

This Was Written by a Person

While there are plenty of things that demand our attention, prayerful consideration, and action these days (hoo-boy, so many), I find myself more and more horrified by the onslaught of artificial intelligence (AI) products, services, bots, surveillance equipment, and, of course, the bleak nihilism of those who claim AI produces works of art, and even a new “actress.” Both philosophically and theologically, I have some pretty grave concerns about what the full-throttle embrace and universal application of AI to all areas of human activity means for us as human beings (as living images of God) in a world that I understand to be God’s own Creation, of which we are called to be stewards. At the risk of sounding like a Luddite, it seems that enthusiasm around AI already is diminishing the true and irreplaceable worth and dignity of humanity as such, and insists we should be happy to cede that dignity to the algorithm.

I don’t think AI is inherently evil. AI’s detection and diagnosis of various cancers is, so far, significantly earlier and more accurate than detection without AI tools—no complaints about that. But the attitude that views *all* applications of AI as equally worthwhile and harmless strikes me as a dangerous degradation of our own humanity, our capacity for free expression, creativity, actual intelligence (which we possess, but computers do not), and the *imago Dei* (image of God) we each embody. There is a real temptation to use the term “demonic” when discussing the essence or power of AI and the way it is holding so many in thrall. But I don’t want to get too carried away. I insist, however, that the degradation of the environment (the astonishing amount of land and water required, the noise and light pollution that confuse and force out insects, birds, animals of all sorts, including us, etc.) combined with the degradation of our own humanity, are factors that we, as people of faith, must take seriously.

It’s helpful to look to Martin Heidegger’s seminal essay, *The Question Concerning Technology*. It is a masterful exploration of the relationship between human beings and the essence of technology as such, and modern technology specifically. Heidegger wants to engage his readers in questioning the way in which our relationship with technology shapes our relationship with everything else in the world, including ourselves and each other. As he puts it, “Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.”¹ We owe it to ourselves as faithful (or just thoughtful) people to spend time together considering AI and its role in our lives and in the world. As much as I’d love to lead (or drag) a group through a philosophical study over the course of several weeks, I came across a better vehicle for deeply exploring our relationship with technology.

In May, Pope Leo XIV published a papal encyclical titled *Magnifica Humanitas* [*Magnificent Humanity*]: *On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*. The Introduction opens with the following statement: “Humanity, created by God in all its grandeur, is today facing a pivotal choice: either to construct a new Tower of Babel or to

¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (Harper: New York, 1977), 4.

build the city in which God and humanity dwell together.”² Unsurprisingly, the Pope means business. The encyclical is scholarly and theological (and thus philosophical), but his writing is clear, step-by-step, and quite beautiful in the way it builds its argument.

So, consider this your invitation to join me for a reading study of *Magnifica Humanitas*, by Pope Leo XIV! We will meet for six weeks, on Thursdays at 6 pm, beginning September 17 and going through October 22. We will find good points for grounding our own views on AI and talking about it with other people. We will explore the relationships between our faith and our humanity, between AI and our humanity, and how those relationships intersect and interact. We will explore hopeful project of being human. And, surely, there will be snacks.

You can find a printable copy of the letter online here:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html> (the print is small, and I am working on getting a version available with larger text).

With you in our magnificent humanity,
Pastor January

² Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas* (15 May 2026), 1.