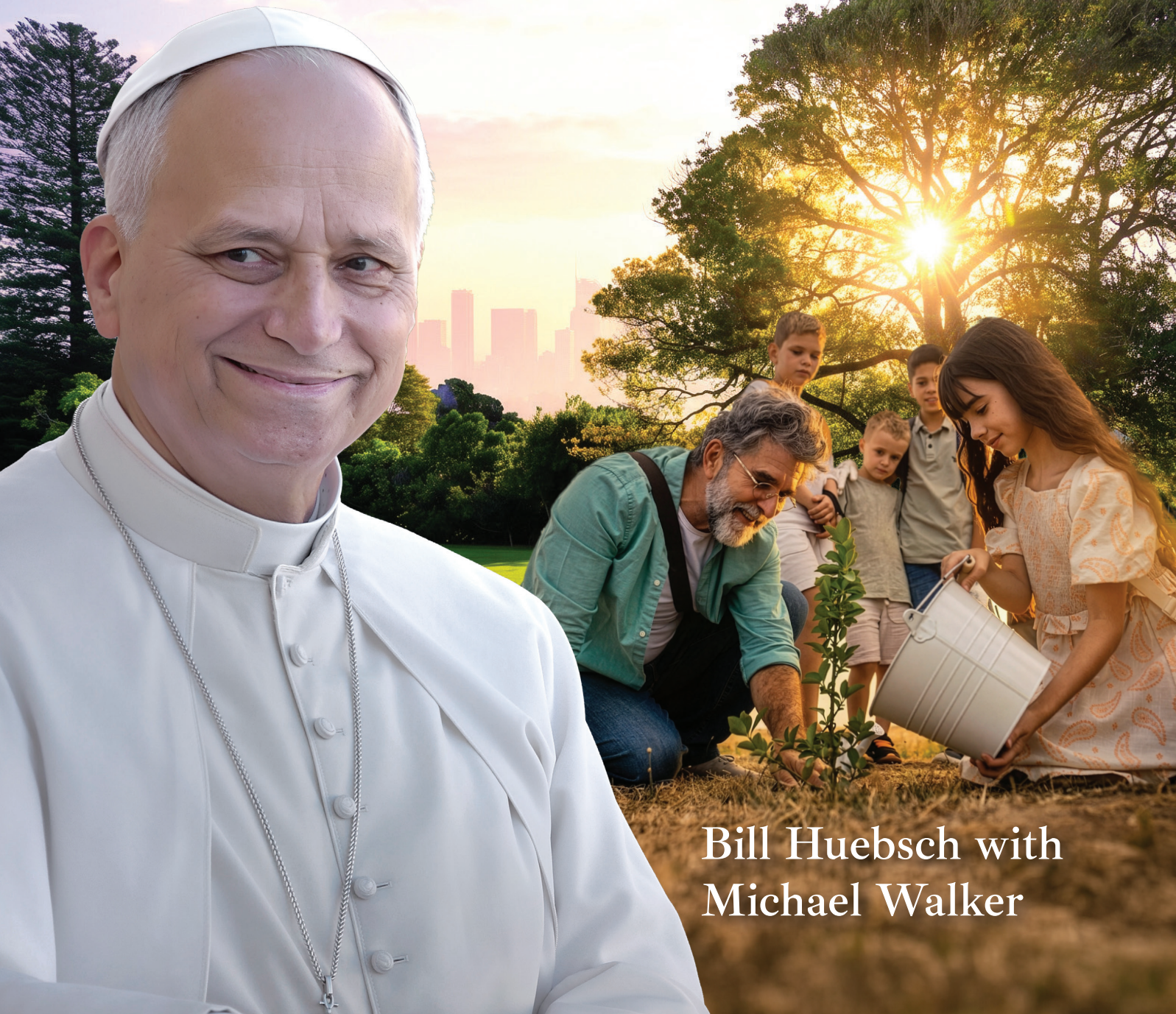


An Australian Group Reading Guide to Pope Leo's Encyclical
MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS

POPE LEO XIV

MAGNIFICENT HUMANITY

On Safeguarding the Human Person in the
Time of Artificial Intelligence



Bill Huebsch with
Michael Walker



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HOW TO USE THIS READING GUIDE

Gather

Welcome everyone. Begin each
session with an Acknowledgment
of Country suited to your particular
context. (Information available online
from the National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council
[NATSICC], 'Welcome to Country &
Acknowledgement of Country'.)

Offer a special welcome to participants
from other faith traditions who may join
you. Ask participants to introduce and
share briefly about themselves around the
circle.

Read

Moving around the circle in your group,
read aloud the stanzas of this summary
Rotate readers with each stanza or
paragraph. Group members should note
items in the Pope's teaching that strike
them as especially important. Feel free to
write notes in the margins of the booklet.
(Do not read aloud the article numbers.
Their purpose is to help you find each article
in the original document, which is available
in a print edition or on the Vatican website:
vatican.va).

Have a conversation.

When you come to the group
conversations, pause to continue around
the circle, discussing as the notes direct.
Use our suggestions as a starting point
and add your own questions or action
plans.

Finish

As you come to the end of your process,
invite participants to identify the
one or two large ideas they hear the
pope teaching in that segment of the
document. Each participant may listen to
the text differently; there are no 'correct'
answers. Conclude your session with a
brief prayer and hospitality.

Editor's Note

While the official English translation
of Pope Leo XIV's encyclical refers to
Magnifica Humanitas as 'Humanity
in Its Grandeur', this study guide uses
'Magnificent Humanity' as a more concise
and accessible title while remaining
faithful to the encyclical's central vision of
the dignity and greatness of the human
person.

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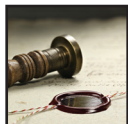


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Foreword

Two things were clear from the moment Pope Leo XIV was elected:

First, the importance he placed on the Church's social doctrine, a tradition that started with Pope Leo XIII in whose honour he chose his papal name.

Second, that he was deeply concerned about artificial intelligence as the defining challenge of this time.

That he chose to issue his first encyclical letter on the exact anniversary of Leo XIII's famous *Rerum Novarum*, and that it would focus heavily on the morality of artificial intelligence, was not a surprise.

In *Magnifica Humanitas*, Leo reiterates the primary principle of Catholic social doctrine: that the human person, created in the image of God, has inviolable dignity. Technologies, our own creations, will never possess such magnificence. Our guiding principle when deploying technology, should always be to do so in ways that enhance and support human dignity, not ways that strip it away.

Somewhat overlooked in early commentary that has focused on artificial intelligence, this encyclical also contains some other remarkable and even surprising statements:

- The review and summary of past Catholic Social Doctrine in Chapter One, and the enunciation of the principles of Social Doctrine in Chapter Two, give these teachings a formal shape and embed the social tradition's place in Catholic teaching generally.
- Leo's apology for slavery in paragraph 176 is unprecedented for a pope. Ancestry experts were quick to discover that Leo's family tree includes both slaves and slave-owners, so the legacy of slavery is embodied in his own personal heritage.
- He declares in paragraph 192 that 'Just War' theory is outdated and reminds us that the Christian call is to be peacebuilders. This is a major teaching development as just War theory has a very long heritage stretching back even before Christianity.
- Finally, to the delight of many commentators, in paragraph 213, Leo quotes the beloved 20th Century Catholic author JRR Tolkien.

In the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, the encyclical generally does not prescribe responses for acceptable or unacceptable use of technologies including AI, instead it presents broad principles. It is left to local pastors and their flocks to consider how best to use it.

It is our hope that this book will help small groups in Catholic schools, parishes, and agencies as they engage in that process of discernment. The text is presented in condensed form, with important points highlighted and illustrated. See the facing page for suggestions for how to structure such a small group meeting.

I wish God's blessing on your reflections and discussions as you delve into Leo's encyclical on the grandeur of humanity.

Dr Michael Walker

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School of Philosophy and Theology,
Australian Catholic University
August 2026

Introduction

Magnifica Humanitas

- 1 Humanity, created by God in dignity and beauty, faces a profound choice: to build a new Tower of Babel, a world shaped by division and confusion, or one marked by justice, compassion, and communion. Christians look to Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, because in him we discover both the true meaning of humanity and the path toward fullness of life. In Christ, the magnificence of being human shows us the way forward.
- 2 Founded on Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, we believe God blesses every sincere effort to build a more just and compassionate world. The Church seeks to work alongside all people of goodwill, listening carefully to the hopes and struggles of our time and helping promote the dignity, unity, and flourishing of every human person.
- 3 In 1891, Pope Leo XIII published *Rerum Novarum*, helping begin what we now call the Church's social teaching. He insisted that the Gospel must speak not only about eternal life but also about the real struggles and hopes of people in the world. He showed us that the concrete lives of people are the business of the Church. Since then, the Church has continued to reflect on human dignity, justice, and the common good in light of Scripture and human experience. This living tradition still guides Christians in serving the world with wisdom, compassion, and hope. I now add my voice to this living conversation.

The *res novae* (‘new things’) of our time

- 4 Like Pope Leo XIII before me, I call the Church to reflect prayerfully on the ‘new things’ shaping our age. Today, those new realities include digital technology, artificial intelligence, and robotics, all of which are rapidly transforming daily life. Technology itself is not the enemy; it has often improved human life and relieved suffering. Yet, these powerful new tools also raise serious questions about human dignity, freedom, and the common good. Humanity now possesses enormous power, but wisdom must guide how that power is used.
- 5 Our generation must face the challenges of new technology with wisdom, honesty, and responsibility. We need ways to manage technology that are just. Good laws and regulations are important, but the deeper question, asked by Pope Francis, is this: Who holds this growing technological power, and how is it being used? Increasingly, enormous influence rests not with governments but with powerful private companies whose reach extends across the globe. For this reason, society must work carefully to ensure that technology serves human dignity, justice, and the common good rather than narrow interests or unchecked control.
- 6 For this reason, we must look beyond immediate problems and ask deeper spiritual and human questions about the direction in which our world is moving. We are living through a time of enormous change. While some race to shape the future of technology, many others simply watch and hope for the best. Yet, all of us must now ask: Where are we going? What kind of future do we wish to build together? What does it mean to remain truly human along the way?

Two biblical images

- 7 To help us reflect on artificial intelligence and the future of humanity, I turn our attention to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis. The people sought unity, power, and security, but they tried to build a future – and a temple ‘with its top in the heavens’ – without God and at the cost of human diversity and communion. Babel reminds us that when pride, control, and efficiency replace humility and human dignity, true communication breaks down and people become divided rather than united.
- 8 The story of Nehemiah offers a different vision for humanity's future. After Jerusalem lay in ruins, the city was rebuilt through prayer, shared responsibility, and cooperation among the people. Nehemiah convened the families in the city, assigned each of them a section to rebuild, listened to their needs, and coordinated their efforts. Each person contributed according to their gifts, and God remained at the center of the work. The result was not forced uniformity but true communion – a community strengthened by trust, participation, and a shared sense of hope. It was ‘an undertaking with God at the center’.
- 9 Technology can help ‘heal, connect, educate and protect’ human life, but it can also deepen division and injustice. The real question is not whether technology is good or bad but rather what kind of world are we building with it? Will we create a new Babel built on power and control or a new Jerusalem shaped by community, dignity, and shared responsibility?
- 10 We must resist the temptation to build a modern Tower of Babel – a world driven by profit, control, and uniformity, where people are reduced to data and efficiency. Instead, let us choose ‘the way of Nehemiah,’ rebuilding community together through listening, dialogue, and shared responsibility. Diversity need not divide us. Guided by God's Spirit, our different voices and gifts can become the foundation for a more peaceful, just, and compassionate human family. This ‘vision of grace is an invitation’ to work together for the benefit of everyone.

Building for the common good

- 11 First and foremost, a truly human society begins with a living relationship with God, who created us for love, communion, and fullness of life. As St. Augustine reminds us, deep within every human heart is a longing for happiness that ultimately finds its rest in God. We in the Church recognise the urgent need to let this hope move us ‘toward its deepest truth’.
- 12 Second, building the common good also means accepting human limits and weaknesses with humility and compassion. True human flourishing does not come from chasing perfection, unlimited power, or endless technological ‘upgrades’. Such illusive goals leave many people behind. It grows instead through mutual care, shared responsibility, and solidarity. Real progress is measured not by efficiency or wealth alone, but by the dignity of every person and the well-being of all.

Who was Leo XIII?

Today's Pope Leo XIV took his name in honour of the previous Pope Leo, an Italian who was pope from 1878 to 1903. Leo XIII is remembered for modernising the Church, after the long reign of his predecessor Pope Pius IX. Under Pius, the Church had refused to dialogue with ideas of the modern world, such as democratic government.



BABEL

Humanity without God
Uniformity
Dehumanisation

JERUSALEM

God at the centre
Diversity as a source of richness
Brotherhood/Collaboration

'Never has humanity had such power over itself.' (GA 9)

THE TOWER OF BABEL SYNDROME



Profit before people



Reducing people to mere data



Growing inequalities



Loss of dignity

CHOOSE 'NEHEMIAH'S WAY'



Build together



Dialogue



Listening



Inclusion



Shared responsibility

- 13** Building a more human future requires shared responsibility. Every person and every community has a role to play. By working together across generations, cultures, and differences, humanity can transform tension into creativity and help build a more just, peaceful, and hopeful world.
- 14** Building the common good also requires 'an evangelical language' shaped by honesty, hope, and respect. Rather than giving in to fear or naive optimism, we are called to measure technology by its impact on human dignity, the poor, peace, and care for creation, always placing the most vulnerable at the center.

Remaining human

- 15** Strengthened by the hope and grace of the Jubilee Year, we are called to remain deeply human in an age of artificial intelligence. No machine can replace the dignity, beauty, and magnificence of the human person. True progress grows from compassion, listening, and a shared desire to build unity rather than division.
- 16** I invite Christians and all people of goodwill to help build a more human and compassionate world. Rather than constructing new 'Towers of Babel' shaped by pride and division, we are called to become builders of communion, placing God first and keeping the human person at the center of every decision. A just and peaceful future will emerge when the poor, the vulnerable, and the forgotten are welcomed, protected, and allowed to flourish. 'With the heart of a shepherd and a father.' I invite everyone to join together in this noble enterprise.

CONVERSATIONS



1. What words of Pope Leo here strike you as especially important as we move into new technologies?
2. What do you think Pope Leo means when he speaks in articles 15 and 16 about remaining deeply human?
3. When you look at today's technological world – especially the rise of AI – where do you see echoes of Babel? Where do you see possibilities more like Nehemiah's rebuilding spirit?
4. How can churches, families, schools, and communities help ensure that AI and new technologies serve human dignity rather than human ego, profit, or domination?
5. How might AI either deepen human division or help foster deeper understanding, compassion, and solidarity? What determines which path we take?