



Pope Leo XIV visits the Gateway of Europe monument in Lampedusa, Sicily, southern Italy, July 4, 2026, during a one-day pastoral visit to the island long associated with the plight of migrants crossing the Mediterranean. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)



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This is the fourth of a series of columns by the author on Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical, Magnifica Humanitas. This piece focuses on Chapter 4. For earlier columns, see [Chapter 1](#), [Chapter 2](#) and [Chapter 3](#).

After using Catholic social teaching to examine digital technology in Chapter 3 of his encyclical, [Magnifica Humanitas](#), Pope Leo XIV in Chapter 4 analyzes the impact of this technology on truth and democracy, children and education, workers and freedom.

Like many of us, Leo worries the tools of the digital age "that could foster dialogue and participation are often used to construct distorted narratives and blur the boundaries between truth and falsehood, mixing facts with opinions."

He warns that those who command powerful technological and economic resources can control what others accept as true, which is especially important in a democracy. We see that already in social media and in commercial and political advertising.

In public discourse, Leo believes the truth of facts requires verification, cross-checking of sources and responsible argumentation, which is one reason he calls for strengthening serious journalism.

Quoting the philosopher Hannah Arendt, he warns of the danger of totalitarianism when people lose "the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist."

Like parents and teachers everywhere, the pope also worries about the impact of digital technologies on children and education.

Leo wants school to be "the place where new generations can learn to seek and love the truth, to reflect on the meaning of life and to recognize the dignity of every person." But education is made more difficult by the pervasiveness of digital media, which "fosters a culture of immediacy and hyper-stimulation, which gives rise to fatigue, boredom and apathy concerning the effort required for seeking the truth."

"Having a personal mobile device at too early an age and using it without adult supervision," warns Leo, "can exacerbate young people's vulnerabilities, foster addiction and expose them to isolation, bullying and cyberbullying, as well as to pressures to share intimate images or sensitive information."

As a result, he supports government interventions, like those in Australia, "for setting age limits, holding service providers accountable rather than shifting the whole burden of control onto families, and for providing specific protections against all forms of online sexual exploitation and violence."

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Catholic social teaching has always emphasized the protection of workers, so it is no surprise that Leo gives space in his encyclical to the impact of robots and AI on workers.

"It is certainly desirable for technology to relieve humans of arduous, repetitive or dangerous tasks and to provide intelligent support for human activity," affirms Leo.

But at a time when AI developers are promising corporations that AI will save money by replacing workers, the pope warns: "The pursuit of greater profits cannot justify choices that systematically sacrifice jobs, because the human person is an end, not a means, and the economic order must remain subordinate to human dignity and the common good."

Like unions, which he supports, Leo opposes simply laying off workers with no support or plan as is done in America.

"Every introduction of automation and AI should be accompanied by verifiable measures to protect the employment, retraining and participation of workers," says Leo. This requires "continuous training and professional transitions accessible to all, ensuring that the cost of adaptation does not fall solely on individuals."

To achieve a just society, Leo calls for "a vigilant State and civil institutions that are capable of overcoming the singular mentality of efficiency, and of ensuring that resources, creative solutions and regulations favor the most vulnerable." This is anathema to libertarians who hate government interference in business.

Nor does the pope believe in the "trickledown" theory of the economy. "Instead of waiting for the benefits of growth to reach the poor 'eventually,' decisions need to be taken to ensure that growth becomes inclusive from the outset," he asserts.

Leo notes that the world's wealth has grown in absolute terms, but "it is increasingly concentrated in fewer hands, widening inequalities both within and between countries."

Sounding like a democratic socialist, he says that "just laws and methods of redistribution are certainly necessary for correcting imbalances, including tax systems that lighten the burden on the weakest and ask for more from those with greater resources."

In summary, Leo says that "it is no longer possible to rely solely on the 'invisible hand' of the market. Politics has the task of orientating economies and technologies to the common good, promoting dignified work, social inclusion and an equitable distribution of the benefits of innovation."

Leo also cautions how digital technologies can be addictive and limit freedom. He finds fault with platforms and services that "are often designed to capture users' time and attention, exploiting their vulnerabilities and weakening their inner freedom."

"When business models thrive on human weakness, the person is treated as a means rather than as an end," he complains. "(T)hose who design or finance such systems bear a moral responsibility that cannot be ignored."

Leo also warns of various forms of servitude linked to the digital economy, including those who work for minimal wages at "data labeling, model training and content moderation, often involving disturbing material."

Even harsher work is endured in "extracting the resources required for the production of the devices and microprocessors on which AI depends," Leo complains. "In some regions of the world, 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."

Responding to digital technologies calls for a response by everyone, according to Leo. "It asks that these processes be guided with foresight: by institutions capable of regulating without stifling, and protecting without taking over; by businesses that recognize work and dignity as measures of success; by intermediary organizations and educational communities that rebuild trust and relationships; and by citizens who cultivate responsibility, moderation, discernment and a sense of truth."

Will everyone respond?

This story appears in the **AI Encyclical: Magnifica Humanitas** feature series. [View the full series.](#)