

Leo XIV and the Future of Civilization: Evil Shall Not Prevail

Juan Miguel Matheus

White Smoke

On May 8, 2025, St. Peter's Square filled with people. Hundreds of thousands of faithful fixed their gaze on the chimney of the Sistine Chapel. Around the world, millions waited in suspense for the name of Pope Francis's successor. Who would become the new Vicar of Christ on earth? Then came the unmistakable signal: white smoke rose into the sky, and the crowd erupted in jubilation. Minutes later, the Cardinal Protodeacon stepped out onto the basilica balcony to deliver the traditional announcement.

*Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum: habemus Papam!
Eminentissimum ac Reverendissimum
Dominum, Robertum Franciscum,
Cardinalem Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae Prævost,
qui sibi nomen imposuit Leonem Decimum Quartum.*

At that moment, the newly elected Pope steps forward calmly, visibly moved. His predecessor, Francis, had recognized him as a pastor deeply devoted to God's people and raised him to the rank of Cardinal. Without saying much, the scene is full of symbolism. He had been Prior of the Augustinians (a sign of the longing for peace and concord that civilization yearns for); he takes the name

Leo XIV (reflecting a strong commitment to the Social Doctrine of the Church and a profound awareness of the social question); he served as Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops (a testament to his deep knowledge of the particular Churches); and, finally, he was born in the United States of America, of mixed heritage — European roots and Peruvian by adoption— (a voice uniquely positioned to denounce the global liberal disorder, rooted above all in the institutional crisis and fragility of that democratic power).

We must still wait to see how his pontificate will develop. Time must take its course. Yet his very presence seems to mark the beginning of a new chapter for the Church, one defined by the urgent need to renew spiritually the face of the earth.

His pastoral program and of spiritual renewal

The election of Leo XIV restores to the world a forgotten language: hope grounded in truth. Amid global disarray, cultural relativism, and authoritarianism —whether disguised as democratic consensus or not— the new Pope steps forth as a prophetic shepherd. His words do not flatter. His presence does not divide. His style does not trivialize. He does not pose. With papal dignitas and auctoritas, Leo XIV reminds the world that the Church's mission is to proclaim the truth that saves and, from it, to propose justice as the foundation of peace.

This pontificate does not arise in a vacuum. It inherits a vast doctrinal architecture: the one built by Leo XIII with *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 when he proclaimed that social justice is inseparable from the Gospel —carried forward by every Pope since—, and the one reaffirmed by John Paul II with *Centesimus Annus* in 1991, when he condemned the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century and warned that freedom without truth destroys man (while also declaring that the Social Doctrine of

the Church is Theology, specifically Moral Theology). Leo XIV embraces that legacy and reshapes it for a contemporary world where the so-called liberal order –consolidated after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet empire– has revealed itself to be less an order than a chaos marked by moral voids. That is why his program is peace in the Augustinian sense: “the tranquility of order.”.

Social Doctrine as a defense of truth against totalitarianism

Since Leo XIII, the Social Doctrine of the Church has acted as an antidote to all forms of political or economic absolutism. Against collectivism, which denies individual autonomy, and liberalism, which reduces the person to mere self-interest, the Church has affirmed the transcendent dignity of the human person as the center of society.

John Paul II, who was witness and victim of Nazi and communist totalitarianisms, understood that evil does not always wear a violent mask: it sometimes disguises itself as “efficiency” or “progress.” In *Centesimus Annus*, he warned that regimes denying the truth about man are inevitably doomed to inhumanity. His teaching framed freedom as a path toward truth, not as an excuse for the whims of any human will, much less for the exercise of power.

Leo XIV reaffirms this line of thought with renewed urgency. He warns that emerging forms of cultural totalitarianism –such as subordinating education to state ideologies, suppressing religious freedom, attempting to distort family and marriage, and threatening the right to life– pose real dangers to democracy. In his first *Urbi et Orbi* message, he declared: “the world is hungry for order, not imposition; for truth, not manipulation; for peace, not complicit silence.” While he did not quote Saint Augustine

directly, he evoked his ideas, portraying the human being as a pilgrim on the way to a true homeland and emphasizing —once again— that peace arises from a just order..

Peace as a moral horizon: just order and political hope

In a world torn by conflict, Leo XIV positions peace as the central focus of his pontificate. But not as a sentimental utopia —rather, as a realistic horizon grounded in justice. There is no peace where lies prevail. No peace where human nature is denied. There is no peace where conscience is replaced by fear.

By reviving the Augustinian notion of peace as *tranquillitas ordinis*, associated with the idea of concord, Leo XIV restores politics to its moral dimension: order is not domination. It is the collective pursuit of truth. He emphasizes that diplomatic pacts or systems of Public International Law, which may be exhausted or ineffective, are not enough. What is needed is a spiritual renewal of power. Only through truth, freedom, love, and justice —as San John XXIII taught— can lasting peace, stable political communities, and a truly human civilization emerge.

For this reason, the world has responded with attention. Leaders from various religions and ideological currents recognize that, in a time of noise and instability, Leo XIV radiates serenity rooted in peace. His presence —sober, firm, and approachable— signals the possibility of a new era of dialogue without ambiguity and of peace without moral compromise.

Youth and public life: educating to serve in truth.

One of Pope Leo XIV's key priorities seems to be the education of young people —both in faith and in their responsibility to engage with politics and society. He sees that the collapse of the

global liberal order stems from failed structures, from generations adrift, lacking a moral compass, untrained in virtue, and without guiding mentors. He perceives —and seeks to convey— that the disorder of the liberal world is fundamentally an anthropological crisis, a crisis of the soul. It is therefore a crisis of meaning regarding humanity's purpose and the pursuit of the good throughout history.

From his time in Chiclayo, where he worked with marginalized youth, the former missionary and later Bishop Prevost came to see that true revolution lies in education. That is why he often references the Doctrinal Note on the Participation of Catholics in Public Life, issued in 2002 by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which affirms that political engagement is a duty of Christian charity and that a well-formed conscience is the only defense against the corruption of power. To this dimension, he has aimed to recover the example of Saint Thomas More, proclaimed by John Paul II as patron of rulers and politicians. Leo XIV describes More as “the archetype of the Christian politician: cultured, free, courageous, willing to lose everything rather than lose his soul.” He urges Catholic youth not to shy away: “Do not fear public life. Engage with truth —not to impose, but to serve.”

Against cultural totalitarianism and the dictatorship of relativism: a Church that teaches and resists with hope.

Leo XIV makes it clear that the Church is not neutral when the dignity of the human person is at stake. It is not like Pilate. It does not wash its hands. It is not indifferent to the manipulation of childhood, the dissolution of the family, the commodification of life, or —as he has repeatedly emphasized— the dehumanizing risks posed by artificial intelligence without ethical limits. His

pontificate begins with a gesture of resistance: declaring that the Church will educate, even if forbidden; that it will form consciences, even if power or paid ideological agendas seek to prevent it; that it will speak the truth, even at the cost of being persecuted.

This resistance is not ideological. It is spiritual. Leo XIV does not call for sterile confrontation. He summons the courageous affirmation of the Gospel. Just as Leo XIII did in the face of the excesses of industrial capitalism and the threats of Marxism, and John Paul II did against the tyranny of uniform thought, Leo XIV today confronts the totalitarianism of indifference and the authoritarianism of political correctness —against the dictatorship of relativism that Benedict XVI so bravely opposed.

Leo XIV: a pontiff to restore order in truth.

The pontificate of Leo XIV is a sign of our times. Amid global disorder, he proposes a vision of order. Amid cynicism, he proclaims simplicity. Amid lies, he announces the truth.

Like Leo XIII, he knows that justice is impossible without a social doctrine grounded in natural law. Like John Paul II, he knows that there is no freedom without truth, nor politics without virtue. And like Saint Augustine —whom he did not quote literally, but whose spirituality permeated his first address— Leo XIV understands that peace is not merely the absence of conflict: it is the fruit of a reconciled community in pursuit of truth. In doing so, he has traced both a spiritual path and a framework for ecclesial governance in the world: to build the universal common good.

His pontificate is announced as a time of moral reconstruction, political education, doctrinal resistance, and true peace. Leo XIV

projects to the world a realistic and profound hope: that a just civilizational order is still possible and that the Church has the duty to sow it in the hearts of individuals and nations. A pontificate of greater emphasis on the Social Doctrine of the Church and on a deep conviction in trust in the human being is approaching. As he stated in his first address: evil shall not prevail...