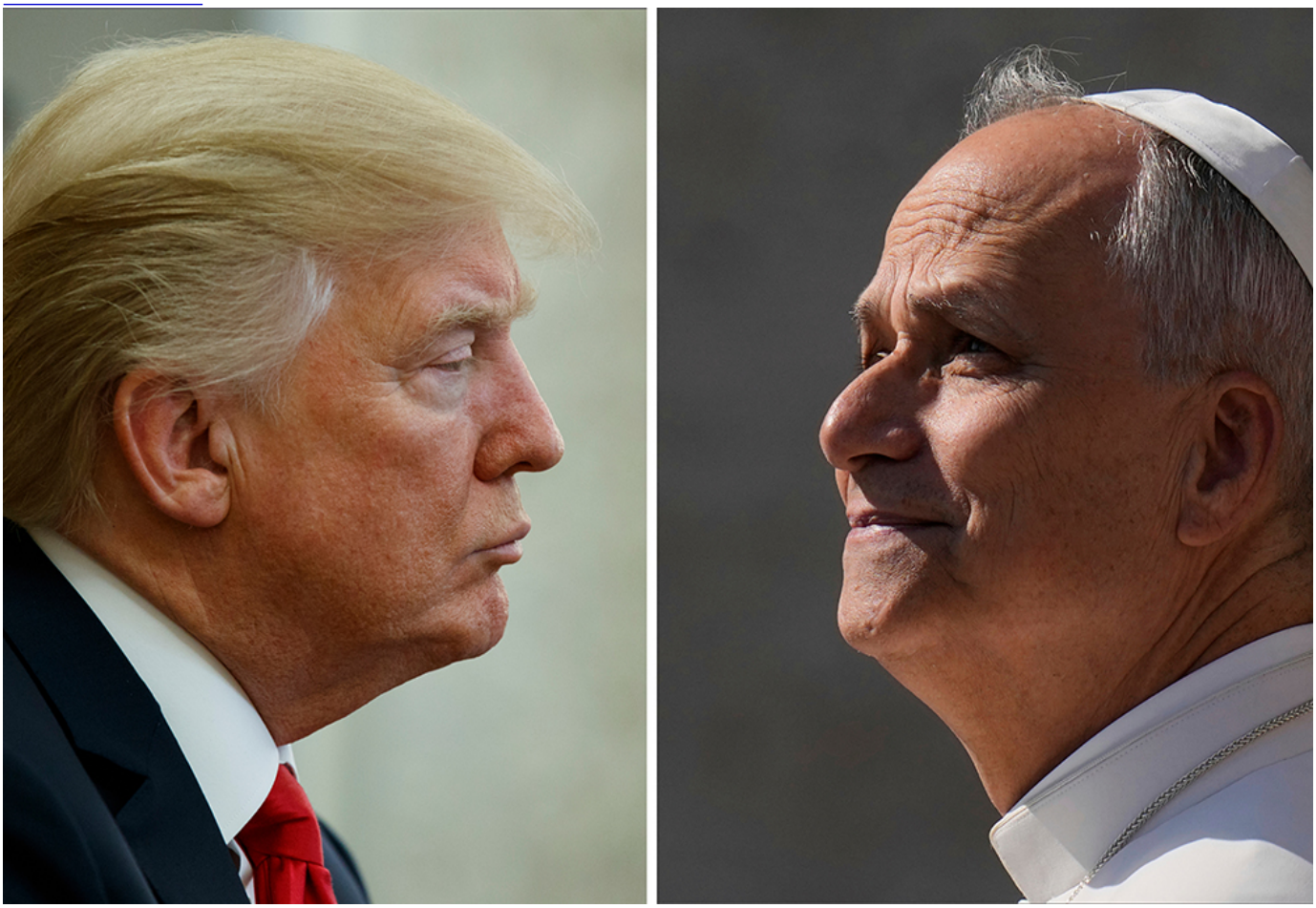
Opinion

Guest Voices



This combination file photos show on left, President Donald Trump listening during a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House, on Feb. 2, 2018, in Washington and on right, Pope Leo XIV arriving for his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican, on Aug. 6, 2025. (AP photos/Evan Vucci and Gregorio Borgia, file)



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President Donald Trump renewed his attacks on Pope Leo XIV by accusing the pope of believing that "it's just fine for Iran to have a nuclear weapon." The president's May 4 accusation is false. Leo does not want Iran to possess nuclear weapons. In fact, like his predecessors, he has consistently rejected nuclear weapons.

"The church has spoken out for years against all nuclear weapons, so there is no doubt about this," the pope responded after the president suggested he was sympathetic to Iran's nuclear ambitions. Pope Leo also said: "If anyone wishes to criticize me for proclaiming the Gospel, let them do so with the truth."

That phrase matters.

The pontiff was not merely correcting a factual error. With remarkable restraint, he pointed to a deeper moral problem increasingly present in public life: the willingness to distort the beliefs of others in service of political narratives. His response reminded us that truth is not simply a rhetorical weapon, but a moral responsibility that places limits on power itself.

More and more, truth is treated not as an obligation but as a political instrument — something to bend, simplify or weaponize in service of power. Opponents are no longer criticized for what they actually believe, but for distorted positions constructed to generate fear, outrage and doubt.

Related: Ahead of Rubio meeting with pope, Trump says Leo is 'endangering a lot of Catholics'

The accusation against Leo followed this logic. If one questions military escalation, one must secretly sympathize with the enemy. If one urges restraint, dialogue or diplomacy, one is portrayed as naive, weak or even dangerous. Yet the Catholic tradition has never accepted that binary. The pope can reject Iran's nuclear ambitions while also rejecting the growing assumption that peace is secured primarily through force, escalation and the permanent threat of catastrophic

violence. That is why the president's accusation against Leo is so misleading.



The U.S. Air Force's B-21 "Raider", the long-range stealth bomber that can be armed with nuclear weapons, rolls onto the runway at Northrop Grumman's site at Air Force Plant 42, during its first flight, in Palmdale, California, in this 2023 file photo. (OSV News/Reuters/David Swanson)

The Catholic Church does not want Iran to possess nuclear weapons. It also does not want the United States, Russia, China, North Korea, Pakistan, India, France, the United Kingdom or Israel to organize international order around the permanent threat of mass annihilation. This is not a recent development in Catholic thought. Nor is it the product of contemporary political progressivism. The church's moral unease with nuclear weapons emerged almost immediately after humanity first acquired the power to destroy itself.

After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Pope Pius XII warned that scientific progress detached from moral responsibility could become catastrophic for humanity. In *Pacem in Terris*, written after the Cuban missile crisis, Pope John XXIII insisted that

nuclear weapons must ultimately be banned because peace cannot rest indefinitely upon terror. Successive popes deepened that teaching. Pope Francis eventually declared not only the use but even the possession of nuclear weapons immoral.

Related: Pope Leo upholds Vatican opposition to nuclear weapons despite Trump's 'weak' critique

The Holy Father stands firmly within that tradition. His rejection of military escalation does not imply support for Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. Rather, he rejects the premise that authentic peace can be built upon fear, domination and the permanent readiness for mass destruction. In recent months he has repeatedly called for dialogue, reconciliation and what he describes as a "culture of peace." During his visit to Africa, he warned of a world "ravaged by a handful of tyrants" and lamented the "masters of war" who destroy in moments what generations labor to build.

His voice stands against a vision of power that is sustained not only by political rhetoric, but also by vast economic interests — defense industries, military contractors and entrenched structures of power that thrive on perpetual insecurity and the endless expansion of arms.

At moments of tension and fear, it becomes especially important to pause and ask whether what we are hearing is true or whether it primarily serves interests that benefit from sustaining fear, conflict and division. Some political leaders present themselves as defenders of civilization by portraying critics as allies of danger or chaos. But civilization cannot be defended through falsehood. Truth is not weakness in public life; it is the foundation of moral credibility and human trust.

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On the evening of his election, Leo spoke of the need for "a peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering." At his inaugural Mass in May 2025, he deepened that vision further by reminding the church that her "true authority" is "the charity of Christ."

To a political culture fascinated by strength, deterrence and domination, such language can appear naive. Yet Christianity has always proposed something far more demanding: that truth cannot be produced through intimidation and that no nation possesses the moral right to place itself above the dignity of the human

person.

Leo is not asking the world to allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons, nor does he ignore the many civilian victims of tyranny, violence and repression. Faithful to the Gospel, he continues to call the leaders of the world toward paths other than fear and destruction, keeping alive the hope that peace can still be built through justice, restraint, dialogue and reconciliation. We should be grateful for voices such as his, which summon the world back to the patient, difficult and deeply human work of peace.

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