

From Maven to Magnifica Humanitas

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Artificial intelligence is no longer a future concept within the U.S. military – it is now operational infrastructure. Project Maven, launched by the Pentagon in 2017 under Marine Corps Colonel Drew Cukor, marked a turning point in modern warfare by integrating AI into military decision-making. Officially created to analyze drone imagery from conflict zones in Asia and the Middle East, Maven quickly evolved into a broader effort to automate target identification and accelerate the kill chain.

Cukor believed the main weakness of modern warfare was human limitation: analysts were slow, fatigued, and prone to error. AI therefore became not just a technological advantage, but a structural solution for increasing military efficiency. To bypass Pentagon bureaucracy, Maven advanced semi-clandestinely and partnered directly with Silicon Valley firms before strategic rivals such as China could achieve similar capabilities.

The project entered public debate in 2018 when Google collaborated with the Pentagon, triggering protests from over 4,000 employees opposed to military AI applications. Although Google withdrew, Maven continued expanding across Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, turning modern battlefields into laboratories for algorithmic warfare.

Companies including Microsoft, Anduril, Clarifai, Scale AI, Amazon Web Services, and especially Palantir became central to the program. Since 2019, Palantir's Maven Smart System has integrated more than 150 military data streams in real time, enabling operational visualization, pattern recognition, and accelerated battlefield decisions.

According to journalist Katrina Manson in Project Maven, AI-driven automation multiplied the number of military targets detected daily by the U.S. military, while large language models compressed the time between detection, analysis, and neutralization. Warfare is increasingly becoming a competition of data, automation, and algorithmic superiority.

The central question is no longer whether AI will shape future wars, but how much human control will remain in lethal decision-making. Supporters argue these systems reduce mistakes and casualties; critics warn they could erode core principles of international humanitarian law, especially the distinction between civilians and combatants.

Maven is not simply a military tool. It represents the definitive integration of artificial intelligence into the core of U.S. strategic doctrine.

The Vatican has now entered the global debate over artificial intelligence. In Magnifica Humanitas, Pope Leo XIV's first major

doctrinal text on AI, the Holy See warns against the growing power of algorithms and calls for international regulation to prevent AI from "dominating the human being."

Presented alongside technology experts – including a co-founder of Anthropic – the encyclical argues that control over digital infrastructure has shifted from states to powerful technology corporations capable of defining "the rules of access, visibility, and participation" in modern society. According to the Vatican, this concentration of computational power threatens political sovereignty, deepens inequality, and subordinates societies to corporate interests.

Leo XIV rejects the idea that AI is "morally neutral" and calls for a form of "technological disarmament," particularly regarding military applications. Without directly naming the United States, the Pope challenges the doctrine of "just war" and criticizes the rise of autonomous weapons and AI-guided combat systems. "No algorithm can make war morally acceptable," the document states.

The encyclical arrives amid growing concern over the absence of global AI regulation. For the Vatican, the crisis is not only technological but civilizational: mass automation risks reducing human beings to data, productivity, and consumption.

The document also condemns the hidden human cost of the digital economy; denouncing forms of labor exploitation tied to the extraction of rare earth minerals essential for AI infrastructure. Leo XIV links the technological revolution to extractive neocolonialism and modern slavery, drawing parallels between today's moral failures and the Church's delayed condemnation of slavery in the past.

Citing Plato, Tolkien, Picasso, and Beethoven, the Pope argues that creativity, dignity, and consciousness will become the defining battlegrounds of the 21st century. He also warns of a broader geopolitical crisis in which war is once again normalized as a legitimate instrument of power, with AI accelerating global instability and asymmetries between states, corporations, and societies.

Signed on May 15 – the anniversary of Rerum Novarum, Pope Leo XIII's landmark encyclical during the Industrial Revolution – Magnifica Humanitas seeks to become the doctrinal response to the algorithmic age, much as *Laudato Si'* became the Vatican's ecological manifesto.

With this document, the Vatican positions itself not only as a spiritual authority, but as an ethical actor in the global struggle over the future of artificial intelligence. The fundamental question raised by Leo XIV is whether humanity can govern AI before AI begins reshaping humanity itself.

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