

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – TUESDAY, 2ND JUNE, 2026

PROFESSOR TINA BEATTIE – writer and Catholic theologian

Good morning.

I recently had to write a painful letter to someone I love. I sent it to a friend for advice and she ran it through ChatGPT. It came back, polished for sensitivity and kindness. I couldn't fault it, so why did I feel sick when I read it? I think it's because the AI version lacked a soul – my soul. The letter was too perfect, because it had been dehumanised. The struggle and sorrow were gone, but so was the love.

Pope Leo launched his first encyclical last week, titled *Magnifica Humanitas* – magnificent humanity. It asks how we might strive together to preserve our human magnificence in the face of the threat posed by AI to the very meaning of what it is to be human. It calls us to connection and cooperation, rather than the disconnection and competition fuelled by AI. For me, it's an invitation to rediscover the quotidian beauty and vulnerability of embodied, dependent life.

The encyclical speaks of illusory forms of salvation offered by technology. These include transhumanist and posthumanist ideologies that seek to transcend the human condition by eliminating all that is weak, suffering and finite. Over and against these fantasies of perfection, Pope Leo invites us to experience our capacity for transcendence, not above and beyond but in and through our bodily lives, as an adventure that is, he says, both tragic and splendid. We must relieve suffering where we can, but sorrow, finitude and struggle are woven into the human condition. They can be sources of wisdom, bringing us closer to one another and to God.

The Pope is no luddite. *Magnifica Humanitas* is as much about the good that AI can do as about the dangers it poses, so long as it's used to serve and not to master our humanity. We must, says the Pope, disarm AI from the mentality of armed conflict fuelled by powerful algorithms.

The encyclical asks us to use AI in ways that resist its dehumanising effects. Through it all runs a persistent reminder that the power of love is greater than the love of power. And that our task – as J.R. Tolkien writes – is not “to master all the tides of the world, but to do what we can for the salvation of the years in which we live.”