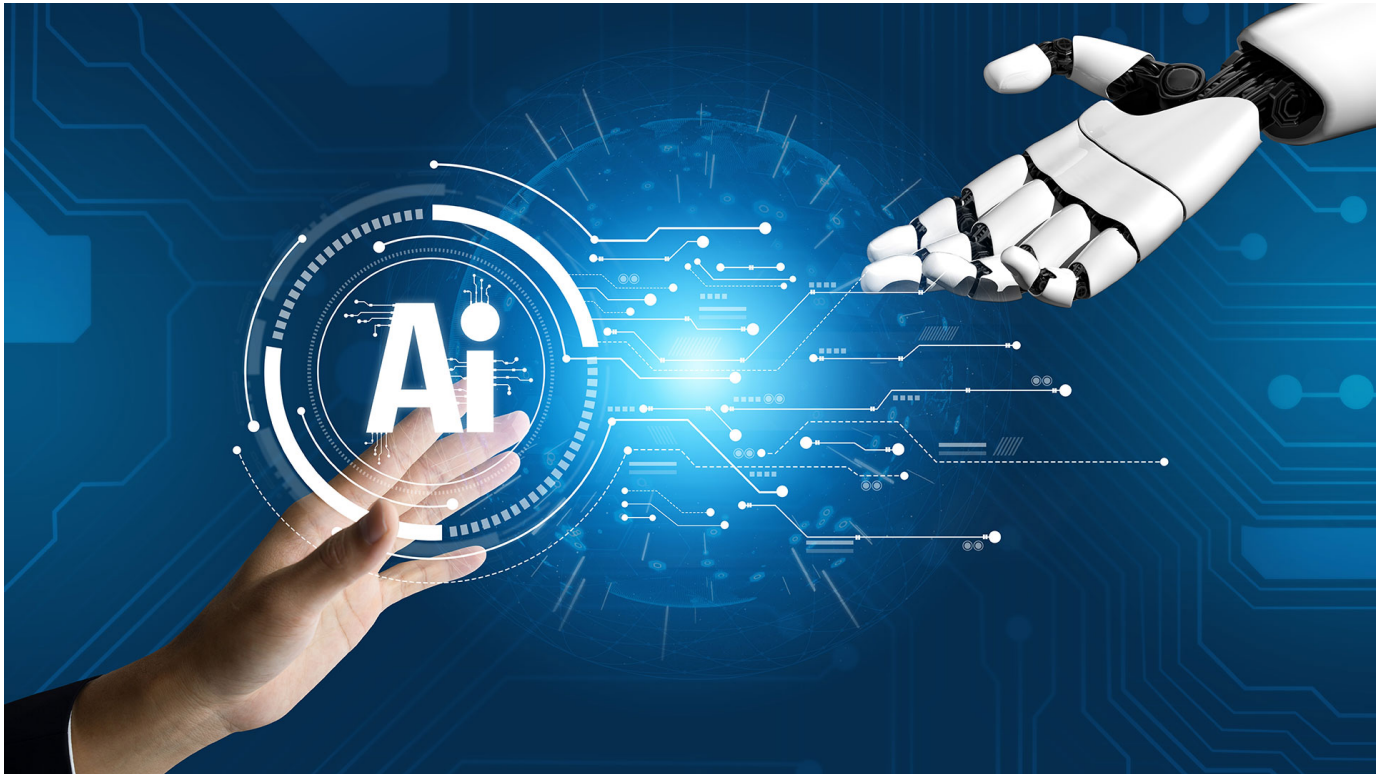


Pope Leo XIV's encyclical on AI: What is its significance?



Tec specialists analyze Pope Leo XIV's encyclical on AI and explain why it raises questions about power, humanity, and technology.

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is often discussed among engineers, technology companies, governments, and research laboratories. **Now the Vatican has gotten involved as well.**

With [*Magnifica Humanitas*](#), **Pope Leo XIV** made **AI** the central theme of the **first encyclical** of his pontificate, one of the most important documents the Catholic Church can issue.

To understand **why the Vatican decided to join this conversation**, [CONECTA](#) consulted experts in the philosophy of science, digital humanities, ethics, and theology at [Tecnológico de Monterrey](#).

Their interpretations agree on one point: **the encyclical uses artificial intelligence** to discuss **human dignity**, the concentration of power, and **what it means to be human** in the midst of a **technological revolution**.

Pope Leo XIV. Photo: Shutterstock



Why did Leo XIV choose AI as his first battle?

The date chosen to sign [*Magnifica Humanitas*](#) seems to be a clue, according to Tec experts consulted by **CONECTA**.

Leo XIV signed the document **on May 15, exactly 135 years** after [*Rerum Novarum*](#), the encyclical in which Pope **Leo XIII** addressed the **social consequences of the Industrial Revolution**.

For [*Joel Sierra Cavazos*](#), a professor in the Department of Humanities at the Tec and author of numerous articles and resources focused on faith, philosophy, and human dignity, this reference **can hardly be seen as a coincidence**.

“Today, we’re experiencing a situation similar to what happened in 1891. Back then, there were concerns centered on factories, the exploitation of workers, and profound social changes,” he says.

Today, we’re seeing the emergence of **automation**, digital platforms, **generative models**, and systems capable of reorganizing everyday activities.

According to Sierra, **the concern is similar**. He says, *“There’s the possibility or danger of **dehumanization, marginalization, exploitation, and injustice.**”*

According to the expert, the decision also reflects another transformation: *“The idea is **to take faith out of the private sphere and bring it back into the public sphere.**”*

*“That helps us understand why an encyclical on AI ends up addressing issues such as work, regulation, inequality, and technological concentration,” he explains, “because the discussion no longer takes place solely in laboratories or tech companies but also **in areas that affect everyday life.**”*

For [Luis Ricardo Fernández Carril](#), Academic Manager of Sustainability at the Tec and holder of a doctorate in the **Philosophy of Science**, dedicating the first encyclical of the pontificate to artificial intelligence also serves as an **institutional statement**.

*“(Pope) Francis made climate change the central theme of his first encyclical. **Leo XIV chose artificial intelligence**, one of the most pressing issues we face today.”*

The question behind the encyclical

According to the experts, **Magnifica Humanitas** raises the question: What happens when we begin to delegate creativity, judgment, learning, decision-making, and intellectual production?

For [Fernández Carril](#), a professor and Sustainability Coordinator at the Tec and holder of a doctorate in the **Philosophy of Science**, that is where the philosophical core of the document lies.

“Artificial intelligence isn’t presented as a technical problem but as a profoundly human challenge.”

The concern doesn’t stem solely from the existence of increasingly sophisticated systems. It arises when we **begin to measure human value using productivity, efficiency, or performance** as the primary variables.

“We can’t reduce ourselves solely to instrumental worth.”

[José Miguel Muñoz Apresa](#), Director of the Master’s Program in **Digital Humanities at the Tec**, sees the problem elsewhere.

“The problem has to do with how we apply these methods.”

*“The discussion,” he says, “must begin with **the questions of what problems we’re trying to solve, which communities we seek to benefit, and what consequences we’re willing to accept.**”*

This is because the question isn’t just what technology can do. It’s also important to decide **what we want to continue to do.**

“Artificial intelligence isn’t presented as a technical problem but as a profoundly human challenge.” - Luis Ricardo Fernández

The real debate: Power

Muñoz Apresa sums up much of the document in a single sentence: ***“He’s talking about power.”***

In his view, the discussion takes place in a context in which infrastructure, computing capacity, data, and **technological development remain concentrated in the hands of a few players.**

*“In the Global South, we also participate in the creation of data. It’s just that it’s not entirely clear, once we’ve participated in it, **to what extent that information belongs to us as well.**”*

*“It seems that **it doesn’t belong to us** because then **we have to pay to access the very data that we ourselves have been generating.**”*

Furthermore, he points out that the infrastructure needed to store, classify, and monetize that information is **concentrated far from those who produce it**.

The consequence, Muñiz explains, isn't merely economic. It also **affects representation, participation, and decision-making capacity**.

*"Technological power is concentrated in the hands of a few players. And often," he adds, "those actors aren't even governments. **They're companies**,"* explains Fernández.

As a result, **regulation, institutions, and democratic mechanisms** are advancing more slowly than technology.

"That's why," Muñiz explains, *"the discussion must also address democratic governance: **who regulates, who decides, who participates, and who is left out.**"*

Data, invisible labor, and digital colonialism

The encyclical introduces concepts that are not common in papal documents. One of them is **digital colonialism**, the experts noted.

It highlights that **it is no longer** just natural resources that are being extracted but also **health data, genetic maps, and epidemiological profiles**.

And this idea forces us to look beyond the models. Every search, photograph, conversation, medical record, or digital activity generates useful information for training increasingly sophisticated systems.

For Muñiz, the question is no longer just about **who builds artificial intelligence**.

It also matters **who produces information, who benefits from it, and who decides how to use it**.

The encyclical mentions everyone from **people who work in data tagging** to the **material supply chains** needed to build technological infrastructure, including the **extraction of strategic minerals** and the **low-wage labor** required to sustain

increasingly complex digital systems.

Sierra finds another connection to ***Rerum Novarum*** there.

He explains that **Leo XIII** had already spoken of the **universal destination of goods**, the idea that wealth and abundance exist for **the collective benefit of humanity**.

“Rain doesn’t fall only for the rich, and air isn’t just for those who can afford it.”

For Sierra, the encyclical brings that discussion into the digital world.

*“The data, information, and resources provided by artificial intelligence cannot be the exclusive domain of a select few. Rather, **they are meant to be distributed universally**.”*

The encyclical highlights human fragility

Part of the document challenges an idea that is increasingly prevalent in certain technology-related discussions, **that human fragility is a technical problem**.

The debate centers on **transhumanism**, a movement which generally posits that biological limitations, vulnerability, and dependence **can eventually be overcome through technology**.

For Sierra, this is where one of the encyclical’s most profound reflections appears: *“The human condition is precisely fragility.”*

According to Leo XIV’s encyclical, **we must accept our limitations and our human frailty**.

*“The notion that we’ll be able to overcome our weaknesses thanks to robots or robotic prostheses that we can invent **is a delusion**, an illusion. This is because **they’ll only be available to the very wealthy**, thereby creating yet another divide between the haves and the have-nots.”*

Fernández finds another consequence. What happens to our concept of humanity when vulnerability is no longer a part of it?

*“Vulnerability, limitations, and dependence are an integral part of the human condition. That fragility,” he adds, “also gives rise to **compassion, mutual recognition, and collective construction.**”*

“The notion that we’ll be able to overcome our weaknesses thanks to robots or robotic prostheses that we can invent is a delusion, an illusion.” - Joel Sierra

The cost of moving forward without pausing

The encyclical is not against AI, **but it does call for a pause.** Fernández believes that technological development, **regulation**, social adaptation, and **ethical reflection are progressing at different paces.**

“The transformation that artificial intelligence can bring about isn’t going to happen in the next ten years. It’s happening now.”

That is why **the discussion cannot be postponed.** The impact isn’t limited to employment or education. There are also **social, environmental, and spiritual costs.**

“We can’t just throw open our arms and embrace artificial intelligence without giving it some thought.”

And for Muñiz, the discussion cannot be limited solely to technologists or developers. It also needs to incorporate **the humanities, ethics, philosophy, and the social sciences.**

En la era de la [#InteligenciaArtificial](#), en la que la dignidad humana corre el riesgo de verse eclipsada por nuevas formas de deshumanización, tenemos el deber urgente de permanecer profundamente humanos, custodiando con amor esa magnífica humanidad que se nos ha dado y revelado...

— Papa León XIV (@Pontifex_es) [May 25, 2026](#)

A new Babel or a new Jerusalem?

together on the same task.

“It’s another construction project, one whose purpose is not human glory but the glory of God.”

Sierra uses another term to describe that difference: **Courageous shared responsibility**.

*“The idea is **courageous shared responsibility** in the construction of this wall.*

***“No one can do it alone.** No one has a monopoly on an agenda that is entirely good, positive, or correct.”*

The difference, he explains, also lies in the method:

- *While Babel focuses, Jerusalem distributes.*
- *While Babel reigns supreme, Jerusalem is built collectively.*

According to Luis, *“This isn’t a call to the Catholic world. The discussion touches on philosophy, politics, economics, ethics, religion, and technology all at once.”*

That brings us to the main conclusion of the three readings. The encyclical uses artificial intelligence to explore a broader question: **What kind of human future are we building with these technologies?**

What is an Encyclical?

According to the Vatican, encyclicals are the **most important documents written by a pope** and are typically addressed to bishops, the Catholic faithful, and, in many cases, people outside the Church.

The term “encyclical” comes from the Latin “encyclia” and the Greek “egkyklios,” and means “to encircle”; that is, it is a circular letter of the utmost importance to the Church and of a solemn nature.

They are traditionally written in Latin (the official language of the Catholic Church) and then translated into various languages.

Magnifica Humanitas is **Pope Leo XIV's** first encyclical.

The document was published on May 25 and signed ten days earlier, on May 15, a date that coincides with the 135th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, the encyclical in which Leo XIII responded to the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

Divided into five chapters, *Magnifica Humanitas* addresses topics such as automation, work, data, regulation, technological concentration, and digital development.

You can read the [encyclical here](#).

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