
DISCOVERING THE TRUTH IN *FRATELLI TUTTI*

在《众位弟兄》中发现真相

DENNIS P. McCANN 丹宁斯

ABSTRACT

Pope Francis' recent encyclical, *Fratelli tutti* (2020), is an important resource for understanding the attempt to contribute to a new economic paradigm, outlined in the "Macau Manifesto". But the encyclical is very long, and readers may not feel ready to devote so much time to absorbing its meaning. The following essay is an attempt to interpret the themes and outline the main points of the encyclical, so that readers of the MRIJ can appreciate its significance, and thus the importance of the "Macau Manifesto" as a response to its message.

Fratelli tutti, as its Italian title may suggest, is not addressed primarily to theologians and ethicists who may have a professional interest in Catholic Social Teaching (CST); it is, instead, an attempt to communicate directly with ordinary believers, especially young people, whom the Pope must convert to a new—though also very old—way of thinking and acting, as well as with people of other belief systems especially Islam, if human civilization is to survive the challenges that threaten it. A fresh approach to dialogue and collaboration was already evident in Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in veritate* (2009), where his analysis of the 2008 global financial collapse focused on trust, its corruption, and its recovery through a renewed appreciation of the principle and practice of "gratuitousness" (McCann, 2011). *Fratelli tutti*, however, takes the argument a step further by showing how "gratuitousness" is a consequence of fraternity and social friendship, properly understood.

Why are fraternity and social friendship so important if our world is to be saved from itself? Part of the answer emerges in a series of critical observations about how desperate things have become as these have declined. The most salient feature is the paradoxical distortion of human communications, in which the promise of digitalised and universally accessible social media has been hijacked to create "closed circuits [that] facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate" (Francis, 2020, par. 45). The failure in our communication systems makes cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation nearly impossible. The risk is both personal and global in its consequences. Pope Francis observes:

As silence and careful listening disappear, replaced by a frenzy of texting, this basic structure of sage human communication is at risk. A new lifestyle is emerging, where we create only what we want and exclude all that we cannot control or know instantly and superficially. This process,

by its intrinsic logic, blocks the kind of serene reflection that could lead us to a shared wisdom. (Francis, 2020, par. 49)

The impact of this systemic failure is evident in the disappearance of "historical consciousness," resulting in a hollowing out of traditional social values (Francis, 2020, par 13-14), creating a moral vacuum in which a sterile "deconstructionism" confers legitimacy on a "throwaway world" in which human rights are ignored and marginalized groups are increasingly subject to discrimination and abuse.

The looming environmental catastrophe of climate change, that Pope Francis addressed in *Laudato si'* (2015), is but one symptom of the malaise now personally confronting virtually everyone through the COVID pandemic (Francis, 2020, par. 32-36). Exploring the "shattered dreams" symptomatic of this crisis, nevertheless, suggests a path of renewal, given the heroic examples of love and genuine caring that have emerged, especially in the creative use of the very same social media that often subvert our capacities for human interaction (Francis, 2020, par 54-55). The point of *Fratelli tutti*, then, is to alert everyone to the nature of the obstacles preventing the recovery of our capacities for fraternity and social friendship, which he believes are indispensable to solving the world's current problems.

Pope Francis opens the search for a cure to the Earth's global malaise by exploring the New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), which Jesus used to answer the question, "Who is my neighbour?" Chapter Two of *Fratelli tutti* (Francis, 2020, pars 56-86) is his attempt to move beyond academic discussions of the parable to a properly pastoral challenge: How are each of us implicated in this story? With which characters do we identify? Nowadays, which of us thinks and acts like the Samaritan? Would we regard him as Good, were we to hear a story like his, or would we dismiss him as merely foolish and inconsequential, someone who just might

get singled out for praise on a television evening news programme, but who is quickly forgotten as a distraction from today's serious business?

Pope Francis' interpretation of the Parable, however, emphasises its social realism. The various characters in the story, the traveller assaulted and left for dead by robbers, the various passers-by, the Samaritan who shows care for the traveller, the innkeeper with whom he leaves the traveller and to whom he gives instructions on managing his recovery, each in turn is analysed so that the tale becomes as vivid as a traffic accident, and the all-too-human onlookers who pass on without stopping to help its victims. The story in the Pope's telling is about boundaries, the borders we defend in limiting our empathy and thus our capacity to respond. Such barriers to empathy are highlighted in the Parable by the fact that the assault victim as well as the passers-by are orthodox Jews while the one who responds is a Samaritan, a member of a group whose religious practices met with disapproval in Jerusalem. The boundaries in this case are religious, but in the Pope's telling, they challenge us to consider the borders that divide us, based on race, ethnicity, social status, poverty, political ideologies, and cultural diversity. The project of renewing our commitment to fraternity and social friendship means setting aside these boundaries, and coming, as the Good Samaritan did, to treat each person in need as our neighbour.

The chapters following this meditation on the Parable envision a world of "open borders", but the point is not simply to confront the structures enforcing the nation-state sovereignty system. Pope Francis contends that the removal of barriers preventing the realization of universal fraternity and social friendship must start with a change of heart that, in turn, will heal our indifference and self-centeredness (Francis, 2020, par 89), giving us a fresh start in learning to communicate and cooperate with one another. The invitation to change is personal, but the consequences of such a change are emphatically

social and global.

Chapter Three begins the process of reconstruction by recalling the main tenets of CST. The core, not surprisingly, is love. But in Pope Francis' vision, as in the consistent teachings of his predecessors, the love invoked is emphatically Christian, indeed "infused" (Francis, 2020, par 91), ultimately a gift of the Holy Spirit that overcomes the limitations all-too-often imposed by the exclusionary tendencies of human bonding. Giving free reign to real love results in genuinely "open societies," that is, the creation of communities remaining open to foreigners, overcoming racism (Francis, 2020, par 97), and reaching out to the "hidden exiles" among us, while working toward inclusion for persons with disabilities and the elderly (Francis, 2020, par 98). Genuine love means embracing "diversity" (Francis, 2020, par 100), as opposed to succumbing to "the one-dimensional uniformity" evident in social media indifferent to such love.

While Pope Francis sometimes invokes conventional slogans like the French Revolution's "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," in his hands these terms have their true meaning restored, thus creating fresh openness to a social vision that is centred on respect for human dignity and a commitment to human rights (Francis, 2020, par 107). He notes pointedly that conventional ideas about "equality of opportunity"—all-too-often touted as a revolutionary moral ideal—simply do not capture the agenda implicit in fraternity and social friendship. "Such opportunity societies are not yet on track to achieve the common good" (Francis, 2020, par 109). By contrast, the common good will emerge as one of the "Fruits of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), namely, as the impulse "to help individuals and societies to mature in the moral values that foster integral human development" (Francis, 2020, par 112).

"Integral human development," an important theme in CST first advanced in Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) in his approach to humanise economic development,

is resonant with “*benevolentia*,” an attitude—as Pope Francis emphasises—that “wills the good” of others: “It bespeaks a yearning for goodness, an inclination towards all that is fine and excellent, a desire to fill the lives of others with what is beautiful, sublime and edifying” (Francis, 2020, par 112). *Fratelli tutti*’s discussion of benevolence identifies it with a term more familiar in recent CST, namely, “solidarity” (Francis, 2020, pars 114-117). Solidarity is the result of an educational process, which starts from what is learned naturally in families¹. Solidarity, as Pope Francis reminds us, is

a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion, [that] calls for commitment on the part of those responsible for education and formation. I think first of families, called to a primary and vital mission of education. Families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on.” (Francis, 2020, par 114)

A genuine commitment to solidarity, that is, “service” to people especially the poor and needy, leads to social action:

It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history, and this is what popular movements are doing. (Francis, 2020, par 116)

Pope Francis concludes his review of CST, by

¹ Pope Francis’ discussion of benevolence is strikingly similar to the Way of Confucius, particularly in the pedagogical dynamics of moral development within the family. What he notes in passing on benevolence may confirm for many the need to dialogue with China on CST’s convergences with Chinese moral philosophy. See the essays in Antonio Spadaro’s *La Chiesa in Cina: Un Futuro da scrivere*, as reviewed in the *Macau Ricci Institute Journal*, Vol 5 (McCann, 2019, pp. 107-117).

highlighting the moral challenge perennially implicit in it, namely, its counter-cultural affirmation of the “social role of property.” CST has never denied that the right to private property is a basic human right, but it has always insisted on the “common destination of created goods” (Francis, 2020, par 119), which overrides any attempt to absolutise this right. The common destination of created goods is the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order” (Francis, 2020, par 120). The right to private property thus must be regarded as “a secondary natural right derived from the universal destination of created goods.”

The practical consequences of CST remain radical and wide-ranging. The emigration and immigration of peoples, for example, must not be restricted or prevented simply to protect some group’s property rights, at the expense of others who lack access to the “created goods” necessary for human survival and flourishing (Francis, 2020, par 121-127). Similarly, the question of international indebtedness, of one country’s debts to other countries, cannot be resolved simply on the basis of property rights. Openness to structured settlements, including renegotiation and even debt forgiveness, are morally obligatory, given an overriding concern to acknowledge CST’s consistent teaching on the “common destination of created goods.”

In subsequent chapters, *Fratelli tutti* outlines the steps to be taken, if a solidarity inspired by fraternity and social friendship is to be pursued. Chapter Four, “A Heart Open to the Whole World” (Francis, 2020, pars 128-153), focuses on the spiritual and psychological transformation that individual persons as well as communities must attempt to effect the changes that must come, if humanity is to be saved from itself. How must we confront, for example, the attitudes that prevent a fair and equitable resolution of the problems evident in the migrations of economic and social refugees, now underway both globally and locally? Pope Francis goes to the heart

of the matter, questioning the significance of national borders and their enforcement, and of maintaining boundaries among peoples for one reason or another. His response is not to abolish all borders and boundaries, but to promote international cooperation and planning designed to safeguard the dignity and human rights, not only of migrants, but also of those who must accommodate them as they are relocated.

To be taken seriously, his proposals require not just a familiarity with demographic statistics, but also a re-envisioning of our common humanity, the personal stake that each of us has in the flourishing of all other people. Citing the experience of his Italian immigrant ancestors in Argentina (Francis, 2020, par 135), he tries to dramatise the change of heart that emerges when fraternity and social friendship animate our collaborations, for example, in addressing concretely and practically the challenge of balancing “local” and “universal” cultural concerns (Francis, 2020, par 142-153). To create such a society, what is needed is a realisation of how, in fact, people are enriched by practicing “the principle of gratuitousness” (Francis, 2020, par 139-141), memorably explained in Pope Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in veritate* (2009).

Chapter Five, “A Better Kind of Politics” (Francis, 2020, pars 154-197) outlines an approach that demonstrates the practical consequences of genuine solidarity. Pope Francis begins with a criticism of the current political situation, in which a sterile polarization between populism and liberalism (Francis, 2020, pars 155-175) has created the greatest obstacle to the realization of fraternity and social friendship. The stalemate between populism and liberalism cannot be broken by either of them. Inspired by the rediscovery of the significance of “social and political charity” (Francis, 2020, pars 176-185), the way forward must begin with a renewed commitment to reforming the United Nations (Francis, 2020, par 173), thus working toward a rebalancing of international relations consistent

with CST’s Principle of Subsidiarity (Francis, 2020, par 175). But as Pope Francis observes, “Global society is suffering from grave structural deficiencies that cannot be resolved by piecemeal solutions or quick fixes. Much needs to change, through fundamental reform and major renewal” (Francis, 2020, par 179). Sustainability must be the long-term goal of a new form of international politics.

Chapter Six, Seven, and Eight, “Dialogue and Friendship in Society” (Francis, 2020, pars 198-224), “Paths of Renewed Encounter” (Francis, 2020, pars 225-270), and “Religions at the Service of Fraternity in our World” (Francis, 2020, pars 271-286), spell out in some detail what Pope Francis means by “dialogue” and why he thinks it is the key to a global transformation consistent with fraternity and social friendship. If dialogue is to be genuine, it must be rooted in an unflinching pursuit of truth. It is not simply an “exchange of opinions” (Francis, 2020, par 199), which unfailingly deteriorates into a “relativism” (Francis, 2020, par 206) from which nothing new or transformative can emerge. Genuine dialogue must be based on a willingness to be self-critical, a willingness to learn from others, beyond superficial disagreements, however intensely felt. Such dialogue, then, can become the basis for “a culture of encounter,” the development of habits of the heart that are open to “the joy of acknowledging others” (Francis, 2020, par 218-221). The promised result Pope Francis describes as “kindness”—understood in a Biblical sense as *chrestótes*—which “Saint Paul describes (Gal 5:22) as a fruit of the Holy Spirit” (Francis, 2020, par 223).

If a return to the practices of genuine dialogue is to yield “a culture of encounter,” what are the characteristics of such a culture? Chapter Seven, “Paths of Renewed Encounter” (Francis, 2020, par 225-270), proposes several benchmarks that signal progress in “peacemaking”:

Every peace process requires enduring commitment. It is a patient effort to seek

truth and justice, to honour the memory of victims and to open the way, step by step, to a shared hope stronger than the desire for vengeance.” (Francis, 2020, par 226)

While the characteristics of genuine dialogue, challengingly redescribed as the Fruits of the Spirit, are the same at all levels, in this chapter Pope Francis describes their impact in international relations. He highlights important lessons to be learned from the “truth and reconciliation” processes that have seen success in South Africa and Korea (Francis, 2020, par 229). Within this context he explains the Latin American bishops’ advocacy of an “option for the poor” (Francis, 2020, par 233-235), and “the value and meaning of forgiveness” as the “best way to move on” beyond otherwise intractable social conflicts (Francis, 2020, pars 241-245). What he means by forgiveness is clarified in contrast to the conventional attitude of “forgive and forget.” Genuine dialogue is not about forgetting, which is impossible in any case, but in remembering well the complicity of all participants in the conflicts that must be ended (Francis, 2020, par 245-249).

As an example of the complicity that must be remembered and forgiven, Pope Francis clarifies the Church’s traditionally nuanced teachings on violence in the form of war and the death penalty (Francis, 2020, pars 255-270). If dialogue is to be genuine and effective, the traditions of CST that offered moral justification for some acts of organised violence must be re-examined and set aside in the realization that at bottom all wars and all executions are unjust, involving egregious assaults upon human dignity as well as multiplying the risks of environmental catastrophe. While his remarks on war and the death penalty are offered in the context of a chapter on the dynamics of dialogue in international relations, in themselves they represent an important milestone in the development of CST and as such deserve serious study by Catholic moralists.

The final chapter, “Religions at the Service of Fraternity in our World” (Francis, 2020, pars 271-286), concludes *Fratelli tutti* with a recognition that the world’s religions must demonstrate leadership in creating the “culture of encounter” that should emerge from genuine dialogue. The challenge to religious leaders is twofold: first, they must not allow their understandable desire to preserve the distinctive identities of their religious traditions stand in the way of collaboration expressing a unity of concern to address the world’s problems; second, they must defend the rights of all religions to participate in international dialogue, recognising that any attempt to marginalise or suppress religious perspectives is a threat to all religions and their service to fraternity and social friendship. Interreligious dialogue and collaboration clearly are an important part of creating and sustaining a “culture of encounter” on a global level, but its importance can only be recognised if religions practice what they preach, namely, a common commitment to peace-making, a repudiation of violence, and principled resistance against religiously inspired forms of terrorism (Francis, 2020, pars 281-285) within their own traditions and communities.

Pope Francis concludes *Fratelli tutti* where it began, with a recollection of his own dialogue with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb and their mutual pledges to support this agenda: “In the name of God and of everything stated thus far, [we] declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard” (Francis, 2020, par 285).

Fratelli tutti, then, is a comprehensive updating of CST in the tradition of similar encyclicals issued by Pope Francis’ predecessors, starting with Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* (1891). The distinctive contribution of this

encyclical is its focus on dialogue or human communication systems, their systematic distortion, and the resources for restoring them in a search for genuine moral consensus. The encyclical embodies the Pope's own efforts to model effective communication and to reach out to all those who are experiencing the alienation of a digitalised and globalising technocratic culture, which not only has lost its anchoring in basic human values, but also seems incapable of addressing the pandemic of global problems that threaten humanity's survival.

Restoring our capacities for dialogue, in this context, is no placebo, no set of pious platitudes to be dismissed as preliminary to an examination of CST's real message. The collaborative pursuit of truth, our ability to discover it through the processes of dialogue outlined in *Fratelli tutti*, becomes foregrounded as a challenge transcending all other social concerns. As the Bible says, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). If we cannot recover our capacity for recognising the truth, and acting upon it socially and politically, we forge the chains of our own enslavement. Fraternity and social friendship, then, must mark the path of recovery, in all the many ways that challenge us in *Fratelli tutti*.



DENNIS P. McCANN, Director of Research,
Rothlin Ltd, Co-Editor, Macau Ricci Institute
Journal

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