

From the Editor

It is Easter Monday, April 21, 2025. Pope Francis died this morning after a valiant battle with double pneumonia and a variety of infections. After a long hospitalization that began in mid-February 2025, he rallied to return home to his residence in the Vatican, Casa Santa Marta. He thrilled the faithful around the world as he made unexpected public appearances throughout the Easter Triduum and continued to meet with visitors. Pope Francis has died, and the church and the world have lost a powerfully loving and courageous moral voice.

Early in his pontificate, Pope Francis reflected on dialogue as he continued to do in many other speeches and writings. In his July 27, 2013, speech to leaders of Brazil at the Municipal Theatre, Rio de Janeiro, he taught:

An element that I consider essential for facing the present moment is constructive dialogue. Between selfish indifference and violent protest there is always another possible option: that of dialogue. Dialogue between generations, dialogue within the people, because we are all that people, the capacity to give and receive, while remaining open to the truth.... I consider fundamental for this dialogue the contribution made by the great religious traditions.... When leaders in various fields ask me for advice, my response is always the same: dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. The only way for individuals, families and societies to grow, the only way for the life of peoples to progress, is via the culture of encounter, a culture in which all have something good to give and all can receive something good in return. Others always have something to give me, if we know how to approach them in a spirit of openness and without prejudice. This open spirit, without prejudice, I would describe as “social humility,” which is what favors dialogue. Only in this way can understanding grow between cultures and religions, mutual esteem without needless preconceptions, in a climate that is respectful of the rights of everyone. Today, either we take the risk of dialogue, we risk the culture of encounter, or we all fall; this is the path that will bear fruit.¹

Francis’s 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* reflects on the type of world that all peoples could build if they trusted in a

¹ Francis, *Meeting with Brazil’s Leaders of Society, Address of Pope Francis* (July 27, 2013), §3, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html.

culture of encounter. He deftly describes the sociopolitical situation, a description that remains accurate five years later:

Today, in many countries, hyperbole, extremism and polarization have become political tools. Employing a strategy of ridicule, suspicion and relentless criticism, in a variety of ways one denies the right of others to exist or to have an opinion. Their share of the truth and their values are rejected and, as a result, the life of society is impoverished and subjected to the hubris of the powerful.²

To combat such a situation, Francis calls for

the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions.... Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centres of power where weighty decisions are made.³

In his 2025 Easter homily, Pope Francis taught that “Easter spurs us to action.”⁴ Pope Francis has stirred many Catholics and non-Catholics alike to action—to care for the earth, the poor, and one another, attempting to build what Pope Paul VI dubbed a civilization of love. We cannot know whom the coming conclave will choose as Francis’s successor. But in many speeches and texts, Francis has made it abundantly clear that dialogue and encounter provide the tools for decreasing violence, increasing respect for human dignity, and forging a more forgiving and peaceful world. By the time readers see this issue of *Horizons*, we will know if the 267th pope will continue Pope Francis’s teaching of dialogue and encounter inspired as he was by Saint Francis of Assisi, whom he said “did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God.”⁵

This issue’s articles can help us to consider anew both the priorities of Pope Francis and areas where the church has failed to advance these priorities. Ma. Maricel S. Ibita’s article “Groaning with Creation: Ecoanxiety, Biblical Ecopedagogy, and the Future” builds on Pope Francis’s teaching in *Laudato Si’* and explores the use of ecological biblical hermeneutics for an ecological

² Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (October 3, 2020), §15, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html#_ftnref204.

³ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, §215.

⁴ Francis, *Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis* (April 20, 2025), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250420-omelia-pasqua.html>.

⁵ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, §4.

education that promotes ecological conversion. Pearl Maria Barros's article suggests that Pope Francis's emphasis on listening and dialogue positively affected the investigation into the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) by the formerly named Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as she gives a detailed analysis of the "contemplative processes and practices" of the LCWR and Gloria Anzaldúa's "path of *conocimiento*." David Cloutier and Daniel Finn propose a new definition of sinful social structures in "Improving Theology's Understanding of Complicity and Oppression in Sinful Social Structures," thus prodding us to look more carefully at our failings and weaknesses that obstruct the social friendship and culture of encounter called for by Pope Francis. Marc J. Delmonico's study "Co-Workers or Laborers?: Hermeneutical Considerations of the 2005 USCCB Statement on Lay Ministry with Some Implications for Pastoral Practice" identifies tensions and problems concerning the understanding of lay ministry. Eli Valentin's book review essay of *In Sheep's Clothing: The Idolatry of White Christian Nationalism*, by George Yancy and Bill Bywater, rounds out the issue.

It is my hope that the work of the authors and editors of *Horizons* will be judged as having contributed to building a church and world in which, as Pope Francis has taught in so many ways, "no one is expendable." In a world riven by war and perilously threatened by, among others, economic inequality, climate change, and hateful bigotries, Pope Francis's teaching will remain of paramount importance:

What is important is to create *processes* of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences. Let us arm our children with the weapons of dialogue! Let us teach them to fight the good fight of the culture of encounter!⁶

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As always, I thank our authors for sharing their scholarship with our readers, and I thank all of the members of the *Horizons* editorial team for their inspiring creativity, diligent work, and unwavering commitment to excellent scholarship.

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⁶ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, §217.