

**Beyond Productivity: Catholic Social Thought, Artificial Intelligence,
and the Future of Good Work**

“...work is not simply an instrument; it expresses and enhances the dignity of our lives. It is a requirement of the human condition, a normal path toward maturity, development and personal fulfilment.” *Magnifica Humanitas*, no. 149

The publication of Pope Leo XIV's *Magnifica Humanitas* on the 135th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* invites us to reconsider the questions we ask about work, technology, and economic life. Both encyclicals emerge during periods of significant disruption. *Rerum Novarum* responded to industrial capitalism's transformation of work and the growing tensions between capital and labor. *Magnifica Humanitas* addresses a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, automation, and data-driven systems. While separated by more than a century, both documents confront the common challenge of how to ensure that economic and technological progress remains ordered toward human dignity and the common good.

Much of today's discussion surrounding artificial intelligence focuses on productivity, efficiency, and labor displacement. Whether optimistic or pessimistic, these conversations often share a common assumption: the primary ethical questions concern how much work will remain and how the economic gains of increased productivity should be distributed. This presentation argues that such discussions may be asking the wrong questions, or, at least, not enough questions.

Drawing on *Rerum Novarum*, *Magnifica Humanitas*, and the broader tradition of Catholic social thought, this presentation examines whether contemporary understandings of productivity are themselves ethically incomplete. Economic systems are frequently evaluated according to

measures of output, efficiency, and growth. Yet Catholic social teaching has long insisted that work is more than a means of producing economic value. Human labor contributes to identity, agency, participation, community, and the development of human capacities. Work is not merely something people do; it is one of the primary ways people understand themselves, contribute to society, and pursue human flourishing.

This perspective raises concerns beyond job loss. If artificial intelligence increasingly performs work traditionally undertaken by human beings, what happens to the developmental pathways through which individuals acquire expertise, exercise responsibility, and discover meaningful vocations? If organizations eliminate entry-level and apprenticeship-like work in pursuit of efficiency, what obligations do they bear toward future generations of workers? If productivity becomes the dominant measure of success, what forms of human value risk being overlooked?

The presentation explores these questions through a comparative analysis of the ethical concerns animating *Rerum Novarum* and *Magnifica Humanitas*. Particular attention will be given to the dignity of labor, the concentration of economic and technological power, the relationship between work and human flourishing, and the responsibilities of institutions during periods of disruption. While discussions of public policy will be considered, which includes proposals such as universal basic income, alternative tax structures, and AI governance frameworks, the primary focus is to examine the moral assumptions that shape contemporary conversations about work and technological change.

Finally, this session will consider the implications for Jesuit business education. Many students are entering a labor market characterized by uncertainty and rapid technological change. In response, business schools often emphasize adaptability, technical skills, and career resilience.

While these remain important, Jesuit educators are also called to ask deeper questions about vocation, good work, and the purpose of economic life. If disruption is to become a catalyst for human flourishing, educators must help students critically examine the metrics by which economic systems are judged and develop the moral imagination necessary to shape organizations that serve both human dignity and the common good.