

ENCYCLICAL LETTER
MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS
OF THE HOLY FATHER
LEO XIV

ON SAFEGUARDING THE HUMAN PERSON
IN THE TIME OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Commentary,

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Pope Leo XIV's *Magnificat Humanitas* (MH) highlights four concerns regarding Artificial Intelligence's influence, issuing a call to discern its effects on human flourishing and to deepen our understanding of Christian theological anthropology.

The first caution concerns safeguarding the capacity of the mind to attain truth. (MH134) Pope Leo reminds us that machines ought not to replace our responsibility to apprehend truth according to our own intellectual agency. We lose our ability to collaborate creatively with one another if we offload our personal responsibility for making judgments onto machines. We must find the truth in ourselves and in relation to others, growing in consciousness of who we truly are (MH132).

The second caution centers on preserving inner freedom. Pope Leo reminds us to be aware of digital platforms that are "designed to capture users' time and attention, exploiting their vulnerability and weakening their inner freedom." (MH170) When persons are exploited, "What prevails is efficiency, rather than respect for freedom and human dignity." (MH172) We may know many things, but lack a sense of purpose. Humans can know not only a set of facts but also make coherent sense of information, thereby building a worldview. If we offload our judgments onto machines, then we will no longer strive to know the whole and will consign ourselves to mere recognition of partial aspects. Pope Leo argues that maintaining inner freedom requires a healthy attitude, characterized by rhythms involving silence, thorough study, reading, and careful analysis. (MH146)

The third caution MH raises regards the fact that truth is relational. Data/facts are subject to "verification, cross-checking of sources, and responsible argumentation." (MH132) Knowledge "is deeply relational for it is built through bonds of trust and shared practices, as well as an honest exchange with others and with the world." (MH132). A point made by 20th-century Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan fits well here: he notes that scientific collaboration requires trust. Knowledge is fundamentally communal because it is fundamentally rooted in our trust of one another and our openness to dialogue.

The social and relational nature of consciousness and learning is enhanced by diverse historical experiences, human bonds, emotions, joys, and sorrows. It grows with families and multifaceted cultures and expressions, including *convivencia* and *conjunto*, *en lo cotidiano*, arising out of the problems of the people. It arises "From among the poor" as claimed by Msgr Romero, for "it is

the poor who tell us what the world is, and what the church's service to the world should be."¹ It also arises through living the gospel. The poor raise our consciousness that those devoid of human faces are to recover humaneness, for they, too, like all of us, are embodiments of Magnificent Humanity. Genuinely new frameworks emerge from embodied intercultural and intercontextual relationships, which will hardly be met through AI. There is also the worry that we will go to AI to learn, rather than learn from one another. This atomization of learning is destructive of the shared inheritances of communities! We learn best when we are loved and encouraged to be confident in our abilities. We cannot actualize our cognitive capacities without the love of others.

Expanding upon these traditions of human connectedness, in most communal cultures of Africa, there is the Ubuntu philosophy that is "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share." The Ubuntu African anthropological vision resonates deeply with the communal cultures of Asia:

In Korea, Jeong (정) is the sense of emotional connectedness, so people see others as fundamentally linked to themselves. This leads to a philosophy valuing "we" over individual success. Japan emphasizes Wa (和), a cultural ethos of humility and consideration to preserve group harmony and peace. It shows that "the individual fully exists only within the harmony of the whole." Indonesia and Malaysia value Gotong Royong, meaning "to share and carry heavy burdens together." In the Philippines, Bayanihan is mutual support within villages that holds communities together.²

Most tribal and Indigenous cosmological visions in Asia and Africa teach that humans and their environments are in a symbiotic relationship, affirming the self as "muntu," person existing beyond a material focus on efficiency and accumulation. Thus, MH calls on the global South not to lose the human values of their diverse cultures to AI. AI can lead people to treat learning as an isolated, transactional process rather than a communal, dialogical one. There is, therefore, a danger that those cultures that understand learning as a matter of relationship, community, and dialogue will be eroded. This will make those cultures even more vulnerable to colonial extractivism. For this reason, I emphasize Pope Leo's claim that "Even today, colonialism assumes new forms. It no longer dominates only bodies, but appropriates data, transforming personal lives into exploitable information." (MH178) Yes, AI can very easily be colonial. It is more likely to further violate the rights of the global South.

The speed of AI extinguishes the desire to ask questions. Here, Pope Leo warns us that knowing is not an accumulation of data already simulated by technology (MH146), but rather the ability to engage in the 4 basic human cognitive activities Lonergan suggested: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. Pope Leo cautions us not to forfeit our wonder to AI. He calls for rethinking the role of teachers, the organization of schools, and evaluation methods to provide an authentically integrated education that forms the inner and the whole person (MH145), enabling growth in virtue. Education must enable people to question the unchecked power of technocracy

¹ Óscar A. Romero, "The Political Dimension of the Faith from the Perspective of the Option for the Poor," in *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, ed. Ignacio Martín-Baró and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1985), 179.

² Interview with Hongcheol Jeong, South Korean Doctoral Student at the Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University. May 21, 2026.

when that power works against our ability to fully express our wonder and so fully realize our cognitive capacities. This is a moral responsibility to resist whatever power dynamics or “dominant technocratic paradigm” (*Laudato Si'*, 101) would enslave people, not allowing them full liberty to be what they are as made in the image of God.

One way the Church and society in the global South could leverage this technology for good is by giving people a voice in ways we haven't before. It is time to make good use of the local means that preserve the culture of encounters: the many “structures of brotherhood,” and sisterhood we have, where we can hold each other accountable for making “systems and principles of justice.”³

Finally, the fourth caution articulated by Pope Leo concerns the protection of workers, especially the vulnerable. AI is increasing the vulnerability of developing countries. MH recalls the need to look beyond GDP and, like Pope Francis, to care for our common home by “Breaking the chains of new forms of slavery” (MH173-179); that is, to disarm technology, which does not mean renouncing it, but preventing it from dominating humanity. For, as the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison once warned, “Enslave the liberty of but one human being and the liberties of the world are put in peril.”⁴

Pope Leo calls for the irreplaceable social function of credit, “thereby creating both jobs and self-employed work” (MH160), and calls us to refuse finance for its own sake. Technology should serve human flourishing and human dignity, remaining “at the service of the human person and not become a form of control over consciences.” (MH171) Pope Leo denounces a technological development that represses human dignity and widens the gap between the rich and the poor, as AI is doing, following the patterns of economic globalization. As Pope Francis already suggested, “Technological developments that do not lead to an improvement in the quality of life of all humanity, but on the contrary aggravate inequalities and conflicts, can never count as true progress.” (World Day of Peace, January 2024, 2)

MH sheds light on the transnational actors and international forces at play that benefit from AI to the detriment of the poor. “In some regions of the world, [especially in the global South], children and adolescents work in dangerous conditions, crushing the materials from which rare earth elements are extracted. The bodies of these people are scarred, injured, and worn down so that computational flow may continue uninterruptedly.” (MH173) As the Catholic Peacebuilding Network emphasizes, governments prioritize mineral supplies for robotics when shaping their policies and strategies. However, these so-called “critical minerals” such as “cobalt, nickel, copper, lithium, tungsten, and rare earth elements” are not benefiting the integral development of people in the global South, where extraction causes environmental pollution and deprives communities of land and potable water.⁵ Among other things, this extraction is needed for Graphics Processing Units (GPUs), a type of semiconductor that enables parallel processing, important tools that ensure AI can work quickly, at a very high ecological cost. As Pope Leo puts it, “Nothing in the world of

³ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man. Volume II: Human Destiny*, 1st ed, Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

⁴ Cited in Siddharth Kara, *Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective*, Paperback edition, 2023 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 78.

⁵ Caesar A. Montevecchio and Séverine Deneulin, *Catholic Approaches to Mining: A Framework for Reflection, Planning, and Action* (University of Notre Dame, 2025), 9, 6042609 Bytes, <https://doi.org/10.7274/29941550>.

AI is immaterial or magical. Every seemingly immediate and flawless response is the result of a long chain of mediation, involving vast networks of natural resources, energy infrastructure, and, above all, people.” (MH173) AI performs a billion or more computations every minute. The minerals needed come from vulnerable regions of the global South, mostly in Africa and Latin America, as demonstrated by the March issue of the journal *Science*.⁶

Pope Leo reminds us of the need to adopt the victims' perspectives (MH216-217). This requires that we consider the people's own voices, such as that of a mining worker who declared, “We work on our graves,”⁷ when describing the conditions that kill them and their communities as they work for less than 2\$ per day. This is the voice of a worker from the DRC, one of the world's largest cobalt reserves. This cry of the poor recalls Gustavo Gutiérrez's claim that “El Sur También existe” - referring to the alterity of the oppressed, inviting us to read reality from the social, cultural, racial, and gender perspective of the victim.⁸ Alterity here is more than the very important principles of mutuality, reciprocity, and solidarity. It is a demand to make space for the irreducible otherness of Christ in “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40 and 45). Indeed, Christ is the otherness in all victims. This reinforces Pope Leo's call to safeguard the dignity and rights of workers and indigenous communities, who are the most impoverished, “who pay the highest price, while the theories that promise automatic general prosperity often prove to be illusory.” (MH158). Protecting workers' rights is an ethical obligation for all of us.

MH reminds us that safeguarding the dignity of all workers is fundamental to the common good, especially in the age of AI, where workers' suffering often goes unnoticed in global supply chains as AI provides users with immediate results, leaving them without thinking or understanding whose life made those results possible. Here I think especially of all immigrant workers, including farmworkers, most of whom put food on our tables.

⁶ Chinasa T. Okolo, “Global Majority Countries Must Embed Critical Minerals into AI Governance,” *Science* 391, no. 6789 (March 2026): eae6678, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aef6678>.

⁷ and Siddharth Kara, *Cobalt Red: How the Blood of the Congo Powers Our Lives*, First edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2023); Siddharth Kara, *Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective*, Paperback edition, 2023 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Vivir y Pensar El Dios de Los Pobres* (Lima, Perú: Centro de estudios y publicaciones (cep); Instituto Bartolomé de Las Casas (IBC), 2025), 234.