



## Just Peace and Pope Francis' encyclical Fratelli Tutti

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### Introduction

For Pope Francis, peace, security and the flourishing of people and the planet are grounded in right relationships with God, each other, and the whole of creation. However, each of these relationships is wounded and in need of reconciliation. This basic stance is clear in both of his social encyclicals. *Fratelli Tutti* focuses on fraternity and social friendship, while living in a 'sublime communion' with all of creation receives greater attention in *Laudato Si'*.

If the great insight of *Laudato Si'* is that 'everything is connected', perhaps the key insight of *Fratelli Tutti* is that 'everyone is connected'. Security and peace are global questions in which the whole human family must be engaged. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis identifies several things that we often place trust in, but which do not really make us secure or cultivate peace:

- The accumulation of material goods
- Control over scarce resources
- A balance of power
- The possession of weapons, especially nuclear weapons
- Closed borders and keeping 'strangers' out.

Pope Francis begins *Fratelli Tutti* by contemplating the world, noting "dark clouds over a closed world" and identifying "trends in our world that hinder the development of universal fraternity". These trends get in the way of our sense of being sisters and brothers to each other and members of one human family as children of God. They include:

- shattered dreams of peace,
- economic globalisation (n 12) and new forms of cultural colonisation (n 14),
- widespread social exclusion, and political visions that are 'lacking a plan for everyone',
- the lack of truly universal respect for human rights, e.g., women's rights, new forms of slavery (n 22-24),
- a throwaway world that even considers some people disposable (n 18 – 21),
- conflict and fear,
- hostility towards migrants and refugees (n 36 – 41), and
- the challenge of authentic encounter and communication in our digital world; Pope Francis is very concerned that we are losing the ability to sit down and listen to one another, to seek the truth in dialogue (n48).

Francis sums this up by saying that “the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading” (n 30).

One key to understanding a document is to consider its purpose, or why it was written. Francis himself says that *Fratelli Tutti* is a response to “present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others” and that he wants instead to promote “a new vision of fraternity and social friendship” (n 6). The encyclical appeals to everyone to “acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives” (n 1).

Some of the major themes and concerns of the encyclical are:

- Racism and hostile responses to asylum seekers, migrants, and migration,
- The dynamic of exclusion, including the exclusion of people with disabilities even within the Church,
- Popularism, liberalism and the need for “a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good” (n 154),
- the need for more effective international institutions,
- Nurturing a culture of dialogue and encounter,
- Peacebuilding and reconciliation, war, and the death penalty,
- The potential of religions to serve fraternity

Like *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti* is also a call to continuing conversion:

“Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realised every day.” (n 11)

Embracing a culture of encounter and dialogue is central to this conversion. I will offer some reflections on these themes and how they connect with social relations in Australia and internationally. But first, a word on Francis’ vision of an open world, animated by universal love.

### [An Open World Animated by Universal Love](#)

At the heart of Pope Francis’ commitment to social friendship and the dignity of every person is his belief in one human family. We are all children of God regardless of our beliefs. This encyclical challenges Christians to work actively for the rights of other believers who are minorities, just as Christians ask that our freedom and rights be respected.

*Fratelli Tutti* invites all believers to return to our sources and concentrate on what is essential – worship of God and love for our neighbor. This is a timely message when so much in popular culture encourages us to make ‘gods’ of possessions or celebrity and to think only of ourselves. *Fratelli Tutti* issues a strong challenge to xenophobia and an exaggerated focus on national self-interest. It encourages social and economic inclusion at all levels and stresses that all human beings are sisters and brothers, members of one human family.

### [Dialogue](#)

The sixth chapter of *Fratelli Tutti* explores dialogue and social friendship in society, consensus and truth, and the recovery of kindness.

In a world marked by the “parallel monologues” of social media (n 200), Francis calls for real dialogue in which we approach, speak, listen, look at, come to know and to understand one another, and find common ground (n 198). He says that “no one can possess the whole truth or satisfy his or

her every desire” and so we need a “dialogic realism” in which we remain faithful to our own principles while recognising that others also have the right to do the same (n 221).

Such hospitality towards all people, their experiences, and perspectives, is a core part of the content of the encyclical and it is reflected in its methodology. *Fratelli Tutti* endorses and promotes perspectivalism in theological ethics by rejecting relativism while affirming the importance of an historically conscious approach that attends to multiple perspectives and experiences. This is a return to the approach of Pope Paul VI after the personalism of John Paul II and the classicism of Benedict XVI.

Truth is not relative – it is not a matter of ‘my truth’ and ‘your truth’, or of ‘alternative facts’. Rather, when we acknowledge with humility that none of us possess the truth in its entirety, we understand that we need to consider everyone’s perspectives if we are to be seekers and doers of truth. It is not that consensus makes a thing true but rather that through dialogue and being “unafraid to the get to the heart of an issue” (n 212) we may discover or uncover truth and enduring values. We see this approach embodied in the way the encyclical quotes the teachings of a range of national bishops’ conferences and especially in the way in which it honours the contribution of the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb.

- We might ask if the Australian Government is engaged in a “parallel monologue” with China?
- Is talking past one another a key dynamic of the unofficial election campaign that has begun?

Pope Francis is critical of the “illusion of communication” in our digital world and “information without wisdom” (n 42-50). He says that “the ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives” (n 48).

I think this is an area where Francis’ Ignatian spirituality is evident. The Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus approved by Pope Julius III in 1550 includes in the purpose of the Society the reconciliation of the estranged.<sup>1</sup> Hence number 650 of the Constitutions of the Society includes in a list of ministries, “the reconciliation of quarreling parties”.<sup>2</sup>

From the late medieval period to today, a presupposition encouraged by Ignatius of Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises helps to equip Jesuits for this task. The Exercises are a primary source of Ignatian spirituality that shape the ministry of all Jesuits.<sup>3</sup> As Thomas Massaro SJ explains:

Nowhere in the Spiritual Exercises are the techniques of formal mediation treated, but very early in the text, Ignatius commends a principle of constructive interaction that is highly relevant to the task of peacemaking. Number 22 is labeled “Presupposition”... As a basic principle of dialogue, Ignatius urges: “Let it be presupposed that every good Christian is to be more ready to save his neighbor’s proposition than to condemn it. If he cannot save it, let him inquire how he means it; and if he means it badly, let him correct him with charity.” The paraphrase offered by David Fleming of the literal rendering of this paragraph from the Latin text includes the terms “mutual respect,” “favorable interpretation” and “Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Society of Jesus, “The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms” (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 4. Reconciliation was added to the purpose of the Society that had been set out in the original Formula approved by Pope Paul III in 1540. The 1550 version of the Formula remains in force today.

<sup>2</sup> Society of Jesus, 298.

<sup>3</sup> St Ignatius of Loyola, “The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius” (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

understanding,” all of which are in service of developing “a good relationship” between parties in dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

- How can we nurture this ability within Australian society, in regional relations, and international relations?
- How can we create spaces for real dialogue?

In *Laudato Si'* Francis names the existing conflicts over resources such as water and anticipates that they will escalate unless things change. But this is not the only way in which ecological questions impact security and the possibility of real peace. It is not just about resolving specific conflicts. Pasquale Ferrara notes two ways of “rethinking security in the Anthropocene” the most common of which is “a re-articulation in terms of environmental security, understood as a potential violent struggle over scarce natural resources”. The second builds on the concept of ecological security by “focusing on the close ties between the human and non-human world, tracing the implications of an understanding of the world in terms of the complex interdependence of ecosystems.” However, he concludes that “the real paradigm shift” required is a “rethinking of politics itself as something other than security politics, as a politics of vulnerability”.<sup>5</sup>

This would require dialogue across a vast range of disciplines - and a dialogue with the rest of creation.

- Who and what do we need to engage as dialogue partners at this time?

Speaking of who we engage as dialogue partners, it is interesting that Francis does not reference John Paul II's teaching on dialogue. Perhaps this is because Francis wishes to live a form of dialogue and encounter within the church – a synodality or journeying together - that is distinctively different from John Paul II's agenda of emphasising the role of the universal teachings. His teaching on dialogue was directed more to the community of nations than to the community of the church and I think its impact was affected by the contrast between the internal life of the church and what was being asked of others.

Francis' appeal for the recovery of kindness may seem quaint (n 222) but I think it is linked to embracing a politics of vulnerability. When we look to the needs of others, and of all, rather than only to our own interests, we leave ourselves vulnerable. However, the attention to others required by kindness entails noticing their vulnerability too. Francis says that because kindness “entails esteem and respect for others” if it becomes part of the culture of a society it “transforms lifestyles, relationships and the way ideas are discussed and compared” and it “facilitates the quest for consensus” and “opens new paths where hostility and conflict would burn all bridges” (n 224).

Dialogue is one of the essential ingredients of what Francis calls a ‘culture of encounter’.

## A Culture of Encounter

The seventh chapter of *Fratelli Tutti* focuses on a culture of encounter. It discusses the art and architecture of peace, memory, forgiveness, the death penalty, and war.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Massaro, “The Peace Advocacy of Pope Francis: Jesuit Perspectives,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 8 (2021): 531.

<sup>5</sup> Pasquale Ferrara, “Sustainable International Relations. Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the Planetary Implications of ‘Integral Ecology,’” *Religions* 10 (2019): 465, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel10080466>.

Francis says that a culture of encounter means that we “should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone” and that this should become “an aspiration and a style of life” (n 216). He urges us to “hear the true stories” of victims of violence and people pushed to the edges, to “look at reality through their eyes” and to “listen with an open heart to the stories that they tell” (n 261).

This is the opposite of the globalization of indifference that Francis so frequently decries. It also sounds like the opposite of Australian politics right now.

- How do we change the politics of division and self-interest, and the creation of enemies to fear?
- How do we change the deliberate isolation and dehumanization of asylum seekers and prisoners?
- How do we build willingness to listen to the true history of this country with an open heart?

### Memory, truth and forgiveness

Francis says that there is an ‘architecture’ of peace that requires the engagement of institutions but there is also an ‘art’ of peace that involves all of us (n 231). Ordinary people need to be involved in peace processes; these cannot remain at the level of politics, law, or diplomacy.

The path to peace begins with the historical truth of events and the cultivation of a “penitential memory” in order to open the way to a “a shared hope stronger than the desire for vengeance” (n 226) or as the Bishops of the Congo say, “people have the right to know what happened” (n 226). Francis goes on to say that the path to peace “entails acknowledging the possibility that others have, at least in part, a legitimate point of view, something worthwhile to contribute, even if they were in error or acted badly” (n 228). He notes the South African Bishops’ view that reconciliation is achieved proactively “by forming a new society, a society based on service to others” (n 229) and that the Bishops of South Korea seek peace by striving for “justice through dialogue, pursuing reconciliation and mutual development” (n 229).

Forgiveness and reconciliation are central themes in many religions, including Christianity, but Francis points out that the call to love everyone without exception does not mean allowing oppressors to continue oppressing others (n 241). Nor can a sort of ‘social forgiveness’ be demanded from those who have endured injustice (n 246).

True forgiveness does not mean forgetting but rather remembering. The nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Shoa must never be forgotten. The memory of the victims awakens our consciences to break the cycle of oppression and revenge.

### Just War Theory

Pope Francis, like so many of his predecessors, sees a positive role for the observance of juridical norms and the observation and application of the Charter of the United Nations in preventing war, but it is the development of mutual trust to which he gives greater emphasis (n 262).

While there is not much new content in *Fratelli Tutti*, there is innovation in what Francis chooses to emphasise, and what he emphatically deemphasises. Some hoped that in this encyclical Francis would finally rule out the use of the Just War Theory. He does not do this, but he certainly deemphasises it.

Pope Francis criticizes the frequent use of “an overly broad interpretation” (n 258) of Just War criteria to justify wars. He also says:

“We can no longer think of war as a solution because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘just war’. Never again war!” (n 258).

He is clearly not a fan of the Just War Theory however striking it out of the Catechism (as he did with the last justifications for the use of the death penalty) is simply not Pope Francis’ project. He says instead:

“... let us not remain mired in theoretical discussions, but touch the wounded flesh of the victims... let us hear the true stories of these victims of violence, look at reality through their eyes, and listen with an open heart to the stories that they tell. In this way, we will be able to grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war. Nor will it trouble us to be deemed naïve for choosing peace.” (n 261)

He is privileging contemplation of reality and embodied encounter as starting points over abstract ideas.

- How can we develop and embed processes of encounter in our efforts?
- How can we ensure that our action at the international, regional as well as local levels are always based in a culture of encounter?

### Conclusion: Francis’ Vision in Australia

Francis’ choice of the language of ‘fraternity’ and ‘social friendship’ emphasizes an ethic of care and relationship – just like *Laudato Si’* does. By contrast, the language of ‘the unity of the human family’ and ‘solidarity’ which are more common in the modern social teachings, is used sparingly. The emphasis is on being called by love rather than driven by duty or constrained by law. It is a move from a focus on duty ethics to virtue ethics. Francis’ tone is encouraging and appeals to our hearts as much as our heads.

What might such an ethic of care and a culture of encounter look like in Australia?

### Welcoming the Stranger

Migration is a key issue in *Fratelli Tutti*. Pope Francis says that we are “obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfillment” (n 129). He sets out a range of ‘indispensable steps’ needed in response to people who are fleeing (n 130). They include for example:

- Increasing and simplifying the granting of visas
- Adopting programs of individual and community sponsorship
- Opening humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable refugees
- Providing suitable and dignified housing
- Guaranteeing personal security and access to basic services
- Equitable access to the justice system
- The possibility of opening bank accounts and the guarantee of the minimum needed to survive
- Freedom of movement and the possibility of employment

- Protecting minors and ensuring their regular access to education
- Promoting integration into society
- Supporting the reuniting of families
- Preparing local communities for the process of integration.

The contrast with Australia's refugee and asylum seeker policies could not be starker. There is nothing in that list for which we could give ourselves an unqualified tick – it is a description of what needs to be done.

The fear of strangers and racism run deep in Australian society. In this context use of the *Migration Amendment (Strengthening the Character Test) Bill 2021*, as a 'national security test' for the opposition is almost as odious as this unnecessary bill itself.

The major political parties must be persuaded to relinquish the politics of fear and exclusion, but this will only happen when enough people stop responding to the dog whistle. What community-based groups know works in changing hearts and minds is embodied human encounter. Welcome dinners and all manner of events that enable people to meet one another are practices of a culture of encounter.

#### A Better Kind of Politics

The far-sighted, integral, and interdisciplinary approach to handling different aspects of the current crisis with a focus on the long-term common good (n 177) for which Francis calls is sorely needed in Australia. A federal integrity commission and reform of the political donation laws would go some way towards supporting the realization of the vision of politics as "something more noble than posturing, marketing and media spin" (n 197).

The Vatican's COVID-19 Commission is providing thought leadership on how to build back better, kinder, and greener after the pandemic which Australian Governments would do well to consider. The stimulus that our economy continues to need could be an opportunity to lift people relying on social welfare benefits out of poverty, to facilitate a just carbon transition, build more social housing and invest in community services.

We could also benefit from taking to heart Pope Francis' call for the patient building of dialogue and friendship in society rather than parallel monologues and the social media pile-on culture. It was heartening to see the Australian Bishops' Statement *Making it Real: Genuine human encounter in our digital world* quoted at n 205 in the encyclical!

We need to create spaces and processes in which we can really listen to one another, accept differences, and seek the truth together.

#### Reconciliation

*Fratelli Tutti's* reflections on truth, forgiveness and reconciliation hold important messages for our journey towards a just relationship with First Nations people and communities. For instance, Pope Francis says that "we can never move forward without remembering the past; we do not progress without an honest and unclouded memory" (n 249) and that we cannot demand a "sort of social forgiveness" of those who "have endured much unjust and cruel suffering" (n 246).

The Uluru Statement from the Heart can provide an element of 'architecture' while all of us can cultivate the 'art' of seeking out and listening to the voice of First Nations people and communities.

#### No to War

If war is never a solution and the very possession of nuclear weapons is immoral, we must ask questions about the nature of Australia's defense expenditure and the ambition to become a major player in the arms trade. The AUKUS submarines contract affair has undermined trust, entangled us more deeply in the nuclear cycle, and increased costs. It is hard to see how it makes us safer or promotes peace.