

POPE FRANCIS’ “CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER” AND “FRATERNITY”: ENHANCING THE POSTSECULAR DISCOURSE IN IR

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Abstract: On February 4, 2019, the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* was signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayeb in Abu Dhabi. The moment marked a historical breakthrough in the area of interreligious dialogue becoming one of the broadest commented interreligious initiatives of the last decades. But it also symbolized the changing role of religious discourse in its relation to the political discourse as well as their mutual “entanglement”. Soon the series of events that followed visibly evidenced the growing role of the religious ideas and religious actors in the global discussion on the most problematic contemporary issues and their increasingly collaborative relations to non-religious actors, both at governmental and non-governmental level. As such they became the exemplification of the new postsecular discourse that had been conceptualized two decades ago calling for a more inclusive approach towards religion in the public sphere as well as for a “mutual process of learning” between the religious and the secular domains. In the area of international politics, it has been further developed into the concept of the religious and inter-religious engagement, proposing some practical tools for a more effective exploitation of the religious potential. Adopting the IR perspective, the article aims to analyze both normatively and empirically how the religiously based initiatives and ideas have contributed to international debate developing its own concepts such as “culture of encounter” and “fraternity” that from a secular point of view represents the call for political inclusion and non-discrimination of minorities (Petito, Daou, and Driessen 2021, 10). Based on the examination of the Holy See’s documents and through application of comparative, interpretative, and discourse analysis methods, the main focus will be put on Pope Francis’ teaching who formulated both concepts as the leading topics of his pontificate. Realized in the global context through interreligious dialogue, they constitute the exemplification of what Jodok Troy (2021) called “global politics from below”.

Keywords: postsecular discourse, interreligious dialogue, Pope Francis, culture of encounter, fraternity



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Rezumat: La 4 februarie 2019, *Documentul privind fraternitatea umană pentru pacea mondială și conviețuirea împreună* a fost semnat de Papa Francisc și de Marele Imam Ahmad al-Tayeb la Abu Dhabi. Momentul a marcat un eveniment istoric în domeniul dialogului interreligios devenind una dintre cele mai ample comentate inițiative interreligioase a ultimelor decenii. Totodată, acesta a sporit rolul discursului religios în relația sa cu discursul politic, precum și „întrepătrunderea” lor reciprocă. La scurt timp, seria de evenimente care au urmat a evidențiat vizibil rolul din ce în ce mai mare al ideilor religioase și al actorilor religioși în dezbaterile globale despre cele mai complexe probleme contemporane precum și relațiile din ce în ce mai colaborative cu actorii laici, atât la nivel guvernamental, cât și neguvernamental. Ca atare, acestea au devenit exemplificarea noului discurs postsecular conceptualizat cu două decenii în urmă, avasând o abordare mai incluzivă a religiei în sfera publică, și sprijinind „procesul de învățare reciprocă” între domeniul religios și cel secular. În domeniul politicii internaționale, această abordare a fost dezvoltată în cadrul conceptului de angajament religios și interreligios identificând câteva instrumente practice pentru exploatarea mai eficientă a potențialului religios. Adoptând perspectiva de RI, articolul își propune să analizeze atât normativ cât și empiric modul în care inițiativele și ideile religioase au contribuit la dezbaterile internaționale, dezvoltând propriile concepte precum „cultura întâlnirii” și „fraternitatea”, care din punct de vedere secular reprezintă un apel la incluziunea politică și nediscriminarea minorităților. Pe baza examinării documentelor Sfântului Scaun și prin aplicarea unor metode comparative, interpretative și de analiză a discursului, studiul va pune accentul pus pe învățătura Papei Francisc, care a formulat ambele concepte ca subiecte principale ale pontificatului său. Realizate în context global prin dialog interreligios, acestea constituie exemplificarea a ceea ce Jodok Troy a numit „politica globală *from bellum*”.

Cuvinte cheie: discurs postsecular, dialog interreligios, Papa Francisc, cultura întâlnirii, fraternitate

I. Introduction

On February 4, 2019, the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* was signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayeb in Abu Dhabi. The moment marked a historical breakthrough in the area of interreligious dialogue, becoming one of the broadest commented interreligious initiatives of the last decades. But it also demonstrated the changing role of religious discourse in its relation to the political discourse, as well as their mutual “entanglement”. Soon the series of events that followed visibly evidenced the growing role of the religious ideas and religious actors in the global discussion on the most problematic contemporary issues and their increasingly collaborative relations to non-religious actors, both at governmental and non-governmental level. While

religious and faith-based contribution into global discourse has a long history¹, the Document itself and the events that followed can be perceived as the most current, innovatory example of the ideational influence exerted in the area of international and global politics by religious actors. As such, those events embody the perspective of a postsecular approach that has been developing in the area of IR (International Relations) during the last two decades, and in particular, since 9/11². According to this approach, introduced by Jürgen Habermas and developed by numerous other authors, it is necessary to abandon the dominating discourse which contradicts religious and secular thinking. Postsecularism acknowledges that in the secularizing environment it is necessary to recognize the existence of the religious communities and include them in the public debate for the “good of all”. These communities with their “normative intuitions” should be perceived as those that may bring a valuable contribution when existential issues are discussed. Instead of exclusive alternatives between the secular and religious parts of society, Habermas proposes a “mutual learning process”. This act of listening to each other, drawing conclusions and implementing knowledge from this process is a prerequisite for the efficient functioning of the liberal state. Without mutual acceptance of complementarity and reciprocity arising in the relationship between religion and secularism, the modern liberal state will fall apart, torn from within by ideological disputes and cultural wars³.

The concept has been developed by IR scholars that applied it to the international and global public discourse, widening its scope to both state and non-state actors, but also crossing the borders of the liberal state and applying it to the non-Western socio-political area⁴. Within the framework of “religious engagement”, a postulate has been made for inclusion and for a wider redefining of the political thinking in the direction of perceiving religious contribution not just as the “addendum” to secular ideas but as the equally valuable voice in the

¹ Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century. Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011).

² Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, eds., *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

³ Miłosz Puczydłowski, „Filozofia Jürgena Habermasa wobec zwrotu postsekularnego”, *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny* XIV, no. 1 (2016): 158-159.

⁴ Mariano Barbato, “Postsecular Plurality on the Middle East: Expanding a Postsecular Approach to a Power Politics of Becoming”, *Religions* 11, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11040162>.

international and global discourse based on a new kind of religious-secular partnership rooted in the most pressing challenges of the contemporary world⁵.

Adopting an IR perspective, the article aims to analyze both normatively and empirically how the religiously based initiatives and ideas have contributed to the international debate by developing their own concepts such as “culture of encounter” and fraternity that from a secular point of view represent a call for political inclusion and non-discrimination of minorities⁶. Main focus will be put on Pope Francis’ teachings who formulated both concepts as the leading topics of his pontificate. Realized in the global context through interreligious dialogue, they constitute the exemplification of what Jodok Troy called “global politics from below”⁷.

II. From Post-secularism to (Inter)Religious Engagement: Defining the Concepts

Postsecularism can be regarded as one of the most challenging conceptual turns of the last decades within the area of social science. Proposed by Jürgen Habermas just after the events of 9/11, it aimed at creating a wider platform for public debate by including, alongside the dominant secular arguments, also those coming from religious actors. Interestingly, the author has not been very interested in religion prior to this and his turn to a more positive attitude towards religion resulted in his inclusion into the group of most famous “converts” critically assessing secularization theory along with such figures as Peter Berger⁸.

The term postsecularism has been used in social sciences in two interconnected ways. According to the first, more descriptive in nature, it refers

⁵ Scott Appleby, “Comprehending Religion in Global Affairs: Toward a Postsecular Paradigm of Religious Engagement to Advance Human Fraternity”, in *Human Fraternity and Inclusive Citizenship. Interreligious Engagement in the Mediterranean*, eds. Fabio Petito, Fadi Daou, and Michael D. Driessen (Milan: LediPublishing, 2021), 67-85.

⁶ Fabio Petito, Fadi Daou, and Michael D. Driessen, “Fraternity, Citizenship and Interreligious Engagement”, in *Human Fraternity and Inclusive Citizenship. Interreligious Engagement in the Mediterranean*, eds. Fabio Petito, Fadi Daou, and Michael D. Driessen (Milan: LediPublishing, 2021), 10.

⁷ Jodok Troy, “International Politics as global politics from below: Pope Francis of global politics from below”, *Journal of International relations and Development* 24 (2021): 555-573.

⁸ Miłosz Puczydłowski, *Religia i sekularyzm. Współczesny spór o sekularyzację* (Kraków: Universitas, 2017), 13.

to the return of religious traditions in modern life. According to the second one, postsecularism is a form of theorizing and critique:

“[...] prompted by the idea that the values such as democracy, freedom, equality, inclusion and justice may not necessarily be best pursued within an exclusively immanent secular framework. Quite opposite, the secular may well be a potential site of isolation, domination, violence and exclusion”⁹.

The notion of religious engagement has been proposed in the US in 2010 in the report prepared by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs entitled *Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for US Foreign Policy*. The report critically reflected on the failures and lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan where the Western community failed to understand the key role that local mainstream Islamic communities played in such crucial areas as education, sanitation, and other social services in the absence of a functional state structure. A reductionist perception of religion perceived only through the prism of the counter-terrorist framework that characterized the American strategy, prevented a constructive engagement with religion as part of the solution to build peace and stability in the region in a more holistic way¹⁰.

In 2015, Peter Mandaville and Sara Silvestri published an article where they pointed to some slow but meaningful changes in the approach to religion as the source of diplomatic strategies within the area of American diplomacy and some new, though “delayed” phenomena in the EU space¹¹. Over the next years, the concept of religious engagement has been developed by European scholars such as Gregorio Bettiza, Fabio Petito, Scott Thomas, and many others. The notion of narrow and broad understanding of religious engagement proposed by Gregorio Bettiza identified two strategies of religious engagement. The first one, a narrower one, sees religion as the means of promoting world peace and security. The other one is more ambitious and broader, and views religion as the means of promoting international order and progress¹².

In 2018, the notion of religious engagement was developed as part of the strategy for protecting freedom of religion and belief which has become one of

⁹ Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, “The postsecular in International Relations: an overview”, *Review of International Studies* 38 (2012): 931-942.

¹⁰ Scott R. Appleby, Richard Cizik, and Thomas Wright, *Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: The New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: The Chicago Council of Global Affairs, 2010).

¹¹ Peter Mandaville and Sara Silvestri, “Integrating Religious Engagement into Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities”, *Brookings. Issues in Global Governance*, no. 67 (January 2015).

¹² Gregoria Bettiza, *Finding Faith in Foreign Policy. Religion and American Diplomacy in a Postsecular World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

the most often violated rights and freedoms on the globe. The report analyzing the stages of development of religious engagement was published by a group of scholars from the University of Sussex that conceptualized both religious and interreligious engagement within the framework of freedom of belief. In their analysis entitled *Interreligious Engagement Strategies: A Policy Tool to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief*, they developed the argument that religious actors should not only be seen by policy makers as the victims or the perpetrators of “freedom of religion or belief” (FoRB) violations, but as partners in building long-term strategies to advance FoRB for all and to foster pluralism, social cohesion, and sustainable peace¹³.

According to the concept of religious engagement, the role of religious and faith-based non-state actors cannot be reduced to charity and humanitarian aid performed in the international arena. The essential contribution that religious communities and other non-state religious actors can make is a new form of knowledge which is generated through the encounter and dialogue between religious and non-religious actors. The approach is based on the assumption that in the contemporary world knowledge is constructed from the bottom and not from the top. Therefore, the bottom layers of the society and not the top ones “can also be the preferential place for epistemology, for discovering what knowledge is, how it is constructed and in whose interests it is constructed” in the area of global politics¹⁴. As such, religion needs also to be understood as part of historical progress¹⁵.

The perspective of religious engagement refers to the ways in which governments and international organizations can better engage religious actors, including religious leaders, communities and a variety of religion-based organizations, to promote common global ambitions like sustainable development, human rights, and peace¹⁶. The authors of the report *Interreligious Engagement Strategies: A Policy Tool to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief* underline the idea that some far-reaching changes are needed to effectively implement this new approach:

¹³ Fabio Petito, Stephanie Berry, and Maria Mancinelli, “Interreligious Engagement Strategies: A Policy Tool to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief”, University of Sussex, FoRB & Foreign Policy Initiative, 2018, 3.

¹⁴ Fabio Petito and Scott M. Thomas, “Encounter, Dialogue, and Knowledge: Italy as a Special Case of Religious Engagement in Foreign Policy”, *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 13, no. 2 (2015): 44

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Petito, Daou, and Driessen, *Fraternity*, 11.

“[...] Religious engagement does not refer to the simple diplomatic activity of ‘reaching out’ to cultivate good relations with religious actors. These initiatives are not new and are arguably part of the common diplomatic culture”.

They point to the new set of skills and mindset for both governments and religious actors. As they remark, this “transformed thinking” on mutual relations between religion and politics is regarded as a precondition to build a new capacity aimed at delivering innovative government-religious partnerships. This deep change of policy mindset includes the removal of “secular blind spots” in governments. Religious engagement is also a call for a new dialogue and mutual learning between secular and religious institutions in the acknowledgement and respect of their different domains, responsibilities and missions¹⁷.

Emergence of the concept of religious engagement should be viewed as the constructive, both theory and practice-oriented element of the long-term debate on the complex and ambivalent presence of religion in the area of global politics. Contrary to the one-sided, unbalanced perspective on how religious ideas and practices shape the face of contemporary socio-political reality that developed after the Cold War¹⁸, this outlook both conceptually and practically contributes to the more holistic and more objective view. The authors of the report on religious engagement and inter-religious engagement in the Mediterranean Region call this the “more nuanced approach” that redefines former, often limited patterns of cooperation:

“This more nuanced approach has opened the possibility in the global policy community to the idea that religion can be actually part of the solution, that is, a strategic resource for diplomacy, peace-building, the strengthening of human rights, and the advancement of citizenship and sustainable development. This new policy-oriented discussion, referred to in the global policy community as “religious engagement”, is emerging as one of the most promising fields of strategic and creative thinking on which governments and international organizations are working collaboratively with religious organizations to achieve common goals”¹⁹.

¹⁷ Petito, Berry, and Mancinelli, *Interreligious Engagement*, 8.

¹⁸ Douglas Johnston, “Introduction: Realpolitik Expanded”, in *Faith-Based Diplomacy. Trumping Realpolitik*, ed. Douglas Johnston (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-10.

¹⁹ Petito, Daou, and Driessen, *Fraternity*, 14-15.

III. Interreligious Dialogue and the Pluralization of Discourse

The concept linking religious engagement and interreligious dialogue is the one of interreligious engagement. This notion points to the interreligious, policy-oriented interactions between states and international organizations on the one hand, and religious and interreligious actors, groups, coalitions, platforms and activities on the other. These interactions can include a wide range of interreligious activity, dialogue, and collaboration initiated by multiple actors: from theological exchanges, to common everyday social action, to high-level meetings between official representatives, to more informal/grassroots initiatives²⁰.

Interreligious dialogue is not a new phenomenon. Already at the end of 19th century, the World Parliament of Religions had been established in Chicago (1893) becoming the first organized interfaith gathering²¹. In the next decades, the concept was developed by one of the fathers of ecumenical and interreligious movement, the Swedish Archbishop Lars Olof Jonathan Söderblom who is considered to be a pioneer in this regard and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his achievements. Söderblom's contribution to the concept of inter-religious dialogue referred to both the theoretical and organizational dimension especially for Protestantism which heavily relied on the approach proposed by him²². During the same time period, ideas of interreligious dialogue were also essentially implemented by Mahatma Gandhi for whom introducing dialogue between different religions was the imperative on the way to overcome religious prejudices and build a culture of mutual tolerance and non-violence²³.

The concepts of interreligious dialogue as well as interreligious movement have been increasingly present in the international context gaining new momentum over the last decades when numerous new initiatives were proposed

²⁰ Ibid., 11.

²¹ World Parliament of Religions, <https://parliamentofreligions.org/home>, accessed 31 August 2021.

²² Anne Stensvold and Ingrid Vik, “Religious Peacemakers in the International Scene: Hopes and Motivations”, *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 16, no. 3 (2018): 11.

²³ Anne M. Pearson, “Gandhi and the Imperative of Interfaith Dialogue”, Faculty of Humanities, McMaster University, 2019, https://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/gandhi/onefifty/AnnePearson_Gandhi_and_imperative_of_interfaith_dialogue.pdf, accessed 31 August 2021.

including those reaching the level of the UN. They significantly contributed to the call to engage in a “postsecular reading” of the world especially after 9/11 when it was badly needed to contradict one-sided, negative perception of religion in IR²⁴. As John Fahy and Jeffrey Haynes remark, the interfaith movement gained unprecedented prominence in the years following 9/11 and had its own specifics and rationale in different regions and cultures. In Western liberal democracies, interfaith initiatives were developed as part of wider multiculturalist responses to the threat of radicalization. In the Middle East, interfaith projects have become the platforms for the promotion of what is often described as ‘true’ or ‘moderate’ Islam, and serve as valuable opportunities to counter the ‘clash of civilizations’ discourse between the Muslim world and the West²⁵. Other well-known initiatives following this pattern were the Dialogue Among Civilizations²⁶ proposed in 1998 by the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and International Harmony Week based on the proposal of King Abdullah II of Jordan, which was pursued at the United Nations in 2010²⁷.

Anne Stensvold and Ingrid Vik emphasize that interreligious dialogue “[...] involves religious leaders in a hybrid function as diplomats trapped between the secular and religious realms”²⁸. This observation reveals the reality of hundreds and thousands of religious leaders engaged both in the official diplomatic activities, but also those acting less officially through the channels of track two diplomacy²⁹. “Trapping” though should not be perceived as the deficit or weakness of such initiatives. Contrary, the mutual learning process between the religious and the secular reflects well the postsecular approach that allows one to look at the bridging between both spheres as mutually advantageous and promising. Intercultural dialogue becomes thus one of the most visible examples

²⁴ Joanna Kulska, “A Balanced Perception of Religion in International Relations”, *E-International Relations*, 9 July 2015, <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/07/09/a-balanced-perception-of-religion-in-international-relations/>, accessed: 18 August 2021.

²⁵ John Fahy and Jeffrey Haynes, “Introduction: Interfaith on the World Stage”, *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 13, no. 3 (2018): 4.

²⁶ Seyed Mohammad Khatami, “Dialogue Among Civilizations: Contexts and Perspectives”, *UN Chronicle*, 2001, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/dialogue-among-civilizations-contexts-and-perspective>, (accessed: 16 August 2021).

²⁷ United Nations, “World Interfaith Harmony Week 1-7 February”, 4 February 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/interfaith-harmony-week>, accessed 4 December 2021.

²⁸ Stensvold and Vik, *Religious Peacemakers...*, 9-22.

²⁹ Douglas Johnston, “Introduction: Beyond Power Politics”, in *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, eds. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

of the new, redefined perspective on the role played by religion in the area of IR.

Among transnational religious actors participating in the discourse at the UN level, but also at numerous other fora of intercultural dialogue, the contribution of the Holy See needs to be recognized³⁰. Many popes before Francis have reflected on the significance of the issue. The importance of conducting such a dialogue has been emphasized in the magisterium of the Catholic Church especially since the Second Vatican Council which was the first ecumenical council in the history of the Catholic Church opening, among others, the new stage in the relations between Vatican and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The historical breakthrough in this regard was marked by the conciliar Declaration *Nostra aetate* which significantly changed the Catholic approach toward non-Christian religions, and which concludes with a paragraph dedicated to “universal fraternity”³¹. All the popes starting from John XXIII and Paul VI developed both the doctrinal and practical sense of interreligious dialogue reaching the point of the historical breakthrough with the annual interreligious meetings in Assisi initiated by Pope John Paul II in 1986. During the first World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi on 27 October 1986, 160 religious leaders spent the day together fasting and praying to their God or Gods.

IV. Culture of encounter: countering marginalization and exclusion through interreligious dialogue

To describe the contemporary social-political reality, Pope Francis uses two opposing categories. These are the concepts of “culture exclusion” and the “culture of encounter” that appear both in papal speeches and in doctrinal texts. The culture of the encounter is not only an alternative and a cure for the spread of a culture of exclusion. It is also a peculiar key word for his entire pontificate, without which it is not possible to understand some of his gestures, decisions or words³². The notion of the culture of exclusion, also referred to as the “throw

³⁰ Jeffrey Haynes, “Transnational religious actors and international politics”, *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2001): 143-158.

³¹ Andrea Tornielli, “Notra aetate: Openining the path to interreligious dialogue”, *Vatican News*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-06/nostreae-aetate-opening-the-path-to-interreligious-dialogue.html>, accessed 14 August 2021.

³² Mateusz Podlecki, „Przekaz i służba, czyli kultura spotkania w orędziach papieża Franciszka na Światowy Dzień Środków Społecznego Przekazu”, *Forum Młodych Pastoralistów* 2, (2016): 57.

away” culture, was used for the first time in the *Evangelii Gaudium* where the Pope reflects directly on economic rules effecting all areas of human existence:

“Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a “throw away” culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers”³³.

Pope Francis strongly reveals here the problems of progressing egoism and pathological individualism which lead to social indifference and blindness to the problems of “the other”.

The alternative to the culture of exclusion is the culture of encounter that cannot be perceived solely as a possibility, but also as a necessity. According to Francis, to overcome the crisis is not enough to return to the values that we followed in the past. The new quality of life needs to be sought, the spiritual fullness which will enable one to reach beyond oneself and create a new culture. The call to join this initiative is directed to all humanity and is to lead the man to the heights of the existence, both in individual and social sense. The competitor or rival whom we see in the other is to become our brother. In this regard the pope uses such terms as “globalization of hope” and “culture of communion”³⁴. For Pope Francis, the culture of encounter serves as the foundation for entering inter-religious dialogue. Realized in the global context through interreligious dialogue, the culture of encounter constitutes an effective illustration of interreligious engagement but also an exemplification of what Jodok Troy called “global politics from below” – meaning politics from periphery of society unmasking global inequalities³⁵.

As the head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis became one of the most well-recognized actors of the interreligious engagement expressing his ideas in

³³ Pope Francis, “Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*”, 24 November 2013, no 53, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed: 22 August 2021).

³⁴ Podlecki, *Przekaz i służba*, 59.

³⁵ Troy, *International politics*, 555.

numerous speeches and specifically in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Francis' vision of interreligious dialogue, understood as a duty for Christians and non-Christians alike, can be found in his first adhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, announced just a few months after he became pope, where he defined the essence and importance of interreligious dialogue. The pope also referred to the problem that has been exposed as one of the crucial aspects in such a dialogue, namely the problem of fundamentalism:

“An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue is in first place a conversation about human existence or simply, [...], a matter of “being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows”.”³⁶.

Referring to religious fundamentalism requires special attention as it plays a key role in the postsecular discourse from the beginning of its conceptualization. Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, in his discussion with Jürgen Habermas on secularization, reason and religion, organized in Munich, in 2004, called fundamentalism which uses religious rhetorics the greatest danger within religion³⁷. He considers it a “falsification of religion” which goes against the true purpose of religion which is “an invitation to share God’s peace throughout the world”³⁸. Benedict XVI’s follower, Francis, calls fundamentalism a “plague”³⁹, a disease which is present in all religions. According to the pope, fundamentalism cannot be called religion, but rather idolatry from which God is missing⁴⁰.

From the perspective of the postsecular approach, fundamentalism is perceived as the contradiction of how the discourse between the religious and the secular should develop. Fundamentalism brings a homogenization of the

³⁶ Pope Francis, “Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*”, no. 250.

³⁷ Piotr Burgoński, „Sekularyzacja”, in *Religia i polityka. Zarys problematyki*, eds. Piotr Burgoński, Michał Gierycz (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2014), 462-463.

³⁸ Catholic News Agency, “Benedict XVI: fundamentalism: a “falsification” of religion”, 14 September 2012, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/25675/benedict-xvi-fundamentalism-a-falsification-of-religion>, accessed 1 September 2021.

³⁹ Junno Arocho Esteves, “Pope Francis: religious fundamentalism is a “plague””, *America. The Jesuit Review*, 19 November 2019, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/11/19/pope-francis-religious-fundamentalism-plague>, accessed 1 September 2021.

⁴⁰ Cara Modiset, “The Pope: Fundamentalism is a disease in all religions”, *Episcopal Café*, 2 December 2015, <https://www.episcopalcafe.com/the-pope-fundamentalism-is-a-disease-in-all-religions/>, accessed 1 September 2021.

discourse and as a result closes the possibility of open, pluralistic “mutual learning process”. As Mariano Barbato explains, the postsecular approach is an analytical tool used to observe, but also a normative framework needed to evaluate an expanding integration of diverse social and religious strata into the public discourse without providing a comprehensive, homogenizing doctrine⁴¹.

Following this view, one of the most important achievements within the area of interreligious dialogue during the papacy of Pope Francis needs to be recalled. *The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* was signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi, in February 2019. The UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdallah Ben Zayed Al Nahyan, described the Pope’s meeting with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar as marking a new phase in “relations between religions”⁴². Historical thoughts are expressed in the document including the foundational one: “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties, and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters”⁴³. While the document was not initiated by the papacy, but by the Muslim side⁴⁴, it very well “subscribed” to Pope Francis’ idea of creating the culture of encounter, of friendship, where:

“(…) we meet the brothers with whom we can talk, those who do not think like we do, or even confess different religion, who do not share our views. They all have something in common with us: they resemble God, they are God’s children”⁴⁵.

According to Pope Francis, the Document was born “from faith in God who is Father of all” and follows “the spirit of the Second Vatican Council”. The document was widely acknowledged as a milestone, not only regarding relations between Christianity and Islam, but as a broader incentive to build a culture of dialogue and collaboration between different faiths⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Barbato, “Postsecular Plurality”, 1.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ His Holiness, Pope Francis, The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, “Document of Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html, accessed 3 September 2021.

⁴⁴ Barbato, “Postsecular Plurality”, 7.

⁴⁵ Diego Fares, *Papież Franciszek o kulturze spotkania* (Kraków: Bratni Zew, 2015), 17-18.

⁴⁶ Ameneo Lomonaco and Linda Bordoni, “1st anniversary of Document on Human Fraternity”, *Vatican News*, 3 February 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-02/pope-grand-imam-document-human-fraternity-anniversary.html>, accessed 2 September 2021.

V. Francis as “Relational Pope”. Fraternity as the “New Name” of Interreligious Dialogue

According to Pope Francis, “faith is a relationship and not a set of rules”⁴⁷. It is not first of all a doctrine or moral ideal, but the living relationship with God⁴⁸ that needs to be transcended into the relationship with the other. Based on that, the pope developed his concept of culture of encounter that resonates in all the key topics of his teaching including the one of fraternity. While in the interreligious domain, the exemplification of the pope’s vision has been the *Document on Human Fraternity* – the full, all-encompassing conceptualization of fraternity has been presented in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. The encyclical on fraternity and social friendship, *Fratelli tutti* is the third encyclical of this pontificate, after the encyclicals *Lumen fidei* (29 June 2013) and *Laudato si* (24 May 2015), yet it is the second social encyclical. Francis remarks that while the inspiration to write his first social encyclical *Laudato si* was his meeting with the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, the encouragement for the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* came from the meeting with the Great Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb on 4 February 2019. Francis underlines also the fact that his was no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment.

In *Fratelli tutti*, Francis recalls as the source for his reflection the ideas of some religious leaders such as Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, or Mahatma Ghandi⁴⁹, but his main reference is Saint Francis of Assisi:

“Of the counsels Francis offered, I would like to select the one in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother “as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him”. In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and

⁴⁷ Cindy Wooden, “Faith is a relationship, not a set of rules, pope says at Angelus”, *National Catholic Reporter*, 6 August 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-chronicles/faith-relationship-not-set-rules-pope-says-angelus>, accessed 12 August 2021.

⁴⁸ Linda Bordoni, “Pope at Regina Coeli: Christianity is relationship, care and joy”, *Vatican News*, 18 April 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-04/pope-francis-regina-coeli-catechesis-3rd-sunday-easter.html>, accessed 12 August 2021.

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*”, 4 October 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, accessed 25 August 2021.

love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives”⁵⁰.

In this respect, he reminds the reader in the first lines of the document of St. Francis’ famous encounter with Sultan Malek al-Kamil at Damietta which took place in Egypt, in 1219. Daniel P. Horan recalls how by referring to that “historic episode of mutual respect, peacemaking and fraternity – a shared sense of a fraternal bond between the two men from different cultures and religions – Pope Francis identified a comparable sense of encounter he had with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, whom he met in Abu Dhabi, in 2019”⁵¹.

What Pope Francis proposes in his encyclical is not only centered on developing the religious perspective on the issue of fraternity. He also refers to the “political triad” of freedom, equality, and fraternity showing how the relations between them can be redirected and enriched:

“Fraternity is born not only of a climate of respect for individual liberties, or even of a certain administratively guaranteed equality. Fraternity necessarily calls for something greater, which in turn enhances freedom and equality. What happens when fraternity is not consciously cultivated, when there is a lack of political will to promote it through education in fraternity, through dialogue and through the recognition of the values of reciprocity and mutual enrichment? Liberty becomes nothing more than a condition for living as we will, completely free to choose to whom or what we will belong, or simply to possess or exploit. This shallow understanding has little to do with the richness of a liberty directed above all to love”⁵².

This is also when Pope Francis voices his warning concerning an egoistically understood individualism. The pope expresses his concern that individualism will not make humanity more free, more equal, more fraternal. Instead, radical individualism turns out to be “a clever virus”, because it is extremely difficult to be eliminated. The problem with individualism is that it creates some kind of illusion which we follow thinking that our individual ambitions will somehow serve the common good⁵³. The remedy for the contemporary world should be thus the culture of encounter which means:

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no 1.

⁵¹ Daniel P. Horan, “Relationship leads us to peace: Three key Franciscan themes in “Fratelli Tutti””, *National Catholic Reporter*, 4 October 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/faith-seeking-understanding/relationship-leads-us-peace-three-key-franciscan-themes>, accessed 11 August 2021.

⁵² Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, no.103

⁵³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, no. 105.

“(…) that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life. The subject of this culture is the people, not simply one part of society that would pacify the rest with the help of professional and media resources”⁵⁴.

Finally, what is essential and embodies the essence of the postsecular approach is the need for dialogue and mutual learning in which religious and secular arguments should engage:

“As believers, we are convinced that, without an openness to the Father of all, there will be no solid and stable reasons for an appeal to fraternity. We are certain that “only with this awareness that we are not orphans, but children, can we live in peace with one another”⁵⁵. For “reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity”⁵⁶.

Pope Francis introduced a new stage in developing more on the dialogical I-You approach which he applies to all the levels of human existence, from the individual to the global one. The notion that he proposes is “dialogic realism”. As he writes “(…) false notion of tolerance has to give way to a dialogic realism on the part of men and women who remain faithful to their own principles while recognizing that others also have the right to do likewise” (221)⁵⁷. When applied in the area of IR, Pope Francis’ concept of global politics contests widespread assumptions of central hierarchic interstate relations and individualism dominating the discourse about global politics. Jodok Troy shows that when trying to “out-narrate” the existing rivalries in international politics, Francis pays strong attention to serious thinking about inequality. His message is anti-consumerist and anti-materialist but what is more he preaches a code of sacrifice⁵⁸. Fraternalism is called upon here not only on the side of the “average

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, no. 216.

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, “Homily at Mass at Domus Sanctae Marthae”, 17 May 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200517_spiritosanto-accesso-al-padre.html, accessed 25 August 2021.

⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, “Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*”, 29 June 2009, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html, accessed 25 August 2021.

⁵⁷ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, no. 221.

⁵⁸ Troy, *International politics*, 568.

people” but also those strong and powerful. This is precisely what Pope Francis underlines in the *Fratelli Tutti* encyclical:

“It is wrong when the only voices to be heard in public debate are those of the powerful and ‘experts’. Room needs to be made for reflections born of religious traditions that are the repository of centuries of experience and wisdom”⁵⁹.

VI. Concluding Remarks

The *Human Fraternity Document* signed by Pope Francis and Sheik Al-Tayeb of Al-Azhar, Pope Francis’ encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, but also the Marrakesh Declaration⁶⁰ issued by more than 250 Muslim religious leaders, scholars and heads of state, are among the recent documents articulating the principles and goals of both interreligious and secular-religious collaborations for human fraternity and inclusive citizenship in the modern world⁶¹. In February 2021, the International Day of Human Fraternity was celebrated at the UN for the first time. As the organizers pointed out, the purpose of that event was to provide an opportunity to highlight the principles and values included in the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and living Together* and explore good practices towards its implementation as a pathway to the future, as we rebuild a better world⁶². One month later, in March 2021, Pope Francis made an historic visit to Iraq. The official Vatican slogan of the trip was “You are all brothers”. During the visit, Francis hosted a large interfaith gathering of religious leaders in Ur, the birthplace of the patriarch Abraham, and he met with the Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in the holy city of Najaf, speaking with him about fraternity, citizenship, and the future of religious diversity in the country⁶³.

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 275.

⁶⁰ ***, “Marrakesh Declaration. Executive Summary of the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities”, 25-27 January 2016, <https://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/>, accessed 4 December 2021; United States Institute of Peace, “Understanding and Extending the Marrakesh Declaration in Policy and Practice”, 30 September 2016, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/09/understanding-and-extending-marrakesh-declaration-policy-and-practice>, accessed 4 December 2021.

⁶¹ Appleby, *Comprehending Religion*, 67.

⁶² United Nations, “Human Fraternity for Peace and Cooperation, International Day of Human Fraternity”, 4 February 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/human-fraternity>, accessed 18 August 2021.

⁶³ Petito, *Fraternity*, 10.

In the course of only two years, the notion of fraternity has become the element of universal discourse. This way, one more concept initially conceptualized in the religious discourse “transcended” the religious domain to be accustomed to the secular domain. Just like numerous notions before, including those of reconciliation or peacebuilding⁶⁴ that have been implemented in the secular discourse, fraternity entered the public domain not just to enrich the discourse but to propose its own, religious vision of solutions for the global challenges. This vision though did not limit itself only to ideational dimension. It was also followed by practical political-theological initiatives that emerged as the potential patterns of conduct outside of religious domain.

From the point of view of IR, these developments can be perceived as the element of the decades long debate on how the international reality should be envisaged and researched. Should that be the interest and power oriented approach or rather the one proposing some normative component aimed at purposeful transformation of global politics. With the contribution made by the concepts of “culture of encounter” and “fraternity”, the reflexivity of IR has been brought to the fore and the hotly debated IR view on religion of this traditionally most secularized discipline of social sciences has been questioned again. The “return of religion” in ir and IR emerged in a new, constructive transformation, oriented perspective.

Human Fraternity, the religiously rooted concept, can be perceived as a message of relational politics countering widely understood exclusion and discrimination. One may look at it as the new, innovative notion introduced into public discourse in the second decade of the 21st century. But paradoxically, it may also be perceived as an “old”, never realized call that pushed Saint Francis to undertake his extraordinary trip to Egypt over 800 years ago and develop some new kind of relationship with the sultan. Looking from one more perspective, it may also be the element of the triad that shaped the Western ideal of what every single human being deserves. While freedom and equality have been the constant call of the last two centuries it may be the time for fraternity to eventually find its proper place in the public discourse as well.

⁶⁴ Joanna Kulska, *Między sacrum i profanum. Rola czynnika religijnego w rozwiązywaniu konfliktów i budowaniu pokoju* (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2019).

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