

THE WISDOM OF THE HEART IN THE ALGORITHMIC AGE: CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND THE COMMON GOOD IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Christian leadership in Nigeria now operates in an environment where algorithmic systems shape judgement. Nigerian churches have already embraced digital platforms for evangelisation, pastoral care, and religious education. Two challenges follow. AI mimics reasoning and empathy while possessing only functional abilities, lacking intentionality, conscience, or reference to meaning and values, so leaders risk surrendering the judgement constitutive of their office. Structurally, tools developed in the Global North and distributed through opaque platforms reinforce algorithmic coloniality and inequality. This paper develops a theological and ethical framework for Christian leadership in Nigeria in the algorithmic age. It proceeds by a dual-source method, reading Catholic Social Teaching—the Rome Call for AI Ethics, *Antiqua et Nova, Dignitas Infinita*, and Pope Leo XIV's *Magnifica Humanitas*—alongside the African communal ethics of *ubuntu* and *igwebuike*, and applying both to the Nigerian ecclesial context. Three findings emerge. The wisdom of the heart (*sapientia cordis*)—the integration of intellect, conscience, affect, and relationship—is the competence the age requires and no system can simulate. Nigeria's leadership crisis is a crisis of ethical embodiment, aggravated by a power differential between pastors and congregations that digital tools can either moderate or magnify. And *ubuntu* and *igwebuike* converge with *Magnifica Humanitas* on the common good, the universal destination of goods, and subsidiarity. The paper recommends relational presence, discernment against algorithmic opacity, prioritising the digitally vulnerable, servant leadership, and accountable delegation mediated by subsidiarity, along with formation in digital competence for clergy and lay leaders.

Keywords: wisdom of the heart; Christian leadership; common good; artificial intelligence; *ubuntu*; *igwebuike*; Catholic Social Teaching; Nigeria

Introduction

Christian leadership in Nigeria now operates in an environment where algorithmic systems increasingly make or shape decisions formerly reserved for human judgement in areas like hiring, credit, diagnosis, and religious communication. Nigerian churches have embraced digital platforms for evangelisation, pastoral care, and religious education, expanding spiritual practice beyond traditional boundaries (HOPE, 2026). The question is not whether church leaders will use digital platforms and AI systems, but whether they will govern and regulate them. Three considerations highlight the urgency of the situation. Artificial intelligence now plays a central role in institutional life. Since 2020, the Church has addressed this increasingly, culminating in

Magnifica Humanitas of 15 May 2026 (Leo XIV, 2026). In Nigeria, a deeply religious society with influential religious leaders, religion has become a thriving, even commercialised, enterprise (Muonwe, 2024).

The paper argues that, alongside *ubuntu* and *igwebuike*, the Catholic tradition provides a framework for Christian leadership in the algorithmic age, emphasising human dignity, the common good, and vulnerability, with technology as a tool. It highlights *sapientia cordis*, or wisdom of the heart, endorsed by Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV, as an integrated trait of intellect, conscience, affection, and relational presence that cannot be replicated or outsourced.

Two Major Challenges: Anthropological and Structural

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has seen technological development as a sign of the times—an instrument for evangelisation and the common good, but also a domain that needs moral guidance (*Inter Mirifica*, 1963; *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965). Two challenges now confront those forming conscience.

The first is anthropological. AI increasingly mimics reasoning, empathy, and aesthetic judgment, blurring the line between algorithmic output and genuine meaning, intention, and conscience. The Church states that algorithmic processing is not understanding: AI has only functional abilities and lacks intentionality and reference to meaning and values (Kowalczyk, 2025). Mimicry is not relational presence, and its output shares nothing in the spiritual soul that connects a person to God and others.

The second is structural. Poorer nations are exploited through AI tools produced mainly in the Global North, trained on its data, and distributed through opaque platforms (Giantini, 2023). Digital and algorithmic colonialism allows powerful countries and firms to extend influence over less developed societies (Singh, 2025; Mohamed et al., 2020). Without local adaptation, northern data systems exclude and discriminate under weak regulation (Ghozali, 2025). In Nigeria, AI credit scoring uses GSM data, social media, and spending patterns, causing harms such as the Kano textile lawsuit and Lagos' "Buy Now Pay Later" scandal, amid weak enforcement and transparency (Obi, 2025). Across Africa, risks include digital colonialism, bias, job loss, poor infrastructure, and the spread of foreign values (Sule, 2026).

This paper argues that Nigerian Christian leaders can address these challenges through two sources. The first is the Catholic tradition, which reasons from the person outward, establishing the anthropological ground before evaluating technology. The second is African ethics of *ubuntu* and *igwebuike*, with their communal metaphysics rooted in solidarity, complementarity, and mutual cooperation, directly addressing the problem's structural aspect (Egara et al., 2025). These are not alternatives; they converge on the common good, unified by the wisdom of the heart (*sapientia cordis*).

Anthropological Foundations: Why the Human Person Cannot Be Replaced

Grounded in the theological reality of the *imago Dei* and an inviolable ontological dignity, the human person possesses an intrinsic, irreplaceable worth that artificial intelligence cannot replicate or supersede. Human nature is uniquely rooted in God's Trinitarian nature—a loving communion

of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Created for relational communion with God, others, and creation, human agency is characterised by a spiritual soul, intellect, free will, and capacity for self-giving love (Scherz & Green, 2025).

Philosophically, bioethical analysis distinguishes fluctuating forms of value—such as merit, moral stature, and identity—from universal (ontological) dignity, which is inherent to every person simply because they exist and can never be stripped or lost (Nordenfelt & Edgar, 2005). Catholic magisterial teaching aligns directly with this ontological grounding, demanding that human beings be treated always as ends in themselves rather than utilitarian tools or economic resources (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith [DDF], 2024; Golung & Waworundeng, 2026; Leo XIV, 2026).

The primary danger of contemporary artificial intelligence lies not in machines becoming human, but in human subjects being demoted to machine logic—quantified, optimised, and subjected to what Pope Francis (2015, 2023) critiques as the "technocratic paradigm." Lacking a physical body, affective interiority, and relational growth, artificial systems merely simulate empathy and imitate language without genuine understanding (Leo XIV, 2026).

On this basis, Christian personalism forcefully rejects both transhumanism (the attempt to technicalize and bypass natural human limits) and posthumanism (the dismantling or merging of the human subject into synthetic networks). If persons are reduced to automated data streams or units to be continuously augmented and optimised, "it becomes easier to accept that some lives are less useful, less desirable or less worthy" (Leo XIV, 2026). Because AI architectures lack an embodied soul, moral agency, and genuine spiritual perspective, the human person remains fundamentally irreplaceable.

The Magisterium on Artificial Intelligence: From the Rome Call to *Magnifica Humanitas*

The Catholic Church's magisterial engagement with artificial intelligence reflects a dynamic development of Catholic social teaching, evaluating technological progress by its impact on human dignity and the common good (Wright, 2017). This formal response began in February 2020 with the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, a multi-stakeholder pledge signed by the Pontifical Academy for Life, along with technology corporations, international agencies, and government bodies. The document introduced *algorithethics*—the ethics of algorithms—shifting focus from functional capability to moral evaluation: what algorithms *should* do, who holds authority over their deployment, who bears liability for errors, and whose dignity is impacted (Tsojniashvili, 2026). In the 2024 declaration, *Dignitas Infinita*, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith consolidated this ethical framework around a central thesis: every human person possesses an inalienable, ontological dignity prior to any capability, social utility, or technological recognition (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith [DDF], 2024; Golung & Waworundeng, 2026). While automated tools assign value based on data availability, human dignity remains unconditional; because algorithmic systems cannot perceive vulnerability or offer genuine pastoral care, classifying persons as mere datasets fundamentally offends the *imago Dei* (Stoddart, 2023).

Building upon these foundations, two Vatican dicasteries issued the joint note *Antiqua et Nova* (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education [DDF & DCE], 2025), which represents the most systematic Catholic evaluation of artificial versus human

intelligence to date (Alojzije, 2025; Nicolás, 2025). Across 117 paragraphs, it establishes that both the ends and means of AI applications—and the global vision they embody—must respect human dignity and promote the common good (Matić, 2026; Nicolás, 2025). Anthropologically, the document contrasts the integrated unity of human intelligence (body, soul, intellect, freedom, and conscience) with AI's purely functional processing, which lacks intentionality, meaning, and values (Kowalczyk, 2025). Socially, *Antiqua et Nova* warns of technocracy and deepening inequality across labour, healthcare, education, governance, and defence (Kowalczyk, 2025). Crucially, it rejects shifting moral responsibility onto machines: algorithms lack the freedom and conscience required for moral agency, yet they often serve as vehicles for systemic injustice when trained on biased data (Čerbová, 2025). Because this injustice stems from human decisions about design and deployment, moral answerability remains strictly human—a duty algorithmic complexity must not obscure through "responsibility gaps" (Martin, 2018; Siebert et al., 2022).

This magisterial trajectory peaks in Pope Leo XIV's (2026) encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, which extends the tradition of Pope Leo XIII's landmark 1891 text, *Rerum Novarum*, into the digital era on its 135th anniversary. *Magnifica Humanitas* makes four vital contributions to social doctrine:

- a. **Structural Revision of Church Teaching:** It asserts that AI disrupts established Catholic Social Teaching from within, requiring theologians to update and expand its core concepts while remaining faithful to the Gospel (Leo XIV, 2026).
- b. **Biblical Typology:** It contrasts the pride of *Babel* (Genesis 11:1–9)—symbolising technology divorced from God, driven by profit, and enforcing uniformity—with *Nehemiah's* reconstruction of Jerusalem, which models community reborn through shared responsibility (Leo XIV, 2026).
- c. **Universal Destination of Data:** It extends the principle of the universal destination of goods to patents, algorithms, computing infrastructure, and data. Concentrating digital power in a few corporate entities creates a structural injustice, turning algorithmic opacity into a direct violation of social equity (Leo XIV, 2026).
- d. **Supply Chain Justice and Solidarity:** Rejecting the myth that AI is "immaterial or magical," the encyclical exposes the hidden human and environmental chains enabling digital tech—including rare earth extraction by children in hazardous conditions and the underpaid, demanding labour of data labelling and content moderation performed largely by young women in the Global South (Leo XIV, 2026).

Ultimately, *Magnifica Humanitas* demands that justice be a baseline design condition rather than a deferred postscript, extending the common good to computation, the universal destination of goods to data, subsidiarity to algorithmic governance, and solidarity to hidden tech workers (Leo XIV, 2026). Efficiency and innovation cannot justify hidden human exploitation. For religious and civil leadership, the ethical implications are immediate: using AI tools trained via exploited labour implicates the user in the very injustices the Church condemns, reinforcing that the means of ministry and governance must align with the dignity of human labour.

The Wisdom of the Heart as a Leadership Ethic

If the anthropological boundary separating human personhood from algorithmic computation holds, the core competence required of contemporary leadership is what the Catholic tradition calls

the wisdom of the heart (*sapientia cordis*). While algorithmic systems disaggregate persons into data features, scores, and predictive probabilities, wisdom holds intellect, conscience, affect, and relationship together in a single act of moral judgment. Pastoral care and ethical governance depend on empathic presence and authentic social discernment rather than probabilistic calculation; an automated system can retrieve vast amounts of data about an individual, but it can never truly *know* the person (Stoddart, 2023). In ecclesial contexts, the danger arises when leadership replaces genuine discernment with algorithmic convenience. For instance, using automated summarisation tools in synodal or consultative processes risks mistaking statistical convergence across opaque parameters for genuine spiritual consensus (Freitas & Marcondes, 2026). The wisdom of the heart is therefore not a devotional gesture, but the essential discipline that prevents decision-making from being quietly delegated to non-conscious instruments incapable of judgment.

This internal wisdom finds its social expression in the principle of the common good, which Pope Leo XIV (2026) characterises in *Magnifica Humanitas* as the "social expression of the dignity recognised in every person" (para. 59)—an indivisible, shared enterprise built through unified communal effort rather than the aggregation of individual utilities. Grounded in this framework, Christian leadership is a baptismal vocation ordered to service rather than to personal prestige or visibility. Every institutional or technological initiative must be evaluated by whether it builds up the community or merely serves self-promotion. This criterion carries sharp practical weight in contexts such as Nigeria, where religious leadership has at times drifted toward commercialisation and corporate enterprise (Muonwe, 2024).

Closely tied to the common good is the principle of subsidiarity, which holds that higher-level organisations must not usurp functions that lower or subordinate entities can perform (Wright, 2017). In *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV (2026) grounds subsidiarity directly in anthropology: because every individual is called to take ownership of their life and contribute to society, higher institutions must protect and foster local freedom and creativity. Centralised algorithmic platforms inherently challenge subsidiarity by consolidating decision-making authority at the system level to improve operational efficiency. Because artificial intelligence naturally amplifies the power of those who already control data, expertise, and capital, its deployment in public and pastoral spheres must be governed by active participation and oversight to ensure that communities are not reduced to passive recipients of automated decisions (Leo XIV, 2026).

Finally, Catholic social doctrine intersects with contemporary organisational theory through the paradigm of servant leadership, in which authority derives from dedicated, sacrificial service rather than top-down coercion (Tucker et al., 1969). Scripturally modelled in Christ's washing of the disciples' feet (John 13:1–17), servant leadership demands moral courage, transparent accountability, and an authentic, embodied presence. In the digital age, this requires resisting the illusion of screen-mediated presence, which can make a leader appear available while leaving the community functionally unaccompanied. Servant leadership ensures that technology remains a tool under human conscience, guided by the wisdom of the heart and dedicated to the genuine flourishing of the human person.

Christian Leadership in Nigeria: Power, Formation, and the Digital Turn

Nigeria's contemporary crisis is not a deficit of religion, but a crisis of ethical embodiment. Despite intense public religiosity, the nation continues to grapple with systemic corruption, violence, and leadership failure; what is urgently required is a lived religious ethic grounded in justice, integrity, love, and accountability capable of transforming public life (Chinedum, 2026). In *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV (2026) diagnoses this societal failure anthropologically, rejecting any ideology that reduces persons to resources to be used and exploited as particularly insidious. Leaders—religious and political alike—who treat persons as instruments of their own advancement abandon the very ethics they profess. Any theological evaluation of Christian leadership in Nigeria must reckon directly with power dynamics, examining whether leadership empowers followers or functions as a manipulative instrument of control (Muonwe, 2024). Where institutions allow deep relational imbalances to take root, power abuse becomes normalised. Many pastors fail to recognise paternalistic abuse due to vast power differentials, while congregations often accept these dynamics as biblical or theological (Muonwe, 2024). Reorienting pastoral authority requires exercising power as a share in Christ's authority through pastoral charity, eschewing all forms of domination. This dynamic is directly relevant to artificial intelligence: because algorithms act as force multipliers, deploying them within paternalistic structures further concentrates authority at the top, whereas deploying them within collaborative communities allows the many to hold power accountable.

To address these imbalances and technical challenges, formation and digital competence are paramount. Churches must ensure that ministers receive comprehensive training that frames leadership as Christ-like service rather than a contest for social power (Muonwe, 2024). Studies across African and international contexts show that leaders with limited technical understanding risk misusing digital tools to their congregations' detriment (Tagwirei, 2025). Theological institutions must therefore update curricula to equip leaders with digital literacy, framing technological competence not as a technical luxury but as a prerequisite for pastoral freedom and agency (Heryanto & Pramono, 2025; Nord & Schleier, 2025; Tagwirei et al., 2026).

Nigerian churches have already embraced the digital turn. Case studies of major denominations—including the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Daystar Christian Centre, The Covenant Nation, Christ Embassy, and Streams of Joy International—show that livestreaming, social media, mobile applications, and AI-driven platforms have expanded access to worship and transnational engagement (Ojo & Afolaranmi, 2025). However, this shift has generated acute theological tensions over reconfigured embodied worship, sacramental presence, data privacy, and performative spirituality (Ojo & Afolaranmi, 2025). Pastors face significant operational and digital obstacles, including infrastructure deficiencies, e-illiteracy, misinformation, cyberbullying, and privacy concerns (Afolaranmi, 2022, 2025).

Furthermore, empirical research across South-Western and North-Central Nigeria underscores complex ethical contradictions: AI-assisted evangelisation often risks diminishing personal engagement (Osunlana, 2025), and digital media reshapes youth spirituality while risking information overload (Oyebanji et al., 2025). Additionally, surveys of higher education staff in

Plateau State show that, although AI adoption remains moderate due to training and infrastructure constraints, emotional intelligence significantly moderates leadership performance—underscoring that human affective capacity remains irreplaceable by algorithms (Bashir et al., 2025). The Nigerian church, therefore, does not face a choice between digital ministry and no digital ministry; it faces a choice regarding the ethical and theological terms on which digital ministry is conducted.

African Communal Ethics and the Governance of AI

To govern artificial intelligence ethically, Christian leadership in the Global South cannot rely solely on Western regulatory paradigms or purely technological solutions. Instead, it must ground its governance models in moral frameworks that recognise the relational-ontological nature of human personhood. In the African context, this requires an intentional dialogue between Christian social teaching and indigenous relational ethics. Rather than viewing technology as a neutral efficiency tool, African communal ethics insists that algorithmic systems, data practices, and automated governance must be evaluated by how they affect human dignity, community solidarity, and shared flourishing. Two philosophical expressions of this communal ethos—the Southern African concept of *ubuntu* and the Igbo concept of *igwebuike*—provide a vital moral foundation for interrogating digital power and guiding AI governance.

Ubuntu and Igwebuike

African philosophical ethics, especially *ubuntu*, is increasingly linked to AI ethics debates from the Global South, notably in UNESCO discussions (Norren, 2022). *Ubuntu*, a Zulu term without a direct English equivalent, embodies a worldview linked to being truly human, expressed through the aphorism, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*—"I am because we are." It emphasises humanity, Africanness, and becoming an ethical person through care, respect, empathy, and kindness (Friedman, 2022; Oyaro, 2021). Rooted in communitarian values, it prioritises communal over individual concerns, in contrast to Western individualism (Taimu, 2026).

The Igbo philosophical concept of *igwebuike*—"there is strength in unity," "multitude is power," "number is strength"—operates at the level of lived identity. Rooted in the Igbo language and soil, it conveys harmony and community, with its nearest English equivalents being complementarity, harmony, and communality (Kanu, 2017). It is best understood as the African metaphysics of communal strength, an expressive modality of being and belonging within African ontology (Onebunne, 2019). Its principles of communalism, inclusivity, and consensus-building can strengthen inter-ethnic understanding, enhance participatory governance, and foster tolerance and peaceful coexistence (Egara et al., 2025). Although these studies do not address AI directly, the principles they articulate are directly relevant to ethical leadership in an AI-driven era.

Because both philosophies share a common core—that personhood is defined through community—the *ubuntu*-based critique of AI extends seamlessly to *igwebuike*, yielding a unified Afro-communitarian framework. The fullest statement of this position (from an *ubuntu* perspective) is detailed by Friedman (2022), who outlines five core commitments:

- a. **Equitable Distribution:** Rejecting wealth-concentrating AI economies in favour of communal sharing.

- b. **Group Privacy:** Expanding data protection beyond individual privacy to safeguard collective communities—a principle directly applicable to Nigerian groups facing algorithmic profiling (as documented by Obi, 2025).
- c. **Consensus Governance:** Replacing opaque platform algorithms with deliberative, community-led decision-making.
- d. **Rejection of Transhumanism:** Dismissing individualist technological enhancement as an anthropological error.
- e. **Contextual Relevance:** Demanding that AI deployments address concrete African needs and reflect indigenous ethical values.

The convergence of *ubuntu* and *igwebuike* with *Magnifica Humanitas* is not a forced analogy. *Ubuntu* prioritises solidarity; the encyclical likewise demands it. *Igwebuike* insists that being is intrinsically communal and that communal bonds are a kind of power; the encyclical grounds personhood in the Trinitarian image and places the common good above every technical optimisation. All resist transhumanism. Nigerian Christian leaders are therefore not importing a foreign framework when they integrate *ubuntu* and *igwebuike* into ecclesial governance; they are deepening, from the South African and within Igbo language and soil, a framework the universal Church has been calling for.

Leadership Practices for the Algorithmic Age

Navigating the intersection of artificial intelligence and pastoral ministry requires translating foundational theological principles into concrete, daily governance habits. As automated systems, predictive analytics, and generative models become increasingly embedded in ecclesial and administrative life, Christian leaders face the subtle danger of adopting technical efficiency at the expense of human warmth, moral agency, and relational presence. To preserve the sacred nature of pastoral care and prevent the erosion of community life, leaders must cultivate specific practices that ground their authority in service, ethical discernment, and the inviolable dignity of the human person.

Relational and Visible Presence: No advanced technology can substitute for authentic, face-to-face human interaction. Pope Leo XIV (2026) frames this presence as a spiritual vocation in *Magnifica Humanitas*, emphasising that genuine human progress flows from a heart open to others, an intelligence willing to listen, and a commitment to communal unity. Empirical research on servant leadership highlights physical visibility as the primary channel through which a leader's core values inspire vision, empowerment, and trust across an organisation (Tucker et al., 1969). Conversely, Nigerian research on virtual ministry highlights the tension digital platforms introduce, noting how online worship reconfigures embodied gathering and creates distinct challenges for incarnational ministry; consequently, scholars recommend a balanced hybrid model that thoughtfully integrates digital access with physical fellowship (Ojo & Afolaranmi, 2025). Ultimately, a leader who intimately knows the names, life stories, quiet struggles, and prayer intentions of those entrusted to their care embodies a relational depth that no algorithmic model can replicate.

Discernment Against Algorithmic Opacity: Commercial digital platforms rely heavily on "black-box" algorithms whose underlying decision-making processes remain entirely hidden from users. When tech platforms keep algorithmic power secret, they create structural imbalances that

directly contradict the universal destination of goods (Leo XIV, 2026). Leaders must therefore cultivate a disciplined scepticism toward automated systems that demand uncritical trust. No algorithm is inherently neutral; systems presenting themselves as objective routinely reflect and reinforce the implicit biases of their human designers (Leo XIV, 2026), and every technical tool embodies value choices through what it measures, ignores, and optimises (Kowalczyk, 2025). When a leader treats AI-generated output as authoritative rather than as an aid to judgment, they surrender personal moral accountability. The pastoral consequences are immediate: research indicates that AI-driven technologies frequently generate information overload while gradually eroding traditional spiritual authority among Christian youth (Oyebanji et al., 2025). Authentic discernment requires asking what a system measures, what it ignores, whose financial or social interests it optimises for, and who remains answerable when errors occur.

Prioritising the Vulnerable in a Digital World: Christian leadership ethics are firmly anchored in the gospel imperative to care for the least among us (Matthew 25:31–46). In *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV (2026) extends this principle to the digital era through the biblical imagery of the rejected stones—symbolising the poor, the sick, the migrant, and the digitally marginalised—urging us to recognise that they stand at the very foundation of our social and technological vision. Because algorithmic tools are trained predominantly on data from dominant majority populations, they often overlook, misrepresent, or exclude individuals on socioeconomic margins. Indeed, documented risks in automated credit scoring and algorithmic resource allocation consistently fall hardest on those with the least capacity to contest them (Obi, 2025). Before adopting any automated platform or technological system in ministry, a Christian leader must carefully evaluate whom the technology might marginalise, ensuring that technological innovation never replaces direct, personal care for the most vulnerable.

Servant Leadership over Dashboard Management: In an increasingly automated society, leaders are constantly tempted to govern through screens and statistics—managing people as data points on a digital dashboard rather than as living persons within a faith community. In *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV (2026) insists that authentic leadership builds a civilisation of love grounded in real encounter and sacrificial service, pointing to Nehemiah, who prayed and fasted before mobilising families to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, as a model. While an algorithm can calculate statistical trends, it cannot express genuine compassion, listen to heartbreak, or exercise spiritual discernment; human judgment remains indispensable to ethically sustainable technological development (Čerbová, 2025). Recent studies examining pastors who utilise generative AI reveal this boundary clearly: while ministers effectively employ AI as an idea generator, research assistant, co-author, or translator, they simultaneously wrestle with tensions between digital innovation and sacred rites, questioning the spiritual depth and authenticity of AI-generated content (Cheong & Liu, 2025). Data tools maintain a legitimate administrative purpose, but they must never replace prayer, pastoral intuition, or the wisdom of the heart.

Ecclesial Accountability Mediated by Subsidiarity: Christian leadership is inherently collaborative and accountable, not autocratic. Subsidiarity acts as a two-way safeguard: higher ecclesial authorities assist and empower local leaders without infringing on their conscience, while local leaders remain transparent so no single person acts as an isolated decision-maker (Leo XIV, 2026). In contexts where the power differential between pastors and congregations is vast and paternalistic structures have historically weakened the faithful’s critical independence (Muonwe,

2024), subsidiarity serves as a vital structural remedy. This principle also carries crucial canonical and legal implications: magisterial reflection insists on clearly assigning personal human responsibility whenever AI systems malfunction or are misused (Čerbová, 2025). Furthermore, canonical scholarship advocates for a theologically informed regulatory framework that safeguards human dignity and pastoral mission while confronting the real threats of depersonalization, algorithmic bias, and the erosion of pastoral authority (Tarantino, 2025). The decisive pastoral boundary is clear: while AI-assisted care can be an auxiliary tool, artificial care must be ruled out entirely; what must be fiercely avoided is the abdication of pastoral care in favour of AI substitutes (Stoddart, 2023).

From these principles, four concrete administrative habits follow for Christian leaders:

- a. Explicitly designate which human officer is answerable for a technology's outputs before deploying it.
- b. Mandate that all automated processes or administrative decisions affecting human persons remain subject to human review.
- c. Treat the pastor, chaplain, and local minister as active participants in communal discernment rather than passive bystanders to automated outputs (Stoddart, 2023).
- d. Resist centralised platform designs that bypass or silence the local community's voice.

Conclusion

We stand at a historic threshold. The emergence of artificial intelligence is not merely a technological upgrade but a profound cultural shift that tests our understanding of human dignity, authority, and community. Nigerian Christian leaders do not face this challenge empty-handed. *Magnifica Humanitas* extends the *Rerum Novarum* tradition into the algorithmic age, affirming that data, algorithms, and digital infrastructure are common goods subject to justice, subsidiarity, and solidarity. *Dignitas Infinita* affirms that every human person possesses an inalienable dignity no machine can measure, optimise, or replace. *Ubuntu* and *igwebuike* remind us that true power and personhood are inherently communal.

Three conclusions follow. First, the wisdom of the heart is not a decorative ideal but the specific competence the age demands: the capacity to hold intellect, conscience, affect, and relationship together in judgement, which no system can simulate and no leader can outsource. Second, the anthropological boundary is also a pastoral boundary. Because artificial intelligence lacks conscience, intentionality, and a true sense of meaning, it can assist with administrative tasks, but it can never provide genuine care. Consequently, a machine can never be delegated the core responsibilities of pastoral care. Third, in Nigeria, the question of AI in the Church is inseparable from the question of power: where leadership is service-oriented and mutual, algorithmic tools can be held to communal account; where it is paternalistic, they can consolidate evaluative power, removing discernment from local human communities. Formation—of clergy, religious, and lay leaders alike—is therefore the decisive investment, as the literature on church leadership and technology consistently concludes.

Christian leaders must reject two easy temptations: a naive techno-optimism that uncritically adopts biased and opaque systems, and an apocalyptic techno-pessimism that retreats from the digital continent altogether. The Catholic path is neither blind adoption nor fearful refusal but

discernment—a uniquely human, spiritual capacity that cannot be automated or reduced to a prompt—integrating intellect, conscience, prayer, and communal presence. The Church in Nigeria has already embraced digital platforms for evangelisation, pastoral care, and religious education; what remains is to govern them by the terms of its own tradition. Like Nehemiah, who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem through shared responsibility rather than individual effort, Nigerian Christian leaders are called to build a digital culture rooted in truth and human solidarity. Algorithms can process data. However, only human hearts formed in grace can exercise mercy, heal broken communities, and build the civilisation of love.

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