

Con il PVA in mano

Rileggere la Magnifica Humanitas
per custodire l'umano nel tempo dell'IA

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Per i Salesiani Cooperatori e la Famiglia Salesiana

Introduction

Among the commitments I have sought to fulfil during these years of service as World Coordinator has been that of encouraging Salesian Cooperators to truly make the Church's documents their own. Not as compulsory reading, nor as material to be added to the many other documents present in our archives, but as a living tool for understanding the times in which we live and for guiding our actions.

The PVA explicitly provides for this: the 'Documents of the Church' are listed among the sources of initial formation (Reg. Art. 15 §2), and ongoing formation requires that time be devoted to the study of Church doctrine (Reg. Art. 16 §1). But there is often a gap between providing for this and actually doing it, a gap that is worth bridging. Not merely out of a sense of duty, but because in those texts the Church helps us to interpret reality without fear and without naivety.

On 15 May 2026, Pope Leo XIV published the encyclical letter **Magnifica Humanitas**, dedicated to the protection of the human person in the age of artificial intelligence. It is a comprehensive document that addresses artificial intelligence, work, the family, education, communication, peace, and new forms of exploitation linked to the digital economy. These are not peripheral issues for us: they lie at the very heart of our mission.

I wanted to reread this encyclical while referring to the PVA's Statutes and Regulations, looking for points of dialogue between the two texts. Not to prove that the PVA had already said it all — that would be a futile and somewhat contrived exercise — but to show how a document of the Magisterium can shed light on and enrich what we have already committed ourselves to living out. The two texts speak to one another, complement one another, and at times challenge one another.

Keeping the report on the State of the Association to hand as well, I realised that some of the challenges and dreams that have emerged on our journey find a very concrete echo in the encyclical. Not all of them, of course. It would not be honest to seek correspondences at any cost. But where dialogue arises spontaneously, it is worth noting. For this reason, throughout these pages, I have included a few brief notes: small references to the challenge of walking with young people towards a more Christian and humane society, to the dream of being credible and joyful witnesses, and to the struggles of identity, formation, mission and shared responsibility. Not as a second discourse alongside the first, but as an additional light on the same journey.

This text is intended, above all, as a proposal for a method. It does not claim to be a systematic commentary on **Magnifica Humanitas**, nor a detailed analysis of all its contents. The encyclical is far richer than these pages can possibly convey. Here I have tried to do something simpler, and perhaps more useful for the life of our Centres: to show how we can take a Church document, read it in the light of our Project of Apostolic Life, and allow ourselves to be challenged by it. The immediate audience for these pages remains the Association of Salesian Cooperators, but the method is not confined within our own boundaries. With the necessary adaptations, it can also help other groups within the Salesian Family: each starting from its own identity, its own Constitutions or Rules of Life, and its own way of participating in Don Bosco's charism. Every local Centre could do this during a monthly meeting, a retreat, or a shared formation session; and the same could happen in other settings within the Salesian Family. No special skills are required. What is needed is the curiosity of those who wish to understand the times in which they live and the fidelity of those who have made a Promise or embraced a Salesian vocation. Perhaps a little courage is needed too: the courage to allow oneself to be challenged, without immediately putting up a defence, and to ask what the Lord is asking of our Association today and, more broadly, of the Salesian Family.

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Rome, May 2026

The text

A first encounter with **Magnifica Humanitas** may at first seem disorientating due to the breadth of the topics covered. But one need only follow the central thread that Leo XIV sets out from the very first pages to find an interpretation accessible to all: we are not called to be experts in technology, but not to stand by and watch whilst the world changes around us.

The Pope uses two biblical images as guiding principles throughout the document. The first is the Tower of Babel: a grandiose project built on pride, uniformity and the presumption of self-sufficiency, which ends in confusion and disarray. The second is Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem: not alone, not from on high, but together with the people, each person responsible for their own section of the wall, through prayer and shared responsibility. The choice set before every Christian in the encyclical is played out between these two images.

On closer inspection, it is also very much a choice that confronts us. In the report on the State of the Association, we had identified as a priority challenge the task of **walking alongside young people towards a new, more Christian and humane society**. The image of Nehemiah helps us to understand this clearly

What this means is: not imposing a project from above, not imagining a perfect and uniform community, but working together to rebuild the section of the wall entrusted to us, in concrete situations, with young people and not simply for young people. It is a very Salesian perspective: few solemn words, a strong presence, great patience and a steadfast trust in the good that can be accomplished. Precisely for this reason, it can speak even beyond our Association, because the whole Salesian Family, in different ways, carries the same educational passion in its heart.

1. A living Social Doctrine, not consigned to the archives

Magnifica Humanitas is published on the 135th anniversary of Leo XIII's **Rerum novarum**, the encyclical that launched what we now call the Church's Social Doctrine. The gesture is not merely commemorative. Leo XIV wishes to show that this tradition is still capable of interpreting the present. Social Doctrine is not a catalogue of principles to be consulted only when needed, but — as the Pope writes — 'a living body of truth' that grows in response to the challenges of every age (no. 3). Chapters I and II of the encyclical trace this development and apply its fundamental principles — the dignity of the person, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity and social justice — to the transformations brought about by artificial intelligence.

For Salesian Cooperators, this is familiar territory. The Regulations (Art. 2 §1) place fidelity to the teachings of the Social Doctrine alongside fidelity to the Gospel, as if they were inseparable. The Statutes (Art. 8 §4) state that the Cooperators 'pay attention to the Church's Social Doctrine and to social communication in order to promote educational pathways'. And the Regulations (Art. 3 §2) call on the Association to act 'courageously' to promote a socio-political culture inspired by the Gospel.

This is where one of the challenges we had already acknowledged in our journey as the Association comes into play: formation. Not an abstract form of formation, which remains in the mind and does not translate into lived experience, but a form of formation capable of providing the criteria, the language and the courage needed to respond. If the Social Doctrine is alive, then it must also come alive in our Centres, in our Councils, in our apostolic choices, and in the ways in which we interpret our local realities. And this applies, with varying emphases, to every part of the Salesian Family that wishes to allow itself to be educated by the Magisterium of the Church. Otherwise, we risk merely quoting it - perhaps even well - but without truly allowing it to shape our outlook.

Magnifica Humanitas is therefore, for us, the most recent update to that compass. To ignore it would be like having a precious tool in a drawer and not using it. And perhaps, quite simply, it would mean missing an opportunity to make our PVA less a written

text and more a living reality.

2. Discerning the times, in the Salesian spirit

One of the most frequently used words in the encyclical is ‘discernment’. It is not a question of being against technology, nor of embracing it unreservedly. It is a question of evaluating it in the light of ethical and spiritual criteria, of asking ourselves who truly benefits from it, who bears the cost, and what impact it has on people’s everyday lives. Leo XIV calls for this discernment from everyone — not just bishops or theologians — because decisions regarding artificial intelligence are made every day, including by those who use it without realising it.

The PVA acknowledges this task as an essential part of the Cooperator’s identity. The Regulations (Art. 11 §1) describe people who ‘discern the signs of the times and, with a spirit of initiative, strive to provide appropriate responses to the needs emerging from the local area and civil society’, ready to ‘constantly review and adapt their actions’. The Statutes (Art. 16 §1) call for ‘promoting new developments with a critical Christian perspective’ and for ‘listening above all to young people in discerning the signs of the times’.

This is neither a defensive attitude towards what is new, nor naive enthusiasm. It is that stance—at once practical and contemplative—which the Regulations (Art. 11 §2) describe as ‘a sense of the concrete’, accompanied by ‘an attitude of contemplation that leads one to seek and acknowledge the mystery of God’s presence in everyday life’.

On this point, the encyclical also touches closely on another challenge facing the Association: internalising the PVA. It is not enough simply to have approved it; it is not enough to have studied it once. We must allow it to work within us, so that it becomes a criterion for discernment. Reading **Magnifica Humanitas** with the PVA in hand means precisely this: not simply adding one document to another, but training ourselves to look at the world as Salesian Cooperators. And the world today does not ask us for answers repeated out of habit; it asks us for presence, clarity, a willingness to listen, the ability to assess the situation and, when necessary, even to change tack.

3. Within reality: economics, politics, culture

The encyclical is demanding on one point that risks going unnoticed: it is not enough to have good principles; we must take them to the places where decisions are made. Leo XIV puts it bluntly: ‘It is not enough to invoke ethics: we need adequate legal frameworks, independent oversight, user education, and a political system that does not abdicate its responsibility’ (no. 106). Christians are called to be present in technology companies, parliaments, universities and

trade unions, bringing with them criteria of justice and the protection of the most vulnerable.

This is precisely the sphere in which the PVA assigns a role to Salesian Cooperators as lay people, who live out their vocation ‘in the ordinary circumstances of life and work’ (Statutes, Art. 3 §2). The Regulations (Art. 2 §§ 2 and 4) call upon them to develop ‘a mature critical awareness in order to participate responsibly in social life in the spheres of culture, the economy and politics’ and to become involved ‘in cultural, trade union and socio-political structures, for the attainment and development of the common good’. The Statutes (Art. 12 §2) specify that activities take place within ‘civil, cultural, socio-economic, political, ecclesial and Salesian’ structures.

There is, therefore, no separation between faith and public life. The encyclical does not add anything new to this conviction already expressed in the PVA: it reinforces and updates it. And at the same time, it reminds us of something very concrete: co-responsibility is not measured solely within our associative structures. It is also measured by the laity’s ability to engage in the spheres of social life with competence, conscience and inner freedom.

In the report on the State of the Association, we spoke of ‘autonomy in solidarity’ within co-responsibility. It is an expression that finds a very practical application here. Autonomy does not mean walking alone, nor does it mean distancing ourselves from the Salesian Family. It means becoming adults in the mission, capable of taking on specific responsibilities wherever life places us: at work, at school, in institutions, in our professions, and in our daily relationships. ‘In solidarity’ because this maturity does not close us off, but opens us up to communion and the common good.

4. Young people in the digital world: the Salesian frontier

Of the encyclical’s chapters, the fourth is perhaps the one that speaks most directly to the Salesian heart. Leo XIV describes young people who are exposed from an early age to digital devices, who can become trapped in cycles of addiction, bullying, online grooming, and easy access to violent or pornographic content (no. 141). Behind these dynamics lie economic models that monetise attention, algorithms designed to keep users engaged, and platforms that have no interest in protecting the most vulnerable. The Pope calls for an ‘educational alliance’ between families, schools and institutions, and urges adults to rediscover their vocation as educators — not as controllers, but as companions.

Don Bosco would have had no difficulty in recognising these dynamics. The names have changed, the public spaces have become digital, but the loneliness of the most vulnerable young people remains the same. The PVA places this concern at the heart of its mission: the Statutes (Art. 8 §2) call for special attention to be given ‘to young people, especially the poorest

or those who are victims of any form of marginalisation, exploitation and violence'. The Regulations (Art. 2 §3) call for us to keep 'constantly abreast of developments in the media, particularly in view of their impact on the formation of young people, families and the working classes'.

Today, this means having knowledge of the risks of the digital environment, knowing how to guide young people and families towards more informed choices, and promoting that 'hygiene of attention' referred to in the encyclical (no. 146). The Regulations (Art. 16 §4) already point the way: to use new technologies 'to foster the development of critical thinking', rather than simply being at their mercy.

Here, the connection with the report on the State of the Association is almost self-evident. We had acknowledged the impact of new technologies on the formation of the younger generations as one of the great challenges of our time. We had also noted a difficulty: that of truly engaging young people, of speaking their language without merely chasing after them in a superficial way, of offering them spaces in which they are not merely recipients but active participants. The encyclical tells us that this is no minor matter. It is a genuine frontier in education.

And so the dream expressed in the report — to be credible and joyful witnesses, realising projects of hope, faith and life with and for young people — cannot remain merely an inspiring phrase from a congress. It must take shape here too: in digital education workshops, in courses for parents, in partnerships with schools, in local communities capable of listening before speaking. This is a task that concerns us Salesian Cooperators in particular, but one that can be shared with the whole Salesian Family, because no single group, on its own, is sufficient to face today's educational complexities. A young person living in a connected world is no less in need of a presence; perhaps they need it even more. But they need an adult presence that is calm, competent, neither anxious nor moralising.

5. Work, family, dignity

In paragraphs 148-169, the encyclical defends work as a 'fundamental dimension of the human experience' — not merely a source of income, but a place of identity, relationships and contribution to the community. Automation and AI are not inherently bad, but they risk impoverishing this experience when driven solely by the logic of efficiency and profit. And when work becomes precarious or disappears, the family—which depends on it for its stability—also suffers.

The PVA acknowledges this connection. The Statutes (Art. 8 §3) commit the Cooperators 'to promote and defend the value of the family as the fundamental unit of society'. The Regulations (Art. 2 §1) identify 'serious and up-to-date professionalism' as one of the concrete forms of Christian witness in daily life. The Regulations (Art. 7 §2) emphasise the witness of adults precisely through 'commitment in the sphere of their work and culture, and the exercise of social, economic and political responsibilities'.

Decent work and a stable family are not issues separate from the apostolic mission: they are an integral part of it, today more than ever. This is because young people do not grow up in a vacuum. They grow up within a family, within a neighbourhood, within economic conditions that can either foster or stifle hope. When a family is crushed by uncertainty, when work is lacking or becomes inhumane, education too becomes more fragile.

In the report on the State of the Association, we spoke of family crises and the crisis of human dignity as challenges that call for a specific presence of Salesian Cooperators. Many of us are spouses, parents, workers and professionals. We do not view these realities from the outside; we live them. This is why we can offer not just words, but a daily witness: families that do not close themselves off, adults who work honestly, skills put at the service of others, and support networks for those who struggle most. It is a simple and concrete form of apostolate, but no less decisive for that.

6. Communication, truth, critical thinking

Disinformation is not a technical problem, says the encyclical: it is a moral problem. When the distinction between truth and falsehood becomes blurred, democracy is weakened and people become susceptible to manipulation (no. 134). Those who control digital platforms wield enormous power over the collective imagination, and this power must be exercised responsibly. Leo XIV calls for an 'ecology of communication' that is not reduced to rules and regulations, but forms people capable of critical thinking, of verifying sources, and of resisting oversimplification.

The PVA had already identified communication as a specific area of apostolic work. The Statutes (Art. 11) include it amongst the 'typical activities' of a Cooperator. The Regulations (Art. 2 §3) call for 'promoting the ethical dimension of culture'. The Regulations (Art. 16 §4) commit the Association to using new technologies 'to contribute to cultural dialogue, to foster the development of critical thinking, and to develop and disseminate educational resources accessible to all'.

The encyclical explores the reasons behind this commitment: it is not merely a question of communicating more effectively, but of safeguarding that social trust without which a community — whether ecclesial or civil — cannot survive. Here, too, we can see just how relevant the challenge of formation is. If our local Centres are to be places of education, they must help foster a Christian and Salesian approach to communication. The same applies to the educational, pastoral and associative communities of the Salesian Family, where words can become either a bridge or an obstacle. It is not enough simply to open a channel, publish a poster or forward a message. We must educate ourselves and others in the use of words that are true, verified, respectful, and capable of building rather than hurting.

There is also a very practical aspect of associative identity. A community that communicates poorly, that oversimplifies, that allows itself to be carried away by immediate reactions, ends up losing its own style. A community, on the other hand, that takes care with its words, listens, verifies, and explains patiently, becomes more credible. And credibility, as we know, was one of the key words in the vision outlined in the report: to be credible and joyful witnesses. Salesian joy is not about making noise. It is also serenity in the way we communicate, the ability to tone things down, and not to add confusion to confusion.

7. New forms of slavery: an uncomfortable but necessary issue

One of the most powerful and least predictable passages in the encyclical is its condemnation of the ‘new forms of slavery’ linked to the digital economy (nos. 173-179). Behind every response generated by an AI system lies a chain of labour that is often invisible and exploitative: those who label data for a pittance, those who extract minerals for microprocessors in mines under dangerous conditions, and those who fall victim to human trafficking facilitated by digital tools. Leo XIV does not merely denounce these issues: he calls for transparency in production chains, ethical responsibility on the part of businesses, and concrete protection for victims. He also makes an unexpected gesture: he asks for forgiveness, on behalf of the Church, for the historical delays in condemning slavery (no. 176).

The PVA places this sensitivity at the heart of its charism. The Regulations (Art. 2 §2) call for ‘rejecting everything that causes and fuels injustice, oppression, marginalisation and violence, and to act courageously to remove their causes’. The Regulations (Art. 3 §2) commit the Association to promoting ‘solidarity with developing peoples, justice and peace’. The Statutes (Art. 7) call on us to live out justice ‘to build a more fraternal world that acknowledges and promotes the rights of all, especially the most vulnerable’.

This passage from the encyclical is an invitation not to stop at the surface of the technologies we use, but to ask ourselves what lies behind them: who built them, under what

conditions, and at what human cost. It is an uncomfortable question, because it also touches on our daily habits. But it is precisely here that the crisis of human dignity, referred to in the Association's Annual Report, becomes a reality. It is not a generic issue. It is the lives of real people, often hidden from our view but no less part of our responsibility.

For us Salesian Cooperators, this page can also serve as an educational appeal. Helping young people use technology does not simply mean teaching them to be cautious online. It also means opening their eyes to supply chains, consumption patterns, inequalities, and new and hidden forms of poverty. It means encouraging them to ask themselves: does this progress make anyone freer, or does it make anyone more invisible? It is a simple question, but it can change the way we engage with the world.

8. Peace, dialogue, rejection of violence

The fifth chapter of **Magnifica Humanitas** is a direct condemnation of the 'culture of power': the growing tendency to consider war as a normal instrument of international politics, to invest in ever more sophisticated weapons systems, and to use AI to make violence faster and less visible. Leo XIV calls for 'disarming words', for building peace through justice, for reviving diplomacy and multilateralism, and for refusing to be persuaded that no alternatives exist.

The PVA roots the vocation to peace at the heart of Salesian identity. The Statutes (Art. 7) include 'the firm resolve to be peacemakers in a world troubled by violence' amongst the baptismal commitments lived out in the spirit of the Beatitudes. The Statutes (Art. 8 §5) call for a commitment 'to education for global citizenship as an openness to dialogue between cultures'. The Regulations (Art. 3 §4) commit the Association to "promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue".

Being peacemakers today also means — as the encyclical suggests — keeping a watchful eye on the use of technology in contexts of war and resisting the mindset that presents force as the only realistic response to conflicts. But it also means starting with what is closest to us: the words we use, the tensions we fuel or defuse, and the ability to remain in dialogue even when we disagree.

Here we see an important theme from the report re-emerge: communion in diversity as a path to holiness. In a world that often turns diversity into suspicion or conflict, the Association can be a small workshop for peace. Not because there is a lack of struggles, differences or misunderstandings within it. These exist, as in any family. But it is precisely for this reason that we can learn to turn them into an exercise in communion. Peace does not arise when everyone thinks the same way; it arises when diversity does not break the bond.

9. The source: prayer, the Eucharist, Mary

The conclusion of the encyclical brings everything back to the source. Leo XIV evokes the *Magnificat* as the song of those who can see God's action within history, even when it is not evident. He calls for a Eucharistic spirituality that does not separate the inner life from engagement with the world, but holds them together. And he reminds us that those who work to build a more just world do not do so by relying on their own strength, but by allowing themselves to be sustained by a hope that comes from above.

On this point too, the PVA did not need to wait for the encyclical: the Statutes (Art. 19 §2) state that the Cooperators find 'in the Eucharist the nourishment for their apostolic charity' and in Reconciliation 'the Father's mercy, which instils in their lives a dynamic and continuous conversion'. The Statutes (Art. 14 §3) describe daily entrustment to Mary as a characteristic feature of Salesian spirituality. The Regulations (Art. 12 §1) base everything on the life of prayer, 'daily dialogue with the Lord, participation in the sacraments and lectio divina'.

The point of contact between the two texts is simple yet important: action without prayer becomes activism; prayer without action risks becoming escapism. It is in the interplay between the two that a lasting Christian witness is born.

The report on the State of the Association also stated, in very concrete terms, that we must cultivate a profound spirituality in order to reach out to young people, listen to them and accompany them. This expression strikes me as particularly apt. Spirituality does not take us away from young people; if it is authentic, it sends us towards them. It does not shut us away in a quiet room to protect us from complexity; it gives us the breathing space we need to enter into it without losing our souls. And perhaps this is precisely what we need today: adults who are not easily flustered, do not lose heart, do not set themselves up as saviours, but stand by them, listen, accompany them and bring a little of Mary's hope into the story.

In conclusion

Magnifica Humanitas does not ask Salesian Cooperators to change course. It asks them to follow, with greater awareness and urgency, a path that the PVA had already mapped out. It offers new arguments, new priorities and new scenarios in which we are called to live out the commitments we undertook in making the Promise. And, at the same time, it suggests a method that can be valuable for the whole Salesian Family: allowing oneself to be challenged by the Church's documents, starting from the charism received, without reducing them to mere quotations and without turning them into theoretical exercises.

The report on the State of the Association had presented us with some powerful words:

challenges, shared responsibility, identity, formation, mission, young people, family, dignity, dream. The encyclical does not take up all of these in exactly the same way, nor does it need to. However, when we read it with the PVA in hand, we realise that many of those words were not merely words spoken at the Congress. They were, and remain, living issues.

Perhaps the simplest message we can take away is this: we must not wait for the future to simply happen to us. We can shape it as Salesian Cooperators, with a Christian critical sense, with lay competence, with a family spirit, and with a passion for education. And we can do so by feeling ourselves to be a living part of the Salesian Family, not as isolated entities but as brothers and sisters who share the same charismatic roots. We can choose not to build Babel, but to work together on the section of the wall entrusted to us.

I hope this text may become a useful tool in the meetings of local Centres, in ongoing formation sessions, and in the preparation of apostolic plans. And I hope that, as a method in its own right, it may also be adopted in other areas of the Salesian Family, whenever there is a desire to read a Church document not from the outside, but starting from one's own vocation and mission. Not as yet another text to be filed away, but as a starting point for a concrete conversation: what does it mean, in the context in which we live and work, to be Salesian Cooperators today? What does this very appeal say to the other groups of the Salesian Family? And what small section of the wall, right here and right now, is the Lord asking us to rebuild together with the young people?