THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This keynote address was delivered at a conference on “The Culture of Encounter: An Imperative for a Divided World” held in Rome at Villa Malta on May 27-28, 2022. The conference was co-sponsored with La Civiltà Cattolica as part of the Culture of Encounter and the Global Agenda project.
INTRODUCTION

I am very grateful to you for this invitation to reflect together on the relationship between global governance and the culture of encounter, taking as our guide the teaching of Pope Francis. From the beginning of his papacy, the Holy Father has encouraged us to see dialogue as the principal method for bringing the Gospel message of peace into our daily lives and into international relationships. The very word “encounter” points to the interplay of diplomacy, global governance, and the search for peace. In the words of the Pope:

“There is always movement in an encounter. If we all stand still, we will never meet. ‘Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter’” (Fratelli Tutti, 215). That is what life is: the art of encounter. Encounter is, as it were, the oxygen of life. And this is why we need a culture of encounter, because “we the people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone” (ibid., 216).1

We can say, then, that formation for a culture of encounter involves an education in the art of peacemaking, drawing individuals, nations, and peoples out of the spiral of war, resentment, and hatred, and guiding them to the path of dialogue and the pursuit of the common good. In contributing to the culture of encounter, the Church does not simply talk about relationships, but seeks to educate, to help people grow by examining the intellectual, the moral and social dimensions of their relationships, and daily decisions, directing them towards peace.

The conditions for a culture of encounter and the relationship between global governance and justice, viewed as the realization of charity in truth, have always been matters of concern in the life of the international community. They emerge most forcefully at those times when conflicts undermine the foundations of peaceful coexistence at the various levels of human society.

Even so, it must be admitted that our present-day world is less and less governed by the culture of encounter. Today’s thinking seems to prefer confrontation and the rule of “might makes right,” to the detriment of charity and justice. As a result, the world is slowly dying of selfishness, greed, injustice, and especially a lack of charity, precisely as self-gift. Realizing this, Pope Francis, in his first Message for the World Day of Peace, urged the world to abandon the “throwaway culture” and to develop a “culture of encounter,” to replace the globalization of indifference with the globalization of fraternity, and to combat the fragmentation of nuclear families with their revitalization as part of the one, indissoluble human family.2

Efforts to build a culture of encounter are grounded in human nature, for we do not live alone and apart from others, but are social beings, meant to interact with one another. In societal relationships and in global governance based on relationships between nations, two virtues make those relationships more authentic and more humane: charity and justice. Charity, or friendship, inspires communion, unification, and fraternity. Justice, or law, inspires right relationships with others.

Justice/law is respect for the dignity and rights of others, so that, within society, the property of other persons is respected and each is given his or her due: unicuique suum. Social justice respects the essential needs of every person, ensuring that he or she enjoys all the means necessary not only to live, but to live in a way worthy of human beings.

Charity/friendship, as a natural virtue, is benevolence: love that sees the other person as an alter ego, for whom we desire all the good that we would want for ourselves. It is naturally directed, insofar as possible, towards the integral good of all the members of the community. Charity inspires individuals to act as
brothers and sisters, ensuring respect for each member of the community and helping them to achieve their full human potential.

Attempts to see human and international relationships in purely legal categories, and to structure the life of communities only in the light of what is due to each person, overlook the essential value of charity. In order to bring about a true culture of encounter, the processes of the international community need to be structured along both tracks, those of justice/law and those of charity/friendship. In this way, positive laws will tend towards justice and foster charity and peace. For peace, as Saint Thomas Aquinas taught, is the fruit of justice (opus iustitiae pax).3

A true encounter, an authentic relationship between people and between nations, can only come about at the level of charity and the recognition of the fundamental dignity of each person. Justice, that is, respect for the rights of others, is merely a preparatory stage; as Saint Paul VI said, it is the “minimum measure of charity,” necessary so that each person can be enabled to live and realize himself or herself in encounter: encounter with life, encounter with others, and encounter with God.

The culture of encounter can be said, then, to have the following features:

It encourages us to regard the world with an attitude of openness. This means making our own the values and virtues of all people, including the traditions and good intentions of our enemies, respecting goodness wherever it may be found.

It is constructive. It does not preach conflict, but invites each of us to care for our neighbors, considering them as brothers and sisters.5

It helps create the future. Encounter is at the heart of all social ethics, the science that regulates and ensures peaceful relationships between individuals and states, since only through encounter are individuals inspired to advance towards progress and perfection. The culture of encounter can thus be considered a stimulus for the creation of a peaceful society, possessed of the conditions needed to envision a better future.

It is a guarantee of balance. The interpretation of law requires equity, in order to find the point at which different rights and privileges converge and to achieve scenarios where individuals and groups can attain their goals in respect for one another.

It is founded on charity. The culture of encounter must necessarily be grounded in an interior unity capable of reconciling differences in charity and building relationships in the light of mutual understanding and support.

**MAN IS “NATURALITER SOCIALIS”**

After this brief look at Pope Francis’ understanding of the culture of encounter and its relevance for diplomacy and for world governance, I would now turn to the Holy See’s presence and activity in the international community. These aim at improving the quality of life in our world and offering—as Pope Francis stated in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*—a solid basis for initiating processes of healing. Encounter cannot be built on empty diplomatic gestures, double-speak, hidden agendas, or mere politeness, but only on truth and sincere efforts to understand one another and to work for a new synthesis for the benefit of all (cf. ibid., 225-226).
The heart of the culture of encounter is the human person, considered as a being directed outwards, towards communion and openness to others; it follows that any relationship that excludes even one other person proves inauthentic. This distinctly Christian perspective, which applies also to the family of nations, was described by Pascal in these words: “God’s love is unitive, for it leads human affection from multiplicity to unity..., whereas self-love dispels human affection among disparate things.” It is through encounter that, as human beings, we discover our identity, which is *naturaliter socialis* (naturally social), since:

As individuals, we have needs that must be met. Both economically and in our daily activities, we find that, left to ourselves, we lack the resources for our self-perfection and must constantly cooperate with others, not so much to live well, as simply to live. These needs draw us towards society and the state.

As persons, human beings are by nature open and generous. Yet we do not truly love until we love another person. The person, then, is open to encounter, both on the volitional level and on that of action. We naturally tend to communicate with others, in fundamental openness to others, to understanding them and bonding with them through dialogue. As Aristotle explains, “man is by nature a political [social] animal...; someone incapable of taking part in the life of the polis, or of associating with other men, is either a god or a beast.”

Based on these thoughts, I would suggest three ways in which the day-to-day activity of the Holy See can help further the culture of encounter in the processes of global governance:

1. **By insisting that institutions are at the service of the human family for the pursuit of the universal common good.**

2. **By insisting that decisions be made in the sure knowledge that human rights and duties, and the great values of human dignity, justice, and peace, are grounded in objective reality and not merely on the vote of an assembly.** Recognizing this will help prevent reducing the various initiatives of the international community to a series of interventions linked to single issues and enable a more responsible exercise of the duty to safeguard human dignity and peace between nations.

3. **By insisting on the importance of the transcendent dignity of the person.** Only by acknowledging the truth of our human nature can we work to advance it. In this regard, “it is important for international agencies not to lose sight of the natural foundation of human rights. This would enable them to avoid the risk, unfortunately ever-present, of sliding towards a merely positivistic interpretation of those rights. Were that to happen, the international bodies would end up lacking the necessary authority to carry out their role as defenders of the fundamental rights of the person and of peoples, the chief justification for their very existence and activity.”

The culture of encounter is the bedrock of society, inasmuch as civil society is a society of persons. Hence, it presupposes the person, who is, in Rosmini’s words, a “subsisting human right,” never to be treated simply as a means but always as an end. Persons have their own proper end, as created in the image and likeness of God.

We can end this first part of our reflections by repeating that only through daily efforts to spread a culture of encounter can we ensure a better future for all and foster authentic respect for human dignity.
“IF FROM YOUR ABUNDANCE YOU CANNOT GIVE TO YOUR BROTHER, HOW WILL YOU BE ABLE TO LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE FOR HIM?”

On the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the United Nations, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated that the changes of recent years have led to a growing appreciation of the fact that, in his words, “never before have so many courageous and committed people been involved in world betterment. Never before have nations recognized so clearly that their fate is bound up with each other. And never before has it been so undeniable that mutually beneficial international institutions of cooperation—with the United Nations foremost among them—are of vital global necessity.”

Within this context, the Holy See, through its diplomatic activity, even today continues to belong to international organizations, to participate in international conferences, to cooperate in international codification, and to promote the recognition of the human dignity, peace, and concord between nations. For this reason too, the Holy See has always been an active participant in multilateral diplomacy, along with the more traditional sphere of bilateral diplomacy.

Pope Francis reaffirmed this commitment in his address to the members of the United Nations General Assembly. The pope noted that “integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed. They must be built up and allowed to unfold for each individual, for each family, in communion with others, and in a right relationship with all those areas in which human social life develops.” He added that, “without the recognition of certain incontestable natural ethical limits and without the immediate implementation of those pillars of integral human development, the ideal of ‘saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war’ and ‘promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom’ (cf. United Nations Charter, Preamble), risks becoming an unattainable illusion or even worse, idle chatter which serves as a cover for all kinds of abuse and corruption, or for carrying out an ideological colonization by the imposition of anomalous models and lifestyles which are alien to people’s identity and, in the end, irresponsible.”

If education is the path to peace, human dignity and the culture of encounter are the driving force behind diplomacy’s efforts to promote peace. We need, of course, to keep in mind that human “dignity,” grasped in all its varied aspects, has long been the subject of heated debate; hundreds of monographs and essays have been written by scholars from all social disciplines, from anthropology to bioethics, from philosophy to the general theory of law, constitutional law, and international law. Even so, in the minor literature, in the media, and on websites, the term is being used more and more frequently, above all in its social and ethical connotations. By now, no one doubts that “dignity” is a “value”—with all the weight that the word “value” bears—even though its meaning is necessarily relative and mutable in time, space, memory, and the ways people choose to present it.

That is why Pope Francis has stated that the principle that “every human being possesses an inalienable dignity” is “a truth that corresponds to human nature apart from all cultural change” (Fratelli Tutti, 213). This straightforward reading of reality shows the objective need to reiterate that “dialogue is the best way to realize what ought always to be affirmed and respected apart from any ephemeral consensus” (ibid., 211).

It follows that the culture of encounter should not be restricted to philanthropy. Encounter is more than a simple gesture of friendship. Its content is much richer: it is closeness to God, witnessed by love for our neighbor, and the spiritual basis of just relationships. If the modern world, dominated by globalization, has
often betrayed justice, one reason may be the fact that it has attempted to replace the culture of encounter with a philanthropy that, as Châteaubriand observed, is an odd form of fraternity that would disregard “paternity.” Philanthropy, as the very etymology of the word expresses, is moved by love of humanity, impelled by human compassion, and desirous of curing material ills by eliminating economic disparities. This idea of a humanistic solidarity and a vision of human relationships leads to a welfare state in which socialization can make great progress, but communion increasingly recedes, friendship becomes more and more difficult, and practical solidarity struggles to find its place, except sporadically or as a result of emotional impulses.

Certainly social solidarity presupposes justice. The culture of encounter proposed by Pope Francis, however, is not based only on social demands that are often confused with private interests; its roots are in Christian charity and in the vital sense of solidarity that the Gospel sums up in the Golden Rule: doing to others what you would have them do to you. Without this balance of charity, all social, economic, and political struggles, even if directed to a just end, will poison human relationships. The culture of encounter seeks to transform the disagreements and conflicts of present-day society, and thus replace hatred with fraternity and charity. Without entering into specific studies, it is clear that modern psychology has discovered the need to establish or reestablish human relationships inspired by respect for the dignity of the human person in every sector of social life. Human beings need respect as much as they need food, and mutual respect is the first form of love, because it recognizes the intrinsic value of the other as a person created in the image of God. In the words of the fourth-century author Lactantius, “the basis of society is fellowship, the principle of giving so that we may in turn receive.” It is only when men and women are bound by a common intent that they constitute a true human community.

Human society does not take root, prosper, or flourish in the shadow of fear, but in the light of love. Ultimately, every law or juridical-political system is based on moral relationships between individuals. The most elementary of contracts between human beings presupposes the willingness, inspired by charity for our neighbor, to be faithful to our duties. For charity, as Saint Augustine says, “gives rise to the obligations of human society.”

To sum up, we can say that “encounter,” as a certain form of friendship and charity, is prior to law, inasmuch as friendship precedes, accompanies, and follows law, and what might first appear as an opposition between encounter-friendship and law is resolved in the harmonious union of these two demands. Positive law thus arises only when minimal social conditions exist: a communal life based on respect for life and the property of others, fidelity to obligations undertaken, and other fundamental elements of social life.

It is not sufficient, then, to desire justice; what is also necessary is a culture of encounter, since, without relationship, men and women will never manage to overcome that degree of uncertainty inevitably present in every exchange. If we want peace, we need to recognize that it must be based on more solid foundations than non-relationships, or merely cultural or economic relationships. True peace must be based on justice, on the human dignity of each individual, on the recognition of the equality of persons, respecting the charity due to every person.

The emphasis placed by Pope Francis on the need for a growing culture of peace is not unconnected to the fact that one of the deeper causes of the grave crisis now shaking our world and jeopardizing its future is that the project of building the future together is often accepted in words, but very imperfectly followed and applied. The ultimate basis of peace is the ability to see other people as our equals, our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father, whom I need for the development of my personality even as they need me. When the community of nations lacks a culture of encounter, only the strongest individuals and groups occupy space in the world, marginalizing those who are weaker and increasing the tensions that give rise to resentment and war. As a result, society lacks peace because it lacks charity: in its
self-centredness and self-absorption, it is not open to the problems of others. “Without love,” Garaudy has written, “an individual or a society can function, but it cannot exist.”

At the beginning of this address, I sketched some of the features that paint the portrait of a culture of encounter. I would now like to list a few essential principles that guide and support the building of that culture:

1. **The culture of encounter is a requirement of justice.** Creating a relationship means before all else rendering full justice to our neighbor. Those who wish to be charitable must first be just.

2. **The culture of encounter is a summons to effective action.** It is not enough to have good feelings towards our neighbors; we need to do something for them. In other words, building a culture of encounter cannot stop at the affective level, but pass to the level of effective action. The proof of fraternity is not just benevolence but beneficial actions that embrace justice, because our encounter is with a neighbor who has real needs, even if not strict rights.

3. **The culture of encounter is a summons to responsibility in an age of entitlement.** Individuals and societies have to choose ways of cultivating authentic and sincere relationships, while taking account of concrete historical situations.

4. **The culture of encounter fosters creativity.** By encountering others, we come to discover new needs that call for new solutions and new ways of seeing things.

5. **The culture of encounter is a powerful source of forgiveness.** This is its most distinctive and, at the same time, its most demanding aspect. Consequently, if the mission of encounter is not to be distorted, relationships must be integrated with mercy, so that law, tempered by charity, will always prevail.

**CONCLUSION**

Constant change in the human condition and in the dynamics of our relationships forces us to change radically the way we view the world. To find our bearings, we must ask about the future of humanity, which–by the combined motors of science, technology, and economy–is impelling us towards a humanity that is “augmented” but in no way improved.

Our world is experiencing instability, uncertainty, and a creeping fear that a “global war” may break out. Now more than ever, we need to opt for the culture of encounter that Pope Francis indicates as the most adequate approach to viewing the future of the international community and humanity as a whole. As he has said, “Dialogue and fraternity are two essential focal points in our efforts to overcome the crisis of the present moment. Yet ‘despite numerous efforts aimed at constructive dialogue between nations, the deafening noise of war and conflict is intensifying’. The entire international community must address the urgent need to find solutions to endless conflicts that at times appear as true proxy wars.”

Consequently, it is important to begin to reexamine our ideas of progress, growth, and globalization from a broader and more complex standpoint, and finally commit ourselves to measuring growth other than in the purely quantitative terms of the GDP, setting in place indicators that consider human dignity and development. We need to rethink and appreciate more fully the irreducibility and complexity of the bonds linking states, nations, and people. Only by understanding these bonds will it be possible to devise new political and institutional mechanisms better suited to the complex identities of individuals and communities. The international community has shown itself capable of defusing numerous historical conflicts precisely because, in part, its institutions have been shaped by a rethinking of the nature of
national identities and territories. Despite these efforts, we hear talk of the implosion of the multilateral system and the community of nations. Should we be pessimistic?

The response must be equal to the danger. We are in the midst of a clash whose outcome we cannot foresee. What will be born? A world of disintegration, a battleground for colonization by old and new superpowers, or a world finally reunited? No one can escape this choice. No one is safe from danger, much less exempt from the responsibility of shaping his or her own future and that of others.

Today more than ever, the management of enormous national and supranational problems calls for vision, breadth of culture, and awareness of the new global human condition. At the same time, today more than ever, politics seems to prefer a ruling class with scant vision, bound to short-sighted tactics of self-preservation, in a state of moral and material decay. Without addressing this dramatic crisis of culture, it will be impossible to regenerate democracy and restore substance and credibility to politics. That is why Pope Francis insists on the importance of the culture of encounter. For a brighter future will only be possible if it is born of an awareness of the common destiny that now links all individuals and peoples of the earth, the whole of humanity. That acknowledgment requires a profound change of outlook, in which the opposition between diversity and identity, unity and multiplicity, is rejected, and all of us feel called to a greater degree of responsibility.

We have no other choice. We need to make the fact of our interdependence the springboard for new efforts to create a civilization based on coexistence and peace. This task before us is necessary and indeed ineluctable. It calls for creativity in meeting the challenge that, in this time of war, lies before us: to help humanity rediscover the path of understanding and communion.21

I would like to conclude this intervention by quoting from the message of Pope Francis for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. His are words of hope, but at the same time an appeal to build a better future for our world:

We are faced with a choice between two possible paths. One path leads to the consolidation of multilateralism as the expression of a renewed sense of global co-responsibility, a solidarity grounded in justice and the attainment of peace and unity within the human family, which is God’s plan for our world. The other path emphasizes self-sufficiency, nationalism, protectionism, individualism and isolation; it excludes the poor, the vulnerable and those dwelling on the peripheries of life. That path would certainly be detrimental to the whole community, causing self-inflicted wounds on everyone. It must not prevail… We never emerge from a crisis just as we were. We come out either better or worse. This is why, at this critical juncture, it is our duty to rethink the future of our common home and our common project. A complex task lies before us, one that requires a frank and coherent dialogue aimed at strengthening multilateralism and cooperation between states. The present crisis has further demonstrated the limits of our self-sufficiency as well as our common vulnerability. It has forced us to think clearly about how we want to emerge from this: either better or worse.22

Thank you for your patience, and also because, by listening to one another, we have taken a significant step towards a culture of encounter.
Endnotes
1 Pope Francis, “Address to the Saints Peter and Paul Association,” January 8, 2022.
3 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 29, a. 3, citing Isaiah 32:17.
4 Pope Paul VI, Address for the Day of Development, Bogotà, August 23, 1968, n. 3.
6 Blaise Pascal, Pensées, n. 455.
7 Aristotle, Politeia, I, 1,2, 1253a.
10 Saint Augustine, Tractatus in Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos, V, 12.
13 Lactantius, De divinis institutibus, VI, 10.
14 Saint Augustine, De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae, I, XXVI, 49.
21 Cf. M. Cannata, Interview with Mauro Ceruti, in www.notedipastoralegiovanile.it.

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Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher is the secretary for relations with states and head of the Second Section of the Holy See’s Secretariat of State. Throughout his life of service to the Roman Catholic Church he has held diplomatic positions in Tanzania, Uruguay, the Philippines, Guatemala, and at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France. In 2012 he was named papal nuncio to Australia, serving until Pope Francis appointed him to his current position in 2014.