

Artificial Intelligence, Leadership, Europe and the Mediterranean:

Building a Civilization of Peace

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Senyor i senyores, estimats amics, bon dia, i gràcies per convidar-me a aquest important esdeveniment.

It is a great pleasure and a privilege to be here in Barcelona. I thank the Catalan authorities, in particular your President. Josep Sànchez Llibre and your Director Maria Mora, and congratulate them, and you all, for the extraordinary work that you are doing to promote dialogue, social responsibility and cooperation on AI issues.

I particularly appreciate the focus you are putting on the impact of AI on leadership, the quality of leadership, the purpose of leadership, the meaning itself of leadership. AI in fact is not only changing in depth production processes and organizations, technologies and markets. But it also affects the whole approach and the role of **leadership** in the enterprise, in society and in policymaking. It is a “cultural revolution”, a **test of our capacity to govern a new age, the age of AI**.

I will bring to your attention the reflections on this issue of our Vatican foundation, based on Catholic Social Thought (what we call “the Social Doctrine of the Church” SDC), which draws on a millenary tradition that has evolved through time in response to the “*Rerum Novarum*” of the time, and has now found a new centrality in the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV and an effective formulation in the Encyclical “*Magnifica Humanitas*” released a few months ago.

The gist of my message is the following: In the new context of growing polarizations and radicalizations, business leaders have to face up to new opportunities and risks, well beyond the conventional risks of the balance sheet, competitiveness, innovation.- Also beyond the opportunities and risks of climate change, ESG, etc. They must deal with geopolitics, social and political instability, and the laborious and complex tasks of the construction of peace and security. This used to be considered exogenous factors, public goods to be left to governments and public agencies. It is not the case anymore. It is also and foremost a responsibility of the whole society, and all those who have a position of responsibility in the economy and society. The so called “élite” or ruling class. Business leaders must become agents of peace, bridge builders, visionary social reformers. I understand that this is a lot to ask. But it is necessary to stay afloat, to survive competition and being recognized in society. It is not something that we can leave to others to do. It belongs to all of us!

I add that those widespread and pervasive functions of leadership require first a deep change in our own hearts and souls, a “humanistic conversion”, an ethical regeneration and training, and a new spiritual initiation. Only when peace is reached and well rooted in our inner self, in our deep

motivations, in our life equations, can we aim at consolidating it through leadership in our enterprises, communities, societies and organizations.

My message wants to be a positive, reassuring and hopeful one. In fact, in the middle of unprecedented challenges, I believe we have reached a turning point with the new Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV. His leadership towards a “new humanism”, a “magnificent humanity” (the title of His Encyclical), promises to put these goals in our reach. Besides, Peace must be built from below, by ordinary people, by economic agents and business leaders, by young people, and requires therefore new leadership models, a regeneration of the elite, a new lymph in society. This perspective goes to the heart of the mission of the SDC and our Vatican Foundation. Our purpose is to invest in this new humanism, promote networks (and network of networks) of business leaders, academics, policymakers, opinion makers, to pursue unity solidarity and human dignity, and facilitate the transition out of the present moral crisis, out of the “the culture of power”, transhumanism and irresponsibility, towards what the Pope calls the “civilization of love”.

I will proceed by first highlighting those features in the present context that make the transition to the AI era particularly challenging, but also the opportunities created by the growing demand for this new humanism and the new business leadership models that go with it.

I will then illustrate my claim by making reference to the main lines of activity of the FCAPP and the experience we are gaining in pursuing our work on IA and its related issues. I will mention five lines of work. They all focus on Catholic Social Thinking and are placed at the service of the Pope by mobilizing our networks of committed individuals, communities and organizations. In so doing I hope to stimulate interest from you on establishing partnership and collaboration with us on the many areas of common interest, drawing on the universal values and principles we share. I want to mention in that context the important activities of the **Barcelona Chapter of our Foundation, led by Marcel Alsinella**, and our commitment to continue and strengthen collaboration with Foment, its members and stakeholders, whose engagement and expertise we acknowledge and praise.

1. We are living through a change of epoch, rather than an epoch of change (Pope Francis)

We at the Foundation devoted in the last few years considerable attention to AI. We created a global network of academic institutions, starting with Catholic Universities (the so called SACRU network), led by FCAPP former President Anna Maria Tarantola, to do joint research on the opportunities and risks of AI (see Tarantola ed. 2025). The network has already produced among other things a book that we presented last December to Pope Leo. We also established an Award for the best book on the SDC: under an international jury of scholars led by Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich, we granted the award to Father Paolo Benanti, a Franciscan who has become the world expert on the ethics of AI (see Benanti 2022). We established a Working Group on AI led by Paul Twomey from Australia and Augustin Destremaux from Marseille. We now have a formal framework of collaboration with the Vatican Dicastery on Integral Human Development, which coordinates the Interdicasterial mechanism created by the Pope to steer the Vatican activities on AI and promote the implementation of the Encyclical.

Pope Leo XIV begins Magnifica Humanitas with a very powerful image. Humanity, he says, is faced with a choice: we can construct a new Tower of Babel, or we can build a city in which humanity, created in the image of God, flourishes. This is more than a theological metaphor. It describes the fundamental political and economic choice before us. Technology gives humanity unprecedented power. Artificial intelligence multiplies that power. But power without direction can become domination; efficiency without purpose can become dehumanization; connectivity without fraternity can produce greater isolation.

An epoch of changes requires adaptation. A change of epoch requires discernment. It requires us to ask not simply: What can artificial intelligence do? And what can we do with artificial Intelligence? But: What does “intelligence” mean? In which ways “human intelligence” is different and superior to AI? What does it mean to be human? And towards what kind of economy and society are we going? This is precisely why the social doctrine of the Church is so relevant. We want to engage with business leaders to discuss those issues and promote best practice in the SDC.

2. The preferential option for the poor. AI should not create new vulnerabilities and fractures.

This is the second priority line of work we are pursuing at the FCAPP. At the presentation of the Encyclical, Pope Leo put it beautifully: no person can be left at the margins of digital transformation, and no person can be reduced merely to a tool for productivity, cognitive performance or data accumulation. This is the first principle of the SDC: the centrality of human dignity, and the equal dignity of all human beings. We should make AI work for unity, equality, fraternity and solidarity of all human beings, starting from the most vulnerable, starting from the poor.

That is why we at the FCAPP are orienting our activities more and more towards vulnerable groups in society, marginalized communities, developing countries, the Global South. After the FCAPP European Conference of 2016, the FCAPP plans to organize in 2027 an **Asian Conference** and an **American Conference**, then it will be the turn of Africa. We are promoting twinning arrangements between our Chapters in Europe and North America and vulnerable communities in the developing world. On this we closely connect and cooperate with international organizations that promote development and poverty eradication, *in primis* the United Nations system. We have strengthened our links and partnership with the World Bank, UNCTAD and UNESCO. Following the visit of the Pope at UNESCO in September 2026, we plan to intensify our cooperation with the Vatican Dicastery of Communication and UNESCO on the protection of human faces and voices threatened by audio-visual deepfakes and robocalls that risk manipulating the public opinion, penalizing marginalized groups and eroding public identity.

3. Reforming global governance, multilateralism and international law.

If artificial intelligence concentrates extraordinary forms of technological and economic power, then the question of governance becomes unavoidable. We cannot govern the AI age exclusively through markets. We cannot govern it exclusively through technology. And we cannot govern it through isolated local or national responses to problems that are global by nature.

This brings me to the third line of action on which we are reflecting and acting at the Fondazione: the reform of multilateralism, international law and global governance. The international system that emerged after the Second World War was built around the conviction that power must be subjected to agreed rules supervised by supranational organizations. The United Nations, international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the institutions of international cooperation were established with those goals in mind. They represented an extraordinary civilizational achievement. But their operation now, and their existence itself, are under threat. The SDC played a decisive role in the design and implementation of the international post-war order. It suffices to quote John XXIII and His Encyclical "*Pacem in Terris*", the constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, like *Gaudium et Spes*, and Saint Paul VI' "*Populorum Progressio*".

The FCAPP devoted both its 2025 and the 2026 International Conferences to the issues of global governance reform, the revitalization of multilateralism and international law. In 2025 we dealt with the "Ethical foundations for overcoming polarizations and rebuilding global governance". In 2026 we focused on "A fragmented world in search of spirituality: freedom and pluralism from within the SDC" and discussed "How to mobilize conscience and action to build new frameworks for multilateralism and international law".

We need international institutions that are more representative, more effective and more accountable. We need international law and the rule of law to prevail over the law of force. We need mechanisms capable of addressing problems that individual states or communities cannot solve alone. And we need to give developing countries a stronger voice in global decision-making.

Pope Francis in His *Laudate Deum* pleaded for a reform of the global financial architecture, capable to supporting those vulnerable countries that are struggling with huge and growing public debts. We devoted a Conference and a publication to this topic (see FCAPP 2025).

At the intergovernmental level there is a fierce discussion now on whether AI and digital markets should be left unregulated or whether there should be an international authority at the global level for regulation and supervision. Scientists and a few providers themselves have raised the alarm belt on the risks we are facing if we do not devote sufficient attention to control innovation and experimentation at the frontier of knowledge, avoiding misalignments and automatic responses. Several countries have introduced strict legislation to protect minors and vulnerable groups or imposed taxation on extra-profits (e.g. the AI Act of the EU). The debate appears now utterly polarized: between those that fear the limitless quest for profit and exploitation of free unfettered markets, and those that point to the intrusiveness and oppression of illiberal and despotic governments against individual freedoms and the protection of privacy. In line with the tradition, the SDC proposes a middle way, whereby public bodies and international organizations should intervene with rules and supervision to prevent abuses and protect vulnerable groups, provided human rights and freedoms are safeguarded and the principle of subsidiarity is applied. This is the approach that from the beginning was adopted by the SDC to counteract both the *laissez-faire* of the ultra-liberals and the rigid command economy preached by the Marxists. This is the "social market economy" that has been recently relaunched as the "Economy of Francesco" or the "civil economy", a third way between the conventional market economy and the political economy.

4. European Integration and peacebuilding

Paul VI gave us perhaps one of the most important principles of Catholic Social Teaching when he wrote in *Populorum Progressio*: “Development is the new name for peace.” John Paul II repeated and developed this insight: genuine peace cannot exist where people and nations are excluded from the fair distribution of resources and opportunities. AI can be a powerful tool for economic and financial development, trade and investment, jobs and skills. But it can also be weaponized, destroy skills and jobs, lead to hegemonic competition, new forms of poverty and social exclusion, or war.

It is here that Europe comes into play. There is a paradox about Europe. Europe has achieved something extraordinary: the transformation of a continent historically devastated by war into a space of peace, cooperation, free movement and shared prosperity. This was called and is the “European Dream”. It was accomplished by integrating economies and markets, industries and finance, money and trade. And it has worked.

But now Europe is confronted with a new geopolitical environment. Europe is under attack. From the outside and from the inside. European values are under attack, because European values are universal values and universal values are under attack. This gave rise to new demands for security, stability and effective decision making. And war has returned to the European continent. Moreover, technology is transforming and enhancing economic and political power. The international order is under pressure, at risk of collapse. Strategic competition is intensifying, beyond historical standards and safeguards. And European citizens are asking whether Europe in this new context is capable of protecting them, representing them, giving them necessary public goods – like security and welfare- and a meaningful voice in the world.

The FCAPP inaugurated the European Conference as the first continental Conference of its work program and dedicated this Conference to Peacebuilding. In a Pontificate that focuses on peace (peace was the first word of the newly elected Pope) and on the SDC (Leo XIV), Europe has become the cornerstone of success or failure for the SDC. The peace we aim at is not merely the peace of this world, but the peace of St. Augustine, the peace of Christ, the peace of justice and love, a peace that can be attained not merely through negotiations diplomacy and compromise, but through the SDC, i.e. aiming at the root causes of conflict, social inclusion, justice, human dignity and rights.

Europe has shown that the way to peace through development, welfare, human rights and democracy can work. But Europe has also shown its Achilles’ heel: that economic and financial integration alone cannot work unless they are accompanied and supported by political and democratic integration. Because in a political democracy, minorities are protected, and majorities decide. All gaps in “European strategic autonomy” (be they in energy, defense, education, industrial social and fiscal policies) have their roots in the lack of a working political union and democratic union. The FCAPP devoted its first European Conference, in Luxembourg in January to peacebuilding and discussed **political integration “as a way to peace”**. In the fall 2026, we will have our second European Conference in Brussels once again on peacebuilding, on recovery and reconciliation, once again addressing the role of SDC, i.e. the principles of justice, fraternity, equality and human dignity, which affect the root causes of conflicts.

Europe is still unfinished business. If it wants to be an actor for peace, it must become more capable of taking collective decisions in an effective and democratic way. It must become more visible and credible in global relationships. It must strengthen its capacity for common foreign and security policies. Peace is inseparable from economic and social policies. And economic and social policies can only be effective if they are consistent with and scaled up at the European level.

5. The Social Doctrine of the Mediterranean

Finally, I wish to focus on the Mediterranean. Because if Europe is to rediscover its role in the world, it must start by looking again towards the Mediterranean.

I had the privilege of participating at the **Med26** meeting in Barcelona in June 2026, organized by Card. Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona, and Card. Aveline, President of the Episcopal Conference of France, on the occasion of the Pope's visit to Barcelona. Med26, as you certainly remember, is the meeting of bishops, youth and local actors of the Mediterranean that follows from the 2023 Manifesto on the so called "Theology of the Mediterranean", the new approach to theological studies that represent probably the richest and most promising legacy of Pope Francis. After more than 10 years' work by theologians of the main theological Schools of the Mediterranean, with the engagement of Jewish and Islamic institutes, young people and several other key players, after fruitful exchanges of "Abrahamic dialogue" among the universal religions of the Mediterranean, the ball is now in the camp of social scientists, experts of Catholic Social Thought, business leaders, academics and policymakers (see FCAPP 2026). The FCAPP is actively participating in this experience and in cooperation with the Catholic Institute of the Mediterranean in Marseilles, the Gregorian Pontifical University, the Antonianum (the University of the Franciscans in Rome), and other players, is launching a forum on the "Social Doctrine of the Mediterranean". This forum engages in an interreligious dialogue aiming at cross-fertilization and consensus building, upholding the principles of the SDC and their application to the *Rerum Novarum* taking place in the great sea. We want to give value to what the universal religions of the Mediterranean have in common in terms of ethical orientations, and promote a dialogue on the most pressing needs and demands of the economies societies and cultures of the Mediterranean. The focus on AI and its pervasive impact on the whole Mediterranean *problématique* brings about fruitful results in the Mediterranean, as AI represents a promising terrain for making progress on peacebuilding and promoting opportunities for development social progress and intercultural exchanges. Those in fact build on a millenary tradition of good practices and promise therefore to overcome the present context of incomprehension conflict and fragmentation. An integrated Mediterranean approach to Catholic Social Thinking, based on human dignity, subsidiarity, development, jobs and education, can, and should, become the foundation of a joint ethical effort, a mutual engagement in dialogue research training and policymaking across the different shores of the Mediterranean. This ethical effort will benefit of the guidance provided by the new Synod of Bishops of the Mediterranean.

The way ahead is long, ambitious and complex. But it is the right way forward, and it has been blessed by the Pope here in Barcelona in the spring of 2026. I sincerely hope that this new interreligious and intercultural Mediterranean dialogue on the SDC and AI becomes another

prominent chapter in the collaboration between Foment and our Foundation, and I look forward to exploring all possibilities of mutually beneficial cooperation with you on this project.

6. The contribution of Barcelona and Catalonia to leadership in Europe and the Mediterranean

Barcelona and Catalonia have developed a great tradition of contributions to both the SDC, Europe and the Mediterranean. The continuation and the legacy of this tradition bring something very special to this Mediterranean project. Names like **Raimon Panikkar** or Bishops **Josep Torra I Bages, Pont I Gol, Torrella and Joan Carrera**, come to my mind as outstanding examples of people of high spirituality and deep influence on Catholic Social Thought. Another exemplary symbol of the Catalan identity is **Pau Casals**: when the old musician, who had suffered exile and marginalization, received in 1971 the first United Nations Peace Medal, he told the General Assembly with pride: “I am a Catalan.” And he immediately connected that identity with a universal message of peace and fraternity and played his cello and his music to make the point. He showed that a strong identity does not necessarily become a reason to withdraw from the world or make a partisan political point, but on the contrary, it can be a reason to speak to the world and for the unity of the world. “We are leaves of the same tree, and the tree is humanity”. That is precisely the kind of identity that Europe and the Mediterranean need today.

In that context AI can become a driver for European integration and Mediterranean dialogue. Artificial intelligence can be a source of deeper and more solidaristic relations, a lever for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. It can help young people in the North and South, West and East, understand one another and relate to one another. It can help translate not only words but knowledge, emotions, empathy across barriers and borders. It can connect universities, businesses, churches, mosques, synagogues, civil society organizations and young people. The Mediterranean can become a laboratory of peacebuilding and Europe a decisive actor of global cohesion and stability.

I want to highlight also in this context the concept of **seny** that emblematically represent the culture of Barcelona and Catalogna. Seny is what we need today in Europe and the Mediterranean. The art and virtues of seny can become effective tools for relaunching the “the third ways” so well known by the SDC: a sense of authentic wisdom and sensibleness, the refusal of all forms of radicalization and polarization, an approach that is rooted in the Catalan tradition and reverberates across the whole ethical and religious foundations of European and Mediterranean integration.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I hope I have conveyed to you the main thrust and inspiration of our activities at FCAPP on AI and SDC. I also hope I have given you a sense of the enthusiasm and the determination we have to contribute to the new humanism that we can and should realize in the age of AI bringing about the “civilization of love” of which spoke Pope Leo in his latest Encyclical:

“let us become “weavers of hope” in our world ... so that ... the era of AI can become a time in which the Holy Spirit brings about the civilization of love in our lives and ... offers us the possibility of becoming part of salvation history” (Magnifica Humanitas, para. 245).

Thank you and God bless you all!

Paolo Garonna

Rome, September 2026

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