


Article

Communicating Transcendent Love: Interpersonal Encounter and Church–State Transitions in *Fratelli tutti*

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Abstract: This essay analyzes Pope Francis’ social teaching on relationality within his 2020 encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti* [Brothers all]. The relationship between the Church and modern nation-states is an important macro-level social dynamic, and Francis explains it by placing Church–State relations into a broader spiritual context of human communication and interaction. He articulates norms of fraternal contact growing from the bottom-up, that is, from interpersonal encounters through groups and movements on to countries and the United Nations. After a focused research question and discussion of critical method, this article offers a rhetorical critique of *Fratelli tutti*. To provide context, it explains the genres of Judeo-Christian and papal communication, Francis’ biography, and the immediate global context of his encyclical. Working within the text, this study details the Biblical foundations of his argument for “fraternity and social friendship” and shows how they are applied to global social media dystopia and accelerating migration/border crises. Conclusions include the utility of Francis’ *contact* terms in analyzing complex religio-political dynamics and their value in advancing peace.



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1. Invocation

“Every commitment inspired by the Church’s social doctrine is ‘derived from charity, which according to the teaching of Jesus is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36–40)’. This means acknowledging that ‘love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world’. For this reason, charity finds expression not only in close and intimate relationships but also in ‘macro-relationships: social, economic and political.’” Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*. (Francis 2020, § 218)

2. Introduction—Church and State Post-Enlightenment

One of many 21st century transitions turns toward the pervasive role of religion in geopolitics. Religious nationalism is on the rise, with regular displays of extremism marking highly visible edges of much broader “new configurations of alliances and conflicts between religious institutions and the state” (Denysenko 2022; see also Friedland 2001; Safran 2008). This era is changing, with agents of both violence and peace citing religious motivation, often from within the same traditions. While Enlightenment leaders and secular modernism posited and legislated clear divisions between Church and State, today theorists attempt a more holistic recognition of situated interdependence.¹ When people and social systems flourish and decay in collaboratively constituted relation, separation becomes a structural impossibility.² Political actors, groups, and institutions are increasingly seen as diverse and intersectional, simultaneously public and private, political and personal, religious and pragmatic (Crenshaw 1989).

Today's step from independence and sovereignty toward integral relation, recognizing religious dimensions in institutions and offices that were explicitly designed to be secular, has not been a smooth process.³ For instance, the USA is a country founded on firm Enlightenment era distinctions between Church and State; a separation that has not proven stable of late. Today's entire ladder of political offices appears fraught with religious meaning and energy. From marriage license clerk ethics all the way up through Supreme Court Justice denominations, presidential Bible grips, and eucharist approvals, religious and political power can appear completely merged.⁴ It may feel new and even revolutionary to relatively young nation-states and their leaders. However, denying humanity's religion-politics complex is no longer an option. Secularist arguments for confining religion to a private sphere repeatedly and tragically fall before international crisis cycles. Non-state religious terrorism, normalized violence and warfare, escalating environmental degradation, rampant economic exploitation, and large-scale refugee immigration all drive research and vigorous debate on the intersection of politics and religion. For an aggregate view, the Pew Research Center lists twelve sub-categories of religion research. Of the twelve, only two, "Beliefs and Practices" and "Religious Education and Knowledge", tend to be directed internally within particular traditions. The remaining ten categories all bear on religions in complex socio-political contexts. "Religion and Politics", "Religion and Government", and "Religion and Social Values" are all vital research trends tracking dynamic institutions (Pew Research Center 2022).

In contrast to modern states, the Catholic Church is ancient. It offers pre-modern terms and spiritual practices for engaging violent and abusive socio-political crises. Contra terrorism and violence, this article argues that religion does not necessarily drive aggressive systems; it can also provide integral values and foster historically proven practices enabling peace.⁵

This essay analyzes Pope Francis' social teaching on relationality within his encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti* [Brothers all] (Francis 2020). The relationship between the Church and modern nation-states is an important macro-level social dynamic, and Francis explains it by placing Church-State relations into a broader spiritual context of human communication and interaction. He articulates norms of fraternal *contact* growing from the bottom-up; that is, from interpersonal encounter through groups and movements on to countries and the United Nations. After a focused research question and discussion of critical method, this article offers a rhetorical critique of *Fratelli tutti*. To provide context, it explains the genres of Judeo-Christian and papal communication, Francis' biography, and the immediate global context of his encyclical. Working within the text, this study details the Biblical foundations of his argument for "fraternity and social friendship" and shows how they are applied to global social media dystopia and accelerating migration/border crises. Conclusions include the utility of Francis' contact terms in analyzing complex religio-political dynamics and their value in advancing peace.

2.1. Research Question

This article approaches Pope Francis' teaching in his 2020 encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti* as an especially significant example of peace advocacy in international relations. It invites readers to ask: How do Pope Francis' diplomacy and teachings on macro-level international and Church-State relations reshape and redefine the intersection of religion and politics in a changing world?

2.2. Method

The research method applied is a close textual analysis. Repeated careful, critical, and methodical readings of a key rhetorical artifact can yield knowledge about how leaders work to frame issues and advocate for causes. Unpacking and detailing a rhetor's arguments can aid scholars in discerning shades of meaning and assessing degrees of validity. To define rhetoric, the authors use the "dimensional" approach to cultural texts as described by Brummett (1991). The "rhetorical dimension" is the part of an act or object

influencing the creation, maintenance, and opposition of social meanings. Where most readers engage most texts briefly and then move on, rhetorical critics return to the same text again and again in a hermeneutic cycle that traces patterns of both internal resonance (within the artifact) and external influence within genre and society (Black 1978; Kennedy 1984; Burgchart and Jones 2017).

Following Kenneth Burke's foundational work in *The Rhetoric of Religion*, this critical analysis maps patterns of "identification and division" advocated by the text (Burke 1961). Identificatory appeals affirm shared "substance" between the rhetor and audience, while divisive appeals draw distinctions between groups. Persuasion can be achieved via divisive rhetoric, as with invective or a war rally, but appeals to identification can also "induce" bonding around transcendent human universals (Burke 1950). Rhetorical elements including genre and literary style, argument structure, mode of address, metaphors, and archetypes are analyzed to explain how persuasive efforts like encyclicals influence social dynamics (Herrick 2012).

Burke argues that rhetorical symbolism induces attitudes toward history and one another, instead of merely persuading audiences to adopt proposals (Burke 1937, 1950). These attitudes range across our entire range of relationality, from flattery, sophistry, and manipulation up through honorable leadership and genuine love. The words rhetors use generally contrast with scientific discourse. Empiricists make true or false statements about reality (the scene), but rhetors speak more in gray zones of opinion, belief, and power, so they are more or less morally influential, not more or less accurate. In this way, rhetoric forms people disposed to act—this is the Burkean "identification" process. Identities manifest attitudes as we decide to act in a particular way, mode, or style, and not others. In this sense, rhetoric induces audiences to become certain kinds of people, such as someone who engages faithfully or lovingly or aggressively or disengages quickly, and so on across all possible permutations of symbolic acts.

Lastly, our critical method approaches *Fratelli tutti* as a "contact rhetoric". Where discursive rhetorical theory (including much of Burke) is predicated on symbolism and artful abstractions, contact rhetorical theory directs attention to physically embodied interaction dynamics (love, war, flight, etc.) to highlight ethical communication patterns (Radwan 2012). Following discussions of genre, authorship, situation, argument, and style, this close-reading outlines Francis' contact archetype and traces associated norms through both direct (international borders) and mediated (virtual/online) contact patterns.

3. Contexts: Judeo-Christian and Papal Communication as Genres

Research on the socio-cultural context is an essential first step in understanding how a text does rhetorical work. *Fratelli tutti* has been translated into a dozen languages and distributed globally. It is a long letter from Pope Francis addressed to "all" (§ 1), and while it can and should be read by anyone anywhere, it is not an isolated piece of discourse.⁶ In context, Francis' letter is the cresting edge of an ancient religious movement with its own distinct understanding of the universe as God's creation and humanity as His image. This section describes the theological significance of all communication in the Judeo-Christian tradition and then situates *Fratelli tutti* within the powerful sub-genre of papal discourse.⁷ Christianity has an original and constitutive relationship with communication. Scripture and discourse itself are infused with deep spiritual-relational significance across the entire tradition. As Rowan Williams explains, "[w]e meet God as 'word', as communication, in the world, in Jesus, and in the Biblical record, because the action of God is always communicative, designed to transform our knowing and feeling selves" (Williams 2003, p. 77). A full account of the spiritual power of God's Word is beyond any article's scope; here, brief readings of Genesis and Jesus' ministry establish a Christian interpretive frame for *Fratelli tutti*.⁸

Growing from centuries of oral storytelling, the Hebrew Bible achieved the written form between 450 BCE and 200 CE, roughly. It opens with creation stories (cosmogony), relating how God *speaks* the world into existence. In Genesis 1, the spoken word is God's

primary mode of action, and He speaks both to create and to name His creations. The earth and heavens are created formless, “And God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day’, and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning the first day” (Gen. 1.3–5). This same oral creation pattern repeats throughout chapter 1. God speaks light and time into being, and then continues to speak across five more days to form and order the earth and sea and sky and flora and fauna, culminating the series with humanity. Once created, humans are God’s first addressees. He speaks *to* them, blessing them with fertility and dominion in His image. God’s sight and judgment are important secondary modes. He sees His creation is good, and then very good, and He tells humankind, male and female, it is His gift to them.

In Genesis 3, the Fall narrative advances via spoken dialogue and poses key relational challenges (human–nature, human–human, human–God). The serpent asks the first crafty question and Eve’s faithful response is met with the first lie. The serpent divides speech from reality, contradicting God and misrepresenting the nature of His creation. Eve acts on malinformation, Adam follows, and when God asks, the man expresses fear and then blames Eve. Newly “knowledgeable”, he distinguishes himself from his God-given partner, dividing their “one flesh”. God curses them all, and all are banished from His Garden.

As the ancestral narrative progresses, the consequences of humanity’s transgression and God’s curse extend into mass-scale errors and punishments, but God forms covenant relationships with faithful individuals Noah, and then Abraham, and then Moses, and commits to their descendants. This is the challenging scene that Jesus is born into. Humanity has fallen and is divided from integral relationships with God and nature and each other, so even chosen people who have seen God’s miracles and know better continue to falter, as when divinely freed yet impatient Hebrews turn to idolatry at Sinai in Exodus 32.

With the New Testament, the narrative time-frame shifts from ancestral history to events recorded within the living memory of people active within the young movement. Discourse is again central and sacred Jesus *is* God’s word incarnate. As John explains, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). Jesus’ public ministry begins after temptations in the desert, where He defeats Satan by citing scripture. Jesus’ words are His Father’s words (John 14:24), and as he travels across Judea teaching and healing, he becomes widely revered. Crowds “were astonished at his teaching, for he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:21). Jesus is not a copyist reciting another’s word, He *is* an astonishing and authoritative divine Word announcing God’s kingdom and preaching love of God and neighbor.

Jesus conferred his teaching authority on his close students, the apostles, and upon His crucifixion and ascension, the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (Jn 16:13), is sent to guide teachers as they bring God’s message to the world until the end of time. Truth’s Spirit is not distinct from God. In trinitarian theology, God the Father and Jesus the Son are *one* with the Holy Spirit, God in three persons, so God is continually inspiring and guiding faithful discourse.⁹ As the young Church grew, leaders were recognized as successors of the apostles; all working as God’s emissaries across hundreds of generations. Within this expanding communication system, the goal is that audiences hear God’s truth from and through trained and committed authoritative teachers. Here, communicating God’s love is far from optional or incidental. Instead, missionary teaching, sharing God’s word and love, is a vital and constitutive act performing Christian faith.

With an informed theological context in place, the divine import of papal encyclicals as a sub-genre comes into focus. Popes are heads of state, but they are also high priests and prophets bringing God’s Word, so their discourse does not match political norms set by worldly leaders. Papal words are not just words or mere rhetorical power plays. Where a president might speak strategically, or not, papal rhetoric strives to teach lovingly.

In Latin, a *magister* is a master teacher, and in the Catholic Church, the *magisterium* references teaching from the bishops and the pope.¹⁰ Biblical figures like Paul, James, and

Peter wrote letters to teach distant communities and maintain unity within the burgeoning Christian movement. The pope is the infallible successor of Peter, the leader of all Catholic teachers worldwide, and since the 18th century, popes have increasingly relied on formal and carefully composed letters, encyclicals, to share and explain Christian principles and correct spiritual errors.¹¹ The loving truth of scripture is eternal, and God calls popes to “clarify in new contexts aspects of what has been revealed by God and to apply these understandings to what should be done in these new contexts” (Ziccardi 2018). Each new context is more than a simple material reality, it is a moment of Word-borne divine creation unfolding with and through human failings and triumphs. Carried along within the Christian relational narrative, both the movement and individuals falter as they distance themselves from God and neighbor. Conversely, faithful people and institutions are justified as they work to transcend divisions and image loving communion.

4. Authorship: Jorge Bergoglio to Pope Francis

Another key step in contextualizing discourse involves research on the rhetor. Whether in Europe or in the Americas, or even in Africa, the news about Pope Benedict XVI’s resignation in early February 2013 surprised many observers from different socio-political spheres. It was the first time in about six centuries to witness a sitting pope stepping down. However, even more surprising was the election of the Argentinian Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Bergoglio was born on 17 December 1936 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Jorge, the eldest of five children, partially spent his first twenty years living with his Italian immigrant parents, Mario José Bergoglio (1908–1959) and Regina María Sivori (1911–1981).¹² He joined the society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1951, and the novitiate seven years later (Rosales and Olivera 2013; Ivereigh 2014).¹³ While this section and the scope of this paper does not cover the details surrounding both the resignation and elections of the two popes, it will approach Pope Francis’ domestic and foreign policies as guided by his upbringing and theological views.

The arrival of a new pope elected by cardinals marks a period of continuity and/or rupture with policies and ideologies of preceding administrations. Each pope chooses the direction or emphasis of his own tenure largely based on his worldviews. Following the death of Pope John Paul II, the 115 elector cardinals of the 2005 conclave had to select one of their peers. Cardinals Joseph Ratzinger a conservative from Germany who chaired the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a moderate from Argentina, were among the finalist *papabiles* considered for the Chair of St. Peter (McCarten 2019; see also Ivereigh 2014). On 19 April 2005, late in the afternoon, with the fourth ballot on the second day of the conclave, Cardinal Ratzinger secured the election with at least 77 votes and became, at 78 years old, the successor of Pope John Paul II. He chose the name of Benedict XVI. Although many at the conclave were aware that his age could mean a relatively short papacy, they were probably not expecting to have a new conclave so soon.

On 12 March 2013, eight years after the election of Pope Benedict XVI, a new conclave was convened.¹⁴ While spiritual considerations and the role of the Holy Spirit remain essential in the papal selection process, this conclave brought in at least three additional interrelated criteria: (1) the selected pope should not only have a global view on issues, but he should also be someone the majority of Catholics and non-Catholics will identify with; (2) a pope should “energize” Catholics from different geographical and cultural areas in their missionary work as well as their religious fervor; and (3) a leader should address and promote papal internal affairs with relatively more transparency and efficiency (McCarten 2019). Two main groups of *papabiles* belonging to what Anthony McCarten identifies as candidates of either the Old World or of the New World were competing for the position. Old World candidates were from the so-called “developed” countries, and those from the New World were originally from developing countries. They both had and still have challenges in their respective nations related to religion in general and Catholicism in particular. For instance, societies in the New World (developing countries) tend to be cautious with religious influence and roles in the public sphere, and as a result

Church–State relations are contentious. This is not to say that Church–State relations are exclusively challenging in developing countries and friendly in developed ones. In the latter’s socio-political context, both religion and the Catholic Church as an institution play a vital and sometime substitute role to the State in providing, for instance, goods and services to local populations which include also political engagement (e.g., mediations, counter-power to the state, and electoral processes).

Returning to the issues regarding candidates in the two *papabile* groups, one will notice in the Old World, cardinals like Angelo Scola of Milan, Marc Ouellet of Canada, and Timothy Dolan from the United States of America. On the other side, from the New World category there were, among others, cardinals Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga from Honduras, Jorge Mario Bergoglio from Argentina, the Philippine Luis Antonio Tagle, and the late influential African, Congolese cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasigna. After six ballots conducted in two days, the new pope, the 266th, was elected by 115 cardinals eligible to vote (out of 151): the 76-year-old cardinal from Argentina, Bergoglio, received the majority of votes. As one of the papal customs preceding his initial and regnal tenure, he was “required” to choose a pontifical name. Cardinal Bergoglio chose Francis: the first pope to be named after Saint Francis of Assisi. This act of choosing a name carries key symbolic meanings which identify, on the one hand, the person and character of the new pope; and, on the other hand, also shape the kind of policies (domestic and foreign) he intends to pursue and the legacy he plans to leave in the image of the Saint. Who then was Saint Francis of Assisi, and what kind of impact did he have on Cardinal Bergoglio? Answering these questions helps to interpret and anticipate, though only partly, Pope Francis’ decision-making processes as they relate to different stakeholders, including internal audiences.

Born as Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone in 1181 or 1182, from a relatively wealthy, though probably not aristocratic, Italian-French family, Saint Francis of Assisi converted from a spiritually weak worldly lifestyle. Augustine Thompson observes that Saint Francis’ challenges were of the “spirit, not of the body” (Thompson 2012, p. 9). Elsewhere, in *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, Austen Ivereigh (2014) points out that “he spent his time in vanities” (p. 51). A moral comparison can be drawn with Saint Augustine, whose youthful experience was largely dominated by physical drives toward fornication and stealing. Regarding Saint Francis’ attitude, Thompson (2012) argues that there is no evidence of overt immorality or lust. All three cases (Saint Augustine, Saint Francis, and recently Pope Francis) demonstrate transformation from worldly desires, lusty or vain, toward God’s plan and purposes, exhibiting divine mercy and love toward sinners.

Although Saint Francis’ spiritual transformation or conversion was relatively progressive, one of its pivotal moments occurred when he received a vision from God instructing him to “go and repair my house which, as you see, is falling into ruin” (Franciscan Media 2022). This divine encounter reshaped his way of living almost completely by denying himself for the sake of the Gospel and his perception toward others. Francis was led to sacrificial decisions which his wealthy parents did not necessarily agree with. Some of the economic implications or indications, as previously noted, for Cardinal Bergoglio choosing the name “Francis” include the influence of Saint Francis in terms of theology and policy. In other words, Pope Francis’ actions are largely guided by the way in which Saint Francis has or would have lived.

Returning to Pope Francis’ biography, he grew up in a turbulent socio-political context and was not exclusively concerned about religious or spiritual matters. Argentina had a military coup six years prior to his birth followed by another one in 1943. As a result of the latter, Juan Domingo Peron was able to govern the country for several years. During those years of socio-political instability, the Argentinian Catholic Church, including the young Jorge, played an active role (e.g., mobilization, resistance, and protests), which on several occasions exacerbated Church–State tensions. Beyond the socio-political context of Argentina influencing Jorge Bergoglio as an adolescent, young priest, and bishop, one should not ignore a broader influential Latin American movement: *la teologia del pueblo* (the

theology of the people). The demarcation line between the theology of the people and its more controversial cousin, the theology of liberation, is relatively thin.

While both theologies of liberation and of the people share almost the same objective, to save the poor from their suffering, their premises diverge. There have been mixed views regarding Pope Francis' perspective on both theologies, especially the theology of liberation. Almost all supporters of both schools claim Pope Francis' acquiescence or adherence to their views in contrast with his predecessors who have explicitly expressed their opposition to such theology, Cf. Rourke (2016); Stephenson (2015); Kaiser (2014). *Theologia del pueblo* emerged in 1968 with the creation of the *Comision Episcopal para la Pastoral* (COEPAL) in Medellín, Colombia. A month earlier in the same year, the "theology of liberation" was coined by the Peruvian theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez. According to Thomas Rourke (2016), the theology of the people emphasizes both the cultural and historical experience of peoples, while theology of liberation stresses social classes as an analytical component.¹⁵

5. *Fratelli tutti's* Rhetorical Situation, Argument, and Style

Fratelli tutti is the third and most recent encyclical letter promulgated by Pope Francis. The first, *Lumen fidei* (2013), was a transitional document reflecting the faith perspective and work of his predecessor, Benedict XVI. Francis' signature on *Lumen fidei* demonstrates and affirms the papacy's unbroken continuity. Each pontiff has differences in attention and emphasis, but all popes are operating within the same divine discursive frame and are collaboratively building up a "deposit" of magisterial teaching.¹⁶ Unlike sometimes unpredictable successions of power in secular states, the recent popes are all clearly on the same mission.¹⁷ Francis' second encyclical came in 2015 and is called *Laudato si'*, "on care for our common home". A clearer representation of Francis' inaugural teaching, its call for environmental justice earned wide acclaim.¹⁸

Francis composed *Fratelli tutti* in collaboration with the Vatican's Dicastery for Integral Human Development, and promulgated it worldwide on 4 October 2020, amid the global ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, trenchant Church finance and abuse scandals, and numerous divisive geo-political movements.¹⁹ Within the Christian fall narrative, rhetorical situations are always challenging the audience's need for spiritual leadership as a given; however, in 2020, the psycho-social volatility seemed to strike almost everyone almost everywhere, including Francis. On the eve of *Fratelli tutti's* release, noted Catholic religion columnist John Allen explained the global Church-State challenges facing Francis:

A pope who's a champion of European unity has watched Poland and Hungary spin progressively out of the EU orbit, while Great Britain formally walked away . . . A pope who preaches welcome and compassion for immigrants has seen the US elect a president who ran on getting tough; . . . Italy . . . was refusing to allow desperate migrants to disembark their rescue boats. A pope who preaches non-violence has seen the Philippines, arguably the most vibrantly Catholic country in the world, embrace a leader who's unleashed a torrent of extra-judicial killings; and he's seen Brazil, a cornerstone nation in his own Latin America and the largest Catholic nation on earth, elect a head of state for whom *Laudato si'*, the pope's environmental encyclical, is a sort of Magna Carta in reverse, outlining what not to do. (Allen 2020)

Despite these geo-political power shifts and a very crowded news cycle, Catholic interest in *Fratelli tutti* was high and reception was generally positive.²⁰ *Infovaticana* even went so far as to leak the full Spanish text a day in advance.²¹ Proponents praised its peace advocacy and open "culture of encounter", and critics noted gender bias within the title and the Church as a whole (Zagano 2020).

Fratelli tutti's magisterial function is to complement *Laudato si's* attention to nature with teaching on human relationships. Subtitled "on fraternity and social friendship", it is book length, with 287 sections over eight chapters. Like most books and all recent encyclicals, it requires a significant commitment of time and attention to read and grasp, and as a

Christian teaching it asks to be engaged with openhearted goodwill. These structural and attitudinal factors place it at odds with our contemporary media sphere. Faith leaders and scholars pay close attention, and many lay Catholics hear related news or teaching, but broader audiences tend to overlook papal encyclicals. To adapt and reach more of our online and fragmented “soundbite” culture, the Vatican hosted a conference and produced a *Fratelli tutti* website featuring both the full text and numerous explanatory essays, videos, and infographics.²²

As an argument, *Fratelli tutti* follows a problem->solutions pattern. It opens with a brief yet powerful introduction explaining its title, inspiration, context, and goal. The first chapter assesses contemporary problems with a bleak global metaphor: “Dark Clouds over a Closed World.” Chapter 2 is the letter’s Biblical pivot point, looking through planet-scale challenges toward scripture for a divine solution. Francis rehearses and meditates upon Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan, a story divinizing immediate aid and charitable support, and uses it as an ethical archetype for the remaining six chapters. Each one addresses a different dimension of relationality and shows how familial and neighborly love shifts social dynamics toward harmony and transcendence. Chapter 3 envisions an open world, Chapter 4 is on globally open hearts, 5 describes an integral politics, 6 covers pro-social dialogue and bonding, 7 calls for a renewed spirit of contact, and 8 exhorts religious leaders and institutions to advance fraternal peace. It closes with two prayers: an appeal to the Creator for global unity and then an ecumenical prayer on behalf of all Christians.

In terms of rhetorical style, *Fratelli tutti* is a highly intertextual pastiche of quotations and allusions. There are 288 endnotes and citations pulling together a fascinating array of voices in support for, and demonstration of, global brotherhood. All encyclicals open with a magisterial or scriptural reference, but *Fratelli tutti* goes on to sustain and amplify its referential pattern in every subsequent paragraph, *identifying* the teaching and Pope Francis himself with both God and spiritual teachers worldwide. This is an important quality in Burkean dramatic criticism, and “identification” is the prime rhetorical act. Burke explains how “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (Burke 1950, p. 55). Alongside scripture and his own previous statements, earlier popes, saints, and bishops’ conferences from many countries are frequently and fluently quoted, performing a faith teaching fused with caring and responsive listening.²³ *Fratelli tutti*’s polyphonic voice demonstrates Francis’ identification with God and His people. It invites readers to act and speak within the same divine discourse and explains why they should choose to. In the next section, close readings of the introduction; Chapter 1 on problems; and Chapter 2 on Jesus’ solution, a *contact ethic* of encounter, aid, and support, set up solutions for media, borders, and international politics.

5.1. Close Textual Analysis: Introduction International Journeys toward Fraternal Transcendence

Pope Francis identifies with St. Francis by honoring him with the opening quotation titling the document. It is a broad and open familial greeting: “‘Fratelli tutti.’ With these words St. Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel”. (§ 1) These first two sentences, positing two metaphors, set up Francis’ key relationships. The first, one global human family, is foundational and more literal than figural within Judeo-Christian tradition. Anyone who hears the greeting is cast as a sibling family member, brother, or sister. One thousand years ago, St. Francis addressed “all” as family and proposed a way of being, and so will Pope Francis today. God’s family is cast as original and primary; brothers and sisters are already here and have been since Eden.²⁴ Calling to siblings reminds them of shared substance, and when they accept Francis’ proposal, life is seasoned with God’s word. Universal family, brothers and sisters all, is Francis’ master term for human relationships, and taste provides a nuanced secondary metaphor. Nourished by the Word, internalizing it and becoming infused with it, marks Christian living.²⁵

Francis' opening mode of address is universal in principle: there is no one to whom this letter is not addressed.²⁶ In this way, Franciscan fraternity transcends a key rhetorical dilemma: who is honored with address and who is excluded? Francis does not divide humanity by acknowledging multiple and diverse audiences; rather, there is one global audience composed entirely of siblings. "Brothers and sisters all" is an open greeting, arms wide, and building an entire encyclical around it performs Christian love.²⁷

After announcing Francis' familial frame, *Fratelli tutti* uses two parallel international journey narratives to establish a trajectory for the rest of the encyclical. Both journeys advance across borders toward meetings: encounters between specific leaders working in specific challenging conditions. The first is historical, describing St. Francis' courageous trip to visit the Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Egypt during the Crusades. St. Francis traveled to the Sultan at great risk and hardship, and rather than fortitude and power, he brought humility and love. He explicitly instructed his followers, traveling among non-believers in a war zone, "not to 'engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake'" (§ 3). Rather than support a holy war waged by fellow Christians, they met with the Sultan and his people to express and share fraternal love. St. Francis' teaching and mode of encounter in this violent geo-political context is, as Mark might say, "astonishing". To work toward peace and harmony, St. Francis met war with its obverse, voluntary subjection brought in a brave yet quiet spirit of love and care.

In 2019, this international narrative played out again when Pope Francis traveled to meet the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi, marking the first time a pope has ever visited the Arabian Peninsula. The relationship between Christianity and Islam has often been tragic, but this groundbreaking meeting was warm and collaborative, yielding a joint "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" (Francis and Al-Tayyeb 2019). Francis credits the Grand Imam with encouragement, not only for 2019's declaration but also for 2020's encyclical. Together, they have already affirmed that God calls humanity to live together as brothers and sisters, and created all "equal in rights, duties, and dignities" (§ 5). Now, at length, Francis is inspired to follow up on these same themes to help everyone reflect on fraternity's universal invitation to each and every human being. Coming full circle, he goes on to quote their joint declaration on fraternity and peace in *Fratelli tutti's* concluding chapter.

Thus, Francis' primary argument is that humble friendship and courageous brotherhood are needed to face and heal contemporary fragmentation and isolation, especially as evidenced in our piecemeal and contrarian response to the global pandemic: "anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality" (§ 7). He brings in visual and vocal imagery to close the introduction; "mirages" are seen alone and are not real, but "dreams" express precious collaborative visions. In praying for a shared dream built up with diverse voices, family and journey imagery reinforce one another. "Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all" (§ 8).

5.2. Problems—"Dark Clouds over a Closed World": Trends Contra Fraternity

Within the Christian fall narrative, problems derive from failed or skewed relationships with God, nature, and humanity. *Fratelli tutti* focuses on the last, social relationships at all levels, and the first chapter analyzes contemporary trends that work against fraternal love. There are a lot of them. In Francis' account of twentieth century history, in response to World War II, post-war geo-politics did well in advancing a shared "dream" of peace and unity, seen especially in parts of Latin American and the birth of the European Union. More recently, this collaborative dream has been "shattered" and pro-social energy has lagged worldwide. Francis points to many "signs of a certain regression" (§ 11). Today, racism, misogyny, and varied forms of slavery are trending. Extremism and ancient hatreds are back, polarization and nationalism are rising, and "transnational" economic "progress"

exploits peoples and erases local cultures (§ 12). Universal human rights, boldly declared and pursued in the mid-20th century, have now become selective, secured by particular states for particular sub-groups and ignored by and for others. Fears are stoked to drive resentments and conflicts, with both particular demagogues and a depersonalized corporate quest for economic advantage seeking to divide and conquer.

How are collective dreams shattered? Francis argues that we generally lack historical knowledge demonstrating our continuity with the past. Ignorance is not accidental or a personal failing, it is a deliberate ideological rhetoric severing the young from their roots and decoupling great words like justice and freedom from historical realities (§ 13–14). Living outside of history and only in the pure creativity of each new moment can seem empowering, but depriving youth of critical contexts and their cultural inheritance makes them highly susceptible to manipulation and false promises.²⁸ Repeating history, including tragedies and injustices like wars, becomes an easy choice when peoples are not aware of what society has already tried and suffered. In a return to his joint journey/family metaphor, Francis quotes his own 2018 address to South American civil authorities and diplomats to identify both the salvific “path” and our companions along the way.

“Once more we are being reminded that ‘each new generation must take up the struggles and attainments of past generations, while setting its sights even higher. This is the path. Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day. It is not possible to settle for what has been achieved in the past and complacently enjoy it, as if we could somehow disregard the fact that many of our brothers and sisters still endure situations that cry out for our attention’”. (§ 12)

Along Francis’ fraternal path, two contact patterns crying for aid are immigration crises along international borders, and our dystopic global media-sphere. The former is ancient and territorial, and the latter is a 21st century technology that, despite promise, cannot engender genuine communication.²⁹ In the next section, Francis’ interpretation of Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan presents a relational archetype demonstrating norms for both direct (border contact) and mediated (online) relationships.

5.3. Scriptural Basis: The Parable of the Good Samaritan as Contact Archetype

Pope Francis examines, in Chapter 3 of *Fratelli tutti*, “Envisaging and Engendering an Open World”, several themes related to human relationships ranging from love and fraternity to the notion of property. The deep mutuality of the love that he explores in this encyclical likens to the African concept of *Ubuntu* promoting communal relationship based on interdependence: “I am because we are”. Relational matters and the presence or absence of love can either make or break humanity. For Pope Francis, love is not a solo internal feeling, which might lead to “selfishness and mere self-preservation”. Rather, love manifests externally in accepting, embracing, and helping others. In other words, love that is “authentic and mature . . . can only take root in hearts open to growth through relationships with others” (§ 89). Genuine mutual love opposes itself to apparent, superficial, and “self-interested” love. The parable of the Good Samaritan is Francis’ primary illustration of love which does not despise anyone on any basis for the common good.

Chapter 3’s call for openness grows from a scriptural basis. Chapter 2 offers a comprehensive presentation of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, a story of immediate and healing contact. Across both chapters, Pope Francis emphasizes the unconditional nature of love. Although in relatively good positions to assist a vulnerable victim, the majority of observers deliberately chose to ignore and pass by him. *Fratelli tutti* invites readers to think about and reconsider their posture towards human suffering. For Pope Francis, the other “meaning of dignity” is the ability and willingness to “be changed by our contact with human suffering” (§ 68). The four main characters in the story of the Good Samaritan illustrate different degrees of contact that shape their relationships. There is no name given to these characters but their social titles and conditions: (1) the wounded man, (2) robbers, (3) passers-by, (4) and the Good Samaritan.

One of the main questions the narrative deals with is “who is one’s neighbor?” Who and what define that “neighbor?” How does one treat his or her neighbors? The term, according to Pope Francis, has lost its true meaning. The three main actors in the parable either erect boundaries or establish bridges which define and dictate the kind of relationship they have with the vulnerable wounded man. Some of those boundaries separate, on the one side, the larger society, and on the other side, “foreigners”. Even when these two main categories share the same geographic space, they are still separated by mental and philosophical boundaries. Put differently, the proximity of actors does not necessarily lead to mutual love.

A victim of physical violence, the man on the roadside was saved not because of respected people who were more concerned about their personal interests, but because of a foreign yet clearly good Samaritan who “was able to interrupt his journey” (§ 101). This interruption requires immediate caring contact, not discourse or symbolism. The Samaritan provides direct medical aid and later promises continued support. Love, therefore, is not about what the majority say or do, and it does not also seek to satisfy one’s own interest at the expense of others. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis, and others, they have chosen to give and sacrifice privilege in order to answer God’s call for fraternal unity.

5.4. Mediated Contact: The Dream and the Illusion of Communication

The Vatican has a long history and close working relationship with electronic and online media (Radwan and Mahon 2019). The global media sphere is not new to or held apart from Christianity: it is a key zone of Christian evangelism and service. Leading a missionary religion seeking to share God’s word universally, each time a new communication technology is developed the popes have invested and used it extensively.³⁰ Beginning with Vatican Radio in 1931, Christian semantic energy expands progressively via every 20th century broadcast technology (Matelski 1995; Radwan 2020). At the turn of the century, online media were quickly adopted, and today the Vatican has a strong global web presence. In 2015, Francis consolidated all Vatican media operations into a new Dicastery for Communication, demonstrating decisive leadership and knowledge of industry convergence trends (Francis 2015b; Radwan 2021).

Love of God and neighbor are primary, so communication and the relationships it forms are vital within Catholic tradition. Over millennia, scores of serious people have devoted themselves to building up and sharing knowledge about the moral and spiritual dimensions of media.³¹ Drawing upon this rich tradition, and his own direct experience as a world leader and international media personality, Francis’ critique of our 21st century media sphere’s “illusion of communication” is detailed and insightful (§ 42). His central “illusion” metaphor describes individualistic deception and contrasts with collaborative “dreams” built up through loving engagement.

Within Christian anthropology, authentic and open encounters are dialogic and bring us toward the real and true, including one another, via attentive and patient caring (Ashley 1985).³² Following the parable of the Good Samaritan, genuine relationships have an essential bodily dimension. Real friendships and stable social dynamics depend upon slow and careful cultivation of mutuality within concrete embodied realities, replete with “physical gestures, facial expressions, moments of silence, body language, and even the smells, the trembling of hands, the blushes and perspiration that speak to us and are a part of human communication” (§ 42). Sensitive physical contact and co-presence are complemented at the level of discourse via attentive listening. Here, Francis again credits his namesake St. Francis. “We must not lose our ability to listen.’ St. Francis ‘heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life” (§ 48). In listening to God, the outcast, and nature, St. Francis formed himself in identifying with them. He is not cast as an individual but as a humano-divine example living through and in relationality.

Pope Francis consistently begins at the interpersonal level to argue for a constitutive approach to communication, where the self is formed and developed only via others. This

is one of his central goals, inviting closeness and fostering a “culture of encounter”.³³ Unfortunately, at the social level, postmodern media do not tend to facilitate genuine fraternity. Francis warns that within our pervasive web technologies the “basic structure of sage human communication is at risk” (§ 49). Wisdom “demands an encounter with reality”, including real neighbors, but online communication is thoroughly virtual (§ 47). In addition to preventing the embodiment principle noted above, the difference between real and virtual worlds is especially pronounced within digital “mechanism[s] of selection”, whereby users deliberately choose who and what to engage with, and easily prevent exposure to anyone and anything else (§ 47). To exacerbate the individualistic level of conscious exclusion, profit-driven algorithms automatically prevent open and diverse engagement at the network level. Selectivity operates systemically and subtly, pre-limiting web searches and news feeds before they are even accessed.

Francis argues that public and interpersonal communication in the virtual mode quickly become dystopic and toxic because God’s reality is given, not selected. Learning how to deal with diverse ideas and others is a crucial skill requiring patience, care, and effort; virtues that are deliberately reversed online. Quick and easy virtual relationships have weak bonds, so any challenges dissolve them before long and users revert to “closed circuits” of like-minded associates (§ 45). Selective isolation and mutual reinforcement are structural conditions enabling fanaticism, ideological manipulation, and divisive rhetoric of “shameless aggression” (§ 43). Defamation, slander, and partisan spin reverberate and amplify each other, coalescing into “networks of verbal violence” and “digital campaigns of hatred” (§ 46).³⁴ Here, media are far from neutral, they are morally formative. When contrasted with the reality of God’s word shared in embodied fraternity, online hate excludes, malforms, and radicalizes in a tragic misuse of humanity’s divine potential for loving relationships.

Ultimately, online community is cast as an illusion, and authentic virtual encounter as a technological impossibility. Despite obvious potential, the world wide web has proven shallow, narrow, and divisive. This is not because our media sphere is completely or inherently misanthropic. In principle, all media have the potential to share God’s word and facilitate social bonds. The Internet itself is a “truly good” divine gift (§ 205). It is good, not neutral, so the divisive misuse of communication technology with unitive potential marks clear moral error. Whether media are used well or abused, Francis’ teaching holds that humanity needs more than any technology could provide. Digital media “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. Digital connectivity is not enough to build bridges. It is not capable of uniting humanity” (§ 43). In the final section, online and border failures are reframed with Francis’ vision of “polyhedral”³⁵ family unity and a politics oriented to both the individual and the common good.

5.5. Walls vs. One World Family: Polyhedral Transcendence and “Political Love”

Francis’ goal in *Fratelli tutti* is to invite dialogue in the “hope that in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words” (§ 6).³⁶ Currently, international vision is blocked by rigid borders and self-limiting walls.³⁷ Francis’ overarching “new vision” is the familial love of Judeo-Christian creationism, one human family united with God the Father. This love explicitly reaches past exclusion and sectarian borders toward universality and transcendence, brothers and sisters all. As a vision for humanity, it is ancient and biblical, not “new”, but gospel truths are indeed “news” to worldly materialists and ahistorical pragmatists. Too often, daily, the “level of words” is political sophistry dividing discourse from reality, and spinning symbols to delay, distract, and dupe. Even well intentioned and lofty rhetoric can fail at the practical level, dreamed but not realized in effective legislation and policy. In response, Francis proposes a “political love”. Following the Good Samaritan’s archetype of personal encounter, direct contact via

charitable aid informs his policy goal. Migrants, refugees, the poor, and the vulnerable are engaged with care as family, not passed by as others.

A loving politics avoids narrow interest in favor of particular sisters and brothers, and the common good. This is the principle underpinning Francis' preferential "option for the poor" (§ 187). Food policy makes for an especially clear example. He prioritizes hunger, calls out profiting from legalized suffering, and ends with a policy proposal for protecting human rights. "[W]orld politics needs to make the effective elimination of hunger one of its foremost and imperative goals. Indeed, 'when financial speculation manipulates the price of food, treating it as just another commodity, millions of people suffer and die from hunger. At the same time, tons of food are thrown away. This constitutes a genuine scandal. Hunger is criminal; food is an inalienable right'" (§ 189). Francis drew this quote from his own address to the 2014 World Meeting of Popular Movements. Rather than continuing to build policy around the marketplace, build it around starving brothers. Imagine a global policy criminalizing food waste or market inflicted hunger with substantial penalties, carefully implemented and enforced. Astonishing!

Operating within a family love dynamic, Francis clarifies political decisions and social structures by giving them a new shape. His politics of love aligns with reality and truth rather than partisan interest to identify members most in need and provide direct and immediate care. Contra the relativism inherent in majority rule, an authentic politics begins with an absolute truth: the divine dignity of each human person. A central principle of this dignity is that one's personhood cannot be subsumed and lost within a group or party. Migrants or the poor are not anonymous unwashed masses, they are many specific siblings, each with a history and a future and a face. Traditional politics builds society into oversimplified structures by erasing individual differences and lumping people together into parties, factions, and classes. Social structures in this mode become blocky binaries (in vs. out group) or hierarchal ziggurats (elite over middle over mass): basic figures with a limited number of faces. In response, Francis proposes the *polyhedron*, a complex structure with a potentially unlimited number of faces, each united without being submerged. "Our model must be that of a polyhedron, in which the value of each individual is respected, where 'the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts'" (§ 126). Polyhedral transcendence reaches for synergy and greatness by insisting the whole prioritize and surface each person. In this way, Francis' truth about human rights, that each human face must be seen and engaged in its concrete reality, grants politics a new focus and shape. This study concludes with a summary of how Francis' polyhedral family and ethic of immediate encounter reach past borders toward transcendence.

6. Conclusions—Communicating Transcendent Love

In late 2020, *Fratelli tutti* earned a generally positive reception within Catholic circles, and even gender inclusivity critics confirmed its value.³⁸ Along with the expected support from within the Church hierarchy, a special connection was forged with Brazilians. At the level of state policy, Brazil has been working against *Laudato si's* environmentalism for years, but among the Brazilian people, many were elated to read Pope Francis quoting revered samba poet Vinícius de Moraes: "Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter" (§ 215). An example of Francis' polyphonic writing style, he identifies with de Moraes and samba fans everywhere. This quote was especially powerful because, in its original context within "Samba da Benção", there are also direct and positive references to "the ritual music of Candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian religion based on the cult of the orishas African deities of the Yoruba tradition, similar to Santería in Cuba and Vodou in Haiti. The [non-Christian] religion has deep historical connections with the constitution of the Samba music" (Lima 2020). Rather than exclude de Moraes or any "heathen" spirituality, Francis listens, identifies shared truth, and voices a key line from Samba de Benção. This performance is not a strategic show or ploy to gain points in South America. Rather, an open "culture of encounter" is one of Francis' primary goals, and de Moraes is a constitutive resource setting up his central image for a humane social structure, namely, the polyhedron.

“Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter.” I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions. This means working to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which ‘the whole is greater than the part.’ The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centres of power where weighty decisions are made. (§ 215)

This article’s research question asked, “How can Pope Francis’ diplomacy and teaching on international and Church–State relations reshape and redefine the intersection of religion and politics in a changing world?” With his polyhedral vision of “variegated unity”, Francis proposes reshaping power blocks and towering pyramids toward familial networks of reciprocity and policies of deliberate inclusion. To navigate 21st century transitions, Church and State are mutually called to create a culture of encounter and collaboration, grounded in the dignity of each person, and oriented to a shared existence and peace.³⁹ At all levels, Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan provides a clear policy standard: direct and immediate loving contact.

In Burkean rhetorical theory, when appeals to identification are adopted and enacted, rhetorics achieve “transcendence”. As individuals embrace a discourse and worldview, they develop a shared practice and “substance”, a cultural movement forms, and crowds step together into the future.⁴⁰ In their political dimension, cultures enact leadership and advance large scale power dynamics via legislation and concrete policy, affecting transcendent form and shape. Political unity does not automatically equate to moral validity. Far from it. Too often, transcendent rhetoric invokes love of country or God only to erase and deny difference, sacrificing the individual in the name of the collective or cause (Buber 1965). For a humane alternative, Francis’ polyhedron eschews merging Church and State, or groups, or people. When each individual person is a face, and each tradition and institution marks particular vertices and zones, together, a single polyhedron images the transcendent love of global family.

Polyhedral family is an evocative and useful figure in analyzing complex religio-political dynamics, and is valuable in advancing peace, but it is more than a rhetorical image. Rather, like all magisterial teaching, Francis’ letter is powerful divine truth. To enlighten geo-politics, the Holy See refuses a secular modern context and presents its own ancient spiritual tradition. Francis upholds papal sovereignty (teaching absolute truths in love) to modernity’s majority rule (relativism serving constituent interest), and God’s eternal dominion to any strategic power plays. As demonstrated above, papal words and imagery are not bits of isolated discourse. From the beginning, their living tradition casts speech as a divine creative power. In contrast with secular utilitarianism, and unlike other religious cosmogonies, the Judeo-Christian tradition divinizes discourse and relationality. Genesis is driven by God speaking a world into being for His image to rule and fill, and today, humanity is certainly ruling and filling it, for better or worse. Francis’ contact rhetoric works to dispel the “dark clouds” projected over this “closed world”, especially along brutal borders or within a dystopic media sphere, by imaging God’s creative power to save and heal.

Ultimately, Pope Francis teaches that peace can be achieved when individuals, governments, and religious movements integrate realms and properly relate the personal to the political and spiritual. *Fratelli tutti* articulates a rhetoric of transcendent love across all planes of social interaction. Beginning with the interpersonal level, the parable of the Good Samaritan lays out an ethic of aid and caring encounter. “We can start from below and, case by case, act at the most concrete and local levels, and then expand to the farthest reaches of our countries and our world, with the same care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man’s injuries”. (§ 78) Jesus’ archetypal contact narrative

forms Francis' standard for assessing more abstract levels: social and mass mediated communication and international relations. The global social media dystopia and accelerating migration/border crises are assessed in contact terms, outlining moral pitfalls inherent in virtual relationships and the self-limiting nature of walls. His overarching vision is the familial love of Judeo-Christian creationism: one human family united under God the father. This love explicitly reaches past sectarianism toward universality and transcendence, namely, brothers and sisters all.

The papacy is pre-modern and intersectional, with dual incidence and ultimate responsibility in two realms: the spiritual (religion) and the temporal (statehood). The first capacity carries divine significance, the second has political incidence in diplomatic relations, and Francis' teaching shows how Catholicism ensures both are thoroughly intertwined. Francis' interfaith work for peace is his concluding case that there is no inherent link between religion and violence. In *Fratelli tutti's* introduction, he explains how he was inspired by St. Francis' journey to meet the Sultan. Pope Francis, in his turn, visited the Grand Imam, worked together on a declaration for fraternal peace, and shared a warm embrace. To counter rising fundamentalism and religiously motivated terrorism, Francis brings *Fratelli tutti* full circle, quoting their joint declaration immediately before his closing prayers.

“Religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women . . . God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want his name to be used to terrorize people.” (§ 285)

In this joint vision, religious division and violence are manipulative distortions of divine potential. Almighty God does not need anything, least of all defense, but what He desires is familial love for all. For his part, the Grand Imam was inspired by Francis' visit to bring their teaching past the level of words into concrete reality. A joint Mosque/Church/Synagogue complex uniting the Abrahamic faiths is now under construction in Abu Dhabi (Jensen 2019). Astonishing! Genuine global love can seem impossible and utopian, and for those denying any spiritual context it probably is; however, for Francis and faithful people everywhere, God's context is the only one that is real and true, and He has not left humanity alone here. With God's help, *Fratelli tutti* shows how faith astonishes and unites by communicating transcendent love.

Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,
reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
so that we may discover anew
that all are important and all are necessary,
different faces of the one humanity
that God so loves. Amen. (§ 287)

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Notes

- 1 A clear Church/State institutional division structures modern Constitutions (e.g., USA, France, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.) and at the global level it also, partly, influences the way the United Nations and its agencies function. While the UN recognizes only sovereign states as members with a voting “privilege” following one of its key principles outlined in Article 2, Paragraph 1 of its Charter (one-state, one-vote), non-member states like the Holy See and Palestine Liberation Organization (including non-state organizations), through the General Assembly, are granted an “observer” status. When all other member rights were secured in 2003, the fundamental political rights, voting and proposing candidates, were not granted to the Holy See. See [Smith \(2006\)](#); [Beitinger-Lee \(2017a, 2017b\)](#). Cf. also UN General Assembly 58.314, “Participation of the Holy See in the United Nations General Assembly.” https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/58/314 (accessed on 28 March 2022). It is also important to note an existing debate surrounding the notion of secularism (or *laïcité*) and the separation between Church and State. Although Pope Francis points out that such a separation is “healthy”, he affirms that some forms of secularism, like the one applied in France, need to be “elevated” largely because “religions are also part of culture and not subcultures” ([Wolton 2018](#), pp. 23–24). For further readings on secularism, see [Snyder \(2011\)](#); [Fox \(2012\)](#).
- 2 Systems Theory developed in the biological and environmental sciences and came to be applied to social structures in the late 20th century ([Laszlo 1972](#)). In the 21st century, systems principles underpin ethical norms promoting integral human development and institutional/corporate social responsibility. For instance, commitment 4 from the Humanizing Business Education Manifesto reads “[w]e are committed to a concept of dignity, freedom and success that understands that we all depend on creating a world in which all flourish and all prosper. Organizations serve humanity best when they recognize our individual dignity and enhance our interconnectedness” ([Pirson 2022](#)).
- 3 “Every religiously grounded unworldly love and indeed every ethical religion must, in similar measure and for similar reasons, experience tensions with the sphere of political behavior” ([Weber 1963](#), p. 223).
- 4 Shades of gray are a given in law, but the penumbra is destabilizing when state force and religion openly “dominate” citizens at the federal level, as with former President Trump’s infamous June 2020 speech. Promises to mobilize troops against “domestic terror”, followed by tear-gassing Lafayette square, for Church adjacent images of the Chief grasping “a Bible”, marks a turbulent change from decades of quiet prayer breakfasts. Mass outcry prompted General Milley’s apology, and while a few American religious leaders heaped praise, the vast majority condemned and lamented “blasphemy” ([Baker 2020](#)).
- 5 Religion’s peace potential is debated. [Alfani \(2019\)](#) shares in *Religious Peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo* an ethnographic study that involves three different Christian denominations in the city of Goma and details on both the ambivalent and ubiquitous nature of religion (and religious non-state actors). Religion’s role in transforming conflicts and fostering positive peace is not limited to top-down directives; a “hybrid” approach including grassroots (bottom-up) voices complements authority and hierarchy. Despite much scripture, the history of the Abrahamic traditions, and many other global religious movements, shows a clear record of theologically oriented violence and war that rises or falls across different eras. Today, declining religiosity rates generally show a loss of belief in faith institutions making positive contributions ([Inglehart 2020](#)). In 2022, amid continuous abuse and financial crises, the pope is facing past institutional crimes. Francis apologized for decades of Native American human rights violations and will travel to Canada in person this summer ([Native News Online 2022](#)). In addition, with Islam, since 9/11 “the religious veneer of al Qaeda’s public posture led many analysts to search for answers in Islam’s teachings. Some analysts have even [speciously] argued that a wholesale revision of Muslim theology is the only way to defeat violent extremism” ([Gallup 2011](#)). Below we show how, despite violent and oppressive reputations, *Fratelli tutti* uses Catholic+Islamic diplomacy as a frame for peace advocacy.
- 6 Francis’ mode of address is detailed in Section 5.1 below.
- 7 The Judeo-Christian tradition is ancient and broad, living today within many diverse streams ([Engel and Engel 1990](#)). We contextualize papal encyclicals with reference to both scripture and Roman Catholicism. Some movements and historical periods divide Christianity from its Jewish roots and question subsequent dialogue ([Neusner 2001](#)). In the Roman Catholic tradition, Judeo-Christian bifurcation and associated persecution was formally corrected and repudiated in *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II’s declaration on the relationship between the Church and non-Christian religions. “Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.” ([Paul VI 1965](#), § 4)
- 8 For a more complete account of God’s Word see ([Gaillardetz 2003](#); [Radwan and Giffone 2020](#)).
- 9 “[I]nsofar as the Trinity is said to be composed of “persons”, we must translate our idea of perfect correspondence in correspondingly personal terms. And the word for perfect communion between persons is love” ([Burke 1961](#), p. 30).
- 10 Papal encyclicals are considered the most important genre within the “ordinary” magisterium. “Extraordinary” magisterial genres focus on dogma ([Dulles 2010](#); [Ziccardi 2018](#)).
- 11 Papal infallibility applies only to *ex cathedra* proclamations.
- 12 In the late 1940s, Jorge (12) and his younger sister and brother (Martha and Oscar) had to leave their parental home to go to Salesian boarding schools in order to relieve their paralyzed mother, who stayed with the youngest children (Alberto and Maria).

- 13 Bergoglio's clerical path to join the seminary in 1956 rather than pursuing medical studies was not well-received by his parents. It was only during his ordination as a priest, in 1969, that his widowed mother embraced her son's (priestly) vocation (Ivereich 2014).
- 14 Conclaves are complex events presenting serious challenges to journalistic sourcing norms. For an award winning "inside" account of the 2013 conclave and associated reportage see (O'Connell 2019).
- 15 Both movements, theologies of the people and of liberation, inform Francis' famous "option for the poor", addressed below under 4.5. Francis' "polyhedral" approach to politics appears to preclude an overemphasis on class divisions.
- 16 The invocation opening this essay (Francis 2020, § 181) illustrates the principle of magisterial and papal continuity. In sentence one Francis quotes Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, in sentence two he quotes his own previous encyclical *Laudato si*, and in the third sentence he returns to quoting Benedict XVI. The teaching is balanced between two successive leaders, one considered liberal and the other conservative, and neither is credited with inventing the principle. Instead Jesus' law of love is the synthesis from which all Church commitments derive.
- 17 *Humanae Vitae* (Paul VI 1968) is recognized as the most controversial modern encyclical. While many people including high ranking clergy dissented, and continue to, popes continuously support and teach it.
- 18 "Laudato si" is also a quote from St. Francis, "praise be to you, my Lord" (Francis 2015a). For a broad selection of news stories covering reception and related initiatives see the Vatican collection <https://www.laudatosi.va/en/notizie-e-storie.html>, (accessed on 28 March 2022).
- 19 For a comprehensive account of recent Vatican scandals and diminishing diplomatic credibility see (Formicola 2021).
- 20 In a break with tradition, the encyclical's signing ceremony was held at St. Francis' tomb in Assisi, instead of in the Vatican. This choice advances Pope Francis' identification with St. Francis, and may serve to distance his teaching from Vatican controversies.
- 21 The Vatican is familiar with aggressive journalism. For instance, *Laudato si* (Francis 2015a) was also leaked against press embargo rules, and more recently neo-conservative Catholic activists YouTubed their theft of several statues from Francis' Pan-Amazonian Synod (Radwan and Giffone 2022).
- 22 See <https://www.humandevlopment.va/en/fratelli-tutti.html> (accessed on 28 March 2022). The Vatican is a very active web content producer. In addition to robust websites supporting encyclical letters and major events like synods, Vaticannews.va shares extensive Catholic reporting on world and Church events, Vatican.va details all papal activity and archives all papal discourse, etc.
- 23 "I have also incorporated, along with my own thoughts, a number of letters, documents, and considerations that I have received from many individuals and groups throughout the world" (§ 5).
- 24 On greeting variations and modes of address as Speech Acts see (Austin 1975).
- 25 A shared meal, the Eucharist, is the central Christian sacrament. See St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor 10:17, KJV).
- 26 The "adherence" of the "universal" audience is a central principle in Perelman's "New Rhetoric." Rhetorical efficacy is relative to audience quality, so the rhetor appealing to "all" transcends particular biases to approach reason itself (Perelman 1979).
- 27 Later, Francis focuses his topic and audience. "The following pages do not claim to offer a complete teaching on fraternal love, but rather to consider its universal scope, its openness to every man and woman. I offer this social Encyclical as a modest contribution to continued reflection, in the hope that in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words. Although I have written it from the Christian convictions that inspire and sustain me, I have sought to make this reflection an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will" (§ 6).
- 28 Manipulative rhetoric is the prime threat in Judeo-Christian ethics. As noted above, Eve's acceptance of the serpent's falsehood initiates the fall narrative. See Genesis 3: 4–5.
- 29 "Engender" is a central verb in Catholic discourse indicating the fruitfulness of embodied encounter among sexually differentiated humans (McCartin 2010).
- 30 Vatican domestic media is almost a non-sequitur. *L'Osservatore Romano* covers the local/domestic beat, but nearly all other Vatican media work aims for an international audience.
- 31 Catholicism is known for a sacramental worldview, and the tradition explicitly recognizes more formally ritualized sacraments than Protestant traditions. Each of these sacraments formalizes a spiritual relationship (Catholic Church 1994, § 1113–44).
- 32 Politics is not something that Pope Francis refrains from; rather, as demonstrated largely in his Argentinian experience, he undertakes and fosters an engaging and inclusive approach towards political matters that is "rooted in an adequate anthropology and culture" (Rourke 2016, p. 142). His representation of a political anthropology is transcendental in nature and in solidarity with and service of others for the common good.
- 33 "Isolation and withdrawal into one's own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes. Culture clash, no; culture of encounter, yes" (§ 28). Scholars have noted contact and closeness as a central principle in Francis' teaching on communication, e.g., "the power of communication is the "power of proximity" (Borghesi 2018, p. x).

- 34 Reflexively, Francis affirms that some Christians and Catholic media have also joined and fostered “networks of verbal violence” (§ 46). Pope Francis has become a target for fringe “traditionalist” media outlets and influencers that aggressively argue he is leading the Church astray into extreme theological errors like idolatry (Radwan and Giffone 2022).
- 35 It is worth providing Pope Francis’ definition of the term “polyhedron” because of its importance in his imagery. In his address to the participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements on 28 October 2014, he shared the following: “That is why I like the image of the polyhedron, a geometric figure with many different facets. The polyhedron reflects the confluence of all partialities that still retain their integrity. Nothing is dissolved, nothing is destroyed, nothing is dominated, everything is integrated. Nowadays you too are looking for that synthesis between the local and the global” (Wolton 300n5). Pope Francis’ understanding of the “polyhedron” to which he invites everyone is in many ways related to the idea of globalization (and at the same time rooted locally) in that God is “everywhere and in everything . . . [i]n each individual who gives him or herself and who brings his or her own contribution to the whole.” Cf. The series of interviews Dominique Wolton had with Pope Francis between 2016 and 2017 (including Pope Francis’ speeches since his election) covering an array of topics ranging from politics, theology, to dialogue in Wolton (2018, pp. 20, 49).
- 36 “Invitational” rhetoric sets up an ethical dynamic characterized by power parity, mutual immanent value, and dialogic encounter (Foss and Foss 2003).
- 37 Once more, we encounter “the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land, in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people. And those who raise walls will end up as slaves within the very walls they have built. They are left without horizons, for they lack this interchange with others” (§ 27).
- 38 For a nuanced response affirming *Fratelli tutti’s* gender inclusivity but also critiquing its failure to engage women, including Francis’ citation pattern, see (Cahill 2020).
- 39 “What we need in fact are states and civil institutions that are present and active, that look beyond the free and efficient working of certain economic, political or ideological systems, and are primarily concerned with individuals and the common good” (§ 108).
- 40 “To identify A with B is to make A ‘consubstantial’ with B . . . A doctrine of consubstantiality, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. For substance, in the old philosophies, was an act; and a way of life is an acting-together; and in acting-together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (Burke 1950, p. 21).

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