



Catholic Women's Ordination

Challenging Institutional Misogyny in the Roman Catholic Church

WOW responds to Magnifica Humanitas: 'When will women receive an apology?'

May 27, 2026

Pope Leo's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* describes the Church's delayed moral development on the issue of slavery as "a wound in Christian memory, one from which we cannot consider ourselves detached." And "for this, in the name of the Church, I sincerely ask for pardon."

We have waited centuries for a Pope to formally apologise for the Vatican's support of slavery. Instead of teaching and practising equality as a spiritual and moral leader, the Church distorted the Gospel to condone slavery and to take advantage of slave labour for their own material gain.

Women's Ordination Worldwide sees parallels in this pattern of behaviour in the Vatican's teaching about and treatment of women that is based on ancient prejudice and medieval misogyny. We welcome the shift from identifying the evil of slavery as one perpetuated by individuals to a sin committed by the entire Church. And we know that at some point in history, the degrading and distorted teachings about women that are still engaged to justify their exclusion from full membership of the Church will also be seen as an historic sin on a collective scale.

WOW has paid special attention to the few thin lines of paragraph 57 that speak about women. It includes them as a concern about minorities, and refuses to say that women are equal to men:

Along with a greater awareness of the value of every human person, recognition of minority rights has also grown...It is not enough to state simply that men and women have equal dignity and rights; it is necessary that this be reflected in concrete decisions and the way society listens to and values women's contributions. As long as this gap persists, we cannot say that society truly and fully recognizes that women have the same dignity as men.'

Women are not a minority. We are half of humanity. And glaringly, while the document names conditions of women in the world, there is no reflection on the Church's ongoing discrimination against them.



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Pope Leo is failing to confront with any sense of seriousness the exclusion of women from the Church's structures of sacramental ministry, authority, and all decision making. Catholics spoke clearly in the Synod on Synodality demanding a decisive end to the Church's longstanding practice of allowing women to do the behind-the-scenes work of keeping parishes alive whilst refusing to acknowledge their vocations and authorise their ministry sacramentally.

A papal teaching on human dignity that sidelines women is not a comprehensive, 'Catholic' vision. It is a contradiction. A Church that praises women's gifts while withholding real authority and inclusion cannot credibly speak of wholeness. An encyclical aiming to teach the world about dignity and human rights is incompatible with arbitrary exclusion on the basis of physical sex.

Magnifica Humanitas takes a strong moral stand against the risks of discrimination embedded within artificial intelligence, noting that it: 'embodies choices and priorities through what it measures, ignores and optimizes, and how it classifies people and situations. If a system is designed or used in a way that treats some lives as less worthy, or excludes them without the possibility of appeal, then it is not merely a tool "to be used well," since it has already introduced criteria that contradict the inalienable dignity of the human person. For this reason, ethical discernment cannot be limited to asking whether we are using a system for good or bad purposes; it must also examine how that system is designed and what vision of the human person and society is embedded in the data and models that guide it.'

WOW is struck by the glaring hypocrisy of the Vatican lecturing others about creating systems that deem others inferior and are designed to exclude them. We respond: 'why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?' (Matthew 7:3)

The encyclical also claims that: *"We wish to engage in dialogue with all men and women of our time, with whom we share in the events, questions and aspirations of humanity."* And yet, the Vatican refuses to dialogue with women's ordination advocates and instead instructs police to pursue, detain and exclude them.

And so we ask Church leadership: are **all** women really considered equally magnificent in your vision of humanity? If so, it is time to dialogue with us, admit our full equality as humans and as ministers and apologise for centuries of inhuman treatment.



Until Pope Leo names this failure plainly and acts decisively to correct it, *Magnifica Humanitas* will stand as yet another papal text that invokes human dignity while continuing to uphold male supremacy.