

Catholic League Report: Pope Leo XIV's Encyclical

In this episode of "Catholic League Report" Catholic League President Bill Donohue, Director of Communications Mike McDonald, and Policy Analyst Sean Leigh discuss the release of Pope Leo XIV's encyclical "Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence." They have a conversation about the Pope's views on AI as well as what reforms and safeguards need to be made in order for it to achieve the common good.

To watch, click [here](#).

POPE LEO CONFRONTS AI

[Bill Donohue](#)

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII gave us the encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* ("new things"), which affirmed the dignity of work and the need for a fair wage. It was also a qualified endorsement of private property and a denunciation of socialism.

Now, on the 135th anniversary of that encyclical, Pope Leo XIV gives us "Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence." He begins by nicely laying out the moral groundwork that must undergird AI, and then he addresses his subject in detail.

Leo draws on Saint John Paul II who welcomed "the rise of democracy and the market economy." He picks up on that theme, emphasizing the right to private property, noting that "it is

always subordinate” to the common good. That end presupposes that we are not just an aggregate of individuals; rather, we are “interconnected” and are jointly responsible for the commonwealth.

To facilitate the pursuit of the common good, the pope says we must abide by the principle of subsidiarity, meaning that, ideally, civic duties should be handled at the level closest to the individual. To achieve this end we must strengthen “the fabric of associations and communities while avoiding further centralization of power.”

Leo insists on coupling human rights with human dignity. Owing to our human dignity, human rights are “universal and inalienable,” and among those rights “the first is the right to life, from conception to its natural end.” He explicitly cites abortion and euthanasia as contrary to human dignity and a violation of human rights.

Thus does he set the stage for a discussion of AI. At bottom, he understands that AI is here to stay, like it or not.

Contrary to some media accounts, he is not opposed to it; rather, he is opposed to its manipulation in the hands of unscrupulous individuals and groups. Similarly, it has been misreported that when he says he would like to “disarm” AI, he does not mean he wants to extinguish it. “To disarm,” he writes, “does not mean rejecting technology, but preventing it from dominating humanity.”

Technology, he says, can be a force for good or ill. He implores us to guard against the “risk of dehumanization,” i.e., “building a future that excludes God and reduces others to a means.”

The digital revolution, the Holy Father says, has changed the principle of subsidiarity. No longer is the State the highest level—now it is those who command the technological expertise to radically transform society. This means we must protect

against the monopolization of data and decision-making authority. We must resist technological actors who seek to impose on us their grand designs.

AI is not human. Leo offers this insightful nugget. "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, friendship or responsibility mean. Nor do they have a moral conscience, since they do not judge good and evil, grasp the ultimate meaning of situations, or bear responsibility for consequences."

While AI has no moral conscience, the pope hastens to add that "we cannot consider AI to be morally neutral." That is because "every technical tool embodies choices and priorities through what it measures, ignores and optimizes, and how it classifies people and situations." What worries him is the reality that "small but highly influential groups can shape information and consumption patterns," and affect political and economic dynamics to suit themselves, not the common good.

One of the greatest dangers AI poses is the specter of transhumanism and posthumanism. It is undeniably true that the perfection of human beings is an obsession with some technocrats. Indeed, some think they can create a hybridization of human beings. "If the human being is treated as something to be perfected or surpassed," Leo warns, "it becomes easier to accept that some lives are less useful, less desirable or less worthy."

The pope is also adept at noting how unsupervised children are being swallowed up by digital devices and how social media is affecting their psyches. Lower attention spans, sleep deprivation, inability to control emotions—all of this is well documented. Exposure to pornography, hypersexualized material, as well as cyberbullying, are threats to the wellbeing of young people.

He admonishes us not to allow AI to transform us into a new form of slavery. We are being reduced to “data” that allows us to be tracked and treated as “packages” to be moved around with abandon. It is not enough to “invoke efficiency,” especially if it results in a “chain of exploitation.”

Pope Leo ends with a plea not to allow AI to be entrusted with war-like powers. “No algorithm can make war morally acceptable.” Following Pope Francis, he says the “just war” theory is “outdated.” He did not proffer an alternative thesis.

Science tells us what we can do. It does not tell us what we should do. This powerful encyclical should reach an audience well beyond the Catholic community. Pope Leo XIV has given us much to weigh.

INTERFAITH RALLY TO PROTEST MAMDANI

On Tuesday, May 26, Bill Donohue will participate in an interfaith rally to protest Mayor Zohran Mamdani. It will be held outside Gracie Mansion (E 88th Street and East End Avenue, New York, NY 10028) from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM.

The rally will bring together people of different faiths, including Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim leaders, to call out Mamdani for his callous indifference and tacit support for the radical mobs and Islamists who have flooded the streets to attack houses of worship.

This rally is being organized by End Jew Hatred and led by Brooke Goldstein of The Lawfare Project. Other organizations

participating in the event include the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, #WalkAway, Hindus for Universal Human Rights, and American Muslim & Multifaith Women's Empowerment Council.

If you have any availability and wish to send a strong message that these assaults on our religious liberty are unacceptable, we hope to see you there!

MEDIA REACTION TO COLBERT'S EXIT

[Bill Donohue](#)

Media stories on the end of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" lament the decision by CBS to terminate the show, and some are heralding him as the great Catholic evangelizer. This cries out for a rebuttal.

Father James Martin, known for his ministry to gays and transpersons, declares that Colbert is "one of today's best Catholic evangelists." The first three reasons he gives for making this assessment are (1) "he is normal, or at least as normal as a famous late-night talk show host can be" (2) "people understand that he is not paid to promote the church," and (3) "he does it all with a sense of humor." Nice qualities but if that makes him "one of today's best Catholic evangelists," the bar is set pretty low.

Mark Kennedy writes for Crux and notes that Colbert is different from his competitors because he wears "his Catholic faith and his adoration of his wife and frequent guest, Evie McGee Colbert, on his sleeve." He is also someone who

allegedly “could quote Psalms by heart.” Let’s assume this is true. How does this justify Kennedy’s observation, “Many Catholics Mourning the Loss of Late-Night Host Stephen Colbert’s Show”?

Mary McNamara has a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* titled, “We Will Miss the Divine and Very Human Ministry of Stephen Colbert.” She explains her reasoning by noting that he is “the single greatest argument for married Catholic clergy.” Others may see it as “the single greatest argument” to maintain celibacy.

I like Colbert. He invited me twice to appear on his Comedy Central show, “The Colbert Report.” But he is not St. Colbert. His commentary includes defending a Doritos commercial that substituted the snack for the Eucharist. One of his shows featured a close-up photo of a priest distributing condoms instead of the consecrated Host. Regarding the play, “Jesus Christ Superstar,” he said, “It is the least gay musical because it’s got Jesus in it. Just this one guy with great abs hanging out with 12 of his buddies for three years in the countryside. Absolutely. Nothing gay about that at all.”

Colbert’s joke about President Trump performing oral sex on Vladimir Putin—using an obscenity—did not come off as an evangelizing moment. Ditto for his comment heralding a bald British bisexual black actress for playing Jesus in “Jesus Christ Superstar.”

Kennedy and McNamara, like so many in the media, are angry at CBS for firing Colbert. They smell politics. They should instead look at the bottom line.

Colbert’s CBS show had a budget of over \$100 million annually, and he was earning \$15 million a year. The show lost almost half its advertising revenue since 2018, and was losing \$40 million a year.

CBS cannot make miracles. Indeed, not even the “greatest

Catholic evangelizer in the world” can be expected to survive with numbers like that. It’s time the media stopped portraying him as a poor Catholic soul who was victimized by corporate greed.

POPE AND PRESIDENT CLASH; WAR AND DEPORTATIONS DIVIDE

Pope Leo XIV and President Trump have had their differences before, but now they are at a serious juncture. After weeks of the pope criticizing the president over the war on Iran, Trump took to Truth Social on April 12 saying the pope was “WEAK on Crime, and terrible on Foreign Policy.”

Trump’s recent threats to Iran were stark. “A whole civilisation will die tonight, never to be brought back again.” He said he would target bridges and power plants, thus endangering the lives of innocents. Those reckless comments triggered rebukes worldwide, from the U.N. to the Vatican.

The Holy Father labeled Trump’s statement “totally unacceptable.” He added that to attack infrastructure was a “sign of the hatred, the division, the destruction human beings are capable of, and we all want to work for peace.”

Both the U.N. secretary general and the pope said that if Trump went through with his threats, it would be considered a war crime under international law.

Pope Leo’s desire for peace is understandable. Less understandable was his sweeping statement on March 1 claiming that peace is achieved “only” through “dialogue.” That is simply not true. Historically, war has frequently resulted in

peace, an outcome that comes about when dialogue fails. That is why the Catholic Church is not a pacifist religion—it understands the necessity of “just wars.”

Trump’s comment that the pope is weak on crime is no doubt in reference to the pontiff’s criticisms of mass deportations. The U.S. bishops have also been vocal in denouncing the Trump administration on this issue. Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, recently said that “it’s very clear the American people are saying, ‘We really didn’t vote for this.’”

In fact, the American people did vote for mass deportations: Trump made this one of his key issues. Moreover, virtually every survey taken on this subject reveals that a majority of Americans approve mass deportations. They do so because they oppose the Biden policy of deliberately allowing 20 million illegal aliens to crash our borders, about which Catholics—55 percent of whom voted for Trump—heard very little from their leaders, either in Rome or at home.

Trump does not help his case by posing as Jesus blessing a bedridden man; he released this Truth Social picture after he criticized Leo. It is offensive and immature.

There will no doubt be occasions where the pope and the president will continue to make public their disagreements. But there are so many other issues, such as religious liberty, where the two share a common interest. Let’s pray the latter prove to be controlling.

PRO-LIFERS HIT BY BIDEN

It is well known that the Biden administration treated pro-life Americans as if they were a mortal enemy; this was

especially true of Catholics. But we did not know the extent of the misconduct until April when the Department of Justice (DOJ) released a report on more than 700,000 internal records.

The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act puts restrictions on pro-life protesters and abortion-rights protesters. But under Biden, the latter were cut a lot of slack.

Former FBI Director Christopher Wray admitted two years ago that 70 percent of FACE Act offenses were not committed by pro-life protesters; they committed a fraction of them. Moreover, in 2022, the DOJ did not charge a single abortion-rights activist, but it charged 26 pro-life protesters with a FACE violation. Now we know why.

The DOJ under Biden was operating a two-tiered system of justice. It was prosecuting people on the basis of their beliefs. Prosecutors tracked pro-life activists and sought harsher sentences. They even withheld evidence and tried to exclude jurors based on their religion.

On several occasions, the Catholic League contacted federal officials about the way pro-lifers were being treated. Bill Donohue wrote to the House and Senate Homeland Security Committees, Sen. Charles Grassley, Rep. Chip Roy, Attorney General Merrick Garland and FBI Director Wray, imploring them to address this weaponization of justice.

It is up to the Trump DOJ to finish the job. We need justice now.

IS PACIFISM MORAL?

Bill Donohue

Let's cut to the quick. No, pacifism is not moral. Pacifism means that self-defense, and the defense of one's nation, is immoral. However pure the intent, pacifism holds that it is better to permit innocents to die than it is to use force to stop the aggressors. Now that is immoral.

This issue is back in the news largely because of the war in Iran. But it is also relevant again because of the recent death of Colman McCarthy, America's premier pacifist, and some remarks by Pope Leo XIV.

McCarthy wrote for *The Washington Post* for decades. He studied to be a monk and was popular in left-Catholic circles for his opposition to violence in any form and for any cause. He was 89.

He was such a purist that he even refused to stand for "The Star-Spangled Banner," objecting to the refrain "the bombs bursting in air." No doubt he hated fireworks. Any pacifist who views grades and exams as "forms of academic violence" surely must find Fourth of July celebrations to be verboten.

Though McCarthy was loved by his left-wing Catholic fans, he spoke with derision about Catholicism. "As the secretly elected leader of a male-run, land-rich, undemocratic, hierarchic, dogmatically unyielding organization headquartered in a second-rate European country, Pope John Paul II had few, if any, worries about accountability. He ruled, accordingly, as an autocrat."

Why the invective? Among other things, he hated the pope's defense of the "just war" doctrine. In his encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, His Holiness wrote that "the intrinsic value of life and the duty to love oneself no less than others are

the basis of *a true right to self-defense*" (his italics).

McCarthy would have none of it. He believed that we have no right to kill an aggressor even in circumstances where that is the only viable option. Moreover, he believed that even when someone was able to kill an aggressor from killing scores of non-combatant women and children, it would be better to let him slaughter the innocent. This is what pacifism yields—immoral outcomes.

Catholicism ascribes to the "just war" doctrine as broached by St. Augustine. He wanted peace as much as anyone but he also knew there were times when we had to fight in order to achieve it. He laid down several criteria for war, among them that the cause must be just; that there must be a probability of success; that the means used must be proportionate to the desired outcome; and that force should be invoked only as a last resort.

Many years ago, when I was teaching at a Catholic college, I listened to a visiting professor lecture the mostly Catholic faculty on the merits of pacifism. He cited the tradition of the Quakers as exemplary and had the audacity to chide the audience for its affiliation with a religion that justifies war in some instances. He was not too happy with me when I stopped him in his tracks, arguing that the only reason any of us are alive today is because enough Americans rejected pacifism as a just option in World War II.

Pacifists may say they believe in peace, but in my book they confuse peace with surrender.

Pope Leo XIV has not openly rejected the "just war" doctrine, but recent comments he made about the conflict in Iran come close.

On Easter Sunday, Pope Leo XIV called for all nations to lay down their arms and choose negotiation. On March 1, he went further, saying about the Middle East, "Stability and peace

are not achieved through mutual threats, nor through the use of weapons, which sow destruction, suffering, and death, but only through reasonable, sincere, and responsible dialogue.” That comment drew the ire of *Wall Street Journal* columnist Bill McGurn.

McGurn took strong issue with the word “only.” He is, of course, right. Countless wars have resulted in peace. In fairness, the pope was not speaking from a traditional mantle of authority—it was a tweet. No matter, he left himself open for rebuke. It also needs to be said that there are those who wage war on innocents and explicitly reject dialogue. What then? There are times when we can’t talk our way out of a confrontation.

St. Augustine won the debate in 418 A.D. when he wrote that “Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity...in order that peace may be obtained” (my emphasis).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* agrees with Augustine. “Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm. For this reason, those who legitimately hold authority also have the right to use arms to repel aggression against the civil community entrusted to their responsibility.”

The great American political philosopher, Sidney Hook (whom I greatly admired and studied under), once wrote that “Those who will never risk their lives for freedom will surely lose their freedom without surely saving their lives...” A better rejoinder to Colman McCarthy would be hard to find.

WAS POPE LEO XIV HOODWINKED?

Last April, Bill Donohue wrote a scathing review of a book that smeared the Catholic Church, and Opus Dei, in particular. The following letter to the pope explains why he felt compelled to write to him.

March 18, 2026

Secretariat of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV
00120 Vatican City

Your Holiness:

Your service to the Catholic Church is appreciated the world over, by Catholics and by those who belong to other faith communities. It is in this vein that I write to you regarding your meeting on March 16 with Gareth Gore, the author of *Opus: The Cult of Dark Money, Human Trafficking, and Right-Wing Conspiracy Inside the Catholic Church*. After the meeting, Gore said that you found his book to be a “rigorous piece of work.”

I have no idea if this is true, or whether you actually had the time to read it. I read it and published my review in the April 2025 edition of *Catalyst* (see enclosed), the journal of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. I hasten to add that I am not a member of Opus Dei. I am a sociologist who has published twelve books, and I am president of the nation’s largest Catholic civil rights organization.

Quite frankly, Gore’s book is anything but rigorous. I labeled it “sloppy,” saying it is “strewn with hyperbole, innuendo and out-and-out falsehoods. Yet he had the audacity to say in an interview that his book is ‘100 percent correct.’” To cite one example, any author who portrays the late Cardinal George Pell as a pedophile is either ignorant or malicious. I detail many other examples of his irresponsible commentary.

“To be fair,” I concluded, “there are conspiratorial kooks on the right who claim bogeymen are trying to undermine America. However, they are mostly without effect, owing to their notorious stupidity. But those on the left, especially those who write books which appear to be well sourced, are not so easily identified. That’s why they are a much bigger menace.”

I respectfully request that you take another look at Gore’s book. I honestly don’t want to see him take advantage of your goodwill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.

President

CATHOLIC JUSTICES PROBED AGAIN

When Jews and Protestants are being considered for a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court, they are rarely, if ever, asked by legislators to explain how their religious convictions might affect their legal thinking. The same is not true of Catholic nominees: their faith often becomes center stage at the hearings.

Our Catholic Supreme Court Justices are under the microscope again, only this time liberal commentators are afraid they may not be Catholic enough!

Maureen Groppe is a senior reporter for *USA Today*. A recent

column she wrote says it all. "Will the Majority-Catholic Supreme Court Listen to the Church on Immigration?" She is particularly impressed that the bishops' conference is making a moral case against Trump's position on birthright citizenship.

The bishops' conference uses stronger language with regard to abortion. It labels it "intrinsically evil." Yet when Catholic Justices overturned *Roe v. Wade*, sending the issue of abortion back to the states, pro-abortion groups blasted them and law journals ran articles about conflating religious convictions and legal reasoning. The American Bar Association held a webinar on this subject.

"Will the Majority-Catholic Supreme Court Listen to the Church on Same-Sex Marriage?" Imagine a news story on this subject that invites the reader to question the autonomy of Catholic Justices. Would *USA Today* run it?

We all have biases, but when it comes to being clueless about harboring them, no one beats liberals. They live in a world where their political thinking is constantly reinforced, leaving them hopelessly blind to their own prejudices.

OPEN LETTER TO SEN. CORY BOOKER

April 8, 2026

Hon. Cory Booker
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Sen. Booker:

On the April 6 edition of the Fox News show, "Special Report with Bret Baier," you accused ICE agents of "dragging Americans out of churches." This is a very serious charge. It is also manifestly untrue.

Perhaps you are thinking about an incident at North Hills United Methodist Church in the San Fernando Valley on February 26. There was a migrant who was arrested, but he was apprehended while running across the church parking lot.

The only source that supports your accusation is from a piece in the "People's World" (formerly known as the "Daily Worker," an organ of the Communist Party of the United States) on December 2, 2025. It is titled, "ICE Now Grabbing People Out of Churches."

The article begins by saying ICE "is ushering in the Christmas season by launching immigration raids inside churches across the country." This is a lie. Not one example is cited.

Oh, yes, we learn about a Chicago woman who says she saw "ICE vans and agents swarming in front of her house, which is very close to the church." There was also an arrest made of a "Latino man trimming a church lawn in Charlotte, N.C." Speculation about ICE raiding churches at Christmas was also made, but there is no evidence that they did.

By making unsupported accusations about ICE agents, you wind up smearing them, frightening Americans, and undercutting your credibility. Please retract your statement. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.

President

cc: U.S. Senators