



Pope Leo Issues Encyclical in Support of Humanity

The Wired Word for the Week of June 7, 2026

In the News

Pope Leo XIV released his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas* (Magnificent Humanity), last month, on the 135th anniversary of his namesake's landmark *Rerum Novarum* (On New Things), on the Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical stressed that workers have the right to a fair wage and affirmed that humans have "a fundamental value that takes precedence over capital and profit."

In the 83-page teaching document, Pope Leo XIV lays out his understanding of human nature and worth: "At the heart of the Christian understanding of the human person lies the great biblical affirmation that men and women are created in the image and likeness (cf. Genesis 1:26-27) of the Triune God. Created for relationship, every human person is planned and willed by God to enter into communion with him, with others and with creation. ... The value of persons ... does not depend on what they achieve or produce. There are rights that apply to everyone simply by virtue of being human, and no human power can legitimately deny or arbitrarily limit them."

The encyclical covers a lot of ground, touching on minority rights, abortion, euthanasia, care for the environment, gender issues, treatment of migrants, victims of abuse, education, mental health, equitable access to and

allocation of resources, families, labor, fair wages and taxation systems, addiction, media, power dynamics, freedom of conscience, the rule of law, democracy, slavery, colonization, reparations, disinformation, interfaith relations, economics, science, war and peace, and more.

The pontiff took a lot of time discussing the swift development of artificial intelligence with its potential for harm as well as blessing: "Technology has the power to heal, connect, educate and protect our common home; but it can also divide, exclude and generate new forms of injustice," he states. "In the abstract, technology in and of itself is not a solution to humanity's problems, just as it is not inherently evil. In practice, however, technology is never neutral, because it takes on the characteristics of those who devise, finance, regulate and use it."

"Technological innovations, including artificial intelligence, are not neutral, for they can either foster participation and justice or exacerbate inequality, control and exclusion," said Pope Leo. "For this reason, they must be evaluated by asking a crucial question: Do they truly help individuals and peoples to become more humane and fraternal, while respecting our common home and future generations?"

"Every technical or economic decision should include spiritual discernment and be an opportunity for assessing whether the advances in AI are promoting justice and participation or concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a select few," the pontiff advised.

"In the era of artificial intelligence, when human dignity is threatened by new forms of dehumanization, ours is the pressing duty to remain profoundly human," Pope Leo concluded. "We must lovingly safeguard the grandeur of humanity bestowed upon us and revealed in its fullness in Christ, the splendor of which no machine can ever replace."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas* of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV on Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence. *The Holy See*](#)

[A Complete Guide to Pope Leo's First Encyclical: *Magnifica Humanitas*. *Ascension Press*](#)

[The Incarnational Spirituality of Leo XIV's *Magnifica Humanitas*. *National Catholic Reporter*](#)

[In His First Encyclical, Pope Leo XIV Says AI Must Serve Humanity, Not the Powerful Few. *Religion News Service*](#)

[Leo XIV Links AI to Histories of Enslavement and Exploitation. *Religion Dispatches*](#)

Applying the News Story

Use the news story to discuss what our faith teaches us about being human.

The Big Questions

1. What is the essence of being human? What biblical texts shape your ideas on the subject?
2. You might hear someone say, "So-and-so is worth an X-amount of money." Does the balance in an individual's bank account equal that person's value? Why or why not? When is wealth confused with intrinsic holistic value, if ever?
3. How can we ensure that emerging technology does not lead to greater concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few and the impoverishment of the many? How can we ensure that technology will serve

the common good and not become a form of control leading to exploitation of the vulnerable, dependency, and a new form of digital addiction or slavery to those who create algorithms?

4. What is the purpose of technology? How can it help people? What do we need to do in order to make sure that this technology does the best that it can do for the most people in the world?

5. How can we safeguard the dignity of the human person in the era of artificial intelligence? What role should the church play in this endeavor?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Genesis 11:4, 6-9

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." ... And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth, and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (For context, read [Genesis 11:1-9](#).)

Pope Leo compares one approach to the use of technology to the building of the Tower of Babel, which he calls "a project conceived without reference to God, supported by a uniformity that eliminated diversity and that chose homogenization over communion. When a city is built on pride and the claim

to self-sufficiency, communication breaks down, languages are confused and people no longer understand each other. ... We must, then, avoid the 'Babel syndrome,' namely the idolatry of profit that sacrifices the weak, a uniformity that neutralizes differences, and the pretense that a single language -- even a digital one -- can translate everything, including the mystery of the person, into data and performance. The risk of dehumanization -- of building a future that excludes God and reduces the other to a means -- is an ancient and ever-new temptation that today takes on a technical guise."

Questions: When in human history have people in power sought to enforce uniformity, whether by permitting the use of only one official language, the practice of only one particular religion, or other methods of control? What happened to those societies?

Nehemiah 2:17-18

Then I said to [the officials and leaders], "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace." I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good. (For context, read [Nehemiah 2:11-18](#).)

The other building project to which Pope Leo turns is found in the book of Nehemiah (Chapters 1-6). First, Nehemiah asked questions and gathered information about what was happening back in Jerusalem. What he heard about the city's devastation caused him great distress. He went to God in tears, praying and fasting, seeking guidance about what to do ([Nehemiah 1:1-11](#)). Then he went to work as usual, and his master, the king, noticed something was wrong. Nehemiah explained the reason for his unusually sad

demeanor; the king gave him leave and provided support in the form of material and resources for the project.

Once Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he inspected the condition of the city wall for himself before enlisting the city leaders to join together to repair the wall ([Nehemiah 2:11-18](#)).

Nehemiah's approach differed greatly from that of the builders of the Tower of Babel, Pope Leo wrote. "He did not impose solutions from above. He convened the families, assigned each of them a section of the wall to rebuild, listened to their concerns, coordinated their efforts and addressed any opposition. The narrative shows how the city is reborn, not through the initiative of one man, but through the shared responsibility of all: men, women, priests, artisans, heads of households and young people all play a part. It is an undertaking with God at the center, which rebuilds relationships before rebuilding with stones."

The pontiff said Nehemiah found a way "of transforming diversity into a resource and of making listening and dialogue the common ground upon which to cultivate justice and fraternity."

Question: How might Nehemiah's approach to rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem serve as a model for us as we navigate the challenges of AI?

Matthew 20:13-16

[Jesus said,] "But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

(For context, read [Matthew 20:1-16](#).)

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who hires day laborers to work in his vineyard. Every few hours he goes to the marketplace to recruit more workers, and at quitting time, he pays everyone the same wage, no matter how many hours they worked. But those who had toiled all day grumbled, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (vv. 11-12).

In his encyclical, Pope Leo recalled that Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesima Anno*, published in 1931, affirmed "that wages be proportionate not only to performance, but also to the needs of workers and their families."

Question: How does Pope Pius XI's view of workers' rights connect with the parable Jesus told in our text?

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (For context, read [John 1:1-18](#).)

Humanity's drive to adopt AI, according to Pope Leo, reflects "the aspiration to transcend the limits of the human condition" through technologies (transhumanism) or even to surpass, replace or hybridize humans with machines or other life forms "in a new evolutionary stage" (posthumanism). The pontiff writes that "in pursuit of a supposed optimization of the species ... scientific and technological advances, when detached from moral and social progress, end up turning against humanity."

"Everything that appears as a 'limit' -- incapacity, illness, old age, suffering, vulnerability -- tends to be seen primarily as a defect to be corrected, rather than as a reality through which our humanity matures and opens itself to

relationship. And yet we must remember that humanity flourishes not despite limitations, but often through them," Pope Leo cautions.

It is when we experience our human limitations, the pontiff writes, that we discover new capacities for "compassion, ... a sincere concern for the needs of others; a generosity ... a new wisdom, ... the closeness of others and encounter[ing] the presence of the Lord. ... To renounce this adventure, both tragic and splendid, in the name of a presumed transcendence of all limits, could mean many things, but it would no longer be human. Finitude, when truly accepted, does not diminish us but opens us to recognizing the face of God and others."

The ideologies of transhumanism and posthumanism are not the way of Christ, the pope insists, pointing to "the mystery of the Incarnation" as evidence of God's identification with humanity in our greatest weakness, poverty and vulnerability. Jesus doesn't show up like a superhero wearing a cape, but instead appears as a baby in a manger.

"Humanity -- in all its grandeur and woundedness -- must never be replaced or surpassed," according to the pontiff. "We can embrace the technological progress that alleviates suffering and unlocks new possibilities, provided that we do not abandon the very essence of our humanity, namely the capacity for relationship and love."

Questions: What happens when people buy into transhumanism or posthumanism? How have you experienced being human as an "adventure, both tragic and splendid"? What has accepting "finitude" taught you?

For Further Discussion

1. Reflect on this, from TWW Team Member Mary Sells: "I am considering the value of humanity with all its imperfections and how God sees and accepts us as we are, warts and all. To me, that is the message of the

encyclical, to also love one another in our human frailties. Jesus shows love and care for those who are mostly rejected in societies and those very unlikely choices of friends and apostles. Jesus doesn't measure us the way data companies do! There are so many messages in marketing and social media norms that call us to compare ourselves to impossible human ideals of beauty and acceptability." How might technology affect our desire and ability to love ourselves and others as God does? How can faith communities hold fast to our humanity and inclusion of all, just as God does?

2. Comment on this, from a person with disabilities who prefers to remain anonymous: "I've always been of the mind that 'earning a living' was a strange idea. Do I not have the right to simply live without producing value for someone else?"

3. In [AI Godbots: Religious Leaders Warn of 'Alarming Consequences' When Machines Speak in the Name of God](#), professors Adam James Fenton and Chris Shannahan reported that people they interviewed saw a clear distinction between humans and machines: "A Jewish Rabbi reminded us that 'an AI bot cannot hold somebody's hand when they're at the end of their life.' A Buddhist leader pointed to a robot's inability to 'experience suffering.' A Roman Catholic bishop asserted that the ingenious mimicking of human behavior does not indicate a true internal life." How would you describe the difference between humanity and artificial intelligence?

4. Pope Leo wrote in his encyclical: "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. ... access to work for all must be a high priority for public policies and economic processes ... if technology becomes the ultimate criterion, the human person risks being reduced to data, a cog in a machine or a commodity. If, however, technology is

integrated with a wise perspective, it can become an instrument of growth, justice and fraternity."

Discuss this, as it relates to this quote from German philosopher Immanuel Kant: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity ... never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."

Responding to the News

Discuss concerns and hopes you have regarding the development and implementation of artificial intelligence in your community. Brainstorm ways your church might approach the issue, in conversation with other stakeholders in your area.

Prayer

As we look to our Lord Jesus, O God, help us to see in the Incarnation the enormity of your love for humanity, in all our frailty and potential for greatness. May we see ourselves and others not as commodities, but as dearly beloved children of God, endowed by our Creator with dignity and worth, and may we grow in love for one another, by the power of your Spirit. Amen.