

Fratelli Tutti Study Guide (Chapter 6)

Chapter 6: Dialogue and Friendship in Society



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A Word about Inclusive Language

The announcement that the Holy Father was going to Assisi to sign a new encyclical on social relationships caused some people to applaud. When we learned that the encyclical would be known as *Fratelli Tutti*, much of that applause died out. Didn't using the masculine noun show that the Catholic Church is still out of touch with today's realities? In fact, Church language is not known for keeping up with the times

As we go forward, we Franciscans share a deep concern about inclusive language and the role of women in the Church while also sharing the urgent plea of this letter from Pope Francis.

This document would once have been called "an encyclical of the Holy Father Francis on fraternity and social friendship." Somewhere down the line people started referring to papal documents, such as encyclicals, bulls, etc., by their incipit, the first two or three words of the document itself, making it easier to remember and discuss them.

Every word has a denotation, a precise definition, which we can find in dictionaries; however, it also has a connotation, a commonly accepted meaning, even some emotional impact. For this reason, the same word can evoke feelings of joy

and security in one person while causing someone else to feel threatened or repulsed. In any conversation or dialogue, both parties need not only to listen to the words, but also to delve into what the other is saying. I personally find it encouraging that the English translators of this encyclical show some sensitivity to the issue by leaving the incipit in Italian.

Basically, the Holy Father is encouraging all of us to discover what Francis did after that fateful day when he stripped himself and said, "Now I can truly say, 'Our Father.'" If we are all children of one father, we are then all brothers and sisters.

— Sr. Nancy Celaschi, OSF

How to Use This Guide

1. This guide can be used with small or large groups and for personal reflection.
2. Feel free to share with others the URL where you found the guide. You are free to print it for others who prefer a printed text. This guide is **free**.
3. This guide serves as an overview to the chapter featured but cannot in the space available do justice to the richness of each chapter.

Summary of Chapter 6

Pope Francis calls on the witness of his namesake: "Francis' fidelity to his Lord was commensurate with his love for his brothers and sisters [and] Francis went to meet the Sultan with the same attitude that he instilled in his disciples: [do] not 'engage in arguments or disputes, but...be subject to every human creature for God's sake'"(3). Saint Francis urged that a humble and fraternal 'subjection' be shown to those who did not share his faith" (3).

Saint Francis called followers in the early communities to go into the world to transform it by living minority (being servants of the Gospel). Pope Francis challenges us to do the same. As Saint Francis stood with the Sultan, so Pope Francis calls us to stand with people with whom we stand opposite. The call is not to engage the divide but to understand which in us, is common: human dignity.

In the chapter's four sections—Social Dialogue for a New Culture, The BASIS of Consensus, A New Culture, and Recovering Kindness—Pope Francis

engages us to look beyond retrenchment into individualism and isolation in light of the pluralistic societal reality of the current world. His call is a dynamic call to move forward in an attitude of encounter, willing to engage the strengths of the societies we find around us—instead of standing in perpetual opposition.

Francis notes that consumerist individualism and relativism offend human dignity. The monologues fostered by these two positions divide our society. “Feverish exchange of opinions” lead self-isolated audiences to “parallel monologues” (200). This dichotomy, fueled by half-truth, corrupted information, or outright lies, prevents what is true, wholesome, and authentic to be known in the people and cultures we call “other.”

Pope Francis calls the developed world to open hearts, minds, and awareness to indigenous cultures to encounter a way forward. Cultural tolerance is more than “putting up with” another way of thinking, living or being. A culture of encounter is not surmising who I am and who “they” are. A culture of encounter is the “art” of “transcending our differences and divisions” (215). A culture of encounter facilitates perceiving and honoring the common good.

— Charlie McCarthy, OFM Conv.

Quotes from Chapter 6

- Monologues engage no one (200). In a pluralistic society, dialogue is the best way to realize what ought always to be affirmed and respected apart from any ephemeral consensus (211). Three realities [the interests of society, consensus and the reality of objective truth] can be harmonized whenever, through dialogue, people are unafraid to get to the heart of an issue (212).
- “Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter” (204). The word *culture* points to [the] most cherished convictions [of a people’s] way of life.
- A people’s culture...has to do with their desires, their interests and...the way they live their lives. To speak of a “culture of encounter” means that we, as a people, should be

passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone...an aspiration and a style of life. The subject of this culture is the people (216).

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. When have you felt shut down by someone closed to a thought or opinion you expressed? What was that experience like? What similarity/difference has this experience to bullying? What could have made the experience different?
2. When have you cut someone off, or rejected an opinion out of hand, totally disinterested in what the person was thinking? What similarity/difference has this experience to bullying? What was that experience like? How could you have handled it differently?
3. What is the process of coming to know a culture other than my own? How does a person start?

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