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Fratelli Tutti: An Interpretation of Dialogue and Friendship in Society: An Islamic Perspective

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Introduction

In this essay I chosen to discuss Fratelli Tutti's (FT) chapter six, which discusses dialogue and friendship in society, and incorporates existing Islamic perspectives (Piro, 2020). Many of the aspects of chapter 6 in FT are in line with Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb's views, as seen in the publication of Human Fraternity (2019). Fratelli Tutti means "All Brothers and Sisters" (Piro, 2020). The encyclical's aim is to address the causes of lack of unity, which brings about the on-going peace disruptions in the world. It focuses its discussions on human fraternity as the solution to peaceful coexistence. This essay looks at FT from an Islamic perspective and discusses how Islam contributes to dialogue and friendship in society, using the FT context on dialogue and friendship.

"The believers are but one brotherhood, so make peace between your brothers. And be mindful of Allah so you may be shown mercy." (Qur'an 49:10).

"They are those who donate in prosperity and adversity, control their anger, and pardon others. And Allah loves the good-doers" (Qur'an 3:134).

Dialogue and Friendship in Society

Dialogue and friendship involve rapprochement (Kamau, 2018). The word appears twice in the entire encyclical. In Chapter One, rapprochement is used with other words such as integration and reconciliation and Pope Francis states that its application has achieved peace. In Chapter Seven, however, Pope Francis states that rapprochement is not adequate for building social friendship (FT, no. 10).

Building social friendship between groups with a history of being different is not dependent on the absence of war, but by allowing people to show self-expression, and to reciprocate the skills of listening, looking, knowing, understanding, and finding common ground that suits each other. Applying reciprocity leads to constructive dialogue. Factors that disrupt dialogue from happening include fleeing from reality and extending different views, which create hatred and attacks on one another (Kamau, 2018). In FT authentic dialogue is characterized by two people viewing each other as having truth in some of their views. It may not be possible for them to agree completely, but it is possible to have a common ground (Piro, 2020).

In FT, Pope Francis questions the role of media in dialogue. Media is among many other platforms in which dialogue is conducted. Many media users think that their approach is the right one, but they end up expressing their interests and not listening to others. The internet does not provide the required platform for dialogue. Internet dialogues are highly manipulated. The majority of dialogues on the internet are from parties that are not sincere and truthful (Piro, 2020).

Pluralistic society needs to approach dialogue with openness to others. Fratelli Tutti suggests the culture of encounter, which follows the path of truth and peace. Encounter is not possible to build in a short time. It follows a slow process of listening patiently and accepting others.

The parties choose encounter over existing differences and thereby redirecting from violence. People in conflicts should seek to be excused, pardoned, and appreciated in their ideas (Renard, 2011) and contributions to society (Piro, 2020).

Islam's Contribution to Dialogue and Friendship in Society

Before the existence of FT Islam has been a contributor to interreligious dialogue and friendship in society (Alamdari, 2004). Islam has an open mind and ideology that describes religions as being common in many ways. Using FT as a guide to the understanding of Islam's contribution, I discuss the following characteristics: rapprochement, social friendship, and reciprocity. First is rapprochement, which refers to creating or making cordial relations between Muslims and Christians (Piro, 2020). We see from research that many more Muslims have extended friendship to Christians than Christians have extended friendship to Muslims (Azuma, 2012). For example, in studying the hostility of Muslims and Christians toward each other, we see that on the whole, the Muslims surveyed in Southern and Eastern European countries, South Asian countries, and Middle Eastern, and North African countries (Zaborowski, 2013) said that Muslims were less hostile to Christians than Christians were to Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2013, see *Interfaith Tensions*). The research indicates that in most regions, Muslims were willing to dialogue and develop friendship in society.

The second approach discussed in FT is that dialogue and friendship involve building social friendship between groups with a history of differences (Piro, 2020). In the Pew survey Muslims were asked to state if religious conflict was a "big national problem" in their countries. In Central Asian countries, Southern-Eastern European countries and Southeast Asian countries the highest number of Muslims saying that religious conflict was a big national problem was 36%, while the highest number in South Asian countries was 57% (with a low of 29% in Bangladesh); in Middle Eastern-North Africa countries the highest number was 68% (with a low of 13% in Jordan), and in Sub-Saharan African countries it was 64% (with a low of 16% in Ethiopia) (Pew Research Center, 2013, *Religious Conflict*). These findings indicate that peace is a platform for dialogue and friendship in society.

The third approach reciprocates skills, e.g., listening, looking, knowing, understanding, and finding common ground that suits each other (Piro, 2020). Looking at commonness between the two religions, many Muslims in all of the regions said many similarities exist between the religions, though the numbers vary by country and region (Pew Research Center, 2013, *Similar or Different Faiths?*). On average, those Muslims who report having "a great deal or some" knowledge of Christianity are much more likely to say that Christianity and Islam have much in common (Pew Research Center, 2013, *Knowledge Related to Views of Common Ground Between Islam and Christianity*). These results mean that many Muslims see the possibility of dialogue and friendship with Christians. In a pluralistic society and culture of encounter, one of the measures for dialogue and friendship is marriages outside the Muslim religion. In the Pew study, in Southern and Eastern European countries we see the highest percentage of Muslim respondents saying they would be very or somewhat comfortable with a son or daughter marrying a Christian. We also see in the countries in the other regions that a number of Muslims say they would be very or somewhat comfortable. In all countries, Muslim respondents were more likely to be very or somewhat comfortable with sons marrying Christians than they were with daughters marrying Christians, if only by a small percentage in some cases (Pew Research, 2013, *Comfort Level with a Son or Daughter Marrying a Christian*). Openness to interfaith marriage provides an environment for dialogue and friendship in society.

Regarding listening and accepting others, the Pew survey has data on the number of Muslims attending interfaith meetings: Muslims in Uganda, Liberia, Mozambique, and Thailand had the highest numbers, over 50%. From 30-40% of Muslims in a number of Sub-Saharan African countries reported attending interfaith meetings, a higher number than in countries in other regions. The majority of Muslims overall did not attend interfaith meetings (Pew Research Center, 2013, Meetings with Christians). The rate of non-attendance shows that the majority of Muslims were not ready for interfaith meetings because of their unwillingness or ignorance of dialogue and friendship in society (Ciftci, 2012). Muslims were also asked if they have a great deal or some knowledge about Christianity. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau were the only countries where over 50% of Muslims said they had a great deal or some knowledge about Christianity, though in almost all of the other Sub-Saharan countries 30-46% of Muslims said they a great deal or some knowledge (Pew Research Center, 2013, Knowledge About Christianity). From these findings we can see that many Muslim countries do not have much knowledge about Christianity, and as we also saw, the more knowledge Muslims have about Christianity, the more likely they are to say the two religions have common ground.

Effect of Dialogue and Friendship in Society on Peace in the Islamic World

The United Arab Emirates was granted the job of gaining support among the United Nations' member states for the UN World Human Fraternity Day declaration. Most Muslim countries support the declaration. By the end of 2020, 34 countries, including major Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Bahrain, had joined in the World Human Fraternity Day declaration. According to Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti took up and developed some of the great themes raised in the Human Fraternity Document of 2019 (FT, no. 5).

Many Islamic countries have a positive view of interreligious dialogue and friendship in society. Many Islamic countries appreciate FT's views on the solution to the on-going discrimination, hate speech, religious bigotry, violence, and xenophobia between Muslims and Christians. These transnational threats disrupt peace in the Islamic world. The UN World Human Fraternity Day is a first step to true dialogue globally. After the publication of FT, the United Nations unanimously decided that from 2021 onwards, the 4th day of February will be World Human Fraternity Day. The 4th of February was set in respect of the date of the signing of the "Document on Human Fraternity" by Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb and Pope Francis on February 4th, 2019 (Duffner, 2020). Such a move shows the impact of FT on the world, especially the Islamic world. Both Muslims and Christians worked to have the UN resolution passed (O'Connell, 2020).

With the call for interreligious dialogue in the World Human Fraternity Day declaration, and remembering the contribution of Muslims and Christians to the U.N resolution, 27 European countries and the United States of America supported the adoption of the declaration. On a related note, the Vatican-organized Human Fraternity Higher Committee includes five Muslims, which comprises 38% of the total representation at the top positions on the Committee, showing the important involvement of Muslims in efforts to promote dialogue and social friendship. The Day and the Committee hold much promise for the future of interreligious dialogue and friendship.

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