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Ecclesia and Ummah: Understanding Pope Francis' Fraternity

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Abstract: The sustainability of the universe depends on our interactions with each other and with creation. Catholics and Muslims make up about a third of the world's population, and our intercultural relationships are critical to the well-being of the world. Pope Francis has created a constructive forum in which trusted Muslims and Christians can participate in a revitalised discussion about the causes of violence and terrorism, in the spirit of St Francis of Assisi and with the help of Fratelli Tutti. The interfaith dialogue will be more in line with Pope Francis' theology of compassion for the poor, which includes the words "ummah" and "ecclesia". This theology offers a compelling social critique of our existing society,

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namely materialism, covetousness and an abundance of worldly goods. The theology offers a sharp social critique of our consumer culture.

Keywords: Ecclesia, Ummah, Fraternity, community, Christianity, Muslim, well-being, Universe, dialogue, inter-religious, interfaith.

The well-being of the universe depends not only on our interactions with each other but also on our interactions with humanity in general. Catholics and Muslims make up about a third of the world's population, and the well-being of the world depends not only on our interpersonal relationships but also on our interactions with civilisation. Our religions not only educate us to be good and just, but they also provide us with a language that expands the possibilities of what social solidarity can look like in a world beset by one tragedy after another. A. Rashied Omar, Associate Teaching Professor of Islamic Studies and Peacebuilding and an Imam (religious minister) at the Claremont Main Road Mosque in Cape Town, South Africa on *Fratelli tutti*, says, It is my considered view that Pope Francis's third encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti* (which means we are all brothers), undoubtedly marks a big step forward in promoting interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding, especially between Catholics and Muslims. Moreover, *Fratelli Tutti* resonates well with the teachings of Islam." (Omar, 2021) Pope Francis' call to all people in the

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world to become brothers and sisters of all creation. To love everything and to consider everything and every person as your brother and sister, just as St. Francis of Assisi did, is the appeal of this encyclical. The concept that every human being has an "inalienable dignity" (Fratelli Tutti 27) is the most important message Pope Francis wants us to take away from the encyclical about our life as Christians. This is the aspect of truth that Francis considers extremely important.

"Humans are social beings comfortable in society with other individuals and communities with whom they can interact. We believe that humans thrive in a well-organised community where they are required to follow laws that can be rationally explained. People prefer to assume a cyclical relationship between people and their communities. Individuals exist for the benefit of their communities, and the community is responsible for promoting the conditions for human flourishing. People can form communities, communicate, and collaborate on projects because communities are built from the ground up to enable their members to engage in these activities. This is because interacting with others and contributing to achieving a common goal are essential parts of the human experience. Christianity and Islam are considered distinct communities due to the differences in their respective founding documents. Even though they differ in many ways, there are also commonalities.

In numerous places in the Bible and the Qur'an, building meaningful relationships with the people around is emphasised. The Bible gives the aspects of community life as,

"The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." However, for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So, the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the

Lord God made a woman from the ribs he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man” (Gen 2:18 -21).

Moreover, in the Book of Genesis, we immediately learn that the first man was satisfied with this social existence, declaring, “The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she is taken from the man.’” (Gen 2:23). In this essay, I will compare and contrast the community aspects of Islam and Christianity to ultimately provide a platform for dialogue between the different world religions. One of the most important differences between Islam and the two monotheistic religions that preceded it is that Islam accepts that the two previous religious prophets in the revelation of the Quran are also identical. Islam also suggests that there is no priesthood in Islamic tradition. The priesthood is one of the most important differences between Islam and the two monotheistic religions that preceded it. Since Judaism and Christianity each have their priestly structure, it is commonly assumed that the followers of these religions are members of an organised group or institution. This is especially true of the Catholic faith and other Christian denominations.

Ecclesia

In ancient Greece, the assembly of the inhabitants of a city-state was called an *ekklesia* (Greek, “gathering of those summoned”). Its origins go back to the agora, the marketplace, in Homeric times. In the New Testament, this term occurs 114 times. Gospel preachers have been drawing people’s attention to the origin of the word “*ekklesia*” for many years. This word is made up of two different parts: the preposition *ek*, meaning “out of”, and the verb *Kaleo*, meaning “to call out”, which is where the expression “to call out” comes from. The only word used in the New Testament for a church is “ecclesia”, which means “assembly”. Ecclesia was the name given to the governing assembly of Athens, which was officially convened by the relevant officials and had extensive political power, including the ability to exercise judicial functions. It is a symbol of the worldwide Church, which is the body of Christ and

in which the Lord is the head (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:15). The term can be used to refer to the people of God in a particular area (Acts 9:31). It is often used to refer to a local church with its congregation of Christians (1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11). It could also refer to a congregation of people following the Lord and gathering together for worship (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). When Pope Francis discusses "charity" in the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, he begins with the most personal and profound form of charity, the very heart of the Church. The earliest Christian communities clearly understood the concept of charity. In the face of the Church's desire to close itself off and isolate itself, St Paul exhorts it to a broad love that "overflows among you and toward all." (1 Tess 3.12). (Tejado Muñoz)

Ummah

The Ummah is a community that includes all humanity. Its members are obliged to support each other and consider each other as their brothers and sisters in order to be a part of it. Quran says, "O Humankind! We have created you of a male and a female, and fashioned you into nations and tribes, so that you may know each other (recognize each other); surely, the most honorable of you with God is the best in conduct. Lo! God is the All-Knower, Aware of all things. "(Q. 49:13)

The meaning of the Arabic word Ummah, often rendered as "community", is taken literally. This term should not be confused with *shab*, which refers to a nation sharing the same ancestry or location (Hughes, 1994, p.654). Instead, this term refers to people who speak the same language. Therefore, it is conceivable to refer to it as a transnational community with a common historical background. A fundamental concept in Islam emphasises Muslims' underlying unity and theoretical equality, even though Muslims come from various cultural and geographical backgrounds.

When we speak of the Muslim Ummah in its meaning as laid down in the Qur'an, the Prophetic Hadiths and the Islamic heritage, we realise that it has experienced two tendencies: on the one hand, the meaning of unity, cohesion, solidarity and support, and on the other hand, a second tendency in its present reality, namely, the division into states and societies, sects and schools of thought, ethnicities and languages, etc. We will discuss the importance of the intellectual construction of the Ummah under the two conditions mentioned, individually or together. (Malkawi, 2020: 80)

In the Qur'an, where it is stated that God has sent a messenger to each of the Ummahs, this phrase has theological significance. Since they are considered the recipients of the scriptures and builders of the Ummah, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are considered the most important messengers in the history of the religion. The Qur'an is the foundation of the Muslim community, the so-called Ummah, which was "sent down" from God to Muhammad. The Torah is the basis of the Jewish community, also the people known as the Ummah. The Bible, also known as the Gospel, was given to Jesus by God, and Christians form a community based on this book.

Moreover, Muslims are a community called Ummah, according to the Qur'an. To be precise, the term occurs slightly over sixty times in the Qur'an's Holy Scripture. The Meccan period of revelation is often mentioned in these verses. In contrast, the Medinan period of revelation is responsible for only a minimal number of allusions in these verses (Abdullah, 2015: 15).

Omar also comments that, Above all, Pope Francis promotes peace and compassion that are compatible with Islam. For example, he offers a broader and more inclusive view of the concept of charity that is fully compatible with the goal of zakah, the third pillar of Islam (Omar, 2021). And he quotes, "It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity even if we do not know that person to work to transform and change the social situation that caused the suffering in the first place" (Fratelli tutti. 186)

The Scriptural Understanding of Community

In the Bible

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. Everyone was awed at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the people’s favour. Moreover, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2; 42-47).

Belonging to a group allows one to spend time with people at different points in their spiritual journey. It also allows you to share in their struggles (Galatians 6:2). According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit is present wherever two or more believers come together (Matthew 18:20). The early Church described in Acts is an excellent example of this principle, as its members gathered regularly for worship, shared meals and fellowshiped with each other. Acts 2:46-47 states that “the Lord added to the daily new men who were being saved”. Paul placed love above all other virtues in his letter to the Corinthians. Furthermore, he did the same in the letter he wrote to the Colossians: “Be forbearing with one another, forgiving one another if any of you has a grudge against another.” As the Lord has forgiven you, you must forgive others. Colossians 3:13-14 says, “And above all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect harmony.”

The term has been used to refer to a group of people who adhere to a particular religious faith (Qur’an 5:48), the followers of particular prophets (10:47), the faith of a particular group of people (43:22), and even a group of people in general. The term ‘Ummah’ can be used in a variety of contexts (28:23). It has

also been used to refer to a group of people who are part of a larger community (3:113), to describe a group of people who follow the wrong path (43:33), and to refer to a group of people who follow the wrong path and are followers of a prophet. All these usages are found in the Qur'an (27:83). In addition, the word "ummah" is used to refer to a period of time (11:8) as well as communities of non-human people, such as flocks of birds and herds of land animals. This is because the term "ummah" is derived from the Arabic word for "community" (6:38). These are just a few of the many different contexts in which the term can be used; there are many more.

The Muslim community, also known as the Ummah, is referred to in the Qur'an as "the best community". This is because the Ummah was established to serve humanity. This Ummah promotes what is right and discourages evil; faith in God is central to its teachings and principles. This account of the Ummah is explained in a number of verses in the Qur'an, of which verse 3:110 of the Qur'an is the most famous: [Allah] said: "[Believers], you are the best community provided for humankind, for you enjoin what is right, you forbid what is wrong, and you believe in God. "If the People of the Book had believed as firmly as you do, their situation would be much better today. The reason is that most of them break the law, although some believe in God.

In the Quran

Ummah is a versatile term: it has been used to refer to a group of people who follow a particular religion (Qur'an5:48); the followers of the prophets (Q 10:47); the beliefs of a particular group of people (Q 43:22); and even simply a group of people (28:23). It has also been used to refer to a group of people within a larger community (Q 3:113), to describe a misguided group of people (Q 43:33), and to refer to a group of people who are misguided among the followers of a prophet (Q 27:83). In addition, the Ummah is also used to refer to a period of time (Q 11:8) and communities of non-human beings such as birds and land animals (6:38). These are just some of the many uses of the term. In the Qur'an, the Muslim Ummah is the best

community that has evolved to serve humanity. This Ummah enjoins what is right, forbids what is wrong, and is centred on faith in God. This account of the Ummah is explained in several Qur’anic verses, but most notably in Qur’an 3:110: “[Believers], you are the best community chosen for humankind: You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. Had the people of the Scripture also believed, it would have been better for them. For though some of them believe, most of them are lawbreakers.”

[article to be continued]

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