



“Never Again War!” (FT 258) Pope Francis on peace and the abolition of ‘just war’ in Fratelli Tutti^a

“¡Nunca más la guerra!” (FT 258) El Papa Francisco sobre la paz y la abolición de la ‘guerra justa’ en Fratelli Tutti

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Abstract

Starting from the clear and sustained position of Pope Francis against war, armaments and against the violation of human rights, this article explores the positions of his encyclical Fratelli Tutti on violence, war and peace. It underlines the analysis of the current world that is seriously wounded by war and violence. War is systematically described as an absurdity to be abolished. This refers particularly to the doctrine of “just war” which the Pope openly rejects. Additionally, his position is that not only the use but also the possession of weapons, especially nuclear weapons, is immoral and unsustainable. To live these choices, Fratelli Tutti proposes spiritual and ethical attitudes of nonviolence. In this way, it will be possible to walk the path of peace, which is nothing other than peace itself.

Keywords: Nonviolence, Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, just war, spirituality, peace.

Resumen

Partiendo de la postura clara y sostenida del Papa Francisco contra la guerra, el armamento y contra la violación de los derechos humanos este trabajo profundiza en las posturas de su encíclica Fratelli Tutti en cuanto a la violencia, la guerra y la paz. Subraya el análisis del mundo actual que se ve seriamente herido por la guerra y la violencia. Coherentemente, la guerra se describe como un absurdo que hay que abolir. Esto se refiere particularmente a la doctrina de la “guerra justa” que el Papa rechaza abiertamente. Se añade su postura que no solo el uso sino también la posesión de armas, sobre todo nucleares, es inmoral e insostenible. Para poder vivir tales opciones, Fratelli Tutti propone actitudes espirituales y éticas de no-violencia. Así será posible transitar el camino hacia la paz que no es otra cosa que la paz misma.

Palabras clave: No-violencia, Papa Francisco, Fratelli Tutti, guerra justa, espiritualidad, paz.

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Introduction

In the almost eleven years of his pontificate, Francis has never hidden the fact that he does not believe in war, but rather supports all people who work for peace using peaceful means. In his encyclical "*Fratelli Tutti*" (Francis, 2020, forthwith quoted as FT with number of paragraph) he dedicates an entire chapter to peace in the world. The exclamation that heads this article is taken from this chapter. With this call for the end of war, the Pope alludes to his predecessor Paul VI, without mentioning him, who had exclaimed, in his address to the United Nations: "Never again one against the other, never, never again! [...] Never again war, never again war! It is peace, peace, that has to guide the destiny of the nations of all mankind!" (Paul VI, 1965)

The Pope's verdict is part of an impressive series of documents, speeches and previous statements in which he positioned himself against war and military preparations for war, rejecting the arms trade and in favor of a non-violent policy. In addition to his message on World Peace Day in 2017 and his two speeches in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in November 2019, his own addresses to the UN General Assembly in 2015 and 2020 should be mentioned, alongside numerous other speeches, sermons and messages (cf. Nauerth 2018).

This article aims at highlighting the contribution of *Fratelli Tutti* to Catholic theology and ethics of peace. In the first chapter, it underlines the analysis of the current world that is seriously wounded by war and violence. War is systematically described, in the second chapter, as an absurdity to be abolished. This refers particularly to the doctrine of "just war" which the Pope openly rejects. Additionally, his position is that not only the use but also the possession of weapons, especially nuclear weapons, is immoral and unsustainable. To live these choices, *Fratelli Tutti* proposes spiritual and ethical attitudes of nonviolence, as is described in the third chapter. In this way, it will be possible to walk the path of peace, which is nothing other than peace itself.

Fratelli Tutti is not an encyclical explicitly dedicated to world peace, but for this reason it should not be underestimated even alongside John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*. On the contrary, if studied in depth, it reveals several significant developments for Catholic peace theology and ethics that have to be taken into account from now on: the Pope paves the theological and doctrinal way for the Catholic Church in the future to be able to proclaim with a firm voice: "Never again war!" and also: "The only way to peace is peace." As indicated, the first chapter now will deal with the Pope's analysis of the reality of war and peace our world is living presently.

1. "A world war fought piecemeal": Pope Francis's view of present-day global realities

In a broad analysis of the current reality of the planet, the Pope highlights in his "Letter [...] addressed to all people of good will" (FT 56) numerous forms of violence, injustice, exploitation, exclusion and even slavery that offend the rights and dignity of a large part of humanity. He repeats again, that the world is immersed in a "'third world war' fought piecemeal" (FT 25). The Pope explains that the many wars, guerrillas, armed conflicts and other acts of violence in the world today can no longer be considered isolated phenomena: "In today's world, there are no longer just isolated outbreaks of war in one country or another; instead, we are experiencing a 'world war fought

1 FT 259.

piecemeal', since the destinies of countries are so closely interconnected on the global scene." (FT 259). In his 2023 New Year Address to the members of the diplomatic corps, he explained: "Today the third world war is taking place in a globalized world where conflicts involve only certain areas of the planet directly, but in fact involve them all. The closest and most recent example is certainly the war in Ukraine" (Francis 2023). This "piecemeal" world war threatens to leave the world in pieces.

Francis analyzes a series of causes and roots of this world war. Economic injustice and exploitation constitute for him a central factor for the emergence of generalized violence. The neoliberal practices of the market economy cannot resolve global injustices, as they themselves claim, but instead exacerbate and perpetuate them (cf. FT 168). Economic measures deepen the growing division of society, because both wealth and poverty continue to increase. Added to this is the manipulation of the exercise of politics, which does not serve –as it should– the interests of the community and the common good, but has become a "fray of conflicting interests, where victory consists in eliminating one's opponents" (FT 16).

An important factor that induces violence is racism. Although it was assumed that this form of attack on human dignity had been overcome in past centuries, we can find now that it "retreats underground only to keep reemerging" (FT 20). In Francis's analysis, it is one aspect of an economic and political culture that denies global fraternity and tends to oppose different social sectors. Another social phenomenon that was considered obsolete, "slavery in all its forms" (FT 24), is also still in force, turning human beings into mere merchandise and private property. The Pope includes in this criticism the trafficking of human organs and human trafficking for sexual exploitation as other examples of a dehumanizing economy.

We must agree with Pope Francis when he also denounces the ravages that globalized patriarchy commits against a sisterly and fraternal society. It cannot be denied that many women and girls must consider themselves "doubly poor" because they "endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights" (FT 23). However, it is not possible to affirm as "clearly" as the Pope does, "that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men" and only to criticize in front of society that "we say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story" (*ibid.*). With regard to the priestly ordination of women, the internal regime of the Church reflects this violation of equality and rights of women in such an obvious way that it is impossible to remain hidden. This fact, however, does not detract from the validity of the statement of structural inequality and violence produced by patriarchy; on the contrary, it confirms it.

These inequalities, injustices and different forms of violence deeply rooted in our culture and society are often maintained –according to the Pope– through lies and media disinformation. He writes: "War, terrorist attacks, racial or religious persecution, and many other affronts to human dignity are judged differently, depending on how convenient it proves for certain, primarily economic, interests. What is true as long as it is convenient for someone in power stops being true once it becomes inconvenient." (FT 25). This distortion of truth and the manipulation of values can be identified as very effective cultural mechanisms to maintain and legitimize structures of violence and exclusion.

In this way –Francis denounces– deep divisions are produced between people, so that some

seem to hold greater value than others do: "Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled" (FT 18). People can become like "dispensable objects" (FT 19).

While the Pope rejects this global situation of diversified violence, calling it a *world war* within postmodern parameters, he also firmly rejects any notion that these violent structures could be corrected or abolished by violent means: violence can never be a solution for situations of violence, even less will violence be able to end war. On the contrary: war is always a defeat in advance: "Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil" (FT 261). In this context, the Pope definitively condemns all current forms of war, and instead calls for peaceful and healing solutions to the conflicts and divisions that plague the world today. This general condemnation of any kind of warfare, and even its preparations, will be the topic of the next chapter.

2. The Pope's magisterium on the definite abolition of war

While in Western countries, who uphold their Christian and not infrequently Catholic roots, most governments continue to cling to military defense, armament and so-called humanitarian military interventions, the Pope calls for the abolition of war as an instrument of security or of politics. He clearly surpasses the positions of many bishop's conferences that still maintain the principles of legitimate military defense and the so-called *just war*. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis draws new red lines for the theology and ethics of peace: He declares that we can no longer speak of *just wars* (2.1), condemns nuclear weapons, including their production and possession (2.2), censors military assassinations that are being established as a war strategy (2.3), and advocates for an end to international arms production and trade (2.4).

2.1. The absurdity of a just war

The doctrine of a supposedly *just war*, which had been held for many centuries in the Catholic Church, already suffered a decline in credibility during the horrors of the twentieth century. While in the two world wars of the first half of that century, many representatives of the local churches on the different sides, praised war and extolled the participation of soldiers as if war enterprise were a Christian exercise, self-critical reflection after 1945 led many to understand that they had allowed themselves to be manipulated and were actively involved in a manipulation of the Christian doctrine in favor of war.

Under the impression of these horrific experiences and the complicity of parts of the Church, Pope John XXIII, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, gave a first significant turn in the Magisterium's doctrine on war. Pope Francis echoes this first clear distancing from traditional doctrine: "In the words of Saint John XXIII, 'it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice'" (FT 260). It is obvious that for Pope John, this is not a departure in principle, since he does not question the doctrine of the *just war* directly. However, faced with the destructive power of nuclear weapons, John XXIII readjusts the relationships between ends and

means in the doctrine on war and opens the way to understand that the practice of war under these destructive conditions is, ultimately, absurd (John XXIII, 1963, #126-129).

Francis takes up this argument, deepens and radicalizes it. Starting from the "conviction" –reinforced by John XXIII– "that the arguments for peace are stronger than [...] confidence in the use of weapons" (FT 260), Francis argues that in the present –considering "the development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and the enormous and growing possibilities offered by new technologies" (FT 258) – the use of these increasingly destructive weapons must be considered increasingly irrational. The irrationality of war comes into view, compared to the reasons for peace: the risks of war "will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits" (*ibid.*).

Faced with these situations, Pope Francis seriously calls into question the traditional doctrine of *just war*. After noting, "That in recent decades, every single war has been ostensibly 'justified'" (FT 258), he denounces that these justifications should be qualified as "excuses" or even "manipulation" (*ibid.*). He admits that "the Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of the possibility of legitimate defense by means of military force, which involves demonstrating that certain 'rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy' have been met" (FT 258). These conditions, however, cannot be met under current military constellations, since the destruction caused by military means would be greater than the evil that war is supposed to solve, as it displays "an uncontrollable destructive power over great numbers of innocent civilians" (*ibid.*).

So –According to the Pope's argument–, the necessary requirements demanded within the doctrine of *just war* cannot be fulfilled in order to justify war today. For this reason, "it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a 'just war'" and "we can no longer think of war as a solution" (*ibid.*). It is very striking that in the corresponding footnote the Pope even openly distances himself from "Saint Augustine, who forged a concept of 'just war' that we no longer uphold in our own day" (n. 242). The "concept" of Saint Augustine is precisely the historical basis of the entire doctrine of *just war* in the Catholic Church.

What Pope Francis stated is not a definitive condemnation of the *just war* doctrine, nor does he order its eradication from the Catechism (as he did with the death penalty). However, it leaves no room for its application under current military and political conditions. On the contrary, the pacifist attitude of resistance to wars, military threats and (supposed) armed security is revealed to be more rational and efficient, even though this might mean "to be deemed naive for choosing peace" (FT 261).

After *Fratelli Tutti*, war can no longer be advocated, but any path to war must be prevented, avoided and made impossible. This fundamental rejection of wars and their presuppositions raises the question, whether the Catholic churches in the world should not seriously reconsider their respective commitments to national armies such as military ordinariates and chaplaincies.

2.2. Elimination of nuclear weapons

Francis uses a similar argument on the issue of nuclear weapons: they are simply not rational, nor can they lead to the goals they are intended to achieve. Therefore, he emphatically demands that they should be considered immoral instruments and be abolished completely. The Pope bases

his decision on several arguments, set out in a long quote from his message to a UN conference in 2017: Foremost, he explains that nuclear weapons cannot provide a solution to current challenges: "If we take into consideration the principal threats to peace and security [...], as, for example, terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental problems, poverty, not a few doubts arise regarding the inadequacy of nuclear deterrence as an effective response to such challenges" (FT 262).

If it might seem obvious that nuclear weapons cannot solve these important problems, the Pope continues that –secondly– these weapons have dire consequences that would nullify any goal that a war between nations was intended to achieve: "These concerns are even greater when we consider the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would follow from any use of nuclear weapons, with devastating, indiscriminate and uncontrollable effects, over time and space" (*ibid.*).

Thirdly, he also denies a pacifying effect of the use of the atomic bomb for deterrence. "We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear [...]. International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation [...]" (*ibid.*) Fear cannot be a driver of security, not even among nations.

It is for these reasons that the Pope advocates the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This "ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative" (*ibid.*). It is a moral obligation of nations to aim for this goal, which must be achieved in a "collective and concerted" manner (*ibid.*).

However, and leaving the immediate context of *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope is not satisfied with slow processes of international negotiations for nuclear disarmament. In his speech in Hiroshima in 2019, he questioned the incessant production of nuclear weapons: "How can we speak of peace even as we build terrifying new weapons of war?" (Francis, 2019). The Pope even improvised within the prepared text that "the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral [...]. We will be judged on this" (*ibid.*). The judges, in this sentence, would be future generations. The Pope demands with urgency the abolition of nuclear weapons, and declares their mere *possession* as something immoral. This phrase, apparently, caused a diplomatic dissonance between nuclear power France and the Holy See. In 2023, he repeated this verdict in his address to the diplomatic corps, now without any spontaneous interruption and in full conscience of the possible diplomatic consequences: "I can only reaffirm that the possession of atomic weapons is immoral" (Francis 2023).

Fratelli Tutti's rejection of nuclear weapons as immoral must be read in this context: not only their use, whether in war or for so-called deterrence, but also their production, handling and possession must be eliminated to ensure peace. The local churches in countries that produce and possess nuclear weapons, but also those –such as Germany and Italy– that are part of NATO's "nuclear sharing" system, find in this message a solid basis for intervention against nuclear weapons in their countries.

2.3. Homicidal states – deathly violence perpetrated without regard to international law

To justify another definitive and clear rejection of a military strategy widely used today, Pope Francis resorts to his own clarification of abolishing the death penalty that he stated in the text of the Catechism (cf. FT 263, note 248; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2018). Within this context, the Pope speaks out strongly against "so-called extrajudicial or extralegal executions" and considers them "homicides deliberately committed by certain states and by their agents" (FT 267).

This condemnation of "extrajudicial executions" is not just a detail. In recent years, the number of assassinations by armed drones is increasing considerably, and so is the number of states that possess and use this weapon (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2017, 6-12). It is, according to reports, a weapon used by countries with greater economic and military power against weaker enemies, in situations that could be dangerous for the deployment of troops.

These acts of homicide perpetrated by states are aggravated, in the Pope's words, because they are "often passed off as clashes with criminals or presented as the unintended consequences of the reasonable, necessary and proportionate use of force in applying the law" (FT 267). That is, the intention is to legitimize or camouflage the murder with lies.

These blunt and clear qualifications pronounced by the Pontiff can considerably help local churches in countries that use these strategies of extrajudicial homicides, whether with armed drones or through other means. They can also be a basis for disrupting the international network of information and orders that is necessary to carry out these murders. In Germany, for example, Church groups (together with various groups of civil society) oppose the US military air base at Ramstein, through which virtually all US drone operations in the Middle East are conducted, including assassinations (Braun et al. 2019). With the support of the papal statement, global public pressure for the ethical and political rejection of this warfare instrument can be increased.

2.4. Industry and commerce of death – armaments industry and trafficking

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis clearly distances himself from the production and trade of arms, although only briefly. But knowing the attitude of the Pontiff towards the global spread of weapons, these brief allusions cannot be left unnoticed. Already in what is written about nuclear weapons – which he himself extends to chemical and biological weapons (cf. FT 258; 262)– it is obvious that he rejects not only the use and possession of this type of weapons, but also their manufacturing and marketing.

Regarding the arms trade in general, it is striking that it is mentioned along with "human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, including prostitution, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime." (FT 188, cf. 38 and 283) For the Pope, the arms trade is not only part of the crimes that make terrorism and wars possible, but also an unjustifiable diversion of resources missing in other projects of humanity. He proposes therefore, that "with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger once and for all and

favor the development of the most impoverished countries" (FT 262), a solution already proposed by Pope Paul VI, to whom he refers in the corresponding footnote.

This statement is in accordance with what the Pope expressed during his visit to Nagasaki in 2019, where he emphasized: "Our attempts to speak out against the arms race will never be enough. The arms race wastes precious resources that could be better used to benefit the integral development of peoples and to protect the natural environment" (Francis, 2019). In view of the pressing global needs of humanity, "the money that is squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading, maintenance and sale of ever more destructive weapons, are an affront crying out to heaven" (ibid.). The production of weapons, therefore, in the Pope's opinion, is a crime against the poor and against nature, which he qualifies as an injustice and a serious sin quoting the biblical idea of their "crying out to heaven".

On another occasion, when addressing the UN Assembly in 2020, he used words even more critical of the arms industry: "We need to dismantle the perverse logic that links personal and national security to the possession of weaponry. This logic serves only to increase the profits of the arms industry, while fostering a climate of distrust and fear between persons and peoples" (Francis, 2020).

Finally, in a much less formal act, when spontaneously answering questions from schoolchildren, he condemned in an even more drastic and almost offensive way those responsible for the production and marketing of weapons: "Why is it that so many powerful people don't want peace? Because they live on war! The arms industry: this is grave! [...] It is the industry of death. In addition, they profit. [...] So much is sacrificed and war is made to protect the money. Moreover, because of this, many people do not want peace. There is more profit with war!" (Francis, 2015)

Although these words do not have the doctrinal rank of an encyclical, they point to the Pope's will to clearly condemn the production, commercialization and global dissemination of weapons. The speeches in Nagasaki and before the UN have sufficient doctrinal force to corroborate the words used in *Fratelli Tutti* that denounce international arms trafficking. The Pope sets an important and strong example so that all local churches in the world can follow him and denounce the "industries of death" in their respective countries.

3. The path to peace is peace: the Pope's proposal of a spirituality of nonviolence and peace

Pope Francis does not restrict himself to a profound criticism of war and its mechanisms and conditions. On the contrary: the abolition of war will become possible to the extent that believers, alongside many people of good will, commit to fighting with non-violent means for peace, justice and fraternity among people. He therefore dedicates most of his encyclical to the promotion of these means, to mercy, justice, and the active and peaceful construction of peace.

For Francis, it is obvious, although he does not write it expressly, that peace is the privileged path, if not the only path to peace. He shares this conviction with many people across the continents and different faith traditions. Pedro Sanz (2016) attributes the title of his own text *La paz es el camino hacia la paz (Peace is the path to peace)* to Anglican archbishop Karl Gustav Hilding Hammer, who published a book with the same title (in Swedish) in 2013. The phrase also brings to mind themes of Buddhist spirituality, which seeks congruence between means and ends, as in the work of Buddhist

monk and peace activist Thích Nhất Hạnh (1991), who maintains that peace is neither a goal nor an end, but an everyday experience on the path to peace.

In my opinion, the fundamental idea of this phrase can also be applied to the ethical, political, theological and spiritual proposal that the Pope exposes in *Fratelli Tutti*. To achieve peace, it is necessary to live it daily and commit to peace using peaceful means. For this reason, the Pope proposes non-violent practices to overcome violence and enmity and calls for healing social and cultural wounds (3.1). He invites us to look at the people who have suffered and are suffering the harshest consequences of wars and violence (3.2). For the Pope, these proposals constitute spiritual paths and challenges (3.3), and for this reason he invites us to open up to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue to build peace among all (3.4). At the same time, the spirituality of peace must take us to the political spheres (3.5), so that the dedication to peace is efficient and contributes to build the future of humanity.

3.1. Nonviolence as an alternative to violence

"Violence leads to more violence, hatred to more hatred, death to more death. We must break this cycle which seems inescapable" (FT 227). To break this vicious circle, the practice of non-violence is the preferable, most efficient and most consistent option. In his message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 2017, the Pope had proposed nonviolence as "a style of politics for peace" (Francis, 2016). In this message, the Pope insists on the power of non-violent action –which is "more powerful than violence" (#4)– he presents men and women from around the world and from many religions as examples to follow on the path of nonviolence, insists on the evangelical fidelity of nonviolence –explicitly mentioning the Sermon on the Mount– and calls on "political and religious leaders, the heads of international institutions, and business and media executives: to apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of their respective responsibilities" (#6), that is, to apply non-violent measures to build peace.

Despite the powerful program set forth in this message, there is no reference to it in *Fratelli Tutti*. This fact is surprising, because the 2017 message was received with great gratitude by Catholic peace movements around the world, and gave rise, among other factors, to an international project of theological studies that proposed a Catholic vision of non-violence in peacebuilding (cf. Berger et al. 2019; Silber 2021). However, when studying the encyclical, we can see that it presents a very broad panorama of nonviolent attitudes and activities that are important for practices of active nonviolence and, as a whole, can lead to peaceful paths to peace.

One of the papal propositions that resonate greatly with non-violent peacemaking, is the call to solve conflicts based on the truth: "Those who were fierce enemies have to speak from the stark and clear truth. [...] Only by basing themselves on the historical truth of events will they be able to make a broad and persevering effort to understand one another and to strive for a new synthesis for the good of all" (FT 226). The insistence on the "stark and clear truth" resonates with the practice of *satyagraha* developed by Mohandas K. Gandhi and which means "firmness in truth" on the non-violent path to peace (cf. Rynne 2008, 43-83).

Francis proposes a second necessary element for building peace: memory. Because "silence can lead

to complicity in grave misdeeds and sins" (FT 244), the victims demand remembrance, because "we can never move forward without remembering the past; we do not progress without an honest and unclouded memory" (FT 249). The Pope mentions some crucial examples of the need for memory: "The *Shoah* must not be forgotten" (FT 247) nor "the atomic bombs [...], the persecutions, the slave trade and the ethnic killings [...] as well as the many other historical events that make us ashamed of our humanity" (FT 248). At the same time, he insists that "to remember goodness is also a healthy thing" (FT 249). To achieve peace, we must also remember the artisans of peace.

Memory must lead to justice. For this reason, the Pope condemns impunity, but also revenge: "Justice is properly sought solely out of love of justice itself, out of respect for the victims, as a means of preventing new crimes and protecting the common good, not as an alleged outlet for personal anger" (FT 252). Justice, for Francis, does not contradict the search for reconciliation and forgiveness. Rather must both processes accompany each other. There can be no forgiveness through forgetting, but only with memory and justice for the victims. The Pope explains: "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" (FT 241).

Recognizing one's neighbor even in the adversary or oppressor is the attitude of mercy that must characterize Christian nonviolence in the search for peace. It is not a mercy of oblivion, impunity or concealment, but that mercy that seeks justice and the conversion of those who do evil (cf. FT 254).

3.2. Touching "the wounded flesh of the victims": the authority of the victims

The starting point for the peaceful construction of peace, however, is not to look at the perpetrators of violence, but at those who suffer it. The Pope writes: "Let us [...] touch the wounded flesh of the victims. [...] Let us hear the true stories of these victims of violence [...]. In this way, we will be able to grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war" (FT 261)². It is the civilian victims –refugees, women, children, among others– who tell the truth about war. It is for this reason that it is necessary to relate to them physically, listen to them and feel with them.

People cannot be considered "collateral damage" (*ibid.*), as the Pope emphasizes. On the contrary, "every act of violence committed against a human being is a wound in humanity's flesh; every violent death diminishes us as people" (FT 227). There is no distinction here between violent acts committed under the pretext of a good cause and the violence of an aggressor. The bodies of the victims of both kinds of violence display the same kind of wounds.

The Pope consequently advocates "a renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society. For peace" includes –as he continues– "to recognize, protect and concretely restore the dignity, so often overlooked or ignored, of our brothers and sisters" (FT 233). Following the Latin American theological tradition, Francis affirms that "the option for the poor should lead us to friendship with the poor" (FT 234).

To understand the need to end war, ban all the means that prepare it, and to understand why it

² The Italian and Spanish versions of the encyclical express here the Pope's wish that we may hear "the truth" (*la verdad*) of the victims of violence, not only their "true stories".

is necessary to do so through non-violent means, it is necessary to start from this *option for the poor*. Already in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope had elaborated the theological, spiritual and ecclesial meaning of this option (Cf. Francis, 2013, #198). Here he insists on the practical and political significance of an epistemic perspective that overcomes "theoretical discussions" (FT 261) and helps us "to touch flesh".

In contexts of violence and structural exclusions, the friendship with the poor desired by the Pope is not always an easy matter. It is striking that Francis, when insisting on the need to make contact with the wounds, also reflects on the problems that this attempt can entail: even if the victims resist to the attempts to approach them, this resistance needs to be accepted as an effect of the structural violence from which they suffer: "If at times the poor and the dispossessed react with attitudes that appear antisocial, we should realize that in many cases those reactions are born of a history of scorn and social exclusion." (FT 234). This resistance should not lead to abandoning them to their destiny or resigning themselves to the complex difficulties that arise in conflicts. On the contrary, it is necessary to accept this resistance as a call to self-reflection and the search for new paths of closeness and solidarity.

3.3. A Spirituality of nonviolence

For Pope Francis, the practice of nonviolence is not only a means of politics and the best instrument for the resolution of conflicts, but also a spiritual characteristic of people who follow Jesus Christ. For this reason, he reminds that "Jesus Christ never promoted violence" (FT 238) and that the early communities of the church lived without violently defending themselves, even in persecution, and that, on the contrary, they called to respond to grievances with peaceful and non-violent means.

This did not mean they avoided conflicts when they appeared inevitable, but rather they lived them with a non-violent spirituality, based on their faith in a God who created all human beings and could be experienced in them, also in the opponents in the conflict. This faith can also guide us today, because "we should never confine others to what they may have said or done, but value them for the promise that they embody, a promise that always brings with it a spark of new hope." (FT 228). Contemplating the adversary from the perspective of promise and hope are attitudes that allow non-violent action, that allow us to live and resolve conflicts without hurting the other or taking revenge on them. Promise and hope help us open ourselves to the new potentialities that God can bring forth in the midst of conflict without resorting to violence.

Francis proposes several spiritual values to be practiced and deepened in nonviolent action for peace. They are values that are in full harmony with the secular attitudes proposed for non-violent activists. The Pope invites us to cultivate "inner peace" (FT 242) as a remedy and antidote against interpersonal and social hatred. He continues with a call to goodness that awakens "profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties and misunderstandings. Even when affronted, goodness is never weak but rather, shows its strength by refusing to take revenge" (FT 243). In the same way, he continues to recommend "mercy, which heals the injuries caused by mistakes, misunderstandings and disputes" (FT 254), fraternity, as in the entire encyclical, and –as we saw above (cf. 3.1)– truth, active memory and the search for justice.

Pope Francis is aware that the practice of these values and the non-violent solution to conflicts are

not easy matters. On the contrary, "social peace demands hard work, craftsmanship" (FT 217). It is a work that must be done by hand, personally, from the heart and with spirituality. It is a work that requires the daily search for inner peace and self-conversion. It is a path of following Jesus Christ that requires similarity with him even in persecution. It contains, however, also the promises of the fellowship of Jesus including the hope of resurrection.

3.4. In community with churches and religions

In the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope establishes a dialogue for peace together with other Christian churches and other religions. In his words, "a journey of peace is possible between religions. Its point of departure must be God's way of seeing things. God does not see with his eyes, God sees with his heart" (FT 281). This gaze of God "with the heart" implies, from a Christian point of view, the individual and personal value of each human. The Pope applies this vision to the plurality of religions: "the different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society" (FT 271).

His intention is certainly not to appropriate other religions and speak on their behalf. This can be seen when he refers to his own practices of interreligious dialogue and collaboration. The Pope quotes extensively from the joint document with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb on human brother- and sisterhood, for world peace and common coexistence, which they signed in Abu Dhabi on February 4, 2019. In *Fratelli Tutti* he writes, citing this document, that "we resolutely declared that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood" (FT 285). When attempts are made to justify violence or war with religion, the Pope and the Grand Imam classify this as abuse and deviation (*ibid.*).

Another extensive quote from the Abu Dhabi document is found in the condemnation of the alleged legitimization of "deplorable" terrorism that they attribute not only to "incorrect interpretations of religious texts," but also to structural causes in the economic, political and social spheres, like "policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression and pride" (FT 283).

The commitment to peace that the Pope proposes must follow the example of this joint and dialogic effort between different religions, to integrate the spiritual forces of all humanity in this enterprise. For this reason, the Pope explains at the end of his encyclical that he has allowed himself to be influenced by people who belong to different churches and religions. Along with the aforementioned Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Pope "felt inspired particularly by Saint Francis of Assisi, but also by others of our brothers and sisters who are not Catholics: Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi and many more" (FT 286). The reference to non-Catholic and non-Christian persons may surprise in such a high-ranking doctrinal text. The Pope gives a very practical example of ecumenical and interreligious openness in the peaceful struggle for peace.

3.5. Politics on the path to peace

In order to build a sustainable peace, a policy for peace will be necessary, to which Christians must contribute their own political praxis. Gerald W. Schlabach (2019) discusses, on the occasion of the message for the Day of Peace 2017, how the rejection of violence and non-violent spirituality

can be translated into state policies, within democratic processes. The simple rejection of politics would not be sufficient. An active commitment to concrete policies that lead to the construction of peace will be needed. Thomas Nauerth, for his part, questions whether a rejection of violence should not include fundamental redefinitions of the categories of state, power and politics and an empowerment of civil society before exhausting itself fruitlessly in the political area (cf. Nauerth, 2021, 97-114).

Pope Francis maintains, in *Fratelli Tutti*, a critical position towards politics, but insists at the same time on the need to also commit at this level for peace. He advocates "healthy politics... capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practices" and adds that "we cannot expect economics to do this" (FT 177). This "healthy politics" needs to orient itself towards a concept of the common good that includes future generations. But to reach this kind of policy, "much needs to change, through fundamental reform and major renewal" (FT 179).

For the Pope, peace cannot be achieved with a mere political commitment that does not simultaneously aspire to profound changes in our ways of conducting politics. If the faithful work politically for peace, without fighting at the same time for a healthier politics that changes many rules of the political processes, their goals will not be achieved.

Political commitment, understood in this way as a fight for the common good of all human beings, including those not yet born, and of all of creation, will change the very practice of politics so that it better corresponds to this end. In the Pope's opinion, this kind of politics will be a part of the Christian spirituality of non-violence.

Conclusion

Already on World Youth Day 2013, Francis had proclaimed to young people –referring to Jer 1:10– that "bringing the Gospel is bringing God's power to pluck up and break down evil and violence, to destroy and overthrow the barriers of selfishness, intolerance and hatred, so as to build a new world" (Francis 2013). His message in *Fratelli Tutti* for the construction of peace is very similar: it is necessary to actively remove weapons, their production and commercialization and the concepts of *just wars* or religiously ordered wars, and simultaneously build peace with peaceful means. The two strategies of commitment to peace are necessary at every moment and in an urgent and pressing manner. His own practice as an artisan of peace can serve as an example and reason for hope. Catholic theology and ethics of peace will no longer be able, in the future, to easily ignore this profound doctrinal progress.

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