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Task Force on Preserving Human Dignity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence
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Introduction: A New Rerum Novarum Moment

Brothers,

Pope Leo's *Magnifica Humanitas* gives us a treasure of the Church's wisdom and prudential direction to meet the moment that the world faces today.

This is a moment that a year ago artificial intelligence was only occasionally in the headlines and today is in multiple headlines every single day.

It is dizzying. How do we separate fact from hyperbole? What posture should we take in all of this?

Pope Leo gives us a clear direction: neither naïve enthusiasm nor unfounded fear. Our task is to discern and bring the church's wisdom to the public square. This means dialogue with technology leaders, public officials, and civil society leaders, not to mention families and communities affected by these changes.

It is essential that we engage in this consequential discussion about the shaping and direction of society. What kind of society do we want to build? Babel or Jerusalem? Pope Leo insists it must be a "civilization of love": one that respects human dignity; protects the dignity of workers, the innocence of children, the stability of the family, and the dreams and aspirations of young adults. Advancing society with humanity at the center. This is the charge we have been given.

Pope Leo XIV has suggested that we are living through a moment comparable to the Industrial Revolution. The emergence of artificial intelligence is not merely another technological innovation. It is an anthropological transformation, the consequences of which continue to unfold. The Church therefore has a duty similar to the one it embraced in 1891: not to reject progress, but to insist that progress remain ordered to the human person.

And just as Rerum Novarum ultimately led to concrete results, including minimum wage laws, social security, and child labor restrictions, Magnifica Humanitas asks us to work for policies and practices that keep artificial intelligence at the service of the human person.

What We Have Learned

1. Technology Leaders Are Open to Dialogue

Our delegations have found genuine openness to dialogue among major technology companies. While their priorities and cultures differ from each other, most have expressed interest in ongoing conversation with the Church. Many recognize the deep moral and ethical questions at stake.

This represents a significant opportunity for the Church, particularly here in the United States, as most of the frontier AI labs are based here. Magnifica Humanitas speaks directly to those who build these systems: “Developers, therefore, bear a particular ethical and spiritual responsibility, for every design choice reflects a vision of humanity” (MH 111).

The Church possesses something that Silicon Valley cannot engineer: over two thousand years of wisdom on the human person, truth, and the common good.

One of the technologists had this message for us bishops: “Trust your pastoral instincts! Society does not need you to be experts in technology; it needs you to be pastors, who care about your people.” Society needs us to bring the rich heritage of the Church’s knowledge, wisdom, and prudence to this moment and make it part of a healthy public debate that in the months and years ahead will help us to navigate these consequential moments ahead of us.

And the Church can help bring forward the voices of others as well: workers, parents, teachers, parishes, and local communities. The Holy Father warns that “we cannot allow a handful of actors to dictate these processes on their own” (MH 72), and that “A more moral AI is not enough if that morality is determined by a few” (MH 107). Few institutions are as well-placed to listen to and help lift the voices of those most affected by these technologies.

I have been in conversation with Cardinal Czerny, the head of the Vatican Commission on Artifical Intelligence. He asked me to relay this request to the bishops: [“To accompany God’s people in their ‘joys and hopes, their griefs and anxieties (cf. *Gaudium et spes* 1) in facing the many questions and challenges associated with artificial intelligence, and developing appropriate ways of accompanying them pastorally in parishes, schools and other Christian communities.”]

Pope Leo has already given us a road map; a history lesson; warnings; words of hope; and an example of wisdom and courage in this moment. Let us follow his lead.

2. The Greatest Risk Is a Reduced Vision of the Human Person

Magnifica Humanitas repeatedly reminds us that technology is never neutral because it reflects the assumptions and values of those who design and deploy it. [In the Holy Father’s words, technology “takes on the characteristics of those who devise, finance, regulate and use it” (MH 9).]

The Church's contribution is to insist that every human being possesses inherent dignity that no algorithm can measure and no market can price. Magnifica Humanitas warns against the view “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” (MH 51). God formed mankind with his own hands and continues to breathe life into humanity; that breath cannot be replaced by an algorithm.

3. Truth is a Central Pastoral Concern

The Holy Father devotes significant attention to truth and communication.

Unfortunately, AI allows bad actors to produce convincing falsehoods, [fabricated images, and manipulated narratives.] As the Holy Father observes, “Disinformation did not begin with AI, yet today it finds a powerful amplifier in AI” (MH 132).

As bishops, we should recognize that in the coming years there will be an unprecedented pressure on the public's ability to distinguish truth from falsehood.

The Church, which proclaims Jesus Christ as the Truth, must become **a school of discernment in the digital age**. [Pope Leo reminds us that “truth is a common good and not the property of those with power or influence” (MH 137).] Our institutions can be places where people learn to verify, to slow down, and to reason together.

4. The Dignity of Work Remains a Priority

Many Catholics are already asking:

- Will AI take my job?
- Will my children have meaningful work?

The evidence remains uncertain. Some technology leaders have been studying the data and insist that labor disruptions will not be greater than in other moments when we have experienced changes in technology. Other leaders are not so optimistic.

The Church's teaching is clear: work is a participation in God’s creation, in self-development, and service to others. Any technological system that treats workers as disposable must be challenged.

Magnifica Humanitas draws on the teaching of our own Conference, recalling that work is “a crucial sphere in which identity is formed, friendships and relationships are forged, practical responsibilities are learned and one’s vocation is discerned” (MH 167).

The task force will continue monitoring labor impacts and advocating for workers.

5. Protecting Children: An Urgent Priority

Perhaps no area demands greater vigilance than the protection of children and vulnerable persons.

Algorithms shape opinions, emotional development, and social interaction – often in negative ways. The Holy Father is clear: “When business models thrive on human weakness, the person is treated as a means rather than as an end; those who design or finance such systems bear a moral responsibility that cannot be ignored” (MH 170).

For many young people, artificial intelligence will become a permanent companion. Educators and parents are deeply concerned that young people remain capable of critical thought, and that they not lose the capacity for friendship, prayer, and genuine human encounter.

Our educational ministries have an enormous challenge here. It is important that Catholic educators help us develop guidelines for children and young people regarding the prudent use of artificial intelligence.

6. Autonomous Warfare Is No Longer a Theoretical Issue

One of the most urgent themes emerging from the encyclical concerns warfare and autonomous weapons. The Holy Father has called for AI to be "disarmed," freed from a race for dominance that is military, economic, and cognitive (MH 110). Pope Leo says, “To disarm means discrediting the assumption that technical power automatically confers the right to govern. To disarm does not mean rejecting technology, but preventing it from dominating humanity” (MH 110).

The Church must insist that moral responsibility in conflict cannot be delegated to an algorithm. As Pope Leo notes, “…it is not permissible to entrust lethal or otherwise irreversible decisions to artificial systems. No algorithm can make war morally acceptable” (MH 198).

What the Task Force Has Accomplished

The task force has begun implementing the mandate entrusted to it by the Conference:

1. Formation

Many of you have experts in your own dioceses and have already engaged with them. The Task Force will also provide updates and formation opportunities for you and your diocesan leaders. Webinars for bishops are now being scheduled to take place after the new year. Dates will be announced in the coming weeks.

2. Catholic Education

Every diocese should begin discussing how schools, seminaries, universities, and catechetical programs will address AI literacy.

The Task Force hopes to become a clearinghouse for best practices in this regard, We will enlist the assistance of Catholic Universities to helps us with offering formation opportunities. [The Holy Father asks universities, in particular, “to give fresh impetus to these principles,” (MH 47).]

3. Public Policy

The Task Force will work closely with the USCCB Government Relations team to continue advocating for clear guardrails on the development and use of AI, including transparency, accountability, and human oversight.

The Holy Father is direct: “It is not enough to invoke ethics in the abstract; robust legal frameworks, independent oversight, informed users and a political system that does not abdicate its responsibility are required” (MH 106).

4. Continued Engagement

The Church will certainly remain in conversation with the tech sector, [neither endorsing particular companies nor approaching them as adversaries.]

That conversation, however, should grow to include more voices as well. Magnifica Humanitas calls for "local communities, intermediary organizations, schools, universities, religious institutions and associations" to "have a voice" and "contribute to the discernment of choices that affect people's daily lives…." (MH 72).

5. A Theology of Human Dignity for the Digital Age

The Church must articulate with renewed confidence what it means to be human in the time of artificial intelligence.

Artificial systems can imitate human language and reasoning, but as the Holy Father reminds us, The "grandeur of humanity bestowed upon us and revealed in its fullness in Christ," is something "no machine can ever replace" (MH 15).

Concluding Vision

Brothers, at a moment when society is asking what machines can do, we must remind the world who the human person is. Magnifica Humanitas calls us not to fear the future, but to help shape it, with humanity at the center.

The Holy Father reminds us that "technological evolution does not follow a predetermined path but can be guided by personal and collective responsibility" (MH 238). Let us take up that responsibility together, with faith in Christ, who is the source of our hope.