



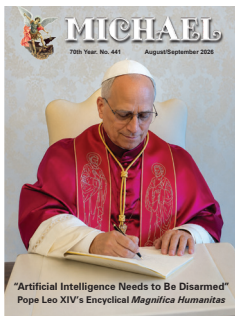
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"Artificial Intelligence Needs to Be Disarmed"
Pope Leo XIV's Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*



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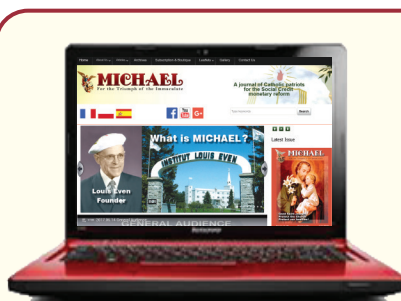
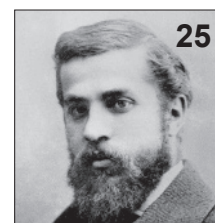
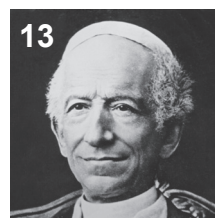
MICHAEL

A journal of Catholic patriots
 for the Kingship of Christ and
 Mary in souls, in families
 and in nations

For social justice through Economic Democracy
 in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic
 Church through the vigilant actions of heads of
 families, and not through political parties

Contents

- 3** “Artificial Intelligence Needs to Be Disarmed” *Leo XIV*
- 13** The Development of the Church’s Social Doctrine *Leo XIV*
- 19** The Root Causes of Injustice *Lise Rodrigue-Fournier*
- 20** Why the Social Dividend Is the Best Form of “Universal Basic Income” *Alain Pilote*
- 24** The Battle Against Lust
- 25** Antoni Gaudí, the Architect of God’s Beauty *Dom Antoine Marie, O.S.B.*
- 32** International Congress and study session in Rougemont



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“Artificial Intelligence Needs to Be Disarmed”

Pope Leo XIV’s Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*

Exactly 135 years after Pope Leo XIII signed his landmark encyclical *Rerum Novarum* on May 15, 1891, Pope Leo XIV signed his first encyclical letter, *Magnifica Humanitas* (Magnificent Humanity), devoted to “safeguarding the human person in the time of Artificial Intelligence” on May 15, 2026.

This is an extraordinary document, fully in line with the great social encyclicals of the Church. It addresses an issue of immense importance for the very future of humanity.

In its March/April 2025 issue, MICHAEL published a multi-page feature on this subject, warning of the potential dangers posed by AI (artificial intelligence), which—if left unchecked—could become a serious threat to the human race.

A Vatican document published in January 2025, entitled *Antiqua et Nova*, stated:

“Artificial Intelligence can prove even more seductive than traditional idols because, unlike idols that ‘have mouths but do not speak; eyes but do not see; ears but do not hear’ (Ps. 115:5-6), AI can ‘speak’—or at least give the illusion of doing so.” The document then refers to Revelation 13:15, the passage concerning the “Mark of the Beast,” without which no one will be able to buy or sell.”

The connection between *Magnifica Humanitas* and *Rerum Novarum* (Latin for ‘Of New Things’) is readily apparent—not only because both were issued on May 15, but also because of their subject matter.

Rerum Novarum addressed the new industrial revolution of the time. Likewise, *Magnifica Humanitas* examines today’s technological revolution driven by Artificial Intelligence.

Just two days after his election to the Chair of Peter, the man formerly known as Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost explained why he had chosen the name Leo XIV:

“Pope Leo XIII, in his historic Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution. In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice and labour.”

These words already foreshadowed the subject of the new Pope’s first encyclical.

For readers unfamiliar with the term, an encyclical (from the Greek *enkyklios*, meaning “circular let-



*Leo XIV signing the encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* on May 15, 2026, at the Vatican, accompanied by Archbishop Paolo Rudelli, Substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State*

ter”) is a solemn papal document in which the Pope addresses the bishops, the Catholic faithful, or even “all men and women of good will,” as is the case with *Magnifica Humanitas*.

Why is Pope Leo XIV’s new encyclical on Artificial Intelligence addressed to everyone?

Quite simply because everyone—governments, businesses, educators, families, young people, seniors, and workers—will be affected by AI.

Generally speaking, the first encyclical issued by a newly elected Pope reveals the principal priorities of his pontificate. *Magnifica Humanitas* is no exception. Through this document, Pope Leo XIV seeks to make a significant contribution to the ongoing development of the Church’s social teaching (see page 13).

The parallel between Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* and Leo XIV’s *Magnifica Humanitas* is particularly striking. Just as *Rerum Novarum* denounced the abuses of the Industrial Revolution, defended the rights of workers, and laid the foundations of modern Catholic social teaching, *Magnifica Humanitas* denounces the excesses of the digital revolution, defends the human person against the growing dominance of algorithms and updates the Church’s social doctrine for the twenty-first century. ►

► After addressing the industrial machines of the nineteenth century, the Church is now turning its attention to intelligent machines, commonly known as Artificial Intelligence.

The encyclical holds that human relationships cannot be replaced by digital interfaces; freedom cannot be absorbed by predictive systems; and moral conscience cannot be delegated to machines. It is a vigorous defence of the primacy of the human person over every technological or social system—a principle that lies at the very heart of the Church's social doctrine—in a world that risks becoming less and less human.



Pope Leo XIV in the Synod Hall on May 25, 2026.

Photo: © Vatican Media

Presentation of the Encyclical

In an unusual departure from tradition, Pope Leo XIV himself presented his first encyclical during a press conference held at the Vatican on May 25, 2026. Addressing the journalists gathered there, he declared:

"At key moments in history, the Church is called to decipher the "new things" in the light of the Gospel and the dignity of the human being. One hundred thirty-five years ago, my venerable predecessor Leo XIII observed the situation of factory workers, their families uprooted and new forms of poverty generated by rapid industrial transformation. He understood that the Church could not remain distant. Within an epochal turning point menacing human dignity, the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* spoke its evangelical and social word about "new things" underway.

"Today we find ourselves facing a transformation of similar magnitude, with perhaps even greater consequences. AI already touches many areas of our

lives and affects decisions that shape human existence. It is also dramatically changing how war is waged.

"Like the earlier Leo, I feel entrusted to look upon another huge transformation with eyes of faith, with lucidity of reason, with openness to mystery, and with cries of the poor and the earth resounding in my heart. (...) From this listening matured a disturbing conviction expressed in *Magnifica Humanitas*: **artificial intelligence needs to be disarmed**. The word is strong, I know, but deliberately chosen because this moment needs words capable of attracting attention, awakening consciences and indicating paths forward for humanity."

The opening lines of the encyclical summarize in just a few sentences the challenge facing both the Church—and indeed all humanity:

"Humanity, created by God in all its grandeur, is today facing a pivotal choice: either to construct a new Tower of Babel or to build the city in which God and humanity dwell together. Each generation inherits the task of shaping its own era, of guiding history to become a place where the dignity of every person is safeguarded, justice is promoted and fraternity is made possible.

"Yet every era also runs the risk of creating an inhumane and more unjust world. Whenever humanity is in danger of marring its true identity, we Christians lift our eyes to the Incarnate God, knowing that it is "only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear."

In other words, humanity faces a choice between building a world without God—symbolized by the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament, where the human person ultimately loses his dignity and becomes dehumanized—or building a world where people live in communion with God: a civilization of love, founded on justice, mutual assistance and charity.

The following pages present extensive excerpts from Pope Leo XIV's encyclical. The paragraph numbers correspond to those used in *Magnifica Humanitas*.

This is the first of two parts. The remainder of the article will be published in the next issue of MICHAEL.

Alain Pilote

by Leo XIV

Part I

The *res novae* (new things) of our time

4. While Leo XIII spoke in his time of "new things" (*Rerum novarum*), today we cannot limit ourselves simply to repeating his insightful teachings. Instead, we must ask God for the wisdom to interpret the great trends of our time, particularly technological advances. In recent years, it has become increasingly evident how rapidly and profoundly digitalization, Arti-



Humanity now stands before a decisive choice: to build a new Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)—a power that seeks to dominate heaven, where the human person loses his or her dignity and is dehumanized—or to build a world in which people live in union with God, a “civilization of love,” founded on justice, mutual assistance, and charity (*Painting by Peter Bruegel the Elder, 1563*)

ficial Intelligence (AI) and robotics are transforming our world. Technology should not be considered, in itself, as a force antagonistic to humanity... Over the centuries, technological development has significantly improved the living conditions of humanity. At the same time, each phase of progress has also revealed the ambiguity of tools that can cause harm when not oriented toward the good.

5. It now falls to us to face the challenges of our time with clarity of thought and responsibility. It is necessary to establish adequate regulatory tools capable of upholding justice and curbing the distorting effects of technological power. Nevertheless, the issue is not limited to regulation. **As Pope Francis warned, we must realistically ask ourselves who holds this power today and how they use it...**

In the past, it was largely up to the State to guide and direct innovation. Today, however, the main drivers of development are private, often transnational, parties that are endowed with resources and the capacity to intervene that surpass those of many Governments. Technological power thus takes on an unprecedented, predominantly “private” aspect, which makes it even more challenging to discern, govern and direct such power toward the common good.

6. We are living through a rapid phase of transition, a “change of era,” in which — while some are vying for the future of new technologies and others dedicate themselves to reflecting on the matter — most people are watching and waiting, observing from afar and merely hoping for the best. For this very reason, crucial questions impose themselves on our conscience and can no longer be avoided: Where are we going? Toward what goal do we wish to orient ourselves? What direction should we choose as a people and as a human community?

Technology is not neutral

9. Scientific discoveries are talents entrusted to humanity so that they may bear fruit (cf. Mt 25:14-30). Technology has the power to heal, connect, educate and protect our common home; but it can

also divide, exclude and generate new forms of injustice. In the abstract, technology in and of itself is not a solution to humanity’s problems, just as it is not inherently evil. In practice, however, technology is never neutral, because it takes on the characteristics of those who devise, finance, regulate and use it. Therefore, the primary choice is not between a “yes” or “no” to technology, but rather between constructing Babel or rebuilding Jerusalem; between a power that claims to dominate the heavens and a people who work together in the presence of God to rebuild the walls of fraternal coexistence.

Building for the common good

11. Building a city founded on the common good implies, first and foremost, building on a firm relationship with God. It means recognizing that the truth of his love calls us to life “in all its fullness” (Jn 10:10) and communion with him. Like Saint Augustine, we too can say, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Indeed, God has inscribed in our hearts a desire for happiness that embraces all the dimensions of life. The Church, in dialogue with the men and women of our time, recognizes the urgent need to safeguard and guide this aspiration toward its deepest truth.

12. 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, (*Editor’s Note: Electronic implants which, as Elon Musk has suggested, could correct our physical disabilities or even turn us into superhuman beings, as well as models of well-being that exclude entire peoples.*)

All too often, we place our hope in unlimited “upgrades,” in forms of progress that exacerbate inequalities, and in immediate solutions incapable of healing people’s wounds. As a result, while some pursue the illusion of unlimited self-assertion, many are deprived of basic necessities. The Church re-

► minds us, with a firm yet humble voice, that true fulfillment is not achieved by eliminating weakness but through harmonious growth. It is found where freedom and responsibility are intertwined with mutual care and true solidarity, and where progress is measured by the dignity of each person and the good of all peoples.

Remaining human

15. In the recent Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025, we walked as pilgrims of hope and were blessed with many graces. Strengthened by these gifts, we can move forward with confidence to face the arduous tasks and demanding challenges that lie ahead. In the era of Artificial Intelligence, when human dignity is threatened by new forms of dehumanization, ours is the pressing duty to remain profoundly human. We must lovingly safeguard the grandeur of humanity bestowed upon us and revealed in its fullness in Christ, the splendor of which no machine can ever replace. True progress always stems from a heart open to others, an intelligence willing to listen and a will that seeks what unites rather than what separates...

16. With the heart of a shepherd and a father, I ask everyone to abandon the construction of yet another Tower of Babel and to join forces in building up the common good, so that humanity will never lose its beauty, and the world once again will come to recognize the human heart as the place where God desires to dwell.

(Editor's Note: In the first chapter of Magnifica Humanitas, Pope Leo XIV provides a brilliant overview of the development of the Church's social doctrine, from Pope Leo XIII to the present day, through all of the major social encyclicals. This chapter is reproduced on page 13 of this issue of MICHAEL.)

Social teaching

The second chapter of *Magnifica Humanitas* develops the fundamental principles of the Church's social doctrine: the primacy and dignity of the human person, the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity, and social justice.

50. At the heart of the Christian understanding of the human person lies the great biblical affirmation that men and women are created in the image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27) of the Triune God. Created for relationship, every human person is planned and willed by God to enter into communion with him, with others and with creation. Human dignity does not depend on a person's abilities, wealth or position in life, nor on the right or wrong choices made; instead, it is a gift that precedes and transcends each person, endowed by God as an expression of his unfailing love. For this reason, the human person always remains the "way for the Church" and the heart of every authentic path of integral human development.

55. Human rights are inviolable, since they are

"inherent in the human person and in human dignity." Consequently, they are universal and inalienable. [68] Precisely because they are grounded in the common dignity of every man and woman, they have practical consequences and legal effects, for "it would be vain to proclaim human rights if, at the same time, everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them, respect by all, in all places and for all." Among these rights, the first is the right to life, from conception to its natural end, without which it is impossible to exercise any other right. When this fundamental right is denied — as in the cases of induced abortion, killing of the innocent and euthanasia — we are faced with choices that the Church considers gravely wrong.

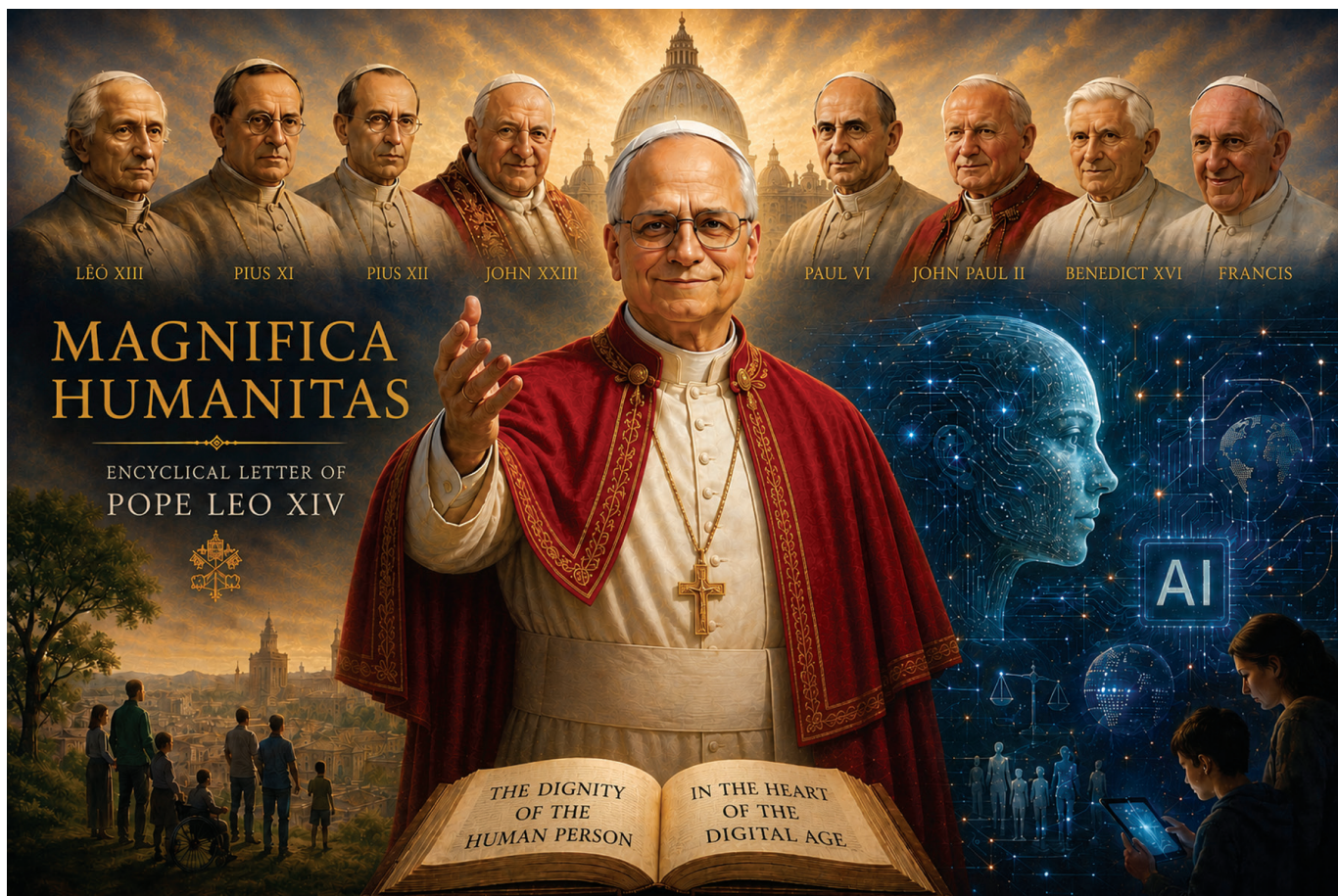
The principle of the common good

59. Recognizing that every man and woman possesses an inalienable dignity, together with rights that no human power can betray or nullify, requires us to shape the way we live together, including our economic and political choices, and the makeup of our cities. From this arises the first major principle of the Social Doctrine that I wish to highlight: the common good. We can describe it as the social expression of the dignity recognized in every person.

When Benedict XVI referred to the non-negotiable values that the Church must always defend, he included among them "the promotion of the common good." For a Christian, going beyond the narrow confines of one's own interests and committing oneself, within the limits of one's ability, to the common good is a non-negotiable value, as is the promotion of life.

60. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that the common good consists in "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily." This definition provides us with a valuable initial reference point, because the common good cannot be reduced to a mere list of conditions or institutions. It is not the sum total of individual benefits, nor the intersection of their particular interests; it is a greater good that belongs to everyone, and it can only be achieved, nurtured and protected by our collective efforts. We can say that social action reaches its fullness when it is directed toward this shared good, just as a person's moral action finds its fulfillment in the choice of the true good.

63. It is the State's responsibility to ensure cohesion, unity and the proper organization of civil society, so that the common good can be pursued with everyone's contribution. In practical terms, this means that public authorities have the delicate duty to "harmonize the different sectoral interests with the requirements of justice," seeking a balance between individual interests and the common good, without leaving behind the most vulnerable. When politics abandons a long-term perspective and reduces itself to short-term calculations or sterile polarizations,



then the language of the common good loses credibility, and, at the same time, social inequalities and divisions grow.

The principle of the universal destination of goods

65. “Among the numerous implications of the common good, immediate significance is taken on by the principle of the universal destination of goods.” First of all, this principle reminds us that the earth’s goods — soil, water, air and natural resources — are given by God to the entire human family to sustain the lives of all, and that every person has an inherent right to the use of such goods, both now and in the future. Saint John Paul II recalled that, “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone.” Consequently, “it is not in accordance with God’s plan to use this gift in such a way that its benefits accrue solely to a select few.” Today, we are called to recognize that this universal destination applies not only to material goods, but also to immaterial and cultural goods.

66. Certainly there is a right to private property, which has its own specific meaning and purpose, yet it is always subordinate to the universal destination of goods. According to John Paul II, this subordination is the golden rule of social conduct and the “first

principle of the whole ethical and social order.” In the Church’s tradition, property has been viewed as a means of protecting and managing goods so that they may better serve the common good. Since “the Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable,” its social function must not be considered a mere theological opinion, but a doctrine of the Church, already present in Sacred Scripture and in the writings of the Church Fathers. For this reason, Pope Francis reminded us that solidarity, when lived out in its fullest sense, also means “to restore to the poor what belongs to them.”

Artificial Intelligence is also part of the common good

Economic Democracy, or Social Credit, teaches that every human being is the owner of a share in a real capital. Each person is a co-heir to both the earth’s natural resources and the fruits of progress—human inventions and technology—and is therefore entitled to receive a Dividend.

This Dividend is based on two realities: our inheritance of natural resources and our inheritance of the inventions created by previous generations.

This is precisely what Saint John Paul II wrote in his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work, no. 13):

► **“Through his work man enters into two inheritances: the inheritance of what is given to the whole of humanity in the resources of nature, and the inheritance of what others have already developed on the basis of those resources, primarily by developing technology, that is to say, by producing a whole collection of increasingly perfect instruments for work. In working, man also enters into the labor of others.”**

In his 1991 Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (no. 32), Saint John Paul II further clarified that new technologies also form part of this common inheritance shared by everyone:

“The present historical period has placed at the disposal of society new goods that were completely unknown until recent times. This calls for a fresh reading of the principle of the universal destination of the goods of the earth and makes it necessary to extend this principle so that it includes the latest developments brought about by economic and technological progress” (*Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church*, n. 179).

Artificial Intelligence must therefore be included among these new technologies. It should be placed at the service of humanity, not used to dominate or control people.

This is precisely the point Pope Leo XIV makes in *Magnifica Humanitas*, no. 67:

“Today, among the goods that are universally intended for everyone, we must also include new forms of property, such as patents, algorithms, digital platforms, technological infrastructure and data. In a context where the wealth of nations depends increasingly on knowledge and technology, when these goods remain concentrated in the hands of a few, without adequate forms of sharing and access, a new imbalance is created that contradicts the universal destination of goods. In turn, it widens the gap between the included and the excluded, between those who can participate in the digital revolution and those who remain on the margins.

“Furthermore, care for our common home and our responsibility toward the poor and future generations require that the use of the goods of creation and the new possibilities offered by technology be regulated in such a way as to respect the environment, avoid waste and prevent new forms of exploitation.” (Editor’s Note: More and more people are, quite rightly, beginning to question the enormous amounts of energy required to power the new data centres needed for artificial intelligence.)

The principle of subsidiarity

68. The principle of subsidiarity stems from the very same understanding of the human person that has guided our reflection on dignity and the common good. If every woman and man is called to take

ownership of his or her own life and to contribute to the formation of society, then social institutions must also respect and support this responsibility. The Social Doctrine of the Church refers to subsidiarity as the principle according to which the role of individuals, families, local communities and intermediary organizations should not be supplanted by higher-level authorities. Moreover, higher-level institutions must recognize, protect and promote the freedom and creativity of lower-level entities, coordinating their contributions so that they can cooperate effectively for the common good.

69. Starting with Leo XIII and the beginnings of modern social teaching, the Church has insisted that neither the individual nor the family should be subsumed by the State, but should be allowed to act freely, as far as possible, without harming the common good. Saint John Paul II took up and developed this perspective, noting that the political community is at the service of civil society and that the State must protect the common good, intervening when necessary, but without permanently supplanting the responsibilities of intermediary organizations and social institutions.

Subsidiarity does not justify the State’s disengagement, but rather guides its actions. Indeed, public intervention is necessary precisely to enable all social actors to fulfill their mission without being stifled. It is the responsibility of the political community to create the conditions that allow individuals, families, associations and intermediary organizations to fulfil their mission in society, without being replaced or reduced to mere facilitators.

70. This principle encourages us to move beyond any form of paternalistic or welfare-based management of societal life, but instead to promote a culture of shared responsibility in a State that values citizens’ initiative, and a civil society capable of forging bonds and mobilizing energies in the service of the common good. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, decisions are made at the closest level possible to the persons involved, thereby fostering community life and avoiding people being presented with decisions that have already been taken. In this way people can participate in the decision-making process.

When families, associations, local communities, volunteer organizations and those in the so-called “third sector” are recognized and supported, social life becomes more accessible to people, services become more attuned to real needs, and solutions are more creative and respectful of the dignity of each person.

71. The principle of subsidiarity applies especially in the context of the digital revolution. Here, the highest level is not the State, but rather major economic and technological actors that exercise de facto power over the conditions of everyday life. This level, which

**The first human right is the right to life, from conception to its natural end, without which it is impossible to exercise any other right. When this fundamental right is denied — as in the cases of induced abortion, killing of the innocent and euthanasia — we are faced with choices that the Church considers gravely wrong
— *Magnifica humanitas*, 55**

monopolizes expertise, data and decision-making authority, involves companies and platforms that define conditions for access, rules of visibility, forms of interaction, and even economic opportunities.

The principle of subsidiarity requires that such processes not be imposed from above in an opaque and unilateral manner, but instead be directed toward the common good with transparency, accountability and meaningful forms of participation (including independent checks, transparency regarding algorithms, equitable access to data and avenues for recourse).

72. In this context, States and transnational institutions are called to ensure fair rules and effective safeguards, so that local communities, intermediary organizations, schools, universities, religious institutions and associations have a voice and can contribute to the discernment of choices that affect people's daily lives, such as employment, access to services, data management and digital environments. When it comes to decisions regarding economic flows and digital platforms, as well as the governance of data and algorithms, we cannot allow a handful of actors to dictate these processes on their own; instead, we must build forms of cooperation that respect the various levels of the global community and make them jointly responsible for the common good.

The principle of solidarity

73. Having considered the common good and subsidiarity, I would like to reflect on the principle of solidarity. This 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. Saint Paul VI observed that the obligations of solidarity, justice and charity are rooted in the human and supernatural fraternal bonds that unite individuals and populations.

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 that the future of each individual is connected to the future of all; indeed, "no one is saved alone."

The close link between subsidiarity and solidarity thereby becomes evident. When subsidiarity is not

linked to solidarity, it ends up becoming merely the protection of particular interests; when solidarity is not supported by subsidiarity, it degenerates into a form of welfare that does not foster responsibility. This interconnectedness also pertains to the responsibility of authentic participation.

Solidarity is expressed when each person, both individually and collectively, takes part in the life of the community — by staying informed, engaging with others, making their voice heard and contributing to public decisions and choices — while also assuming real responsibility so that the common good is achieved through shared decision-making.

74. In many areas, we are already experiencing a kind of "de facto solidarity," 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. This network of relationships, however, only constitutes solidarity in the fullest sense of the word when it becomes a conscious choice.

Faith invites us to see this reality as a call: 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."

75. The Church's social teaching emphasizes that solidarity is both a principle and a virtue. As a principle, it expresses the objective order of relationships among individuals, groups and peoples, pointing to an awareness of interdependence whereby the good of each person depends on the good of others. As a virtue, it requires a "firm and persevering determina-



► tion” to strive for the common good, with particular attention to those most in need.

Pope Francis noted that solidarity is “a way of making history” that creates communities and not just masses of individuals. For this reason, it 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.

76. In a world marked by increasingly close connections between people, communities and nations, solidarity also takes on a global dimension. Benedict XVI strongly emphasized the link between development, justice and responsibility toward future generations, stating that authentic development requires solidarity and inter-generational justice, as well as an awareness of the bonds that unite us to the natural environment.

Today, this responsibility also extends to digital and information infrastructure. Like the natural environment, the “digital ecosystem” can be preserved or exploited, shared or monopolized. Solidarity demands that decisions regarding data, algorithms, platforms and artificial intelligence take into account not only the immediate benefit for a few, but also the impact on all peoples and on future generations.

The principle of social justice

77. For the Christian community, social justice is a concrete way of following Jesus and remaining faithful to the Gospel. In the New Testament, Jesus proclaims the “good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18) and identifies himself with the lowly, the sick, the imprisoned and strangers (cf. Mt 25:31-46). He thus teaches us that justice is born from, and fulfilled in, fraternity, because the way we approach and relate to the least among us becomes, in concrete terms, the measure of our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters.

Justice, however, concerns not only the behavior of individuals, but also the way in which the structures of society are conceived and organized. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council reminds us that every institution is called to serve the human person and his or her dignity. Social justice is, therefore, characterized by the capacity of a social, economic and political order to allow everyone — particularly the weakest — to live a truly dignified life, without leaving anyone behind.

78. The recent Magisterium has insisted that social justice begins with the least among us. Saint John Paul II spoke of a preferential option for the poor [106] that must guide both personal and societal choices, while Pope Francis denounced a “‘throw away’ culture” that generates ever new forms of exclusion.

From this perspective, social justice requires us to look at individuals and communities, starting with the most vulnerable: the poor, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, victims of violence and people living in urban or existential peripheries.

79. The idea of “social justice” helps us recognize that injustices do not arise solely from the wrong choices of individuals, but also from structures, mechanisms and economic and cultural systems that produce inequality almost automatically. Saint John Paul II spoke in this vein of structures of sin that oppose God’s will and require a commitment to personal and social conversion.

(Editor’s Note: In referring to “structures of sin,” Pope Leo XIV alludes to Saint John Paul II’s encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, particularly paragraph 37: “Among the actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God, the good of neighbor and the “structures” created by them, two are very typical: on the one hand, the all-consuming desire for profit, and on the other, the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one’s will upon others.” This attitude or behaviour can certainly be applied to the world’s major financial elites: once they possess more wealth than they could ever spend, the next step is to seek to impose their will on others.)

“In this perspective, justice is not merely about the fairer distribution of resources or the correction of current injustices, but also assumes a restorative dimension. It aims to mend broken bonds and reintegrate those who have been excluded, taking into account the wounds caused by injustices, such as wars, colonialism, racial or gender discrimination, violence against entire peoples and exploitation. This may include restoring dignity and a voice to those who have been ignored, fostering processes of healing for collective memory, opposing discriminatory laws and practices, and providing concrete support to those who still bear the consequences of wrongs suffered in the past.

Integral human development

82. In his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI affirmed that development is authentic only if it is “integral,” meaning that it can “foster the development of each man and of the whole man.” In the decades that followed, the Social Doctrine of the Church reprised and reflected on this expression in order to indicate the practical ways in which the noble principles — dignity, the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity and social justice — are implemented in real life. By “integral human development,” we mean a process in which the growth of individuals and peoples encompasses all dimensions of existence and opens the future to subsequent generations as well.

83. For individuals as well as for nations, development is both a duty and a right. Minimum conditions

The Six Great Principles of the Church's Social Teaching:

DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Every person is sacred, created in the image of God, and must be respected and valued.



THE COMMON GOOD

The common good is the sum of social conditions that enable people and communities to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.



UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF GOODS

The goods of the earth are meant for everyone. Goods are to serve a universal destination.



SUBSIDIARITY

Matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest, or least centralized competent authority. Higher levels should support, not replace.



SOLIDARITY

We are all responsible for one another, especially for the poor and the most vulnerable.



SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social justice calls for respect for the rights and duties of every person, and for the fair distribution of wealth and opportunities.



A just and fraternal society
— in the light of the Gospel —

are required for enabling every person and people to flourish in accord with their dignity, without being kept in a state of dependence or excluded from access to necessary goods. Development is truly human when it places people at the center instead of the accumulation of wealth, and when it concerns peoples as well as individuals. Justice demands the recognition of the rights of society and the rights of peoples, and includes a responsibility toward future generations. Development is not truly human if it increases consumption for some while shifting costs and burdens onto others, or relegates entire regions to subordinate roles, preventing them from realizing their full potential. Development is integral when it is not limited to the economic sphere, but promotes quality of life in its spiritual, cultural, moral and relational dimensions, while respecting our common home, the diversity of peoples and their ways of life.

84. Today, the concept of integral human development is a benchmark for the evaluation of integral ecology, which has become an indispensable dimension of the Church's Social Doctrine. Indeed,

the quality of development is measured by the ability to integrate justice toward people and the care of our common home, and to promote dignified living conditions, access to necessary goods, just social relations, care of creation and consideration for future generations. It follows that true progress is not what increases the wellbeing of some by degrading ecosystems, shifting costs onto the most disadvantaged communities, or compromising the living conditions of those who will follow us.

85. Seen in this light, integral human development is the framework through which we can interpret the changes of our time, including those brought about by the digital revolution. Technological innovations, including artificial intelligence, are not neutral, for they can either foster participation and justice or exacerbate inequality, control and exclusion. For this reason, they must be evaluated by asking a crucial question: Do they truly help individuals and peoples to become more humane and fraternal, while respecting our common home and future generations? It is here that the principles

“We must avoid the misconception of equating this type of “intelligence” with that of human beings... Nor does it have a moral conscience, since it does not judge good and evil, grasp the ultimate meaning of situations, or bear responsibility for consequences.”

- of Social Doctrine become concrete criteria for discernment regarding the issues which we will address in the following chapters.

The dangers of Artificial Intelligence

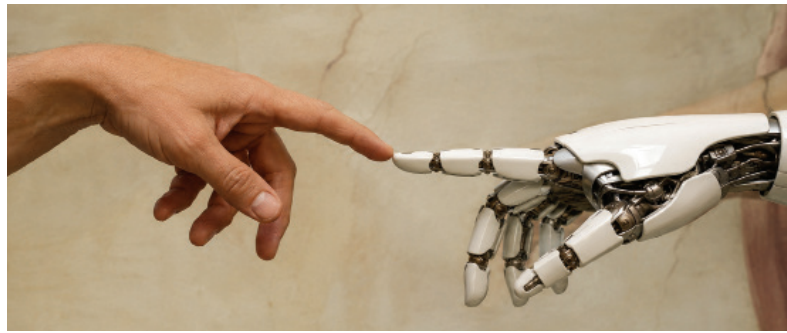
Artificial Intelligence can become a dangerous tool, depending on who controls it and the purposes for which it is used. As Pope Leo XIV wrote:

92. In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis denounced the growing dominance of a technocratic paradigm in our globalized world: the tendency to let the logic of efficiency, control and profit alone shape personal, social and economic decisions. This makes it clear that technology is not simply a tool. When it becomes the standard by which everything is judged, it begins to dictate what matters and what can be discarded, reducing creation to an object of exploitation and human beings to mere cogs in a system driven toward ever greater efficiency.

95. Here, we must recognize another crucial aspect, which I have noted earlier. In many cases within the digital context, control over platforms, infrastructure, data and computing power does not rest with States, but with major economic and technological actors. These entities effectively set the conditions for access, determine the rules of visibility and shape the very possibilities for participation. When such power is concentrated in the hands of a few, it tends to become opaque and evade public oversight, increasing the risk of distorted forms of development that give rise to new dependencies, exclusions, manipulations and inequalities.

Artificial Intelligence is not... intelligent

99. It is not possible to provide a single, comprehensive definition of AI. What can be stated, however, is that we must avoid the misconception of equating this type of “intelligence” with that of human beings. These systems merely imitate certain functions of human intelligence. In doing so, they often surpass human intelligence in speed and computational capacity, offering tangible benefits across many fields. Yet this power remains entirely tied to data processing. 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.

They may imitate language, behavior and analytical skills, or even simulate empathy and understanding, but they do not understand what they produce, for they lack the affective, relational and spiritual perspective through which human beings grow in wisdom. Even when these tools are described as capable of “learning,” their way of doing so is different from that of a human person. It is not the experience of those who allow themselves to be shaped by life and grow over time through choices, mistakes, forgiveness and fidelity. Rather, it is a form of statistical adaptation based on data and feedback, which can be very effective, but does not imply inner growth.

(Editor’s Note: On January 28, 2025, at the request of the Holy Father, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, together with the Dicastery for Culture and Education, issued a document entitled *Antiqua et Nova*, “On the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence.” It expressed essentially the same message that Pope Leo XIV would later emphasize:

“Consequently, although AI can simulate aspects of human reasoning and perform specific tasks with incredible speed and efficiency, its computational abilities represent only a fraction of the broader capacities of the human mind. For instance, AI cannot currently replicate moral discernment or the ability to establish authentic relationships. (...)

“Considering all these points, as Pope Francis observed, “the very use of the word ‘intelligence’ “can prove misleading” and risks overlooking what is most precious in the human person. **In light of this, AI should not be seen as an artificial form of human intelligence but as a product of it.”**

Leo XIV

End of Part One. In the next issue of MICHAEL, we will publish the second and final instalment of this article, which will examine the concrete threats that AI poses to fundamental aspects of human life, as well as the means of addressing them—of “disarming” AI. ❖

The Development of the Church's Social Doctrine From *Rerum Novarum* to *Magnifica Humanitas*

Especially since *Rerum Novarum*, published in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII, the Catholic Church has developed a body of social teaching that provides principles of justice for life in society. This has necessarily led the Church to denounce unjust economic conditions.

Some people, unfamiliar with the Church's teaching, may find this surprising. They argue that material matters or economic problems are not the Church's concern and that she should confine herself to spiritual matters dealing with the salvation of souls.

Why, then, does the Church have a social doctrine?

The salvation of souls is certainly the most important concern in the life of a Christian. And it is precisely for that reason that the Church intervenes in social questions.

The Church cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of the poor, to hunger in the world, or to the crushing burden of debt imposed on nations. As Pope Benedict XV said in 1920, the Church intervenes in social matters because it is in this field that the salvation of souls is in jeopardy.

His immediate successor, Pope Pius XI, stated: **"It may be said with all truth that nowadays the conditions of social and economic life are such that vast multitudes of men can only with great difficulty pay attention to that one thing necessary, namely their eternal salvation"** (*Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 130).

Pius XII spoke similarly, in his June 1, 1941 radio broadcast: **"How could the Church — a so-loving Mother who cares about the well-being of her sons — be permitted to remain indifferent when she sees their hardships, to remain silent or pretend not to see and not to understand social conditions which, voluntarily or not, make it difficult and practically impossible that a Christian conduct [himself] in conformity with the Commandments of the Sovereign Lawgiver?"** Through the years, different Popes have continued to repeat this message.

This is the language spoken by all the Popes, including Pope Leo XIV today, as he writes in paragraph 3 of his encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*.

"With the document *Rerum Novarum*, my beloved predecessor [Leo XIII], gave impetus to reflections on society, the economy and politics, which is now known as the 'Social Doctrine of the Church.' When some objected that the Church should not waste energy on worldly matters, but instead focus on communicating the message of eternal

life, Leo XIII responded with realism and wisdom, saying that the proclamation of the Gospel cannot overlook the concrete lives of people. Many decades have passed since then, and the Magisterium, pastors, theologians and faithful have continued to reflect on social issues in the light of the Gospel."

In the first chapter of his inaugural encyclical, Pope Leo XIV presented a remarkable overview of the development of the Church's social doctrine, tracing its evolution from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 to the present day, 135 years later. He reviews each of the major social encyclicals published by the successive Popes during that period, explaining which aspects of each document remain relevant in 2026.

The text that follows reproduces, almost in its entirety, this first chapter of the encyclical (the paragraph numbers correspond to those used in *Magnifica Humanitas*).

A dynamic approach faithful to the Gospel

17. In this first chapter, I intend to present synthetically how the Social Doctrine of the Church has taken shape in the recent Papal Magisterium and in the Second Vatican Council, in order to demonstrate its dynamic character. Indeed, in each era the *res novae* require that this teaching address historical questions in the light of revealed Truth. In this regard, artificial intelligence, too, should not be considered as merely yet another theme to be studied or a crisis to be managed, but rather as a development that challenges the categories of Social Doctrine from within, calling for their further development in fidelity to the Gospel.

21. (...) The Church does not claim to assume the functions belonging to the State. On the contrary, she esteems those who serve the common good, and she firmly acknowledges the responsibility that civil institutions hold within society. At the same time, the mission entrusted to the Church prompts her to address the real suffering of the men and women of our time.

This closeness does not stem from an intent to supplant civil institutions, much less from an implicit criticism of their work. Rather, it stems from evangelical charity, which impels the Church to draw near to the wounds of humanity whenever they surface with greater severity. When the Church intervenes, she does so following the example of the Good Samaritan, with discretion and closeness, aware that what arises from urgent necessity cannot become the norm, nor replace the institutional responsibilities proper to the civil community. ►

► 22. Starting from this twofold acknowledgment — the autonomy of earthly realities and the distinction between ecclesiastical and political spheres of competence — allows for a clearer understanding of the direction that the Second Vatican Council set for the Church in her relationship with the world. *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us that “it is the task of the whole People of God, particularly of its pastors and theologians, to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of God’s word, in order that the revealed Truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood and more suitably presented.”

No technical solutions, but principles

24. Nourished by this fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and human knowledge, the Church has progressively developed her Social Doctrine, cultivating in history a wise patrimony marked by theological and anthropological coherence rooted in the Christian understanding of the person. Precisely because this patrimony arises from faith and a corresponding vision of reality, it does not amount to a repertoire of technical solutions or an economic or political model to be set against others. Instead, it belongs to a different order, namely that of the principles that guide the interpretation of events and sustain an evangelical understanding of historical processes and the choices these entail.

Herein lies the proper function of Social Doctrine, which does not claim to supplant the responsibilities of politics or institutions, but offers itself as a foundation for collective discernment, helping to recognize and promote whatever serves the dignity of persons, the vitality of communities and the common good.

27. (...) Therefore, when the dignity of our brothers and sisters is violated, when politics fails to address the tragedies of humanity, when the economy turns against the person or science oversteps the limits of its competence, the Church — together with other Christian denominations and believers of other religions — must make her voice heard, not in order to dominate, but to promote communion. Understood in this way, Social Doctrine becomes a theology of communion in history, a history in which the Word made flesh continues to be present through dialogue, memory and prophecy.

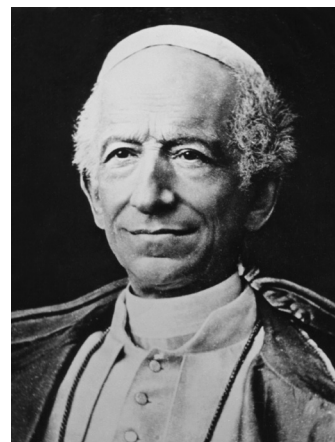
The first stages of the Church’s Social Doctrine

29. What we now call the “Social Doctrine of the Church” is not a spontaneous product of the modern age. Instead, it is the fruit of receiving and structuring a long tradition of ecclesial reflection on life in society, rooted in Sacred Scripture, the Church Fathers and the theological and legal developments

of the Middle Ages and modern era. Although the expression “Social Doctrine of the Church” was coined by Pius XII in 1950 (Apostolic Exhortation *Menti Nostrae*), its content began to take shape as an organic corpus of social teaching with Leo XIII’s Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Rerum Novarum

Confronted with the “new things” of his time — the conflict between capital and labor, the question of the workforce, and economic and social transformations — Leo XIII did not limit himself merely to acknowledging the unrest, but saw these situations as an area for the Church’s pastoral mission. He exposed them to rigorous discernment, illuminating their causes and possible solutions in the light of the Gospel and an integral vision of the human person created in the image of God.



Leo XIII

Saint John Paul II regarded this approach as a “lasting paradigm” of Social Doctrine: an exemplary practice through which the Church, when faced with historical changes, exercises her right and duty to examine social realities, make pronouncements about them and indicate paths for finding just solutions. In this way, the perennial contents of the faith and ancient ecclesial wisdom find expression in a living doctrine that remains faithful to the Gospel while growing in response to the “new things” of every era.

30. Leo XIII’s Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* constitutes a milestone in the development of the Church’s social teaching. The document places the dignity of work and of workers at the forefront of its reflection; affirms the right to a fair wage for oneself and one’s family; recognizes that persons have a fundamental value that takes precedence over capital and profit; defends private property along with its indispensable societal role; esteems workers’ associations; and proposes forms of cooperation between the different components of society as an alternative to the mentality of class struggle. It is not surprising, then, that Pius XI defined it as the “Magna Carta” of Christian social action.

In *Rerum Novarum*, the Church’s ancient wisdom regarding the human person and life in society took on a new form capable of responding to the industrial age and offering the first major system-

atic framework for the Social Doctrine that would be further developed in the following decades. While many of the historical conditions described by Leo XIII have changed, at least two insights remain highly relevant today: the primacy of human labor over any mindset focused solely on finance or productivity — with the consequent attention to the people and families most susceptible to exploitation — and the inseparable link between proclaiming the Gospel and pursuing a more just social order. *Rerum Novarum* thereby continues to remind us that there is no authentic evangelization that does not also affect the structures of human society.

Quadragesimo Anno

31. Pius XI's Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* was published in 1931 on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* at the height of a major global economic crisis, marking a further step in the Church's social teaching. Rather than limiting itself to addressing the "workforce question," it broadened its focus to encompass the overall structure



Pius XI

of the economic and political order. The Encyclical denounces the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few; criticizes both unlimited competition and collectivist projects that undermine the freedom and responsibility of the individual; strongly affirms the workers' right to association; and reiterates the requirement that wages be proportionate not only to performance, but also to the needs of workers and their families.

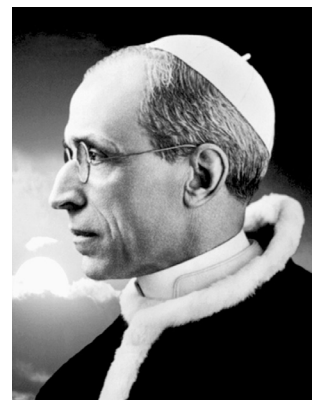
Within this framework, Pius XI systematically formulated the principle of subsidiarity, which was to become one of the cornerstones of Social Doctrine. According to this principle, whatever can be carried out by individuals, families, intermediary organizations and local communities should not be carried out by higher-level authorities. Alongside these contributions, in various interventions of his Magisterium — from the Encyclicals *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* and *Mit Brennender Sorge* to *Divini Redemptoris* — Pius XI clearly recalled the societal role of private property and denounced forms of totalitarianism that demean the dignity of the person, stifle life in society, exalt the State above its just value and discriminate according to race.

At least three insights of his social teaching remain particularly relevant today: the awareness that injustice concerns not only individual behavior but also economic and institutional structures; the im-

portance of the principle of subsidiarity, which calls for the strengthening of the fabric of associations and communities while avoiding further centralization of power; and the link between the dignity of work, fair remuneration and the genuine possibility for families to lead a dignified life.

Radio messages of Pius XII

32. In the tragic context of the Second World War, and the years of reconstruction that followed, the teachings of Pius XII made a significant contribution to the development of Social Doctrine. This is particularly true of his Christmas radio messages, in which he outlined the framework of an international order based on justice,



Pius XII

peace and the recognition of human dignity. In these messages, the Pope proposed a dialogue with society based on an appeal to natural law understood as a set of objective principles that precede the interests of individuals and States, and which must regulate both the internal life of nations and their mutual relations. (...)

Three guidelines remain particularly significant for our own times, currently marked by new forms of global power and growing inequalities: the need for law to take precedence over interests; the awareness that economic disparities are a breeding ground for tension and violence; and the necessity of a network of associations capable of mediating between the individual and the State. These guidelines continue to provide important criteria that enable Social Doctrine to interpret the dynamics of globalization and promote a more just and peaceful international order.

Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in terris

33. A new phase in the Church's social teaching began with Saint John XXIII, who placed a greater emphasis on the global dimension of social issues and the language of rights. In *Mater et Magistra*, he presented the Christian faith as a light capable of uniting heaven and earth. He recalled that, while the Church's primary mission is the sanctification and proclamation of eternal goods, she does not neglect the concrete



John XXIII

► needs of people's daily lives, and is concerned with every authentic human good. Based on this unified vision of humanity, John XXIII emphasized that societal life requires a balance between the initiative of citizens and groups — who are called to organize themselves and work together — and the action of the State, which must coordinate and provide support without stifling the freedom and responsibility of individuals. Hence, he drew attention to fair remuneration for work, worker participation and the growing disparities between countries.

A few years later, in *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII addressed for the first time not only the faithful, but also all people of good will, organically linking the dignity of the person to the recognition of fundamental rights and duties, and proposing a direction for society — at the international level too — based on truth, justice, love and freedom. In the present day, which is marked by widespread conflict and new forms of global interdependence, the following aspects of his thought remain particularly significant: the universal perspective of his appeal; his reference to human rights as a shared framework; and his conviction that lasting peace requires institutions and relations between peoples that are inspired by the dignity of every person.

The Second Vatican Council

34. The Second Vatican Council marked a turning point in the Church's understanding of herself in the contemporary world. In the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council presented the image of a Church that is close to humanity, engaged with the world and committed to reflecting on the concrete reality of historical situations, rather than abstract concepts. The text addresses the major issues of marriage and the family, economic and societal life, the political community, war and peace. It insists that economic and institutional structures are just only to the extent that they serve the integral development of the person and promote the responsible participation of all.

The importance of this conciliar document for the Social Doctrine of the Church lies not only in having opened up horizons for thematic reflection, but also in its method of discernment that invites us to interpret historical changes guided by the Gospel and human expertise. This approach reveals that dialogue with the world is not a tactical choice for the Church, but a concrete expression of her mission because the Gospel, like leaven, is capable of transforming the structures of society from within and forging paths toward a greater humanity.

The Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* can be included in the same context. Here, the Council recognized that religious freedom is a fundamental right

grounded in human dignity that must be guaranteed by law in order to prevent people from being forced to act against their conscience or impeded from seeking and professing the truth both privately and publicly. This principle is highly relevant today and continues to provide the Social Doctrine with decisive criteria for protecting individuals and building pluralistic and peaceful societies.

Populorum Progressio

35. During the Pontificate of Saint Paul VI, an understanding of peace emerged that was not reduced to the mere absence of war, but took shape within the scope of integral human development. In *Populorum Progressio*, he described development as a transition from less humane to more humane living conditions. He further understood it as a process that concerns "each person and the whole person," that is every dimension of the person and all people without exception.



Paul VI

For this reason, Paul VI could affirm that development understood in this way is in reality "the new name for peace," because it aims to eradicate the roots of injustice and conflict and create opportunities for a more dignified life for all. The establishment of the Pontifical Commission *Justitia et Pax* should also be seen in this light as an attempt to give stable form to this insight at the ecclesial and international levels, while bearing in mind the growing gap between rich and poor countries and the need for policies that genuinely promote more humane living conditions for all.

36. In *Octogesima Adveniens*, written on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Paul VI applied this perspective to post-industrial society, marked by urbanization, new forms of poverty and rapid cultural changes that called into question the future of individuals and communities. Paul VI believed that although the Gospel was proclaimed, written and lived out in a historical and cultural context very different from our own, its message was not "outdated."

Instead, it offers a vision of the human person, relationships, authority and the common good that is still capable of guiding economic, political and cultural choices today. In other words, the Gospel remains relevant because it provides the criteria for recognizing what humanizes or dehumanizes and what liberates or oppresses in ever-changing situations.

For the Social Doctrine of the Church, Paul VI's most demanding legacy is precisely this: as long as there are people in the world who are excluded from the development befitting human dignity, the Christian community cannot be content with a theoretical proclamation of peace. Rather, beginning where people are marginalized, it must allow the Gospel to pass judgment on those economic and political structures which — as John Paul II would later remind us — can become veritable “structures of sin.” As a result, no person or people will be treated as expendable in the processes of development.

Saint John Paul II

37. The rich social teaching of Saint John Paul II lies at the crossroads of the crisis of the great ideological systems of the twentieth century and the onset of economic globalization. His Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, written ninety years after the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, opened up a new avenue for reflection on work. It presents fair wages as the concrete means of verifying the justness of the entire socioeconomic system because they reveal whether the worker is treated as a person or merely as a cost of production.



John Paul II

Work is not considered simply as a problem to be dealt with or a means of generating income, but a fundamental good for the person, a principle of economic activity and the key to the entire societal question. Through work, human beings bring their freedom, creativity and capacity for cooperation into play, contributing to the cultural and moral elevation of society. In light of this, the various kinds of job insecurity, fragmented career paths and automation must not be evaluated solely in terms of efficiency, but in relation to the dignity of the worker, the right to sufficient remuneration and the genuine possibility of participating in society.

38. With his Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, marking the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, John Paul II reexamined the scourge of underdevelopment. He acknowledged the failure of numerous attempts to accelerate the economic development of poor peoples and to assist them in the process of industrialization, noting the persistent and indeed widening gap between the world's North and South. He also denounced the economic, financial and commercial mechanisms that, managed by the strongest economies, structurally favor their own interests while stifling weaker economies, and he asked that they be subjected to serious ethical, not just technical, scrutiny. In this context, solidarity

was understood as a concrete, shared responsibility among individuals, peoples and nations — a form of social friendship or political charity oriented toward the “civilization of love” proposed by Paul VI.

39. On the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*, the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* offered a reflection on the collapse of the Soviet system and the rise of democracy and the market economy. Saint John Paul II reiterated Pius XII's message that the Church values democracy insofar as it guarantees the effective participation of citizens, enables them to elect and peacefully replace their leaders and prevents power from being monopolized by small elite groups motivated by particular or ideological interests. Likewise, the Church recognizes the positive potential of the market and private initiative only if they remain subordinate to the moral law and are guided by the principle of solidarity, without sacrificing the most vulnerable to the rationale of profit. This adds a particularly relevant legacy to the Social Doctrine of the Church. The affirmation of the link between the dignity of work, solidarity among peoples, a critical assessment of democracy and the market economy continues to provide criteria for evaluating new forms of exploitation, exclusion and crises in political representation.

Benedict XVI

40. In his social Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI sought to reassess and expand the concept of development presented in *Populorum Progressio*, interpreting it in light of globalization. He noted that such development should translate into “real growth, of benefit to everyone and genuinely sustainable.” That is, economic progress that is truly inclusive and respectful of the limits of creation. He reaffirmed, however, that in wealthy countries new kinds of poverty were emerging as well as unprecedented forms of exclusion, while, in poorer regions, small minorities lived in consumerist affluence alongside situations of dehumanizing poverty. In addition, he observed that the new global economic and financial system, marked by a vast mobility of capital and means of production, had reduced the political power of States and their ability to influence economic processes. For this reason, Benedict XVI reiterated that economic activity cannot claim to solve social problems simply through the expansion of a commercial mentality, but must be ordered toward the common good, for which the political community bears its own irreplaceable responsibility.



Benedict XVI

41. Benedict XVI placed charity at the center of his analysis, stating that it “is at the heart of the Church’s Social Doctrine”, provided that it is always united with truth. He also noted with concern that there is a tendency to dismiss moral relevance precisely within the social, legal, political and economic fields. The originality of his contribution lies in showing that development, justice, institutions and the market are not neutral realities, but spaces where charity in truth must find historical expression. This teaching is especially relevant today in light of growing inequalities, pressures in the financial markets, the environmental crisis and a lack of trust in politics. It stands as an invitation to evaluate every model of development on its ability to be inclusive and sustainable, to rebuild the relationship between economics and politics on the common good, and to acknowledge the critical and generative role of charity in public life.

Francis

42. Pope Francis’ social teaching develops along the lines of *Gaudium et Spes*, which invites us to view history through the lens of human hopes and vulnerabilities, and to bring them into dialogue with the Gospel. This approach emerges with particular clarity in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he states that the Christian



Francis

proclamation has an intrinsic social dimension and calls for a Church capable of listening to the cry of the poor, migrants and victims of new forms of slavery. Francis’ insistence on a synodal Church, a Church that “walks together,” that seeks to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and allows herself to be evangelized by the poor with whom she shares history, also fits into this perspective.

43. In *Laudato Si*, Francis provided the first significant systematic treatment of the environmental crisis in a social Encyclical, demonstrating that it is not an isolated issue, but rather the ecological aspect of the contemporary socio-economic crisis. His proposal for an integral ecology combined care for our common home with the preferential option for the poor, and strongly affirmed that “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” cannot be separated. In this light, the universal destination of goods was brought to the forefront, alongside the critique of a technocratic paradigm that seeks to reduce every-

thing to an object to be dominated; the defense of human labor threatened by the mindset of waste; and the need for intergenerational justice. Finally, he advocated for genuine dialogue between those working in the fields of politics and finance, so that neither would become self-referential.

44. Faced with the breakdown of the social fabric, a “world war being fought piecemeal,” individualistic globalization and the impact of the pandemic on community ties, Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, sought to revive the dream of a humanity that opts for social friendship and universal fraternity. He proposed a culture of encounter, a “better politics” capable of seeking the common good, paths of reconciliation and a world that ensures “land, housing and work for all.” Finally, in *Dilexit Nos*, he showed that these significant social endeavors cannot be separated from a personal relationship with Christ. Turning to the word of God, he reminded us that the truest response to the love of the heart of Jesus is concrete love for our brothers and sisters, and affirmed that “there is no greater way for us to return love for love.”

Interpreting history in the light of faith

45. Considering this historical overview, it is clear that the Church’s Social Doctrine is not the result of a project devised at a desk, but rather the product of a patient process in which each pontiff — together with the Second Vatican Council — made a unique contribution in light of the “new things” of each particular era. In response to the challenges of their time, each one interpreted historical changes according to the Gospel, bringing to light different aspects of a single heritage: the dignity of the person, the value of work, the universal destination of goods, solidarity and subsidiarity, care for creation and the centrality of peace and fraternity.

The result is a harmonious, though not always linear, development that is marked by different emphases, progressive insights, and, at times, changes in perspective that do not break with what came before, but allow its implications to mature. If today we can speak of a corpus of shared principles and criteria, it is because this faith-based interpretation of history has never been interrupted, remaining ever open to the challenges posed by each generation.

It is to the great principles of Social Doctrine, which direct the discernment of believers in their personal and public lives, that I now wish to turn our attention, in order to grasp more effectively their internal coherence and capacity to guide our times. ❖

Leo XIV

The Root Causes of Injustice

The following is taken from *Justice and Order*, an article written by the movement's co-founder, Gilberte Côté-Mercier:

"Injustice? Injustice is everywhere! In small and large societies alike. In that great society called the State, which holds the power of life and death over its citizens, injustice reigns supreme... Workers, who provide valuable service to others, can scarcely earn enough to live... and have already lost the life of their soul: their FREEDOM... Disorder! Injustice! Toward people who have a right to security and freedom...

"Disorder. Injustice. There is order when a being occupies the place where he best fulfills the purpose for which he was created. There is justice when the rights of God and of human beings are respected. God's rights are respected when the beings He created remain in the place He assigned to them and fulfill the purpose He intended for them. That is the definition of order. (...)

In summary: When is there justice? "When the rights of God and of human beings are respected." When is there order? "When a human being occupies the place where he fulfills the purpose for which he was created... the place he ought to occupy according to his talents..." In conclusion: "There can be no justice without order. Injustice comes from disorder."

— *Gilberte Côté-Mercier*

Disorder

If injustice comes from disorder, then we must identify those disorders. J. Ernest Grégoire, lawyer, professor of economics at Laval University, former mayor of Quebec City, and a distinguished contributor to *Vers Demain* (the French-language version of MICHAEL) in the 1940s, wrote: "How can there be justice when the whole of economic life is subjected to the control of professional lenders?"

This submission to professional lenders is precisely the great disorder. The fact that all the money in circulation is money created as debt—that is the disorder.

"But I'm not in debt!"

Even if you have no personal debt, you are still subject to debt money because it is the only money in circulation. There is no other kind. Our entire society has been built on debt money. That is the disorder.

"Then just repay the debt. Do as I do—stop borrowing!"

Do you know what would happen if all debt were repaid?

Not a single dollar—not one cent—would remain in circulation. All the money would disappear. In the present monetary system, eliminating the debt would mean eliminating all the money in circulation. That is the disorder.

"Then pursue economic growth, create jobs, ex-

port more!"

Have you noticed that this is what all our societies are trying to do? Jobs, economic growth, and exports do not change the debt-money system. That is the great disorder.

A way of life imposed by debt money

Every human being has unique talents, abilities, and interests. When a person works in the field he truly enjoys, he is happy, and his work is productive. This is order. As we have just seen, order exists when a person occupies the place that corresponds to his talents.

Does today's society, based on debt money, encourage people to work according to their talents? Certainly not—except perhaps for a few individuals from more affluent families. For most people the need to earn money is a priority long before their interests or talents.

Why? Once again, because of the debt-money system. My life—my entire way of life—is in the hands of the debt-money system. It is the debt-money system that controls everything, dominates everything, and determines the way I live.

"But I don't want a job that is harmful, useless, or contrary to my values!"

"That's not for you to decide," replies debt money. "You're going to work for that company because I'm the one making the decisions! Work according to your interests? If you do that, you'll live in poverty."

How many people have I met who waited until retirement—until they received their pension—before finally doing the work they truly loved?

For example, the former health-care professional who bought a small farm; the former contractor from Montreal who moved to Quebec's North Shore to raise sheep; the former shopkeeper who could finally open his small music school—and many others.

Why did they have to wait until retirement? Because the debt-money system makes those decisions for us. It is debt money that imposes a way of life upon us.

Louis Even, founder of MICHAEL, wrote: "A truly human economic system must allow every individual to make his own plans for life... There must be a full income... Income and employment can very well be separated."

Injustice, disorder, and debt money would be far more easily overcome through the economic reform known as Social Credit, also called Economic Democracy.

Read the MICHAEL journal and encourage others to read it as well, so that together we may free every society from the slavery of debt money. ♦

Lise Rodrigue-Fournier

Why the Social Dividend Is the Best Form of “Universal Basic Income”

by Alain Pilote

With the recent developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the fact that robots are capable of performing most human tasks, a major upheaval is about to take place in the labour market. Millions of workers will be replaced by robots that neither sleep nor eat, can work around the clock, and perform these tasks much faster than human beings ever could.



Alain Pilote

This raises a fundamental question. If all these unemployed workers, displaced by AI, will no longer receive wages, what will be their source of income?

Several leaders in the business world have addressed this issue. At the Aspen Ideas Festival, held on June 27, 2025, Ford Motor President Jim Farley stated that AI “will literally replace half of all white-collar workers in the United States.” Likewise, Jensen Huang, CEO of Nvidia—the company best known for manufacturing the advanced micro chips that power the world’s most sophisticated AI models—declared at the Milken Institute Global Conference on May 6, 2025: “Every job will be affected [by AI], and immediately. It is unquestionable.”

As a result, a growing number of business leaders and politicians have suggested that the time has come to introduce some form of basic income or guaranteed annual income.

More recently, Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, the company that manufactures the Optimus humanoid robots, stated that society will eventually have no choice but to adopt a high universal basic income—not merely enough to survive—distributed in the form of cheques issued by the federal government.

The idea of providing every citizen with a guaranteed income is steadily gaining support under various names—universal basic income, citizens’ income, guaranteed income, universal allowance, basic income, and others. One reason is the growing recognition that today’s social programs are inadequate. Another is that technological progress will continue to eliminate the need for human labour in more and more sectors, thus depriving many people of their employment income.

As early as 1930, economist John Maynard Keynes wrote in *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren*:

“We are being afflicted with a new disease of

which some readers may not yet have heard the name, but which they will be hearing a great deal about in the years to come – namely, technological unemployment. This refers to unemployment caused by the fact that we are discovering ways to reduce the need for labour at a faster rate than we are able to find new opportunities for that labour.”

During the forced shutdown of nearly all workplaces during the COVID-19 lockdowns that began in 2020, many governments introduced emergency funding to assist those who had lost their wages, as well as businesses facing bankruptcy. Naturally, these measures cost billions of dollars and caused public debts to rise to unprecedented levels.

Everyone agreed that, despite this massive increase in debt, governments had no alternative, since people could not simply be left to starve. Yet, all the programs were subject to various eligibility rules, with the result that many people fell through the cracks and received little or no assistance, or had to wait several weeks before receiving any help. Moreover, these programs were cumbersome to administer, requiring extensive investigations and a large bureaucracy.

In Canada, many public figures—including journalists and politicians—suggested that the federal government should adopt some form of basic income or guaranteed annual income. For example, on April 21, 2020, fifty senators—nearly half the members of the Canadian Senate—sent a letter to then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, urging him to introduce a basic income program to prevent more Canadians from “falling through the cracks” and to create “a positive legacy for all Canadians.” According to the Basic Income Canada Network, every adult in Canada should receive \$22,000 per year.

In April 2020, in a letter concerning the pandemic, the Catholic bishops of Quebec proposed “the permanent establishment of a guaranteed minimum income for all citizens.” Support for the idea also came from the highest level of the Church. In a letter addressed to popular movements on Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020, Pope Francis wrote:

“This may be the time to consider a universal basic wage that would acknowledge and honour the noble and essential tasks you carry out.” (The letter was written in Spanish, and the Pope used the expression *salario universal*, which corresponds to the English expression basic income.)

The most recent and concrete development on this issue in Canada was the introduction in the Senate, on May 28, 2025, of Bill S-206 by independent Senator Kim Pate. The bill “requires the Minister of Fi-

nance to develop a national framework to ensure that every person over the age of 17 in Canada has access to an adequate basic income,” and specifies that “participation in the labour market or in a training program would not be a condition of eligibility.” However, since being referred to committee on November 6, 2025, the bill has not been debated further in the Senate. It therefore remains legally alive but dormant in committee, with no significant activity. (The governing Liberal Party has not made it a priority, while the Progressive Conservative party has opposed it.)

As we can see, the idea is being discussed, but one fundamental question remains: How should this basic income be financed? Will the country have to incur even more debt? Another concern is that such an income could eventually be paid in the form of a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), subject to numerous conditions governing how the money may be spent, thereby increasing government control over the population.

The solution: the Social Dividend

As we have seen, no real solution is proposed to finance a basic income scheme other than increasing public debt or taxing the wealthy. Regular readers of the Michael Journal know that Clifford Hugh Douglas and Louis Even proposed a far more effective solution: the Social Dividend, which would require neither higher taxes nor additional public debt.

A Dividend is a sum of money paid every month to every citizen, without conditions, regardless of income or employment status. It recognizes every citizen as a co-heir to the country's natural resources and to the accumulated benefits of progress—that is, all the inventions developed over the centuries—which Douglas called the cultural heritage. This Dividend would be financed by newly created, interest-free money issued through a National Credit Office, or the nation's central bank.

However, the dividend makes sense only when implemented together with the two other principles of Economic Democracy:

1. New money belongs to society, not to private corporations (commercial banks), and should be issued by a public institution established by the State—a National Credit Office. In reality, money derives its value from the country's productive capacity, that is, from its natural resources and from workers willing and able to develop those resources.

2. The second principle of Economic Democracy is the Compensated Discount—a discount applied to retail prices and reimbursed to the retailer—to prevent price increases and therefore eliminate inflation.

Why give everyone an income, and why call it a Dividend?

When we speak of someone receiving dividends, we usually think of a shareholder receiving a share of

a company's profits. Yet it is equally true that every citizen, every member of society, is a co-owner of a vast and highly productive real capital.

It has already been established that money, or financial credit, belongs to society as a whole at the moment it is created. It belongs to society because it is based on real credit—the productive capacity of the nation. That productive capacity certainly depends in part on the labour and skills of those who participate directly in production. But to an even greater extent, and increasingly so, it is based on other factors that belong to everyone.

First, there are natural resources, which are not the product of any human being. They are a gift from God, freely given for the benefit of all. Then there are all the inventions that have been made, improved, and handed down from one generation to another. Today, this accumulated knowledge constitutes the greatest factor of production. No individual can claim greater ownership than anyone else over this progress, since it is the fruit of countless generations.

Of course, people today are needed to put this inheritance to use, and they deserve to be rewarded for doing so. They receive that reward in the form of wages, salaries, and other forms of remuneration. Likewise, an investor who does not personally work in the company in which he has invested still has the right to receive a share of the profits because of his invested capital.

As it is, the greatest real capital in modern production is the immense accumulation of discoveries and inventions that enables us to produce more goods with less human labour than ever before. Since every living person is an equal co-heir to this ever-growing capital, everyone is entitled to share in the fruits of production.

The employed person will be entitled to both his wages and the Dividend. The unemployed person will have no wages, but will still be entitled to the Dividend. We call it a Social Dividend because it is the income derived from social capital.

Karl Marx claimed that labour (the proletariat) created all wealth. Adam Smith argued that the capitalist (the person who invests money in a business) also deserves a share. Yet both overlooked what Douglas called the cultural heritage—the immense inheritance of natural resources and accumulated inventions—which today accounts for more than 90 percent of a nation's productive capacity.

Indeed, when speaking of the poor, it is entirely appropriate to describe them as the disinherited, for they are the ones deprived of an inheritance that rightfully belongs to them.

The Social Credit Dividend is therefore based on two realities: our inheritance of natural resources and our inheritance of the inventions created by previous generations. This is what Pope John Paul II wrote in his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work, no. 13):

► **"Through his work man enters into two inheritances: the inheritance of what is given to the whole of humanity in the resources of nature, and the inheritance of what others have already developed on the basis of those resources, primarily by developing technology, that is to say, by producing a whole collection of increasingly perfect instruments for work. In working, man also "enters into the labour of others."**

Filling the gap in purchasing power

Another reason for issuing a Dividend to every citizen is mathematical: the present financial system creates a chronic shortage of purchasing power.

Whenever production is financed, production follows. And when production occurs, it distributes the money used to finance it. This money—paid out in wages, profits, and industrial dividends—becomes purchasing power for those who receive it. However, two facts must be recognized:

First, industry never distributes purchasing power at the same rate that it builds prices.

Second, production does not distribute purchasing power to everyone. It distributes income only to those whom it employs.

Even if banks charged no interest whatsoever on the money they lend, there would still be a shortage of purchasing power, because the wages distributed can never buy the entire production, whose prices include many other costs besides wages.

Some economists claim that production automatically creates sufficient purchasing power to purchase everything produced (Say's Law). Yet the facts prove otherwise.

The Scottish engineer Clifford Hugh Douglas was the first to demonstrate scientifically this chronic shortage of purchasing power and to propose a practical solution known as Economic Democracy or Social Credit. Douglas explained this shortage through what he called the $A + B$ Theorem.

'A' cannot buy 'A + B'

A producer must include all production costs in the selling price of his products if he wishes to remain in business. The wages paid to employees—which Douglas called "A payments"—represent only one part of the total cost of production.

The producer must also include many other costs that are not distributed as wages, such as payments for raw materials, taxes, banking charges, maintenance, replacement of machinery, etc. Douglas called these costs "B payments."

The selling price of a product must therefore include both wages (A) and all additional costs (B). The selling price is therefore $A + B$. It is obvious, then, that A cannot buy $A + B$. The wages distributed (A) can never purchase the total value of production ($A + B$). Consequently, there is a chronic shortage of purchas-

ing power built into our current financial system.

When the finished product is offered for sale, it has an affixed price. But part of the money included in that price may have been distributed six months, a year, or even several years earlier. Another portion will not be distributed until after the product has been sold and the merchant has spent his profit. Still another portion may not be distributed for ten years, when machinery whose depreciation has been included in today's prices is finally replaced with new equipment.

Then there are people who receive money but save it rather than spend it. That money is reflected in prices, but it is no longer available as purchasing power for those who need to buy the goods. The repayment of bank loans and the present tax system further widens the gap between prices and purchasing power.

Some may object that the businesses receiving the "B payments"—those supplying raw materials, machinery, and other inputs—also pay wages to their own employees, so that part of the B payments eventually becomes A payments.

This does not invalidate what has just been explained. Those wages are simply paid at another stage of the production process, and they, too, become part of the price of another product, whose selling price will again be $A + B$. The gap therefore continues to exist.

Even if wages are increased in an attempt to catch up with prices, those higher wages automatically become part of production costs and are therefore reflected in higher prices. Nothing is solved.

If consumers are to be able to purchase the entire production of the country, they must receive additional income beyond wages, at least equal to B. That is precisely the role of the Social Credit Dividend, paid every month to every citizen of the country.

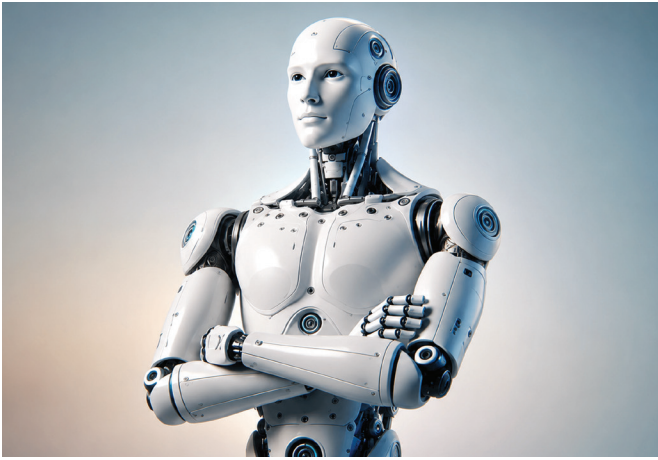
Let us emphasize once again that this Dividend would be financed through new money created by the nation itself, not through taxpayers' money, since taxes merely redistribute income that already originates from wages.

Technological progress replaces the need for human labour

Another major flaw in the present financial system is that production distributes purchasing power only to those whom it employs. Yet the greater the role played by machines, the smaller the role played by human labour. Production continues to increase while the amount of labour required steadily decreases.

A conflict therefore arises between technological progress, which reduces the need for human labour, and a financial system that distributes purchasing power only through paid employment.

Yet everyone has the right to live. Everyone has the right to the necessities of life. The goods of the earth were created for all people, not only for those who happen to have paid employment.



Artificial intelligence is expected to replace millions of workers. But if workers receive no income to replace the wages they lose when machines are introduced, then the machine—which should be humanity’s ally—becomes its enemy, because it deprives people of their income and prevents them from making a living.

That is why Economic Democracy would accomplish what the present system fails to do. Without eliminating the reward for work, it would provide every citizen with a regular income called the Social Dividend—an income attached to the person, not to employment.

Today, the problem is not a shortage of production. The problem is a failure of distribution. What is therefore needed is distributive justice, achieved through the distribution of a Dividend. Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*:

“The social doctrine of the Church has unceasingly highlighted the importance of distributive justice and social justice for the market economy” (no. 35)... Economic life undoubtedly requires contracts, in order to regulate relations of exchange between goods of equivalent value. But it also needs just laws and forms of redistribution governed by politics, and what is more, it needs works redolent of the spirit of gift” (no. 37).

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI places great emphasis on the economy of gift, on gratuitousness in both personal relationships and institutions. Not everything can be measured in terms of wages. Much good is accomplished through volunteer work, for example.

Under a Social Credit system, where every citizen enjoys economic security through the Social Dividend, mutual assistance and volunteer service would naturally flourish.

God Himself continually showers humanity with gifts through the abundance of natural resources and the food He provides. The Social Dividend would simply reflect this divine generosity and these freely given gifts of God. To the extent that production can dispense with human labour, the purchasing power

represented by money must reach consumers through a channel other than wages.

The replacement of human labour by machines in production should be a blessing. It should free people from purely material concerns and allow them to devote themselves to other human activities beyond merely earning a living. If, instead, automation becomes a source of anxiety and deprivation, it is simply because we refuse to adapt the financial system to technological progress. We insist on restricting income to paid employment alone.

Is technology an evil therefore? Should we rebel and destroy every machine because it takes away our jobs? Certainly not. If a machine can perform a task, so much the better. It enables people to devote their free time to other pursuits—activities they freely choose and truly enjoy.

But this is possible only if they receive an income to replace the wages lost when machines and robotics take over their work. Otherwise, the machine, which ought to be humanity’s ally, becomes its enemy by depriving people of income and making it impossible for them to live.

But if a person is no longer employed in paid work, what will he do with his free time? He will devote it to freely chosen activities. It is during our free time that we can truly develop our personality and cultivate the talents God has given us, putting them to good use.

Moreover, it is during their free time that men and women can fulfill their family, religious, and social responsibilities: raising their children, practising their faith (to know, love, and serve God), and helping their neighbours. Raising children is the most important work in the world. Yet because a mother who remains at home to care for her children does not receive a salary, society often considers that she is doing nothing—that she is not working!

Being freed from the necessity of working merely to produce the necessities of life does not mean becoming lazy. It simply means that individuals will be finally free to choose the activities that truly interest them. Under a Social Credit system, there would be a flourishing of creative activity. Many of humanity’s greatest inventions and masterpieces of art were produced during periods of free time.

As C. H. Douglas wrote: **“Most people prefer to be employed, but on things they like rather than on the things they don’t like to be employed upon. The proposals of Social Credit are in no sense intended to produce a nation of idlers... Social Credit would allow people to allocate themselves to those jobs to which they are suited. A job you do well is a job you like, and a job you like is a job you do well.”**

Let us continue educating the public in support of a basic income financed without taxation through our nation’s central bank. ❖

Alain Pilote

The Battle Against Lust

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Mt 5:8)

Lust is not merely a bad habit; it is a spiritual battle to fight the evil that seeks to enslave the heart, darken the mind, and weaken the will. A Christian cannot make peace with this enemy. He must fight it decisively, trusting in God's grace.

I. Recognize the enemy

Lust begins long before an outward act. It is born from a lingering glance, a thought left unchecked, impure conversations and environments that draw the soul away from God.

Whoever toys with temptation will eventually fall into it. The first victory is to cut off sin at its root.

II. Live in a state of grace

Frequent confession strengthens the soul. It is not enough to regret one's falls; one must rise again in humility and return to God.

The Eucharist, received worthily, strengthens the heart against temptation and unites us more deeply with Christ.

III. Flee the occasions of sin

A prudent soldier does not willingly walk into an ambush.

Remove from your life everything that feeds impurity:

- Pornography;
- Social media that stirs impure desires;
- Movies and music that normalize sin;
- Obscene and suggestive conversations; and
- Relationships that lead to temptation.

Retreating is not cowardice; it is spiritual wisdom.

IV. Discipline the body

The Christian tradition has always recommended self-discipline:

- Practise fasting according to your circumstances;
- Be moderate in food and drink;
- Avoid excessive idleness;
- Work diligently; and
- Maintain an orderly sleep schedule.

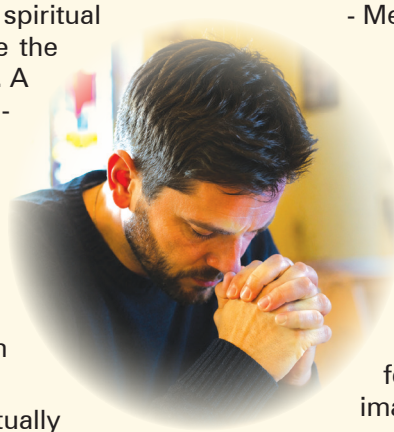
A disciplined body helps form a strong will.

V. Fill your mind with God

The mind never remains empty.

Set aside time each day to:

- Read Sacred Scripture;
- Pray the Holy Rosary;



- Meditate on Christ's Passion; and

- Read the lives of the saints;

Where the light of Christ enters, the power of darkness diminishes.

VI. Maintain custody of your eyes

Many falls begin with a single glance.

Learn to turn your eyes away from whatever leads to sin. Do not feed your imagination with impure images. Purity begins with the eyes.

VII. Have a plan for temptation

When temptation comes:

- Immediately invoke the Holy Name of Jesus;
- Pray a Hail Mary;
- Make the Sign of the Cross;
- Change your activity;
- Get up if you are alone; and
- Go for a walk or find a useful occupation.

Do not enter into dialogue with temptation; cut it off as quickly as possible.

VIII. Turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Blessed Virgin is the perfect model of purity.

Consecrate yourself to her, pray the Rosary every day, and ask her to guard your heart. Many saints taught that devotion to Mary is a powerful help in the struggle for chastity.

IX. Do not despair if you fall

The devil seeks two victories: first, to make a person fall, and then to convince that person that he can never rise again.

If you fall:

- Repent sincerely;
- Confess your sin;
- Learn from your fall; and
- Resume the battle immediately.

God's mercy is greater than any sin when there is genuine repentance.

X. Remember the reward

Chastity is not the denial of love, but its purification. Whoever learns to master his passions gains the freedom to love with an undivided heart and to live according to God's will.

Every victory, no matter how small it may seem, strengthens the soul and draws it ever closer to Christ. ❖

Antoni Gaudí, the Architect of God's Beauty

Builder of Barcelona's Sagrada Família Basilica



The Sagrada Família, or Basilica of the Holy Family in Barcelona, as it appears today in July 2026. Cranes can still be seen on the building site, as there are still four towers to be completed out of a total of 18. The project, which began in 1883, is expected to be completed in 2033, with a total of 18 towers

During his apostolic journey to Spain, Pope Leo XIV travelled to Barcelona to celebrate Mass at the Basilica of the Holy Family (Sagrada Família) on June 10, 2026. The pontiff blessed the Tower of Christ, which had been completed only a few weeks earlier, making the church the world's tallest religious building.

Before the celebration, Pope Leo XIV descended into the basilica's crypt to pray at the tomb of its architect, Antoni Gaudí, who had died exactly one hundred years earlier, on June 10, 1926.

A deeply devout Catholic and mystic, Gaudí became increasingly ascetic with age, embracing fasting and prayer, praying the Rosary daily, and attending Mass each day. He devoted the final years of his life entirely to the construction of the Sagrada Família, refusing to accept any salary for his work. Having assumed responsibility for the project in 1883 at the age of 31, he dedicated the remaining 43 years of his life to this work and never accepted remuneration.

On June 7, 1926, Antoni Gaudí was struck by a streetcar and died three days later, unrecognized by passers-by who mistook him for a beggar. At the time



*Leo XIV praying at the tomb of Antoni Gaudí
Photo: © Vatican Media*

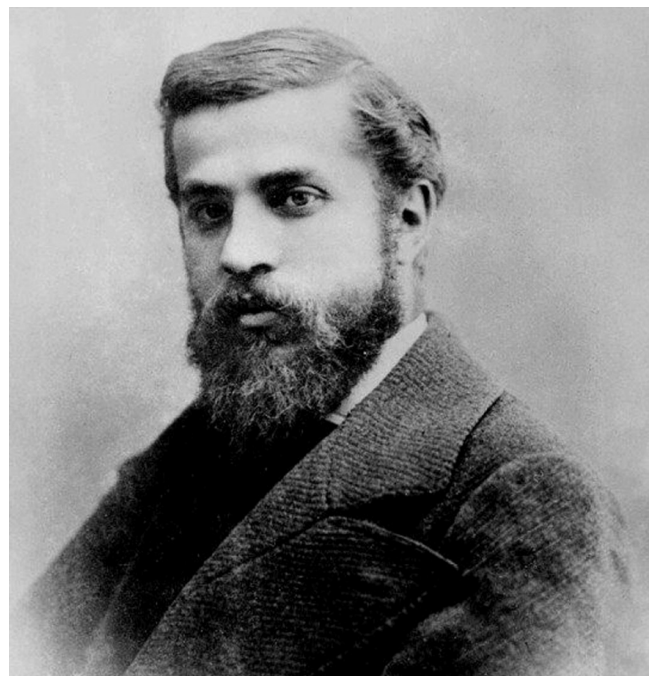
of his death, only the Nativity façade and the crypt had been completed. Knowing that the work would outlive him, he famously remarked:

"My client is not in a hurry," referring to God Himself.

A brilliant but unconventional student, Gaudí's architecture school director said at his graduation:

"We have awarded this diploma either to a madman or to a genius. Time will tell."

Time proved that Antoni Gaudí was indeed a ►



Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926)



Details of the Nativity façade (east side), completed in 1936. There is also the Passion façade on the west side, completed in 2005, and in 2002 work began on the main façade (south side), known as the Glory façade (depicting the Resurrection, eternal life, and the Last Judgement), which is due to be completed in 2033.

genius. He developed a unique architectural style, influenced by various traditions but inspired above all by his desire to reproduce the beauty of nature in his buildings.

His hallmark was simple: his work had not a single straight line. Rather, Gaudí drew inspiration from God's creation: trees, bones, seashells, and stalactites were designs that formed self-supporting structures requiring neither buttresses nor external supports—just as a tree stands firmly on its own.

That is why the 52 columns of the Sagrada Família—one for each week of the year—take the form of

trees, branching out at the top into limbs and leaves that create the vaulted ceiling.

In 2017, Pope Francis declared Antoni Gaudí Venerable.

St. John Paul II became the first pope to visit the Sagrada Família on November 7, 1982, during the centenary celebrations of the laying of its cornerstone.

Pope Benedict XVI became the second pope to visit the basilica when he officially dedicated it on November 7, 2010.

Finally, on June 10, 2026, Pope Leo XIV became the third pope to visit this extraordinary church.

What follows is a summary of the life of Antoni Gaudí, originally published in the January 2011 newsletter of Saint Joseph Abbey of Clairval, France (www.clairval.com).

by Dom Antoine Marie, O.S.B.

"A church is the only thing worthy of representing the soul of a people, for religion is the most noble aspect of man," according to Antoni Gaudí, the architect of the Basilica of the Holy Family in Barcelona, Spain. During its dedication on November 7, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI remarked,

"At a time when man claims to be able to live with his back turned to God, as though he no longer had anything to say to Him, the consecration of this church of the Sagrada Familia is an event of great significance. Through his work, Gaudí shows us that God is the true measure of man; that the secret of true originality consists, as he himself said, in returning to the beginning, which is God. Gaudí, by opening his spirit to God, was capable of creating in this city a space of beauty, faith and

hope which leads one to an encounter with He who is truth and beauty itself."

Antoni Gaudí was born on June 25, 1852, in Reus, in the province of Tarragona, Spain, the fifth child of Francesc Gaudí Serra and Antonia Cornet Bertran. He would know the sadness of the premature death of all of his brothers and sisters. This succession of deaths most likely explains Gaudí's serious temperament. On his father's side, he came from a family of copper-smiths. Seeing copper being shaped at his father's workshop gave young Antoni the habit of "thinking in three dimensions." From childhood, Antoni suffered from rheumatism that would never leave him. This illness constrained him to remain for long periods in the solitude of a small property his family owned in Riudoms, outside Reus. There, his eyes captured the Mediterranean light and the purest images of rocks, plants, and animals; he would always admire nature as a wonderful teacher. At school, Antoni was not a



The interior of the basilica during its consecration by Pope Benedict XVI on November 7, 2010. Each column (there are 52 in total, one for each of the 52 weeks of the year) is shaped like a tree, complete with branches and foliage. Above the nave, colourful pinnacles depict the fruits of the Promised Land, alternating with bunches of grapes and ears of wheat, symbols of the Eucharist

particularly good student, but he received a solid religious formation from the Piarists, the order of priests founded by Saint Joseph Calasanz.

The sole aim: the search for beauty

During the 1868-69 school year, the young man moved to Barcelona to study at the Upper Technical School of Architecture. He paid for his studies by working for well-regarded engineers and architects. He also attended classes in philosophy, aesthetics, and history at the university, and was interested in the world of culture. In his eyes, art must seek its inspiration in the laws and models observed in nature, the work of the Creator, in which shine truth and beauty. This search for beauty became the sole aim of his life. He received his degree in architecture in 1878.

While he was working on the building of a co-op, he met a woman who taught the children of workers. The two spent long periods of time talking together. After wavering for a long time, Antoni finally spoke to her about becoming engaged, but the young woman confessed with regret that she already was. The young man then decided to dedicate himself body and soul to the Lord, as a celibate in the world. He cared for his father during his many years of old age, as well as for a sick and orphaned niece.

For the 1878 World's Fair in Paris, Antoni devised

an original window display for a manufacturer of luxury gloves. When the Count of Guell, a man of vast culture and one of the wealthiest individuals in Barcelona, learned that this masterpiece had been conceived in his city, he inquired about the identity of its creator. Thus was formed an indestructible friendship between the two men.

Immediately, the count commissioned the artist to design some pieces of furniture, then a number of buildings, including the extraordinary Park Guell. Antoni also became a close friend of Bishop Torras i Bages, the bishop of Vic, whose cause for beatification has been introduced, and the bishops of Majorca and Astorga, as well as a number of priests. Thanks to his friendship with these ecclesiastics, he gained a deep understanding of both the spirit of the liturgy and the social doctrine of the Church. From childhood, Gaudi was sensitive to the social problems of his era, particularly the living conditions of the working class. Early on, he realized that the profound social contradictions of his time could not find a solution in materialist utopias, but only by putting in practice Christian social doctrine.

Gaudi never wrote a book, although he left behind many notes on architecture and decor. Nevertheless, one could say that he was one of the best writers in history —not on paper but in stone. He never gave

► any lectures, but he frequently commented on his Sagrada Familia church to visitors, and he shared with his colleagues and disciples thoughts full of human and Christian wisdom. Passionate about aesthetics, he examined the enigma of beauty, and understood that it is because of Beauty (i.e., God Himself) that beautiful things are beautiful. He held that “beauty is the splendor of truth. Without truth, there is no art. Everyone is drawn to splendor — that is why art is universal.”

In his November 7, 2010 homily, Pope Benedict XVI observed, “Indeed, beauty is one of mankind’s greatest needs; it is the root from which the branches of our peace and the fruits of our hope come forth. Beauty also reveals God because, like Him, a work of beauty is pure gratuity; it calls us to freedom and draws us away from selfishness.”

Awakening hearts

The nineteenth century was, for Spain, a century of profound social upheavals. An anti-clerical frenzy raged, and the Church was persecuted. Joseph Bocabella, a bookseller who had a great devotion to Saint Joseph, was inspired to build a church consecrated to the Holy Family of Nazareth. He wished to give a strong witness to the love of God and His Incarnate Son Jesus, in expiation for the sins of the men of his century. He started soliciting donations. As he began to raise funds, a great number of Christians joined in “to awaken lukewarm hearts that have fallen asleep, to increase Faith, and to rekindle Charity, so that the Lord might take pity on the country.”

Construction began immediately, but soon a serious difference of opinion arose between Bocabella and his architect, and the architect abandoned the project. One night, Bocabella’s aunt had a dream — she saw the architect who would make the Holy Family rise from the ground. It was a young man with blue eyes. Attaching no importance to this dream, Joseph went to an architectural firm. Opening the door, he found himself face to face with a young man whose blue eyes gave him a start — for in fact, in Catalonia blue eyes are rare. This young architect was named Gaudi. Although Bocabella’s taste tended towards a strict classicism, he came round to Gaudi’s loftier ideas without hesitation.

Convinced that, without sacrifice, the work would not succeed, Antoni Gaudi abandoned the easy life he had enjoyed as a young architect of great prestige. He intensified his prayer and adopted a rigorous asceticism. “This Temple is a temple of expiation,” he explained, “which means that it is fed by sacrifices.” During Lent of 1894, he fasted so severely that he was brought to death’s door. His friend, Bishop Torras i Bages, had to intervene to persuade him to take some food. “Life is love and love is sacrifice,” Antoni would emphasize. “If a household shows vitality, it is because someone is sacrificing. It is sometimes a servant.” The great love of God and neighbor that filled



The 17-metre cross that was added to the top of the Tower of Jesus Christ, illuminating the city of Barcelona day and night. With this addition, the tower is now 172.5 metres high, 50 centimetres shorter than the neighbouring Montjuïc mountain, which rises to 173 metres: Gaudi wanted human creation never to surpass divine creation.

Antoni had its roots in love for the Cross. In fact, Gaudi crowned his works, both secular and religious, with a four-armed Cross, which often bore the acronym for the Holy Family: “JMJ” (Jesus, Mary, Joseph).

All have a place

Gaudi designed the church of the Holy Family as a synthesis of Catholic doctrine. In it there would be represented the Creation of the world, the work of man on earth, the passage from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of Light, the mysteries of the life of Christ, the seven Sacraments, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Beatitudes, death, Purgatory, Final Judgment, Hell, and Heaven. This “cathedral,” about 100 meters in length, would be built in the shape of a Latin cross, with five naves and three facades. The naves would be separated by slanting columns forming a parabolic arc. All the supports would converge towards the center to give stability to the building. Gaudi devised this innovative technique so that the eighteen towers he planned, about 110 meters tall, could withstand both strong winds and telluric movements. Gaudi’s work would be open to everyone: “The portal must be large enough,” he explained, “not for the individual man, but for all humanity, because all have a place in the heart of their Creator.”

"Gaudi," observes Benedict XVI, "desired to unify that inspiration which came to him from the three books which nourished him as a man, as a believer and as an architect: the book of nature, the book of sacred Scripture and the book of the liturgy. In this way, he brought together the reality of the world and the history of salvation, as recounted in the Bible and made present in the liturgy. He made stones, trees and human life part of the church so that all creation might come together in praise of God, but at the same time he brought the sacred images outside so as to place before people the mystery of God revealed in the birth, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this way, he brilliantly helped to build our human consciousness, anchored in the world yet open to God, enlightened and sanctified by Christ."

On the Holy Family's enormous construction site, Gaudi established a wonderful feeling of brotherhood. Social security did not yet exist, and workers worked until the end of their lives. In his foresight, the architect established a system of mutual aid by which a small portion of each man's salary was deducted to pay the salary of the worker who fell ill. The workers loved him so much that they called him "Father" when they spoke of him; Gaudi would never know of this.

His kindness was proverbial. One day, a sculptor came to the construction site after a sleepless night. The architect told him, "When the body needs sleep, the first thing to do is to rest." "Yes," replied the sculptor, "I will do it when I get home." "No," answered Gaudi, "you must do it now." And the sculptor had to obey. This father's kindness was nevertheless combined with a very keen sense of justice. One of his clients did not want to pay him the fees he was due. Without hesitation, Gaudi took him to court; after winning the case, he gave the money to a convent. In cooperation with the parish priest, he designed and paid for a school to be built for the children of the bricklayers and of other poor families in the neighborhood. "The poor," he would say, "must always find a welcome in the Church, which is an expression of Christian charity."

But Gaudi sometimes had bouts of bad temper that were expressed in biting words. "With the temperament that I have," he declared, "I have no choice but to say things as I see them. Of course, this hurts people." He added, "My strength of will has enabled me to overcome all obstacles, except for one thing — improving my temperament." It did not keep him, however, from being joyful and loving jokes.

Close to him

One day, during a visit to the hospital, Gaudi, accompanied by a sculptor, was introduced by a Sister to a poor dying man who had no family. The two men stayed beside the ill man, whispering prayers in his ear until he very peaceably breathed his last. "This dying man's devotion," the architect would say, "made me

think that the Holy Family was beside him. I had the idea of representing the scene in the cloister of the church." On the spot, he created the sketch: the Child Jesus in the arms of His Mother leaning over, smiling, to caress the dying man, and Saint Joseph at the foot of the bed contemplating the scene.



Gaudi (with the white beard) explains his work to Cardinal Ragonesi of the Vatican in 1915.

Gaudi put everyone's abilities to use. "Work is the fruit of collaboration, which can only be built on love. The architect must make use of all of the knowledge and ability of his colleagues. He must develop each man's particular quality. He must integrate, adding up the efforts of all and supporting them when they begin to become discouraged. This is how one works with joy and the assurance that reflects the full confidence of the organizer. He must know that useless people do not exist. Everyone is useful according to his own abilities. One must simply discover each man's abilities." In his construction projects as well, Gaudi liked to integrate debris, scraps of metal, things that seemed useless.

He also cultivated a love of work done well, and sought perfection: "Generally, when people do something, and the work is already good enough, they do not think of ways to improve it but are satisfied with the current result. This is a mistake. When work aims at perfection, one must make improvements until it is perfect." He explained, from his personal experience, that the first try is seldom successful. Therefore, when people wanted to impose deadlines on him, he replied, "My client is not in a hurry." In fact, he considered his only client to be the Lord Himself. Nevertheless, if he noticed a mistake in work done by one of his associates, he corrected it with great delicacy, saying, for example: "We did not understand each other well. We'll try again."

A step which cost him

After his young niece's premature death in 1912, followed by the death of his father, Gaudi remarked, "I no longer have anything. Now I can give myself completely to the church of the Holy Family." He lived



On the evening of June 10, 2026, to mark the blessing of the Tower of Jesus Christ, drones formed the face of Gaudí in the sky

alone in his house in Park Guell until he moved onto the Holy Family construction site in October 1925. He dressed shabbily. His frugal diet consisted mainly of dried fruit and goat milk with lemon. He poured all his fees into the work of the basilica. When the economic crisis made itself felt, he began to beg to be able to pay his workers, a step which cost him greatly. One day a poor woman gave him a peseta, an infinitesimal sum, which he very happily placed in the church cash box. Another day, as he was waiting under a balcony sheltering himself from the rain, a passerby mistook him for a real beggar and gave him alms of two pesetas. They went the same path. Gaudí's poverty led to some miscalculations.

During Infanta Isabella's visit to the Holy Family, Gaudí appeared on the scene and the royal guards, seeing this man so poorly dressed, pushed him away. His co-workers exclaimed, "How stupid these guards are!" "No," Gaudí replied, "they are doing their job." He was sometimes mistaken for the sacristan, and he humbly gave the schedule of services. The ex-president of the Spanish Federal Republic, Francesc Pi i Margall, came one day to visit the Holy Family. He went down to the crypt, which was already being used for worship, and Gaudí politely offered him some holy water. Mr. Pi, an anticlerical, pretended not to see him, but Gaudí insisted, "Mr. Francesc, please". And Pi i Margall surprised even himself as, in front of everyone, he made the sign of the cross.

Another day, the rector of the University of Salamanca, Miguel de Unamuno, visited, a great writer who had become an anguished agnostic. Arriving before the facade of the Nativity, which proliferated with Christian symbols, he hurled at the architect: "You,

a man so intelligent, you still believe in such things!" Gaudí did not react. A bit later, the Angelus rang. Gaudí broke off his conversation, removed his hat and, without fear, began to pray devoutly, after which, he said, "Praise God! I wish you all a good night!"

A visitor to the edifice, admiring this same facade adorned with a great abundance of images from nature, exclaimed, "It's a song to Nature!" "Yes," replied Gaudí, "but rather say 'a song to Creation!'" Gaudí was heavily criticized for the ornamentations in his work inspired by flora and fauna. He justified himself by pointing out that all these plants and animals

were shown full of life and movement — created nature thus forming the court of its Creator.

Every day, Antoni attended Mass and immersed himself in reading the Gospel, from which he drew the inspiration for the figures which adorn the Holy Family. When he quoted the Gospel, everyone was impressed, even unbelievers. For him, "The man without religion is a mutilated man. To do things well, one must first have love, only then technique." Passionate about Gregorian chant, he took a course at the Palace of Music in Barcelona. When asked the reason for his interest, he replied, "I come here to learn architecture!" The choirs of the Holy Family were designed to accommodate around 3,000 singers, for the architect was convinced that the future belonged to the Church.

He knew that all the wisdom and efforts of man to draw nearer to God find their end in Christ. His architecture is a dazzling testimony to this conviction — echoes of other traditions and cultures are used, like the base that bears the Cross. When he guided visitors through the building's construction site, his explanations constituted an excellent exposition of Christian doctrine. A number of people from different religions, notably Buddhism and Shintoism, were converted to Catholicism after contact with Gaudí or his work.

According to his wish

On the evening of June 7, 1926, about 6 p.m., Gaudí was hit by a streetcar as he was leaving the construction site. Taken for a beggar, he was brought to the Hospital of the Holy Cross, run by nuns who served the poor. There he received Extreme Unction. When his true identity became known, the most expert medical teams offered their help, but it was too late. On June 10, Gaudí died, in poverty just as he had desired, after speaking these last words: "My God, my God!" His funeral was an occasion of great public

mourning, where civil and ecclesiastic authorities rubbed shoulders with the most simple people. He was buried in the crypt of "his" church, in the chapel of Our Lady of Carmel. The process of his beatification is underway, and many graces have been received through his intercession.

Gaudi never believed he would finish the work himself: "I would not want to finish the construction of the church. That would not be fitting... Building the church is a prayer in time. We must leave to future generations the opportunity to praise God in its construction, and using other styles." And he often said, "It is Saint Joseph who will finish this church." In fact, the Holy Family, which Pope Benedict XVI has elevated to a minor basilica, is still unfinished.

During its dedication, the Pope pointed out a fundamental aspect of this work: "[Gaudi] accomplished one of the most important tasks of our times: overcoming the division between human consciousness and Christian consciousness, between living in this temporal world and being open to eternal life, between the beauty of things and God as beauty."

And he added, "We have dedicated this sacred space to God, who revealed and gave Himself to us in Christ so as to be definitively God among men... The Church of herself is nothing; she is called to be the sign and instrument of Christ, in pure docility to His authority and in total service to His mandate. The one Christ is the foundation of the one Church. He is the rock on which our faith is built. Building on this faith, let us strive together to show the world the face of God Who is love and the only One who can respond to our yearning for fulfillment. This is the great task before us: to show everyone that God is a God of peace not of violence, of freedom not of coercion, of harmony not of discord."



The basilica will have eighteen towers in total: twelve for the apostles, four for the evangelists, one for the Virgin Mary (topped with a star), and one (the tallest) for Jesus Christ. Four more towers representing the apostles are set to be built by 2033

May God make us all, according to our stations in life, artisans of beauty and of peace, witnesses to the Truth that is Christ, so that we may be called children of God! ♦

Dom Antoine-Marie, O.S.B.

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