



## WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL Volume 21 Number 5 February 4, 2026

### Where the Pope Got it Wrong

By Freddy Davis

Recently, president Trump and Pope Leo had a little spat. It seems that when the military campaign began in Iran, Pope Leo forcefully condemned it. He repeatedly called for a cease-fire, describing the conflict as “atrocious” and “inhuman.” Then, in his Palm Sunday address, he stated that Jesus “does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war” and that their “hands are full of blood.”

With that, Trump responded by labeling the Pope “terrible for foreign policy” and “WEAK on Crime.” He stated that the Pope “is wrong” and does not understand the necessity of stopping Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

From there, Trump wrote a series of attacks against the pope on Truth Social. The pope responded that he has “no fear” of Trump, and went on to decry “tyrants” who spend billions on “killing and devastation” while ignoring the needs of the poor. There have been many articles written on various aspects of this squabble. You can read some of them at <https://www.newsmax.com/world/globaltalk/trump-pope-leo-crime/2026/04/12/id/1252663/> and <https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/trump-pope-leo-xiv-feud/2026/04/13/id/1252674/> and <https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/pope-leo-feud-donald-trump/2026/04/15/id/1253006/>.

I think both men fairly quickly realized the futility of this kind of back and forth and have since backed away from it. Frankly, that whole thing was quite unseemly. Trump should not have made personal attacks against the pope, and the pope should not have made his attacks against Trump.

Trump, for his part, genuinely sees a threat from Iran, not only against the U.S., but against the entire world. They were close to being able to make a nuclear weapon and, based on their radical Islamic Twelver ideology, it is believed by many experts that they would have used them to set the stage for the coming of the Madhi – which they

believe would usher in the worldwide dominance of Islam. They truly believe Allah was leading them to do this. Based on that threat, Trump believed he had to act now to stop it, and that he was doing the right thing in his position as president of the United States.

The pope, for his part, is convinced that it is his duty to promote peace in the world by his religious pronouncements. He believes that, based on the teachings of the Church, war is wrong and should never be engaged except in self-defense.

It is not my intent here to parse out Trump’s and the pope’s positions regarding whether or not the war with Iran should be engaged. Trump would argue that it should because of the Iranian regime’s radical ideology, and the fact that they have sponsored the killing of Americans for the entire 47 years they have been in power. He would say this has gone on long enough and it’s time to put an end to it. The pope would argue that Trump is the one who initiated the war and that he was unjustified in doing it. Both of them believe they are in the right.

### Where the Pope Is in the Wrong

First of all, let me say that I, like the pope, also hate war, and would like for there to never be one. I agree with him in the sense that war is not God’s will for mankind. However, I do have a beef with his position because I don’t believe he is doing what he thinks he is. In doing what he did, he has massively jumped out of his lane by advocating for a remedy that is not Christian. He contends that his focus is on spreading the gospel, but in fact he has majored on politics rather than on spreading the Christian faith. There are two elements involved in his approach.

The first has to do with the influence of liberal theology. Liberal theology is, at its core, an expression of Marxism and is focused on solving the world’s problems using politics. Of course, the pope is not as all in on liberal theol-

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ogy as many other liberal theologians, but there is an influence from it. People with that mindset end up dealing with the symptoms of the problem, not the problem itself. While I don't believe the pope is as motivated by this as his predecessor, the influence is definitely there. As a Christian leader, his job is to deal with the problem, not with symptoms.

But his larger influence has to do with Roman Catholic theology itself. It is built on a sacramental approach to salvation. Sacramental theology is based on the belief that God uses tangible, physical elements – such as water, bread, wine, etc. – as visible means to impart divine grace and presence to humanity. It considers that ritual actions (sacraments) act as instruments of salvation and communion with God. For instance, the sacrament of baptism uses water to convey saving grace to those who are baptized, and bread and wine impart the presence of Christ into people in communion. They believe God's grace is given to human beings by these sacraments through the mediation of a priest.

This actually ties into the pope's pronouncements concerning war and peace. For him, salvation is not simply a matter of entering into a relationship with God through Christ as Evangelicals understand it. Roman Catholics believe salvation is mediated by the church. So for a person to receive it, they need to be baptized into the church by a priest. [Note: They do have a few off ramps to compensate for situations involving people who have never heard the gospel, martyrs, people who want to be baptized but die before they are able, or people in other faith communities who simply don't understand the need for baptism into the Church. But for them, baptism into the Roman Catholic Church is the ordinary, normative path to salvation that Christ gave the world.] They believe that the sacrament of baptism creates the formal connection with the Catholic Church that provides not only for a relationship with God, but also the means for spiritual growth throughout life based on receiving various other sacraments from the church's priests.

Thus, when the pope speaks of "sharing the gospel," he is not simply talking about evangelism as Evangelicals understand it. Rather it also includes moral and social teachings, addressing world leaders about conflicts and cultural issues, and promoting an attractive message that will entice people to join the church. So when he condemns wars and addresses world leaders about ending them, that is considered part of "sharing the gospel."

Certainly there is nothing wrong with encouraging people not to engage in war. But if that is part of what he means by sharing the gospel, he is going outside of the biblical meaning and aiming for material outcomes as opposed to the intended spiritual outcome of the gospel message. If he is going to go that route, he definitely needs to clarify what he means.

First, he has to deal with the reason for the war. In the case of the Iran situation, it is not simply a matter of the U.S. and Israel deciding to pick a fight. Iran has for years been assisting proxies in attacking Israel and America. Their stated goal is to destroy both countries, and they have been directly and indirectly working on that for decades. Additionally, they have been developing a missile and nuclear capability that would allow them to do it. And based on their Islamist Twelver theology, the purpose of this buildup is to create a world war that would usher in the Madhi (their messiah) so that Islam can conquer the world. This is even stated overtly in Iran's Constitution. If the pope is going to lecture people who want to stop this from happening, he must also lecture Iran to dissuade them from their intentions – which he has not.

But more importantly, as a Christian leader, he has to address the real root of the problem. And just what is that? It is that the heart of man is sinful, and the sinful heart gets expressed in the world by doing sinful actions.

Calling for a cessation of war by itself is rather meaningless. People have to have a reason for wanting to stop. Some want it to stop for economic rea-

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sons, and others for political or moral reasons. But ultimately the reason people start or end a war has a spiritual root. It is a matter of the heart. Since the heart of man is infected with sin, in order for the infection to be abated, the heart must change. And the only way the heart gets transformed is for God to change it based on people's entry to a relationship with Him by faith in Jesus Christ.

In the pope's pronouncements, I see him encouraging people to quit fighting. And I see him encouraging them to become a part of the Catholic Church. What I don't see is him telling people that the only way to have a transformed life is to come to Jesus Christ. He thinks he is doing that by encouraging them to be baptized into the Catholic church and by promoting world peace (the cessation of war). He believes that is how salvation happens – through the Roman Catholic Church.

But that is a false message. Those things in themselves won't stop the war, and won't bring people to God.

What is necessary to get the job done is to share the actual gospel message – that Jesus Christ died as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and those who will receive Christ into their lives will enter into a personal relationship with God. This is the beginning of a transformed life. It is at that point, the transformation begins as people engage a relationship with God throughout the rest of their lives. It involves a lifelong effort where people seek to conform their lives to the image of Christ – to become more like Him. It is not done by sacramental acts through the mediation of a priest. It is done by a personal decision to enter into a relationship with God. Changed hearts create changed actions. And that's what the pope is missing and ought to be focused on.

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