touched by the Pope's empathetic gesture of praying for the collective welfare regardless of people's beliefs, of attempting to soothe tormented souls, of transmitting confidence, strength, and courage in the future, people were aware of the vulnerability of human beings. The awe then experienced was associated with the disruption, the shock, the terror and the fear resulting from the pandemic and its nefarious effects. At that moment, the whole world feared what might happen. But that evening in March represented something else. It was also a moment of revelation of the fragile condition of the planet and of human beings that called not only for a different relationship with the real (which is propelled by awe, as suggested by Mendonça) but that, to some extent, also rendered the whole of humanity accountable for the future. In other words, the sickness of the world was not exclusively due to the pandemic. What the pandemic did was to lay bare how sick the world was and to remind human beings of their indifference and numbness towards individual and/or collective misfortune. As the passage below evinces, Pope Francis suggests in his homily that the pandemic/"storm" signals a much more serious malady, that of human beings blinded by greed and egocentrism:¹³

The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people's souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly "save" us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity.

The reference to the blindness of human beings leads me to my second epigraph, taken from José Saramago's epigraph to his novel *Blindness* ([Saramago 1995](#)): "If you can see, look. If you can look, observe." In a novel that many critics consider a dystopia, Saramago discusses a collective blindness, an epidemic that he associates with a blindness of Reason. Proposing a deeper level of visual acuity, the novelist plays with the meaning of the verb "reparar", which in Portuguese means both "to notice", to "observe" and "to mend", to "repair", or "to fix", which is not evident in the translation into English.

Drawing on Saramago's aphorism and on the context of a novel that depicts the (in)humanity of human beings during an epidemic of blindness, I contend that the experience of "observing" in its blend of meanings can be related to an experience of awe, understood both as horror and fear, wonder and revelation. Far from suggesting that Pope Francis's encyclicals and Byung-Chul Han's texts respond only to the concerns of the Nobel Prize laureate, I argue that they engage with Saramago's association of visual acuity with care in their diverse ways of presenting a thorough diagnosis of contemporary society and of its ills.¹⁴ What Pope Francis and Han propose is ultimately a turning to awe,¹⁵ without which the future will be somber.

The selection of these texts is also related to the fact that *Laudato Si'* and *The Burnout Society* were written before the pandemic and *Fratelli Tutti* and *The Palliative Society* appeared in 2020, during the pandemic. I contend that the latter texts not only complexify and refine some of the main issues raised in *Laudato Si'* and *The Burnout Society*, but also offer solutions to navigate through these issues. With a view to putting the texts that compose my corpus into dialogue, I have identified topics that I consider central to both authors' reflections and around which my reflection will revolve:

- (i) The "common home", its maladies, and the call for renovation;
- (ii) From fear and discipline to numbness;
- (iii) The call for caring for the "common home" and the search for the culture of encounter.

2. Caring for the Common Home: Pope Francis and Byung-Chul Han in Dialogue

The "Common home" is the designation Pope Francis uses to refer to the planet Earth in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*. The expression should not be understood as a rhetorical expedient used to embellish the text. In fact, by referring to the planet as the "common home", Pope Francis is investing the concept with diverse meanings, as the planet is not understood as a simple dwelling place, or the habitat for a wide range of species. It is presented as a *home*, a space invested with affect,¹⁶ where people feel they are welcome and belong to. But to Pope Francis the Earth is more than home; it is a *common* home, which implies a sense of belonging to a community, to a family, and renders the members of the "household" responsible for it. Because Pope Francis views the planet as a common home, he entreaties all people of good will, regardless of faith, to reflect on which planet future generations will inherit. The sense of belonging is made explicit in the first lines of the encyclical's preamble when, evoking Saint Francis of Assisi, the Earth is presented as a sister:

1. "LAUDATO SI', mi' Signore"—"Praise be to you, my Lord". In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs". (LS' 1)

Because the Earth and nature are sisters, they suffer together. It is in the second paragraph of the encyclical that Pope Francis places human beings as perpetrators of the harms inflicted on Earth and nature, associating the Earth with "the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor" (LS' 2).

The characterization of the common home is deeply inspired by the figure of St. Francis of Assisi, who epitomizes the example of care, of an integral ecology, of humanity—in sum, of someone who was open to awe and wonder, as the excerpt from paragraph 11 illustrates:

11. (...) If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer

of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled. (*LS'* 11)

The Pope's concerns with the common home are further expanded in the first chapter of the encyclical, entitled "What is happening to our common home". It is in the third chapter that Pope Francis discusses in more detail the human roots of the ecological crisis. In chapter four, he proposes an integral ecology that presupposes the convergence of environmental, economic, social, cultural and moral preoccupations. The accomplishment of this integral ecology implies a diverse positionality of human beings towards the environment, culture and the Other, without which the respect for the environment and the end of inequality and injustice will not be viable.

Byung-Chul Han does not use the expression "common home" or refer to it in the terms proposed by Pope Francis. However, the philosopher recognizes that the world, and human beings in particular, are ill and need to undergo a process of healing. In *The Burnout Society*, he confronts life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, positing that the current century epitomizes a paradigmatic shift that implies the disappearance of otherness, an aspect to which I will return. His characterization of both centuries rests on landscapes of pathologies (Han [2010] 2015, p. 1). He contends that the twentieth century corresponded to an "immunological age" characterized by the dominance of an immunological pattern epitomized by a distinction between inside and outside, friend and foe, self and other (Idem: 1). This pattern rested on a dialectic of negativity, considered a fundamental trait of immunity, as the Own asserts itself in and against the Other by negating its negativity (Idem: 3–4).¹⁷ The immunological age was marked by an immunological rejection that implied the negation, rejection and/or extinction of the Other. It is illustrated by the disciplinary society defined by the negativity of prohibition and mechanisms of coercion and repression, and whose negativity produced madmen and criminals. The twenty-first century, on the other hand, is characterized by the dominance of neuronal diseases, such as depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, borderline personality disorder, and burnout syndrome. Contrary to what happened in the previous century and because neuronal diseases follow the dialectic of positivity, the current century is poor in negativity (Idem: 4). According to Han, harm can also come from positivity as it comes not only from the Other or the foreign, but also from the Same (Idem: 4). In Han's argumentation, as the Same does not lead to the production of antibodies, the twenty-first century is characterized by a non-immunological rejection (Idem: 5). In other words, rejection exists, but it is a response to an excess of positivity that manifests in exhaustion, fatigue and suffocation that are non-immunological reactions (Idem: 5).

Han calls the society of positivity an "achievement society", a society of the "Yes, we can", due to its positive orientation expressed in a plethora of projects, initiatives and motivation (Idem: 8). This achievement society is fueled by an excess of stimuli, information and impulses, producing, therefore, multitasking and hyperactivity that compromise the ability to contemplate and experience awe (Idem: 12). Because "achievement subjects" are expected to cope with the excess of work and to attain high levels of performance, they become predators and preys of themselves and are caught in a spiral of self-exploitation and narcissism that produces depressives and losers who listen mainly to themselves, and whose ego is constantly fed by social networks (Idem: 9–10). This self-centeredness results, on the one hand, in the progressive disappearance of the Other. On the other hand, Han posits that the achievement society evolves into a "doping society" (Idem: 30).

The characteristics Han attributes to the achievement subject are mirrored in *Laudato Si'* when Pope Francis underlines how humanity has changed, calling for the refusal of a superficial, consumerist, and monotonous society dependent on technology and its novelties, which may be conducive to escapism and emptiness that prevent the experience of awe. Even if Pope Francis does not openly refer to human beings as predators and preys of themselves as postulated by Han in *The Burnout Society*, Pope Francis argues for "a bold cultural revolution" whose principles might be translated by Saramago's aphorism—"If you can see, look. If you can look, observe." What is at stake here is not a more refined degree

of acuity. It is the Portuguese meaning of “to observe” (“to fix”, “to mend”) that ultimately implies that if human beings are not healed, the planet cannot be cared for:

113. (. . .) But humanity has changed profoundly, and the accumulation of constant novelties exalts a superficiality which pulls us in one direction. It becomes difficult to pause and recover depth in life. If architecture reflects the spirit of an age, our megastructures and drab apartment blocks express the spirit of globalized technology, where a constant flood of new products coexists with a tedious monotony. Let us refuse to resign ourselves to this, and continue to wonder about the purpose and meaning of everything. Otherwise we would simply legitimate the present situation and need new forms of escapism to help us endure the emptiness.

114. All of this shows the urgent need for us to move forward in a bold cultural revolution. Science and technology are not neutral; from the beginning to the end of a process, various intentions and possibilities are in play and can take on distinct shapes. Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur. (LS' 113–114)

The cultural revolution proposed by Pope Francis is hindered by the state of “permanent anaesthesia” (Han [2020] 2021, p. 1) that characterizes the palliative society Han talks about. Because this society is dominated by algophobia (the morbid fear of pain), it has become a society of survival that avoids reforms and transformations. This reluctance derives from people’s fear or inability to endure pain because, as Han points out, “pain is negativity par excellence.” (Idem: 2). Since the achievement society is dominated by positivity, it is easy to understand why pain should be avoided at all costs. Inspired by Nietzsche, who refers to health as a form of incorporating pain, Han argues that

[p]ain shakes up the habitual relations between meanings, and forces the mind into a radical change in perspective that shows everything in a new light. As opposed to pleasure, pain triggers processes of reflection. It gives the mind a ‘dialectical clarity par excellence’. It makes the mind more perceptive. It opens up a whole new way of seeing (. . .). (Idem: 40–41)

This “another kind of visibility” (Idem: 48) provided by pain counteracts the anesthesia resulting from the digital order that, by responding to impatience and the “compulsion of immediate access” (Idem: 48), not only fragments attention and the experience of lingering, making the world lose “its aura, its scent” (Idem: 47), but also promotes the decline of human beings’ capacity for empathy. According to Han, this decline is associated with the “disappearance of the other”, as “[t]he palliative society eliminates the other as pain. The other is reified into an object. *The other as an object does not cause pain.*” (Idem: 51–52; Han’s italics). Han posits that

[t]oday, we are utterly dominated by the ego—even dazed, intoxicated by it. The increasingly strong narcissistic ego, in confronting the other, mainly meets itself when it meets the other. Digital media also tends to promote the disappearance of the other. By making the other *available*, it diminishes the *resistance of the other*. We find it increasingly difficult to perceive the otherness of the other. The other deprived of his or her otherness can only be consumed. A sensibility for the other presupposes an ‘exposure’ that ‘offer[s] itself even in suffering’. This is pain. Without this *primordial pain*, the ego rears its head again, its *foroneself*, and reifies the other into an object. The other is withdrawn from the grasp of the ego only with the ego’s pain of being exposed. This pain, as an ethical, *meta*-physical pain, precedes the kind of pain which I experience as *mine*. It is a pain *towards the other*, an original being exposed that is more passive than any passivity of the ego. The

pain of exposure, which also precedes compassion, renders a *comfortable return to oneself, the pleasure in oneself*, impossible. (Idem: 52; Han's italics)

The experience of pain causes disturbance and paves the way for the Other because by exposing one's vulnerability, the Other ceases to be objectified. In other words, the vulnerability caused by pain brings not only the consciousness of the Other (and of the self), but also makes compassion possible.

Out of the texts under discussion, the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*,¹⁸ besides responding to many of Pope Francis's concerns in *Laudato Si'* and Han's preoccupations in *The Burnout Society* and *The Palliative Society*, is the text that clearly offers solutions to human beings' maladies in late modernity.¹⁹ Inspired once more by the example of St. Francis of Assisi's life and work, in the 2020 encyclical, Pope Francis reminds us that the care for the common home is dependent on individual and collective efforts. Moreover, he further elaborates on the suggestion made in *Laudato Si'* that a cultural revolution is necessary to care for the common home. This cultural revolution presupposes "a new vision of fraternity and social friendship" (FT 8) when "[l]ocal conflicts and disregard for the common good are exploited by the global economy in order to impose a single cultural model" (FT 12) grounded on "limitless consumption and expressions of empty individualism" (FT 13). This single cultural model is translated into a "throwaway culture" (FT 18) that not only discards people in a variety of forms, such as racism (FT 20), but also fuels the fear of the Other as a kind of barbarian to be defended from at all costs. This cultural model leads to the construction of "a culture of walls" that prevents the encounter with other cultures and peoples (FT 27).

Pope Francis connects the vilification and disappearance of the Other with globalization and associated media developments. He argues that despite having the potential to help construct a universal fraternity and foment a culture of encounter, globalization processes have contributed to the globalization of indifference, delusion and isolation (FT 20–30), which, in line with Han's reasoning, is mirrored in the hollowness and vacuity of digital relationships. Because social media and digital technologies have brought the illusion of friendships in place of a culture of encounter, "they do not really build community; instead, they tend to disguise and expand the very individualism that finds expression in xenophobia and in contempt for the vulnerable" (FT 43).

In *Fratelli Tutti*, the parable of The Good Samaritan is central to the discussion of the relevance of the culture of the encounter to care for the common home.²⁰ The parable discusses how fraternal love is not conditioned by social, economic or religious status. As Pope Francis aptly notes in paragraph 62, "love shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate; in their place, it builds bridges" (FT 62). The example of the Good Samaritan and the practice of fraternal love can, therefore, be the antidotes to help the achievement subjects of the palliative society to cope with pain and acknowledge the Other in their difference. This possibility is grounded on paragraphs 65–67 of *Fratelli Tutti*, where people of good will are invited to create and implement a new kind of social bond that will dignify the existence of human beings and resist social and political inertia (FT, 71) as the extract from paragraph 67 illustrates:

The parable shows us how a community can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of exclusion, and act instead as neighbours, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good. At the same time, it warns us about the attitude of those who think only of themselves and fail to shoulder the inevitable responsibilities of life as it is.

Pope Francis uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to present what he considers the "paths of hope" for the common home. They are associated with a movement beyond oneself towards the Other through bonds of friendship and love. The Pope contends that life does not exist without the interaction with the Other, for "[i]n the depths of every heart, love creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves

and towards others" (FT 88). Moving beyond oneself to encounter and love the Other for who they are (FT 94) enables the creation of a social friendship and constitutes a possible solution to heal the achievement subjects of the palliative society who are caught in the trap of individualism.²¹

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis's reflection goes far beyond Han's, as the Pope elaborates on the characterization of those who can be considered as the Other. The Other encompasses all those who, because they have a disability or some kind of disadvantage, are considered a burden to society. Pope Francis calls them "existential foreigners" (FT 97) or "the hidden exiles" (FT 98), who despite being citizens with full rights, are "treated like foreigners in their own country" (Ibid.). The implementation of social friendship and fraternity implies "the acknowledgment of *the worth of every human person*, always and everywhere" (FT 106; Pope Francis's italics). Everyone is called on to be solidary once "we are responsible for the fragility of others as we strive to build a common future" (FT 115). Solidarity is seen, first and foremost, as a service to people and not to ideas, which explains why it should never be ideological (FT 115). Pope Francis, in sum, calls for a "global ethic of solidarity and cooperation" (FT 127), which is a powerful strategy to resist the propagation of fear and mistrust that feeds various conflicts around the world.²²

The cultural revolution resting on the cultivation and practice of fraternity based on social friendship and solidarity as suggested by Pope Francis can promote a diverse type of globalization, in which the global and the local are interconnected and the differences among peoples are acknowledged and respected. This way of caring for the common home potentiates the creation of a new global order that implies a better kind of politics (FT 154), which is key to "the globalization of the most basic of human rights" (FT 189). The implementation of this improved politics is dependent on the practice of social dialogue (FT 198–199), a fundamental ingredient to prevent and work through conflicts and to construct the most desired "culture of encounter" (FT 215–217) that will lead to individual and collective peace.

3. Conclusions

Through the discussion of the ills of contemporary society, all the texts under analysis illustrate, in different ways, how our common home is undergoing a period of major overhaul as to what can be considered a paradigmatic change. In other words, a period that points to a novel rupture, to a new crisis in the project of modernity, which is connected to the implications derived from various aspects, such as hegemonic neoliberal globalization processes, ecocide²³, and what can be considered a new moment of de-centering identity and the subject in late modernity that deserves further analysis. As far as this last aspect is concerned, it is worth recalling Stuart Hall's premise in the chapter "The Question of Cultural Identity" in a book curiously titled "Modernity and Its Futures", edited by Hall, Held and McGrew (Hall 1992). Hall posits that "conceptualizations of the subject change, and therefore have a history" (p. 281). According to Hall, in the period of late modernity (that he situates in the second half of the twentieth century, but that I would like to extend to the first decades of the current century), the modern subject faced five major moments of de-centering that are related to a series of ruptures in the discourses of modern knowledge: (i) the traditions of Marxist thinking; (ii) the impact of Freud's discovery of the unconscious; (iii) de Saussure's reflection on language as a social system; (iv) Foucault's disciplinary power; and (v) the impact of feminism, both as a theoretical critique and as a social movement. To Hall's list, I would like to add a new moment of de-centering the subject and identity, that of the dominance of the achievement subject, proposed by Byung-Chul Han. A subject who, lost in navel-gazing and unable to cope with the negativity represented by the experience of pain lives in a state of numbness (fed by the elusive ego reinforcement provided by social networks and gadgets) as a kind of blind man, despite being able to see, does not look nor observe (in the sense of repairing, mending, fixing) to return to Saramago's maxim.

The addition of the achievement subject to Hall's list is not a sign of pessimism, however. Even if the hyper-performing paradigm of success and the principles of the burnout society are supported and fed by the neoliberal policies of hegemonic globalization, the prospect of change is in sight. The 2023 edition of the World Youth Day in Lisbon proved that the seeds of hope sowed by Pope Francis in his encyclicals are being cared for by many young people ("the Pope's youth"), who demonstrated interest in and engagement with calling into question the narrative of the "homus consumens" and working for the application of the principles of the "Economy of Francesco". If Pope Francis's "seedling" blooms, the achievement subject described by Han might perhaps be healed, and the common home can be cared for with fraternity and solidarity. The theme of the event, addressed to religious and non-religious people ("Mary arose and went with haste"), Pope Francis's precept (according to which the only time we are allowed to look down upon others is when we are offering to help them up), and the images of 1.5 million people of all ages and origins gathering for the final Mass constitute experiences of awe that prove that a culture of encounter is viable and that it is possible and worthwhile to care for the common home.²⁴

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Notes

- 1 "O espanto constitui uma rutura com o quadro ordinário e rotineiro em que funcionámos, e face ao qual nos tornámos indiferentes. Basta-nos, contudo, esse instante de graça para intuímos a possibilidade de uma relação mais profunda e prodigiosa com o real." (The translation of this passage from the chronicle "Tornar ao Espanto" into English is mine).
- 2 The original in Portuguese is: "Se podes olhar, vê. Se podes ver, repara." (Saramago 1995). For the translation of Saramago's novel into English, see (Saramago 1999).
- 3 I would like to thank Lucia Boldrini and Emma Hallemans for their thought-provoking questions and comments when a different, abridged version of this essay was delivered at the XIII Summer School for the Study of Culture (The Lisbon Consortium) in Lisbon in July 2023. I am also grateful to the reviewers of this essay for their insightful comments, suggestions and bibliographic references.
- 4 On the lessons taught by the pandemic, see, among many, Santos (2020); Roy (2020) and Esposito (in Christiaens and De Cawer 2020), and (Esposito (2023)).
- 5 The 1990s Balkan conflicts that tore apart former Yugoslavia, despite their violence and cruelty, cannot be compared to the dimension of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.
- 6 Beauchamp (2022) considers Byung-Chul Han "the preeminent gadfly of our age" when he discusses how difficult it is to define if someone can be considered a philosopher or not.
- 7 When referring to the programmatic dimension of the texts under analysis and bearing in mind that Pope Francis is the leader of the Catholic Church and that Byung-Chul Han is Catholic, I do not associate their texts with any kind of proselytism.
- 8 The project is coordinated by CITER (Research Centre for Theology and Religious Studies) with the participation of researchers from CECC (Research Centre for Communication and Culture). The project comprises 10 working groups, and I am involved with the group called "Theopoetics, Aesthetics and Performativity of the Common Home".
- 9 FCH is the acronym of Faculty of Human Sciences at Universidade Católica Portuguesa.
- 10 International media widely covered the event that the Vatican called "An Extraordinary Prayer in the Time of Pandemic". For images of the event and of the Pope walking in a rainy and empty Vatican, see, among many, <https://www.tbsnews.net/coronavirus-chronicle/pope-holds-dramatic-solitary-service-relief-coronavirus-61942>, accessed on 20 June 2023 (Pope Francis Holds Dramatic Solidary Service for Relief from Coronavirus 2023).
- 11 The text of the prayer is available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_omelia-epidemia.html (Pope Francis 2020b), accessed on 20 June 2023.
- 12 The concept of awe has gained particular visibility in the new millennium in the field of Psychology, as illustrated, among others, by various publications on the topic in *Frontiers* journals, Keltner and Haidt (2003), Allen's "The Science of Awe" White Paper (Allen 2018) and Keltner (2022). However, the experience of awe and awe as a topic have pervaded the study of Philosophy. It is worth recalling that in *Metaphysics* 982 b 12 ff. (Aristotle 2016) Aristotle attributed the beginning of Philosophy to awe ("It is owing to wonder that men both now begin, and at first began, to philosophize."). I am grateful to one of the reviewers of

this essay for drawing my attention to the fact that Western philosophy refers to the Greek word “deinòn”, which evokes the ideas of fear, fright, something terrible. The same reviewer reminded me that Freud uses the term “Das Unheimliche”, meaning “perturbing”, “uncanny”; and that Heidegger uses the word “unheimlich” to translate “deinòn”, which means “bewildering” and “disorientating”.

13 Parts of this quotation are also referred to in FT 32.

14 Consider that the texts belong to different genres. Even though an encyclical is also a philosophical text, it is primarily a theological document, a pastoral letter on Catholic doctrine addressed to members of the clergy.

15 I am borrowing from Mendonça the title of the chronicle from where I selected the first epigraph of this work.

16 Consider the distinction between “home” and “house” in various languages, for example.

17 Han’s characterization of the twentieth century as an “immunological age” corresponds to a recurrent pattern in Philosophy that examines the relations between immunity, conflict and community. It was Foucault who explored immunity to discuss the notion of biopolitics, a term used to refer to the means and mechanisms through which power operates on and affects society in order to control and manipulate human life. Roberto Esposito has thoroughly investigated the relationships between mechanisms of immunization and the community to discuss modern biopolitics. In his most recent book *Common Immunity. Biopolitics in the Age of the Pandemic* (Esposito 2023), he attempts to delineate a genealogy of the immunity paradigm within the project of modernity by examining the impact of the twofold process of politicizing medicine and medicalizing politics on community life and identity. One of the most interesting aspects of Esposito’s premises is his analysis of how immunity can turn against itself, thus transforming into auto-immunity, and its impact on the community (which Han has never done in his discussion of the immunological age). For this discussion, see Rosàs Tosas (2022). It is worth pointing out that in *The Burnout Society* Han dismisses Esposito’s immunological analysis, claiming that the Italian philosopher does not address contemporary problems (Han [2010] 2015, p. 3). In *The Palliative Society*, Han does not make any reference to Esposito, possibly because Han’s achievement society is not immunological.

18 The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* was influenced by a declaration signed by Pope Francis and The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, titled “A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”, during the Pope’s apostolic journey to the United Arab Emirates in February 2019 (Pope Francis & The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb 2019).

19 Despite the interest of Han’s characterization of the burnout society and its evolution to a palliative society, the use the philosopher makes of medical language to address the paradigm shift in late modernity is problematic. Han does not refer to how bodies respond to autoimmune diseases when antibodies are produced to attack one’s healthy cells. In other words, to when the Self is considered by the immunological system as an Other, as a foreigner, a potential enemy that it is necessary to fight against and eliminate. How effective and fair are the parallels between the immunological age with the dialectic of negativity and between the society of achievement with the dialectic of positivity when autoimmune diseases are under discussion? When raising this issue, I do not aim to call into question or disqualify Han’s premises, but I firmly believe the examination of autoimmune diseases may arouse new metaphors that will pave the way for new rationalities regarding compassion and the care for the Self, the Other and the planet; in sum, for our common home. On Han’s omission of auto-immunity, see also note 17.

20 The parable revolves around the aid provided by a Samaritan to a Jew who had been assaulted and abandoned on the road by burglars, in a historical context when Samaritans were considered as the Other to be avoided. None of the passersby who saw the man in need on the road helped him, and aid came from someone who was not expected to provide help. On how Samaritans were considered in Jesus’ time, see FT 80 and 83.

21 On Pope Francis’s reflection on the dangers of individualism, see FT 105.

22 The adoption of this global ethics is crucial to change the way migrants are seen and treated. They should not be considered as threats, but as a gift, for they “bring an opportunity for enrichment and the integral human development of all” (FT 133).

23 The struggle to have large-scale environmental destruction recognized as an international crime, prosecutable at the International Criminal Court is not recent, but has acquired visibility in the last ten years. Until now, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) lists four crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes of aggression. On this issue, see the site of the *Stop Ecocide International* (2023) (<https://www.stopecocide.earth/>, accessed on 3 June 2023). The activist Greta Thunberg is one of the main advocates for this cause.

24 For information on the 2023 World Youth Day, see, among others, the official site of the event, Available online: <https://www.lisboa2023.org/en>, accessed on 29 July 2023 (The World Youth Day 2023).

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