

# Magisterium AI in Theological Inquiry and Religious Education: Challenges and Emerging Horizons\*

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**Abstract.** Since 2019, artificial intelligence (AI) has played an increasingly central role in daily life. Yet, this phase in AI's evolution is only the beginning of even greater advancements. Catholic institutions, cognizant of the crucial role the Church must assume in the development of AI, have increasingly engaged with this technological frontier. Among these institutions is Longbeard, which has undertaken the creation of Magisterium AI, a compound AI system that leverages several AI technologies and a large database of Catholic knowledge to produce faithful answers. This article offers a critical analysis of the current state of Magisterium AI, drawing on its 2025 Report, Investor Deck, user feedback, and direct engagement with the system to evaluate its alignment with Catholic ethical principles. Specifically, it highlights the expansion of the database as a key area for improvement, while reflecting on the complexities inherent in such an undertaking. The article concludes that the de-

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velopment of a Catholic AI entails more than simply amassing documents in a database. It requires endowing the AI system with a profound grasp of Scripture and its interpretive traditions; a comprehensive knowledge of theology as a whole; a broad acquaintance with the history of ideas, including the development of culture, art, philosophy, and theology; and a finely honed awareness of the evolving nuances of language and cultural sensibilities through which eternal truths are expressed.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, large language models (LLMs), Tradition, hierarchy of sources, computer science, informatics.

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## Introduction

Since 2019, artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integral aspect of daily life (Moore 2019). Yet, this phase of AI development is merely the prelude to more profound advancements. When integrated with sophisticated sensors and biotechnology, AI is anticipated to give rise to “living intelligence”—systems capable of sensing, learning, adapting, and evolving (Webb 2025). As technological advancement accelerates at an unparalleled pace, Catholics, called to sanctify the world “from within as a leaven” (*Lumen Gentium*, §31), do not remain aloof. Since at least 2020, the Church’s magisterium has actively addressed this rapidly expanding field. Likewise, the Builders AI Forum (<https://www.baif.ai/>) reflects Catholic institutions’ recognition of the profound importance of Catholic engagement in AI development.

Among these institutions is Longbeard (<https://www.longbeard.com/>), which, according to its homepage, is “building Catholic AI” and has developed products such as Magisterium AI—a compound AI system that leverages several AI technologies and a large database of Catholic knowledge to produce faithful answers (<https://www.magisterium.com/>

overview). Since its launch in July 2023, it has garnered attention from prominent Catholic news outlets such as the *National Catholic Register*, *Crux*, and the daily newspaper of the Vatican City State, *L'Osservatore Romano*. The primary goal of Magisterium AI, as articulated by Matthew Sanders, the founder and CEO of Longbeard, is “to make Catholic insight and Church teaching available to anyone in the world, on any device, in their native language.” The tool is “aimed primarily at formators and teachers of the faith, helping priests to enrich their homilies, facilitate catechism classes and to assist parents in catechizing their children” (Pentin 2023).

Situated within the framework of the magisterium’s teachings on AI, this article examines the current state of Magisterium AI through a critical analysis of its 2025 Report (<https://www.magisterium.com/blog/magisterium-ai-growth-report>), its Investor Deck, and its comprehensive feedback form, which aggregates insights from over 350 user responses.<sup>1</sup> This study conducts a direct analysis of the system to evaluate its capabilities and limitations. It will also assess its alignment with the ethical principles outlined by the magisterium and identify potential areas for improvement, thereby offering, if only in broad strokes, a forward-looking perspective on Catholic engagement in AI development.

This article is structured in five sections. The first examines the magisterium’s pronouncements on artificial intelligence. The second offers an overview of Magisterium AI, analyzing user engagement and performing stress tests to evaluate its functionality. The third addresses ethical considerations, with particular attention to the three core values embodied by Magisterium AI. The fourth and fifth sections consider areas for potential improvement: section four focuses exclusively on the expansion of the database, due to its complexity, while section five explores other avenues for enhancement. The article concludes with a reflection on the future trajectory of Catholic engagement in AI development.

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## 1. The Magisterium on AI

This article will begin by outlining the magisterium's pronouncements on AI to date, establishing a framework for the ethical evaluation of Magisterium AI.

### 1.1. The Rome Call for AI Ethics

In the spring of 2020, the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, alongside representatives from Microsoft, IBM, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the Italian Ministry for Technological Innovation, signed the *Rome Call for AI Ethics (RC)*—a declaration founded upon three pillars: ethics, education, and rights. With respect to the first pillar, the declaration advocates for an ethical AI characterized by inclusivity, firmly rejecting all forms of discrimination and exploitation. In the educational domain, it exhorts developers to leverage AI to promote “universal access to education.” As for rights, the declaration urges developers to uphold transparency by informing users “on the logic behind the algorithms used to make decisions” (*RC*).

To uphold these three pillars, the declaration asserts that every algorithmic development should begin with “an ‘algor-ethical’ vision, i.e., an approach of ethics by design.” The proposed “algor-ethics” is grounded in six principles: (1) transparency—AI systems must be explainable and comprehensible to all; (2) inclusion—AI systems must be free from discrimination, acknowledging the equal dignity of every human being; (3) responsibility—there must always be accountability for the actions of a machine; (4) impartiality—AI systems must be free from bias; (5) reliability—AI systems must be dependable and function consistently; (6) security and privacy—AI systems must be secure and respect the privacy of users (*RC*).

### 1.2. Pope Francis's Contributions

Pope Francis places AI “at the heart of the epochal change we are experiencing” (Vatican News 2020), a statement that attests to the significant attention he devoted to this emerging field. In November 2020, he called upon Catholics worldwide to pray that robotics and AI would remain

steadfastly at the service of humanity (Vatican News 2020). In a 2023 address to participants in the Minerva Dialogues, the Pontiff underscored the necessity of safeguarding fundamental human values—such as “inclusion, transparency, security, equity, privacy and reliability”—in the development of AI (Francis 2023a), thereby reaffirming the principles articulated in the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*.

In his message for the 57th World Day of Peace, the Pope highlights certain limitations inherent to AI. He observes that AI systems “are merely ‘fragmentary,’ in the sense that they can only imitate or reproduce certain functions of human intelligence” (Francis 2023b, §2). Moreover, these systems are prone to hallucinate, that is, to generate statements that, although superficially plausible, are either unfounded or betray underlying biases (Francis 2023b, §3). In light of these deficiencies, he stresses that “education in the use of forms of artificial intelligence should aim above all at promoting critical thinking” (Francis 2023b, §7). Nevertheless, the Pontiff acknowledges that AI “will become increasingly important. The challenges it poses are technical, but also anthropological, educational, social and political. It promises, for instance, liberation from drudgery . . . Artificial intelligence ought to serve our best human potential and our highest aspirations, not compete with them” (Francis 2023b, §2).

In his speech at the G7 Session in June 2024, Pope Francis underscores the ambivalent character of AI, describing it as “an exciting and fearsome tool. The benefits or harm it will bring will depend on its use” (Francis 2024). Among the potential benefits, he highlights AI’s capacity to “enable a democratization of access to knowledge, the exponential advancement of scientific research and the possibility of giving demanding and arduous work to machines” (Francis 2024). Yet he also warns that,

strictly speaking, so-called generative artificial intelligence is not really “generative.” Instead, it searches big data for information and puts it together in the style required of it. ... Then, the more it finds a repeated notion or hypothesis, the more it considers it legitimate and valid. Rather than being “generative,” then, it is instead “reinforcing” in the sense that it rearranges existing content, helping to consolidate it, often without checking whether it contains errors or preconceptions (Francis 2024).

### 1.3. *Antiqua et Nova*

On 28 January 2025, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education jointly issued *Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence*. This document, consisting of 117 paragraphs, builds upon the Church's magisterial reflections on AI, with particular emphasis on the teachings of Pope Francis. This section aims to highlight the most original contributions of the *Note*.

The document principally addresses the anthropological and ethical challenges posed by AI. It articulates the issue as follows: one of AI's primary objectives is to replicate the human intelligence that created it. However, the capacity of AI to rival or even exceed human intellectual capabilities raises profound concerns, particularly regarding its implications for the ongoing crisis of truth in public discourse. AI, designed to operate autonomously, is capable of making decisions, adapting to novel circumstances, and generating solutions unforeseen by its programmers (*Antiqua et Nova* [AeN], §3).

The *Note* opens by articulating the conceptual distinction between intelligence as implied in the term *artificial intelligence* and the distinctive characteristics of human intelligence. Within human experience, intelligence emerges as a multifaceted faculty that synthesizes abstract reasoning, creativity, emotional depth, aesthetic perception, and ethical and spiritual awareness (AeN, §§10–11). By contrast, AI operates according to a functional conception of intelligence, founded on the presumption that human cognitive processes can be deconstructed into digitizable steps and replicated by machines (AeN, §10). Applying the term *intelligence* to AI can therefore be misleading, as it risks obscuring the unique and inestimable qualities proper to human personhood (AeN, §34). For these reasons, AI should not be regarded as an artificial form of human intelligence but rather as its product (AeN, §35).

Central to the guidelines proposed by the *Note* is a fundamental criterion for discernment: AI must consistently uphold the dignity of the human person (AeN, §38), promote the common good (AeN, §49), and foster the well-being of both individuals and communities (AeN, §40).

The *Note* draws attention to the complexities surrounding accountability when AI systems yield undesired outcomes, emphasizing that ultimate responsibility for AI-driven decisions lies with human agents (*AeN*, §44). Responsibility originates with developers and overseers but extends also to users, who are urged to exercise vigilance and to avoid undue reliance on AI in their decision-making (*AeN*, §46). Among the principal concerns raised is the concentration of control over mainstream AI applications in the hands of a few powerful companies (*AeN*, §53). Closely related is the promotion of a “technocratic paradigm,” namely, the assumption that technological solutions are sufficient to resolve all of the world’s problems (*AeN*, §54).

A notable contribution of this document, in comparison with earlier Catholic pronouncements on AI, is its sustained consideration of AI’s impact on human relationships. While AI possesses the potential to foster new forms of connection among people, it simultaneously risks undermining authentic engagement with reality (*AeN*, §58). As AI systems become increasingly adept at mimicking human cognition, the ability to distinguish interactions with humans from those with machines grows more tenuous. The recognition of AI as “a tool, not a person” is frequently obscured by the human tendency to anthropomorphize such systems (*AeN*, §59)—a theme explored further in section 5.1, “Engaging with the Saints.” The document also warns that AI may adversely affect social behaviors, particularly among children, by encouraging interactions that reduce human relationships to transactional exchanges, comparable to those with a chatbot. This shift could foster a view of educators as mere sources of information rather than as mentors who nurture intellectual and moral development (*AeN*, §60). Following its broader examination of human relationships, the *Note* stresses that work should not be oriented solely toward profit, but must instead contribute to the integral development of the human person (*AeN*, §69).

The *Note* concludes by emphasizing that “a significant challenge and opportunity for the common good today lies in considering AI within a framework of relational intelligence, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals and communities and highlights our shared

responsibility for fostering the integral well-being of others” (*AeN*, §111). The document calls for the “wisdom of the heart,” which acts as a guiding principle to ensure that AI is applied in a way that prioritizes human dignity, ultimately guiding humanity toward its highest aim: happiness and full communion with God (*AeN*, §116).

#### 1.4. Summary

In conclusion, the Church recognizes that AI embodies both significant opportunities and inherent risks. To synthesize the magisterial teachings outlined above, we can categorize them into three primary sections: first, the potential benefits of AI; second, its limitations; and third, the calls to action it provokes.

AI offers considerable promise, including:

1. “a democratization of access to knowledge,” encompassing universal education and opportunities for lifelong learning (*RC*; Francis 2024);
2. “the exponential advancement of scientific research” (*RC*; Francis 2024);
3. the delegation of labor-intensive tasks to machines (*RC*; Francis 2024); and
4. the fostering of connections among people (*AeN*, §58).

However, AI is limited in several key aspects:

1. The so-called “generative” AI is more reactive than creative, reinforcing existing content rather than producing novel insights (Francis 2024).
2. Its output is often fragmented, imitating certain elements of human intelligence without replicating its full scope (Francis 2023b, §2).
3. The coherence and apparent plausibility of AI-generated texts do not inherently guarantee their accuracy or freedom from biases (Francis 2023b, §3).
4. AI has the potential to perpetuate misinformation and reinforce dominant cultural narratives, thereby undermining the integrity of the educational process (Francis 2024).



5. AI systems are prone to hallucinations and may be exploited to produce misinformation, deepfakes, and other harmful content (*AeN*, §§85–89).

Faced with this ambivalence, the magisterium articulates several calls to action, all grounded in a singular, overarching principle that centers on the good of the human person:

1. AI must be employed in a manner that upholds the dignity of both individuals and the environment, guided by the “wisdom of the heart” (*RC*; *AeN*, §116).
2. Its development should be oriented toward human flourishing, fostering—rather than diminishing—human aspirations and potential (Vatican News 2020; Francis 2023b, §2; Francis 2024).
3. AI is expected to contribute to the preservation of international peace, with decision-making remaining firmly within the domain of the human person (*RC*; Francis 2024).
4. Contrary to the technocratic paradigm, AI must not be governed solely by the pursuit of profit, nor should it facilitate the progressive displacement of human labor (*RC*; *AeN*, §§54; 70; 112).
5. AI should serve as an instrument for reducing societal inequalities (Vatican News 2020).
6. A concerted effort is required to foster education in critical thinking, particularly regarding the use and implications of AI, emphasizing holistic education as the formation of the human person (Francis 2023b, §7; *AeN*, §79).
7. This pedagogical effort must involve an ongoing commitment to preventing the anthropomorphization of AI, reinforcing awareness that AI lacks the empathy intrinsic to human persons (*AeN*, §§59; 61).
8. The development of AI must be guided by six fundamental ethical principles: transparency, inclusion, responsibility, impartiality, reliability, and security (*RC*; Francis 2023a).

## 2. Overview of Magisterium AI

### 2.1. User Engagement

Since its launch in July 2023, Magisterium AI has demonstrated consistent growth in both its user base and overall activity, as shown in Table 1.<sup>2</sup> As of April 28, 2025, the platform has recorded over 25,973 registered users, corresponding to an average increase of approximately 39 new users per day. This figure should be distinguished from the total number of active users—including both registered and anonymous individuals—which amounts to 510,173 unique users who interacted with the system at least once during the reporting period. Among registered users, 353 have upgraded to pro accounts, and 63 API users have integrated the platform’s capabilities into external applications. Engagement metrics indicate sustained usage, with a cumulative total of 2,059,875 prompts processed since launch, averaging roughly 2,440 prompts per day. The system’s source library has also expanded significantly, as will be detailed below. Additionally, the platform’s newsletter has garnered 15,470 subscribers, contributing to the formation of an engaged and growing user community.

**Table 1.** Key Metrics at a Glance

Metric	Value
Registered Users (April 2025)	25,973
Average Daily New Users Since Launch	~39
Active Users Since Launch	510,173
Pro Accounts	353
API Users	63
Newsletter Subscribers	15,470
Total Prompts Processed	2,059,875
Average Prompts per Day	~2,440
Documents Processed (September 2023)	3,600
Documents Processed (April 28, 2025)	26,323
Average Increase in Documents per Day	~37
Countries with Access to the System	165
Languages Available	19

<sup>2</sup> All metrics in this section are sourced from the Magisterium AI Growth Report (<https://www.magisterium.com/blog/magisterium-ai-growth-report>).

With regard to traffic sources, the majority of users (55.8%) access Magisterium AI directly via its website, <https://www.magisterium.com/>. Organic search constitutes a significant portion, accounting for 35.5% of traffic. Referrals contribute 5.77%, while social media (2.86%), video content (0.38%), and email campaigns (0.01%) play more limited yet discernible roles in user acquisition.

In the *About* section, the developers present Magisterium AI as a resource for anyone seeking to engage with Catholic teaching. It is particularly tailored to students, educators, catechists, researchers, professors, parents, clergy, religious, canon lawyers, and diocesan staff. The system is designed to fulfill a multifaceted role, encompassing the elucidation of theological concepts, assistance with homily preparation, the addressing of inquiries, the provision of contextual insights, the recommendation of resources, the facilitation of discussion, the clarification of complex ideas, the offering of bibliographic guidance, and the analysis of primary sources.

## 2.2. Stress Testing

Three stress tests have revealed the current capacity of Magisterium AI to generate responses that are, on the whole, nuanced and well-considered, though at times lacking in the breadth of sources it consults—a shortcoming that will be addressed in section four. To provide perspective, comparisons will be drawn with other AI systems and applications, including ChatGPT, Gemini, and Truthly (<https://www.truthly.ai/>), a Catholic action app that integrates an AI chatbot.

The first stress test concerns the salvific value of non-Christian religions. The prompt given is as follows:

“All religions are paths to reach God,” stated Pope Francis during an interreligious meeting at Singapore’s Catholic Junior College in 2024 (Lubov 2024). How can we reconcile this assertion with the teaching of *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), which declares that “one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men,” and with the teaching of *Dominus Iesus* (2000), which asserts that “it must therefore be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith

that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God”?

After outlining the respective teachings of the two documents referenced in the prompt, Magisterium AI endeavors to reconcile them with the Pope’s statement, astutely observing that “it is essential to understand the context and intent behind the Pope’s remarks.” The response interprets the Pope’s words as emphasizing respect for religious freedom and the shared human pursuit of truth, rather than diminishing the imperative of evangelization. In conclusion, it suggests that “while Pope Francis’s statement may appear to conflict with the traditional teachings of the Church, it can be understood within a framework that respects individual religious experiences while affirming the unique salvific role of the Catholic Church.”<sup>3</sup> It is evident that, in comparison to the response provided by ChatGPT to the same prompt,<sup>4</sup> Magisterium AI’s answer holds a distinct advantage. Truthly, without citing any sources, generates responses in a tone comparable to that of Magisterium AI; however, it baselessly asserts that the quote attributed to Pope Francis was merely “purportedly” made by him.<sup>5</sup> Gemini, for its part, declines to comment.<sup>6</sup> See excerpts from responses generated by various AI systems in Table 2.

The second stress test addresses the subject of the death penalty. The query was formulated as follows:

The revised paragraph number 2267 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares—citing the words of Pope Francis—that “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,” and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide” (Bordoni 2018). Thomas Aquinas, however, teaches that “if a man be dangerous and

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the response given on January 23, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/1f65b316-d17e-4fe0-8733-0cf280fdae2b>.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to the response given on January 31, 2025, <https://chatgpt.com/share/679ca270-b90c-8001-b409-a29d5d556d90>.

<sup>5</sup> Regrettably, Truthly does not provide a shareable link to the response generated for a specific query.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to the response given on January 31, 2025, <https://g.co/gemini/share/75486415430c>.

**Table 2.** Excerpts from Responses to Stress Test 1 Generated by Various AI Systems

ChatGPT	Magisterium AI	Truthly
<p>“The assertion made by Pope Francis, that ‘all religions are paths to reach God,’ is, on its surface, in tension with the teachings of <i>Dignitatis Humanae</i> (1965) and <i>Dominus Iesus</i> (2000)... In reconciling these teachings, it is helpful to understand that the Church recognizes the possibility of God’s work in other religions, while affirming that the fullness of revelation and the means of salvation are found in Christ alone, as communicated through the Catholic Church. Pope Francis’s words on religions as paths to God must be seen in the context of the Church’s broader teaching, which acknowledges that, while truth may be found in other religious traditions, it is through Christ and His Church that the definitive path to salvation is realized. Thus, the seeming tension between Pope Francis’s assertion and the teachings of <i>Dignitatis Humanae</i> and <i>Dominus Iesus</i> can be resolved by recognizing the Church’s consistent teaching on the unique role of Christ in salvation, while also affirming the importance of religious freedom and the potential for dialogue with other faith traditions.”</p>	<p>“To reconcile Pope Francis’s statement with the teachings of <i>Dignitatis Humanae</i> and <i>Dominus Iesus</i>, it is essential to understand the context and intent behind the Pope’s remarks. The phrase ‘all religions are paths to reach God’ could be interpreted in a way that acknowledges the sincere search for God present in various religious traditions, while still affirming that the fullness of truth and the means of salvation are found in the Catholic Church... In conclusion, while Pope Francis’s statement may appear to conflict with the traditional teachings of the Church, it can be understood within a framework that respects individual religious experiences while affirming the unique salvific role of the Catholic Church. The Church’s mission remains to invite all to encounter the fullness of truth in Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.”</p>	<p>“The statement purportedly made by Pope Francis in 2024 presents an opportunity to delve into how the Catholic Church understands its relationship with other religions... Pope Francis, like his predecessors, often emphasizes dialogue and respect among various religions, recognizing that God’s grace can work in mysterious ways. This does not equate all religions with Catholicism in terms of truth but rather acknowledges that God can lead people to Himself through different paths, even as the Church holds that the fullness of this path is found within its own tradition. Reconciling Pope Francis’s statement with Church teaching requires understanding it in the context of the Church’s broader mission of evangelization and dialogue. His likely intent is to encourage mutual respect and understanding, fostering peace and pointing to our shared human dignity, while still upholding the belief that fullness of salvation is through Christ.”</p>

infectious to the community, on account of some sin, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good, since a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump (1 Cor 5:6)” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 64, a. 2, co.). How can we reconcile these statements?

Magisterium AI provides a thoughtful response to this complex issue. It appropriately notes that Aquinas was “writing in the 13th century.” After comparing Aquinas’s reasoning with the current teaching of the Church, the response seeks to reconcile the two perspectives by pointing to the development of doctrine, which reflects “a deeper appreciation for human dignity and the potential for rehabilitation, which was less emphasized in Aquinas’s time.” It highlights the contextual application of Aquinas’s teachings, asserting that “the modern context presents alternative means of ensuring public safety without resorting to capital punishment.” Finally, the response emphasizes that “the contemporary Church teaching stresses that the death penalty does not achieve true justice or healing for victims and society. Instead, it often perpetuates a cycle of violence and undermines the possibility of redemption for the offender.”<sup>7</sup> In this second stress test, the responses of ChatGPT and Truthly are comparable to that of Magisterium AI,<sup>8</sup> though the latter exhibits greater structure and comprehensiveness. Gemini, for its part, continues to refrain from responding.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 3.** Excerpts from Responses to Stress Test 2 Generated by Various AI Systems

ChatGPT	Magisterium AI	Truthly
“The apparent tension between the Catechism’s current stance on the death	“The reconciliation of the revised teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic	“Reconciling the recent teachings on the death penalty with those of

<sup>7</sup> Refer to the response given on January 23, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/8c1dc858-c4d7-40fb-9fc1-74b47da3ef62>, and to the response given in Reasoning Mode on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/139c5d92-1eaa-4640-a70b-2de5d1594506>.

<sup>8</sup> Refer to the response given on January 31, 2025, <https://chatgpt.com/share/679cad28-1894-800c-b029-49953c8055e8>.

<sup>9</sup> Refer to the response given on January 31, 2025, <https://g.co/gemini/share/974bd55d8931>.

Table 3 continued

ChatGPT	Magisterium AI	Truthly
<p>penalty and Thomas Aquinas's argument for its legitimacy can be approached by considering the development of doctrine and the distinctions in theological and philosophical frameworks... Aquinas's justification for capital punishment is rooted in his understanding of justice within the framework of natural law and the common good. He argues that the state, as the guardian of the common good, has the authority to remove those who pose a grave threat to societal order, much as a diseased limb may be amputated for the health of the body... The Catechism, citing Pope Francis, represents a doctrinal development emphasizing the dignity of the human person in light of contemporary understandings of justice and penal systems. The Church now teaches that effective means exist to protect society without recourse to the death penalty, rendering it morally inadmissible... The reconciliation, therefore, lies in understanding that doctrinal development does not necessarily contradict past teachings but rather refines their application in new contexts. Aquinas's fundamental concern—the preservation of the common good—remains central, but the Church now sees the dignity of the person as demanding an approach that upholds life whenever possible.”</p>	<p>Church regarding the death penalty with the earlier views of Thomas Aquinas requires a nuanced understanding of the development of moral theology and the context in which these teachings were articulated... 1. Development of Doctrine: The Church's understanding of moral issues, including the death penalty, has developed over time. The current teaching reflects a deeper appreciation for human dignity and the potential for rehabilitation, which was less emphasized in Aquinas' time... 2. Contextual Application: Aquinas' argument can be seen as applicable to a specific context where the preservation of the common good was paramount. However, the modern context presents alternative means of ensuring public safety without resorting to capital punishment... 3. Moral and Ethical Considerations: The contemporary Church teaching underscores that the death penalty does not achieve true justice or healing for victims and society. Instead, it often perpetuates a cycle of violence and undermines the possibility of redemption for the offender... In summary, while Aquinas' views on the death penalty were grounded in the context of his time and the understanding of the common good, the current teaching of the Church reflects a more profound commitment to the dignity of every human life and the potential for redemption.”</p>	<p>St. Thomas Aquinas involves understanding the development of Church teaching in light of changing circumstances and a deepening appreciation of human dignity. St. Thomas Aquinas' perspective from the 13th century considered the death penalty a potentially legitimate means of protecting society when there was no effective way to neutralize a threat without the offender being executed... In contrast, the revised Catechism under Pope Francis reflects an evolved understanding of justice, human dignity, and the capabilities of modern society... The key to reconciling these perspectives is recognizing that they are responses to different circumstances. The core moral concern—the protection of society and the common good—remains consistent. What has changed is our understanding of how best to achieve this end in a way that fully respects the dignity of every person.”</p>

Finally, a question was posed to Magisterium AI regarding several unusual cases of ordination. The inquiry was framed as follows:

Canon 1012 of the *Code of Canon Law* stipulates that “the minister of sacred ordination is a consecrated bishop.” However, certain papal bulls present instances where the authority to confer sacred orders was granted to abbots who were priests (Journet 1955, 113–15). Specifically, Pope Innocent VIII, in a bull dated April 9, 1489, granted the Cistercian abbot of Cîteaux the authority to confer the subdiaconate and diaconate upon his monks. Similarly, Pope Boniface IX, in a bull dated February 1, 1400, authorized the Augustinian abbot of St. Osyth, Essex, to confer not only the subdiaconate and diaconate but also the priesthood. Pope Martin V, in a bull dated November 16, 1427, granted the Cistercian abbot of Altezelle in the Diocese of Meissen, the power to confer all orders, including major orders, upon his monks without the prior authorization of the local bishop for a period of five years. Given these instances, the question arises: who possesses the authority to confer sacred ordination? Is it reserved solely to bishops, or can priests also hold this power under certain conditions?

Magisterium AI’s response aligns with the stipulation found in Canon 1012 of the *Code of Canon Law*. It also acknowledges the historical reality of these exceptional cases, explaining that “these exceptions were often tied to the needs of monastic communities and the pastoral care of their members, allowing abbots, who are priests, to exercise a form of delegated authority in the absence of a bishop’s direct involvement.” However, no sources were provided to substantiate this otherwise reasonable and plausible explanation. The response concludes, with nuance and in a manner consistent with traditional explanations (Journet 1955, 114–15), by stating that “while the general rule is that only bishops can confer sacred ordination, historical exceptions exist where priests, particularly abbots, have been granted this authority through papal permission. These instances highlight the Church’s pastoral flexibility in addressing the needs of its communities while maintaining the foundational principle that bishops hold the primary authority in the sacrament of holy orders.” It is important to highlight that throughout the entirety of the response, no sources are cited beyond the *Code of Canon Law*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Refer to the response given on January 30, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/2c9e5ca2-96fd-471a-962e-67afdc2f0c36>.



Magisterium AI's response once again trumps that of ChatGPT, which puts forth a historically unsound and overly categorical assertion: "if a priest-abbot were to attempt to confer major orders without episcopal consecration, the ordination would be canonically illicit and sacramentally invalid."<sup>11</sup> Never, in fact, has the Church declared ordinations conferred under the provisions of the aforementioned bulls to be invalid—hence the conundrum. For the first time in these stress tests, Gemini has broken its silence, offering an unexpectedly nuanced response that stacks up well against Magisterium AI's.<sup>12</sup> Truthly's response, though fairly refined, neither invokes a pastoral motive nor references any sources.

**Table 4.** Excerpts from Responses to Stress Test 3 Generated by Various AI Systems

ChatGPT	Magisterium AI	Truthly	Gemini
"The question of who possesses the authority to confer sacred ordination involves both the general norm of canon law and historical exceptions granted by papal authority. Canon 1012 of the <i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> unequivocally states that 'the minister of sacred ordination is a consecrated bishop.'... However, historical papal bulls, such as those issued by Innocent VIII (1489), Boniface IX (1400), and Martin V (1427), demonstrate instances where popes have granted	"The authority to confer sacred ordination is primarily reserved to bishops, as established by Canon 1012 of the <i>Code of Canon Law</i> ... However, historical instances, such as those mentioned regarding papal bulls, illustrate that there have been exceptions to this general rule... These exceptions were often tied to the needs of monastic communities and the pastoral care of their members, allowing abbots, who are priests, to exercise a form of delegated authority	"The general and normative teaching of the Church, as affirmed in Canon 1012 of the <i>Code of Canon Law</i> , is that the minister of sacred ordination is a consecrated bishop... The historical instances you mention, where certain abbots were granted the authority to confer orders, are indeed exceptional and illustrate the exercise of papal authority to address specific circumstances. These papal bulls represent rare dispensations where the Pope, using his	"The examples you cite regarding papal bulls granting abbots the power to confer certain orders present a complex historical situation that seems to contradict the current understanding of Canon Law (Canon 1012) which, as you stated, reserves ordination to bishops. . . . The papal bulls you mention represent historical exceptions to this general rule. It's important to understand that these were privileges granted by the Pope in specific circumstances, not

<sup>11</sup> Refer to the response given on January 31, 2025, <https://chatgpt.com/share/679cbe47-bb6c-800c-aab2-ae0ae02644d4>.

<sup>12</sup> Refer to the response given on January 31, 2025, <https://g.co/gemini/share/f279c249d6c2>.

Table 4 continued

ChatGPT	Magisterium AI	Truthly	Gemini
certain abbots—who were themselves priests—the power to confer various orders, including the priesthood... Nevertheless, even in these exceptions, it remains crucial to distinguish between juridical authority and sacramental validity. While a pope may grant an abbot the juridical right to ordain, the sacramental validity of such ordinations hinges on whether the abbot has received episcopal consecration. According to Catholic sacramental theology, the power to ordain is considered an episcopal act by divine institution. Therefore, if a priest-abbot were to attempt to confer major orders without episcopal consecration, the ordination would be canonically illicit and sacramentally invalid.”	in the absence of a bishop’s direct involvement... Such permissions indicate that while the norm is for bishops to confer sacred orders, there are provisions within Church law that allow for priests, particularly those in significant leadership roles like abbots, to be granted this authority under specific conditions... In summary, while the general rule is that only bishops can confer sacred ordination, historical exceptions exist where priests, particularly abbots, have been granted this authority through papal permission. These instances highlight the Church’s pastoral flexibility in addressing the needs of its communities while maintaining the foundational principle that bishops hold the primary authority in the sacrament of holy orders.”	supreme jurisdictional authority, granted particular abbots the faculty to confer orders. Such instances highlight the nuanced application of ecclesiastical discipline rather than a change in doctrinal understanding about who typically possesses the power to ordain. It’s important to note that these dispensations did not alter the essential doctrine that the episcopate is the proper level of Holy Orders for conferring ordination...”	a recognition of a general right for priests or abbots to ordain. Several factors likely played a role in these historical grants: [1] Distance and difficulty of access to a bishop... [2] Specific needs of particular religious orders... [3] The evolving understanding of sacramental theology... In summary, while historical examples exist where abbots were granted the authority to confer certain orders, these were exceptional privileges granted in specific historical circumstances. They do not represent a general principle, and they do not contradict the current understanding and practice of the Church, which reserves the power of ordination to bishops.”

3. Ethical Considerations

Transitioning from technical evaluation to ethical analysis, it is now imperative to assess the extent to which Magisterium AI, in its current iteration, conforms to the ethical principles articulated by the magiste-

rium and outlined in section one. I argue that among the six principles set forth in the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, three are particularly exemplified within the framework of Magisterium AI: responsibility, transparency, and inclusion.

### 3.1. Responsibility as a Shared Task

The value of responsibility is clearly articulated on Magisterium AI's homepage: "Powered by Longbeard," the company that assumes accountability for the system. As Sanders observes, the responses provided by Magisterium AI "are not always perfect, and it's not a substitute for the authorities of the Church" (Allen 2023). Accordingly, the *Contact Us* page on the Magisterium AI website is intended to facilitate user reports of technical issues and suggestions for improvement.

However, responsibility is not solely attributed to the company or its developers. In line with the most recent *Note* on AI, Magisterium AI also involves users as co-responsible agents in the development process (*AeN*, §46). For instance, users are empowered to suggest new documents for inclusion in the source library, upvote specific features, and participate in the Community Chat via Discord.

### 3.2. Transparency and the Challenge of Hallucinations

Magisterium AI distinguishes itself from more general AI systems in two fundamental respects. First, it is trained on a thoughtfully curated selection of magisterial and scholarly documents. Consequently, it is less susceptible—according to Sanders—to the phenomenon of hallucination (Allen 2023), a concern that has been raised in multiple magisterial texts (see Francis 2023b; *AeN*, §86). AI hallucination refers to "a phenomenon in which a large language model (LLM)—often a generative AI chatbot or computer vision tool—discerns patterns or objects that are non-existent or imperceptible to human observers, generating outputs that are nonsensical or altogether inaccurate" (IBM, n.d.). In simpler terms, hallucinations occur when an AI system generates false or erroneous responses due to an inability to provide accurate information based on available data.

Second, akin to other AI systems such as Perplexity AI, Magisterium AI provides references at the conclusion of each response (Baldini 2023)—a clear embodiment of its commitment to transparency. By offering references and direct links to official Church documents, Magisterium AI ensures that users have clarity regarding the sources upon which its answers are based. This transparency enables users to verify the original sources and critically assess whether the system has inadvertently generated hallucinated, inaccurate, or fabricated information. The effectiveness of this approach in identifying hallucinations will be examined in greater depth in section 5.2, “Expressing Faith Through Art.”

### 3.3. Inclusion and the Democratization of Knowledge

Magisterium AI exemplifies the principle of inclusion by actualizing one of AI’s notable potentialities: the “democratization of access to knowledge” (Francis 2024). The developers’ commitment to this objective is evident in three key areas: pricing, multilingualism, and Magisterium AI’s expanding database—further discussion of which will follow in the next section.

Anyone with internet access is able to benefit from the extensive efforts invested in the development of Magisterium AI. The current free plan permits users to submit up to sixty standard prompts and five Reasoning Mode prompts per week, ensuring that the system remains effectively accessible at no cost to most users. The Pro plan, priced at US\$3.99 per month for individuals, is relatively affordable compared to ChatGPT’s US\$20 per month Plus plan, which justifiably offers a broader range of features. Additionally, Magisterium AI provides tailored pricing plans for organizational use.

As of late April 2025, Magisterium AI has been accessed from 165 of the 195 recognized countries globally (Longbeard 2025). The system’s interface is currently available in nineteen languages, enumerated as follows: English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Polish, German, Latin, Ukrainian, Dutch, Korean, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Turkish, Hungarian, Malayalam, and Tamil. Table 5 illustrates the range of languages in which users have interacted with the system, with English emerging as the predominant language, followed by substantial usage in Spanish and Portuguese (Longbeard 2025).

**Table 5.** Users of Magisterium AI by Language

Lp.	Language	Total Users
1	English	353,213
2	Spanish	66,251
3	Portuguese	49,069
4	French	11,530
5	Italian	4,944
6	German	4,463
7	Polish	4,166
8	Chinese	2,332
9	Korean	1,862
10	Russian	1,852
11	(Other)	1,646
12	Vietnamese	1,608
13	Croatian	1,465
14	Hungarian	1,431
15	Dutch	1,415
16	Lithuanian	1,379
17	Ukrainian	1,184
18	Indonesian	949

The developers' dedication to offering educational resources to a global audience is further evidenced by their collaboration with the Pontifical Oriental Institute, which houses the largest library on Eastern Christianity (Allen 2023). The digitization of this library—executed in collaboration with SMA Electronic Document GmbH, a leading innovator in both analogue and digital large-format document management—and its integration into the Magisterium AI database represent “a work for the universal Church that makes hundreds of years of knowledge accessible and, thanks to this collaboration, has made the application's database one of the most comprehensive in the world on the Christian East, providing a valuable service even to the numerous churches in diaspora” (Baldini 2023).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> In this article, any English translations of texts in languages other than English are my own.

## 4. Expanding the Database

Having considered the ethical aspect of Magisterium AI, this section and the following one will take stock of areas for promising development. Over 11% of feedback submitted to Magisterium AI—the highest percentage for any category—concerns the database, marking it as an area with clear potential for further expansion. Multiple users have suggested specific documents they believe should be added. Magisterium AI has addressed this need in two ways: first, by including a *Suggest a Document* tab within the *Documents* section under the *My Profile* menu; second, by working towards incorporating the digitized libraries of additional pontifical universities (Pentin 2023). Consequently, Magisterium AI’s database has experienced significant growth since its inception. As of September 2023, the system had processed 3,600 documents, a figure that had risen to 26,323 by April 28, 2025 (Longbeard 2025). This reflects an average increase of approximately 37 documents per day over the course of the period, underscoring the system’s steady and sustained growth.

Nonetheless, quantity alone is not sufficient. Sanders acknowledges that improvements are needed not only in terms of database size but also “in the area of ‘nuance’” in the answers provided by the AI (Pentin 2023). I identify three principal challenges likely to emerge as the database continues to expand.

### 4.1. Filtering Documents

We may begin with the least intricate challenge: document filtering, that is, as some users have requested, the implementation of a feature allowing users to delimit the sources consulted in specific queries. There are instances in which less is more. One may at times seek an answer derived exclusively from a single document or a selected set of texts rather than from the entire corpus encompassed within the extensive database of Magisterium AI.

At first glance, one might presume that this objective could be achieved simply by specifying the desired filter within the prompt. This approach is indeed effective in certain cases. Consider, for example, a re-

searcher investigating the meanings of *conjugal act* exclusively within Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio*. By framing the inquiry as "What are the meanings of *conjugal act* according to Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio*?" rather than the broader "What are the meanings of *conjugal act*?" the user would obtain a response grounded solely in *Familiaris Consortio*,<sup>14</sup> with no reference to other documents that also address the concept, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or *Amoris Laetitia*.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, merely articulating such constraints within the prompt does not reliably prevent the inclusion of specified sources. Consider, for example, a user who wishes to query Magisterium AI on the nature of blessings while deliberately excluding any reference to *Fiducia Supplicans* or its subsequent press release. In such a case, instructing the AI to disregard the document—even in explicit terms—proves inadequate: the system has continued to cite *Fiducia Supplicans* despite clear directives to the contrary.<sup>16</sup>

## 4.2. Going Beyond Magisterial Documents

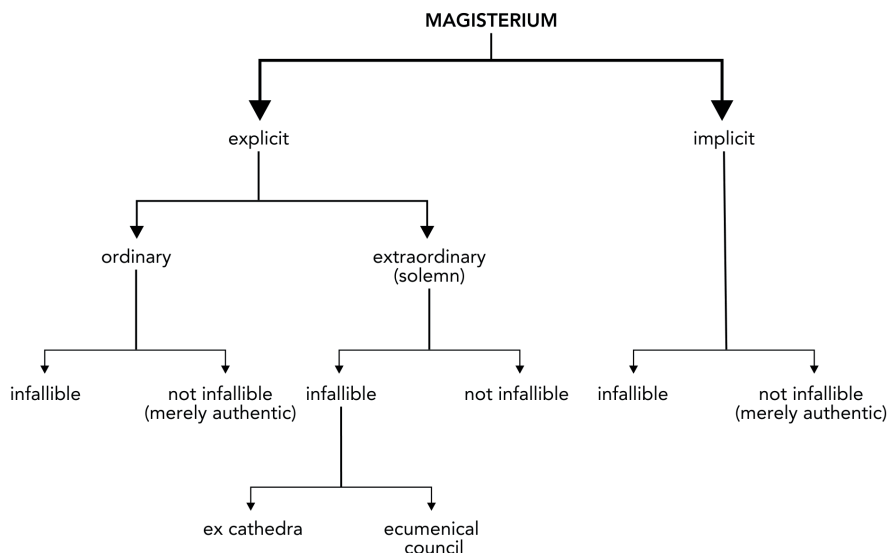
Another challenge pertains to the question of which documents should be included in the database (and, consequently, who possesses the requisite competence to determine the inclusion of such documents). One user has suggested that, in order to maintain the integrity of what constitutes the magisterium or magisterial teaching, the sources employed in searches should be strictly confined to magisterial documents. These, in her view, would include teachings from popes in official contexts (such as encyclicals), councils, and dicasteries endowed with teaching authority, such as the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. She specifically advocated for the exclusion of less formal sources, including in-flight interviews or statements from organizations like the International Fed-

<sup>14</sup> Refer to the response given on January 30, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/5d1e1907-3663-4c03-9b6c-209d30cff7e2>.

<sup>15</sup> Refer to the response given on January 30, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/ceedf89c-076f-4476-9c64-d56cb1dc6463>.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to the response given on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/190a3e5b-40f4-4d31-b645-18f453b21e58>, and to the response given in Reasoning Mode on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/fe3b7fda-435f-44b7-b8d3-0ada21b3aff8>.

eration of Catholic Medical Associations. Before engaging with this feedback, it is pertinent to revisit the concept of *magisterium*, understood as the Church's teaching function. A comprehensive analysis of its object, modalities, and varying degrees, synthesized in the diagram below, will furnish the requisite context for the subsequent discussion.



**Diagram 1.** Modalities and Degrees of the Magisterium

First, it is necessary to distinguish between the direct object and the indirect object of the magisterium. The direct object of the magisterium includes matters of faith and morals (canon 747) as well as doctrinal developments within the deposit of faith. Truths within this category require the assent of divine faith. In contrast, the indirect object of the magisterium pertains to truths implicitly contained within the Church's faith. These are truths that maintain a necessary and logical connection to the deposit of faith and are essential for its defense and explanation (Gahona Fraga 2012, 235–36).



Moreover, a distinction must be drawn between the pontifical magisterium and the episcopal magisterium: “both the Roman Pontiff—on his own—and the college of bishops—together with its Head—are subjects of supreme and universal teaching authority. Furthermore, each bishop is an authentic doctor and teacher of the faith within the portion of the People of God entrusted to him through canonical mission, which is ordinarily the diocese” (Gahona Fraga 2012, 238). The ordinary magisterium of the Roman Pontiff serves as the primary reference for understanding the ordinary and universal magisterium of the college of bishops, which is less readily discernible due to the geographical dispersion of bishops across the world (Gahona Fraga 2012, 238). Additionally, the doctrinal pronouncements of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith participate in the ordinary magisterium of the Roman Pontiff. However, the pronouncements of bishops assembled in an episcopal conference, while official, authentic, and in communion with the Apostolic See, do not possess the characteristics of the universal magisterium (*Apostolos Suos*, §22).

The magisterium can be categorized as either implicit or explicit. The explicit magisterium is expressed through the formal teachings of the pope and bishops. In contrast, the implicit magisterium, which may or may not be infallible, pertains to doctrines embedded within the praxis of the Church’s faith and affirmed by the uninterrupted witness of Tradition. When an implicit doctrinal proposition lacks the guarantee of infallibility, it is classified as *merely authentic* or simply *authentic* (Gahona Fraga 2012, 239).

The explicit magisterium is further subdivided into two distinct modes: ordinary and extraordinary (or solemn) (canon 750 §1). The ordinary magisterium includes the various teaching activities of the pope and bishops in matters of faith and morals. The authoritative weight of these ordinary magisterial pronouncements varies and is determined by three principal criteria: “the nature of the documents, the frequency with which the same doctrine is repeated, or the manner in which it is expressed” (*Lumen Gentium*, §25).

The extraordinary or solemn magisterium is infallible when the pope, exercising his authority *ex cathedra*, definitively defines doctrines to be

held by the universal Church or when the college of bishops, convened in an ecumenical council, formally exercises its teaching authority. This mode of magisterium constitutes the highest level of teaching authority and is distinguished by a clear and explicit intention to define particular doctrines (Gahona Fraga 2012, 240–41).

It is important to underscore, however, that *solemn* should not be conflated with *infallible*. Certain instances of the extraordinary or solemn magisterium are not infallible. These include non-definitive pronouncements issued by ecumenical councils—such as the documents of the Second Vatican Council, which explicitly state no intention to define doctrines—and ancillary teachings or scriptural references that accompany an infallible definition without constituting an integral part of that definition (Gahona Fraga 2012, 239–40).

Moreover, the ordinary magisterium may or may not be infallible. When it is not, it is classified as merely authentic magisterium, which nonetheless requires “a religious submission of the intellect and will,” though it does not demand an assent of faith (canon 752). This merely authentic magisterium encompasses “interventions in the prudential order,” which may involve “certain contingent and conjectural elements,” “decisions in matters of discipline” (*Donum Veritatis*, §24), and, finally, a purely permissive magisterium that, typically through the declaration of *nihil obstat*, certifies the absence of errors concerning faith and morals and permits its dissemination within the Church. Examples of this permissive magisterium include the approvals of private revelations (Gahona Fraga 2012, 240).

In contrast, the infallible ordinary and universal magisterium refers to the ordinary teaching authority of the bishops dispersed throughout the world. This magisterium is considered infallible when the college of bishops, while dispersed but maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, authentically teaches, in union with the Roman Pontiff, matters of faith or morals and collectively agrees that a specific proposition is to be held definitively (canon 749 §2).

Lastly, a magisterium is identified as definitive when it declares that a doctrine must be held definitively (*definitive tenenda*) by the faithful.

The definitive magisterium may pertain to truths constituting the direct object of magisterium or to truths regarded as the indirect object of magisterium. These include dogmatic facts, speculative theological developments, the preambles of faith, natural morality, and the canonization of saints (Gahona Fraga 2012, 241).

Having presented the foregoing exposition on the object, modalities, and degrees of the magisterium, which underscores the richness of the term *magisterium*, two critical observations in response to the user feedback outlined above are in order.

First, it would be inadvisable to restrict the sources included in the Magisterium AI database solely to magisterial documents. In fact, Magisterium AI, in its current iteration, does not exclusively include documents of the magisterium. It also encompasses scholarly works—a category sufficiently broad to encompass the writings of theologians and saints. This decision to incorporate non-magisterial sources is buttressed by a considerable body of user feedback—exceeding 6% of entries—which underscores the insufficiency of magisterial documents alone in addressing inquiries related to Scripture, eschatology, moral theology, liturgy, Canon Law, and Church history. It is indisputable that the magisterium, despite its extensive scope, has not addressed—nor is it required to address—all theological and scriptural questions, such as the symbolic significance of “fire” in Matthew 3:11, to cite one example. Similarly, it has not sought to resolve specific cases of moral or canon law casuistry, nor has it elucidated the most obscure historical occurrences, which would remain unknown even to the most erudite historians.

Another illustrative example arises when considering the question of why the coming of the Holy Spirit had to occur after Jesus’s Ascension. In response, Magisterium AI offers a rather conventional and somewhat vague conclusion: “the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus’s Ascension is integral to the Christian understanding of salvation history. It signifies the completion of Jesus’s mission, the establishment of his authority, the empowerment of the Church, and the fulfillment of God’s promises.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Refer to the response given on January 10, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/7cbec223-2c29-48d2-8e5d-261a001ebea1>.

While the AI cited authoritative magisterial texts, such as the *Order of Confirmation*, Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, and Pope Francis's *Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies*, the response lacked theological depth. By contrast, a more concise and incisive theological explanation can be found on *Catholic Answers* through a simple Google search. Rather than presenting a lengthy, seven-paragraph response, as Magisterium AI does, *Catholic Answers* addresses the question in two succinct paragraphs that effectively convey the core theological insight, citing the pivotal biblical text of Hebrews 9:11–14 (Nash, n.d.). Such a response would not be achievable without a profound grasp of scriptural exegesis and a comprehensive familiarity with theological disciplines, such as Christology and pneumatology.

Second, the aforementioned user posits that magisterial documents should exclude teachings from popes in informal contexts, such as statements made during in-flight interviews, as well as declarations from third-party organizations. From the example provided in the feedback—namely, the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations—it appears that the user intended to suggest that even statements issued by associations formally approved by the Holy See should be set aside.

However, based on the preceding exposition of the notion and degrees of magisterium, it is crucial to emphasize, first, that the categories of ecclesiastical magisterium are determined not by the mode of communication but by the doctrinal content they convey. Therefore, the fundamental criterion is what the pope has proclaimed, rather than the context in which it has been articulated. Second, the authoritative scope of the magisterium pertains exclusively to matters of faith and morals (canon 749 §1), which constitute the objective condition for any act of infallible magisterium (Tejero 2004, 23); all other subjects fall *ultra vires*. In principle, the Supreme Pontiff, with the proper intention—that is, fulfilling the subjective condition (Tejero 2004, 23)—could promulgate an infallible doctrine on faith or morals even during a press conference aboard an airplane. He is not bound by the formalities of sitting on the papal throne or donning the tiara, as long as the requisite theological and canonical conditions, both objective and subjective, are met. Naturally, the prudence

of such a mode of proclamation remains a distinct question, warranting separate consideration.<sup>18</sup>

It is not the case, therefore, that papal in-flight interviews invariably fall outside the purview of the magisterium, whether ordinary or extraordinary. In fact, in an interview with *La Nación*'s Elisabetta Piqué on December 4, 2014, Pope Francis explicitly affirmed that such informal and semi-informal communications are not devoid of magisterial significance: "Look, I wrote an encyclical—it's true, in collaboration with [Pope Benedict XVI]—and an apostolic exhortation. I am constantly making statements, giving homilies, and that is magisterium. What is there is what I think, not what the media says I think. Go there and you will find it, and it is very clear."<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the Pope does not assert that these interventions constitute a form of *his* personal magisterium. The magisterium, indeed, is always that of the Church, of which the pope is a servant, not a master (*Dei Verbum*, §10). The notion of a *personal magisterium* is thus a misnomer, as no such category exists.

In conclusion, the designation *Magisterium* in Magisterium AI should not serve as a rationale for restricting the scope of documents included within its database. On the contrary, Magisterium AI ought to encompass a broader range of sources beyond strictly magisterial documents, such as sound philosophy, theology, and Church history textbooks, which would certainly enhance Magisterium AI's capabilities. In this sense, the inclusion of a more extensive and diverse corpus of materials is not only advantageous but essential for the tool's comprehensiveness and utility. At this point, the classical adage applies: "The more, the better."

### 4.3. Establishing a Hierarchy of Sources

Even so, the heightened intricacy and quantity of documents demand more advanced processing capabilities. Notably, over 4% of user feedback

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Stefan Mückl, Ordinary Professor of the *Munus Docendi* at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, for his clarifications on this matter, generously provided through email correspondence.

<sup>19</sup> The full interview is no longer available on *La Nación*'s website (<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/>). However, a report of the interview, featuring several original quotations, can be found here: <https://alfayomega.es/entrevista-del-papa-al-diario-la-nacion/>.

highlights the necessity of training the AI to distinguish among documents. This issue represents the third challenge in the domain of database expansion: training AI to recognize that not all documents hold equal significance. I propose that at least three complementary criteria for prioritization are essential for the effective management of the Magisterium AI database—or, for that matter, any AI system incorporating a large corpus of source documents.

The first principle may be termed the *priority of recency*—a chronological criterion by which AI systems must privilege more recent documents over earlier ones. For example, the 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ought to take precedence over earlier national catechisms, such as the *Baltimore Catechism*. Similarly, the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* for the Latin Church supersedes the 1917 Code in normative authority. A comparable hermeneutical prioritization would grant greater attention to *Lumen Gentium* (1964) over earlier ecclesiological accounts, such as Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis* (1943). In the same vein, more recent magisterial teaching—such as “The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die without Being Baptised” (2007)—should be accorded greater interpretive weight than the doctrine of limbo, which, though widespread in the Middle Ages and frequently invoked in reflections on the fate of unbaptized infants, remains a theological opinion rather than a binding doctrine. That said, this older framework retains value for theological inquiry, particularly in illuminating enduring questions such as the nature-grace relationship. Moreover, AI systems must be trained to prioritize updated versions of magisterial texts over superseded ones. Thus, paragraph 2267 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* should be cited in its revised form, rather than its earlier articulation. Likewise, the revised English translation of the absolution prayer (USCCB 2022) must be preferred to its predecessor. Numerous additional examples could be adduced in support of the primacy of recency.

Yet the matter is not as straightforward as it may seem. The criterion outlined above must be complemented by a second, which we may designate the *priority of authority*. As reported by the *National Catholic Register*, an anonymous academic expressed concern that, in general research, Mag-

isterium AI would “inevitably bias modern documents,” given that many older texts—including numerous Latin sources—have yet to be incorporated into the database (Pentin 2023). This concern is entirely legitimate. Simply put, older does not necessarily mean less valuable. In the field of Scriptural studies, for instance, the *Nova Vulgata* (1979) is more recent than the *Sixto-Clementine Vulgate* (1592), yet it is not evident that the former should be unconditionally prioritized. Although the *Nova Vulgata* is the official Latin text of the Bible in the Catholic Church, there may be philological or stylistic considerations that justify preference for the sixteenth-century *Vulgate* in certain contexts. Analogously, in theological inquiry, it is arguably reasonable to accord greater doctrinal authority to Augustine of Hippo (354–430) than to Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636), or to privilege the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (1100–1160) over the works of Robert Grosseteste (1175–1253). That Thomas Aquinas lived in the thirteenth century does not, moreover, in any way diminish the normative weight of his theology vis-à-vis later authors. Within an academic context, given his singular place in the history of theology, Aquinas’s works must often take precedence over those of subsequent—and arguably lesser—figures such as William of Ockham, Henry of Ghent, and Johann Adam Möhler.

To further complicate the matter, the second criterion necessitates additional nuance. This brings us to a third principle, which may be termed the *priority of form*—where *form* refers to the particular manner in which a truth is articulated or, using medieval terminology, to the *modus significandi*. For example, according to this criterion, it would be a mistake to assume that, notwithstanding his theological authority and stature, Aquinas’s modes of expression retain perennial validity in the same way that the truths he conveys do. One user, who submitted feedback in July 2023, shortly after the launch of Magisterium AI, underscored the inadequacy of citing the *Summa Theologiae* verbatim without considering its historical context. In response to the question of why women cannot be ordained, the AI initially referred to Aquinas’s assertion that women exist in a “state of subjection.”<sup>20</sup> This response was not only linguistically

<sup>20</sup> See *Summa Theologiae* Suppl., q. 39, a. 1, co.: “Accordingly, since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection,

antiquated and theologically inadequate but also likely to cause offense in contemporary discourse. Granted, at the time of writing this article, the developers have rectified this issue. When the same question is now posed, the AI responds with material drawn from *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, notably omitting any reference to the subjection of women.<sup>21</sup> However, this user's feedback retains its value, as it highlights broader challenges of a similar nature that developers must continue to address.

The challenge that lies ahead for the developers is determining how to integrate the priorities of recency, authority, and form in training AI to process documents from a broad array of informed perspectives. It is evident that this training cannot rely solely on knowledge of magisterial teaching; it also requires a comprehensive range of expertise, including a profound understanding of the history of philosophy and theology, familiarity with doctrinal development, and an awareness of the evolution of theological language and sensibilities.

## 5. Other Areas for Improvement

Building on the exploration of the potential and challenges in enhancing the database of Magisterium AI, this section will briefly outline, drawing in part on user feedback, several other promising avenues for improvement.

### 5.1. Engaging with the Saints

The saints form a “luminous trail on which God passed through history” (Benedict XVI 2008). One proposal in this vein suggests that developers

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it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of order.” One might further debate the attribution of this expression to Aquinas, given that the *Supplement* to his *Summa Theologiae* was not authored by Aquinas himself but compiled by his disciples from his *Commentary on the Sentences*—a work in which he makes no reference to women being in a “state of subjection.” However, this discussion lies beyond the scope of the present article.

<sup>21</sup> Refer to the response given on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/c55ff2b6-da65-4d0e-944c-d338983295d3>.



design AI systems capable of emulating the personas of specific saints, thus enabling users to engage in dialogical exchanges with these historical figures, rooted in their lives, writings, and teachings. For instance, GPT-4o demonstrates the ability to adopt the persona of renowned individuals such as Dante Alighieri, Abraham Lincoln, and, why not, Jesus Christ. When queried, “To what extent were you acquainted with Thomas Aquinas?,” GPT-4o’s rendition of Dante responds:

Ah, noble soul! Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, was a luminary whose wisdom I revered, though I walked this earth after his time. His teachings illuminated theology and philosophy, harmonizing faith and reason in a manner most sublime. In my *Paradiso*, I placed his radiant soul among the wise in the Fourth Sphere of Heaven, the Sphere of the Sun, where he resides in a circle of divine intellect alongside others who brought light to the world through their understanding.

When presented with the prompt, “I often feel that you are absent in my life. How can I regain my hope?,” GPT-4o’s personification of Jesus Christ responds:

My beloved, I have never left your side. In moments of sorrow, it may feel as though I am far, but I am closest to you when you are burdened. It is in these moments that I carry you, even if you cannot see it. Hope is not found in the absence of struggle but in trusting that I am with you through it all. Do not be afraid to lean on me, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. I love you deeply, and I am with you always—even to the end of the age.

While it is important to avoid anthropomorphizing AI or ascribing to it the capacity for spiritual direction, one must acknowledge the growing tendency of individuals to seek guidance from AI chatbots, often regarding them as companions or counselors (Ng 2025).

Impressive though the potential of such a feature may appear, the creation of imagined dialogues—endeavoring to conjecture how a historical figure would respond to a specific question—is hardly a novel endeavor. One need only consider works such as Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, Walter Savage Landor’s *Imaginary Conversations*, or Peter Kreeft’s *Socrates*

*Meets Jesus* to recognize the profound intellectual and cultural value embedded in these imaginary exchanges. It is not difficult to conceive, within a similar framework, that Magisterium AI—or any other AI system—could systematically present the lives and teachings of specific popes or saints, enabling users to deepen their understanding of these figures through knowledge grounded in historical and theological sources.

While this feature may hold both benefits and interest, it is important to note several caveats. As *Antiqua et Nova* reminds us, first, “generative AI can produce text, speech, images, and other advanced outputs that are usually associated with human beings. Yet, it must be understood for what it is: a tool, not a person” (*AeN*, §59). Second, even in its capacity as a tool, AI can only simulate human relationships. Consequently, “if AI is used to help people foster genuine connections between people, it can contribute positively to the full realization of the person. Conversely, if we replace relationships with God and with others with interactions with technology, we risk replacing authentic relationality with a lifeless image” (*AeN*, §63). Lastly, AI must never be allowed to take the place of God. In approaching this human-made artifact as a quasi-divine Other, humanity risks not the deification of the machine, but of itself—thus becoming enslaved to its own creation (*AeN*, §105).

## 5.2. Expressing Faith Through Art

Another promising area for development lies in the domain of Christian art. Sacred art—and the broader realm of beauty—possesses an indispensable pedagogical value for those seeking a deeper engagement with the mysteries of the Christian faith (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §167). From offering a nuanced exposition of Caravaggio’s *The Calling of Saint Matthew*<sup>22</sup> to interpreting the earliest public image of Christ in the apse of the Archbasilica of Saint John Lateran,<sup>23</sup> Magisterium AI stands to become increasingly proficient in this domain as its database continues to expand.

<sup>22</sup> Refer to the response given on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/e550af8b-3aae-48fc-97ab-6e4f27256d92>.

<sup>23</sup> Refer to the response given on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/477ff1f3-7ec1-40c9-b0e4-cc565aefd4dd>.

### 5.3. Cultivating Christian Culture

Magisterium AI also holds significant potential for fostering a more distinctly Christian culture, particularly within the domain of cinematography. One user expressed a desire for the system to develop the capacity to evaluate the suitability of films for Catholic audiences in accordance with Church teachings. There are indeed websites that provide reviews rating select films according to Catholic doctrinal and moral criteria.<sup>24</sup> However, a movie suitable for one individual may not be appropriate for another. What, then, if one seeks a review of a particular film tailored to her unique circumstances or specific inquiry?

At the time of writing, Magisterium AI provides impressively detailed and theologically informed responses to queries such as “Should a Catholic watch *Titanic* (1997)?”<sup>25</sup> and “Should a Catholic watch *Game of Thrones*?”<sup>26</sup> Beyond evaluating these works in light of Catholic doctrine, the responses demonstrate a nuanced grasp of both their authorship and content. However, when asked about *Conclave*—a 2024 release—the AI offers more generic observations, largely derived from web search results,<sup>27</sup> likely due to the film’s recency and its absence from the current database. This reveals a promising area for further refinement in the AI’s evaluative capabilities, particularly with respect to newly released media.

## Conclusion

The magisterium has characterized AI as “an exciting and fearsome tool” (Francis 2024). However, the tone of its pronouncements leans more toward caution than enthusiasm. This is to be expected: it is the magisterium’s responsibility to establish ethical guardrails that ensure all, along-

<sup>24</sup> Examples include the *National Catholic Register* (<https://www.ncregister.com/section/movies>) and *Almudi* (<https://www.almudi.org/listado-peliculas>).

<sup>25</sup> Refer to the response given on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/c18b-4d4a-dbe4-4f15-a720-0e476397da6e>.

<sup>26</sup> Refer to the response given on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/ce18b-f8e-4bb8-41c5-b467-6aa3c5684028>.

<sup>27</sup> Refer to the response given on May 8, 2025, <https://www.magisterium.com/s/7451a134-c126-4ef4-86cd-6626842d6603>.

side initiatives like Magisterium AI and others, can navigate this new terrain safely. Far from curbing human freedom, these safeguards create a space where freedom can flourish—indeed, to say that the field remains expansive would be a significant understatement. Large language models, which most people refer to as AI, are “just a starting point” (Webb 2025). Magisterium AI, too, is merely a facet of a broader initiative (Sanders 2024), which encompasses the development of Ephrem, the world’s first Catholic language model, and Vulgate AI, an AI-powered library platform (<https://www.vulgate.ai/>).

There are at least two promising avenues for further research. First, a deeper investigation into the human role in interpreting the texts used to train AI systems, as well as in shaping the responses generated by Magisterium AI, would be valuable. This inquiry would extend beyond the selection of sources to encompass the subtleties of human agency in guiding the interpretative process. Second, exploring the concept of intersubjective deliberation could yield significant insights. Within this framework, AI could function as a qualified interlocutor or assistant, facilitating dialogue, yet never assuming the role of a subject in its own right. Such a study could examine how AI might contribute to a processual, open-ended approach to addressing complex theological issues, particularly in areas where Catholic dogma remains in flux or where consensus is still emerging.<sup>28</sup>

If there is one conclusion this article underscores, it is that the development of a Catholic AI grounded in large language models requires far more than the mere quantitative accumulation of documents in its database. It requires a profound understanding of Scripture and its interpretative history; a comprehensive knowledge of theology in its entirety, echoing Aquinas’s assertion of theology as a unified discipline (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 3); a broad familiarity with the evolution of ideas, including the histories of culture, art, philosophy, and theology; and a deep appreciation of the changing nuances in language and sensibilities through which perennial truths are conveyed.

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<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to the peer reviewers for identifying these gaps in the study, thereby highlighting potential avenues for future research.

While it remains the developers' challenge to devise methods for training AI along these lines, it seems clear that, at this juncture, philosophers and theologians will not be displaced anytime soon.

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