



The Dialogical Mission of the Servant Church: A Study of the Indonesian Catholic Church through *Fratelli Tutti*

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Article History

Received: 24 June 2023

Revised: 1 June 2025

Accepted: 30 July 2025

Published: 31 July 2025

Keywords: Indonesian Catholic Church; interreligious relations; servant Church; social friendship

Abstract: This article critically explores the role of the Indonesian Catholic Church in fostering dialogue with the marginalized and with people of other religions. The Church's mission, as emphasized in Catholic social teaching, is not solely for itself but is directed toward all creation. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia—characterized by religious, cultural, and political diversity—the Church is called to be present as a dialogical and servant Church (*Gereja abdi*) that is deeply rooted in the life of the people. This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical method, utilizing data drawn from journals, books, and online theological articles. The analysis is based on Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, especially its emphasis on social friendship and authentic dialogue. The findings reveal that the Church in Indonesia must develop a deeper awareness of its mission to engage in sincere dialogue, particularly with the poor and followers of other religions. Such dialogue is not an abandonment of identity but a faithful expression of Christian love and synodality. Ultimately, the Indonesian Catholic Church is invited to embody a living theology—one that embraces others, fosters unity, and contributes to the common good (*bonum commune*) through solidarity and mutual understanding.

INTRODUCTION

The presence of the Catholic Church is not solely for itself but exists as a Church in solidarity and collaboration with people of other religions. This is particularly important in Indonesia, a country marked by its rich diversity in religion, culture, society, and politics. This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for the Indonesian Church in building a vision of a Church that serves and engages in dialogue. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of fostering social dialogue with a genuine openness to truth. This kind of dialogue is intended to respond to the signs of the times, inviting people to express themselves through deep communication and relationships.

Dialogue is not merely about presenting ideas or refuting others and forcing one's own thoughts to be followed. True dialogue is characterized by openness to the truth. Pope Francis consistently highlights the importance of forming authentic friendships. Dialogue should not be confused with heated arguments or monologues that make others feel attacked (Francis, 2020).

As a servant Church, the Indonesian Church strives to be deeply rooted in local traditions and cultures (Riyanto, 2010). The Church endeavors to engage in dialogue with local cultures.

With humility and openness, it draws wisdom from these traditions. According to Armada Riyanto, such a dialogical servant Church increasingly displays a distinctive embodiment of faith that is inclusive, welcoming, and open (Riyanto, 2010). The Church seeks to take root and bear fruit in its pastoral context. This contemporary dialogical approach is particularly effective when it engages cultural dimensions that align with the character of the Indonesian nation, composed of diverse cultures (Tinambunan, 2022). This also legitimizes the long-standing tradition of dialogue within the Indonesian nation, including the political sphere where the Church plays a role in "humanitarian politics" (Satrio & Viktorahadi, 2021).

According to Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*, authentic dialogue presupposes the ability to appreciate or respect the views of others, and the willingness to accept that others may hold legitimate convictions and interests (Francis, 2020). At the same time, the Indonesian Church is called to embrace its sacred mission of dialogue with the poor and with people of different beliefs. No one should become apathetic or build walls that separate them from their fellow human beings. The Church becomes a mediator of peace and fraternity, driven by the spirit of solidarity and service to the vulnerable (Mujiyanto & Saputro, 2021).

The Church is invited to cultivate the awareness that all people are called to be the new People of God—not in a uniform way, but in diverse ways that reflect each one's culture and beliefs. In this context, the Church becomes a sacrament of salvation—both a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and unity among all human beings (Riyanto, 2010). The vision of an Indonesian servant Church in dialogue calls us to reflect on how we live as part of a nation. This resonates with *Fratelli Tutti*, which challenges people to reaffirm the ontological nature of humanity as an interdependent entity with intrinsic connections in a pluralistic society (Bahariyanto, 2022).

Based on the above overview, this paper aims to present how the Indonesian servant Church plays a role in embracing dialogue. Dialogue is not only about expressing opinions or ideas, but also about being deeply rooted and realistic in engaging with local culture and tradition. The Indonesian servant Church is called to manifest its unique identity in the life of faith without losing the essence of Christian teaching itself. A servant Church is one that is willing to serve and engage in dialogue with the poor on the margins of society and with people of other religions. In doing so, the servant Church enlivens theology in a tangible way for communal life.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method. This method aims to critically examine the available data, analyze it in depth, and develop a systematic evaluation. The research presents data related to the role of the Indonesian servant Church in promoting dialogue, which is then grounded in Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, particularly its teachings on dialogue and social friendship. The analysis seeks to generate new insights within the horizon of contextual theology, with a specific focus on the development of dialogical theology in Asia, especially within the Indonesian context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dialogue in *Fratelli Tutti*

In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, particularly in the sections on dialogue and social friendship, Pope Francis offers a concrete explanation of what authentic dialogue entails. Dialogue is a process of mutual approach and self-expression, of looking at and listening to one another, and of seeking common ground (Francis, 2020). Dialogue should not be narrowly defined as mere verbal exchange between two or more people. Rather, it is a reciprocal and progressive expression of communication, relationship, action, and experience — including silence as a space to listen to God's voice within the human heart (Otor, 2020).

Pope Francis seeks to move people out of themselves. He observes that many individuals attempt to escape from reality by retreating into their own self-made worlds. There is a degradation of human capacity for encounter. People become reluctant to recognize God in others. In our contemporary world, filled with a flood of opinions, people increasingly avoid direct verbal communication. This gives rise to habits of discrediting others while rigidly clinging to one's own opinions. Worse still, according to Pope Francis, sarcasm has become normalized in social media, particularly in political campaigns, and is consumed regularly by social media users.

This information-saturated reality breeds apathy. Negotiations become mere expressions of one-sided political interests. Francis argues that the absence of true dialogue means that no one — across various sectors — genuinely cares about the common good; instead, they seek personal gain through power, often by coercing others into accepting their views (Francis, 2020). People demand, even force, others to accept and listen to their opinions. As a result, human relationships fall into chaos, and interactions become cold and disengaged. People avoid sitting together to find shared solutions in a spirit of fraternity.

To address the modern human reluctance to engage with others, Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, proposes a vision of authentic dialogue — one that avoids coercion and fosters mutual respect. Authentic dialogue, according to Francis, presupposes:

“...the ability to respect the other person's point of view, to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns. Based on their identity, others have something to contribute, and it is desirable that they articulate and defend their positions so that public debate may be enriched. It is true that when individuals or groups remain true to their beliefs and values and develop their arguments, they ultimately benefit society. But this can only happen if such development occurs through dialogue and openness to others. In true dialogue, we grow in our capacity to grasp the meaning of what others are saying and doing, even if we cannot accept it as our own conviction. This makes it possible to be honest, not hiding what we believe, yet continuing the conversation, seeking points of contact, and above all, working and struggling together. Public discussion, if it truly allows everyone to participate and does not manipulate or conceal information, is a powerful incentive to seek the truth more adequately

— or at least to express it more fully. It prevents various sectors from retreating into their own narrow perspectives and limited interests. Let us remember that ‘differences are creative; they create tension, and in resolving this tension lies humanity’s progress’” (*Fratelli Tutti* no. 203).

Francis emphasizes that dialogue is not about eloquently expressing one’s ideas to intimidate others. Rather, it is about authenticity — where people mutually respect and accept one another. People humbly share their thoughts simply and honestly for the sake of the common good. This kind of dialogue fosters a spirit of fraternity and love among all. Such friendship has the power to touch the hearts not only of acquaintances or relatives but of all who are involved (Tinambunan, 2022). At the same time, we must not forget that fraternity and friendship with all people is a universal vocation (Satrio & Viktorahadi, 2021).

Dialogue and social friendship represent a rational consensus. People are invited to unmask the lies that circulate in both public and private spheres. This rational consensus arises from deep intersubjective communication. It is a form of critical reflection in response to the damaged and vulnerable state of social friendship. Here, Pope Francis calls us to boldly expose the lies manipulated by those in power — who distort truth, disguising selfish political interests as legitimate claims. “Truth,” he argues, is not merely about factual reporting through journalism but about seeking the solid foundations that undergird our choices and laws (Francis, 2020). He warns:

“Otherwise, could it not be the case that fundamental human rights, now considered unassailable, will be denied by those in power, once they have secured the ‘consent’ of a people lulled or intimidated into submission? A mere consensus between different countries — which can all be manipulated — is not enough. There is already abundant evidence of the good we are capable of doing. But at the same time, we must acknowledge our destructive potential. Could not our fall into cruel and indifferent individualism be the result of our failure to seek higher values that transcend our immediate needs? Relativism adds to the risk that the most powerful or the most cunning will impose their own notion of truth. On the other hand, ‘in the face of moral norms that prohibit 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: before the demands of morality, we are all absolutely equal.’”

We are invited to deeply examine ourselves, recognizing the destructive tendencies within. This awareness is necessary to prevent further harm and disconnection from others. We build inner walls to keep people away. Today, people often withdraw from intersubjective communication with others, preferring to remain in the comfort of their own worlds. Therefore, in a pluralistic society, dialogue that transcends incidental consensus is essential. People are called to open themselves to the common good and avoid dialectics that pit one against another (Francis, 2020).

In engaging in authentic dialogue, one enters into a *culture of encounter* that recognizes others as interdependent persons. Every individual plays a role, including those at the margins of society. According to Pope Francis, people on the peripheries often have different perspectives and possess insights into aspects of reality that are not recognized by those at the

center of power, where decisions and policies that shape communal life are made (Francis, 2020). This implies that public policy should not merely be the outcome of discussions among political elites, but must be rooted in the lived reality of the broader community.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, dialogue presupposes a consensus that is not merely formalized on paper, but one that permeates the everyday life of human beings. Authentic dialogue becomes a weapon of joy that empowers individuals to enter into shared values of unity. It calls people not to neglect their fellow human beings, especially the poor, as such neglect can lead to unexpected social unrest. It must be acknowledged that when policies are made without seeing or listening to the poor, even well-intentioned proposals are rejected by the poorest sectors because they are presented within a cultural framework that is foreign to them, making it impossible for them to identify with it (Francis, 2020).

Dialogue must be realistic, not just theoretical discourse or brilliant ideas. It must enter into the concrete realm of the lives of the poor. Dialogue is also meant to foster a culture of encounter, in which individuals do not become apathetic or view others as obstacles to their own personal peace and comfort (Francis, 2020). People are called not to focus solely on their own salvation, but to genuinely recognize others as part of themselves. There is a sense of goodness of heart that seeks to be shared with others. Such a disposition of kindness presupposes respect and reverence for others, thereby facilitating the search for rational and intersubjective consensus as a *bridge of love*.

The Vision of the Indonesian Servant Church

In his book *Dialog Interreligius: Historisitas, Tesis, Pergumulan, Wajah*, Armada Riyanto articulates the vision of the Church as one that engages in dialogue with the poor, with culture, and with people of other religions (Riyanto, 2010). This dialogical stance presupposes a maturing faith, one that is able to perceive the other as part of a nurturing communion. The vision of the servant Church seeks to root values of peace within society. It involves what is known as the *dialogue of life*, which includes the dialogue of action, theological dialogue, and the dialogue of faith experience (Siswantara, 2020).

Dialogue of life refers to the most fundamental level of dialogue, which unfolds in daily living. It is a dialogue that arises in the very dynamics of life — whether joyful, tense, affirming, burdensome, or threatening. It is a dialogue built upon the spirit of fraternity, rooted in solidarity and subsidiarity, and marked by mutual care (Novalina et al., 2021). Humans exist within a *societas*, a realm of social interconnection in which no one stands alone. Each individual's unique experience is inevitably entangled with the experiences of others in a shared dialogical reality (Riyanto, 2010). It is in this moment that the Church becomes a promoter of the dialogue of life, fully embracing its mission in various fields — education, economics, politics, and beyond — and seeking to contribute through its distinct competencies.

This contribution then gives rise to the dialogue of action, built through collaborative efforts among different individuals and communities. The Church seeks meaningful cooperation with other religions, going beyond the basic level of dialogue of life (Riyanto,

2010). This does not mean abandoning the dialogue of life but rather deepening it so that dialogue becomes more valuable and transformative. Dialogue is no longer merely casual conversation or superficial neighborly exchange; the dialogue of action is directed toward human development and the enhancement of human dignity.

The dialogue of action aims to restore human beings to their inherent nobility. It uplifts dignity. However, the Church must not stop at action alone, as it risks becoming a routine, meaningless daily experience. This can lead to fatigue and despair. The dialogue of action should be transformed into a theological experience, granting deeper meaning to the Church's mission and its cooperation with other religions. This path invites humility and openness to the perspectives of others. Theological dialogue requires mutual openness and the willingness to undergo changes that align more deeply with one's spiritual values (Riyanto, 2010).

Having engaged in the dialogue of life, action, and theological reflection, one is invited into the most profound form — the dialogue of faith. This is the moment when individuals encounter God through every experience of meeting the other. This experience ought to enrich communal life. It opens one to a mystical dimension, entering into the mystery of God's love. Such experiences bear fruit in the form of a humble and compassionate life. The principle no longer centers on the self, but on glorifying God through service to others.

The vision of the servant Church is therefore aimed at cultivating intimate relationships with various cultural and religious traditions wherever the Church is present, so that the seeds of faith may grow and take root in local communities (Riyanto, 2010). The Church becomes a bridge of peace and joy in daily life. It provides a space of encounter where the faithful may undergo transformation toward a deeper and more genuine life of faith (HS, 2022). Since the first assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in 1974, Asian bishops have recognized the importance of dialogue as a fundamental mission of the Church in Asia (Helle, 2012).

This vision ultimately points toward a model of dialogical-negotiative *societas* (Dominggus & Pius Pandor, 2022), a framework for deepening human relationships. Such a framework fosters self-awareness through relational experiences, enabling personal transformation. It positions human beings within a social space marked by respect, reverence, and mutual recognition. This vision should be seen as intrinsic to the Indonesian servant Church — a vision that brings all people into the values of love, cultivated through dialogue. In this context, individuals are empowered to respect one another without discrediting the understanding or beliefs of others.

The Mission of the Indonesian Servant Church

The vision of the Indonesian servant Church is an effort to encourage dialogue between the Church and Indonesian society. The Church acknowledges the importance of dialogue in building constructive relationships with society, and in promoting peace, justice, and unity among all people (Bahariyanto, 2022). For instance, dialogue within the Indonesian Catholic Church is not limited to fellow Catholics but also extends to other sectors of society, including

the government and other religious groups. This is evident in the efforts of the Commission for Interreligious Relations within the Catholic Church (Hidayati, 2018). Such dialogue seeks to foster understanding and tolerance among various groups and to promote collaboration in advancing justice and peace within the broader society.

In practice, dialogue within the Indonesian Catholic Church is carried out through various initiatives, such as discussions, seminars, and workshops. The Church also facilitates dialogue through digital platforms like social media and websites, as well as through pastoral services that offer guidance and support to both the Catholic faithful and the wider public. However, it is crucial to emphasize that dialogue in the Catholic Church does not aim to alter or dilute the Church's identity. Rather, dialogue is intended to foster mutual understanding and tolerance among different groups and to create conditions in which cooperation and peace can flourish and grow.

The concept of the Church as *servant* is a deeply rooted and significant principle in Catholic teaching. This concept highlights that the Church is called to serve the faithful and the wider society with love and dedication, following the example of Jesus Christ. As a servant, the Church is expected to walk in Christ's footsteps by offering care and service to others—especially to those most in need, such as the sick, the poor, and the marginalized. The Church is also called to promote justice, peace, and unity among all people and to advocate for human rights and social justice.

In the Indonesian context, the Church as servant must be attentive to the local social and cultural realities, and promote local values that are in harmony with Christian teachings. The Church must be immersed in the life of the people and collaborate with them in working toward the common good—through social outreach, healthcare services, education, and other areas of public concern. Nonetheless, it is equally important to recognize that the servant Church must not lose its identity as a distinctive community of faith. The Church is expected to preserve the integrity of Catholic doctrine and tradition, and to share Christian values with others through acts of loving and compassionate service, and through dialogue grounded in mutual respect and understanding.

The Church in Dialogue

At its core, the Church must be a dialogical Church. Through dialogue, the Church continually renews the way it believes — a faith that is dialogical (Riyanto, 2014). Dialogical faith refers to a disposition of continual renewal, where believers do not remain satisfied with mere feelings of spiritual comfort. The Church must be rooted and present within society. The People of God are invited to reflect upon truths in a way that is both transformative and dialogical (Riyanto, 2014).

A Church committed to dialogue must engage in intergenerational dialogue, so that it can meaningfully reach all people, including the younger generation. As Pope Francis states in *Fratelli Tutti*, dialogue is also needed among generations — among fellow citizens — for we are all members of one nation (Francis, 2020). It is undeniable that our current society is

flooded with information, much of it disseminated through social media. People can consume content at any time, often without the ability to critically filter what they encounter. The overwhelming spread of facts and opinions on digital platforms often hinders dialogue, as individuals increasingly cling to their own views, interests, and preferences — believing everyone else is wrong (Francis, 2020).

In light of this, and as urged in *Fratelli Tutti*, the Church is called to be a strong medium for fostering dialogue. The Church becomes a promoter of peace, justice, and human dignity, all grounded in genuine dialogue — including interreligious dialogue (Otor, 2020). Such dialogue must be rooted in the daily lives of the people and marked by a spirit of ongoing renewal. The Church is called to cultivate a dialogue of life — one that engages other religions, cultures, and the poor, as emphasized in the vision of the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC) (Nelahi & Prasetyantha, n.d.).

A Church that dialogues leads people to mutual understanding, enrichment, and cooperative efforts to address social issues (Toyo, 2015). Mutual understanding assumes a deeper appropriation of one's faith that bears fruit. This also involves a commitment to respecting the perspectives of others (Francis, 2020). The Church expresses itself through openness, undergoing continuous growth. The Second Vatican Council became a turning point for renewal, encouraging the Church to view itself and the world with the spirit of *aggiornamento* — “opening the windows wide” (Siswantara, 2020). Through this openness, the Church becomes a true herald of Jesus Christ, proclaiming the values of love and compassion for all creation.

A dialogical Church is an art of building peace. It is a true shepherd for all, especially for the poor and those on the margins of life. The Church's dialogical presence is not merely a platform for communication with the marginalized or other religions; it is an embodiment of concrete and contextual theology. There is a sustained and ongoing effort to cultivate peace (Otor, 2020). Theology comes alive when it truly touches the reality of human life. Of course, a dialogical Church faces its own challenges — particularly when confronted with contemporary central issues such as fundamentalism, secularism, and the rise of scientific ideologies (Bahariyanto, 2022). These challenges can even provide a basis for agnostics to validate their positions. In this context, Pope Francis reminds us in *Fratelli Tutti* of the need to always create spaces for dialogue (Francis, 2020). Each person is invited to courageously foster a culture of encounter, building bridges and inclusive plans that involve everyone. In this way, the mission of the Church in dialogue becomes a truly living and contextual theology.

Dialogue and Mission

Dialogue and the mission of the Church are deeply interconnected, as dialogue can serve as an integral part of the Church's mission to proclaim Christian teachings and values to those outside the ecclesial community (Riyanto, 2014). In the context of the Church's mission, dialogue serves as a means of fostering mutual respect and understanding with the surrounding society. The Church may initiate dialogue with the wider community through social outreach

and service, such as offering assistance to the needy — orphans, the sick, the poor, and others in vulnerable conditions. Through these concrete acts of charity, the Church builds meaningful relationships with society and opens avenues for introducing Christian values.

Furthermore, dialogue serves not only as a means of outreach but also as a way to deepen the understanding of Christian doctrine and to broaden the horizons of faith within the Christian community itself. In this regard, the Church can organize discussions and workshops that explore Christian teachings in relation to Indonesia's socio-cultural realities. However, it is essential to note that the Church's mission should never become an attempt to coerce others into adopting the Christian faith. Rather, it must be carried out in love and with deep respect for religious freedom and the views of others. In this way, dialogue becomes a tool for building trust and cooperation in pursuit of shared goals — peace, justice, and the well-being of all.

Dialogue can be seen as a form of the Church's mission to bring theology to life in the midst of a pluralistic society. Dialogical theology is a religious approach that must be embraced by society as a foundation for a more humanistic and open religious engagement (Harjuna, 2019). A concrete expression of such lived faith can be found in religious moderation, which emphasizes shared commitment, tolerance, nonviolence, and receptiveness to local cultures (Kendju et al., 2022). These are essential steps toward building a dialogical theology that moves from reflection to action — particularly through the formation of authentic friendships (Riyanto, 2014).

The starting point for understanding dialogue and mission is Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus, sent by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit, came to bring joy, especially to the poor (cf. Luke 4:18). The mandate entrusted to Jesus must be continued by the Church through the proclamation of God's salvation (Riyanto, 2010). Christ came to bring peace and to act as the mediator between God and humanity, reconciling sin through His redemptive mission (Dey, 2021).

Christ, as the center and model for both dialogue and mission, should continually inspire the Christian faithful. As Pope Francis states in *Fratelli Tutti*, when people become absorbed in enjoying what the world offers while pretending that the poor do not exist, it inevitably leads to unforeseen consequences (Francis, 2020).

The mission of the Church is to continue the proclamation of Christ by making the Kingdom of God visible in the world. This kingdom only becomes tangible through a dialogical approach that is both reflective and communicative. In the same way, interreligious dialogue must be conducted in a wise, constructive, and transformative manner — forming the necessary framework for true encounter (Rahmat, 2017). At this point, it is also important to recognize that mission — especially *missio ad gentes* and *plantatio Ecclesiae* (the planting of the Church in places where it has not yet taken root) — must be incarnated in the lives and cultures of local communities (Riyanto, 2010).

Ultimately, the goal of the Church's mission and dialogue is the restoration of the common good. Individuals are called to reject individualism and to stop seeing others as obstacles to their personal enjoyment (Francis, 2020). Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, urges all people to be

moved and engaged in the mission of God — not to remain comfortable in their own isolated worlds, but to open themselves to the presence and needs of others.

In this sense, the Church in Indonesia strives to embody a dialogical face. It is a Church that seeks to engage the poor (Kelen, 2015), the marginalized, and the forgotten. It is a Church that exists not for itself, but for all people — especially for those in need — and in service to the common good (*bonum commune*).

CONCLUSION

The document *Fratelli Tutti* on dialogue and social friendship, as proclaimed by Pope Francis, is not merely a collection of brilliant ideas. Rather, Pope Francis seeks to make all people aware that today's world often drives humanity into a heightened state of individualism. People are confronted with a reality that keeps them constantly connected to digital networks and platforms, which can erode their critical awareness. As a result, individuals consume content indiscriminately and become absorbed in their own worlds, neglecting essential social values — values rooted in a culture of encounter and dialogue.

In this context, the Church in Indonesia presents itself as a servant Church, one that is open to the poor and to people of other religions. It is a Church that seeks to dialogue with those on the margins of life, with the neglected and forgotten. It is also a Church that strives to build friendship with other religions, refusing to remain closed in upon itself. Instead, it lives out its calling as the true follower of Jesus Christ — the one who proclaimed the Good News to all people.

The Church commits to dialogue with the concrete realities of human life as a servant, so that theology becomes a lived and life-giving reality. Dialogue and mission thus form an inseparable unity — a single expression of the Christian proclamation of faith. This proclamation is grounded in a goodness of heart that liberates us from the chains of selfish comfort and indifference. The vision of the Indonesian servant Church is ultimately directed toward building human flourishing and restoring human dignity — for the sake of the common good (*bonum commune*).

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