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***Fratelli Tutti* and Interreligious Friendship: An Indonesian Christian Reflection**

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Introduction

As a scholar who focuses on Christian-Muslim relations, Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti* (FT)¹ brings excitement for me, mainly because he openly states that the document was not only inspired by St. Francis, but also by Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb of Al-Azhar, Egypt (no. 5). They signed a document titled "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" on February 4, 2019 (Francis & Al-Tayyeb, 2019). Among its statements, which is also quoted in FT, is, "God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters" (no. 5). Pope Francis' humility in expressing how a Muslim stimulated him to write an encyclical is monumental because, as Cardinal Michael L. Fitzgerald said in an interview, no other pope in history has done it before (O'Connell, 2020). In FT Pope Francis demonstrates his commitment to interreligious dialogue in particular and Catholic engagement with other faiths since Vatican II in general.²

In Pope Francis FT covers many interesting subjects that mirror current theological discourse and interreligious conversation, such as hospitality, the immigration crisis, and the intersections between peace, reconciliation, and memory. However, this essay will focus on dialogue and friendship, which Pope Francis explained in chapter 6. Topics related to interreligious friendship have attracted Christian theologians and scholars in recent years (Fredericks & Tiemeier, 2015; Goshen-Gottstein, 2018). The importance of building friendship in society is affirmed in FT. In this essay, I will discuss how FT draws several vital points related to dialogue and interreligious friendship while pointing to some areas that can benefit from improvement. Here, I will bring my experience and perspective as a Christian in Indonesia, a country with the largest number of Muslims worldwide.

Dialogue, Differences, and Dignity

In chapter 6 of FT, titled "Dialogue and Friendship in Society," Pope Francis emphasizes that an authentic social dialogue must respect the different points of view of each person involved, including her convictions and concerns. He says, "When individuals or groups are consistent in their thinking, defend their values and convictions, and develop their arguments, this surely benefits society. Yet, this can only occur to the extent that there is genuine dialogue and openness to others" (no. 203). Unlike secular societies of the West where religious views are sometimes perceived with contempt and suspicion, Indonesia somewhat stands in the middle between a secular and a religious society. Pope Francis' idea is a gentle reminder to Indonesian Christians who championed the strict separation of state and religion but failed to engage others in the public sphere, let alone participate in constructive public debates.

The chapter also highlights human dignity as an intrinsic, universal value that is "superior to that of material objects and contingent situations" (no. 213). This understanding of human dignity is one of the core beliefs required to build a just and peaceful society. Whether it is sexual, religious, or other identities, one's identity is irrevocable and integral to her dignity in front of other human

beings. It also applies to any economic system that treats human and non-human beings as expendables for the sake of financial gains or authority. In places that still discriminate against people based on their sexual, religious, or other forms of identity and where a large gap between the rich and poor exist, Pope Francis' words call for self-examination and repentance toward transformation into a more just society.

Pope Francis utilizes the image of a polyhedron to describe a society "where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations" (no. 215). He reiterates his words in *Evangelii Gaudium* that champions unity over division, "the whole is greater than the part" (Francis, 2013). When I read the phrase for the first time, I felt discomfort because I grew up during the New Order era (1966-1998) under President Suharto, an authoritarian ruler. At that time, to support the government's development program, the phrase "give priority to the public interest" (*mengutamakan kepentingan umum*) was often quoted. In school, I was taught to always sacrifice self-interest for the sake of public interest and the nation's unity. However, such jargon often harms the poor and marginalized while benefits those in power. Fortunately, Pope Francis underlines that unity should not undermine the part. He asserts, "No one is useless and no one is expendable" (no. 215). Those who are in the peripheries of society may see things differently, and their views matter.

Friendship in (Multi-Religious) Society

Pope Francis' utilization of the word "friendship" in FT is commendable because it expresses a deeper human relationship. The portrayal of Interreligious dialogue often does not entail any notion of friendship. It refers to an event where the speakers consist of leaders of different religious traditions or church denominations, and they talk about a particular theme from their perspective. Bringing the notion of friendship to dialogue, Pope Francis has moved beyond that kind of interreligious dialogue. Moreover, his friendship with Imam Al-Tayyeb becomes an example of the interconnection between friendship and dialogue. Nevertheless, interreligious dialogue must progress beyond the example of Pope Francis and Imam Al-Tayyeb precisely because both of them are prominent religious leaders. To promote dialogue in society, one must undertake interreligious friendship in everyday life and on a personal level, not only among the elites.

Next, it is beneficial to discuss the definition of "friendship" itself. When I read chapter 6, I think it explores dialogue more than friendship itself. As a result, what Pope Francis means by "friendship" remains unclear. Alon Goshen-Gottstein notes that there are different definitions and multiple levels and dimensions of friendship (Goshen-Gottstein, 2018, p. xi). The exact meaning of friendship is nowhere to be found in FT. Yet, I take Pope Francis' elaboration of love as moving beyond oneself as the foundation of his understanding of friendship. He states,

In the depths of every heart, love creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves and towards others...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 (nos. 88 and 89).

Here, it is clear that Pope Francis thinks of friendship as a deeper bond between people and not shallow human relations. Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz offer a similar understanding of friendship from a Christian perspective: “The friendships we have in mind require the *commitment of time* and *extended communication*. They involve *open communication* and *are not restricted to a certain facet of life* (e.g., ‘office friends’). And, in concert with the roots of the English word ‘friend’ (from the Proto-Germanic *frijōjan*, ‘to love’), they are marked by *affection*” (Volf & McAnnally-Linz, 2018, p.46; italics by authors). In both definitions, the connection of hearts is what marked friendship, including interreligious friendship. Friendship entails openness and mutual growth. I believe such a meaning of friendship is closer to a family bond, and that is why Pope Francis uses both “friendship” and “family” in FT (no. 230).

Interreligious Friendship as Peacebuilding

Another important aspect of friendship is to achieve common goals together. Joas Adiprasetya and Nindyo Sasongko, Indonesian theologians, describe friendship as sharing lives between people who are bound by their affection and shared vision. They state, “the culmination of friendship is not mutually exclusive bonding, an attraction which is shown between friends; friendship also brings about a common vision or project for the other and for the world. Only in friendship is inclusive and non-hierarchical love found” (Adiprasetya and Sasongko, 2019, p. 24). Moreover, such friendship always opens toward outsiders and constantly invites them to join the circle. Thus, it always happens in public spaces. For a multi-religious society, interreligious friendship relates to the peacebuilding effort to maintain harmony.

Interreligious friendship as peacebuilding is essential for today’s multi-religious society. Pope Francis touches upon this theme at the end of chapter 6, when he speaks about cultivating kindness. He affirms that kindness “facilitates the quest for consensus; it opens new paths where hostility and conflict would burn all bridges” (no. 224). Furthermore, he elaborates several essential points related to peacebuilding in chapter 7, such as forgiveness and memory. Interreligious friendship is an effective way for peacebuilding in today’s world, especially in a post-conflict society. One example from Indonesia is interreligious peacebuilding in Maluku, a region in the Eastern part of Indonesia that suffered from violent Muslim-Christian conflicts (1998-2002). Strategies used to build peace include interfaith live-ins and trauma workshops focused on building friendship between participants. The biggest challenge of the peacebuilding effort was to confront one’s fear of the religious other due to the trauma caused by the violence. Such an effort aimed at transforming an enemy into a friend.³ During a program called Young Ambassador for Peace that has a workshop and live-in for women, Helena Rijoly explains how the participants

continued to share their stories about the struggles all women faced in life, no matter what their religious background. There were stories about their efforts to fulfil their daily needs, about the loss of a child, husband and belongings, about concerns for the future etc. With every story told, they embraced each other, they talked from the heart and dreamed that Ambon will return to its beautiful state. The incident, which had made the situation quite tense, then created solid friendships and familial relationships (Rijoly, 2017, p. 286).

After the situation has improved for several years, in 2011, another incident happened in Ambon, the capital city of Maluku that led to a local riot. It created an eerie atmosphere for the population because of its resemblance with the beginning of the 1998 conflict. Fortunately, the riot did not spread far due to the effort of local grassroot movements. One of the movements is called Peace Provocateurs, and it has a particular focus on building interreligious friendships (Al-Qurtuby, 2013). When the riot happened, Peace Provocateurs employed social media platforms and short text-messages to halt any hoaxes and fake news related to the incident in order to reduce tension and restrain people from retaliating and fighting. In the aftermath, the group organized programs and activities to connect people and build friendship. Notably, they target young people not using religious means but through activities in public spaces such as music and photography (Harmakaputra, 2016, p. 9-10).

Conclusion

I believe the issuance of FT is timely and relevant in many aspects for Christians and non-Christians. This essay intends to offer a few reflection points on dialogue and friendship as elaborated in FT from an Indonesian Christian perspective. As it has inspired me, I sincerely believe FT will inspire broader discussions on the topic that involve more diverse perspectives to enrich the conversation. Such conversations serve Pope Francis' aspiration toward the unity of all as a human family and a community of equal friends who work for justice and peace.

Endnotes

1. *Fratelli Tutti* means “all brothers,” but it can be interpreted inclusively as “all brothers and sisters.” In this essay I will refer to it only with its paragraph numbers (Francis, 2020).
2. For studies on Pope Francis' interreligious engagements, see *Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue: Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives* (Kasimow and Race, 2018). For studies on Catholic engagements with other religions, see *Catholicism Engaging Other Faiths: Vatican II and its Impact* (Latinovic, Mannion, and Welle, 2018).
3. For stories related to interreligious friendship and peacebuilding in Maluku, Indonesia, see *Basudara Stories of Peace from Maluku: Working Together for Reconciliation* (Manuputty, 2017).

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