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Education, Cooperation, and Responsibility in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

In January 2026, Pope Leo XIV published a major message for the 60th World Day of Social Communications, titled "Preserving Human Voices and Faces." In it, he addressed one of the most pressing questions facing modern society: how should humanity respond to the rapid rise of artificial intelligence? Rather than calling for a ban on new technology, the Pope proposed a working relationship between humanity and AI, one built on three essential pillars: responsibility, cooperation, and education. While all three pillars are important, education stands out as the most foundational. Without it, neither responsibility nor cooperation can function the way they need to in order to protect the human spirit and guide society toward the common good.

To understand why education matters so much in this context, it helps to look at what the Pope is actually worried about. His concern is not that technology will become too powerful, but that AI is already changing the way people think, communicate, and relate to one another. Social media algorithms, for example, are designed to keep users engaged as long as possible. The easiest way to do that is to feed people content that triggers strong emotional reactions, whether that is anger, fear, or outrage. The Pope pointed out that these systems reward quick, emotional responses and make it harder for people to slow down, think carefully, and genuinely listen to one another. When that becomes the standard practice, the quality of public conversation suffers and meaningful public discourse becomes harder to sustain.

This is where education becomes critical. The Pope called for media, information, and AI literacy to be built into education systems at every level and this goes far beyond simply learning

how to use technology. What he was describing is teaching people to think critically about the systems that shape their daily lives: understanding how algorithms decide what information people see, recognizing when content has been generated or manipulated by AI, and developing the judgment to evaluate sources and resist manipulation. These are skills that no app or device can provide. They have to be taught, practiced, and developed over time through genuine human engagement.

Pope Leo also made a point of saying that AI literacy should not be limited to young people. He emphasized the importance of reaching older adults and marginalized communities as well. This is significant because AI is not just reshaping entertainment and social media, it is influencing hiring decisions, medical care, legal systems, and access to public services. People who do not understand how these systems work are not just at a disadvantage in a general sense, they are at risk of being treated unfairly by systems they cannot see, question, or challenge. In this light, education is not just an intellectual goal, it is a matter of justice.

Looking at the relationship between education and the other two pillars makes this idea even stronger. The pillar of responsibility, as the Pope described it, involves honesty, transparency, and a genuine concern for the common good. Tech companies are responsible for being transparent about how their algorithms work, lawmakers are responsible for creating rules that protect all people, and individual users are responsible for how they engage with and share information online. But none of these forms of responsibility can function well if the people involved do not have a basic understanding of what they are dealing with. A lawmaker who cannot evaluate the claims of an AI company, or a user who cannot tell the difference between real and synthetic content, cannot exercise genuine responsibility, but education is what makes that responsibility possible.

The same logic applies to cooperation, the third pillar. Pope Leo envisioned a broad alliance in which technology companies, governments, educators, journalists, artists, and communities all work together to shape how AI develops and how it is used. That kind of cooperation sounds appealing, but it requires a shared foundation of knowledge and values. If each group only understands its own narrow domain, the conversation breaks down. Educators need to understand enough about technology to advocate effectively and citizens need to understand enough about policy to hold their representatives accountable. Cooperation across such different sectors only becomes real when education has built the common ground it requires.

Beyond these practical considerations, however, the Pope's argument ultimately points to something deeper. He was not just making a case for digital literacy, but for a renewed understanding of what it means to be human. The challenge posed by AI, he wrote, is not technological but anthropological. In other words, the real question is not what machines can do, but what kind of people we are becoming in response to them. When people stop wrestling with difficult ideas, stop forming their own opinions, and stop engaging in the hard work of genuine communication, something essential is lost. Education, in its fullest sense, is the practice of keeping that something alive. It means cultivating curiosity, moral seriousness, the ability to sit with hard questions, and the desire to connect with other people in ways that are real rather than simulated.

Pope Leo warned that surrendering our mental capacities and imagination to machines would be like burying the talents each person has been given. AI can process information faster than any human, help with complex tasks, and expand access to knowledge in meaningful ways, but a tool is only as valuable as the wisdom of the person using it and wisdom cannot be

generated by a machine. It comes from experience, reflection, failure, and growth. Education is how society passes those elements on from one generation to the next and ensures they are not lost in the flood of digital convenience.

Pope Leo XIV's call for an alliance between humanity and artificial intelligence is both realistic and hopeful. He did not ask people to reject new technology or pretend it does not exist, he asked them to engage with it thoughtfully, on their own terms, as human beings. Among the three pillars he proposed, education is the one that makes everything else possible. It builds the critical thinking that responsibility requires, the shared understanding that cooperation depends on, and the human depth that no algorithm can replace. Investing in genuine education at every level of society is not just a smart policy choice, it is one of the most important ways to protect and preserve what makes us human.

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