



VOICES FOR JUSTICE THREE ECOLOGICAL THEMES IN MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS

BY BRENNA DAVIS

[<https://ignatiansolidarity.net/blog/author/bdavis/>] |

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While Pope Leo’s new encyclical about the human person in an age of artificial intelligence does not contain lengthy sections on the environmental impacts of AI (paragraph 101 is the main place he discusses this), it does include ecological themes that expand and emphasize Pope Francis’ reflections on care for our common home. Below are three ideas and 10 quotes from *Magnifica Humanitas* [<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html>] that expand on ecological themes from Catholic Social Teaching [<https://educationforjustice.org/homepage/catholic-social-teaching/>] to promote a vision of abundant life for all of creation, now and into the future.

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Students make a human web at ISN's Student Ecology Summit.

Solidarity is Essential in the World Wide Web of Life

Pope Leo essentially writes a Catholic Social Teaching 101 guide at the beginning of the encyclical, and his reflections on solidarity between humans and nature contain some of my favorite lines in the document. These reflections on solidarity also make me think of a concept in *Laudato Si'* [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/document_francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html] , integral ecology, which means everything is interconnected.

This [solidarity] emerges from a vision of the human person generated by faith, namely that every human being is created in the image of God and is part of a network of relationships that bind him or her to others, to specific populations and to creation... Fraternity is not merely an aspiration of believers, but is a social and political reality to be embodied in communal choices and endeavors. Solidarity, then, is the concrete recognition

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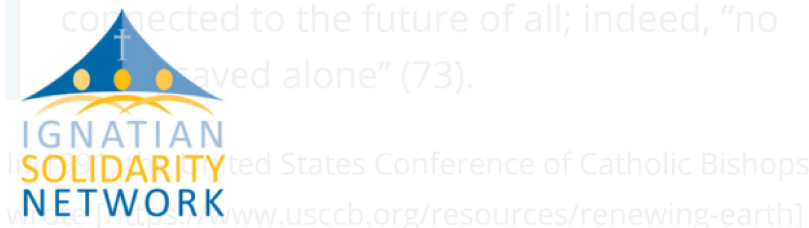
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“The web of life is one.” The image of life as a web is one I return to again and again as I imagine this invisible network of relationships: it is interconnected but fragile. As I was reading this section of the encyclical, the phrase “World Wide Web” came to mind. While we don’t use that name for the internet often now, Pope Leo makes clear that we are not only connected through the web of life in nature but also through a digital web that plays an outsized role in the future of humanity and creation.



Students at Magnificat High School in Ohio advocate for migrant justice as part of ISN's "Faith not Fear"

[<https://ignatiansolidarity.net/blog/2026/03/25/choosing-faith-over-fear-on-the-feast-of-st-oscar-romero-catholic-students-stand-in-solidarity-with-migrants/>] campaign.

In light of this reality, Pope Leo centers a call to solidarity and the reminder that “no one is saved alone” (a line from Pope Francis' *Laudate Deum* [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/laudate-deum.html]). Oftentimes, especially in the United States, there is a narrative that ecological degradation needs to be addressed at the individual level, but here Pope Leo clearly states that working for solidarity in this

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for our lives are intertwined; digital networks connect people and communities across the world in real time, and global economies and communications mean that events in one place have a far-reaching impact... we are not merely neighbors to one another, but entrusted to each other, so that each of us may take responsibility, as best we can, for the lives and wounds of our brothers and sisters. Solidarity arises precisely when we decide not to remain indifferent to what happens to our neighbor but instead to transform unavoidable bonds — economic, cultural and technological — into paths of sharing, cooperation and mutual care, embracing the idea of “thinking and acting in terms of community” (74).

While the internet and technology connect us in ways I couldn't have imagined as a child, there is a danger that we also experience what Pope Francis called the “globalization of indifference.” At a time in the United States when narratives of personal freedom and individual needs dominate, Pope Leo reminds us that we have a responsibility to respond to our neighbors' needs, just as the Good Samaritan did. While screens can put a wall between us and others and make us feel numb to the injustice we witness, we are called to choose solidarity and to consider the common good when making decisions, rather than only our own wants in the immediate moment.

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sustainable for current and future generations.

The web that the pope mentions extends to supply clean water and natural resources and habitats affected by climate change. Asking an AI model to generate a search query, video, or written report is frictionless for the user,

there is an invisible chain of people and natural elements that are impacted to make this process and the devices we use possible.

Every seemingly immediate and flawless response [of AI] is the result of a long chain of mediation, involving vast networks of natural resources, energy infrastructure and, above all, people...In many cases, these workers are young people, predominantly women, working under demanding conditions for minimal wages. Added to this invisible labor is the even harsher work of extracting the resources required for the production of the devices and microprocessors on which AI depends. In some regions of the world, children and adolescents work in dangerous conditions, crushing the materials from which rare earth elements are extracted. The bodies of these people are scarred, injured and worn down so that computational flow may continue uninterrupted (173).

Throughout the encyclical, Pope Leo makes clear that the benefits of technology are a common good meant to be shared, and we cannot sacrifice the most vulnerable people, particularly women and children, in order for people in wealthy nations to benefit. When we violate the rights of people and creation in this way, we move away

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recognizes the human being as a creature embedded in a network of relationships with other living beings and with all of creation. Fidelity to the truth requires integrating the possibilities offered by technology within a framework marked by wisdom, which is capable of safeguarding both the dignity of each person and the future of our common home (237).

While images of what the world will look like in the future often feel imposed upon us by those in society with the most money and power, Pope Leo invites us to use our own imaginations to envision a world with systems and practices that support living in harmony with others and the planet. We **can** find a balance between new technologies and concerns for justice, and we must all be active participants since we are alive at this unprecedented moment in history.

Limits Are Natural and Necessary

A favorite theology professor of mine once asked our class to read the story of the Garden of Eden and to recount what happened line by line in the text, not what we recalled from memory. It was a powerful exercise that revealed Eve accepted the fruit not because she was trying to break God's rules but because she "saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat, and she

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Pomegranate tree

This left me with two lasting impressions: “sin” often starts because we see the good in things, and, as a result, humans have a hard time respecting limits. Eve and Adam had access to more than they needed in the garden, but they wanted to try that one last thing that looked so good. This feels like an apt learning for our current relationship with technology. There is a sense of wonder at what technology can accomplish; however, unlimited knowledge without healthy limits creates problems. Pope Leo reflects on the importance of limits and measured progress in the document.

Secondly, building for the common good means accepting the limits and weakness of humanity without considering them an error to be corrected. Today, the human desire for fullness of life is at risk of being misled by deceitful goals, such as the prospect of a technology that promises to free us from all weakness, and models of well-being that leave behind entire populations. All too often, we place our hope in unlimited “upgrades,” in forms of progress that exacerbate inequalities, and

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healing people's wounds (12).

As we move into the planet and the impacts of technology on
this reflection on limits, the common good,
essential. Pope Leo is encouraging us to

consider the consequences of unchecked acceptance of new technologies, not because they are inherently evil, but because, without a measured approach, certain people and ecosystems are at risk of exploitation. Instead, he invites us to accept the limits around convenience and instant gratification for some in support of abundant life for all of creation and future generations.

For this reason, it [solidarity] requires a modest and shared way of life, the ability to forego immediate benefits in order to create opportunities for others in the future, and a willingness to challenge habits and privileges — including those related to digital consumption and the use of technology — when they prevent others from living with dignity (75).

Pope Leo continues later in the encyclical by using balance in an ecosystem as an image for us to contemplate as we move deeper into an era obsessed with information, intelligence, and unlimited growth. He reminds us that humans are more than what we understand in our heads and that there is a danger when we limit the diversity of human experience and expression by uplifting human intellect above all else.

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Students at the Arrupe Leaders Summit

[<https://ignatiansolidarity.net/programs/arrupe-leaders-summit/>] collaborate through dialogue to meet a shared goal.

In an ecosystem, balance is disrupted when one species expands at the expense of others; in human life, something similar occurs when one faculty claims to be the measure of everything. Thus, intelligence, when absolutized, overshadows other essential dimensions of life, such as affection, the will, commitment and relationships. Similarly, technical power, if left unbalanced, does not make us more capable; it makes us more isolated and more vulnerable to being dominated and excluded. This critical point does not oppose intelligence, but serves as a reminder that when intelligence becomes self-referential, its true purpose of serving life and the human person is lost (113).

Humans are finite, and this is natural. However, our tendency to see the good, particularly in greater intellect—which is different from wisdom—has led us to desire continued technological expansion, even at the expense of others and the ecosystems that sustain us. There must come a point where we check ourselves and ask how much

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will ultimately suffer.



er of humanity becoming a victim
 achievements was already
 ognized by Saint Paul VI, who

warned that “the most extraordinary scientific progress, the most astounding technical feats and the most amazing economic growth, unless accompanied by authentic moral and social progress, will in the long run go against man” (94).



Data center

Throughout the document, Pope Leo evokes imagery of the Tower of Babel—humans attempting to make themselves Godlike by building a giant structure without concern for consequences. I am left wondering if AI data centers are our contemporary version of this tower.

In *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis’ follow-up document to *Laudato Si’*, he ends with a powerful line reminding humanity that we must remain humble: “Praise God’ is the title of this letter. For when human beings claim to take God’s place, they become their own worst enemies.” We have seen this dire warning play out again and again throughout history. Technology created to benefit humanity can also be used to create the atomic bomb. We are on a threshold of computational power that is hard for

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remain humble and to discern limits in this unprecedented moment that life can continue to flourish.



waste Time to Grow Love and Community

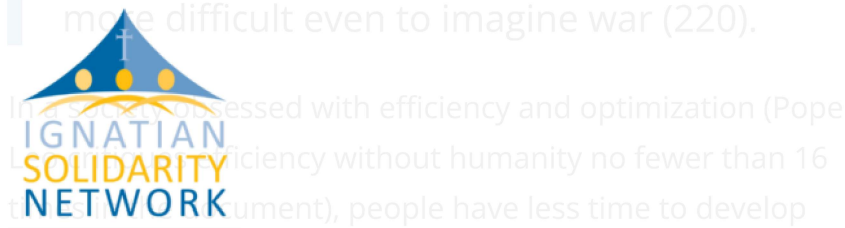
Toward the end of the document, Pope Leo discusses what is required to build a “civilization of love” and mentions the importance of dialogue. My favorite part of that paragraph is the focus on making time for relationships and even “wasting time together.”



*Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice [<https://ignatiansolidarity.net/iftj/>]
musician Francisco Herrera leads students in joyful song before they advocate
on Capitol Hill.*

Indeed, dialogue is an ordinary part of human life and does not only concern relations between States. It involves acquiring an attitude that seeks to forge bonds of fraternity built on listening, an open demeanor, making time for each other and even wasting time together. For if we experience authentic encounters with others, with those who are different,

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relationships with their neighbors because it is deemed to have the lowest “return on investment.” It also creates a culture in which people do not slow down to care for one another, and ultimately a culture that promotes war, even more dangerous with new AI technologies, because of a lack of respect for human dignity globally.

When efficiency becomes the ultimate measure of value, human beings are tempted to see themselves as a project to be optimized rather than as persons called to relationship and communion (112).

Similarly, in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis warns of “a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called ‘rapidification’ (18). We live in a society that prioritizes quick results, no matter the cost, visible or invisible. Pope Francis describes our condition when he writes, “Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them. This too affects how they treat the environment” (225).

The antidote to this disease is slowing down and being present to the people around us. Pope Francis suggests, “taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us...” That is the path towards inner and outer peace, and Pope Leo also states that we must prioritize relationships and trust in the slow work of God, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin mentions in his prayer, “Patient Trust

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Students and teachers take time to enjoy each other's company in nature at the Student Ecology [<https://ignatiansolidarity.net/blog/2026/03/06/rooted-in-gratitude-the-2026-isn-student-ecology-summit/>] and Ignatian Eco Educator Summit [<https://ignatiansolidarity.net/ignatian-eco-educators-network/>] s.

...what saves humanity is not enhanced self-sufficiency, but a relationship that liberates, a communion that transforms. In this light, a technology that merely classifies and optimizes what already exists can, however unintentionally, become an obstacle to change and growth. For an algorithm, an error is a flaw to be corrected; for a person, however, an error can be a catalyst for profound change. A person's future is not calculable, but depends on one's freedom — elevated by the inexhaustible grace of God — and on the relationships cultivated (128).

Pope Leo is inviting us to break with the unnatural speed of technology that often relegates human beings and nature as obstacles to achievement and reminds us that we need to slow down to the pace of nature to support relationships, which can be fragile like a seedling and grow slowly, in order to create a civilization of love. He is not

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encourages us to keep humanity and creation at the center of all our decisions so we can build a just world characterized by love and justice. This document and as a way of closing, set



aside some time to “waste” in communion with the people and natural space around you, do something slowly, without a worry about efficiency, or place a healthy limit on something like screen time today or in the days ahead. In this small way, you will begin to build the civilization of love, just as Nehemiah organized local neighbors to rebuild Jerusalem, “not through the initiative of one man, but through the shared responsibility of all” (8).



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