

## ***Catholic Trends: Spring-2026 (#1)***

***Pope condemns Trump's genocidal threat to Iran.*** The president of the United States threatened Iran with genocide. There are no qualifications to this threat, which we must never forget. Trump said that “[a] whole civilization will die tonight.”

The only world leader who behaved appropriately and took a moral stance was Pope Leo XIV, who immediately said, “[t]oday, as we all know, there was a threat against the entire people of Iran, **and this is truly unacceptable.** There are certainly issues here of international law, but even more than that, it is a moral question for the good of the people.” (emphasis added).

***U.S. military archbishop and former president of the USCCB claims Iran War unjust, putting Catholic troops in dilemma: ‘Do as best you can.’***

Archbishop Timothy Broglio, who has ministered to all U.S. military Catholic chaplains since 2008 and was president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops until 2025, stated in an interview with CBS *Face the Nation* that the Iran War is unjust. He said, “I would think that under the just war theory, it is not, because while there was a threat of nuclear arms, it’s compensating for a threat before the threat is realized.”

Broglio acknowledged the complex moral situation U.S. service members who are Catholic and who are fighting a war that fails to meet the just war criteria of the Catholic Church face, but are nevertheless generally required to obey. He went on to say that the duty of Catholic service members “is to do as little harm as you can and try to preserve the lives of innocent persons.”

In regards to Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth’s attempt to couch the conflict as a Holy War, Broglio said, “I think it is hard to cast this war as something that would be sponsored by the Lord.”

***Pope declares that God does not heed prayers for violence and destruction.*** U.S. officials, most notably Pete Hegseth, Secretary of the Department of Defense, have used Christian terms to justify Iran strikes. On Palm Sunday, Pope Leo XIV said that God does not heed such prayers and rejects leaders who start wars and by doing so they have *“hands full of blood.”*

Addressing tens of thousands in St. Peter’s Square on Palm Sunday, the celebration that opens the Holy Week leading up to Easter for the world’s 1.5 billion Catholics, the Pontiff called the conflict *“atrocious”* and said that Jesus cannot be used to justify any wars.

*“This is our God: Jesus, King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. Jesus does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them, saying: ‘Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen: your hands are full of blood,’”* he said, citing a Bible passage.

Pope Leo did not specifically name any world leaders, but here’s a prayer that Hegseth intoned at his monthly prayer service at the Pentagon (which is a violation of church-state separation):

*“You made my enemies turn their backs to me and those who hated me I destroyed. They cried for help, but there was none to save. They cried to the Lord, but He did not answer them.”*

And here’s Hegseth calling for God’s assistance against the enemy:

*“Let every round find its mark against the enemies of righteousness and our great nation. Give them wisdom in every decision, endurance for every trial, unbreakable unity and overwhelming violence of action against those who deserve no mercy.”* Prayer for peace, Pope Leo said, was a way to *“break the demonic cycle of evil”* to build instead the Kingdom of God where there are no swords, drones or *“unjust profit.”*

• ***Pope Leo denounces the ‘delusion of omnipotence’, he says fuels the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran.*** The pope demanded that (April 11) political leaders stop and negotiate peace. Without mentioning President

Trump or the United States by name, the Holy Father said in his prayer, *“[e]nough of the idolatry of self and money. Enough of the display of power! Enough of war!”* Prayer for peace, Pope Leo said, was a way to *“break the demonic cycle of evil”* to build instead the Kingdom of God where there are no swords, drones or *“unjust profit.”* He went on to say that *“[i]t is here that we find a bulwark against the delusion of omnipotence that surrounds us and is becoming increasingly unpredictable and aggressive. Even the holy Name of God, the God of life, is being dragged into discourses of death.”*

Leo’s prayerful petitions contrast sharply with some American leaders who have used religion to justify their actions in war. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth (see above) has invoked their Christian faith to cast the U.S. as a Christian nation trying to vanquish its foes.

***Is the Church attracting many more young adults today?*** There have been a number of compelling stories (cf. *The Washington Post* and *The National Catholic Register*) recording record-breaking increases in Catholic campus ministries that have occurred in both the national secular and religious news media.

Given that, the folks at *America Magazine* (*Our Take*; January 2026) have offered cautionary advice: *“[t]he mission of the Church is not to tailor its teaching to suit the preferences of each generation; it is to draw each person into relationship with Christ. And the best way to do that is to do what the Church has been doing for 2000 years: building communities of worship, communities of practice.”*

**Speaking of young people, a lot of them can’t read!** According to the *New York Post* (January 23, 2026), students are arriving at college with such feeble reading skills that some professors have begun reading aloud to them in class. “It’s not even an inability to critically think,” said Jessica Hooten Wilson, professor of great books at Pepperdine University. “It’s an inability to read sentences...There’s so much they

can't process about the very words that are on the page." So, she reads passages aloud in class and helps students analyze them, line-by-line.

At Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management—one of the best in the country—up to half the students describe themselves as “novice or reluctant readers.”

What's going on? Professors chalk this up to video-first media apps and AI summaries. Students have been “formed in a kind of scanning approach to reading,” said Notre Dame theology professor Timothy O'Malley. Earlier in his career, he would routinely assign 25-40 pages of reading. “Today, if you assign that amount of reading, they often don't know what to do.” This broad lack of reading skills coincides with a YouGov study indicating that half of all Americans didn't crack open a single book in 2025.

***At the same time, younger generations are leading a Bible reading comeback.*** The Barna group, an independent research organization, has issued its annual report on Bible reading and has found that young adults are leading the way. Bible reading among Gen Z and Millennials has surged since 2024, with nearly half now engaging in Scripture reading.

But there's an interesting twist: *Bible reading outpaces belief.* While more Americans are reading the Bible, a smaller percentage strongly affirms the Bible's authority—revealing a gap between curiosity and conviction.

***Till Disillusionment Do Us Part.*** While the overall divorce rate in the U.S. is trending downward, the rate of “grey divorces” has been rising. A study by the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University found that divorce among couples age 65 or older nearly tripled over the past three decades, from 5.2% in 1900 to 15.2% in 2022. Julia Dezelski, associate director of marriage and family life for the USCCB, said that factors leading to grey divorce include the following: “[a]s empty nesters, the couple is faced with a

new season 'rediscovery,' and this can be a source of stress as well as disillusionment as they learn that the years of child-rearing and careerism may have changed them as individuals and as a couple,' she said. Other factors include health and hormonal changes that come with age and the realization that the couple "really haven't communicated with each other" properly in years, said Sheila Oprysko of Worldwide Marriage Encounter (EWTN News, January 2, 2026).

***Israel—the neighborhood bully—bombs civilians.*** 80% of Lebanese people killed in Israel's renewed airstrikes on its northern neighbor were slain in attacks targeting mainly civilians.

Between March 1-16, Lebanese officials said the death toll from Israeli attacks topped 1,000. Israel is targeting civilian infrastructure, including entire apartment buildings, with reports of entire families being wiped out.

More than one million people are now displaced in Lebanon because of Israeli attacks.

"When the international community did not stop Israel as it deliberately killed nearly 75,000 Palestinians in Gaza, including 20,000 children, Israel knew they could kill civilians with impunity," Lebanese diplomat Mohammad Safa said on social media. "The result is exactly what we are seeing in Lebanon and Iran right now."

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