

Spiritual Insights of *Magnifica Humanitas*

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Abstract

The article is an attempt to bring to light the least-explored dimension of the Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, spirituality. The presentation is organised into six headings, excluding an introduction and a conclusion. *Magnifica Humanitas* argues that Humanity must place the God-given dignity of the human person at the centre of technological progress, ensuring that AI serves the common good rather than reducing people to measurable, exploitable datasets. The encyclical is a reminder that working towards social justice is a key part of our faith and Christian spirituality. The Incarnational Spirituality becomes clear in the closing paragraphs of *Magnifica Humanitas* and is present throughout the document. Pope strongly recommends establishing concrete criteria for discernment, which foremost include personal responsibility. The spirituality we need today is a Eucharistic spirituality, that is, a spirituality of ecclesial unity in love. Drawing on the encyclical's title, the text highlights Mary as an icon of humble faith. It encourages individuals to become "weavers of hope" regardless of political or technological turmoil.

Keywords: Spirituality, Great Challenges, Incarnational Spirituality, Discernment, Civilisation of Love, Yearning for God, Eucharistic Spirituality

Introduction

One dimension of *Magnifica Humanitas* that has not yet received as much attention as it should be is the spirituality that undergirds the Leonine analysis of the promise and threat of Artificial Intelligence (AI), among other concerns in our contemporary age. Following the footsteps of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), who initiated a scientific

analysis of the social teachings of the Church with the publication of *Rerum Novarum* on May 15, 1891, Pope Leo XIV continues this great legacy of the Church with the signing of his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, on May 15, 2026, on the 135th anniversary of the publication of *Rerum Novarum*. To show the importance of this socially oriented document, the Pope himself was present for its presentation on May 25, 2026, for the first time in history. In a world where the dignity of human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, is at its lowest ebb, the Pope, through this encyclical, seeks to restore their dignity. Thus, we have the beautiful title, the “Grandeur of Humanity.” Although the document addresses various dimensions of the Church’s social teaching, my focus is on its spiritual dimension.

Great Challenges

Magnifica Humanitas addresses the ethical challenges of AI and tries to defend human dignity, labour rights, and the common good. We are created in the image of God (Gen. 1: 26-27) and have a responsibility to one another, especially to the most vulnerable. *Magnifica Humanitas* argues that Humanity must place the God-given dignity of the human person at the centre of technological progress, ensuring that AI serves the common good rather than reducing people to measurable, exploitable datasets. The encyclical is a modern iteration of Catholic Social Teaching, drawing parallels to Pope Leo XIII’s landmark 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Just as the previous Leo addressed the Industrial Revolution and the exploitation of workers, Pope Leo XIV addresses the digital revolution.

St Augustine uses the image of two cities to define the central conflict that runs throughout history between the self-love that constitutes the City of Man and the divine love that forms the City of God. Pope Leo XIV, the first Augustinian Pope, uses this image in explaining the predicamental situation of modern Humanity: “Humanity, created by God in all its grandeur, is today facing a pivotal choice: either to construct a new Tower of Babel or to build the city in which God and humanity dwell together” (1). In contrast to Babel (Gen.11: 1-9), a tower meant to demonstrate Humanity’s prideful power to reach the heavens, Leo presents Nehemiah’s (Neh. 2: 6) rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls as a model of peaceful cooperation for the glory of and the common good. The project of the construction of the Tower of Babel, a dangerous project with no place for God, eliminating diversity, choosing homogenisation over communion, and uniformity

without unity, collapsed. Whereas the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls began in the context of prayer, having God at the centre, with due permission from authorities and collaboration through the shared responsibility of all concerned. They began by rebuilding relationships, by rediscovering a language of love.

We are challenged to see our relationship with technology in the context of these two images. In itself, technology is neither a solution to human problems nor is it inherently evil. Hence, the basic question is whether technology has the dehumanising 'Babel Syndrome' as its background, or the Nehemian way of transforming diversity into a resource for communion in the context of plurality. Pope speaks clearly about progress. "True progress always stems from a heart open to others, an intelligence willing to listen and a will that seeks what unites rather than what separates" (15). So the challenge before us is to be profoundly human, safeguarding the human grandeur bestowed upon us and revealed in its fullness in Christ.

The encyclical is not inherently anti-technology, but it insists that AI must be regulated and driven by ethical principles. It calls on developers, politicians, and everyday people to work toward an "unarmed peace" and a civilisation of love.

Dimensions of Spirituality

The spirituality of *Magnifica Humanitas* anchors human dignity in our inherent creation in the image of God. The encyclical is a reminder that working towards social justice is a key part of our faith and Christian spirituality. "For the Christian community, social justice is a concrete way of following Jesus and remaining faithful to the Gospel" (77). The Pope's message asks us to work together to address the causes of inequality and injustice both now and as we look to the future. Pope continues: "For this reason, it is necessary to begin a shared discernment process for identifying the spiritual and cultural roots of ongoing transformations" (6). Quoting from *Populorum Progressio* of St Paul VI, Pope Leo XIV says that "Development is integral when it is not limited to the economic sphere, but promotes quality of life in its spiritual, cultural, moral and relational dimensions, while respecting our common home, the diversity of peoples and their ways of life" (83). In the context of modern technological growth, Pope reminds us of the urgent need for a twofold commitment: "on the one hand, a deepening of scientific research; on the other, the exercise of moral and spiritual discernment" (98).

The Pope is fully aware of the spiritual dimension of the postmodern era and warns us against becoming victims of spiritual and cultural blindness. “We live at a time of significant spiritual and cultural blindness. A false pragmatism urges us to sever the roots of our history, as if it were possible to inaugurate a kind of “new creation” detached from the past (204). Pope proposes interreligious dialogue as a new form of spirituality to address world peace. Through this dialogue, believers can draw upon the most authentic sources of their particular spiritual traditions, where there is no room for “sanctified hatred” (223). “In rejecting the mindset of violence, interreligious dialogue plays a decisive role, because at the heart of the great spiritual paths lies a message of peace” (223).

Incarnational Spirituality

The Incarnational spirituality is beautifully narrated in the encyclical (231). There is a thread of “Incarnational Spirituality” that runs throughout the Encyclical. This kind of spirituality prioritises our corporeality, embodiment, and the central Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word. One of the overarching concerns raised in *Magnifica Humanitas* is the danger of discounting our intrinsic embodiment (Horan, 2026). The theme of spirituality does not appear explicitly in *Magnifica Humanitas* until the conclusion, where Leo discusses the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and ways forward for constructing a Christian life for the common good. In this concluding session, the Pope lays out a beautiful vision of the Christian life, which can only be properly understood in terms of Jesus’ own earthly life and ministry. He writes: “At the heart of everything is the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us” (231).

Magnifica Humanitas acknowledges familiar concerns about AI, including job insecurity, information manipulation, privacy violations, ideological bias, autonomous weapons, and a futuristic vision of an “enhanced human being.” But Pope identifies a deeper danger: those human beings may begin to see themselves and others as projects “to be optimised.” He warns us that “When efficiency becomes the ultimate measure of value, human beings are tempted to see themselves as a project to be optimised rather than as persons called to relationship and communion” (112). Against this, the encyclical teaches that human limits such as illness, ageing, suffering, and vulnerability are not simply defects to be corrected; rather, human beings often flourish through their limitations, where they can discover wisdom, experience

the closeness of others, and encounter the Lord (118-119). Therefore, AI should serve Humanity not by tempting us to escape limitation through optimisation, but by supporting a life of “openness and communion, which leads us to desire that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (231).

In fact, so good is the created world and our embodied experience as humans that God entered this world to share in the vulnerability, precarity and community of creaturely life as a human being. This is what it means to talk about an Incarnational Spirituality, and it is clear that *Magnifica Humanitas* conveys this way of seeing ourselves, one another, the rest of creation and God.

Drawing from the rich tradition of recognising God’s grace, building on our embodied human nature, the Pope offers a response grounded in this Incarnational Spirituality: “Humanity-in-all its grandeur and woundedness – must never be replaced or suppressed. We can embrace technological progress that alleviates suffering and unlocks new possibilities, provided we do not abandon the very essence of our Humanity, namely, the capacity for relationship and love. This leads to a crucial question: if an authentic “more than human” exists, where is it to be found? The Christian faith answers that question by pointing to a fulfilment that does not arise from a technological divinisation, but through God’s grace received in Christ” (126).

While this Incarnational Spirituality becomes clear in the closing paragraphs of *Magnifica Humanitas*, it is present throughout the entire text, knitting together the Pope’s wide range of analyses and reflections. For example, in chapter 4, which focuses on what the Pope calls “safeguarding humanity at a time of transformation,” he notes that the concerns raised such as the search for the truth in public life, education in the digital environment, the transformation of work, the fragility of families and new forms of slavery are interconnected and threaten dehumanisation when “technology becomes the ultimate criterion” without the necessary reflection, justice and community required for sound discernment (180). “A genuinely healthy attitude is needed, requiring rhythms that incorporate silence, in-depth study, reading and judicious analysis, for without these elements inner freedom may be compromised” (146). The great threat today is the disembodied Humanity (232). Pope Leo calls his fellow Christians to a renewed appreciation and realisation of their defining confession: the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

Discernment

Discernment, a frequently used expression in Ignatian spirituality, appears twenty-four times in the encyclical. Discernment is the ability to judge, understand, and see situations, people, or truths clearly. It is a holy or prayerful path to find guidance. In the postmodern or post-truth world, discernment has no proper place, and the encyclical strongly recommends it to arrive at mature decisions. The document recommends establishing “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 such as responsible planning, the inclusion of the most vulnerable, the promotion of digital literacy and guiding research and industry toward justice and peace” (14). Listening to the many voices requires spiritual discernment. This discernment invites us to interpret historical changes in light of the Gospel and human expertise (34). Foreseeing the dangers of technological development, Pope suggests that these developments require careful discernment of the anthropological vision that guides them and the ends they pursue (94). Pope strongly recommends establishing concrete criteria for discernment, which foremost include personal responsibility. “Any technology that facilitates attacks without seeing the face of human beings lowers the moral threshold of conflict” (199). Thus, discernment is a key word that runs throughout the document.

Build a new Civilisation of Love through daily action.

Even with machines rapidly excelling in efficiency, the document emphasises the irreplaceable need for genuine closeness, empathy, and community. It warns that digital connectivity can sometimes lead to isolation, and insists that society must pivot from a culture of power to a civilisation of love. All are precious in the eyes of God. Our mission is to testify to the world that we are created in the image of God, and we are duty-bound to protect and promote human dignity. Technological development may transform the world. But the change of heart is possible only through love.

The culture of power must be replaced with the civilisation of love. Technology, detached from ethics and responsibility, is bound to become more detrimental. God created humans in His image, and with the Incarnation, human creation reached its climax. The glory of

humans is rooted in God's ardent love for human beings. Therefore, humans glorify God through their very existence.

In a war-torn world, Pope Leo stresses the importance of creating a civilisation of love. The title of the fifth chapter of the encyclical is 'The Culture of Power and the Civilisation of Love', which emphatically underscores its focus. Through the theme of the 'civilisation of love', Pope develops a new concept of spirituality. This spirituality is rooted in love in a world of hatred and disunity and gives us hope in an age of frustration and fragmentation. The phrase 'the civilisation of love' was coined by St Paul VI (186). Pope Leo reflects that "a subtle temptation may emerge, namely the thought that the problems are too big and we are too small, and that our choices, therefore, cannot make a difference" (212). He continues by saying that no one is without responsibility. He proposes: "We all have our own areas for action, and precisely there – and nowhere else – that we must choose whether to fuel the mentality of force (even if only through indifference, cynicism, lies or hatred), or to preserve the mindset of peace (with truth, moderation, closeness and care)" (212). Human culture is ultimately grounded in spiritual realities that shape our aspirations and guide us through adversity. Pope Leo invites the whole of Humanity to build a city based on love.

Pope proposes five paths for the realisation of the civilisation of love, which is also a public responsibility: "the need to disarm words, building peace through justice, adopting the perspective of victims, cultivating a healthy realism and reviving dialogue and multilateralism" (213). Numbers 214 to 228 explain the above theme and conclude the section with the words: "Let us never be tired of praying for peace and of committing ourselves to achieving it in our relationships and in society" (228). Pope once again reminds the international organisations of their unique role in promoting the civilisation of love. "International organisations, particularly the United Nations, are essential instruments for promoting a civilisation of love, for they can foster dialogue among nations and promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the integral development of peoples, the protection of the most vulnerable, disarmament and the care of creation" (226). The Pope calls for disarming AI, meaning we should not accept that technological power automatically confers the right to govern human lives. Technology should be used to alleviate suffering, but it must be subject to moral and ethical scrutiny rather than allowed to dominate.

To fight against dehumanisation, we must prioritise actions that reflect human dignity, refusing to relinquish life to impersonal forces. The Pope makes an appeal in this regard: “I invite everyone to cherish places and times where physical presence remains crucial, such as shared meals, Christian community gatherings, time spent with the lonely and serving the poor. These are signs of a humanity that continues to believe that every person’s body is a dwelling place of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit” (239). This proposal strongly promotes the civilisation of love. This requires us to reflect that “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” (233). Pope Leo speaks of this as a kind of education we all must undertake as we “learn how to engage with the digital world humanly,” and as we guide our children to develop a sense of responsibility to guard their dignity. What ultimately safeguards Humanity is a civilisation of love, which we build in relationship with God and others. “The civilisation of love will not arise from a single or spectacular gesture, but from the total of small and steadfast acts of fidelity that serve as a bulwark against dehumanisation. It is worthwhile pausing to reflect on some aspects of how we, each in our own way, can cooperate in building the civilisation of love” (213).

Yearning for God

Pope quotes St Augustine’s famous line from *The Confessions* of St Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” This idea supports the encyclical’s teaching that human flourishing cannot be reduced to technological fulfilment; the human heart is ordered toward God (11). God has inscribed in our hearts a desire for happiness that embraces all the dimensions of life. This yearning is beautifully described by the Psalmist: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God” (Psalm 42: 1-2). Again, in Psalm 63, we read: “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water” (Psalm 63: 1-2).

Eucharistic Spirituality

Pope Leo grounds social action in the Eucharist. By partaking in this sacrament, Christians are called to recognise the divine image in every person, combating a culture of power with a “civilisation of love.” The introduction and conclusion of the encyclical show clearly that the vision inspiring, guiding, and sustaining his teaching is foundationally

Christ-centred- indeed, Eucharistic. Thus, the encyclical's very first paragraph confesses: "We Christians lift our eyes to the Incarnate God, knowing that it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of Humanity truly becomes clear. In Jesus Christ, this Humanity in its grandeur becomes the Way, the Truth and the Life, opening the path for each one of us to grow toward fullness." (no.1)

In the conclusion of the encyclical, Pope writes: "The spirituality we need today is a Eucharistic spirituality, that is, a spirituality of ecclesial unity in love. The Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery reveal God entering into our human condition and transforming it through the gift of himself. This gift remains present and active in the Eucharist, in which the Lord gives himself and gathers the Church together, so that his offering becomes the principle of unity and source of new life. It is from this communion that Christian solidarity also arises, since "union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself" (234) (Benedict XVI, 2005, para. 14).

A comprehensive and transformative Eucharistic spirituality opens the disciples to compassion for the myriad needs of Humanity, who, in Christ, discover their infinite dignity as created in the image of God. In *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo insists: "The Eucharist opens us to justice and sharing, with a preferential concern for those who are burdened by poverty or 38ecognizes38tion. And while new economic and technological networks can generate exclusion, isolation and dependencies, the Church – nourished by the Eucharist – is called to make visible a different paradigm, one that preserves human connections, gives a voice to the invisible and ensures that processes are aimed at respecting people's dignity" (235). Eucharistic faith, though deeply mysterious, is far from magical. It works its transforming effect gently and patiently, almost imperceptibly, as befits our embodied existence.

Conclusion

Pope concludes: "I would like to propose a sober yet demanding programme of Christian life with which we can navigate this epochal change in the light of the Gospel. This avenue emerges through contemplating God's plan, living ecclesial unity by partaking of the Eucharist, building a world centred on the common good and praying in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary" (229). The warning from the Apostle Paul to the Church in Ephesus remains relevant. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against

the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). Pope Leo recalls that “the expression ‘more than human’ is not an exclusive domain of technological promise. For centuries, the Christian tradition has maintained that the boundaries of their own nature do not confine human beings; rather, they are called to self-transcendence, not through an escape from reality or a contempt for their limitations, but through their fulfilment in love. Faith recognises an openness toward the ‘beyond’, which originates as a gift from God. This transformation is a work of the Holy Spirit” (12). What saves Humanity is not enhanced self-sufficiency, but a relationship that liberates, a communion that transforms (128).

The encyclical invokes Isaiah’s promise of renewal: “Behold, I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Is. 43:19). This passage supports the encyclical’s call to hope: even amidst confusion and conflict, God is still bringing forth new possibilities for goodness, peace, and communion (210). *Magnifica Humanitas* is a powerful social and synodal appeal to see the world from the perspective of the poor, refugees, and war victims. The text calls for justice, fraternity, and peace to be placed at the heart of public life.

The encyclical challenges the Church to see AI not merely as a technical issue, but as a moral one. If the future of human knowledge is being shaped today, what responsibility does the Church have to ensure that no people, cultures, or communities are left behind? Rather than focusing on technology alone, the encyclical examines the concentration of power, the exploitation of data, and the dignity of those whose voices risk being excluded from the digital future. Drawing on the encyclical’s title, the text highlights Mary as an icon of humble faith. It encourages individuals to become “weavers of hope” regardless of political or technological turmoil.

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