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«Rebuilding Democratic Consensus—At Home and Abroad»

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«Il Nostro Piccolo Sentiero»

What we can learn about building Democratic Consensus
with Pope Francis' «the architecture and craftsmanship of peace»

1. Building Democratic Consensus

All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter. We balance inconveniences; we give and take; we remit some rights, that we may enjoy others; and we choose rather to be happy citizens than subtle disputants.

Edmund Burke, *Burke's Speeches and Letters on American Affairs*,
ed. Ernest Rhys (New York: J.P. Dutton, 1950), 76–144

We are living in a historical period characterized by the accumulation of crises, especially when, in the Western world, we expected an economic, cultural and political development of peace and a more comprehensive democratization.² The promotion of democratic consensus seems to be a central condition for the maintenance of societies and their development. A survey of the literature reveals at least three meanings consensus may be conceived:

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² Since 2008, we have witnessed the aggregation of high-intensity financial and political upheavals, occurring in a socio-economic climate of globalisation, some of which took governments by surprise and forced emergency measures that favoured the radicalisation of some parties and the rise of populism, threatening the cohesion of societies, a cohesion that was already being challenged by the promotion of identities and the hardening of the challenges posed to governments democratically elected. Democracies themselves are changing: « When we are not taking democracy for granted, we often mock it because of the frustration and despair we experience with it. Established democracies are not performing well. Gridlock among elected representatives, vetocracy engineered by cashed-up interest groups, and apathy among voters—in particular toward their political parties—are all symptoms of a deep malaise. » Roland Rich. *Democracy in Crisis: Why, Where, How to Respond*. Boulder, CO: Lynee Rienner Publishers, 2017, 4.

- 1) As a method of operation in politics characterized by reliance upon compromise and a search for some accommodation of interests that are often in collision, and that must be reconciled;
- 2) A more or less profound relation to the existing pattern of harmony within a political system and may refer either to the agreement which is alleged to exist with respect to the fundamental principles or belief system generally accepted in the society, or, alternatively, to the agreement that prevails on some immediate issue of public policy.
- 3) Finally, the equilibrium which results from the process of bargain interests is sometimes described as consensus.

Since «politics is a *collective* enterprise», with great likelihood of uncertainty and disagreement» about priorities, goals, methods, and the directions toward which society should move, the importance of consensus in political life is of vital importance. Avoiding ever-ending conflicts, if functionally rooted in some kind of cooperation and legitimate compromise, consensus can be a relevant way to prevent coercion.³

Vasilev (2015) reminds us that «consensus has a close affinity with democracy. Democracy provides a set of criteria for *collective action based on mutual convictions*, and this activity of joining with others to make a proposal publicly acceptable serves as a pathway for the realization of *democratically prized values* tied to *freedom* and *respect*.»⁴ Democratic life means to seek to rule with others, aiming to win their support. «And by making claims openly justifiable to those potentially bound by them, one is going *beyond self-interest* to orient oneself to a *common good*.»⁵

As the social world is often characterized by persistent disagreement, the «pursuit of mutually acceptable answers of freedom and respect» around values, beliefs and preferences is very challenging and the process can be so intractably that *reconciliation*

³ As Joseph H. Carens. *Compromises in Politics, Nomos*, Vol. 21, COMPROMISE IN ETHICS, LAW, AND POLITICS (1979), 123-141, 125-126, 139, argued, «legitimacy» is a prior and fundamental question about consensus, so that «compromise is not an end in itself. [...] The method of settlement is not irrelevant to moral judgements about conflicts, but it should not be the sole criterion» because «political conflicts are not limited to conflicts of interests» and «may involve conflicts of principles, of rights, or of ideologies [...] Interest and morals are often intertwined in politics». Not every difficult debate – as about justice or equality – are reducible to conflicts of interest, and need to be framed by truth search: «it is impossible to govern effectively and to remain innocent in a moral sense. [...] we must all take responsibility for the consequences of our actions and [...] for the consequences of inaction in cases where we could have acted. [...] To compromise one's principles is wrong by definition».

⁴ «One reason why compromise is so common in politics is that in politics we are required to act. [...] in practical affairs we are often forced to act in the face of uncertainty before we are confident that we have reached the truth. Under such conditions, compromise may offer the best solution. [...] He would prefer not to sacrifice any aspect of either one. Nevertheless, the need to act in a particular situation may force him to make some sacrifice, and frequently an individual will choose a smaller partial sacrifice of both of his goals in preference to a larger sacrifice of one.» Carens, *Compromises in Politics*, 124-125.

⁵ George Vasilev. The Uneasy Alliance between Consensus and Democracy. *The Review of Politics* 77 (2015), 73-98, 73-74. doi: 1 0. 1 01 7/S003467051 4000849

under a single horizon of agreement could lead to a situation that forces parties to give ground on their deepest commitments. That pressure to conform undermines the democratic goal of reaching decisions and agreements that reflect the needs and interests of all parties without silencing those that deviate most from the prevailing point of view. All parties need to see their interests respected in some way, not blurred or forgotten in a universalist quest for the common good.

A *general model* of integrative-indirect democracy – *consensus democracy* – can be found in some countries. It's built on *dissensus* rather than consensus: many attempts to reach a pacific common ground when differences in conviction and outlook on life, need to be carefully integrated, through accommodation and pacification, and coalitions and compromises. As citizens play the role of political spectator and of consulted party, in consensus democracy leadership is a more moderate and less expressive affair than it is in pendulum democracy.

Critics of consensus democracy focus on the elites «expertocratic» tendencies, and also on their tedious, paternalistic «kind and gentle» collaboration. In terms of (dis)advantages, consensus democracy is the reverse of pendulum democracy: its core quality is not swift decisiveness but controlled integration, its pitfall not so much over-commitment as viscosity.⁶ The «expertocratic tendencies» of *democratic consensus* – if seen as an *inclusive power-sharing* – are also present because (technical) arrangements do not ensure democratic inclusion and many large groups will never reach true consensus. Those elites can counterintuitively restrict opportunities for participation, often limiting the distribution of power among them and acting to not lowering barriers to entry for political parties and candidates. This kind of democratic consensus can also be a problem by making governance difficult, because small minorities can always resist agreement⁷, and powerful minorities can kill reform efforts.

So being, *consensus* both serves and threatens democratic inclusion. On the one hand, it provides the means for individuals *to will in common*. On the other hand, it can *impose assimilatory pressures* that marginalize perspectives at odds with the prevailing point of view. But consensus need not to be viewed as an «absolute», as unattainable as

⁶ Frank Hendriks. '4 Consensus Democracy: Pacification and Accommodation', *Vital Democracy: A Theory of Democracy in Action* (Oxford, 2010; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 May 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199572786.003.0005>, accessed 19 June 2023.

⁷ Francis Fukuyama. *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. London: Profile Books, 2022, describes America as a «vetocracy» because includes many choke points designated to encourage consensus.

undesirable. It requires that we are able to understand *how complex human relations are* and so, to distinguish the potential accomplishments of consensus from its potent hazards.

Needed as it is, so that political life goes on, consensus often is, as said before, a *dissent*: in increasingly fractured societies⁸, attaining something based not on common beliefs, but on the difference of convictions and conceptions of life. The dissent consensus requires careful integration. It is about reflecting on the possibilities of accommodation, the needs (and limits) of pacification, coalitions and compromises, moderation and low impact leadership, and an eventual balance, but always with some – major – costs. What societies need may be a new – better – social contract. Similarly, *Democratic Consensuses* may be based on *inclusion* as a shaping modality for power arrangements, but these arrangements do not necessarily ensure it, and may limit the supply of power to a few elites and restrict the supply of power and opportunities for participation of many others.

2. Happy Citizens in a Time of Discernment

[...] men, though they must die, are not born in order to die, but in order to begin.

Hanna Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University Press, 1958, 246.

In a speech on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, Pope Francis characterized the political – governmental – needs of today as «a time of discernment» that «calls for a new hermeneutic for the future»:

In the last sixty years, the world has changed a lot. If the founding fathers, who survived a devastating conflict, were animated by the hope of a better future and determined by the will to achieve it, avoiding the appearance of new conflicts, our time is more dominated by the concept of crisis.⁹

⁸ Highly atomized societies respond to (competitive pressures of) globalization, technological abrupt changes and increasable diversity by a «people like me» syndrome, and so tending to lose a «common life» sense; and so, failing to achieve social mobility and social sustainability (society's internal cohesion and ability to hold together) by generating distance, division and social fragmenting. To make it worse, in those societies political action is, mostly, a never-ending political campaign, «a source of the resistance to political compromise» that «lies in the democratic process itself», interfering with the balance in democratic governing. Amy Gutman & Dennis Thompson. The Mindset of Political Compromise. *Perspectives on Politics*, December 2010, Vol.8, No. 4 (December 2010), 1125-1143, 1125.

⁹ Francis, Pope. *Address to the Heads of State or Government of the European Union on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome* (24 March 2017). In Jan Tobinski, Giovanni Maria Vian. *The Popes and Sixty Years of European Integration* (Vatican City: Delegation of the European Union to the Holy See. L'Osservatore Romano, 2017), 99-107, 101-102.

But if we live the impact of the economic crisis, the «crisis of the family and of consolidated social models», therefore, a «crisis of institutions», to which is added the crisis of migrants, and although these foment the fear and «the profound disturbance of contemporary man», and decisively involve the «political action in itself, politics as such», the Pope stresses that,

the term «crisis» does not in itself have a negative connotation. It does not only indicate a sad moment, which must be overcome. The word crisis originates from the Greek verb *krino* (κρίνω), which means to *investigate, to evaluate, to judge*. In this context, the time of crisis, if accompanied by discernment, becomes «a time of challenges and opportunities». The first movement of this political dynamic is to help those in charge of this political dynamic to face it as an opportunity, by giving rise to a more decisive responsibility «first on the part of the highest leaders,

and then by advancing to the intermediate levels until it embraces all the citizens.¹⁰ This historic vision Pope Francis has, means that that «life» goes on with «crisis», transformation, challenge, opportunity, «a rightful demand for renewal and a step forward», a «movement, a part of our journey» and must not be confounded with «conflict».¹¹ And so, crisis can call on «realistic hope» because «a hopeless reading of reality cannot be termed realistic. Hope gives to our assessments an aspect that in our myopia we are often incapable of seeing»¹². And «we can look to the future with hope, if we truly take care of one another as brothers and sisters », encouraging us «to tell and

¹⁰ Francis, *Address 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome*, 102.

¹¹ Francis. Pope. *Address to the Roman Curia*. December 21, 2020, 8,10. And about the difference between crisis and conflict: « I would urge you not to confuse crisis with *conflict*. They are two different things. Crisis generally has a positive outcome, whereas conflict always creates discord and competition, an apparently irreconcilable antagonism that separates others into friends to love and enemies to fight. In such a situation, only one side can win. [...] Conflict always tries to find “guilty” parties to scorn and stigmatize, and “righteous” parties to defend, as a means of inducing an (often magical) sense that certain situations have nothing to do with us. This loss of the sense of our common belonging helps to create or consolidate certain elitist attitudes and “cliques” that promote narrow and partial mind-sets that weaken the universality of our mission. “In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality”» (N.7) And, learned with de pandemic crisis: «The crisis is no longer a commonplace of conversations and of the intellectual establishment; it has become a reality experienced by everyone. [...] The crisis of the pandemic is a fitting time to reflect briefly on the meaning of a crisis [...] A crisis is something that affects everyone and everything. Crises are present everywhere and in every age of history, involving ideologies, politics, the economy, technology, ecology and religion. A crisis is a necessary moment in the history of individuals and society. It appears as an extraordinary event that always creates a sense of trepidation, anxiety, upset and uncertainty in the face of decisions to be made. We see this in the etymological root of the verb *krino*: a crisis is the sifting that separates the wheat from the chaff after the harvest. » (N. 3, 5).

¹² Francis, *Address to the Roman Curia*, 6: «If we can recover the courage and humility to admit that a time of crisis is a time of the Spirit, whenever we are faced with the experience of darkness, weakness, vulnerability, contradiction and loss, we will no longer feel overwhelmed. Instead, we will keep trusting that things are about to take a new shape, emerging exclusively from the experience of a grace hidden in the darkness. “For gold is tested in the fire and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation” (*Sir 2:5*)».

share constructive stories which help us understand that we are all part of a story bigger than ourselves». ¹³

To understand the Pope's political thought, it is important to take into account his proposal regarding the quality of democracy and his idea of citizenship and «education for peace»: «people»¹⁴. Pope Francis often affirms that including citizens in political processes is not only worthy and useful, but possible and efficient, since «it is often “from below” that requests and proposals arrive», whose potential is adulterated not by their lack of understanding of reality or adjustment to the needs at stake, but because they are «instrumentalized for other interests by ideologized groups».

There is always the danger of «ideologization» and the answer is to promote a «better policy» through the «development of a world community capable of realizing fraternity from peoples and nations that live social friendship»¹⁵. A «policy that is implemented as **«architecture and craftsmanship of peace»**,¹⁶ the convening of all society institutions and the involvement of all social and political sectors that are usually «left aside or made invisible».¹⁷ And,

while solidarity is the principle of social planning that allows the unequal to become equal; fraternity is what allows the equal to be different people. Fraternity allows people who are equal in their essence, dignity, freedom, and their fundamental rights to participate differently in the common good according to their abilities, their life plan, their vocation, their work, or their charism of service.¹⁸

¹³ Pope Francis. *Regina Coeli*. May 24, 2020.

¹⁴ «A political-economic system, for its healthy development, needs to guarantee that democracy is not only nominal, but that it can be expressed in concrete actions that watch over the dignity of all its inhabitants under the logic of the common good, in a call to solidarity and a preferential option for the poor. [...] states to not renounce their most exalted and primary function: to look after the well-being of their people. [...] prioritization of social rights above other kinds of interests». Francis, Pope. *Statement to the «Judges' summit On Human Trafficking and Organized Crime»*. Rome, July 3, 2019. Barrett Turner. *Pacis Progressio: How Francis Four New Principles Develop Catholic Social Teaching into Catholic Social Praxis*. *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2017): 112-129, 116, observes that «one should therefore understand Francis four new principles as originating from, entering into, and completing this period debate about the essential link between evangelization and social justice by proposing and developing an Argentine way of reconciling faith and justice in the task of building a people.»

¹⁵ Francis, Pope. Encyclical Letter «Fratelli Tutti». (October 3, 2020), Città del Vaticano: LEV, 2020a, 154.

¹⁶ Cf. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 228-235.

¹⁷ Francis, Pope. «Politics as architecture and craftsmanship of peace». The Pope's invitation to the Leaders Pour la Paix Foundation, September 7, 2021.

¹⁸ Francis, Pope. *Message to Prof. Margaret Archer*, President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, April 24, 2017.

Politics' are not limited to the institutional level but are, as proposed by John Dewey¹⁹, an «associated way of life», a matter of working simultaneously at two levels: *cultural* and *institutional*²⁰. The first level is the *culture of encounter*, placing at the centre the human dignity, caring for his or her history, favoring the «most needed», the weak and the marginalized. To be truly democratic, the political life of today's societies needs to be concerned with «faces», the way to incorporate *mercy as a political category*²¹, a Way of Life guided by the processes of coming close (welcoming), sensing the need (discerning), responding concretely and individually (accompanying) and promoting change, conversion and belonging (integrating)²². Political relations can so be guided «with trust in the reserves of good that exist in the heart of the people».²³

Working at the level of institutions means «fostering dialogue and multilateral collaboration» in order to achieve «the care of a truly universal common good and the protection of the most vulnerable States» and persons²⁴. And the Pope adds: «Let us not remain in theoretical discussions, let us make contact with the wounds, let us touch the flesh of those who pay the damage»²⁵, the logic of mercy. This is the perspective that we wish to bring to the discussion, what we can learn from the principles of «better politics» and the «social dialogue for a new culture», which the Pope has been defining, and the goals that democratic politics must pursue in the current context of societies: a «stable reciprocity and even a consensus that matures over time», an «authentic social dialogue» from «life as an “art of encounter”»²⁶.

¹⁹ John Dewey. *Democracia e educação* (Lisbon: Didática Editora, 1916/ 2007), 88: «democracy is more than a form of government; it is, first of all, an associated way of life, an experience shared together. [...] It is equivalent to the breaking of the barriers of class, race and national territory that prevent man from understanding the importance of his activity.»

²⁰ As Paul VI, Pope. *Encyclical Letter Populorum Progressio (March 26, 1967): AAS 59 (1967)* wrote: «the development of each man and the whole man» (N. 15), «a true humanism that is open to values of the spirit and to God who is their source» (N. 42) Pope Francis endorses that «integral human development entails that the human person's material, economic, social, and spiritual needs should ultimately not be separated, not only in theory but even in practice, and must be pursued in society simultaneously.» Turner. *Pacis Progressio*, 113.

²¹ Mercy as a Political Category: A Misericórdia como categoria política: um estilo de vida redefine o papel da educação nas sociedades. Carvalho, C. M. R. C. D. S. (Student). 26 Jul 2022. *Doctoral Thesis*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.14/40054> How mercy can «make the world less cold and more just», and «change everything [...] change the world» (Francis, Pope. *Angelus*. March 17, 2013).

²² Wolton says that this lifestyle is explained in Francis, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (March 19, 2016): AAS 108 (2016), 311-446. Dominique Wolton. *Politique et Société* (Paris: Éditions L'Observatoire, 2017), 20. It is also at the heart of the Vatican's policy of defending migrants.

²³ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 196.

²⁴ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 174.

²⁵ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 261.

²⁶ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 215.

3. The «architecture and craftsmanship of peace»

The first step to the «*architecture and craftsmanship of peace*» is, substantially, the concept that «the path to peace does not involve homogenizing society, but allows us to work together [...] for the common good», and so, accepting the complexity that inherently comes with personal, social and political life.²⁷ Discernment not only accepts that complexity but works from it, so that «existence and experience» can become part of the person and transform him, «with the aim of directing one's own individual and social choices towards good and beauty». This must take place because:

Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a “mystique” of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage. Greater possibilities for communication thus turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone. If we were able to take this route, it would be so good, so soothing, so liberating and hope-filled! To go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us. To be self-enclosed is to taste the bitter poison of immanence, and humanity will be worse for every selfish choice we make.²⁸

3.1. The Principles for Common Good and Peace in Society

Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their lifestyle while others have to make do as they can. Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a *consensus* on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the *human person* and the *common good* rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised.²⁹

Since the publication of his «Programme», the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis clearly states that «people in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens»³⁰, and

²⁷ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 228. Pope's principles respond to the inherent «bipolar tensions» that arise in life and must be managed, leading individuals and communities through tensions: getting a hard-won synthesis without collapsing each side tensions, the Romano Guardini's «inherent oppositions», produced by creative tensions in human life and thought. Romano Guardini. *Der Gegensatz* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1955).

²⁸ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. (November 24, 2013). AAS 105/12 (2013): 1119-1137, 87.

²⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 218.

³⁰ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 220.

that social and political peace are not «the absence of warfare»³¹ but *the result of integral development*, as was affirmed by Pope Paul VI, «an ongoing process in which every new generation must take part: a slow and arduous effort calling for a desire for integration and a willingness to achieve this through the growth of a peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter [...] where differences are harmonized within a shared pursuit». This process – «becoming a people [...] in peace, justice and fraternity» – depends on «four specific principles» due to harmonize differences within a shared pursuit³² and allow us to build «a common project in the life of a people».³³

I) Follow: *Time is greater than space*

Let us refuse to be robbed of hope, or to allow our hope to be dimmed by facile answers and solutions which block our progress, «fragmenting» time and changing it into space. Time is always much greater than space. Space hardens processes, whereas time propels towards the future and encourages us to go forward in hope.³⁴

A constant tension exists between fullness and limitation. Fullness evokes the desire for complete possession, while limitation is a wall set before us. Broadly speaking, «time» has to do with fullness as an expression of the horizon which constantly opens before us, while each individual moment has to do with limitation as an expression of enclosure.³⁵

«Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces», so that we'll be able «to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results», but being patients before adverse or changeable situations and accepting «the tension between fullness and limitation», the principle of

³¹ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 76: «When we fight poverty and oppose the unfair conditions of the present, we are not just promoting human well-being; we are also furthering man's spiritual and moral development, and hence we are benefiting the whole human race. For peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men.»

³² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 221.

³³ Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Cardenal. «Nosotros como ciudadanos, nosotros como pueblo. Hacia un Bicentenario en Justicia y Solidaridad (2010-2016), Conferencia, 13ª Jornada Arquidiocesana de Pastoral Social, Buenos Aires, 16 de octubre de 2010». In *En tus ojos esta mi palabra. Homilias y discursos de Buenos Aires 1999-2013*. org. Antonio Spadaro (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 2018), 964-987, 966-967. Turner, 116, explains that «Bergoglio would constantly keep his focus on what was necessary to serve the people, who were living at the peripheries of the elites' ideological programs. He therefore developed his four principles in relation to constant tensions in Argentine social questions, tensions that were being reduced, col- lapsed, or ignored by the predominant powers. It is for this reason that Ivereigh calls Bergoglio's four principles "anti-ideological" and working against "the schemes of the elites"».

³⁴ Francis, Pope. Encyclical Letter «Lumen Fidei», AAS 105 (June 29, 2013), 555-596, 57.

³⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 222.

accompaniment³⁶. What societies need is «to give priority to actions which generate new processes [...] and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity»³⁷, calling «on attention to the bigger picture, openness to suitable processes and concern for the long run».³⁸

II) Welcoming: *Unity prevails over conflict*

Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality.³⁹

From a purely anthropological standpoint, unity is superior to conflict; rather than avoiding conflict, we need to confront it in an effort to resolve and move beyond it, to make it a link in a chain, as part of a progress towards unity.⁴⁰

«Blessed are the peacemakers!» (*Mt 5,9*), those «who have the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process», building «communion amid disagreement [...] willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity».⁴¹ Consequently, peace is the conviction that a new unity, a new synthesis (brought by the Spirit) can harmonize every diversity, «a process of *reconciliation*», of *forgiveness* in society, creating a «reconciled diversity», and not any «negotiated settlement».⁴²

³⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223. «One of the faults which we occasionally observe in sociopolitical activity is that spaces and power are preferred to time and processes. Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back.»

³⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223. Criticizing the «quick short-term political gains», the Pope says, quoting Romano Guardini. *Das Ende der Neuzeit*, Würzburg, 1965, 30-31: «The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful human existence, in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age.» (N.224).

³⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 225.

³⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 226.

⁴⁰ Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 55: «Forgiveness is possible once we discover that goodness is always prior to and more powerful than evil, and that the word with which God affirms our life is deeper than our every denial.»

⁴¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 228. Solidarity «in its deepest and most challenging sense», is an important tool, that can lead us to «a resolution which takes place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides», without syncretism OR «the absorption of one into the other».

⁴² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 230. Reconciliation as a practicable goal: nothing and no one is definitively lost in the relations between nations, peoples and states and true peace means that no one is left out of the negotiation process and no one is left out of the solution found, «no one is excluded from the joy» (N.3, cf. N. 23, 39).

III) Discerning: *Realities are more important than ideas*

Realities simply are, whereas ideas are worked out. [...] It is dangerous to dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric. [...] This calls for rejecting the various means of masking reality: angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, empty rhetoric, objectives more ideal than real, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom.⁴³

Pope Francis strongly warns about «ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism» and the dangers of «ideas disconnected from realities» that fail to account for the concrete history of the people, manipulate truth and do not call for action: «What calls us to action are realities illuminated by reason».⁴⁴

To really understand the world complexity and its phenomenon's, we must «not stay on the balcony, do not observe with detachment, but approach, bend down, touch with your hands», because «touching with your hands humanizes us» and so we can really appreciate and recognize the complexity and dynamism of life and its problem's and taking to account many different points of view, without the risks of impoverishing and distorting it⁴⁵. This wise «closeness» is the first step to *discernment*⁴⁶, the intellectual, moral and spiritual attitude that can lead us to «understand», so that all «nuances» in a web of situations can be grasped. It's essential an approach-based understanding of reality in struggle, to «mix with it, touch it»⁴⁷, because «realities are greater than ideas» and urge for justice, calling us «to a renewed and expansive hope, for they represent «new directions for humanity and open us to the future», without «nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today's world».⁴⁸

⁴³ Francis, *Evangeli Gaudium*, 231.

⁴⁴ Francis, *Evangeli Gaudium*, 232. « We have politicians – and even religious leaders – who wonder why people do not understand and follow them, since their proposals are so clear and logical. Perhaps it is because they are stuck in the realm of pure ideas and end up reducing politics or faith to rhetoric. Others have left. Ideas – conceptual elaborations – are at the service of communication, understanding, and praxis. Others have left simplicity behind and have imported a rationality foreign to most people. »

⁴⁵ CF. Francis, *Evangeli Gaudium*, 176.

⁴⁶ «Discernment is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. [...] We need it at all times [...] is exercised in small and apparently irrelevant things, since greatness of spirit is manifested in simple everyday realities. It involves striving untrammled for all that is great, better and more beautiful, while at the same time being concerned for the little things, for each day's responsibilities and commitments. [...] also enables us to recognize the concrete means that the Lord provides in his mysterious and loving plan, to make us move beyond mere good intentions.» Francis, Pope. «Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*» (march 19, 2018). AAS 110 (2018), 1137- 1138, 169.

⁴⁷ Francis, *Discorso ai partecipanti al Capitolo Generale dell'Istituto Figlie di Maria SS. dell'Orto*. 26 marzo 2022.

⁴⁸ Francis, *Evangeli Gaudium*, 108.

IV) Integrating: *The whole is greater than the part*

«*The whole is greater than the part*» is a principle of Inclusion: attention must be paid to the tension that «also exists between globalization and localization» so as to «avoid narrowness and banality»; not to be obsessed with limited and particular questions but still looking to the local «which keeps our feet on the ground»⁴⁹. And if the whole is greater than the part, «it is also greater than the sum of its parts»:

we constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which *will benefit us all*. But this has to be done without evasion or uprooting. We need to sink our roots deeper into the fertile soil and history of our native place, which is a gift of God. We can work on a small scale, in our own neighborhood, but with a larger perspective. Nor do people who wholeheartedly enter into the life of a community need to lose their individualism or hide their identity; instead, they receive new impulses to personal growth. The global need not stifle, nor the particular prove barren.⁵⁰

Integration is a very dynamic process – a difficult one – so that can reflect «the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness», a «polyhedron» of a political activity that seek to gather the best of each and not leaving anyone behind:

There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential. Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked. It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the *common good*, which truly has a place for everyone.⁵¹

3.2. On Consensus Building:

Fratelli Tutti, envisaging and engendering an open world

[...] between selfish indifference and violent protest there is always another possible option: that of dialogue. Dialogue between generations; dialogue among our people, for we are that people; readiness to give and receive, while remaining open to the truth. A country flourishes when constructive dialogue occurs between its many rich cultural components: popular culture, university culture, youth culture, artistic culture, technological culture, economic culture, family culture and media culture.⁵²

⁴⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 234. « In the first, people get caught up in an abstract, globalized universe, falling into step behind everyone else, admiring the glitter of other people's world, gaping and applauding at all the right times. At the other extreme, they turn into a museum of local folklore, a world apart, doomed to doing the same things over and over, and incapable of being challenged by novelty or appreciating the beauty which God bestows beyond their borders. »

⁵⁰ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 235. This is a practical implication of solidarity and also of subsidiarity: development must preserve diversity among individuals and groups, like the image of «polyhedron»: against homogenization or conformism, a globalism that do not dissolve cultures in an unique one for all.

⁵¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 236.

⁵² Francis, Pope. *Meeting with Brazilian Political, Economic and Cultural Leaders*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (27 July 2013): AAS 105 (2013), 683-684.

Providentially, many groups and organizations within civil society help to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in complex situations, its lack of attention to fundamental human rights and to the critical needs of certain groups.⁵³

Pope Francis' meaning of consensus is always *Encounter* – approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and «really» be able to find common ground – starting from Dialogue⁵⁴, a serious search for a common ground due to Common Good's pursuit. That's the political and social work of *building fraternity together*, healthy relations, communities, bridges, «a project that includes everyone», «a common destiny» and «future»: «a new culture [...] capable of transcending our differences and divisions»⁵⁵. And since «political charity is born of a social awareness that transcends every individualistic mindset»⁵⁶, «good politics will seek ways of building communities at every level of social life», «by spirits that are free and open to authentic encounters»⁵⁷, «open societies that integrate everyone»⁵⁸.

⁵³ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 175: «a concrete application on the principle of subsidiarity [...] lower levels as a means of integrating and complementing the activity of the state.» «Fratelli Tutti» is Pope Francis third encyclical, addressed to all people, in consonance with *Laudato si'* and the 2019 meeting with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi, which resulted in the *Document on Human Fraternity* for World Peace and common coexistence. The Pope wants to bring «active hope» to the world, shaken by the pandemic and torn apart by conflicts, many of them armed, so a chapter is devoted to peace promotion. In the context of the Church's Social Doctrine, it urges us to review the manipulation of concepts such as *democracy*, *freedom* and *justice* and warns us against heartless «radical individualism». The Pope proposes care of fragility as the center of «better» political action, through the Culture of Encounter (solidarity, care, closeness). Without using the terminology, the Pope offers, as a model, the great figure of mercy, the Good Samaritan.

⁵⁴ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 198. «Dialogue is often confused with something quite different: the feverish exchange of opinions on social networks, frequently based on media information that is not always reliable. These exchanges are merely parallel monologues. They may attract some attention by their sharp and aggressive tone. But monologues engage no one, and their content is frequently self-serving and contradictory. » (N. 200). And, « Discussion is often manipulated by powerful special interests that seek to tilt public opinion unfairly in their favor. This kind of manipulation can be exercised not only by governments, but also in economics, politics, communications, religion and in other spheres. [...] Lack of dialogue means that in these individual sectors people are concerned not for the common good, but for the benefits of power or, at best, for ways to impose their own ideas. Round tables thus become mere negotiating sessions, in which individuals attempt to seize every possible advantage, rather than cooperating in the pursuit of the common good. » (N.201, 202). Is due to the dominant culture propose/process of manipulation, that Pope Francis often uses the qualifications of «real», «good», «authentic» and «truth» to a needed renewed vision for long-earned «enduring» democratic values (values that « rise above consensus; they transcend our concrete situations and remain non-negotiable» (N.211).

⁵⁵ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 216.

⁵⁶ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 181.

⁵⁷ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 50.

⁵⁸ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 97.

In a pluralistic society, the best way to affirm and respect «what ought always to be affirmed»⁵⁹ is this authentic *dialogue* – social, political – that «involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns»⁶⁰, making room for everyone to a better grasp of the truth⁶¹. Differences are creative and in the resolution of tension lies progress. And «forms of politics focused on immediate interests» must be prevented: «true statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the *long-term common good*. Political powers do not find it easy to assume this duty in the work of nation-building»⁶². But dialogue also «needs to be enriched and illumined by clear thinking, rational arguments, a variety of perspectives and the contribution of different fields of knowledge and points of view»⁶³.

Pope Francis’s «basis for consensus» points out that «relativism [...] and the absence of *objective truths* or *sound principles*» corrupt culture and so laws seem arbitrary or «obstacles to be avoid»⁶⁴. Consensus can only happen in an – most needed – universe of «basic and non-negotiable ethical principles»⁶⁵, that truly protect and preserve the inviolable and inalienable «dignity of others» that must «be respected in all circumstances [...] because human beings possess an intrinsic worth superior to that of material objects and contingent situations».⁶⁶

A New Culture as an open conclusion

The heroes of the future will be those who can break with this unhealthy mindset and determine respectfully to promote truthfulness, aside from personal interest. [...] Social

⁵⁹ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 211.

⁶⁰ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 203: « 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».

⁶¹«[...] some things may have to be renounced for the common good. No one can possess the whole truth or satisfy his or her every desire, since that pretension would lead to nullifying others by denying their rights.» Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 221.

⁶² Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 178.

⁶³ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 211.

⁶⁴ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 206. «What is law without the conviction, born of age-old reflection and great wisdom, that each human being is sacred and inviolable? If society is to have a future, it must respect *the truth of our human dignity* and submit to that truth. [...] A society is noble and decent not least for its support of the pursuit of truth and its adherence to the most basic of truths. » (N.207). And «when it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the ‘poorest of the poor’ on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal. » Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 96: AAS 85 (1993), 1209 (apud. cit. N.209).

⁶⁵ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 214. The Pope stresses that those values, acceptable to all intelligence (as spiritual or agnostic may be) «could serve to prevent further catastrophes».

⁶⁶ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 213.

peace demands hard work, craftsmanship [...] the fruit of a culture of encounter that brings enduring stability.

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 202, 217.

As a synthesis of his thought, Pope Francis stresses that a *culture of encounter* is the only framework to a *process* «capable of transcending our differences and divisions, each of us learning something from others, including those on the peripheries of life and remain invisibles to the centers of power and decision making, because “the whole is greater than the parts”». ⁶⁷ Democratic societies – so that democracy does not become «a mere nominalism» – need a new culture, a new way of life, «passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone» ⁶⁸.

It’s a **craftsmanship** because is hard and difficult to start the «processes that built a people that can accept differences» ⁶⁹. And to achieve solid enduring results, demands many complex skills ⁷⁰, since «peace is not achieved by recourse only to those who are pure and untainted» and «nor does it come from ignoring social demands or quelling disturbances» and cannot be confused with «a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority».

From this culture of encounter and dialogue, different sides form a variegated unity, «in which “**the whole is greater than the parts**”. [...] a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. » ⁷¹ And, «a 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». ⁷² «Pain and

⁶⁷ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 215.

⁶⁸ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 216. «It would be easier to keep freedoms and differences in check with cleverness and a few resources. But such a peace would be superficial and fragile, not the fruit of a culture of encounter that brings enduring stability. Integrating differences is a much more difficult and slow process, yet it is the guarantee of a genuine and lasting peace. » (N.217).

⁶⁹ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 217.

⁷⁰ Under the finality of «Recovering Kindness», Pope Francis addresses those skills/virtues of Mercy: choose to cultivate kindness, helping other people lives more bearable, sharing problems, needs and fears, «a readiness to alleviate their burdens», offering «comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement»; «free us from cruelty [...] and anxiety [...] show interest [...] to listen amid indifference. »

⁷¹ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 215.

⁷² Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 221: «This is the genuine acknowledgment of the other that is made possible by love alone. We have to stand in the place of others, if we are to discover what is genuine, or at least understandable, in their motivations and concerns. »

conflict transform us. We no longer have use for empty diplomacy, dissimulation, double-speak, hidden agendas and good manners that mask reality. » We need to stand up for truth: « “**Truth**, in fact, is an inseparable companion of **justice** and **mercy**. All three together are essential to building peace»⁷³.

And **building peace** – «an open-ended endeavor, a never-ending task that demands the commitment of everyone and challenges us to work tirelessly to build the unity of the nation»⁷⁴ – is an **art** and an **architecture** because «does not mean making society blandly uniform, but getting people to work together, side-by-side, in pursuing goals that benefit everyone» starting by first identifying the problems, «acknowledging the possibility that others have, at least in part, a legitimate point of view, something worthwhile to contribute»⁷⁵. Then, working «to overcome our divisions without losing our identity as individuals» presuming «that a basic sense of belonging is present in everyone».⁷⁶ Pope Francis emphasizes that «great changes are not produced behind desks or in offices and «everyone has a fundamental role to play in a single great creative project: to write a new page of history, a page full of hope, peace and reconciliation” »⁷⁷.

To such peace building it’s crucial to understand that «for tranquil social coexistence should never forget that inequality and lack of integral human development make peace impossible». Politics and dialogue and peace building must «begin with the least», a «renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society».⁷⁸ But consensus and peace also care for forgiveness without forgetting but they do not «involve renouncing our own rights, confronting corrupt officials, criminals or those

⁷³ Francis, Pope. *Address at the National Reconciliation Encounter*, Villavicencio, Colombia (8 September 2017): AAS 109 (2017), 1063-1064, 1066.

⁷⁴ Francis, Pope. *Meeting with Authorities, the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of Civil Society*, Bogotá, Colombia (7 September 2017): AAS 109 (2017), 1029.

⁷⁵ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 228.

⁷⁶ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 230.

⁷⁷ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 231. « [...] we have learned that these ways of making peace, of placing reason above revenge, of the delicate harmony between politics and law, cannot ignore the involvement of ordinary people. Peace is not achieved by normative frameworks and institutional arrangements between well-meaning political or economic groups... It is always helpful to incorporate into our peace processes the experience of those sectors that have often been overlooked, so that communities themselves can influence the development of a collective memory. » Francis, Pope. *Homily*, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (10 September 2017): AAS 109 (2017), 1086.

⁷⁸ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 232. The main question is that «without equal opportunities, different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode. When a society – whether local, national or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility». Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 59.

who would debase our dignity», because true «forgiveness does not entail allowing oppressors to keep trampling on their own dignity and that of others, or letting criminals continue their wrongdoing».

We are called to love everyone, without exception; at the same time, loving an oppressor does not mean allowing him to keep oppressing us, or letting him think that what he does is acceptable. On the contrary, true love for an oppressor means seeking ways to make him cease his oppression; it means stripping him of a power that he does not know how to use, and that diminishes his own humanity and that of others.⁷⁹

How can this be done in «real politics»?

«Do we love our society or is it still something remote, something anonymous that does not involve us, something to which we are not committed?»⁸⁰

Pope Francis stresses the need to look at political differences from the point of view of «open thinking», through «peripheral roads», without rigidity. But with the effectiveness that comes from contemplation of reality, discernment and action, never confusing prudence with the attainment of any balance of forces, which, he says, inexorably leads «to detachment», whose patron saint is the biblical figure of Pilate. The principal author, the historic subject of this process, *is the people as a whole and their culture*, and not a single class, minority, group or elite. We do not need plans drawn up by a few for the few, or an enlightened or outspoken minority which claims to speak for everyone. It is about agreeing to live together, a social and cultural pact.

There is no recipe. There are reference principles, but then the path to follow is always a small path (*senderito*) that must be discovered in prayer and discernment of concrete situations. There are no definite rules that always apply. The path is opened by walking with *open thinking* and not with abstract principles of diplomacy. One looks at the signs, one discerns the path to take. [...] Sometimes, more than motorways, the small paths work, those peripheral roads that nevertheless get you to your destination. They are not rigid, big, obvious, but they are effective.

[...] *open our eyes to our reality* [...] and find our own little path [not always] well-organized, precise, rigid, always defined in the same way [...] And of course, *commitment, courage*. By committing ourselves we understand things. It takes, in short, the virtue of prudence, which is also a virtue of government. But beware! Do not confuse

⁷⁹ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 241.

⁸⁰ Francis, Pope. *Meeting with Political, Economic and Civic Leaders*, Quito, Ecuador (7 July 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 July 2015.

prudence with mere balance. Prudents of balance always end up washing their hands of it. And their patron saint is «Saint' Pilate».

Pope Francis, «Il nostro piccolo sentiero».⁸¹

The Pope's proposal for an effective and powerful democratic construction of consensus is certainly arduous and complex, but it seems increasingly necessary in these uncertain and diverse times, when the many conflicts and their polarizations need to be treated as crises that are opportunities and can improve the course of humanity, giving rhythm and decisiveness to the paths of true integral development, opening political life to compassion and encounter. There will be no peace without justice, and we cannot achieve justice without deep mutual understanding, social friendship founded on dynamic respect for human dignity and action directed towards the common good. And this is what Pope Francis challenges us to do as a matter of critical urgency.

⁸¹ Pope Francis. Il nostro piccolo sentiero. *La Civiltà Cattolica*. Quaderno 4067, 417-423, Anno 2019, Volume IV. Em <https://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articolo/il-nostro-piccolo-sentiero/>, consultado em 15 de jun. de 23.