



Fratelli Tutti: A Foundation for Advancing Nonviolence in a Violent World

A statement from Pax Christi International on
Pope Francis' encyclical
6 October 2020

Pax Christi International is grateful for Pope Francis' new encyclical, "Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship." This timely document grapples with the realities of a polarized, violent and unjust world amid the worldwide crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and envisions a new way forward to a more just, peaceful, equal, hopeful and nonviolent future.

Although *Fratelli Tutti*, does not explicitly use the term *nonviolence*, the encyclical offers a clear foundation for developing and integrating the theology and practice of nonviolence in the teaching of the Church, an effort to which Pax Christi's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative is dedicated. In particular, Pope Francis' clear analysis of global violence, including structural violence, sets the stage for a deeper understanding of nonviolence.

Early in the document, Pope Francis describes the "unjust normal," with its interlocking economic, political, social, and technological structures dividing the privileged from billions of others, including the impoverished, migrants, women, those who are sick, the elderly. To nonviolently transform the world, we must first glimpse its violence, and Pope Francis does not spare us in this.

The pope, though, does not simply describe the reality of our unjust world; he responds to it with key themes grounded in a primordial spiritual vision, which is also the basis of the universal ethic of nonviolence: that all beings everywhere are interrelated. Inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi, who made the sisterhood and brotherhood of all beings a touchstone of his spirituality and concrete action in the world, Pope Francis dissolves all barriers that keep us from seeing, and living, this reality.

In the encyclical, a series of themes logically follow from this. If we are all related, if we are all one family, then we must challenge everything that destroys this unity by: showing radical care for one another; building a culture of authentic encounter; making dialogue central to our way of being; and putting solidarity into action with those most excluded, dispossessed, dehumanized and systematically under attack. Pope Francis is here relentlessly calling us to the nonviolent life, especially illuminated by his extended analysis of the story of the Good Samaritan.

Pope Francis in this encyclical also takes action, even as he calls the world to do so. He reiterates the inadmissibility of the death penalty, but perhaps even more far-reaching is Pope Francis' reflection on war, which we believe goes further than any papal encyclical in history.

Emphasizing how the just war tradition fails in the face of modern warfare, he writes, “We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘just war.’” In footnote #242, he is even more direct: “Saint Augustine, who forged a concept of ‘just war’ that we no longer uphold in our own day, also said that ‘it is a higher glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war’ (Epistola 229, 2: PL 33, 1020).”

Pax Christi International and its Catholic Nonviolence Initiative are enormously thankful for Pope Francis’ vision of such a world, which he has shared since the beginning of his papacy. In response to this vision, we have been exploring nonviolence as a spirituality, a way of life, a programme for social transformation, and a universal ethic. *Fratelli Tutti* offers a basis for advancing the theology and faithful practice of nonviolence.

Pope Francis invites us to a reflection on the reality of war and on another reality when we “choose peace.” Let us take this journey with the pope as we move this reflection together in search of a more just, peaceful and nonviolent common home.