

**With Rights Come Responsibilities**  
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**August 12, 2025**

This week Israel announced plans to use their military to take control of all Gaza. This comes as no surprise to me. While the announcement is no surprise, it disappoints me.

*It is very important that you realize that my motivation is in no way political. It is also not antisemitic.* I have great respect for the Jewish faith as the foundation of our Christian faith. Jesus, the cornerstone of our Christian faith was himself a Jew.

Rather, I am disappointed because the rights of the people who live in Gaza have not been respected.

It is true that Israel has a right to defend itself. That defense must be conducted within the ethical limits of [just war theory](#). To do otherwise is to take on some of the characteristics of those we call terrorists, selfish, and/or power hungry (pride).

It is not my intent to debate the application of [just war theory](#) to the war between Israel and Gaza today. You can read about [just war theory](#) on my website. You can read various blog articles I have written about the application in Israel and Gaza as well as Ukraine and Russia at <https://renewaloffaith.org/category/just-war-theory-real-life-application/>.

This article is about *rights and responsibilities*. As I said above, Israel has a *right* to defend itself. With that right comes a *responsibility* to ensure the rights of others, including the people living in Gaza, especially the innocent.

I acknowledge the general understanding of Hamas as a terrorist organization but I fear that the military destruction of Hamas will not end the centuries old war (see my article [“What Is Needed to Make Things Better”](#)). I fear that that if Hamas is destroyed by military efforts, it will not be long before another similar organization will take its place. Israel’s military actions may do more to inspire more terrorism (or open war) in the long term than it does in bringing an end to Hamas.

The way to peace is one that requires us to love our enemies. If we want the fighting to stop, we must make sure the rights of all people are ensured. *I am not saying* that Hamas or its members should go free. I am writing out of concern for the dignity of human life.

We need to seek the *common good*. To promote a proper understanding of what the common good is, I offer three quotes from the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.<sup>1</sup>

- “The principle of the common good, to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning, stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people. According to its primary and broadly accepted sense, the common good indicates “the sum

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<sup>1</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2005.

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_2006\\_0526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_2006_0526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.”<sup>2</sup>

- “*A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level is a society that has the common good — the good of all people and of the whole person — as its primary goal. The human person cannot find fulfilment in himself, that is, apart from the fact that he exists “with” others and “for” others.*”<sup>3</sup>
- “*The responsibility for attaining the common good, besides falling to individual persons, belongs also to the State, since the common good is the reason that the political authority exists.*”<sup>4</sup>

I write for the common good of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, political nationality, or religion. All nations have a right to defend themselves. Each person has the same rights as given to them by God. With these rights all nations and individuals have a responsibility to respect the dignity of all life, most especially the innocent.

In 1963 Pope St. John XXIII wrote *Pacem in Terris (PT)*.<sup>5</sup> While less than fifty pages, it is an important document for discussions of peace, rights, responsibilities, and how people and nations interact with each other.

Pope St. John XXIII begins

Peace on Earth—which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after—can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order.<sup>6</sup>

If we want to seek the peace that God offers us, then we must submit ourselves to his “divinely established order.” We must submit ourselves to our Father’s Will as we pray *thy will be done*.

It is true that when Joshua led the Israelites in the Promised Land, God instructed them to eliminate their enemies. We see this in [today’s first reading](#)<sup>7</sup>. That was then. The Jews were just beginning to understand their place as God’s people.

Jesus changed things. He calls us to *love our enemies*.<sup>8</sup> Many of the Jews were waiting for a political messiah who would get rid of the Romans. Jesus did not get rid of the Romans. He sets an example for us to look beyond political divisions and yearnings.

Regarding the “divinely established order,” Pope St. John XXIII continues

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<sup>2</sup> Comp. Social Doctrine, 164.

<sup>3</sup> Comp. Social Doctrine, 165.

<sup>4</sup> Comp. Social Doctrine, 168.

<sup>5</sup> April 11, 1963. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html)

<sup>6</sup> PT, 1.

<sup>7</sup> August 12, 2025, 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Tuesday, Year 1.

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/081225.cfm>.

<sup>8</sup> [Matthew 5:43-48](#).

And yet there is a disunity among individuals and among nations which is in striking contrast to this perfect order in the universe. One would think that the relationships that bind men together could only be governed by force.<sup>9</sup>

Our human desires cloud our judgment and contribute to disunity when we seek our own will. The way to true peace requires us to seek God's Will. Pope St. John XXIII notes

But the world's Creator has stamped man's inmost being with an order revealed to man by his conscience; and his conscience insists on his preserving it.<sup>10</sup>

If we want there to be peace, we need to respect the human rights and duties that God has given to every single person. Pope St. John XXIII writes, "These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable."<sup>11</sup>

When you look at those who you see as in opposition to your will, do you see an enemy to be destroyed or a person who is in need of conversion. For that matter, do you see yourself as in need of conversion to our Father's Will?

Do you understand that your enemies have the same rights as you do? Pope St. John XXIII lists some of these rights.

Man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services.<sup>12</sup>

Pope St. John XXIII continues, "Moreover, man has a natural right to be respected. He has a right to his good name."<sup>13</sup> I do not write out of concern for Hamas. I am writing out of concern for the people of Gaza. From here on, I will identify them as Palestinians. The Palestinians have a reason to feel that they are not being respected. In identifying all the people of Gaza as Hamas, the "good name" of innocent people is being destroyed. (If Israel thinks that all the people of Gaza belong to Hamas, then they need to provide evidence of that.)

If we seek to bring an end to Hamas, we need to ask ourselves why Hamas came into being. The Palestinians were not respected as a people. They felt that they had to fight for what is their due. I am not condoning their actions. I am merely looking for a way to peace. Yes, Hamas is known as a terrorist organization, but we need to understand that while such groups sometimes form in a quest for power and control, sometimes there are legitimate concerns that much be addressed if there is to be any hope for true and lasting peace.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> PT, 4.

<sup>10</sup> PT, 5.

<sup>11</sup> PT, 9.

<sup>12</sup> PT, 11. Other rights are listed in paragraphs 14-27.

<sup>13</sup> PT, 12.

<sup>14</sup> see PT, 24.

The Palestinians deserve a voice. As Pope St. John XXIII writes

Finally, man's personal dignity involves his right to take an active part in public life, and to make his own contribution to the common welfare of his fellow citizens. As Pope Pius XII said, "man as such, far from being an object or, as it were, an inert element in society, is rather its subject, its basis and its purpose; and so must he be esteemed."<sup>15</sup>

One news article I read yesterday indicated that Israel says they intend to establish an Arab friendly government in Gaza *after* Hamas is eliminated. I pray this is true. The article also said Israel does not intend a long-term occupation of Gaza. I pray this is also true.

True peace cannot be achieved "under the constant pressure of external coercion or enticement. There is nothing human about a society that is welded together by force."<sup>16</sup> Regarding the use of force, the ends do not always justify the means.

While there is not presently a political nation for the Palestinians in Gaza, I think the following still applies to them.

Thus all over the world men are either the citizens of an independent State, or are shortly to become so; nor is any nation nowadays content to submit to foreign domination.<sup>17</sup>

Governments do not exist for their own benefit.

Human society can be neither well-ordered nor prosperous without the presence of those who, invested with legal authority, preserve its institutions and do all that is necessary to sponsor actively the interests of all its members (PT, 46).

Governments do not exist solely for the needs of people who share their ethnic and/or religious background. Those nations who enjoy rights have a responsibility to ensure the needs of other groups, most especially within their own boundaries (and outside). The work of governments must work for the *common good* of all people.

Might does not make right. Might does not provide a reason, except fear, for people to work for the common good. Achieving control through might only serves to encourage those without the power to seek power and the destruction of their enemies.<sup>18</sup> This is a lesson not just for Israel but for *the whole world*, including my home country of the United States of America.

We need to keep our faith but governments are called to "harmonize their own interests with the needs of others, and offer their goods and services as their rulers shall direct—assuming, of course, that justice is maintained and the authorities are acting within the limits of their competence."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> PT, 26 cf. PT 27.

<sup>16</sup> PT, 34.

<sup>17</sup> PT, 43.

<sup>18</sup> see PT, 48.

<sup>19</sup> PT, 53.

Pope St. John XXIII writes

We must add, therefore, that it is in the nature of the common good that every single citizen has the right to share in it—although in different ways, depending on his tasks, merits and circumstances. Hence every civil authority must strive to promote the common good in the interest of all, without favoring any individual citizen or category of citizen. As Pope Leo XIII insisted: "The civil power must not be subservient to the advantage of any one individual, or of some few persons; inasmuch as it was established for the common good of all."<sup>20</sup>

The Palestinians, and all minorities, have a right to be heard, not just to be heard, but as a

A natural consequence of men's dignity is unquestionably their right to take an active part in government, though their degree of participation will necessarily depend on the stage of development reached by the political community of which they are members.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, they deserve either a proper place in the government of the political nation of Israel or to have their own nation. Is this not some part of the reason that Israel was formed as a nation for Jews in 1948?

Pope St. John XXIII continues

The first point to be settled is that mutual ties between States must be governed by truth. Truth calls for the elimination of every trace of racial discrimination, and the consequent recognition of the inviolable principle that all States are by nature equal in dignity...Each is also legitimately entitled to its good name and to the respect which is its due.<sup>22</sup>

In any conflict nations or groups often make accusations against each other. The present war between Israel and the Palestinians is no exception. What is needed is truth. Israel says there is not starvation going on in Gaza. Much of the rest of the world knows otherwise. Where is the proof? Pictures show there is starvation.

Both sides need to submit evidence for any accusation they offer (This is needed in the discussion between any groups). We need to end the rhetoric.

True and lasting peace

Requires that the fundamental principles upon which peace is based in today's world be replaced by an altogether different one, namely, the realization that true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> PT, 56.

<sup>21</sup> PT, 73.

<sup>22</sup> PT, 86.

<sup>23</sup> PT, 113.

War does not ensure peace. Instead, it often provides reason to obtain more arms. Hamas may be destroyed but the feeling behind their cause might only be strengthened.

I will end here with the following quote from Pope St. John XXIII.

We would remind such people that it is the law of nature that all things must be of gradual growth. If there is to be any improvement in human institutions, the work must be done slowly and deliberately from within. Pope Pius XII expressed it in these terms: "Salvation and justice consist not in the uprooting of an outdated system, but in a well designed policy of development. Hotheadedness was never constructive; it has always destroyed everything. It has inflamed passions, but never assuaged them. It sows no seeds but those of hatred and destruction. Far from bringing about the reconciliation of contending parties, it reduces men and political parties to the necessity of laboriously redoing the work of the past, building on the ruins that disharmony has left in its wake."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> PT, 162.