



MAIN ARTICLES

From *Rerum Novarum* to *Magnifica Humanitas*: Artificial Intelligence, Integral Human Development and the Preservation of the Human Person in the Early Magisterium of Leo XIV

De Rerum Novarum à Magnifica Humanitas: inteligência artificial, desenvolvimento humano integral e preservação da pessoa humana no magistério inicial de Leão XIV

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ABSTRACT: Since the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, the Church has interpreted the major transformations of modernity in light of human dignity and the common good. In the context of the sixtieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, this article offers a pedagogical-anthropological reading of selected texts from the early magisterium of Leo XIV on artificial intelligence, interpreted as an emerging and still developing magisterial framework. In light of the subsequent publication of *Magnifica Humanitas*, the study does not seek to present a closed or definitive account of Leo XIV's thought, but rather to identify the initial anthropological and educational coordinates through which his pontificate addresses the challenge of preserving the human person in the age of artificial intelligence. Using a hermeneutical-interpretative approach, it analyses a corpus of addresses and messages devoted to education, youth, technological ethics, and the mission of the university. The study identifies emerging anthropological and pedagogical emphases through which Leo XIV approaches artificial intelligence not only as a technical tool, but

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also as a cultural environment that reconfigures identity, attention, and relationality. It argues that the Church's response to the digital revolution requires a solid anthropology centred on human dignity, discernment, character formation, and the irreplaceable role of the educator.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence. Catholic Social Teaching. Human Dignity. Integral Development. Leo XIV.

RESUMO: Desde a publicação de *Rerum Novarum*, a Igreja tem interpretado as grandes transformações da modernidade à luz da dignidade humana e do bem comum. No contexto do sexagésimo aniversário de *Populorum Progressio*, este artigo oferece uma leitura pedagógico-antropológica de textos selecionados do magistério inicial de Leão XIV sobre a inteligência artificial, interpretado como um marco magisterial emergente e ainda em desenvolvimento. À luz da publicação posterior de *Magnifica Humanitas*, o estudo não procura apresentar uma visão fechada ou definitiva do pensamento de Leão XIV, mas identificar as coordenadas antropológicas e educacionais iniciais por meio das quais o seu pontificado aborda o desafio de preservar a pessoa humana na era da inteligência artificial. Mediante uma abordagem hermenêutico-interpretativa, analisa-se um corpus de discursos e mensagens dedicados à educação, à juventude, à ética tecnológica e à missão da universidade. O estudo identifica ênfases antropológicas e pedagógicas emergentes por meio das quais Leão XIV aborda a inteligência artificial não apenas como uma ferramenta técnica, mas também como um ambiente cultural que reconfigura a identidade, a atenção e a relacionalidade. Sustenta-se que a resposta da Igreja à revolução digital exige uma antropologia sólida, centrada na dignidade humana, no discernimento, na formação do caráter e no papel insubstituível do educador.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Inteligência Artificial. Doutrina Social da Igreja. Dignidade Humana. Desenvolvimento Integral. Leão XIV.

Introduction

Since Leo XIII published *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, the Church has sought to interpret the decisive “revolutions” of modernity—industrial, social, political, cultural, and now technological—from the perspective of human dignity, the common good, and the moral vocation of institutions. In this long arc of discernment, the current digital transformation may be read as a new revolutionary threshold: one that not only affects production and communication, but also reshapes attention, identity, relationality, and the conditions under which human beings learn, judge, and act. In the context of the sixtieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* (1967), Paul VI's call for the “integral development of man and of all men” acquires renewed urgency. In a world marked by artificial intelligence, socio-environmental vulnerability, and the crisis of democracies, the question of how to preserve the human dimension has become one of the central challenges for the social sciences and the humanities (Agejas, 2003, 2017).

The emergence of artificial intelligence reopens that ecclesial tradition of discernment under new historical conditions. If the industrial revolution compelled Catholic thought to confront the dignity of labour, the social question, and the ethical limits of economic power—concerns already central to *Populorum Progressio* (n. 26-28)—the present digital revolution raises analogous questions regarding education, freedom, truth, relationality, and the status of the human person in technologically mediated societies. As Andrade has observed in his reading of the development of Catholic social teaching, this tradition advances not by abandoning its principles, but by reinterpreting them in the face of new historical configurations (Andrade, 1991). Paul VI's affirmation that "peoples themselves are the authors and primary subjects of their own development" (PP, n. 77) remains as challenging and timely as ever in the age of algorithmic culture.

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence and digital ecosystems has profoundly reshaped the ways in which individuals come to know, relate to one another, construct their identity, and participate in social life. Technological acceleration introduces an ambivalent horizon in which opportunities related to creativity, accessibility, and efficiency intersect with risks that affect human dignity, interior freedom, critical capacity, and community cohesion.

In the educational sphere, this question acquires particular urgency, for artificial intelligence not only adds new tools to university work, but also fundamentally transforms the aims of education, the status of knowledge, the modes of learning, and the very figure of the teacher (Sánchez Rojo; Martín-Lucas; Alonso Sainz, 2024). From various pedagogical and philosophical perspectives, it has been argued that technology embodies implicit anthropologies and epistemologies that shape experience even before individuals interpret it (Miró López; De la Rosa Ruiz, 2025). The idea that media are not neutral and that technologies reconfigure attention, perception, desire, and the sense of effort places the educational task before the need for deep discernment capable of articulating a robust ethical and anthropological response (Gil Cantero, 2022, p. 20). In this vein, Newman's reflections in *The Idea of a University* emphasise that education does not consist in accumulating information, but in forming the mind to think critically and act with wisdom, strengthening moral judgement in the face of technical specialisation (Newman, 1852, p. 152-153)¹.

Recent magisterial reflection has insisted on the same criterion. In *Antiqua et Nova*, Francis states that education in artificial intelligence "should aim above all at promoting critical thinking. Users of all ages, but especially the

¹ Quotes from Newman have been taken from the Spanish version of his work and translated by the authors. For the Spanish version, please see: NEWMAN, John Henry. *La idea de la universidad*: Definida e ilustrada. Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2025.

young, need to develop a discerning approach to the use of data and content collected on the web or produced by artificial intelligence systems” (AN, n. 82). Critical thinking becomes an indispensable condition for the ethical use of technologies, understood as the capacity to analyse, evaluate, and discern in a rational and ethical manner, oriented towards the common good.

Otherwise, as Nussbaum warns, there is a risk of producing “generations of useful machines, instead of complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticise tradition and understand the meaning of another person’s sufferings and achievements” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 20)². Every scientific discipline implies, either explicitly or implicitly, an anthropological, epistemological, and ethical vision that is not neutral. This requires the university to educate in such a way that human dignity is never subordinated to technical efficiency or digital pragmatism (García del Dujo *et al.*, 2021).

The Church’s tradition has always upheld the same criterion. In *Sapientiae Christianae* (n. 42), Leo XIII already emphasises that education must form not only the mind, but also the heart and the virtues, orienting action towards the common good. Benedict XVI (2008, unpaginated) reinforces this vision by affirming that education must cultivate the interiority and moral freedom of young people, adding in *Caritas in Veritate* (n. 9) that “only with charity, illuminated by the light of reason and faith, is it possible to achieve development goals that are more human and more humanising”. Pope Francis, in *Christus Vivit* (2019) and in his messages on digital culture, reminds us that education must nurture young people’s interiority and moral conscience.

Within this horizon, and in continuity with the social and educational concerns articulated by Leo XIII, Paul VI, Benedict XVI, and Francis, the early magisterium of Pope Leo XIV may be approached as a developing point of reference for interpreting the impact of artificial intelligence on education. This reading must remain necessarily provisional, given the recent beginning of his pontificate; nevertheless, the publication of *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026) confirms the relevance of the anthropological and pedagogical concerns already present in his first addresses, especially the need to safeguard human dignity, truth, interior freedom, and the formative role of educational communities. His addresses to universities, educators, young people, and international bodies devoted to the ethics of technology converge in suggesting that AI cannot be understood merely as a functional tool, but rather as a cultural environment that shapes human identity. In this respect, Leo XIV’s initial reflections can be read in continuity with Paul

² Quotes from Nussbaum have been taken from the Spanish version of her work and translated by the authors. For the Spanish version, please see: NUSSBAUM, Martha C. *Sin fines de lucro: Por qué la democracia necesita de las humanidades*. Buenos Aires: Katz Editores, 2010.

VI's insistence in *Populorum Progressio* on integral human development as an adequate response to the challenges of the modern world.

Against this background, the present study offers an articulated reading of the early magisterium of Leo XIV in order to identify the main anthropological, pedagogical, and ethical insights that emerge from his texts and to assess their contribution to preserving the human dimension in higher education. The analysis argues that character formation, the reconstruction of interiority, and the consolidation of teacher identity are decisive elements for addressing the challenges posed by artificial intelligence.

Table 1. *From Rerum Novarum to Magnifica Humanitas: social challenges and anthropological criteria in Catholic Social Teaching*

Pope / Document	Historical challenge	Main anthropological concern	Relevance for this article
Leo XIII, <i>Rerum Novarum</i>	Industrial revolution and labour question	Dignity of work and worker	Establishes the Church's method of reading modern "new things"
Paul VI, <i>Populorum Progressio</i>	Global inequality and development	Integral development of every person and all peoples	Provides the concept of integral human development
John Paul II, <i>Laborem Exercens</i> / <i>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</i>	Globalisation, labour and structural injustice	Person as subject of work and development	Deepens the social and ethical dimension of development
Benedict XVI, <i>Caritas in Veritate</i>	Globalisation, economy and technology	Development guided by charity, truth and reason	Links technical progress to moral responsibility
Francis, <i>Laudato Si'</i> , <i>Fratelli Tutti</i> , <i>Antiqua et Nova</i>	Technocratic paradigm, ecological crisis, digital culture	Human dignity, fraternity, care and critical thinking	Prepares the ecclesial reflection on AI and human intelligence
Leo XIV, <i>Magnifica Humanitas</i>	Artificial intelligence as new "res nova"	Custody of the human person in the digital age	Confirms the need for education, discernment, truth and human-centred AI

1 Methodology

1.1 Hermeneutical–interpretative approach

The present study adopts a hermeneutical–interpretative approach, characteristic of the philosophy of education, in order to identify the anthropological and pedagogical meanings implicit in the early magisterium of Pope Leo XIV. This methodological perspective is particularly

appropriate for the object under analysis, since the texts considered here do not merely provide doctrinal affirmations or practical recommendations, but also articulate a vision of the person, education, technology, and the common good. In this sense, the magisterium is understood as a discursive framework that conveys values, criteria, and normative orientations regarding the human person, rather than as a strictly doctrinal or juridical corpus.

The aim of this approach is not to reconstruct in detail the historical circumstances surrounding each papal intervention, nor to offer an exhaustive philological commentary on the selected documents. Rather, it seeks to understand how these texts illuminate contemporary educational challenges, especially those related to the preservation of the human dimension in the face of artificial intelligence. The hermeneutical task, therefore, consists in interpreting the anthropological assumptions, pedagogical concerns, and ethical orientations that underlie the papal discourse, and in examining their relevance for the university and for educational institutions more broadly.

The analysis focuses on identifying conceptual gestures, thematic recurrences, semantic emphases, and ethical orientations present in the addresses and messages under study, thereby drawing out their normative and anthropological contribution to the educational and social sphere. Special attention is given not only to explicit statements about artificial intelligence, but also to the broader language through which Leo XIV frames the meaning of education, the task of educators, the formation of young people, and the place of technology within human development. This makes it possible to situate individual interventions within a wider intellectual and ecclesial horizon.

The reading is carried out in a comparative and systematic manner, articulating the various documents around a coherent vision of the value of the person, the educational mission, and the meaning of technology from a humanistic perspective. Comparative reading makes it possible to observe continuities and nuances across texts addressed to different audiences and occasions, while systematic reading helps to organise those elements into a unified interpretative framework. In this way, the magisterium is approached not as a series of isolated statements, but as a developing set of reflections that together configure an educational and anthropological perspective on the digital age.

Rather than merely identifying the presence of predefined concepts in papal texts, this study asks which anthropological themes related to artificial intelligence emerge as central in the magisterium of Pope Leo XIV, how these themes are articulated within different educational and ethical contexts, and to what extent they confirm, nuance, or challenge the

initial assumptions. The method is thus interpretative in a strong sense: it does not reduce the documents to a catalogue of terms but seeks to clarify the internal logic through which Leo XIV understands the relationship between technological change, human dignity, moral formation, and the educational vocation of institutions.

1.2 Corpus and selection criteria

The corpus analysed brings together a set of addresses, messages, and educational interventions directed to different spheres closely related to the central concerns of this study: education, youth, childhood, higher education, and the ethical governance of technology. The selection of these documents responds to a thematic criterion rather than to a merely chronological one. Although all of them belong to the early magisterium of Pope Leo XIV, they were chosen above all because they make it possible to reconstruct a coherent anthropological and pedagogical horizon from which the Pope interprets artificial intelligence and its implications for the human person.

Among the documents centred on education and the university mission are the *Address to the Jubilee of Educators* (31 October 2025), the *Address to the Members of ODUICAL* (31 October 2025), the *Address to the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (15 May 2025), the *Message to the International Federation of Catholic Universities (FIUC)* (21 July 2025), the *Address for the Inauguration of the Academic Year at the Pontifical Lateran University* (14 November 2025), and the Apostolic Letter *Disegnare nuove mappe* (27 October 2025). These texts are especially relevant because they articulate Leo XIV's understanding of education not only as transmission of knowledge, but as moral, cultural, and spiritual formation within institutional settings.

The texts more directly centred on artificial intelligence and ethical governance comprise the *Message on Artificial Intelligence: Ethical Criteria for a Human-Centred Development* (17 June 2025) and the *Message to the Builders AI Forum* (3 November 2025). These documents are particularly significant because they address artificial intelligence explicitly, not only as a technical innovation, but as a cultural and civilisational challenge requiring ethical discernment, anthropological clarity, and institutional responsibility. Their inclusion allows the study to bring into dialogue those texts in which Leo XIV addresses education directly with those in which he reflects more explicitly on technological change.

The corpus was therefore delimited according to three complementary criteria: first, the thematic relevance of the documents to the relationship between artificial intelligence, education, and human dignity; second, their representative value within the early magisterium of Leo XIV; and third, their capacity to illuminate the anthropological and pedagogical implica-

tions of contemporary technological transformations. This selection does not aim at exhaustiveness, but at interpretative consistency. The intention is to work with a corpus sufficiently broad to reveal recurrent themes and sufficiently focused to sustain a coherent analysis.

Because *Magnifica Humanitas* was published after the initial composition and evaluation of this article, it has not been treated as a replacement for the original corpus, but as a subsequent magisterial text that confirms, deepens, and clarifies several of the themes identified in the selected addresses and messages. Its inclusion in the revised version therefore functions as a hermeneutical point of confirmation rather than as the exclusive object of analysis. This methodological decision also requires caution: the article does not claim to offer a definitive synthesis of Leo XIV's magisterium, but rather an interpretative reading of its first anthropological and pedagogical orientations in relation to artificial intelligence.

This study intentionally engages primarily with Latin-Iberian scholarship, insofar as this intellectual tradition has been particularly attentive to the anthropological and educational implications of technology within Catholic social thought. Such a choice also responds to the conceptual proximity between this field of scholarship and the concerns that structure the present article, especially those related to integral human development, moral formation, and the humanistic mission of educational institutions.

1.3 Methodological synthesis

The methodology is articulated in four interrelated dimensions, each of which highlights the humanistic horizon that guides the study. First, the anthropological foundations are examined, taking human dignity as a non-negotiable criterion and understanding the person as relational, embodied, vulnerable, and morally responsible. This dimension provides the interpretative basis for resisting reductive conceptions of the human being in technological environments, especially those that tend to equate intelligence with computation or personhood with functionality.

Second, education is approached as formation in wisdom, discernment, and integral development. From this perspective, education cannot be reduced to the transmission of information or the acquisition of technical competences alone; rather, it concerns the formation of judgement, character, and interior freedom. This dimension is particularly important for assessing the educational implications of artificial intelligence within a framework shaped by the Catholic intellectual and social tradition.

Third, artificial intelligence is analysed as a cultural environment that shapes identity, desire, perception, and social interaction, generating both

risks and opportunities that require an ethical framework centred on the person. The question is therefore not limited to the use of particular tools but extends to the anthropological and symbolic transformations introduced by algorithmic culture and to the need for a critical response capable of preserving what is properly human.

Fourth, attention is given to educational communities in the post-digital society, in which families, schools, and universities share responsibility for safeguarding truth, accompanying processes of growth, and resisting dehumanisation. In this sense, the study considers institutions not merely as functional structures, but as communities of formation in which the human person can be guided, protected, and educated in freedom.

Given the hermeneutical and qualitative nature of the study, the overall argument follows a thematic–interpretative logic rather than a strictly empirical IMRAD model. Nevertheless, a structured presentation inspired by IMRAD conventions has been adopted in order to facilitate analytical rigour, methodological transparency, and the readability of the interpretative process. This choice also reflects the conviction that humanistic research benefits from clear formal organisation, even when its central task is interpretative rather than experimental. Accordingly, the article advances by identifying recurring themes, organising them into coherent analytical units, and interpreting their relevance for contemporary debates on education, technology, and the preservation of the human person.

2 Results

2.1 Anthropological foundations: dignity, relationality and vulnerability

Within this framework, anthropology and education are intrinsically linked: the way the human person is understood implicitly determines what is considered worth teaching, how formation is conceived, and which educational practices are legitimised. No educational project is anthropologically neutral. Every account of learning, autonomy, intelligence, and human flourishing presupposes a certain vision of the person, of his or her relational constitution, and of the ends towards which education should be directed. For this reason, any serious assessment of artificial intelligence in educational contexts requires prior anthropological clarification.

The analysis of the selected texts allows us to identify emerging anthropological emphases centred on human dignity, relationality, and vulnerability, in continuity with Paul VI's vision of the "integral development of man and of all men" (PP, n. 14). In the *Address to the Foundation for*

Childhood and Adolescence (13 November 2025) and in the *Message on Artificial Intelligence: Ethical Criteria for a Human-Centred Development* (17 June 2025), Leo XIV emphasises that the human person is irreducible to data, algorithms, or computational models. Such an affirmation is not merely rhetorical. It establishes a fundamental anthropological criterion: the person exceeds functional description and cannot be adequately understood through categories derived exclusively from calculation, prediction, or performance. These emphases are subsequently reinforced in *Magnifica Humanitas*, where Leo XIV insists that the dignity of the person does not depend on capacity, productivity, social role, or performance, but precedes and exceeds all such criteria.

The Pontiff warns that “artificial intelligence must not affect fundamental freedoms such as religious freedom”, underscoring that all technological innovation must be oriented “towards the common good, justice, and truth” (Leo XIV, 2025c, unpaginated). In continuity with the Christian social tradition, Leo XIV insists that “AI must serve human dignity”, ensuring that technological devices do not “undermine personal relationship” (Leo XIV, 2025d, unpaginated). These statements show that, in his view, the ethical evaluation of technology cannot be reduced to questions of efficiency, utility, or innovation alone. Rather, it must begin from the recognition that the human person is always an end and never merely a variable within a system of optimisation.

This anthropological perspective also gives a central place to relationality. The person is not conceived as an isolated individual defined by productivity or autonomous choice alone, but as a being formed through bonds, dependence, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. In this respect, Leo XIV’s vision resonates with the ethics of care promoted by Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) and with Newman’s understanding of the person as central to education (1909). Education, therefore, cannot be interpreted simply as the transfer of content or the acquisition of competences; it is also the formation of persons through meaningful relationships, moral guidance, and institutional belonging.

Finally, vulnerability appears not as a secondary theme, but as a central interpretative criterion. The vulnerability of children and young people is presented as a decisive reason for ethical vigilance: technology must protect and accompany their growth, avoiding the amplification of fragilities (Barrios Tao; Díaz Pérez; Guerra, 2020; Riart, 2025; Bekerman, 2024). In this sense, vulnerability is not understood merely as weakness, but as a constitutive dimension of human existence that calls for protection, accompaniment, and responsibility. This emphasis reinforces the humanistic core of Leo XIV’s early magisterium: artificial intelligence must be evaluated not only according to what it can do, but according to what it does to persons, relationships, and the conditions for integral human development.

2.2 Education as formation in wisdom and discernment

In his *Address to the Jubilee of Educators* (Leo XIV, 2025a, unpaginated) and in his inaugural address for the opening of the academic year at the Pontifical Lateran University (Leo XIV, 2025b, unpaginated), Leo XIV distinguishes clearly between information and wisdom, insisting that to educate does not mean simply to transmit data, but to form the criteria that enable a critical interpretation of digital and algorithmic content. This distinction is decisive in the contemporary educational context, where the abundance of information and the speed of technological mediation can easily obscure the deeper aims of formation. For Leo XIV, education must help students not only to access knowledge, but to judge, order, and integrate it within a meaningful vision of life.

The integral formation of the person therefore requires cultivating interiority, moral conscience, responsibility, and the capacity for discernment, as well as orienting desire towards authentic ends. In this perspective, discernment is not a merely private or subjective operation, but an intellectual and moral habit that makes it possible to distinguish between what is efficient and what is good, between what is available and what is worthy, and between what is technologically possible and what is humanly desirable. Education is thus presented as a task of forming judgement, not merely of facilitating access to content.

Educators are presented as guides and witnesses, promoting a form of knowledge that prioritises truth, meaning, and ethical inquiry over mere technological efficiency. Their role is not exhausted by technical mediation or by the management of learning processes. Rather, they accompany students in the formation of criteria, in the exercise of freedom, and in the search for truth. In this sense, Leo XIV places the educational relationship itself at the centre of the pedagogical task, reaffirming the irreducibly human character of teaching in a cultural context increasingly shaped by automation and algorithmic delegation.

This approach directly echoes *Populorum Progressio*'s vision of development as something that is not merely economic, but also educational, cultural, and spiritual, and therefore concerned with the full flourishing of the human person. Development, in this tradition, cannot be reduced to growth, productivity, or technical progress alone; it must include the formation of conscience, the expansion of human responsibility, and the cultivation of wisdom. The theological critique of the ideology of capitalist progress formulated in PP n. 26-28—denouncing the subordination of human labour to economic efficiency—finds its contemporary analogue in the subordination of human consciousness to algorithmic optimisation. What is at stake, therefore, is not only the use of new tools, but the defence of a truly human form of education capable of resisting reductionist models of intelligence, success, and progress.

Magnifica Humanitas deepens this point by stressing that education in the use of artificial intelligence must also include the capacity to decide when and for what purposes not to use it. This nuance is decisive, because it shifts the educational question from mere digital competence to moral discernment, self-limitation, and the protection of interior freedom.

2.3 AI as a cultural environment: identity and the risk of dehumanization

In the messages addressed to young people during the Jubilee of Young People (29 July–3 August 2025), Leo XIV notes that algorithms not only provide tools but also create ecosystems of meaning that shape imagination, desire, self-esteem, and the perception of freedom (Leo XIV, 2025e, unpaginated). He identifies risks such as cognitive superficiality, dependency, identity fragmentation, and algorithmic manipulation, while also recognising opportunities for creativity, accessibility, and collaboration. Nonetheless, these opportunities can flourish only if artificial intelligence is integrated within an ethical framework that preserves the primacy of the person. In this sense, artificial intelligence is not presented merely as an external instrument, but as a formative environment that influences habits of attention, patterns of self-understanding, and modes of social interaction. In this same vein, Zuboff (2019) uses the concept of surveillance capitalism to warn of the risks of algorithmic dehumanisation. This idea is later developed in *Magnifica Humanitas* through the notion of an “ecology of communication”, which broadens the analysis of AI beyond individual use and situates it within the formation of attention, public truth, institutional responsibility, and the integration of knowledge in schools and universities.

2.4 Educational communities in the post-digital society

In the Apostolic Letter *Disegnare nuove mappe* (Leo XIV, 2025f) and in his message to FIUC (Leo XIV, 2025g), Leo XIV emphasises that families, schools, and universities share the responsibility of safeguarding truth, promoting dialogue, and sustaining processes of human growth. Leo XIII had already noted that education must form not only the mind but also the virtues and the heart:

For we were created in the divine image and likeness, and are impelled, by our very nature, to the enjoyment of our Creator. But not by bodily motion or effort do we make advance toward God, but through acts of the soul, that is, through knowledge and love (SapCh, n. 1).

Education therefore requires relational presence, accompaniment, and stable bonds, making educational communities spaces in which the person can resist digital solitude, cultivate interior freedom, and develop a mea-

ningful vision of his or her life. In *Magnifica Humanitas*, this responsibility is expressed with particular clarity: schools are not called to imitate the speed of the digital world, but to offer what the digital environment cannot provide by itself: shared time for learning and reliable relationships. This formulation strengthens the article's claim that educational communities are not merely places of instruction, but spaces of humanisation. In this perspective, educational institutions are not functional settings for the delivery of knowledge alone, but communities of formation in which truth, responsibility, and human dignity are actively preserved. They constitute themselves as guardians of meaning, ethics, and humanisation in the face of contemporary technological challenges.

3 Discussion

3.1 Recovering character education in the age of AI

The combined reading of the results shows that artificial intelligence tends to erode certain virtues fundamental to education and to the integral formation of the person, such as sustained attention, perseverance, intellectual honesty, temperance, and prudence. In this sense, the challenge posed by AI is not limited to the transformation of tools or learning environments, but extends to the habits, dispositions, and forms of judgement through which persons are educated. The magisterium of Pope Leo XIV converges with that of Pope Francis, both emphasising the need to recover character education, understood not as moralism but as an indispensable condition for the exercise of human freedom and for resisting algorithmic dehumanisation (Francis, 2019; Leo XIV, 2025a; Leo XIV, 2025h).

In the texts analysed, and more explicitly in *Magnifica Humanitas*, character formation appears within an anthropological framework, capable of sustaining human essence under technological pressure. Moral education thus becomes a task of reconstructing interiority, providing criteria for critically discerning the content and dynamics characteristic of algorithmic culture, orienting desire towards authentic ends, and strengthening the capacity for free and responsible decision-making (Leo XIV, 2025i, unpaginated). In this respect, the question of character is inseparable from the question of freedom: without habits of discernment, self-command, and moral attention, the subject risks becoming increasingly vulnerable to technological forms of heteronomy masked as convenience or efficiency.

Leo XIV's approach converges with the international resurgence of character education from neo-Aristotelian perspectives (Yacek; Jonas,

2025) and with the OECD's emerging shift from an education centred on labour-market competencies towards an education oriented to human flourishing. The cultivation of Aristotelian *phronesis* is presented as an indispensable educational goal (Kristjánsson, 2023), since it enables persons to deliberate well about the ends of action and not merely about the means. This conviction is deeply consonant with *Populorum Progressio's* understanding of development as requiring wisdom and moral formation, not only economic growth.

3.2 *The substantive role of teachers beyond the label of 'facilitators of learning'*

The emergence of AI poses the risk of reducing the teaching profession to the merely technical function of a facilitator, focused exclusively on the management of digital content. In contrast, in his recent addresses Leo XIV highlights the importance of teachers who accompany their students through personal relationships and the transmission of cultural knowledge rooted in tradition—an endeavour that, in a world increasingly shaped by emotional immediacy and instant gratification, becomes distinctly countercultural. As he notes:

Artificial intelligence, in particular, with its technical, cold and standardized knowledge, can further cut off students who are already isolated, giving them the illusion that they do not need others or, worse still, the feeling that they are not worthy of them. The role of educators, on the other hand, is a human endeavor; and the very joy of the educational process is fully human engagement, a “flame to melts our souls together, and out of many to make but one” (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, 8,13) (Leo XIV, 2025a, unpaginated).

The encyclical also reinforces the need to rethink the figure of the teacher in light of integral education. Rather than replacing the teacher with technological mediation, Leo XIV calls for the lifelong formation of educators so that they may help students engage with new technologies responsibly, critically, and creatively.

In this regard, Leo XIV's ideas resonate with those of Taylor (1989), according to whom moral identity is shaped by qualitative judgements about what is truly worthy of being, not simply by what is instrumentally effective or immediately available. Teachers are thus conceived as cultural agents, custodians of meaning, and witnesses of humanity, whose mission exceeds the mere role of facilitator, a term commonly used in supranational documents (Leo XIV, 2025j; Leo XIV, 2025k). They accompany processes of growth, awaken questions of meaning, integrate different forms of knowledge, and bear witness to ways of life:

Finding one's place in the world seems to be even harder today, as societies are constantly changing, traditional values are frequently looked down upon,

and technology while containing positive elements can also leave us more isolated from each other (Leo XIV, 2025l, unpaginated).

Reclaiming this conception of the professional identity of teachers not only preserves the human dimension within educational environments, but also constitutes an antidote to algorithmic pressure, ensuring that technology serves educational and human ends rather than determining them. In this perspective, the teacher is not reducible to a manager of learning processes but remains a formative presence whose authority is rooted in accompaniment, judgement, and responsibility. This conviction aligns with the logic of *Populorum Progressio*, (n. 14-16): just as Paul VI insisted that authentic development must be guided by human wisdom and moral responsibility, so too must the development of AI be guided by educators who embody and transmit an integral vision of the human person.

Conclusion

The early magisterium of Leo XIV, now illuminated by *Magnifica Humanitas*, offers significant initial criteria for education in the age of artificial intelligence. Without claiming to provide a definitive synthesis of a still developing pontificate, this article has identified that his first interventions identify human dignity, truth, discernment, character formation, and the irreplaceable role of educators and educational communities as central coordinates for preserving the human person in digital culture. Education cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of information or subordinated to the logic of algorithmic efficiency; rather, it must orient formation towards wisdom, discernment, and the virtues, teaching prudence, honesty, temperance, and courage so that students may navigate digital environments critically (Leo XIV, 2025a; Leo XIV, 2025i).

AI, conceived as a cultural environment, influences attention, desire, and self-perception; therefore, education must accompany students in understanding these dynamics, strengthening interiority, autonomy, and critical capacity, and fostering resilience in the face of algorithmic manipulation. This entails prioritising depth over immediacy, promoting reflective thinking, and cultivating solid criteria in the face of the pressures of digital culture (Leo XIV, 2025k; Leo XIV, 2025h).

Character formation and the consolidation of a robust teacher identity are necessary conditions for preserving the human dimension. Educators must be a presence, not a process, offering availability, accompaniment, and humanity—qualities that no automated system can replace—and acting

as cultural agents who guide, model hope and creativity, and foster the construction of meaning and purpose in the lives of students (Leo XIV, 2025l; Leo XIV, 2025m).

Finally, the educational community emerges as the privileged space in which integral formation is sustained, dehumanisation is resisted, and relationships that foster growth, responsibility, and freedom are promoted. On the sixtieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, Leo XIV's magisterium invites us to renew Paul VI's prophetic insight: artificial intelligence can contribute to a more human culture only if it is integrated within an ethical and pedagogical framework that prioritises the uniqueness of the person, the education of character, and the strengthening of teacher identity—thus ensuring that technology serves the humanisation of the educational experience rather than reducing it to what is quantifiable or predictable (Leo XIV, 2025n; Leo XIV, 2025o). In this sense, the “new humanism” called for by *Populorum Progressio* remains not only relevant but necessary: a humanism adequate to the revolutions of each age, and today, equal to the challenge of artificial intelligence.

Abbreviations

AN	= <i>Antiqua et Nova</i> : Note on the Relationship between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence
CV	= Encyclical Letter <i>Caritas in Veritate</i>
ChV	= Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation <i>Christus Vivit</i>
FT	= Encyclical Letter <i>Fratelli Tutti</i>
PP	= Encyclical Letter <i>Populorum Progressio</i>
RN	= Encyclical <i>Rerum Novarum</i>
SapCh	= Encyclical <i>Sapientiae Christianae</i>

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Article submitted on 23.04.2026 and accepted on 22.08.2026.

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Data availability:

The data underlying the research text are contained in the article.