



CAFOD UK offers Q and A on the Encyclical:  
*Magnifica Humanitas*.

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*A better world needs all of us*

## What is Magnifica Humanitas?

### Your questions answered on Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical

25 May 2026

On 25 May 2026 the Vatican released Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, on safeguarding the human person in the time of artificial intelligence.

This Q&A explains some of the context and key messages of the document.

## What is an encyclical?

An encyclical is a letter circulated by the Pope to Catholic churches worldwide. It is sent directly from our Holy Father in Rome to Catholics all over the world and is often addressed to all people of good will, namely non-Catholics who may also want to read the document.

Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* is addressed to all people of goodwill.

Papal encyclicals provide analysis in the light of the Gospel and the Tradition of the Church on relevant issues for the faithful. Previous popes have issued encyclicals on a variety of topics from the study of Scripture (Leo XIII, 1893) to the importance of caring for the earth, our common home (Francis, 2015)

## Why was it signed on 15 May?

On 15 May 1891, Pope Leo XIII released his ground-breaking encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (Of New Things). The text, widely considered foundational to Catholic Social teaching, responded to injustice and exploitation of workers during the Industrial Revolution, articulating tenets such as human dignity, the rights of workers and the pursuit of the common good. Both Pope Pius XI and Pope John XXIII also released important social justice encyclicals on this day, in 1931 and 1961 respectively.

When he was elected, just over a year ago, Pope Leo XIV explained his choice of name demonstrates his commitment to carrying forth the Church's social teaching in the challenges of the modern world.

Presenting *Magnifica Humanitas*, he reflected on this again, saying,

“Like the earlier Leo, I feel entrusted to look upon another huge transformation, with eyes of faith, with lucidity of reason, with openness to mystery and with the cries of the poor and the earth resounding in my heart.”

## What does *Magnifica Humanitas* mean?

*Magnifica Humanitas* means “Magnificent humanity” and is apt for a document about how we preserve the wonder and glory of the human person in the age of artificial intelligence. Pope Leo reminds us all of our dignity as human persons, made in the image and likeness of God.

Our diversity is a richness and all we do must seek the common good of all people, especially those who are poor, vulnerable or marginalised.

## **What is the encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* about?**

Pope Leo reminds us of the common principles that run throughout Catholic Social Doctrine, based in Scripture, from *Rerum Novarum* to the present day. He explores how the principles of dignity, common good, solidarity and subsidiarity can apply to the challenges that we face in this age of rapid technological development.

## **Is this encyclical all about artificial intelligence (AI)?**

Pope Leo clearly views AI as one of the key challenges of our times, but the encyclical is not all about technology. Rather it is about how we respond to the challenges that this technology brings to our world and how we live our lives, in the light of our faith, the Gospel and the history of Catholic teaching. It is a warning about allowing ourselves to build further inequality into our structures and systems, with economic and technological resources being concentrated in a few hands. This could lead to a widening of the gap between the included and excluded, those who can participate and those who do not have access.

Pope Leo is clear that “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.” #9

## **What are some of the most important messages about AI?**

Pope Leo says that the development and use of AI needs responsibility and discernment to ensure that it serves the interests of humanity as a whole.

While reminding us that all that we have is given to us by God to sustain life, and that every person now and in future generations has a right to these gifts, he widens this out to include immaterial and cultural goods, such as these new technologies.

Pope Leo also affirms that we must regulate these technological developments in order to protect the environment. He condemns the exploitation of people for the digital economy including underpaid data labellers, child miners extracting rare-earth elements, and human trafficking victims. He warns too against placing the burden of our increased consumption on those who are poor and on future generations.

He also states that AI is not morally neutral and should only be viewed as a tool. We must be careful not to delegate our decision-making to something that cannot experience life or feel hope, joy, fear or pain. AI does not know compassion, mercy, forgiveness or hope of change. We must build in the right social and moral vision right from the start, rather than thinking that using the tool “well” is enough. It is not just about how we use AI, but how AI is developed, and by whom, as it is has the possibility to shape our culture, our imagination, and therefore our lives.

## **What does *Magnifica Humanitas* say about migration?**

Pope Leo talks about how the way that we treat migrants, refugees and those who are forced to move due to poverty, violence or climate change reveals a lot about our society. It shows whether our actions are driven by fear or by a sense of community and care for one another.

He calls for the creation of safe and legal routes for migrants, dignified conditions for receiving them and genuine pathways to integration. But he also reminds us that we should address the root causes that lead to forced migration in the first place, by promoting peace and addressing economic injustice and the climate crisis.

## What does Pope Leo say about progress?

Like his predecessors, Pope Leo is clear that true progress is not just about material wellbeing, but about the wellbeing of the whole person. This includes a spiritual and moral dimension as well as ensuring that basic practical needs are met. This progress is measured by the dignity of each person and the good of all peoples.

This progress is not something that we can achieve alone, as he says:

“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

Exploring the contrast between the two biblical stories of the Tower of Babel and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, we come to understand that we must place God and human dignity at the centre, collaborate, listen to one another’s concerns and take shared responsibility. True progress means choosing to work together in the presence of God, rather than trying to dominate.

## What does this encyclical say about peace?

*Magnifica Humanitas* contrasts the “culture of power” and the “civilisation of love.”

In the “culture of power” we see increased division and polarisation, a normalisation of war and the prospect of AI making rapid decisions about life and death detached from ethical considerations or moral responsibility.

In this context, while acknowledging the right to self-defence, Pope Leo argues that the “just war” theory, “which has all too often been used to justify any kind of war, is now outdated”, writing that today “humanity possesses far more effective and capable tools for promoting human life and resolving conflicts, such as dialogue, diplomacy and forgiveness”. #192

The “civilisation of love” offers a different path; building peace through justice, dialogue and recognising the dignity of each person. Each of us can play our part.

“The civilisation of love will not arise from a single or spectacular gesture, but from the sum total of small and steadfast acts of fidelity that serve as a bulwark against dehumanisation.” #213

## What does *Magnifica Humanitas* mean for the Catholic community?

The encyclical is a reminder that working towards social justice is a key part of our faith:

“For the Christian community, social justice is a concrete way of following Jesus and remaining faithful to the Gospel.” #79

We cannot remain to the side and hope for the best but must actively participate in the creation of a better world, where no one is excluded and all are able to flourish. The benefits of our human creativity can and must reach all of us.

We are called to live in solidarity and ensure social justice. We are asked to consider how we can move forward together and make the world better for everyone.

As Pope Leo XIV writes in his closing reflection on Mary's *Magnificat*:

With the same faith as Mary, let us become 'weavers of hope' in our world, sharing who we are and what we have, so that the presence of Jesus may grow among us and his Kingdom take shape. In the humble fidelity of daily life, even the era of AI can become a time in which the Holy Spirit brings about the civilisation of love in our lives.

MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS #245

Archbishop Richard Moth of Westminster welcomed the encyclical and echoed Pope Leo's reminder that "we are made in the image of God and have a responsibility to one another, especially the most vulnerable."

## **How can we respond to this encyclical?**

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.

CAFOD seeks to build a better world, and we believe that it needs all of us to play our part.

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