

A Religious Response to *Magnifica Humanitas*: Artificial Intelligence and the Prophetic Mission

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Abstract

The accelerating development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has initiated a profound transformation in human self-understanding and moral reasoning. This article offers a religious response to the encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* (MH), a critical ecclesial intervention addressing the perils of the technocratic paradigm. Focused on the prophetic vocation of religious life, this study explores the significant religious notions, metaphorical nuances and deeper meaning of the encyclical through a fundamental choice between technocratic self-sufficiency and relational communion grounded in divine grace. Within this framework, the study develops the concept of the ‘Babel syndrome’ as a critical hermeneutic for understanding the dehumanising tendencies of AI-driven cultures, particularly their reduction of persons to data, efficiency, and performance metrics. In response, the article retrieves the Nehemiah paradigm of shared responsibility, subsidiarity, and prayerful discernment as a constructive ecclesial model for engaging technological modernity. This work further proposes three dimensions of religious prophetic response, such as ecclesial conversion, digital mission, and ascetical ‘digital sobriety’ as essential practices for sustaining interior freedom and theological discernment in the digital age. Ultimately, the article contends that the encyclical calls religious communities to reimagine their mission as participation in the construction of a ‘civilisation of love,’ where technology is subordinated to human dignity and oriented toward communion, solidarity, and eschatological hope.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Dignity, Babel Syndrome, Digital Sobriety, Technocratic, Discernment

Introduction

The rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence has introduced a profound transformation in the spiritual, moral and anthropological landscape of the Church and society. Far beyond its technical capacities, AI represents a cultural force that reshapes human self-understanding, social relations, and institutional structures. In this context, *Magnifica Humanitas* emerges as a significant theological intervention within the tradition of Catholic Social Doctrine, offering a critical discernment of technological progress in light of the doctrines of the Church.

The first Encyclical of Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, arrives at a pivotal choice for humanity. On the 135-year legacy of Catholic Social Doctrine, the decision is to either construct a new Tower of Babel or to build a city where God and humanity dwell together (MH [1]). For religious priests and sisters, this document serves as both a profound ‘examination of conscience’ and a roadmap for a renewed prophetic mission in an era dominated by technological power (MH [4]). The Encyclical strongly highlights that AI lacks moral conscience, inner growth, and the affective, relational, and spiritual perspectives through which humans attain wisdom. Considering the digital world as a new continent to be evangelised, one that requires generous missionaries who are mature in the faith (MH [238]), the encyclical opens up a new mission for the religious.

Reflecting on the religious perspectives in the encyclical, the study primarily analyses the conceptualization of the ‘Babel syndrome’ as a critique of technocratic rationality and its anthropological consequences. Secondly, it retrieves the Nehemiah narrative as a constructive ecclesiological model of collaborative discernment and shared responsibility. Thirdly, it articulates the implications of the encyclical for religious life, particularly in terms of ecclesial reform, digital evangelisation, and ascetical practices of ‘digital sobriety.’ In doing so, the study argues that the encyclical invites religious communities to a renewed prophetic identity, one that resists technological determinism while actively participating in the construction of a civilisation grounded in love, dignity, and communion.

The Babel Syndrome and the Way of Nehemiah

Pope Leo XIV uses the biblical imagery of the Tower of Babel and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem to contrast technocratic pride with collaborative, God-centered progress. The profound metaphorical images of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2-6) gives a powerful Message to Priests and Religious that The specific call before us is that of being builders of communion, rather than architects of Babel (MH [16]). The Tower of Babel represents a project of pride and self-sufficiency that eliminates diversity and reduces the mystery of the person to mere performance. (MH [2-7]).

The ‘Babel syndrome’ (MH [10]) in the encyclical represents a modern, technical guise of an ancient temptation to seek self-sufficiency and power while excluding God and human dignity. Within the context of Artificial Intelligence, this syndrome risks dehumanizing people through several specific mechanisms. A core risk of the Babel syndrome is the pretense that a single digital language can translate the entire human experience. This leads to the reduction of the ‘mystery of the person’ into mere data and performance metrics, treating individuals as profiles to be optimized rather than human beings with intrinsic value. The syndrome is driven by an ‘idolatry of profit’ (MH [10]) that prioritizes the logic of efficiency and control over the needs of the vulnerable. The Encyclical profess that when efficiency becomes the ultimate measure of value, human beings are tempted to see themselves as projects to be optimized rather than persons called to relationship and communion. Just as the biblical tower of Babel sought a uniformity that eliminated diversity, the modern digital version promotes a homogenization that neutralizes differences. This replaces authentic communion with a sterile uniformity, ignoring the unique, ontological dignity of every individual. The Babel syndrome facilitates a future that reduces the other to a ‘means’ or a resource to be exploited for results. By aspiring to ‘reach heaven’ through technological ‘upgrades’ and enhanced self-sufficiency, the Babel syndrome ignores the authentic ‘more than human’ (MH [128]) reality found in God's grace. This prideful self-affirmation ultimately leads to the breakdown of communication and the dispersion of the human community.

Nehemiah's model of shared responsibility acts as a direct spiritual and social antidote to the ‘Babel syndrome’ by replacing prideful uniformity with fraternal communion (MH [10]). While the Tower of

Babel represents a project of self-affirmation that eliminates diversity in favor of a 'single language' and 'single technology,' Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem demonstrates how a community can flourish by valuing every individual's contribution. Nehemiah's approach counters the risks of Babel in several specific ways. Babel relies on a uniformity that 'neutralizes differences' and reduces the human person to data. In contrast, Nehemiah's way rediscovers a common language of communion, where harmony arises not from being the same, but from everyone 'assuming their own role'. The Babel project is a 'single direction' feat imposed by a desire for stability and power. Nehemiah, however, did not 'impose solutions from above'. He convened families, listened to their concerns, and assigned each group a specific section of the wall to rebuild. This 'logic of subsidiarity' ensures that no one is too weak to play their part and that no one bears the weight of history alone. While Babel sacrifices human dignity for the sake of efficiency, Nehemiah's project 'rebuilds relationships before rebuilding with stones'. It recognizes that the strength of a city comes from the 'fraternal coexistence' of its people in the presence of God, rather than the height of its towers. The 'Babel syndrome' views a plurality of voices as a source of confusion to be homogenized. The 'way of Nehemiah' sees a 'bright possibility' in the plurality of visions, transforming diversity into a resource for the common good through listening and dialogue.

Babel is a project 'conceived without reference to God,' seeking to 'reach heaven' through human self-sufficiency. Nehemiah's work is an 'undertaking with God at the centre,' beginning with fasting and prayer, which prevents human effort from dissipating into the disorder of pride (MH [16]). By adopting this 'way of Nehemiah,' the encyclical advocates that humanity can move away from being 'architects of Babel' and instead become 'servants of the coming Kingdom,' ensuring that technology serves to build a 'civilisation of love' rather than new forms of digital servitude. The Image of the Rebuilding of Jerusalem under the guidance of Nehemiah emphasises shared responsibility, where priests, religious, and families all play a part in rebuilding 'piece by piece' (MH [184]). The Religious and prophetic response to the Way of Nehemiah involves the following key dimensions:

1. An Internal Examen of the Church: The encyclical states that the principles of social doctrine must first be applied within the Church's own structures. Religious communities are called to

cultivate a culture of transparency, accountability, and participation, ensuring that authority remains a ‘ministry of service’ “Every power is at the service of communion and mission. All authority is at the service of the People of God. This ministry of service is expressed not only through our faith celebrated and lived in the Sacraments, and in the adoption of a synodal style, but also in the concrete sharing of goods.” (MH [89]).

2. Witnesses to ‘More Than Human’ Grace: In response to transhumanist narratives that seek a ‘disembodied humanity’ through technology, religious need to witness to a ‘more than human’ life found only through God’s grace, ‘what saves humanity is not enhanced self-sufficiency, but a relationship that liberates. “When we embrace the possibility of transcending ourselves through God’s grace, we do not deny our nature, nor do we become less human. On the contrary, as Pope Francis explained, “We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. (MH [128]), Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 8.
3. Missionaries of the ‘Digital Continent’: The Priests and Religious are urged to view the digital world as a ‘new continent to be evangelized,’ requiring missionaries who are ‘mature in the faith’ to guide others in using technology in a ‘human way’ “Indeed, we must to consider the digital world as a new continent and to be evangelized, one that requires generous missionaries who are mature in the faith. In a particular way, we need adults to rediscover their vocation as artisans of education, prepared to work each day patiently, with the support of extensive and shared educational partnerships.” (MH [238]).

Discerned Vow of Digital Sobriety

The encyclical further warns to cultivate alertness and to remain vigilant in this digital age, and to adopt a stance of ‘Digital Sobriety’ (MH [170]). There is an urgent need to promote technologies that strengthen interior freedom by fostering education in ‘digital sobriety’ and the protection of minors, thus countering models that exploit vulnerability. In the practice of religious life, digital sobriety can be practised as an ‘exercise of responsible care’ for the human person and a spiritual discipline used to protect inner freedom against the ‘paradigm’. The encyclical calls us to prudence, rigorous evaluation, and, at times, a slower pace in adopting AI; this does not mean

opposing progress; instead, it is an exercise of responsible care for the human family (MH [106]). The risk extends beyond the misuse of certain technologies. More gravely, the pervasive technocratic paradigm in which we are immersed, amplified by the digital revolution and AI, threatens to normalise an anti-human vision. (MH [112]). In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis also has denounced the growing dominance of a technocratic paradigm in our globalised world: the tendency to let the logic of efficiency, control and profit alone shape personal, social and economic decisions. (Francis, *Laudato Si*, 106). For priests and religious sisters, digital sobriety is not merely a set of rules for limited screen time, but a profound commitment to interior freedom and a necessary component of our prophetic mission in the digital age. Based on the encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, digital sobriety for religious involves several concrete practices:

Guarding Inner Freedom: 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. The encyclical further foster a reflection on truth and education, work and families that we must now consider the impact of the digital revolution on human freedom, addressing risks to both the mental health of individuals and broader social challenges. The encyclical reminds that we should not underestimated, the subtler forms of addiction linked to the ‘digital attention economy’, since platforms and services are often designed to capture users’ time and attention, exploiting their vulnerabilities and weakening their inner freedom. (MH [170]). Religious are called to be more vigilant against the ‘digital attention economy, where platforms are specifically designed to capture a user's time by exploiting human vulnerabilities.

The Educational Alliance: Our Schools and institutions must move beyond just teaching ‘how’ to use AI; they must teach people ‘when and for what purpose it ought not to be used’ (MH [140]). Education, by contrast, is a long journey requiring patience, and therefore needs time for development and for engagement with reality beyond appearances. School is 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. (MH [143]). It is necessary to support the ongoing formation of teachers throughout their professional lives, so that they can engage positively with new technologies, helping students to use them responsibly, critically and creatively, rather than passively succumbing to their influence (MH

[145]). Many educators already report signs of dehumanization, where people may ‘know many things’ but struggle to find direction in their lives, partly due to an inability to connect information with deeper knowledge or maintain a sense of purpose (MH [146]).

Restoring the Human Face: At the heart of history must remain the ‘human face that asks to be gazed upon’ a reality no computational system can replace (MH [233]). The dignity inscribed in each of us by the Holy Spirit can also be seen in our capacity to reflect critically, choose and love freely, and form authentic relationships. No computational system, however sophisticated, can create a heart that gives itself, or a conscience that discerns good from evil. Even when machines excel in efficiency, a human face that asks to be gazed upon remains the center of our history. This human face is the fullness toward which history is moving. It is the mystery of “recapitulation”: the certainty that the Father has decreed to bring all things, those in heaven and those on earth, back to Christ, the one Head (cf. Eph 1:10. (MH [233]). Theologically, the encyclical reinforces that the human person is the image of the Triune God created for relationship and possessing an ‘ontological dignity’ that cannot be earned, justified, or erased by any machine or algorithm. (MH [192]).

Conclusion: The Song of Hope, the Magnificat

The encyclical concludes with the Magnificat, Mary’s song of hope. Priests and religious are called to be ‘weavers of hope’ who are like Mother Mary, interpret history through the eyes of the lowly and the marginalized (MH [244]). Our religious response to Magnifica Humanitas is to work tirelessly on the ‘construction sites of history,’ ensuring that technology serves to build a ‘civilization of love’ rather than new forms of global servitude (MH [186]). A Religious Response to Magnifica Humanitas is an invitation to reflect on the greatness of human dignity and the responsibility of the Church to guide humanity through the opportunities and challenges of Artificial Intelligence with wisdom, faith, and hope. Transitioning from ‘Babel’ to ‘Jerusalem’ involves a profound shift in how communities approach power, technology, and relationship. According to the encyclical, this transition requires moving away from self-affirmation toward shared responsibility and communion.

The Religious Communities are in need to move away from the ‘Babel syndrome,’ which is rooted in pride, the claim to self-sufficiency, and projects conceived without reference to God. Like Nehemiah, the

transition begins with fasting, prayer, and ‘shared discernment’ before taking action. Our Communities need to acknowledge that true fulfillment is not achieved through technological ‘upgrades’ or enhanced self-sufficiency, but through God’s grace and a relationship that liberates.

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