

INITIAL BRIEFING ON *FRATELLI TUTTI* ('Brothers and Sisters All')

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

These notes are a brief initial theological appraisal of the new encyclical from Pope Francis. This is a major teaching document in relation to the social teaching of the Catholic Church; this is simply an initial appraisal. The current pandemic is a big part of the context, so the letter needs to be read alongside the Holy Father's prolific teachings during this period.¹

GENERAL OVERVIEW

As in other writings Pope Francis follows the familiar 'See- Judge-Act' methodology. In his introduction he stresses the theme of 'no borders', following the example of St Francis, and using interfaith co-operation as an important model. The first chapter, 'Dark Clouds over a Closed World', in some ways the most moving and passionate section of the letter, looks with stark realism at what is going wrong with the world – a world of shattered dreams, lacking a plan. The world is not becoming a better place. I suspect in parish and other groups where we might share this encyclical chapter two, the pope's reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan, will be the best 'way in'. Every aspect of the story is given a deep meaning, and Francis also links the parable to other ways in which Jesus calls us away from a culture of violence and contempt.² The Lord's parable is the pope's way into a message of hope after the rather sobering first chapter of the encyclical, and in chapter three he examines how we can 'envisage and engender an open world'. How we related to other people in our lives is connected to how countries should relate to each other: so he coins and defines 'social friendship': we should be neighbours, not 'associates'³. At a time when the phrase 'Do-Gooder' has again become a term of abuse, the Holy Father's stress on the promotion of the moral good (sections 112-113) is particularly welcome; his language in this part of the letter about the social value of property, is forceful.⁴

As I stress below Francis' treatment of borders is a running theme in the encyclical, and this is explored in detail in chapter four, 'A Heart open to the whole world.' The pope coins a simple phrase to sum up how we should react to the migrant in our midst: '**Welcome, Protect, Promote and Integrate**' (129); in particular he calls on young people not to be misled by falsehood (133). Reflecting our theology of Grace, the Holy Father points to *gratuitousness* as the way to welcome others.⁵ Chapter five, 'A Better Kind of Politics' looks at how far contemporary political culture fails to help us develop 'a global community of fraternity.' He pinpoints 'populism' as the problem, and it is easy to think of examples of political leaders who promote this throughout the world; the pope's

for there to be stronger international institutions with real powers. One of the pope's concerns is that civility and kindness have receded from public life, and in chapter six he explores the value of dialogue and friendship. For many of us this may appear obvious – perhaps it's a sign of how bad things have become that this needs to be said. Of course, the pope challenges all of us. In the UK at the moment a great many people, Catholics included, feel a great deal of anger towards those in power and those who support them and brought them to power – understandably, because of incompetence and mendacity in relation to Covid-19, not to mention *Brexit*, and yet the pope is rightly calling on us, not to pretend that there is peace or reconciliation where this does not exist, but simply to engage in dialogue and maintain friendship and kindness, perhaps in the face of hostility. This leads naturally into chapter seven, where Pope Francis addresses the issues of war and peace. The extent of suspicion and hostility in the world which he addresses earlier on is bound to find expression in real violence, and he assesses how far this continues to poison the world, drawing also on the historical events of the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, reiterating the Church's distance now from international strategies which depend on the fear of the use of nuclear or other morally unacceptable weapons⁶. He links this to a restated condemnation of the death penalty. The final chapter of the letter stresses the need for inter-religious co-operation as the pope makes a final plea for solidarity and love, reflecting on his co-operation with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. It is worth remarking that those who are likely to challenge the teachings of this encyclical are also those likely to be hostile to the Church's engagement with inter-faith dialogue and ecumenism. It is significant that in his closing paragraphs the Holy Father pays tribute to '**our brothers and sisters who are not Catholics: Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi and many more**', (286) together with Blessed Charles de Foucauld.

SOME IMPORTANT POINTS

1. The phrase ‘Without Borders’ which is a heading early on in the text, is the watchword for the whole letter. It affects not only how we look at international relations, but at the society in which we live and indeed personal and pastoral relationships. This connecting thread, in some ways blindingly obvious, gives the letter real freshness and originality. The Holy Father puts forward migrants as a *theological paradigm* for the Church: those who are disparaged and discriminated against so much become models, reflecting earlier papal teaching. This is a very strong challenge to large parts of the political culture here in the UK, the rest of Europe and the USA, and I suspect will elicit a hostile response, as happened in relation to the pope’s teachings in *Laudato Si’* (and probably from the same people). I think we need to tackle this issue ‘head on’ with assertiveness and confidence.
2. Particularly for those of us living in the UK, what is striking early on in the letter is the explicit commendation of the vision of the founding fathers of common European institutions.⁷ This is clearly a challenge to this country as it turns its back on that vision through the process of *Brexit*, and affirms those of us who have always argued that this step being undertaken by the UK is at odds with Catholic teaching⁸. My own view is that unlike political parties we should not let this issue go away: the churches should really carry on saying that *Brexit* is not something we have to accept, but at the heart of problems in political life in the UK. I suspect some of those who will dissent from the teaching of this encyclical will be annoyed by this reference and draw attention to it. Just as migration was a key issue in the 2016 Referendum campaign, the way in which the issue is treated by the Holy Father is very important indeed. Everything he says here about international relations is in strong continuity with papal teaching since 1963⁹ and again this needs to be stressed.
3. So many negative forces in the world promote violence and war in countless ways – the passionate denunciation of war in this letter, consonant with Catholic teaching particularly since Benedict XV and World War I, needs to be stressed in any presentation we make of the letter’s priorities, particularly as there are in my view disturbing signs in the UK of how war continues to be glorified, particularly at this time of year; and in line with the teachings particularly of Benedict XVI¹⁰ and his previous pronouncements Pope Francis again criticises the nuclear deterrent. He also makes the clearest papal statement yet distancing the Church from the ‘Just War’ doctrine.
4. Civility in public life is something which most people feel is somewhat lacking, here and elsewhere in the world. This is a concern of the Holy Father, raised by others¹¹ - the pope’s points are important and have also been argued by others.¹² As I indicate in my text this is more challenging to many of us than we might realise. What is significant in the letter is the link the pope makes between this and the bad ways at the moment in which we communicate with each other. If we seek to share the main points of this letter with others we should stress this point. A problem for many of us is that if we challenge those who need to be challenged, in ways identified in the pope’s letter, we arouse such levels of hostility that dialogue and mutual respect become more difficult.

CONCLUSION

There is an enormous amount in this encyclical which will be important for many years to come. I hope we can do something in the parish in the next few months to listen to what the pope is saying.

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¹ See also, for example, the presentation at the launch of the letter in Rome by Professor Anna Rowlands, the articles and blogs by Christopher Lamb and my colleague Professor Philip Booth, the video by Bishop Moth and the recent statement by Bishop McAleenan.

² So section 86: **‘I sometimes wonder why, in light of this, it took so long for the Church unequivocally to condemn slavery and various forms of violence. Today, with our developed spirituality and theology, we have no excuses. Still, there are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different. Faith, and the humanism it inspires, must maintain a critical sense in the face of these tendencies, and prompt an immediate response whenever they rear their head. For this reason, it is important that catechesis and preaching speak more directly and clearly about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters’.**

³ Section 89: **‘Nor can I reduce my life to relationships with a small group, even my own family; I cannot know myself apart from a broader network of relationships, including those that have preceded me and shaped my entire life. My relationship with those whom I respect has to take account of the fact that they do not live only for me, nor do I live only for them. Our relationships, if healthy and authentic, open us to others who expand and enrich us. Nowadays, our noblest social instincts can easily be thwarted by self-centred chats that give the impression of being deep relationships. On the contrary, authentic and mature love and true friendship can only take root in hearts open to growth through relationships with others. As couples or friends, we find that our hearts expand as we step out of ourselves and embrace others. Closed groups and self-absorbed couples that define themselves in opposition to others tend to be expressions of selfishness and mere self-preservation’.**

⁴ **‘Once more, I would like to echo a statement of Saint John Paul II whose forcefulness has perhaps been insufficiently recognized: “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone”. For my part, I would observe that “the Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property”. The principle of the common use of created goods is the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order”; it is a natural and inherent right that takes priority over others. All other rights having to do with the goods necessary for the integral fulfilment of persons, including that of private property or any other type of property, should – in the words of Saint Paul VI – “in no way hinder [this right], but should actively facilitate its implementation”. The right to private property can only be considered a secondary natural right, derived from the principle of the universal destination of created goods. This has concrete consequences that ought to be reflected in the workings of society. Yet it often happens that secondary rights displace primary and overriding rights, in practice making them irrelevant’.** (120)

⁵ So he writes in section 141: **‘The true worth of the different countries of our world is measured by their ability to think not simply as a country but also as part of the larger human family. This is seen especially in times of crisis. Narrow forms of nationalism are an extreme expression of an inability to grasp the meaning of this gratuitousness. They err in thinking that they can develop on their own, heedless of the ruin of others, that by closing their doors to others they will be better protected. Immigrants are seen as usurpers who have nothing to offer. This leads to the simplistic belief that the poor are dangerous and useless, while the powerful are generous benefactors. Only a social and political culture that readily and “gratuitously” welcomes others will have a future’.**

⁶ **‘Rules by themselves will not suffice if we continue to think that the solution to current problems is deterrence through fear or the threat of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Indeed, “if we take into consideration the principal threats to peace and security with their many dimensions in this multipolar world of the twenty-first century as, for example, terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental problems, poverty, not a few doubts arise regarding the inadequacy of nuclear deterrence as an effective response to such challenges. These concerns are even greater when we consider the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would follow from any use of nuclear weapons, with devastating, indiscriminate and uncontrollable effects, over time and space... We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples. International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power... In this context, the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative... Growing interdependence and globalization mean that any response to the threat of nuclear weapons should be collective and concerted, based on mutual trust. This trust can be built only through dialogue that is truly directed to the common good and not to the protection of veiled or particular interests’.** With the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and

favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory solutions, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life’.

⁷ Section 10, quoting his 2014 address to the European Parliament: ‘**For decades, it seemed that the world had learned a lesson from its many wars and disasters, and was slowly moving towards various forms of integration. For example, there was the dream of a united Europe, capable of acknowledging its shared roots and rejoicing in its rich diversity. We think of “the firm conviction of the founders of the European Union, who envisioned a future based on the capacity to work together in bridging divisions and in fostering peace and fellowship between all the peoples of this continent”.**’

⁸ For example, my article ‘Catholic Social Teaching in unprecedented times?’, *The Pastoral Review* volume 16 issue 3 (July/August/September 2020) and earlier material I published during the referendum campaign.

⁹ Particularly St John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, St Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, St John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*.

¹⁰ See his first World Peace Day message from 2006, ‘In Truth, Peace’, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20051213_xxxix-world-day-peace.html#:~:text=1%20JANUARY%202006%20.%20IN%20TRUTH%2C%20PEACE%20..committed%20to%20the%20paths%20of%20justice%20and%20peace.

¹¹ The best example would be the new book by the former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 2020). In my review (*The Pastoral Review*, loc.cit.) I suggested that the political Right is by far the most guilty of this.

¹² E.g. Steph MacGillivray, ‘Let us call each other friends’ *The Pastoral Review* volume 16 issue 2 (April/May/June 2020).