Opinion
Guest Voices



Pope Leo XIV speaks during the presentation of *Magnifica Humanitas* at the Vatican's Synod Hall May 25, 2026, the first encyclical of his papacy, which focuses on the rise of artificial intelligence. (OSV NewsVatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

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May 25, 2026

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This spring, something new emerged on commencement stages across the country. Speakers who invoked artificial intelligence were met with boos and groans from graduates who sense, correctly, that the technology isn't being oriented toward what matters most about being human. That unease isn't confined to graduates, and it isn't a rejection of technology. It cuts across political divides and reflects a question many Americans are asking: Who is AI for, and who is it leaving behind?

On Monday, May 25, Pope Leo XIV offered an answer. *Magnifica Humanitas*, his landmark teaching on artificial intelligence, provides not just a diagnosis of what's at stake, but guiding principles that meet the urgency of our moment. From the beginning of his papacy, Leo has signaled his commitment to addressing the AI revolution, choosing his name in direct reference to Leo XIII, the pope who during the industrial revolution insisted that people must come first, even in the face of economic transformation. With *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo has delivered on that commitment.

The Catholic Church's insistence on the dignity of each and every person stretches back to the Gospels. Its engagement with technology and the market economy began with *Rerum Novarum*, the 1891 document that inaugurated modern Catholic social teaching, and it has engaged with questions involving human dignity, technology and labor ever since. *Magnifica Humanitas* adds to that tradition with the seriousness and weight our moment deserves, and the moral authority and trust Pope Leo has earned in his first year.



Pope Leo XIV shakes hands with Chris Olah, a Canadian billionaire and AI researcher who co-founded Anthropic, during the presentation of the pope's encyclical, "Magnifica Humanitas," at the Vatican synod hall May 25, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

The question is no longer whether AI will transform our world — that transformation is already underway. The question is whether that transformation will advance human dignity and whether it will reach workers whose livelihoods are being reshaped, as well as those with no seat at the table where decisions are being made. These questions are at the heart of the unease so many Americans are expressing, and they are the questions Pope Leo engages directly.

He grounds his response in the human dignity each of us shares. He identifies as “particularly insidious” an ideology that “suggests that every person must earn or justify his or her own worth, to the point of attributing greater value to those who are more efficient or effective.” Leo’s answer is clear: A person’s dignity does not depend on what they can “achieve or produce.” Each and every person possesses a fundamental dignity that no one can legitimately deny.

This is not a partisan claim. The unease about AI runs across the political spectrum, from labor organizers worried about automation to those on the right concerned about the erosion of human agency, and from those focused on algorithmic bias to those focused on surveillance. What Pope Leo offers is a framework that transcends divisions, not by papering over real disagreements, but by beginning with something prior to them: the irreducible worth of the human person.

Along with its focus on human dignity, *Magnifica Humanitas* lifts up two other principles that deserve particular attention. First, the dignity of work; what we do shapes who we are, and technology that degrades or devalues human labor isn't progress; it's a great loss. AI should be designed to empower and complement workers, not de-skill or surveil them. Second, care for the vulnerable; how our society treats those in need is the true measure of our commitment to the common good. How AI systems are built will either advance human dignity and the common good or leave the most vulnerable further behind, and we are making such choices now.

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These are not abstract principles. They are criteria to shape concrete action, by each of us and by the policymakers, investors, legislators and corporate leaders who are deciding how AI is built, deployed and governed. As Leo says, "We cannot condone naive enthusiasms, nor fuel unfounded fears. Instead, let us establish standards for discernment — the dignity of the human person, the universal destination of goods, the preferential option for the poor, care for our common home and peace — and let us translate these standards into practices…" That translation is the work of democratic life.

Pope Leo has been articulating this conviction consistently in different contexts over the past year, affirming that such consequential decisions call for engagement from the full range of voices in our public life, beginning with each one of us. That work calls us to participate actively as citizens, to work together across our differences for the common good and to act alongside our allies abroad rather than going it alone.

Magnifica Humanitas is the church's own contribution to this work. It comes from one of the world's most significant civil society institutions, with a physical presence in communities around the world, and with centuries of on-the-ground experience

and a rich moral tradition to inform this conversation. It offers what our moment urgently needs: a vocabulary and framework of principles equal to the questions before us.

As Pope Leo writes, “We must lovingly safeguard the grandeur of humanity bestowed on us and revealed in its fullness in Christ, the splendor of which no machine can ever replace.” People of many faith traditions, and of none, share similar convictions. With *Magnifica Humanitas*, the Catholic Church is answering this call, bringing first principles to the most consequential challenges of our time.

This story appears in the **AI Encyclical: Magnifica Humanitas** feature series. View the full series.