Developing a Culture of Encounter

According to *Fratelli Tutti*

At the centre of Pope Francis’s Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* was the repeated call for Christians to go forth from their own communities in order to preach the Gospel and lovingly serve those in need.[[1]](#footnote-1) In that encyclical, Francis also warned about a church community becoming lukewarm by being too self-centred, by focusing on its own fears and needs, instead of being motivated by Christian charity. In imitation of the Son who went forth from the Father in order to reveal the Father’s love for the world, so too must the faithful Christian go forth from his community to share the love of God that he has experienced in the Sacraments and in Christian fellowship. As Jesus taught in Matthew 25:31-45, it is in serving others that we encounter Christ in the flesh.

This evangelical commission continues in *Fratelli Tutti*, but the context is changed. When the Catholic goes forth from his own faith community, he or she encounters others who claim to already know the truth and who may wish to share with the Catholic their understanding of the truth. For example, the Catholic may encounter Protestants who claim to follow Christ but often with doctrines and practices quite foreign to Catholicism. The Catholic may encounter non-Christians, such as the Muslims, who claim to be following God’s revelation to them through a prophet not recognized by the Church. Lastly, the Catholic may encounter the atheist or agnostic who may believe in nothing higher than the human being. Yet despite the difficulties which could arise in such meetings, Pope Francis urges us to develop a “culture of encounter,”[[2]](#footnote-2) in which “dialogue [is] the path, mutual cooperation [is] the code of conduct, reciprocal understanding [is] the method and standard.”[[3]](#footnote-3) According to the Pope, we must not fear encounters with non-Catholics, but we must welcome such encounters and train ourselves to make them fruitful. We must learn to talk to people whose beliefs are different from our own, to work together with them for the good of our community, and to understand them from their own point of view. Apart from the Christian command to love your neighbour as yourself, there is the practical reality that Catholics and non-Catholics together form a political community, and in a modern democracy, the laws and collective actions of the political community depend on the ability of people with very different beliefs to talk and work together.

The goal of my presentation is to elaborate Francis’s concept of a “culture of encounter.” First, I will connect his exhortation to dialogue to Christianity’s historical openness to learning from other wisdom traditions. Second, I will offer some practical remarks on how Catholics can dialogue with non-Catholics, with separate sections for dialogue with Protestants, non-Christians, and atheists. Lastly, I will attempt to apply Francis’s “culture of encounter” to the PNG context.

I. Learning from non-Christian traditions

Once the Gospel began to be preached to the Gentiles in the Mediterranean world, the early Christians found themselves in contact with the religions and philosophical traditions of the Greek and Roman peoples. While St. Paul warns early Christians not to be taken “captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition,”[[4]](#footnote-4) he also acknowledges the truth and value of the pagan traditions. In Romans 1:19-20, he declares that God’s “eternal power and divine nature” were known to them through their experience of the created world, and in Acts 17 he speaks of the different peoples of the Earth as searching for and even finding God in an imperfect way through their native traditions.[[5]](#footnote-5) Paul does not bring to the Greeks an alien god, but full knowledge of a god they worship but do not know. This original openness to the value of pagan thought is seen in the use by Paul and John of philosophical concepts to express the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, especially in John’s description of the Son as the Logos or Word of God, a concept found in Stoic philosophy.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The early Christian apologists developed John’s teaching that the Son is the Word “which enlightens everyone.”[[7]](#footnote-7) According to Justin Martyr, who was killed for his faith in 165 AD, human reason is an image of the divine logos, such that some non-Christians were able to find and contemplate some part of the Word and thereby developed morally good laws and correct understandings of God.[[8]](#footnote-8) Justin points to many parallels between the teachings of Greek philosophers and poets in order to argue that Christian does not destroy the Greek wisdom tradition, but perfects it by clarifying what is false and affirming what is true within it. Clement of Alexandria (150 AD– 215 AD) argues that philosophy prepared the Greeks for the revelation of God in Christ by teaching them correct morals and the rejection of idolatry. In this way, philosophy for the Greeks was analogous to the Old Testament law for the Jews, a preparation for the Gospel.[[9]](#footnote-9) Finally, St. Augustine of Hippo explains in his *Confessions*, book 7 that he was trapped in a false religion which taught that God is material, until Plato’s philosophy convinced him that God is immaterial and incorruptible and the creator of all things. For Augustine, Greek philosophy enabled him to understand the Christian God.

Thus, a central part of the Catholic faith is that “that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason.”[[10]](#footnote-10) This doctrine means that the Catholic Church does not have a monopoly on the truth, but that truths about creation, human nature, and God are present in the native wisdom traditions of the various peoples of the world, especially in the great philosophies and religions of the world. The value of dialoguing with and learning from non-Catholic traditions was affirmed in the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, and its Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. As quoted by Francis, *Nostra Aetate* states:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The doctrine that religions and philosophies are naturally inspired by contact with the divine logos, who is fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, has many implications. In general, this teaching means that grace and Christian revelation perfect what truth humans have reached through natural revelation; they do not replace, overpower, or destroy them.[[12]](#footnote-12) Let me give three specific applications. 1) Catholic missionaries can affirm the truths and goodnesses found in pre-Christian traditions, and can be challenged about what aspects of their faith belong truly to the Gospel and which are coloured by their own culture. A Catholic missionary can expect to learn from the traditional wisdom of the people that he is ministering to. 2) Catholic theologians and philosophers can research non-Christian wisdom traditions to discover concepts and arguments that help them to better understand and explain Christian revelation. This openness to the possibility of synthesizing the insights of non-Christian wisdom traditions with Christian revelation is exemplified in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. In his summary of Christian wisdom, the *Summa Theologiae,* Thomas never tires of referencing the teachings of Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Muslim philosophers, critically evaluating their arguments, and integrating their insights into his theology. 3) Catholics can engage in serious discussions with non-Catholics with the expectation of discovering real insight about human nature and divine reality, even when serious disagreement remains. Having given some theological support for the “culture of encounter”, I will now offer some practical remarks on how to dialogue with non-Catholics.

II. Dialogue as the Path

Pope Francis speaks of a “dialogical realism” in which we remain faithful to our own principles “while recognizing that others also have the right to do likewise.”[[13]](#footnote-13) What does he mean? Two attitudes must be avoided when engaging in dialogue. The first is “a false notion of toleration”,[[14]](#footnote-14) which ignores or refuses to acknowledge the real differences between dialogue partners. Out of desire for peace, we might act as if we agree when in fact we have serious disagreements. However, the fact that we disagree is both the basis of the need for dialogue and of the possibility that we can learn from each other.[[15]](#footnote-15) For example, if I enter a discussion about the nature of grace with a Lutheran with the attitude that our differences do not matter, then I have closed myself off to the possibility of learning from him. It is by acknowledging that the Lutheran’s understanding of grace may be different from mine that I open myself to having my own view challenged and to learning a new way of thinking about grace from my dialogue partner. The second attitude to be avoided is to treat dialogue as if it were a winner-take-all debate. The goal of evangelizing is to convert another to one’s own faith; the goal of apologetics is to defend one’s faith; the goal of dialogue is to understand the other and be understood by the other. For example, when I discuss the nature of marriage with my Muslims brothers, my immediate goal is not to convince him that the Catholic understanding of marriage as one man united to one woman for life is correct (though I believe it is), but to enable him to understand the Catholic view of marriage and to learn from him what the Muslim understanding of marriage is. Once we clear about what each other believe, then we can clearly identify on what aspects of marriage we agree and on what aspects we disagree. In summary, according to Francis, we must enter into dialogue with a ‘growth mindset’.[[16]](#footnote-16) “We have to stand in the place of others,”[[17]](#footnote-17) realize that they believe in the truth of their own tradition, and affirm that they may have insights through which our own lives and worldviews can be enriched. As Pope Francis explains quite clearly,

Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns. Based on their identity and experience, others have a contribution to make, and it is desirable that they should articulate their positions for the sake of a more fruitful public debate. When individuals or groups are consistent in their thinking, defend their values and convictions, and develop their arguments, this surely benefits society.

I will now apply Pope Francis’s “dialogical realism” to Catholic dialogue with Protestants, non-Christians, and agnostics. I begin with the reminder that a Protestant considers his denomination to be best manifestation of the universal Church, that a non-Christian believes that his faith is true path to salvation, and that an agnostic believes that his own stance is what is most reasonable.

*Unitatis redintegratio* gives very clear instructions on the value and goals of ecumenical dialogue. The decree acknowledges that through belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation and through the sacrament of baptism, Protestants have “access to the communion of salvation.” The decree acknowledges that “many . . . of the most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself . . . can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Therefore, Catholics can expect to be edified by dialogue and fellowship with Protestants, because “whatever is truly Christian . . . can always bring a more perfect realization of the very mystery of Christ and the Church.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Four aspects of ecumenical dialogue are highlighted:

1. Through a sharing of the details of one’s faith tradition, “everyone gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both [traditions].”

2. A foundation is set for cooperation in works of charity that are the duty of every Christian.

3. We can pray and worship together, following the norms for such activities.[[20]](#footnote-20)

4. The Catholic Church can be inspired for renewal and reform.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In other words, dialogue begins with the exchange of information, but the goal is practical action in three areas: cooperation in charitable works, ecumenical prayer and fellowship, and the renewal of the Catholic Church. The decree mentions three areas for renewal. When comparing ourselves to doctrines and lifestyles of our Protestant brethren, we Catholics may be convicted of “deficiencies in moral conduct or in Church discipline, or even in the way that Church teaching has been formulated.”[[22]](#footnote-22) From the Catholic side, we do not doubt the basic truth of our doctrines, but perhaps a Protestant may emphasize a truth that we have neglected, or perhaps we have failed individually or institutionally to live up to the goal of Christian perfection, or perhaps the way that we express or explain a doctrine is misleading and needs a refounding in Scripture and Church tradition.

In my own time in Papua New Guinea, my family and I have been nourished by our friendship with Protestants. I have been personally inspired by the example of Protestant missionaries who raise funds in their own country in order to serve in Papua New Guinea without pay. I personally feel convicted by the moral example of the Seven-Day Adventists who demand that their followers give up alcohol, buai, pork meat, and caffeine and that they always keep the Sabbath holy. I may disagree with them about the Lord’s Day and the value of coffee, but they demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice for the Christian life, a willingness that is sometimes lacking in my own life.

Regarding dialogue with non-Christians, I have already noted the traditional openness of Catholicism to be enriched by insights from non-Christian wisdom tradition. As St. Paul said, through their religious beliefs and practices humans seek after the divine and to some extent find God. *Nostrae Aetate* exhorts Catholics to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among” people of non-Christian faith, while also bearing witness to the Christian faith and way of life.[[23]](#footnote-23) It is helpful to enter into such dialogues while remembering the faith of the other in the truth of his or her own tradition, for example, that Muslims believe that Mohammed is the final prophet and that some Buddhists believe that all humans will eventually be reincarnated as a Buddhist, such that other religions are merely a preparatory transition.[[24]](#footnote-24) Such awareness will help us to be more humble and respectful in our dialogue.

According to the teachings of Pope Francis and the Catholic Church, the goals of dialogue with non-Christians are similar to those of dialogue with Protestants, though our differences may be greater. The first goal is simply to understand each other, to move beyond the generalities about the other that have generated by the media or by own tradition, but not by actual dialogue and interaction with the other. People of different faiths should seek to understand the religion of their neighbours based on its original sources and how its followers presently interpret them.[[25]](#footnote-25) Just as we Catholics would not like to identified with the actions and mindsets of the Catholics of 17th Century France that forcibly converted or expelled the Protestants or with the Irish Catholic terrorists of the 20th Century, so we should not identify our non-Christian neighbours with invaders of the past or extremists of today. Instead, we should talk to them and learn from them themselves who they are and what they believe, while at the same time trying to help them overcome any misconceptions they have about Catholics.[[26]](#footnote-26) Second, our dialogue should be the foundation for cooperative efforts, a point that I will elaborate below. Third, our dialogues should include times of prayer and meditation and visits to each other’s places of worship. Fourth, through explaining our own practices and beliefs to another, we can be challenged about the degree to which we truly understand and live out our own convictions. For example, in learning about the Muslim practice of everyone praying five times daily, I have been challenged by the lack of set prayer time in my own life, and I have renewed interest in the ancient Christian practice of the liturgy of the hours.

In chapters 6 and 8 of *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis touches on the political dimensions of interfaith dialogue and cooperation, and the end of the encyclical has a long quotation from the *Document on Human Fraternity* that he authored with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. Here, Francis is putting in action the instructions from *Nostrae Aetate* that Catholic and Muslims should “together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice, and moral understanding.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Francis urges all religious leaders to support “religious freedom for believers of all religions.”[[28]](#footnote-28) The Vatican 2 Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* affirms that humans have a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially the truth about the origin and purpose of human life. Furthermore, “the social nature of man . . . itself requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion: that he should share with others in matters religious; that he should profess his religion in community.” Therefore, to deny a person the free exercise of his or her religion is an injustice to the human person and a violation of very purpose of the state which is to safeguard the basic rights and liberties of its citizens.[[29]](#footnote-29) Francis calls on people of religion to not only seek to guarantee religious freedom for each other, but also to work together to identify shared moral truths that we can advocate together. He and the past two Popes have warned of material secularism, which, while originating in the West, has been spread throughout the world through media and the spread of capitalism. This secularism reduces happiness to the consumption of good and services and reduces the worth of a person to his economic value. This secular capitalism instils a radical individualism, in which a person thinks he is free when he can satisfy all his desires and live as he pleases.[[30]](#footnote-30) Religions acts as a great check on material secularism, by teaching us that only spiritual goods satisfy the longing of the human soul, that there are certain sinful desires that no human should satisfy, and that only through charity for God and neighbour do we find true fulfilment. In supporting these truths, in rejecting religious motivated violence, in affirming the intrinsic worth of the human person, believers of good faith can stand together against the negative forces in their society.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Third, Catholics are called to be in dialogue with atheists and agnostics, with those who place their faith in human science and natural reason and see no need for religion. Pope Francis focuses on political dialogue with atheists, but we can turn to the Catholic tradition for reasons why such dialogue in general can be fruitful. The First Vatican Council, following the teachings of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, declared that “although faith is above reason, nevertheless, between faith and reason no true disagreement can ever exist, since the same God, who reveals mysteries and infuses faith, has bestowed on the human soul the light of reason.”[[32]](#footnote-32) As discussed, God, the divine logos, is the source of human reason, and therefore what is discovered through the natural use of human reason cannot contradict what we know through divine revelation. If, for instance, there appears to be a conflict between science and Catholicism, it is only because there is a mistake on one side. Either the scientist is confusing a hypothesis or a partial explanation with a proven fact, and can be corrected through a proper application of scientific methods; or the Catholic has misunderstood the Church’s teaching or misinterpreted Scripture.[[33]](#footnote-33) St. Augustine in particular taught that Scripture is open to many possible interpretations and if one is shown to be false through philosophy or science, then we must acknowledge that that interpretation was mistaken.[[34]](#footnote-34) An obvious example of this procedure is found in the old Galileo controversy, in which some Church authorities said that Scripture teaches that the sun goes around the earth. From today’s perspective, it is obvious that Scripture is not an astronomy book but the story of salvation history, such that we cannot turn to Scripture to solve an astronomical question.

In his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II famously stated that “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Through faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, our minds are lifted up to complete truths beyond our natural power to know or understand. At the same time, John Paul II speaks of the ways that the critical use of human reason has enriched the faith. Pointing to the achievements of the Church Fathers, he says that through their adoption of Greek philosophy they learned to understand and express the truth of Christian in a manner that satisfied philosophy’s search for a universal cause of everything whose existence can be established through rational arguments. The Church Fathers developed a “critical awareness of what they believed in,” and “superstitions were recognized for what they were and religion was, at least in part, purified by rational analysis.” Through their “fruitful dialogue with ancient philosophy,” the Fathers developed “new ways of proclaiming and understanding the God of Jesus Christ.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

The same possibility for fruitful dialogue with secular people remains today. It is beneficial for us to develop a critical awareness of what we believe in, to make sure that we have not fallen into superstition, to make a harmony between our faith in God and the wonderful discoveries of human science. At the same time, through respectful dialogue with secular people, we correct the misconceptions sometimes advanced in the media that people of deep religious faith are irrational, bigoted, and intolerant. Religion contains ethical and metaphysical truths that secular people need in order to be happy, and thoughtful dialogue combined with the witness of Christian living can bring about in secular people an awareness of what they are missing as well as conceptual resources needed to solve social and political problems of today.[[37]](#footnote-37)

According to Pope Francis, “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.”[[38]](#footnote-38) He speaks optimistically of the natural ability of the human intellect to recognize “certain universal moral demands.”[[39]](#footnote-39) As St. Paul taught in Romans 2:15, God’s law is written in the hearts of believers and non-believers alike. Thomas Aquinas developed this teaching philosophically. According to Aquinas, humans have inclinations towards what is naturally good for them and away from what is naturally harmful for them. For example, all humans naturally desire food, shelter, friendship, family. By rationally reflecting on our inclinations, we can identify what is naturally good and naturally bad for humans. Aquinas calls this knowledge the natural law. According to him, all humans follow the basic principle that “good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided,”[[40]](#footnote-40) though they disagree about the details of what is good and what is bad. “Through reflection, experience and dialogue,”[[41]](#footnote-41) a community develops a shared vision of what is good and bad and develops laws that direct people towards what it identifies as good and away from what it identifies as evil. Aquinas gives the example that humans naturally recognize that living in community with other humans is good, and so a community understands that actions which destroy community life, such as lying and stealing, are evil and establishes customs or laws that punish thieves and liars.[[42]](#footnote-42) According to Francis, it is imperative that Catholics and other believers of good will take part in such political conversations, in order to make sure that the laws of our countries are based on a correct understanding of good and evil and so that the laws protect the inherent dignity of every human being from conception to natural death. Catholics can have faith that such dialogues can be fruitful, because, while God confirms and clarifies the natural law in Scripture, the basic principles of the law are known simply by reflecting on human reason. Therefore the natural law can be explained or argued for philosophically, in a manner that all humans can understand and agree with, regardless of their religious or non-religious affiliation. For Pope Francis, it is imperative that the fundamental human rights, which the state exists to protect, be founded on an agreed upon understanding of human nature, lest rights become a merely political reality that the majority or a populist leader can alter or ignore out of political convenience.[[43]](#footnote-43)

III. Practical Application to Papua New Guinea

Having elaborated on Catholic dialogue with Protestants, non-Christians, and atheists, I will conclude with some comments on a Melanesian culture of encounter and on the duty of educators to build a culture of encounter. First, in my experience, Melanesians have many cultural and political resources that support a culture of encounter. I will elaborate three points: i) religious freedom with the PNG Constitution, ii) an application of *gutpela sindaun* to the present situation,[[44]](#footnote-44) iii) the need for a harmony of unity and diversity in Melanesian Christianity.

First, the preamble of the PNG Constitution “acknowledge[s] the worthy customs and traditional wisdoms of our people” and pledges “to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours now.” The PNG Constitution thus frames PNG society as a fruitful dialogue between the traditional customs and wisdoms of its peoples and the Christianity that its people have adapted. Section 45 shows that this dialogue is not limited to Christians alone but to all people of faith in PNG. Section 45 affirms the “freedom of conscience, thought and religion,” declaring that

every person has the right to freedom of conscience, thought and religion and the practice of his religion and beliefs, including freedom to manifest and propagate his religion and beliefs in such a way as not to interfere with the freedom of others.

Therefore the freedom of religion for believers of all faiths, which Pope Francis advocates for in *Fratelli Tutti* is already present in the PNG Constitution.

Second, the individualism generated by secular materialism is foreign to the traditional beliefs and practices of the Melanesian peoples. For good and for bad, the traditional Melanesian worldview makes no rigid distinction between the material and spiritual worlds – the spirits of the place, the spirits of the ancestors, the higher spiritual powers are present in the land. Happiness, gutpela sindaun, depends both on the material prosperity needed to sustain and continue the life of the tribe and the right relations between the living and the dead, the human and the spiritual, and the people and the land.[[45]](#footnote-45) By its very nature, gutpela sindaun is not the possession of an individual but belongs to the family line and tribe. An individual’s good is inseparable from the good of the tribe. Ideally, the identification of my good with the good my tribesman, of my wantok, is supposed to guarantee that no one is marginalized or forgotten, because wantoks look after and guard the welfare of each other. Decisions that affect the whole tribe are not made by a chief or an official but by creating a consensus about what is good and what is bad for the tribe as a whole.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The traditional communitarian ethics of Melanesians is difficult for expatriates from the individualistic West to understand, but, though that communitarian ethics must be purified by the Gospel, I judge that it is far closer to the fraternity that Pope Francis encourages in his writings than is the individualism of the West. The challenge of contemporary Melanesian Christians is to strengthen and expand the traditional communitarian ethics to combat the negative values of secularism, individualism, and materialism that come from the outside and to meet the challenge of forming a national identity that transcends old tribal divisions. Just as traditionally the good of an individual is inseparable from the good of his tribe, so today the good of a tribe must be seen as inseparable from the good of its province and the good of its province is inseparable from the good of the nation. Just as Jesus challenged the Jews of his day to expand their concept of neighbour to include anyone in need,[[47]](#footnote-47) so the Gospel challenges us to expand our concept of gutpela sindaun to include right relations with all of those that live lawfully in Papua New Guinea.[[48]](#footnote-48) As Pope Francis says, we all advance or we all fall down together.[[49]](#footnote-49) If my personal happiness requires that others suffer and are neglected, then my happiness is empty and worthless. Establishing national gutpela sindaun requires a return to the traditional Melanesian values of dialogue and consensus building. Those in the city must dialogue in the bush, those with a formal education must dialogue with those educated by life in the streets or the bush, the young who are at home with smartphones must dialogue with the old who remember the Haus Man and the tok ples.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Third, in Melanesia, a culture of encounter requires a proper balance of diversity and unity in regard to both Christian and cultural identity. Regarding our Christian unity, while expatriates brought the Gospel and many good things to PNG, they also brought with them a divided Christianity.[[51]](#footnote-51) Again, with full respect to the riches in different church traditions, Melanesians should reject traditional hostilities between different groups of Christians or different religions. As I mentioned before, the conflict between Catholics and Anglicans in England 400 years ago should not determine the relationship that I have today with my Anglican brothers, with whom I am pledged to dialogue and cooperation. Likewise, in the distant past the Catholic Church may have labelled those who worship on Saturday as heretics and Catholic rulers may have opposed them, but those events are irrelevant to my present day relationships with Seven Day Adventists. Today the Catholic Church defends their right to worship on whatever day they like. Let our common Christianity belief unite us and let us be enriched by our differences. Regarding our cultural diversity, Scripture itself does not picture Christianity or even death itself as destroying cultural differences. In Revelation 7:9, the apostle John sees “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” This means that cultural diversity will continue even into the Kingdom of God.[[52]](#footnote-52) I remember attending an ordination in Enga in 2019 and seeing the people in traditional dress chanting in their tok ples, “When we get to Heaven we will look like this.” They may be right. Therefore, in Melanesia it is the duty of Christians to preserve traditional customs and wisdom traditions so that the fruitful dialogue between Melanesian traditions and Christian principles can be continued. One obvious way forward is for Catholics to work together with the Protestant Bible translations for the development and use of Scripture and liturgical materials in the tok pleses. God does not speak in English or tok pisin, he is the eternal word that inspires all languages.

I close with a quotation from *Dignitatis Humanae* which I believe is a good summary of the main point of chapter 6 of *Fratelli Tutti*. The Declaration says that political, community, and religious leaders, especially those who are charged with the task of educating others, should

do their utmost to form citizens who, on the one hand, will respect the moral order and be obedient to lawful authority, and on the other hand, will be lovers of true freedom—citizens, in other words, who will come to decisions on their own judgment and in the light of truth, govern their activities with a sense of responsibility, and strive after what is true and right, willing always to join with others in cooperative effort.[[53]](#footnote-53)

As the educators and teachers of our faith community, we have the duty to form those under our authority to be good citizens who are able and eager to engage in dialogue and cooperation with their neighbours of diverse religious and cultural background. Good Catholics must be formed to go forth to love their neighbour not only through works of charity but by being willing to listen and learn from them. As Pope Francis and the Grand Imam have said, let the adoption of a culture of dialogue be the path, mutual cooperation the code of conduct, and reciprocal understanding the method and standard.

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1. “Go forth” appears 15 times in the English translation; “go out” appears 5 times. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. FT §215. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. FT §285. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Colossians 2:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Paul’s treatment of the natural knowledge of God followed by a condemnation of idolatry is almost certainly based on Sirach 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For the Stoics, God is the rational element in the world and in the human person. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – 50 AD), a Jewish philosopher and Bible commentator, identifies the logos as the God plan for the world, just as a city-founder lays out the city in his mind first before laying it out in reality. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John 1:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Second Apology* 10: “For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Stromateis* I.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Vatican I, *Dei Filius* 2.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. FT §277; NA §2. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Thomas Aquinas’s principle that grace perfects nature, as found in C*ommentary on Boethius*’s *De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3 and *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. FT §221. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. *Unitatis Redintegratio* §11: “Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This sentence is adapted from the PNG Catholic-Muslim Dialogue, “Statement for Inter-Religious Dialogue and Cooperation and against Religiously-Motivated Violence,” #10. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A term taken from my daughter Anastasia’s primary school: Koroboro International. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. FT §221. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *UR* §3. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., §4. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Catholics are not able to receive Protestant communion and generally Protestants are not to receive Catholic communion, but there can still be worship services without the Eucharist. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., §3. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., §4. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. NA §2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Dalai Lama, “Buddhism and Other Religions,” in Peterson et al, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. PNG Catholic-Muslim Dialogue, “Statement for Inter-Religious Dialogue and Cooperation and against Religiously-Motivated Violence,” #10. This point is from Imam Busaeri Isma’eel. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. NA §3 speaks of forgetting the conflicts of the past, but I agree with Francis, FT 13, 226, 244, and 249 that “We can never move forward without remembering the past; we do not progress without an honest and unclouded memory” (249). We must cultivate a “penitential memory” (244) in which we are aware of and able to admit the mistakes made by our side in the past, mistakes based on political theories that the Church now repudiates. Admitting mistakes on our side hopefully will inspire our dialogue partners to develop a realistic understanding of their own history. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. NA §3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. FT §279. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. DH §2–3. Pope Francis repeatedly advances a rights based ethics in *Fratelli Tutti*. See §22-23 and 114-127, though at §111, he warns that the rights of each individual must be harmoniously ordered to the greater good or else the language of rights becomes empty and self-centered. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. FT §275, quoting the Document on Human Fraternity: “among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and the prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles.” See also FT 13, the summaries of John Paul II and Benedict XVI teaching about the need for a properly human ecology in *Laudatio Si’* §5-6, and *Laudatio Si’* §203-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See the Document on Human Fraternity for further detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Dei Filius §4. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See *Dei Filius* §4 and Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius’s De Trinitate* q. 2, a. 3, including ad 7–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 68, a. 1 repeats Augustine’s teaching that a Christian should be ready to abandon any one interpretation “if it be proved with certainty to be false; lest Holy Scripture be exposed to the ridicule of the unbelievers, and obstacles be placed to their believing.” See also Aquinas, *De Potentia* q. 4, a. 1. See Augustine’s *Literal Commentary on Genesis* I.18, 19, 21 and *Confessions* V.3.4–5.8 and XII.17.24–25.35. See my “Is Thomas Aquinas’s Account of Creation Compatible with Contemporary Science?” *Australian Catholic Record* 97 (2020): 320–31 for further detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. FR §1. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. FR §36. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Jürgen Habermas et al, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010) is the record of a discussion between Habermas (an agnostic) and Jesuit philosopher, in which Habermas argues that through dialogue with religious believers, secular people can regain “an awareness of what is missing,” namely insight and inspiration into how to lessen the alienation and injustice of modernization and strengthen human solidarity. Pope Benedict applies Habermas’s ideas to Catholicism potential contributions to European intellectual life in a lecture he intended to give at a Roman University on 17 January, 2018: <http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080117_la-sapienza.html>. Finally, see my “Political Discourse in Multi-Cultural Societies” *Catalyst*  49 (2019): 16­-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. FT §216. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. FT §213. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 93, a. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. FT §213. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 94, a. 2. See my “Aquinas on Polygamy,” *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 34 (2018): 28­-53, especially 32­36 for more on Aquinas on how reflection on human nature leads to knowledge of the natural law which is expressed in political laws. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. FT §206­-214. Francis speaks of the need for “the interests of society, consensus, and the reality of objective truth” to be harmonized through dialogue. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Gutpela Sinduan is the Melanesian tok pisin expression for happiness, literally it conveys the image of sitting down together in peace to enjoy the good things at hand. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Darrell Whiteman, “Melanesian Religions: An Overview,” in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984), 87­122 for further detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Consensus building is the traditional leadership structure in the Highlands, and I have experienced it in community meetings at Good Shepherd Seminary. I note that those considered to be elders or bikmen are expected to speak first and that they can direct what becomes the consensus. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. FT, chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. These reflections are inspired in part by Andrew Murray, *Thinking about Political Things: An Aristotelian Approach to Pacific Life* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016), especially the section on the wantok system. I agree with Murray that while an extension of wantok thinking can create a national identity, political office and services must be distributed according to merit and the law, otherwise corruption and nepotism result. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. FT §137 – “We need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved.” Francis is using ‘saved’ in its original meaning of delivered from peril as well as protected and preserved in life. He is advocating the development of a global common good in which every country and society sees its own prosperity as linked to the prosperity of others. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. FT §199 promotes dialogue between generations and different parts of society; §215 says that those on the margins of life must be included; § 220 praises the value of “indigenous popular culture.” [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. This point was raised at the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools Conference at Christian Leaders Training College on 2-4 July 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. This interpretation of this verse was given by Daniel Shaw in his keynote address at the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools Conference at Pacific Adventist University on 17 July 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. DH §8. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)