

MAGISTERIUM

How does AI align with moral teaching?

AI can align with Catholic moral teaching **only when it is used and governed in ways that respect the dignity of the human person and the common good.** In that view, AI is not morally neutral—its *ethical character* depends on human intentions, design choices, and the social effects of its deployment. ^① ^②

AI is a “tool,” so morality depends on use and intention

Catholic teaching treats technology (including AI) primarily as a **tool**: “the benefits or harm it will bring will depend on its use.” ^①

This means moral discernment is not optional: the Church insists that the growth of technology must be accompanied by a formation in responsibility so that innovation serves **peace and integral human development, not selfish interests or power.** ^②

The first criterion: human dignity and human judgment must remain central

A core moral question is whether AI **protects or replaces** what is uniquely human. Pope Leo XIV emphasizes that human dignity involves our ability to **reflect, choose freely, love unconditionally, and enter into authentic relationships**, and that AI must be managed so it does not undermine human openness to truth, beauty, wonder, and contemplation. ^③

Similarly, in discussions of decision-making systems, Pope Francis warns against approaches that effectively “delegate to a machine the last word concerning a person’s future,” especially when data categories encode prejudice (e.g., ethnic classification affecting outcomes). ^①

In Catholic terms: AI can assist, but **the human person remains the proper subject of judgment and responsibility.** ^④

The social-moral framework: the common good and justice for all

To evaluate AI ethically, Pope Leo XIV says the criteria for judgment and discernment in the digital environment are “the noble principles of Social Doctrine”: **inalienable human dignity, common good, universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity, and social justice.** ⁵ That implies practical questions like: Does AI expand access to opportunities or concentrate power? Does it protect the vulnerable or deepen exclusion?

Pope Francis likewise states that AI’s positive impact is not automatic; it depends on responsible action and respect for fundamental values such as **inclusion, transparency, security, equity, privacy, and reliability.** ²

Truth, transparency, and accountable governance

Catholic moral alignment includes respect for **truth** and **accountability**. The US bishops warn about how AI can contribute to a “growing crisis of truth,” including deepfakes and misinformation used to manipulate public opinion, so AI systems should have **human oversight** and **well-defined accountability** to promote transparency and fair processes. ⁶ They also stress that AI should not be treated as a substitute for moral reasoning or democratic judgment. ⁷

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Bias and injustice: AI must be tested for discriminatory effects

AI can produce unjust outcomes when training data or categories embed bias. Pope Francis gives a concrete example of predictive systems influencing legal decisions while accessing sensitive private-life data, which may implicitly incorporate prejudices. ¹ Therefore, moral alignment requires rigorous safeguards so AI does not systematically disadvantage groups or worsen inequality and conflict. ²

Care for the vulnerable—especially children

Catholic moral teaching treats protecting minors as especially urgent. Pope Leo XIV notes that AI can manipulate or influence children’s decisions and preferences and that parents and educators must understand these dynamics; it is “essential” that tools be developed to **monitor and guide** young people’s interactions with technology. ⁸ The US bishops likewise call for safeguards to reduce harm from online exploitation and

harmful exposure, emphasizing protection of children's dignity and well-being as a demand of the common good. ⁹ ¹⁰

Work, peace, and the limits of technological power

AI's ethical alignment also depends on its impact on human labor and peace.

- **Labor and inequality:** The US bishops stress that work has inherent worth and AI should supplement human work rather than deprive people of dignity, while regulations should address displacement, inequality, and exploitation. ⁶
- **Peace:** Pope Francis frames AI as a technology that can either advance peace or threaten freedom through selfishness, profit, and power; thus it must serve integral development and the cause of peace, not worsen inequalities and conflicts. ²
- **War:** The US bishops raise specific concern about lethal autonomous weapons and insist that **human control** over weapon systems is essential to mitigate war's horrors and protect rights. ⁶

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"Disarming" AI: rejecting domination, exclusion, and dehumanization

Pope Leo XIV uses strong language: AI must be "**disarmed**," freed from logics that turn it into an instrument of domination, exclusion, and death—analogueous to the moral necessity of disarmament for nuclear power. ¹¹

He also insists that "decisions about technology must never be separated from conscience and responsibility." ¹¹

Practical bottom line: when does AI most clearly align?

AI aligns most closely with Catholic moral teaching when it is:

- **Subordinated to human dignity** (humans judge; AI assists). ⁴
- **Oriented to the common good**, not merely profit or control. ⁵ ³
- **Governed ethically** with transparency, oversight, equity, privacy, security, and reliability. ² ⁶

- **Protected against bias and harmful discrimination** through testing and safeguards. ¹
- **Protective of the vulnerable**, especially children. ⁸ ⁹
- **Integrated into a broader moral formation**, so people remain able to discern truth and choose the good. ¹²

If AI is treated this way—as a **morally accountable tool in the service of persons and society**—it can fit within Catholic moral teaching rather than contradict it. ¹ ⁵

References

1 Pope Francis Attends the G7 Session on Artificial Intelligence (13-15 June 2024) / Pope Francis

2 LVII World Day of Peace 2024 - Artificial Intelligence and Peace 2 / Pope Francis

3 To Participants in the Conference “Artificial Intelligence and Care for Our Common Home” (5 December 2025) 1 / Pope Leo XIV

4 Antiqua et Nova (The Old and the New): Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence Footnote / Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture...

5 Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Leo XIV Magnifica Humanitas (15 May 2026) §96 / Pope Leo XIV

6 Joint Letter on Artificial Intelligence Principles and Priorities (9 June 2025) 2 / United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

7 Joint Letter on Artificial Intelligence Principles and Priorities (9 June 2025) 1 / United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

8 To the Participants in the meeting organised by the Foundation for the Study and Research on Childhood and Adolescence (13 November 2025) 1 / Pope Leo XIV

9 Letter to Congress on Principles for Protecting Children Online (June 6, 2023) 1 / United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

10 Letter to Congress on Principles for Protecting Children Online (June 6, 2023) 3 / United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

11 Presentation and promulgation of the Encyclical Letter “Magnifica humanitas” (25 May 2026) 1 / Pope Leo XIV

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