

Magnifica Humanitas
Session 1 - ; August 5, 2026

We inadvertently started the recording midway through our first presentation.

A transcript of what was not recorded is found at the bottom of this document

Quick recap

The meeting was a webinar hosted by St. John's Evangelist in Columbia, Maryland, focused on discussing Pope Francis's encyclical "Magnifica Humanitas" and its perspectives on artificial intelligence (AI). Scott welcomed participants from various parishes and introduced the speakers: David Opitz, who provided a technological viewpoint and historical context on technology's impact; Michelle Zelaya, who discussed Catholic social teaching and justice issues related to AI; and Father Ryan, who offered a spiritual framework using biblical stories of Babel and Nehemiah. The session included small group discussions where participants shared personal experiences and reflections on how technology affects faith, justice, and community. The conversation highlighted both the benefits and challenges of AI, emphasizing the need for discernment, prayer, and community involvement in addressing its implications for society. The event concluded with a closing prayer and gratitude for the large turnout.

Summary

AI and Social Doctrine Discussion

Scott discussed artificial intelligence, emphasizing its role in challenging and developing social doctrine categories while maintaining fidelity to the gospel. The group then prepared for an upcoming webinar about an encyclical, with participants joining from multiple parishes across the diocese. The webinar was scheduled to start at 7:00 PM, and Scott reminded attendees to mute their microphones before the presentation began.

AI and Catholic Social Doctrine

Scott introduced a panel discussion on artificial intelligence based on Pope Leo's document, explaining that AI should be viewed as a development challenging social doctrine categories rather than just a theme to study. David Optitz, representing Loyola University's technological perspective, began his presentation by clarifying that the Pope's encyclical is not anti-AI but provides guidance on reasoning about AI's implications. David shared historical parallels between current AI concerns and past technological fears,

particularly comparing AI to the printing press and factory production, noting how both innovations sparked worries about job displacement and misinformation.

Technology and Society Framework Discussion

David discussed the impact of technology on society, using examples like the internet and Model T cars to illustrate how technological changes can cause fear and disruption. He introduced a framework for evaluating technology based on its benefits and potential harms to society, using hammers, guns, and cars as examples. Michelle from the Maryland Catholic Conference then spoke about Catholic social teaching and how it provides a framework for addressing technology's impact on society, particularly regarding AI. She emphasized the importance of community involvement and proper discernment when using technology, highlighting the need for balanced discussions rather than polarized views about AI.

Technology and Faith Discussion

The group discussed the impact of technology on faith and society, with participants sharing experiences about technology's benefits and challenges. Sarah highlighted issues of technology exclusion for older people and the influence of financial interests over social justice in technology development. Bart shared a positive experience using AI to help someone in prison, while David noted how different people in his group mentioned different prayer apps that helped their faith journeys. Father Ryan presented a framework using biblical stories of Babel and Nehemiah to guide how people of faith should approach technology, emphasizing the choice between building towers of human effort without God or rebuilding communities with God at the center. The session concluded with participants being asked to reflect on how well society rebuilds when God is placed at the center.

AI Impact on Human Work

The meeting focused on a discussion about AI and its impact on human work and dignity. Participants shared insights from their groups, including concerns about AI quality, human connection, and access control of AI models. Susan Hailman emphasized the importance of beginning with prayer rather than immediately seeking solutions to overwhelming challenges. Scott announced that the next session would cover chapters 3 and 4, which would contain more substantive content, and thanked participants for their engagement.

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Scott Miller: Well, welcome, folks. We are glad you are here. St. John's Evangelist in Columbia, Maryland.

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Scott Miller: is helping to sponsor this event, but we have folks from all around the diocese, and we're glad to have you with us.

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Scott Miller: Our parish has an interesting history with webinars. It started back during COVID, and we got involved in a series of conversations called Honest Conversations About Racism.

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Scott Miller: And we had many, many people who were stuck at home and were more than happy to get on a webinar and have honest conversations about racism. It was a lovely and wonderful thing as part of our history of our parish.

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Scott Miller: So we're happy to do this now again, have a good conversation about something that's important to us, important to the church, and important to our society.

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Scott Miller: We are at an interesting moment in history right now in terms of dealing with this AI issue. Things are transforming in our society at a rather quick bit. And the document itself.

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Scott Miller: In paragraph 17, we read that artificial intelligence, according to Pope Leo, should not be considered as merely yet another theme to be studied.

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Scott Miller: Or a crisis to be managed.

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Scott Miller: but rather as a development that challenges the categories of social doctrine from within, calling us.

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Scott Miller: for their further development and fidelity to the gospel.

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Scott Miller: This is a moment for us to figure out where we are as people, as a society, as a church, in terms of dealing with these immense.

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Scott Miller: changes in our technology.

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Scott Miller: So the format for these sessions will be is that we have three speakers with us.

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Scott Miller: And I want to do so in a second. We have three speakers with us who will be representing different dynamics.

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Scott Miller: David Optitz is here, and he is from Loyola University, where he's a senior security analysis.

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Scott Miller: for the Office of Technological Services, and he serves there as an adjunct professor as well.

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Scott Miller: Father Ryan is the associate pastor here at St. John's.

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Scott Miller: Right after this document came out, he included comments about this document in his homily. And you may or may not know about it, but he's a content creator on YouTube.

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Scott Miller: So he does wonderful little videos and songs about the gospels for young children in English and in Spanish as well, too.

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Scott Miller: And then Michelle Zela is the Associate Director for Social and Economic Justice at Maryland Catholic Conference.

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Scott Miller: Maryland Catholic Conferences are lobbying force in Annapolis.

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Scott Miller: So, we have some basic ground rules here. We're gonna invite you to break up into smaller groups at different points. We ask you to be...

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Scott Miller: concise in your thoughts, and not to, uh, take over the bandwagon, and leave the... if we give you 6 minutes for a conversation, or 13 minutes for conversation.

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Scott Miller: Don't take up all of it. Share it with other people, and listen as well as speak. We'd appreciate that very much.

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Scott Miller: So let us begin our evening together real briefly with prayer, and we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Scott Miller: Lord God, you have the technology.

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Scott Miller: to teach us how to pray, it was very simple. You asked us to say.

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Scott Miller: Our Father, who art in heaven...

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Scott Miller: Father Ryan and I were talking, and he was saying, we need to stay on time. Father Ryan, we're staying on time, we're doing a good job so far. David, you're up first.

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Scott Miller: David's going to talk to us, and David is representing, as a person who works in technology for Loyola University, David's representing the theological angle of our presentations.

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Scott Miller: Michelle will be talking about the social... Catholic social teaching, social justice perspectives, and then Father Ryan gets to cover spirituality, church, faith, and everything else.

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Scott Miller: All right. But, David, you're up first. You want to talk about technology as a tool.

Scott Miller: I'll turn it over to you, sir.

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David Opitz: First, a little background. My viewpoint from here is going to be technological.

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David Opitz: Not from a social justice or theology standpoint, but we have other people on the committee who are both of those.

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David Opitz: who will be speaking, and I'm a big fan of social justice because of my faith.

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David Opitz: So really, we're all on the same team here.

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David Opitz: Um, just different viewpoints, and hopefully we can come to an understanding by looking at it from different angles.

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David Opitz: I told a friend of mine that I was gonna be on this panel a few weeks ago, because the Pope had written an encyclical on AI.

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David Opitz: And he said, oh, so you're going to quit using AI?

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David Opitz: And that puzzled me. I wasn't sure where he was coming from, and I gave him a brief explanation of what the document is about, but I think I know where he was coming from.

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Ann Elizabeth Maria: Yep.

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David Opitz: the Pope, he knows who the Pope is, even though he's not Christian, um, and the Pope is a guy who comments on things that are wrong. He comments on how migrants are treated in various countries around the world.

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David Opitz: They've had some really awful conditions.

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Paule Sonnentrucker: Thank you.

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David Opitz: He comments on war and how it how bad it is to start a war.

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David Opitz: So, when my friend heard that there was an encyclical on AI, he assumed the Pope was gonna write...

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David Opitz: This is why AI is bad. But that's not what he did.

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David Opitz: Similarly, he doesn't also... the Pope is not pro-AI, either. It's much more subtle, with nuances in there. And I think that's why this is a good document. It's gonna go through and teach us how to reason and think about.

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David Opitz: some of the large issues that come up as we talk about AI.

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David Opitz: And it's not even just on AI. I was, you know, I would like, from my technical viewpoint, I like technical papers, but it's not a technical paper either, which makes sense.

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David Opitz: The Vatican's expertise is not low-level technical details of things, but looking at the big picture, and this is definitely a big picture kind of document.

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David Opitz: So, I want to start by reading a section... I don't know, Scott, if you have the PowerPoint slides I mailed you, if you can present them, or I'll just read off if you don't have those.

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Scott Miller: I'm gonna get there. Sorry.

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David Opitz: All right.

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David Opitz: Well, while we're waiting, I was going to read a quote from paragraph 9 of the Magnifica Humanitas document. So you can just listen while Scott's finding the document.

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David Opitz: Technology has the power to heal, connect, educate, and protect our common home.

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David Opitz: But it can also divide, exclude, and generate new forms of injustice.

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David Opitz: In the abstract, technology in and of itself is not a solution to humanity's problems.

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David Opitz: Just as it is not inherently evil. In practice, however, technology is never neutral.

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David Opitz: Because it takes on the characteristics of those who devise, finance, regulate, and use it.

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David Opitz: So he's kind of taking a viewpoint of looking at, I said, the big picture. He's looking at technology, not just AI, but any technology as it influences society.

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David Opitz: So a lot of this would, um, would apply to, say, social media, which has changed society, and we can use the lessons from this document to decide what's appropriate ways to use social media.

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David Opitz: Or are there other technologies?

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David Opitz: So I got a couple other slides. I was told to keep this kind of short so there could be more discussion.

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David Opitz: The next slide I have is on.

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David Opitz: Some history of technology and how it's changed the world.

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David Opitz: So the first example I have is the printing press.

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David Opitz: Johannes Gutenberg in Germany around the year 1440, so almost 600 years ago, invented the printing press.

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David Opitz: And there was a lot of fear about the printing press.

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David Opitz: Prior to the printing press being invented, there were not many books. You had to have a hand scribe copy letter by letter.

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David Opitz: the... the words out of one book to make a copy and have a second copy of the book. And that was a very slow, tedious process.

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David Opitz: So there weren't a lot of books around. And when people found out that they could print lots of books, there was a lot of fear.

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David Opitz: Date of ***** was gonna be in the books. There could be misinformation in the books.

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David Opitz: people won't have to memorize as much. Um, so their intelligence is gonna be not as strong.

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David Opitz: Uh...

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David Opitz: Data was handled by some trusted, handled by trusted authorities.

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David Opitz: Um, mostly the church, who had a lot of the documents that were passed around in books, the keeper of the books.

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David Opitz: And a lot of those same...

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David Opitz: Issues come up with artificial intelligence.

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David Opitz: People are worried in school that if students are using AI, their students won't develop. Same way printing presses were maybe affecting human intelligence.

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David Opitz: AI can make fakes that look almost real, images or videos even. So AI can spread misinformation.

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David Opitz: Um, and anyone can use AI. There used to be, um...

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David Opitz: Uh...

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David Opitz: Limited people who could make create a movie. But now you could almost put together a movie using AI. And that that's a threat to movie studios.

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David Opitz: So I found a historical example. There were not only were people upset with the printing press.

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David Opitz: But there's a lot of incidents, soon after it was invented, all around Europe, of people breaking into buildings where the printing presses were and destroying them.

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David Opitz: Physically destroying them, so there was violence associated with the printing press.

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David Opitz: And I found one example of someone who'd written a document in 1942, 1492.

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David Opitz: Johannes Trithemius.

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David Opitz: He was a Benedictine monk, and he wrote a document in praise of scribes.

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David Opitz: Um... and another example... This brings you back to the video and the comment regarding the production of Textiles in England.