

MAGNIFICENT HUMANITY (MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS)
POPE LEO'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH
CHAPTER THREE – NUMBERS 90 -111

This Chapter acknowledges the benefits that scientific developments have brought but it also warns that technology can endanger the dignity, welfare and happiness of the human family. Pope Leo writes that “the tendency to let the logic of efficiency, control and profit alone shape personal, social and economic decisions...begins to dictate what matters and what can be discarded, reducing creation to an object of exploitation and human beings to mere cogs in a system driven toward ever greater efficiency”. (No.92 p.91) However, it must also be recognised that “In themselves, these innovations can greatly serve human development and care of our common home.” (No.93 p. 91) Without wishing to give a comprehensive treatment of artificial intelligence (because there is already extensive relevant literature), the Holy Father writes, “I limit myself to recalling a few essential elements for a moral and social discernment that safeguards the primacy of the human person, in order to ensure that it will always be human intelligence, with its conscience and freedom, that guides technical innovations and responsibly determines their use and limits”. (No.97 p.94) Artificial intelligence can “often surpass human intelligence in speed and computational capacity, offering tangible benefits across many fields. Yet this power remains entirely tied to data processing. So called artificial intelligences do not undergo experiences, do not possess a body, do not feel joy or pain, do not mature through relationships and do not know from within what love, work, friendships or responsibility mean. Nor do they have a moral conscience, since they do not judge good and evil, grasp the meaning of situations or bear responsibility for consequences.” (No. 99 p.95) “The artificial imitation of positive human communication – words of advice, empathy, friendship and even love – can be engaging and at times genuinely helpful....it can also be misleading, creating the illusion of a relationship”. (No.100 p.97)

To disarm – or make safe – AI technology is not to reject it, but to prevent it from dominating humanity. “To disarm means discrediting the assumption that technical power automatically confers the right to govern...it means freeing technology from monopolistic control and opening it to discussion and debate, therefore making it human-friendly”. (110 p.104) Developers bear a particular ethical and spiritual responsibility. They must ensure that what is being cultivated is a genuine good. AI systems also require enormous amounts of energy. It is essential that sustainable technological solutions which will lessen the heavy demands on natural resources be developed.