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Theological Anthropology in Magnifica Humanitas: Implications for Religious Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) has intensified theological and educational questions concerning human dignity, moral agency, relationality, and the purpose of education. This study analyzed the theological anthropology articulated in *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence* and examined its implications for Religious Education in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilized document analysis of *Magnifica Humanitas* as the primary source, supported by selected ecclesial documents and relevant scholarly literature. Coding was used to identify theological-anthropological concepts and develop themes. The following themes were developed based on the analysis of *Magnifica Humanitas*: (1) the human person as *imago Dei* and the bearer of inviolable dignity; (2) artificial intelligence as a technological reality subordinate to human moral agency and authentic human flourishing; and (3) Religious Education as integral human formation for responsible participation in the age of artificial intelligence. Based on the findings, *Magnifica Humanitas* upholds human dignity as the center of technological progress and rejects the reduction of human intelligence and personhood to technological performance. Furthermore, the study argues that Religious Education should integrate theological anthropology, digital ethics, AI literacy, moral discernment, and relational formation to prepare learners for critical, responsible, and compassionate participation in AI-mediated activities. Hence, the study contributes a theological-anthropological framework that positions Religious Education as a vital context for safeguarding human dignity and promoting authentic human flourishing amid rapidly evolving technological influences.

Keywords: theological anthropology; artificial intelligence; *Magnifica Humanitas*; Religious Education; human dignity; *imago Dei*; moral agency; integral human formation.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the conditions under which people learn, communicate, work, make decisions, and relate to one another. Its educational applications now include generative AI, intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, automated feedback, learning analytics, and AI-assisted assessment. These technologies offer significant opportunities to expand access to educational resources, support differentiated instruction, and enhance pedagogical and administrative efficiency. At the same time, the increasing integration

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of AI into educational environments raises fundamental questions concerning the purpose of education, the authority of human judgment, the formation of conscience, and the protection of human dignity. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that AI should be governed according to principles of human rights, human dignity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and meaningful human oversight.

The educational significance of AI cannot be evaluated solely in terms of technical capability or institutional efficiency. Although AI systems can process information, generate language, identify patterns, and provide personalized responses, these functions do not constitute understanding, wisdom, moral judgment, or personal responsibility. Recent scholarship argues that education in an AI-saturated world must move beyond technology-centered conceptions of competence and attend to ethical discernment, relationality, and human agency (Costa & Murphy, 2025; Murgatroyd, 2023). AI in education presents substantial pedagogical opportunities while also raising concerns related to privacy, algorithmic bias, misinformation, academic integrity, unequal access, and the erosion of teacher-student relationships (Mouta et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2025).

These concerns acquire particular significance within Religious Education. Unlike educational approaches primarily oriented toward technical knowledge or occupational competence, Religious Education is concerned with the integral formation of the human person. It seeks to cultivate intellectual understanding, moral discernment, spiritual maturity, responsibility, and the capacity for authentic relationship with God, other persons, and creation. Its educational mission extends beyond the transmission of religious information to the formation of persons capable of interpreting contemporary realities in the light of faith and exercising conscience within communal and moral life. This understanding is consistent with the Second Vatican Council's teaching that education should contribute to the integral development of the person and assist learners in evaluating moral values through a properly formed conscience (Second Vatican Council, 1965b).

The emergence of AI consequently presents Religious Education with a fundamentally anthropological question: What does it mean to be human when machines can imitate language, generate images, produce explanations, and perform tasks traditionally associated with human intelligence? This question concerns not merely technological innovation but the meaning of human dignity, freedom, conscience, relationality, responsibility, creativity, embodiment, vulnerability, and openness to transcendence. Within the Christian tradition, the human person is not reducible to computational performance, productivity, or functional capacity; rather, every person is created in the image and likeness of God and called to communion with God, other persons, and creation. This theological vision provides a critical anthropological framework for evaluating both the possibilities and the limitations of artificial intelligence and for discerning its implications for education, moral formation, and human flourishing.

Recent Catholic reflection on AI has increasingly developed within this anthropological framework. Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence emphasizes that human intelligence is embodied, relational, morally responsible, and oriented toward truth and goodness, thereby distinguishing it fundamentally from artificial intelligence (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, 2025). Building upon this perspective, Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence places the dignity of the human person at the center of its reflection on technological development. The encyclical presents human dignity, freedom, conscience, relationality, responsibility, and the common good as foundational principles for evaluating AI and argues that technological innovation must remain subordinate to authentic human flourishing rather than technocratic notions of efficiency, control, or productivity (Leo XIV, 2026).

The theological anthropology articulated in Magnifica Humanitas is particularly significant for Religious Education because it offers a coherent framework for engaging artificial intelligence without reducing technological development either to uncritical optimism or to categorical rejection. Its emphasis on human dignity, moral agency, relationality, and the common good provides normative principles through which Religious Education may critically evaluate AI-mediated teaching, learning, assessment, and digital culture while preserving its commitment to integral human formation.

Contemporary scholarship has begun to examine AI through the lenses of theological anthropology, Catholic education, moral agency, and digital ethics. Studies suggest that AI may support instructional innovation

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and personalization while also introducing risks of theological distortion, epistemic conformity, and the weakening of the relational and formative dimensions of religious learning (Corpuz, 2025; Papakostas, 2025). More broadly, scholars increasingly argue that AI must be evaluated in relation to human dignity, embodiment, relationality, and authentic human flourishing (Gaudet et al., 2023; Onyeukaziri, 2024). These concerns are particularly relevant in the Philippine educational context, where ongoing AI initiatives and UNESCO assessments underscore the need for ethical frameworks that integrate technological competence with moral discernment and human-centered educational values (Department of Education, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

Despite the growing scholarship on AI ethics, human-centered education, theology and technology, and AI in Religious Education, a significant research gap remains. Existing scholarship has examined AI ethics, the relationship between artificial intelligence and human dignity, and the pedagogical use of AI in Religious Education; however, relatively little research has undertaken a systematic theological content analysis of Magnifica Humanitas or examined how its anthropological principles may inform Religious Education curriculum, pedagogy, and moral formation. In particular, the interrelated themes of human dignity, freedom, conscience, responsibility, relationality, and human limitation have not yet been sufficiently analyzed as an integrated theological-anthropological framework for educational practice in the age of AI.

In particular, this study explores the interconnected theological themes of human dignity grounded in the imago Dei, moral agency in relation to artificial intelligence, and Religious Education as integral human formation in technologically mediated educational contexts.

This study addresses this gap through a qualitative theological content analysis of Magnifica Humanitas, interpreted in dialogue with Antiqua et Nova, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Rome Call for AI Ethics, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, and relevant peer-reviewed scholarship on AI, theology, and Religious Education. Specifically, the study examines how Magnifica Humanitas articulates a theological anthropology of the human person in relation to artificial intelligence and investigates the implications of this anthropological vision for Religious Education curriculum, pedagogy, and the moral and spiritual formation of learners. By clarifying the Christian understanding of human personhood in the context of artificial intelligence, the study seeks to contribute both to contemporary theological anthropology and to the development of a human-centered and theologically grounded approach to Religious Education in the age of AI.

Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to analyze the theological anthropology articulated in Magnifica Humanitas and to examine its implications for Religious Education in the age of artificial intelligence (AI).

Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does *Magnifica Humanitas* portray the human person in relation to God, other persons, creation, and technological development?
2. What theological-anthropological principles concerning human dignity, freedom, conscience, responsibility, relationality, and human limitation emerge from Magnifica Humanitas?
3. How does Magnifica Humanitas conceptualize the relationship between artificial intelligence and the human person, particularly with respect to moral agency, human judgment, and authentic human flourishing?
4. What implications do the theological-anthropological principles articulated in Magnifica Humanitas have for Religious Education with respect to curriculum, pedagogy, and the moral and spiritual formation of learners in the age of artificial intelligence?

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyze the theological anthropology articulated in *Magnifica Humanitas* in relation to artificial intelligence and to examine its implications for Religious Education.

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Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine how *Magnifica Humanitas* portrays the human person in relation to God, other persons and technological development, with particular attention to human dignity, freedom, conscience, relationality, responsibility, and human limitation;
2. Identify the theological-anthropological principles that govern the document's understanding of artificial intelligence and technological development; and
3. Determine the implications of these theological-anthropological principles for Religious Education curriculum, pedagogy, and the moral and spiritual formation of learners in the age of artificial intelligence.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in document analysis and qualitative content analysis to examine the theological anthropology articulated in Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret theological meanings, conceptual relationships, normative principles, and educational implications rather than measure variables or test causal relationships. The inquiry is interpretive in orientation and situated within the tradition of theological-anthropological scholarship.

Document analysis serves as the primary research strategy because the principal source of data is an official ecclesial document. As a qualitative method, document analysis enables the systematic examination and interpretation of texts within their historical, theological, ecclesial, and educational contexts and is particularly appropriate for the study of magisterial and doctrinal documents (Bowen, 2009). Through close, contextual, and iterative reading, the study examines how Magnifica Humanitas constructs its understanding of the human person and how it relates human dignity, freedom, conscience, responsibility, relationality, and moral agency to the development and use of artificial intelligence.

Qualitative content analysis is employed as the principal method of textual interpretation. This method involves the systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of textual units to identify both explicit statements and underlying theological meanings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Kuckartz, 2019). It is particularly suitable for theological document analysis because it allows key anthropological concepts to be examined both individually and in relation to one another while attending to the document's conceptual organization, normative claims, and theological vision. The analysis integrates deductive coding, guided by the study's research questions and theological-anthropological framework, with inductive coding, which allows additional categories and themes emerging from the text to be incorporated into the interpretive process. This combination enables a rigorous and contextually grounded analysis of Magnifica Humanitas and supports the identification of theological-anthropological principles relevant to Religious Education in the age of artificial intelligence.

Data Sources

The primary data source for this study is Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence (Leo XIV, 2026), which is treated as the principal unit of analysis. The document is analyzed in its entirety through qualitative content analysis in order to identify its theological-anthropological concepts, normative claims, and educational implications concerning artificial intelligence.

To support contextual interpretation and theological comparison, the study also draws upon selected ecclesial and scholarly sources, including Antiqua et Nova (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, 2025), the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Catholic Church, 1994), the documents

of the Second Vatican Council (Second Vatican Council, 1965a, 1965b), the Rome Call for AI Ethics, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (UNESCO, 2021), and recent peer-reviewed scholarship on artificial intelligence, theological anthropology, ethics, and Religious Education. These sources function as secondary interpretive resources that provide theological, philosophical, ethical, and educational context for the analysis of Magnifica Humanitas. They are used to clarify, compare, and situate the document's theological claims within broader Catholic teaching and contemporary scholarly discourse and are not treated as primary data for coding or thematic analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a systematic document analysis of Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence (Leo XIV, 2026) and selected supporting ecclesial and scholarly sources. The procedure was designed to support the study's directed qualitative content analysis by identifying, organizing, and documenting textual data in a transparent and systematic manner (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The aim of data collection was to construct a coherent textual corpus from which the theological anthropology articulated in Magnifica Humanitas and its implications for Religious Education could be interpreted.

The primary data source consisted of the complete official text of Magnifica Humanitas. Supporting documents, including Antiqua et Nova, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Rome Call for AI Ethics, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, and relevant peer-reviewed scholarship, were collected to provide theological, ethical, and educational context for interpreting the primary document. These sources functioned as secondary interpretive resources and were not treated as primary data for coding or thematic analysis.

The unit of analysis comprised textual passages within Magnifica Humanitas, including sentences, paragraphs, and thematic sections addressing the human person, artificial intelligence, technological development, education, and moral formation. The document was read repeatedly to develop familiarity with its theological vocabulary, anthropological framework, and overall argument. Passages relevant to the research questions were identified and organized in a coding matrix that recorded paragraph references, preliminary analytical categories, and interpretive notes. Supporting sources were consulted throughout the process to clarify theological terminology and situate the document within broader Catholic teaching and contemporary scholarship on artificial intelligence and Religious Education. A research journal was maintained to document methodological decisions and emerging insights, thereby supporting the transparency and dependability of the data collection process.

Data Analysis Procedure

The documentary data were analyzed using directed qualitative content analysis, a systematic interpretive approach that identifies and interprets patterns of meaning within textual data while being guided by an existing theoretical framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kuckartz, 2019). This method was appropriate because the study sought to examine the theological anthropology articulated in Magnifica Humanitas and its implications for Religious Education in the age of artificial intelligence. The analysis combined deductive coding, informed by the study's research questions and theological-anthropological framework, with inductive coding, which allowed additional concepts and themes emerging from the text to be incorporated into the analytical process (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The analysis began with repeated and comprehensive readings of Magnifica Humanitas to develop familiarity with its theological vocabulary, anthropological arguments, and treatment of artificial intelligence. Textual units relevant to the research questions were then coded using a preliminary deductive coding framework derived from theological anthropology and Catholic educational philosophy. Initial codes included imago Dei, human dignity, freedom, conscience, moral responsibility, relationality and communion, human vulnerability and limitation, technological power, the technocratic paradigm, artificial intelligence, truth, the common good, and integral human formation. These codes served as sensitizing concepts and were refined iteratively as additional categories and relationships emerged from the text.

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Related codes were subsequently organized into broader conceptual categories and synthesized into themes that represented the document's theological-anthropological vision. The themes were refined through constant comparison with the original text to ensure conceptual coherence, distinctiveness, and adequate textual support. Interpretation was conducted in dialogue with selected ecclesial and scholarly sources to clarify theological terminology, establish continuity with Catholic teaching, and situate the findings within contemporary discussions of artificial intelligence, ethics, and Religious Education. The final stage of the analysis examined the implications of the identified theological-anthropological principles for Religious Education curriculum, pedagogy, and the moral and spiritual formation of learners in AI-mediated educational environments.

To enhance methodological rigor, an audit trail consisting of coding records, thematic matrices, analytical memos, and reflexive journal notes was maintained throughout the analytical process. This documentation supported the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transparency of the study by enabling the interpretation of themes to be traced directly to the textual evidence of the primary document.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of the study was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, which are appropriate for qualitative document analysis and directed qualitative content analysis. Credibility was enhanced through repeated and prolonged engagement with Magnifica Humanitas and through theoretical and documentary triangulation with Antiqua et Nova, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Rome Call for AI Ethics, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, and relevant peer-reviewed scholarship. Dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail that documented data collection procedures, coding decisions, category development, and thematic refinement. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive memo writing and by ensuring that all interpretations were grounded in identifiable textual evidence from the primary document, while educational implications were presented as scholarly interpretations rather than direct assertions of the document. Transferability was addressed by providing sufficient description of the document, its theological context, and the analytical procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to Catholic educational settings, Religious Education programs, and broader discussions on artificial intelligence and human-centered education.

Ethical considerations

This study relied exclusively on publicly available ecclesial and scholarly documents and therefore did not involve human participants or human-subject research procedures such as recruitment, informed consent, or confidentiality protocols. Ethical rigor was maintained through accurate citation, faithful representation of primary sources, and responsible theological interpretation.

Scope and limitations

The study is limited to a qualitative analysis of Magnifica Humanitas and selected supporting ecclesial and scholarly sources. It does not examine the empirical implementation of the document in Catholic schools, Religious Education programs, or AI-mediated learning environments, nor does it investigate the perspectives of teachers, students, or educational administrators. Consequently, the findings are interpretive and conceptual rather than empirical. The study identifies theological-anthropological principles articulated in Magnifica Humanitas and develops theoretically grounded implications for Religious Education, but it does not claim empirically validated educational outcomes or generalizability beyond the analyzed documents.

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RESULTS

The directed qualitative content analysis of Magnifica Humanitas generated three interrelated theological-anthropological themes that address the study's central research question concerning the implications of the encyclical for Religious Education in the age of Artificial Intelligence: (1) The Human Person as Imago Dei and the Bearer of Inviolable Dignity; (2) Artificial Intelligence as a Technological Reality Subordinate to Moral Agency and Authentic Human Flourishing; and (3) Religious Education as Integral Human Formation for Responsible Participation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. These themes emerged through the clustering of conceptually related codes and the refinement of categories through constant comparison with the primary text and supporting ecclesial sources.

Table 1. *Summary of themes, categories, and representative codes*

Theme	Theological-anthropological category	Representative codes
The Human Person as *Imago Dei* and the Bearer of Inviolable Dignity	Theological identity and moral agency of the human person	*Imago Dei;* human dignity; Christological anthropology; freedom; conscience; moral responsibility; relationality and communion; embodiment; human vulnerability and limitation
Artificial Intelligence as a Technological Reality Subordinate to Moral Agency and Authentic Human Flourishing	Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and authentic human flourishing	Technological power; technocratic paradigm; artificial intelligence; algorithmic influence; governance and responsibility; transparency; truth; human limitation; authentic human flourishing
Religious Education as Integral Human Formation for Responsible Participation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence	Education and integral human formation	Integral human development; education as formation; educational alliance; schools; truth as a common good; solidarity; subsidiarity; civilization of love

Theme 1: The Human Person as *Imago Dei* and the Bearer of Inviolable Dignity

The first and most foundational theme that emerged from the analysis is the portrayal of the human person as created in the image of God (imago Dei) and endowed with inviolable dignity. This theme functions as the theological center of Magnifica Humanitas and provides the primary anthropological criterion through which the document evaluates artificial intelligence, technological development, education, and social life (Leo XIV, 2026). Rather than defining humanity in terms of cognitive performance, technological capability, or social utility, the encyclical grounds personhood in divine creation and Christological revelation (Leo XIV, 2026). Consequently, every ethical, educational, and technological judgment is framed in relation to the intrinsic worth of the human person (Leo XIV, 2026).

The anthropological foundation of the document is established at the outset of the encyclical, where humanity is described as "created by God in all its grandeur" and the mystery of the human person is understood through the revelation of the Incarnate Word (Leo XIV, 2026). This passage was coded as imago Dei, human dignity, and Christological anthropology because it locates human identity within the relationship between creation and redemption. The text presents dignity as an ontological reality that precedes all social, economic, and technological evaluation (Leo XIV, 2026), thereby rejecting any understanding of the human person based primarily on productivity, intelligence, or technological enhancement. This stance parallels personalist critiques of transhumanism in educational philosophy, which insist that the person is to be understood as "someone" with intrinsic worth rather than "something" to be enhanced or optimized (Bokedal et al., 2022). This orientation

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reflects the Christological anthropology articulated in Gaudium et Spes, which affirms that Christ reveals the authentic meaning of humanity (Second Vatican Council, 1965a).

A second dimension of the theme emerges in the encyclical's treatment of freedom and moral agency. Magnifica Humanitas states that technological development is deeply connected with "the autonomy and freedom of man" (Leo XIV, 2026), indicating that technology is fundamentally a human activity requiring ethical discernment and responsibility. Throughout the document, references to conscience, freedom, and responsibility recur in connection with technological power (Leo XIV, 2026), suggesting that the human person remains the moral subject of technological action (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, 2025). The encyclical therefore understands freedom not as unrestricted self-assertion but as responsible participation in truth and the common good, a perspective consistent with Catholic moral theology's understanding of conscience and moral responsibility (John Paul II, 1993). This framing aligns with contemporary AI ethics scholarship, which locates moral responsibility in human agents rather than in the technologies themselves, treating developers and users as the primary moral subjects of intelligent systems (Yang, 2020).

The document further develops this anthropological vision through its emphasis on relationality and communion. Human beings are portrayed as fundamentally oriented toward communion with God, other persons, and creation (Leo XIV, 2026), indicating that personhood is intrinsically relational rather than merely autonomous or technologically self-sufficient (Dorobantu, 2022; Klaiber, 2024). The repeated association of dignity with solidarity, communion, and responsibility (Leo XIV, 2026), suggests that authentic human fulfillment is realized through relationships of truth and love rather than through technological transcendence (Leo XIV, 2026). This relational orientation echoes Lumen Gentium's understanding of the human vocation as participation in the life of God and the communion of the Church (Second Vatican Council, 1964).

This theme emerged through the clustering of the initial codes imago Dei, human dignity, Christological anthropology, freedom, conscience, moral responsibility, relationality and communion, embodiment, and human vulnerability and limitation. During category development, these codes demonstrated strong conceptual convergence around the category Theological Identity and Moral Agency of the Human Person. Constant comparison across the anthropological sections of Magnifica Humanitas showed that these concepts functioned as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single theological-anthropological vision, leading to the refinement of the broader theme of the human person as imago Dei and the bearer of inviolable dignity.

This theme reveals that Magnifica Humanitas advances a Christological and relational theological anthropology in which human dignity constitutes the primary normative principle for evaluating artificial intelligence and technological culture (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, 2025; Pontifical Academy for Life, 2020; Teo, 2023). Freedom, conscience, responsibility, and relationality are presented not as isolated ethical values but as constitutive dimensions of personhood grounded in the imago Dei. In relation to the study's research question, the findings indicate that Religious Education should remain fundamentally person-centered and dignity-oriented (Corpuz, 2025; Papakostas, 2025), resisting educational and technological practices that reduce learners to data, performance metrics, or algorithmic profiles (Bozkurt et al., 2024; Knox et al., 2020; Pangrazio et al., 2023; Shneiderman, 2020). Empirical research on generative AI in higher education likewise indicates that these tools can support collaboration and critical thinking, yet their pedagogical value depends on sustained training and attention to ethical considerations (Ruiz-Rojas et al., 2024). The theme therefore provides the anthropological foundation for curriculum development, moral formation, and digital ethics education in AI-mediated learning environments.

Theme 2. Artificial Intelligence as a Technological Reality Subordinate to Moral Agency and Authentic Human Flourishing

The second major theme concerns the relationship between artificial intelligence and the human person. The analysis indicates that Magnifica Humanitas neither embraces technological optimism nor adopts a posture of technological rejection (Coeckelbergh, 2020). Instead, it presents artificial intelligence as a powerful human creation whose legitimacy depends upon its orientation toward human dignity, truth, responsibility, and the common good (Leo XIV, 2026). The document consistently interprets technological development through the lens

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of moral agency and authentic human flourishing, thereby subordinating technological power to the ethical vocation of the human person.

The encyclical acknowledges the pervasive influence of emerging technologies by observing that "the power and prevalence of emerging technologies are interwoven into the fabric of daily life" (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 4). This passage was coded as technological power and artificial intelligence because it recognizes AI as a defining feature of contemporary social existence. However, the text immediately reframes technological development within an ethical horizon by emphasizing human freedom, responsibility, and discernment. Technology is therefore portrayed not as an autonomous force determining human destiny but as a human activity that remains subject to moral judgment and governance (Leo XIV, 2026).

A further dimension of the theme emerges in the encyclical's insistence that technological development must be guided by justice, responsibility, and appropriate governance. Magnifica Humanitas argues that ethical and regulatory structures are necessary to ensure that AI serves humanity rather than dominates it (Leo XIV, 2026). The recurrent references to governance of AI, transparency, responsibility, and the common good indicate that the document understands artificial intelligence primarily as a moral and social question rather than merely a technical one (Leo XIV, 2026; Yang, 2020). This framing is echoed in human-centered AI research, which identifies the social and ethical dimensions of intelligent systems, including their governance and oversight, as challenges that technical development alone cannot resolve (Ozmen Garibay, et al., 2023). This interpretation is consistent with the Rome Call for AI Ethics, which emphasizes transparency, inclusion, responsibility, and accountability as essential principles for AI governance (Pontifical Academy for Life, 2020).

The document also situates AI within the broader question of humanity's vocation by asking: "Where are we going? Toward what goal do we wish to orient ourselves?" (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 6). This passage was coded as discernment, human responsibility, and authentic human flourishing because it evaluates technological progress in relation to the ultimate purpose of human life. Significantly, the encyclical repeatedly acknowledges the limitations and finitude of the human person (Leo XIV, 2026), suggesting that awareness of human limitation is itself a condition for responsible technological development. Rather than promoting technological self-transcendence, the document calls for humility, ethical discernment, and accountability in the exercise of technological power (Chimakonam, 2024; Leo XIV, 2026). This perspective reinforces the view that AI should remain subordinate to human moral agency and should never obscure the dependence of the human person on truth, communion, and divine vocation. In this respect, the document parallels Antiqua et Nova, which distinguishes human intelligence from artificial intelligence by emphasizing embodiment, relationality, moral agency, and openness to transcendence (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, 2025). This insistence that moral agency cannot be delegated to machines is consistent with scholarship arguing that the concepts of moral agency and moral responsibility should be reserved for human agents, even as computational systems exert real causal influence (Fritz et al., 2020).

This theme emerged through the clustering of the initial codes technological power, technocratic paradigm, artificial intelligence, algorithmic influence, governance and responsibility, truth, human limitation, and authentic human flourishing. These codes converged around the category Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and Authentic Human Flourishing, which captured the document's sustained reflection on the ethical evaluation of technological development. During theme refinement, overlapping categories concerning technological domination, governance, and human limitation were integrated into a single theological-anthropological framework centered on the subordination of AI to human moral agency.

This theme reveals that Magnifica Humanitas understands artificial intelligence as fundamentally instrumental rather than personal. AI may assist human activity, but it cannot replace the moral, relational, and spiritual dimensions of human intelligence (Fritz et al., 2020; Leo XIV, 2026). In relation to the study's research question, the findings suggest that Religious Education should cultivate ethical discernment alongside technological literacy (Leo XIV, 2026), enabling learners to evaluate AI systems critically (Qian, 2025; Ruiz-Rojas et al., 2024), recognize the limits of technological power, and participate responsibly in a technological culture oriented toward human dignity and the common good. The competencies associated with AI literacy in the

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educational literature, including the capacity to critically evaluate intelligent systems and understand their ethical implications, provide a concrete pedagogical counterpart to this vision (Long & Magerko, 2020)

Theme 3. Religious Education as Integral Human Formation for Responsible Participation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The third theme concerns the educational vision that emerges from Magnifica Humanitas, particularly its understanding of Religious Education as integral human formation. The analysis indicates that the encyclical interprets education not merely as the transmission of information or technological competence but as the formation of persons capable of truth, freedom, moral responsibility, relational communion, and ethical participation in technological society (Leo XIV, 2026). Groome (1980) similarly conceives of Christian religious education as shared praxis that forms persons rather than merely transmits information. This theme provides the pedagogical bridge between the document's theological anthropology and its implications for AI-mediated educational environments.

The educational sections of the encyclical emphasize truth as a common good and call for a renewed educational alliance in the digital age (Leo XIV, 2026), indicating that technological transformation requires deeper human formation rather than mere technological adaptation. Bozkurt et al. (2024) likewise warn that uncritical adoption of generative AI risks eroding the creativity, critical thinking, and empathy that formation seeks to cultivate. These passages were coded as truth, education as formation, educational alliance, and integral human development because they consistently associate education with the cultivation of moral and spiritual capacities. The document suggests that technological culture can be engaged responsibly only when learners are formed in truth, discernment, responsibility, and relational solidarity.

A second dimension of the theme emerges in the encyclical's portrayal of schools as communities of human and moral formation. Educational institutions are presented not simply as sites of technical instruction but as environments in which learners develop conscience, responsibility, dialogue, and concern for the common good (Leo XIV, 2026). This educational vision reflects the Catholic tradition articulated in Gravissimum Educationis, which understands education as the harmonious development of the intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions of the human person (Second Vatican Council, 1965b). Magnifica Humanitas thus extends this tradition into the context of artificial intelligence by interpreting education as a formative response to technological culture. Corpuz (2025) similarly argues that AI can enrich Catholic catechetical learning when engaged through virtue ethics rather than treated as a substitute for formation.

The document further associates digital culture with moral and relational formation through its reflections on communication, responsibility, and participation in technologically mediated environments. The references to an ecology of communication indicate that AI influences not only access to information but also the conditions under which relationships, identity, and moral judgment are formed (Leo XIV, 2026). This interpretation is consistent with contemporary scholarship arguing that digital technologies shape the contexts in which moral agency and human flourishing are exercised (Crawford, 2021; Coeckelbergh, 2020).

This theme emerged through the clustering of the initial codes integral human development, education as formation, educational alliance, schools, truth, common good, solidarity, and civilization of love. These codes converged around the category Education and Integral Human Formation, which consistently appeared in the educational sections of Magnifica Humanitas. During theme refinement, the related categories of truth, communication, schools, and human development were integrated into a comprehensive educational anthropology linking theological anthropology directly with the mission of Religious Education.

This theme reveals that Magnifica Humanitas envisions Religious Education as a form of integral human formation that prepares learners for ethical participation in AI-mediated societies. Education is presented as the cultivation of persons capable of discerning truth, exercising conscience, assuming responsibility, and engaging technological culture in service of the common good. In relation to the study's research question, the findings suggest that Religious Education curricula should integrate theological anthropology, digital ethics, AI literacy, and moral discernment (Chiu et al., 2024) in order to form learners who can participate responsibly, critically, and compassionately in technologically transformed educational environments. Ocampo and Gozum (2024) likewise

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identify both the risks and the pedagogical opportunities that AI presents for religious education. Chee et al., (2025) AI literacy education should cultivate critical, responsible, and ethical engagement with intelligent systems rather than mere tool use.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Magnifica Humanitas articulates a coherent theological anthropology that offers a significant Catholic contribution to contemporary discussions on artificial intelligence and Religious Education. The three themes identified through directed qualitative content analysis, the human person as imago Dei and the bearer of inviolable dignity, artificial intelligence as a technological reality subordinate to moral agency and authentic human flourishing, and Religious Education as integral human formation for responsible participation in the age of artificial intelligence, form an integrated anthropological framework rather than three discrete observations. Collectively, these themes suggest that the encyclical reorients contemporary technological discourse away from computational capability and toward the theological question of what it means to be fully human

Human dignity as the normative center of theological anthropology

The first finding demonstrates that Magnifica Humanitas grounds human dignity in the imago Dei and interprets personhood through a Christological and relational anthropology. This finding is consistent with Gaudium et Spes, which affirms that the mystery of the human person is fully revealed in Christ (Second Vatican Council, 1965a), and with Lumen Gentium, which understands human vocation in terms of communion with God and others (Second Vatican Council, 1964). The encyclical therefore extends the Catholic anthropological tradition by applying it directly to the context of artificial intelligence.

What distinguishes Magnifica Humanitas is its explicit use of theological anthropology as the normative framework for evaluating technological development. Human dignity is presented not merely as an ethical principle but as the ontological criterion against which technological innovation must be judged (Leo XIV, 2026). This finding supports contemporary scholarship arguing that AI ethics cannot be addressed adequately through technical regulation alone but requires a more fundamental account of the human person (Coeckelbergh, 2020; Dorobantu, 2022; Floridi & Cowls, 2019). Teo (2023) similarly contends that human dignity must be foregrounded in addressing the deeper, second-order challenges that AI poses to personhood. For Religious Education, this suggests that theological anthropology should occupy a central place in educational engagement with digital culture and artificial intelligence, enabling learners to interpret technological questions through the doctrines of creation, imago Dei, embodiment, vocation, and communion.

Artificial Intelligence and the primacy of moral agency

The second finding reveals that Magnifica Humanitas understands artificial intelligence as a powerful human creation that remains subordinate to moral agency and authentic human flourishing. This interpretation closely parallels Antiqua et Nova, which distinguishes human intelligence from artificial intelligence by emphasizing embodiment, relationality, conscience, creativity, and openness to transcendence (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, 2025). The encyclical therefore rejects any reduction of intelligence to computational performance and insists that technological systems cannot replace the moral, relational, and spiritual dimensions of personhood (Leo XIV, 2026). Chimakonam (2024) likewise argues that personhood-based ethics offers a critical framework for evaluating the moral consequences of AI and human enhancement.

The analysis further demonstrates that Magnifica Humanitas critiques the technocratic paradigm by warning against forms of technological power that diminish freedom, conscience, and relational responsibility. In doing so, the document contributes to broader AI ethics scholarship that examines the social and moral consequences of algorithmic systems (Crawford, 2021; Floridi & Cowls, 2019). The educational implication is that AI literacy should extend beyond technical competence to include ethical discernment, critical evaluation of

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technological systems, and reflection on human purpose (Chiu et al., 2024). Religious Education thus has a distinctive role in forming learners who can evaluate artificial intelligence according to human dignity, justice, solidarity, and the common good rather than technological efficiency alone.

Religious Education as integral human formation in the AI age

The third finding indicates that Magnifica Humanitas presents Religious Education as a form of integral human formation capable of preparing learners for responsible participation in AI-mediated societies. This vision develops the educational anthropology of Gravissimum Educationis, which understands Christian education as the harmonious formation of the whole person (Second Vatican Council, 1965b). The encyclical extends this tradition into the context of digital culture by emphasizing truth, conscience, responsibility, dialogue, and the common good as essential dimensions of education in a technologically mediated world. Papakostas (2025) likewise finds that AI can enrich religious education when deployed thoughtfully and ethically, but must not replace its relational and formational dimensions.

Particularly significant is the document's call for a renewed educational alliance in the digital age (Leo XIV, 2026), suggesting that technological transformation requires collaboration among schools, families, religious communities, and society. This interpretation is consistent with Catholic educational philosophy, which understands education as participation in truth, virtue, and communion rather than mere information transfer (Groome, 1980). It also resonates with the Rome Call for AI Ethics and the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, both of which identify education as essential for cultivating ethical technological cultures (Pontifical Academy for Life, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Magnifica Humanitas contributes a distinctively theological dimension to this conversation by grounding educational formation in the imago Dei and the human vocation toward communion and authentic flourishing.

Theological anthropology as a framework for AI-mediated education

When considered together, the three themes reveal that Magnifica Humanitas offers a theological-anthropological framework for AI-mediated education. The document does not treat artificial intelligence as an isolated technological problem; rather, it interprets AI within a broader vision of creation, redemption, moral agency, and education. Human dignity grounded in the imago Dei functions as the normative center; artificial intelligence is evaluated according to its service to freedom, conscience, responsibility, and the common good; and Religious Education is presented as the educational practice through which these anthropological principles are cultivated.

This integrated framework constitutes the principal contribution of the study. Whereas much contemporary scholarship on AI and education focuses on technological effectiveness, digital competencies, or ethical regulation, Magnifica Humanitas reframes the discussion around the theological question of what kind of human person education seeks to form. Bozkurt et al. (2024) likewise caution that generative AI is often celebrated for efficiency at the risk of eroding the human elements of creativity, critical thinking, and empathy in education. The encyclical therefore provides Catholic educators, curriculum developers, and Religious Education scholars with a theological foundation for engaging artificial intelligence critically, ethically, and pedagogically.

Implications for Religious Education

The findings suggest several implications for Religious Education. First, theological anthropology should become an explicit framework for AI-related curriculum development. Second, AI ethics should be integrated into Religious Education through the lenses of human dignity, conscience, solidarity, and the common good. Third, pedagogies of discernment, dialogue, and moral reflection are increasingly necessary in AI-mediated learning environments. Finally, teacher formation programs should integrate both theological anthropology and AI literacy in order to prepare educators for the ethical and pedagogical challenges of rapidly evolving technological cultures.

Future research should examine how the anthropological framework articulated in Magnifica Humanitas can be implemented empirically within Catholic schools, Religious Education curricula, teacher formation programs, and digital ethics education. Comparative studies involving other Christian traditions, religious communities, or philosophical approaches to artificial intelligence and human dignity would further clarify the distinctive contribution of Catholic theological anthropology to AI-mediated education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Magnifica Humanitas through directed qualitative content analysis to investigate its theological anthropology and its implications for Religious Education in the age of artificial intelligence. The analysis identified three interrelated themes: the human person as imago Dei and the bearer of inviolable dignity, artificial intelligence as a technological reality subordinate to moral agency and authentic human flourishing, and Religious Education as integral human formation for responsible participation in AI-mediated society. Together, these themes demonstrate that Magnifica Humanitas is fundamentally an anthropological and educational document that evaluates artificial intelligence through a theological understanding of the human person.

The findings indicate that Magnifica Humanitas places human dignity at the normative center of its engagement with artificial intelligence. By grounding personhood in the imago Dei, Christological anthropology, freedom, conscience, responsibility, and relational communion, the encyclical presents artificial intelligence as a valuable yet fundamentally instrumental human creation whose legitimacy depends upon its service to truth, justice, solidarity, and the common good. In doing so, it offers a distinctive Catholic contribution to contemporary discussions of AI ethics by resisting reductionist conceptions of intelligence and affirming the irreducible moral and spiritual dimensions of human personhood.

The principal contribution of this study is the demonstration that Magnifica Humanitas provides a coherent theological-anthropological framework for Religious Education in technologically mediated educational environments. The encyclical suggests that the central educational challenge posed by artificial intelligence is not merely technological adaptation but the formation of persons capable of discernment, ethical judgment, relational responsibility, and authentic human flourishing. Accordingly, Religious Education emerges as a privileged context for integrating theological anthropology, digital ethics, AI literacy, and moral formation within a person-centered educational vision.

This study is limited to the qualitative analysis of Magnifica Humanitas and selected supporting ecclesial sources; consequently, its conclusions are interpretive rather than empirical. Future research should examine how the anthropological principles identified in this study may be implemented within Catholic schools, Religious Education curricula, teacher formation programs, and AI-mediated learning environments, as well as compare Magnifica Humanitas with other religious and philosophical traditions addressing artificial intelligence and human dignity. In an era increasingly shaped by algorithmic systems and intelligent technologies, Magnifica Humanitas offers a theological anthropology that can guide Religious Education toward a human-centered and ethically responsible engagement with artificial intelligence.

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