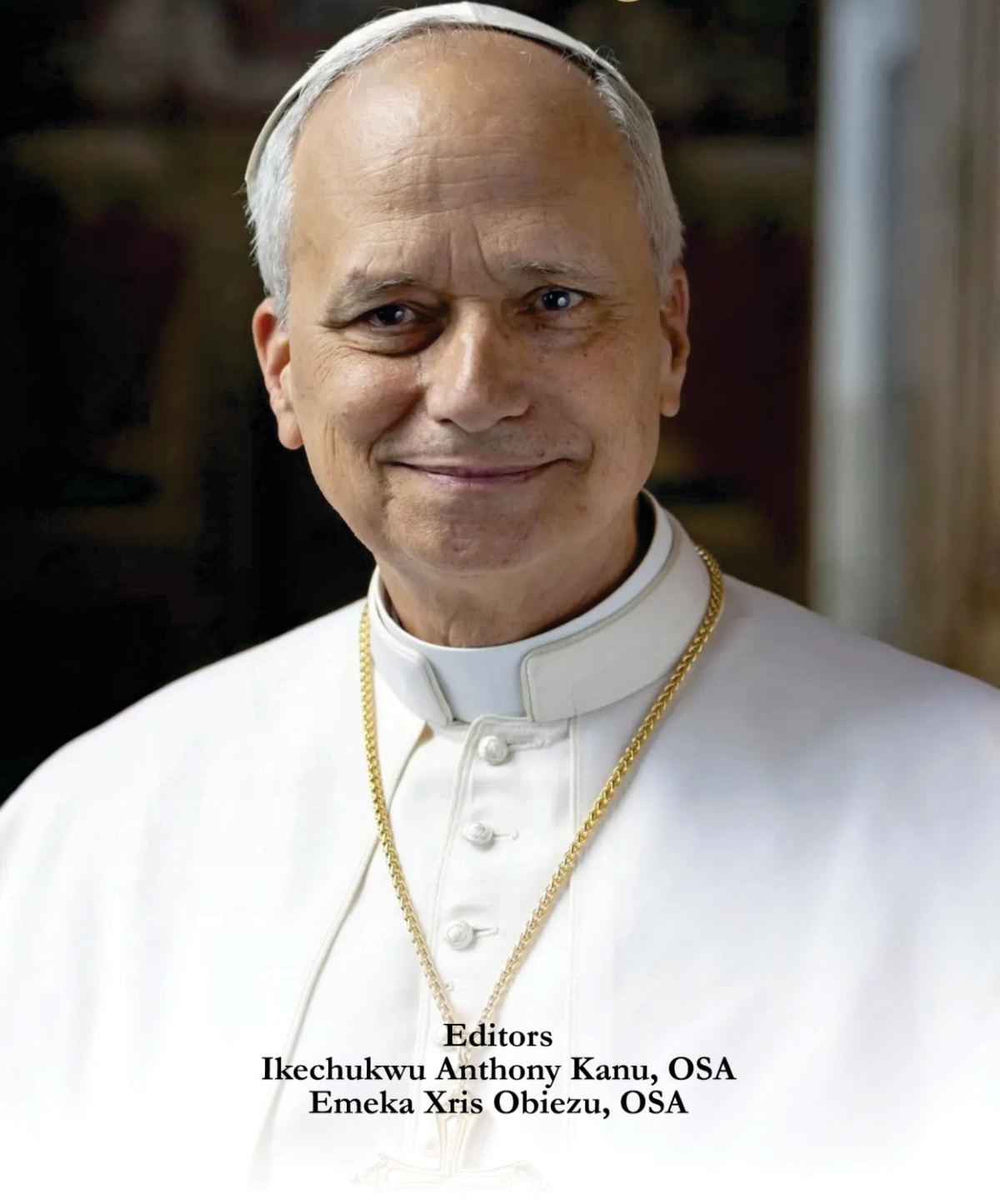


POPE LEO XIV

Son of Saint Augustine



Editors
Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, OSA
Emeka Xris Obiezu, OSA

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Reputable publisher of the Order of Saint Augustine, Province of Nigeria, that advances the Order's goal of disseminating knowledge, promoting research and intellectual discourse, and supporting academic excellence.

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ISBN: 978-978-699-107-0

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The publishing service of



ORDER OF SAINT AUGUSTINE, PROVINCE OF NIGERIA

*State Low-Cost, PMB 7575, Rantya
Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria*

<https://www.provinceofsaintaugustineofnigeria.org.ng>

2025

Foreword



It is a pleasure to do a forward to "Pope Leo XIV: Son of Saint Augustine," for two reasons: first, because it is a systematic scholarly exploration that presents Pope Leo XIV to the world from an Augustinian and African perspective; secondly, because it is a thought-provoking reflection by the spiritual sons of Saint Augustine on how the legacy of this great African Saint, and one of Christianity's most influential thinkers, is directly shaping the papacy of Pope Leo XIV. This book further offers a nuanced perspective of how Pope Leo XIV is drawing upon the rich tradition of Catholic thought, including the contributions of his predecessors, particularly Pope Leo XIII, to address the pressing issues of the contemporary era.

Saint Augustine, a bishop and theologian of the early Christian Church, left an indelible mark on Christian thought and practice. His Letters, Sermons, and writings on original sin, salvation, grace, free will, the nature of God, church and state continue to influence theological discourse to this day. The intersection between Augustine's theological and philosophical insights and Pope Leo XIV's efforts to navigate the challenges of modernity is a rich area of study, revealing the enduring relevance of Augustine's ideas. Making a nexus between the thoughts of Saint Augustine, Augustinian patrimony, Pope Leo XIII, and Pope Leo XIV unveils the broad intellectual and pastoral leadership that characterizes the present papacy and highlights the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity.

"Pope Leo XIV: Son of Saint Augustine," therefore, stands as an eloquent testament to the enduring legacy and relevance of Saint Augustine and the ongoing quest for meaning and purpose in an ever-changing world. This is one of such works to be published in these early days of this papacy, witnessing to the audacity of the authors' expertise and privileged fraternal experience of Leo XIV. The authors of this work, from a variety of academic and apostolate backgrounds but with one common Augustinian patrimony, share points of view and challenge us to think critically about the past, present, and future in a unique manner. They have made a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation on the papacy of Pope Leo XIV, his connection with Saint Augustine of Hippo and Pope Leo XIII, and how the teachings of Saint Augustine and Leo XIII continue to resonate with contemporary debates on

social justice, the role of the Church in the world, and the pursuit of peace and reconciliation.

Saint Augustine writes that: “When we read a book, our most essential trait- imagination- is allowed to soar”. I, therefore, present to the world a monumental, learned, lucid, patient, and comprehensive piece edited by Fathers Anthony and Emeka, which introduces Pope Leo XIV within the context of his connections with Saint Augustine. I strongly recommend this book to all who treasure good literature on recent developments in relation to the present papacy and the Holy Father, Saint Augustine of Hippo, and most especially to anyone who wishes to be abreast with important debates and developments in the Church. Experts, researchers, beginners, and casual readers are bound to treasure the usefulness of this book.

Most Rev. Dr. John Namaza Niyiring, OSA

Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Kano

This Day, 12th June, 2025, Feast of Saint John of Sabagun

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Introduction – *Habemus Papam*

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, OSA & Emeka Xris Obiezu, OSA



The process of electing Pope Leo XIV instilled a sense of pride in many Catholics regarding their faith. It showcased the profound wisdom inherent in the Church. This wisdom does not seek recognition or crave the limelight. Instead, it exists quietly, profoundly, and eternally. It is no surprise that the Church has outlasted empires, weathered schisms, and endured scandals, yet remains steadfast, enduring, and sacred¹. The Catholic Church is, therefore, not a fleeting trend or merely a social phenomenon. It progresses with time while remaining attuned to eternity.

As the world engaged in predictions, compiling lists of prominent Cardinals, analyzing political affiliations, and speculating on who would become the next Pope, the College of Cardinals disregarded the clamor, entered the sacred space, and emerged with a name that left analysts speechless and reset the compass of divine selection. A name that had not been mentioned in the corridors of speculation and headlines. The Cardinals not only accomplished a successful election, but they also proclaimed to the world that God does not conform to trends².

Pope Leo XIV was elected pope on May 8, 2025, on the second day of the conclave, following four rounds of voting. The emergence of white smoke from the Sistine Chapel at 18:07 signaled to the public that a new pope had been chosen

As is always the case, beginning with the first public appearance at the Central Loggia of St Peter's Basilica, the very first moves of any new pope have always drawn unprecedented attention, with varied interpretations, interjections, and predictions on what he will do and how he will do them. Pope Leo XIV is no different. Whether they betrayed a continuation of Francis' legacy or not, as insinuated in some quarters,³

¹Justice Aggrey. 2025. *This is about the selection of Pope Leo XIV, from a Judge in Kenya who is not a Catholic*. https://web.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1138713304947415&id=100064262672887&set=a.302074001944687&_rdc=1&_rdr

²Justice Aggrey. 2025. *This is about the selection of Pope Leo XIV, from a Judge in Kenya who is not a Catholic*

³ Nicolas Senèze, "Leo XIV's First Steps Signal Continuity with Francis," May 12, 2025, <https://international.la-croix.com/religion/leo-xivs-first-steps-signal-continuity-with->

Pope Leo XIV's first remarks and public appearances were unequivocal in highlighting the Augustinian touch he brings to his papacy. Apart from his direct declaration of his Augustinianness, "I am an Augustinian, a son of Saint Augustine,"⁴ his first words in the first week of his papacy were laden with deep Augustinian underpinning.

Focusing on the three discernible dimensions of his public declaration on the occasion of his election, pointing to his identity, his church self-understanding, and outlook on the world, the authors explore the Augustinian nuances behind these courses and how such understanding will help us peep into what may be the trajectory of his papacy. Some thoughts have boldly claimed that Pope Leo XIV's success could be intrinsically contingent on his capacity and capability to translate the "Augustinian Order's ancient ideal of one heart, one mind into structures that protect the vulnerable worker, the displaced migrant, and the wounded planet."⁵

Contributors enhance the standard of this volume by achieving high scholarly quality yet communicating in a manner easily readable by a wide audience. The strength of this volume comes from the authors sharing in the common Augustinian patrimony with the Pontiff and their diverse expertise on Augustine, as well as somewhat personal familiarity with Pope Leo XIV. These elements of diversity are particularly obvious in the varying nuances and perspectives various authors brought to topics that seem similar. What is clear from the voices presented here is that they are united in asserting that Pope Leo XIV's Augustinian heritage in its identity, charism, and spirituality will have its influence on his papacy, no matter the degree. The methodology adopted in this entire volume is the Augustinian model, which makes a difficult synthesis of the fundamental elements of thought and feelings.

The volume is organized in three parts, for easy flow of thoughts, in that way, contributions focusing on similar issues are grouped and presented in a sequence that promotes, as much as possible, seamless transition from one contribution to the other. The three parts were discerned from these words of Pope Leo XIV as he presented himself to the world on the day of his election: "I am an Augustinian, a son of Saint Augustine, ... Together, we must look for ways to be a missionary Church, a

francis?at_source=piano&at_medium=email&at_campaign=11588&pnespid=Crpx_lsB638NxVnFuoCJFVETrwp026t3pFRCDPMHaJnK6BckXmIPojcUAZ17Dlo5V4CPUJC1uQ; Accessed May 16, 2025.

⁴ Pope Leo XIV, "'Peace be with You All.'" <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-xvi-peace-be-with-you-first-words.html>.

⁵ Darius von Guttner Sporzynski, "'Peace be with all of you': how Pope Leo XIV embodies a living dialogue between tradition and modernity," May 9, 2025, <https://theconversation.com/peace-be-with-all-of-you-how-pope-leo-xiv-embodies-a-living-dialogue-between-tradition-and-modernity-256084>.

Church that builds bridges and encourages dialogue, a Church ever open to welcoming... throughout the world, we want to be a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close above all to those who are suffering.”⁶ Thus, this volume’s part one deals with his identity, part two focuses on his projected ecclesiology, and part three articulates his vision for the world.

Part One: Pope Leo XIV and His Identity

In the opening chapter of this volume, **“Pope Leo XIV: Early Life, Education, and Vocation,”** Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, OSA introduces Robert Francis Cardinal Prevost, OSA, who became Pope Leo XIV, to the world. He shows how historical developments in the life of Pope Leo XIV reveal the key themes and initiatives that are likely to mark his papacy, viz., unity and peace, inclusivity, and social justice, which makes bold the efforts to address issues like poverty, inequality, and human rights.

Pope Leo XIV: Intersection of Pontifical Name and Vision - Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, OSA recognizing the profound impact a name can have on an individual’s identity, relationships, and even their self-perception and perception of others, claims that the name Leo XIV holds something significant about his vision and philosophy for the papacy with great implication for the entire church and the world. He articulates the significant roles of the Leonine popes in the history of the Church, making strong connections between Leo XIII and Leo XIV nuanced with insights from Leo XIV’s Augustinian heritage.

Charles Chukwuebuka Ugonwafor, OSA’s chapter, **“I am a Son of Saint Augustine’: Exploring the Augustinian Identity of Leo XIV,”** building on Pope Leo XIV’s message that preceded his first *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, “I am a son of Saint Augustine, an Augustinian”, traces the implications of this identity for Pope Leo XIV and how it will unfold throughout his papacy. He does this by adopting a three-segment methodology, namely the biographical information of Leo XIV; the spirituality of the religious Order of Saint Augustine, and the implications of Leo XIV’s statement and its relevance to his exercise of the Petrine office and the Church today.

Concluding this section, Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, OSA lends his voice to a discourse on the Augustinian identity of Leo XIV. With this title, **“I am ... an Augustinian”:** Reflecting on the Identity and Spirituality of Pope Leo XIV - he

⁶ Pope Leo XIV, “Peace be with You All.”

demonstrates in this chapter through a careful and insightful exposé of the Augustinian identity and spirituality in relation to Pope Leo XIV that when Pope Leo XIV said: “I am... an Augustinian”, he not only identifies with this spirituality but gives it a place in his papacy. And this is not a coincidence, given that he has lived a greater part of his life as a custodian of the Augustinian values.

Part Two: Pope Leo XIV and His Ecclesiology

In this chapter **“With You I am a Christian, For You I am a Bishop’: Pope Leo XIV’s Understanding of His Role as Pope,”** providing a symmetrical link between the identity and the ecclesiological sections of this volume, Jude Aniobodom Ossai, OSA walks us through Pope Leo XIV’s self-understanding of his Petrine role. Jude demonstrates that Pope Leo XIV’s usage of the simple quotation from St. Augustine means he is adopting the Augustinian concept of episcopacy to express his readiness to journey together with everyone as we work towards our heavenly homeland. Jude makes an audacious claim that so far, Pope Leo XIV, in actions, words, and body language, has remained consistent with his adopted Augustinian perspective and spirituality of ecclesiastical leadership.

“We are Disciples of Christ’: Pope Leo XIV’s Vision of Discipleship Vis-A-Vis Saint Augustine’s Anthropology” - Michael Paul Pilani, postulates that discipleship is at the heart of Pope Leo XIV’s ecclesiological and pastoral agenda. Discipleship for Leo is not a static affiliation but a dynamic life of attentive following, communal discernment, and embodied love in the world. This is informed by Leo XIV drawing extensively from Augustine’s theologico-anthropological vision. His contribution enriches the ongoing conversation about what it means to be a faithful, mission-oriented, and Christ-centered Church in a rapidly changing world.

In this chapter, **“We Have to Work Together on How to be a Missionary Church”: Reflecting on Pope Leo XIV’s Missiological Vision** - Ovie, Valentine Aghoghophia, OSA, describes Pope Leo XIV as a theological teacher who has personally encountered the trials of mission that understands the complexities and challenges faced by those engaged in evangelization. X-raying the specific problems and obstacles Pope Leo XIV identifies as hindrances to effective missionary activity in the modern world, Ovie explores the practical and spiritual remedies Leo XIV proposes, the goals and fruits of being a missionary Church, as articulated throughout Pope Leo’s teachings and papal addresses.

Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, OSA ends this section on ecclesiology by presenting an African contextualization of Pope Leo XIV's missiological vision expounded by Ovie. With the title **"Evangelization as the Infinite Grace that Radiates from Lives Transformed: Implications of Pope Leo XIV's Theology of Evangelization for Africa,"** he takes a peek at the theological and non-academic conversations in modern Africa, to which the issues of evangelization still remain critical. The underlying question guiding his reflection is "What contribution will the papacy of Pope Leo XIV make to evangelization in contemporary Africa?"

Part Three: Pope Leo XIV and His Vision for the World

That the three contributions in this section focus on Peace lends credence to Emeka Xris Obiezu, OSA's claim in his chapter that the pursuit of global peace is at the core of Pope Leo XIV's church intersection with the world. In his chapter, **"Disarmed Peace and Disarming Peace: An Augustinian Insight to Pope Leo XIV's Paradigm for Global,"** Emeka opens the conversation on Pope Leo XIV's vision for the world, focusing on his call for world peace. He claims that Pope Leo XIV's reliance on St. Augustine's concept of peace, how to increase or decrease it, enables him to maintain that true peace must begin by exposing structural issues at the root of the world's inability to deliver on peace. This kind of peace and its approach he calls "a disarmed peace and a disarming peace" that is "humble and persevering."⁷

"Peace be with You All": Pope Leo XIV's Commitment to Peace, Dialogue, and Human Dignity: Gabriel Tumba Hassan, OSA, in this chapter, articulates the key elements of Pope Leo XIV's commitment to fostering peace, namely dialogue, justice, and the dignity of every human being. What Gabriel offers the readers is the theological depth and human demand of peace, drawing from the wisdom of the Church, the moral clarity of Pope Leo XIV's first words, and the timeless conviction that peace is not only possible, it is imperative.

Concluding this volume, Michael Paul Pilani, in his chapter **"Peace be with You": Pope Leo XIV on Peace in a Conflict-Ridden World"** asserts that Pope Leo XIV's prophetic articulation, in his inaugural address, of peace as redemptive reordering, sets the focus of his global peace project as to reclaim the Church's vocation as a reconciler in a conflict-ridden world. This assertion is contingent on the author's belief that a robust, peace-centered vision must be retrieved from the heart of

⁷ Leo XIV, "Peace be with You."

Christian tradition, specifically, from the convergence of Scripture, patristic theology, and contemporary ecclesial witness.

We hope this volume enjoys a wide readership, provokes more interest, and garners the support necessary for the pontiff, Pope Leo XIV to succeed in leading the folk, one in mind and heart to the eternal shepherd.

PART I
THE IDENTITY OF POPE LEO XIV

Pope Leo XIV: Early Life, Education, and Vocation

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, OSA



Early life and family

Robert Francis Prevost was born on September 14, 1955, at Mercy Hospital located in the Bronzeville area of Chicago, Illinois, on the city's South Side. He has a diverse African, French, Italian, and Spanish heritage¹. His mother, Mildred Agnes Prevost (née Martínez), was born in Chicago to a mixed-race family of Louisiana Creole descent, having relocated from the 7th Ward of New Orleans. She earned a Bachelor's Degree in Library Science from DePaul University in 1947 and pursued a career as an educator and librarian. His father, Louis Marius Prevost, was also a native of Chicago, raised in the Hyde Park neighborhood. He had Italian roots, originally bearing the surname Riggitano, and French ancestry. He served as a United States Navy veteran during World War II, where he initially commanded an infantry landing craft during the Normandy landings and subsequently took part in Operation Dragoon in southern France. Later, he became the superintendent of the Brookwood School District 167 in Glenwood, Illinois². Prevost is the youngest of three siblings, with two older brothers named Louis Martín and John Joseph.

His Education

Known to his family as 'Rob' and to his friends as 'Bob' in adulthood, Prevost was brought up in Dolton, Illinois. He was raised in the parish of St. Mary of the Assumption in the nearby town of Riverdale, where he attended school, participated in the choir, and served as an altar boy. From an early age, Prevost aspired to become a priest, often reenacting the Mass at home with his brothers. Between 1969 and 1973, he was a student at St. Augustine Seminary High School, a minor seminary located near Saugatuck, Michigan. During his time at the Augustinian seminary, he received a

¹ Lauren Fitzpatrick, From the south suburbs to helping choose the next pope. 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20250508173008/https://chicago.suntimes.com/religion/2025/05/03/robert-prevost-pope-francis-conclave-catholic-church-dolton-saint-mary-assumption-parish>

²David Vergun, Pope Leo XIV's Father, Served in the Navy During World War II. 2025. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4180629/pope-leo-xivs-father-served-in-the-navy-during-world-war-ii>

letter of commendation for his academic achievements, consistently made the honor roll, served as the editor-in-chief of the yearbook, and held the position of secretary of the student council while also being a member of the National Honor Society. He engaged in speech and debate, competing in Congressional Debate. While many of his classmates pursued paths outside of the priesthood, Prevost was among only 13 students in his class to graduate from a cohort of several dozen.

In 1973, Prevost intended to enroll at Tolentine College, an Augustinian seminary located in Olympia Fields, Illinois, but it ceased operations that same year. He subsequently registered at Villanova University, an Augustinian institution near Philadelphia, where he obtained a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in mathematics in 1977. While at Villanova, he pursued elective courses in Hebrew and Latin, which were considered atypical given that he was not majoring in theology. He engaged with the writings of Saint Augustine and participated in discussions regarding the works of Karl Rahner with fellow aspirants. Additionally, Prevost worked as a cemetery groundskeeper at Saint Denis Roman Catholic Church in Havertown, Pennsylvania, during his time at Villanova³. He later returned to his father's hometown of Hyde Park to earn a Master of Divinity (MDiv) from Catholic Theological Union in 1982, while also teaching physics and mathematics at St. Rita of Cascia High School in Chicago. In 1984, he received a Licentiate of Canon Law (JCL), followed by a Doctor of Canon Law (JCD) degree in 1987, both from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome. During this period, he resided in the house of the Order of St. Augustine for the first time and worked on improving his Italian language proficiency. His doctoral dissertation focused on the role of the Augustinian Local Prior⁴. In 2014, Villanova University conferred upon him an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree⁵.

Early Vocation

On September 1, 1977, Prevost entered the Order of Saint Augustine as a novice, spending one year at Immaculate Conception Church located in the Gate District of St. Louis, Missouri. In the summer of 1978, he engaged in a three-month Clinical

³ *Wilson, Shawnette* (May 8, 2025). "Pope Leo XIV previously worked as groundskeeper at cemetery in Havertown". <https://www.fox29.com/news/pope-leo-xiv-worked-groundskeeper-st-denis-parish-havertown>

⁴ *Graham, Ruth; Dias, Elizabeth; Horowitz, Jason* (May 22, 2025). "Pope Leo's Doctoral Dissertation: Thoughts on Power and Authority". *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/22/us/pope-leo-doctoral-dissertation.html>

⁵ *Mervosh, Sarah* (May 8, 2025). "The Pope Is a Graduate of Villanova, Where the Church Bells Won't Stop Ringing". *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/08/world/europe/villanova-pope-leo-xiv.html>

Pastoral Education program at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis. Subsequently, he relocated to Chicago, where he took his initial vows on September 2, 1978, and made his solemn vows on August 29, 1981. On September 10, 1981, Prevost was ordained a deacon by Thomas Gumbleton at St. Clare of Montefalco Parish in Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan. He was later ordained a priest in Rome at the Church of Santa Monica degli Agostiniani by Archbishop Jean Jadot on June 19, 1982⁶.

In 1985, Prevost became a member of the Augustinian mission in Peru, where he held the position of chancellor for the Territorial Prelature of Chulucanas from 1985 to 1986. Following the defense of his doctoral thesis in 1987, he took on the roles of vocation director and missions director for the Augustinian Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel in Olympia Fields, Illinois, while also collaborating with the faculty at the Augustinian Novitiate in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, before returning to Peru in 1988. During his time in Peru, Prevost developed a relationship with the Dominican priest and theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, a key figure in the establishment of liberation theology. He also became proficient in the Spanish language during this time. Prevost dedicated ten years to leading the Augustinian seminary in Trujillo, where he taught canon law at the diocesan seminary, served as prefect of studies, acted as a judge in the regional ecclesiastical court, and engaged in parish ministry in the outskirts of the city. He was instrumental in the Augustinians' initiatives to recruit Peruvian individuals for the priesthood and leadership roles within the order, and he organized assistance for Venezuelan refugees in Peru who were discriminated against⁷.

Prevost criticized the actions of President Alberto Fujimori, particularly highlighting the victims of the Peruvian Army, including the Colina Group, amid corruption and the terrorism crisis in Peru. His experiences in Peru provided him with firsthand insight into political violence and social inequality, prompting him to traverse challenging terrains on horseback to fulfill his missionary duties in the remote communities of the Lambayeque valleys. Additionally, he emerged as a staunch

⁶ Ruff, Joe (May 16, 2025). "As a seminarian, Pope Leo XIV lived 3 months in Minneapolis". The Catholic Spirit. <https://www.thecatholicspirit.com/featured/as-a-seminarian-pope-leo-xiv-lived-3-months-in-minneapolis>

⁷ Horowitz, Jason; Dias, Elizabeth; Bubola, Emma; Pérez-Peña, Richard (May 9, 2025). "Pope Leo XIV Echoes Francis in His First Mass, Aligning Himself With 'Ordinary People'". The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/09/world/europe/pope-leo-mass-catholic-church.html>

advocate for the human rights of the Norte Chico region's population against the violence perpetrated by the Shining Path guerrilla organization⁸.

In 1998, Prevost was elected Prior Provincial of the Order of St. Augustine, Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel, Chicago. He officially took on this role on March 8, 1999. Prevost was elected the Prior General of the Order of Saint Augustine in 2001, serving two consecutive six-year terms until 2013⁹. Throughout his leadership of the Augustinian Order, Prevost resided and worked in Rome while frequently traveling globally. It was during this period, in 2004, that he first met Cardinal Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Buenos Aires. From 2013 to 2014, Prevost held the position of Director of Formation at the Convent of St. Augustine in Chicago, in addition to serving as the First Councilor and Provincial Vicar of the Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel.

Episcopacy

On November 3, 2014, Pope Francis designated Prevost as the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Chiclayo in northern Peru and appointed him as the titular bishop of Sufar. He was consecrated on December 12, 2014, at St. Mary's Cathedral in Chiclayo by Archbishop James Green, the Apostolic Nuncio to Peru. Subsequently, on September 26, 2015, he was appointed Bishop of Chiclayo. Given that most of Prevost's previous ministry in Peru took place in the cities of Trujillo and Chulcanas, he was not well-known among the clergy and laity of this new diocese¹⁰. However, the priests of Chiclayo with whom Prevost collaborated noted that his proficiency in Spanish surpassed that of American priests who had previously served in the area¹¹.

On July 13, 2019, Prevost was appointed a member of the Congregation for the Clergy, and on April 15, 2020, he took on the role of Apostolic Administrator of Callao. On November 21, 2020, he became a member of the Congregation for Bishops. Within the Episcopal Conference of Peru, he was part of the permanent

⁸ Horowitz, Jason; Dias, Elizabeth; Bubola, Emma; Pérez-Peña, Richard (May 9, 2025). "Pope Leo XIV Echoes Francis in His First Mass, Aligning Himself With 'Ordinary People'". The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/09/world/europe/pope-leo-mass-catholic-church.html>

⁹ CAN, Augustinians re-elect current Prior General at Chapter meeting. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/10353/augustinians-re-elect-current-prior-general-at-chapter-meeting>

¹⁰ Beltrán, Edgar (May 20, 2025). "'Great charity and great clarity' - How Pope Leo is remembered in Chiclayo". <https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/great-charity-and-great-clarity-how>

¹¹ Olmo, Guillermo D. (May 8, 2025). "'Mi querida Diócesis de Chiclayo': la estrecha relación con Perú del nuevo papa León XIV". <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/czdyvp1j86go.amp>

council from 2018 to 2020 and was elected president of its Commission for Education and Culture in 2019, also contributing to Caritas Peru. During his tenure as bishop, he established a diocesan Commission on Integral Ecology and appointed a woman to lead it¹².

On January 30, 2023, Francis appointed Prevost the prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, granting him the title of Archbishop-Bishop emeritus of Chiclayo. Although Prevost preferred to remain in Peru, he accepted the appointment to relocate to Rome. On September 30, 2023, Francis elevated Prevost to the rank of Cardinal-Deacon, assigning him the deaconry of Santa Monica degli Agostiniani. In his capacity as prefect, he played a pivotal role in assessing and recommending episcopal candidates globally¹³. In October 2023, Francis appointed him a member of seven additional dicasteries and included him in the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State. On February 6, 2025, Francis further promoted Prevost to cardinal-bishop, designating him as the Titular Bishop of the Suburbicarian Diocese of Albano¹⁴.

Emergence as Pope

He was elected pope on May 8, 2025, during the second day of the conclave, after four voting rounds. The appearance of white smoke from the Sistine Chapel at 18:07 CEST (UTC+2) indicated to the public that a new pope had been selected. Following his election and the adoption of his papal name, Leo XIV warmly greeted his fellow cardinals as he left the Sistine Chapel. Cardinal Dominique Mamberti, the Cardinal Protodeacon, delivered the customary Latin announcement, *Habemus Papam*, introducing Pope Leo XIV to the public for the first time from the central loggia of St. Peter's Basilica. According to Italian law enforcement, there were approximately 150,000 people present in the square at the time of the *Habemus Papam* announcement, just before Pope Leo XIV made his appearance.

Pope Leo XIV made his appearance adorned in the traditional papal stole and mozzetta, which were not worn by Pope Francis during his initial greeting to the world after his election. He subsequently delivered his inaugural address in both Italian and Spanish, expressing his gratitude for the legacy left by Pope Francis, and bestowed his

¹² Deliso, Meredith; Forrester, Megan (May 8, 2025). "What we know about Leo XIV, the new American pope". <https://abcnews.go.com/International/new-american-pope-leo-xiv-robert-prevost/story?id=121604332>

¹³ Rich, Motoko (May 2, 2025). "There's Never Been a Pope from the U.S. Could This Cardinal Change That?". The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/02/world/americas/pope-candidate-cardinal-robert-francis-prevost.html>

¹⁴ Kirby, Paul; Wells, Ione (May 9, 2025). "Who is Robert Prevost, the new Pope Leo XIV?". BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0ln80lzk7ko>

first Urbi et Orbi blessing in Latin¹⁵. He is the second native English speaker to assume the papacy, following Adrian IV. Furthermore, Leo XIV is the first pope born after World War II and during the Cold War. While he is the first pope from the Order of Saint Augustine, six previous popes have belonged to other orders that adhere to the Augustinian Rule¹⁶.

On May 9, the day following his election, Pope Leo celebrated his inaugural Mass in the Sistine Chapel in the presence of the College of Cardinals. During this Mass, he delivered a sermon addressing the prevailing lack of faith in the world and envisioned a church that would serve as a beacon illuminating the nights of this world¹⁷. On May 14, Leo appointed Miguel Ángel Contreras Llajaruna as the Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Callao in Peru, marking his first major appointment. His Inauguration Mass took place on May 18 in St. Peter's Square, during which he received the pallium and the Ring of the Fisherman, in the presence of twelve representatives of the faithful, including cardinals and bishops, who pledged their obedience to the new pope.

Prevost adopted his regnal name in tribute to Pope Leo XIII (reigned 1878–1903), whose encyclical *Rerum Novarum* laid the foundation for contemporary Catholic social doctrine and advocated for labor rights¹⁸. Matteo Bruni, the director of the Holy See Press Office, remarked that this selection is a reference to the lives of men and women, to their work, even in an age marked by artificial intelligence¹⁹. Pope Leo XIV drew inspiration from the teachings of his namesake regarding economic justice during a period of significant technological transformation. Leo XIII integrated Catholic principles into the context of the Industrial Revolution through a pivotal encyclical known as *Rerum Novarum*, which established the foundation for contemporary Catholic economics. He strongly believes that in the present era that

¹⁵ *Stuart, Riley* (May 8, 2025). "In 10 minutes, Pope Leo XIV told us a lot about himself, and his agenda". *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-09/pope-leo-told-us-a-lot-about-himself-in-his-first-speech/105272036>

¹⁶ *Wooden, Cindy* (May 8, 2025). "Breaking: Chicago native Cardinal Prevost elected pope, takes name Leo XIV". <https://www.detroitcatholic.com/news/breaking-chicago-native-cardinal-prevost-elected-pope-takes-name-leo-xiv>

¹⁷ Deborah Castellano Lubov. 9th May 2025. Pope Leo XIV to Cardinals: 'We are to bear witness to our joyful faith in Christ'. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-xiv-homily-faith-college-cardinals-sistine-chapel.html>

¹⁸ *Merlo, Francesca* (May 8, 2025). "Matteo Bruni: Pope Leo XIV's name choice highlights the Church's mission". <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-05/matteo-bruni-holy-see-press-office-conference-leo-xiv-pope-elect.html>

¹⁹ Jason HorowitzMotoko Rich and Elizabeth Dias. 8th May 2025. Robert Francis Prevost, Now Leo XIV, Is First American Pope. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2025/05/08/world/pope-conclave-news>

the Church provides everyone with the wealth of her social doctrine in response to yet another industrial revolution and advancements in artificial intelligence that present new challenges for upholding human dignity, justice, and labor²⁰. In a May 2023 interview, Prevost emphasized the importance of exercising prudence and responsibility in the use of social media to avoid fueling divisions and controversy and to prevent damage to the communion of the Church. This perspective aligns with his inclination to communicate with caution and great deliberation and steely determination, and clarity.

While serving in Peru, Prevost was noted for his impeccable attire during Mass, donning full vestments even in the sweltering summer heat of Chiclayo, where temperatures exceeded 85 degrees. In August 2024, during a speech at a parish in the Chicago area, Prevost emphasized that liturgy must be beautiful to aid and fortify our faith. After he was elected pope, he appeared adorned in the traditional red papal stole and mozzetta, garments that had not been donned by Pope Francis, along with a pectoral cross featuring a relic of Augustinian saints such as Augustine of Hippo, Monica, and Thomas of Villanova. In his Inaugural Mass at the Sistine Chapel as pope, he opted for a papal ferula, or ceremonial staff, originally crafted for Benedict XVI and rarely utilized by Francis. During his Inauguration Mass in St. Peter's Square on May 18, 2025, Leo XIV employed the ferula of Pope John Paul II.

Ideologically, Prevost is regarded as a centrist figure, neither aligning with liberal nor conservative ideologies. In April 2025, the Italian publication *La Repubblica* characterized Prevost as a 'cosmopolitan and reserved individual' who garnered respect from both conservative and progressive factions within the church. Consistent with the church's established doctrines, Prevost is opposed to abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and the death penalty. In May 2025, he remarked that it is the responsibility of governments to foster peaceful societies, 'primarily by investing in the family, based on the stable union between a man and a woman.'²¹

In addition to being fluent in English, Leo is proficient in Spanish, Italian, French, and Portuguese, and has a basic understanding of German²². He is also capable of reading Latin. While in Peru, he acquired some knowledge of the Quechuan language.

²⁰ Nathan Schneider. 2025 19th-century Catholic teachings, 21st-century tech: How concerns about AI guided Pope Leo's choice of name. <https://theconversation.com/19th-century-catholic-teachings-21st-century-tech-how-concerns-about-ai-guided-pope-leos-choice-of-name-256645>

²¹ Kaur, *Anumita* (May 8, 2025). "What we know about Pope Leo XIV's political and social views". The Washington Post. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Washington_Post

²² "Der neue Papst spricht Deutsch – was über Leo XIV. bekannt ist" [*The new pope speaks German – everything that is known about Leo XIV*]. Die Welt (in German). May 9, 2025.

He often engages in Wordle and Words with Friends games with his siblings. Leo has been a devoted supporter of the Chicago White Sox in Major League Baseball and attended Game 1 of the 2005 World Series at US Cellular Field, now known as Rate Field, in Chicago²³. His allegiance to Chicago sports includes the Chicago Bears of the National Football League; JD Vance gifted him a personalized Bears jersey after his papal inauguration, which Leo XIV acknowledged as a 'good choice.'²⁴ He is also an advocate for Villanova University athletics, particularly the Villanova Wildcats men's basketball team. As a youth, he took pleasure in recreational driving and has consistently favored long-distance road trips over flying for journeys that many would typically choose to fly, such as from Philadelphia to Chicago, Brisbane to Sydney, and Chiclayo to Lima²⁵.

The historical developments in the life of Pope Leo XIV reveal the key themes and initiatives that are likely to mark his papacy. Pope Leo XIV has emphasized the importance of unity and peace in his papacy, suggesting a more inclusive approach to church leadership. He has highlighted the need for social justice, which may lead to increased efforts to address issues like poverty, inequality, and human rights. Building on the approach of his predecessor, Pope Francis, Pope Leo XIV is likely to maintain a consultation-focused approach, engaging with laity and clergy alike in discussions shaping church policies. In his first official meeting with the College of Cardinals, he discussed the challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence, indicating that this will be an area of focus for his papacy. The Pope's actions, such as boarding a public bus with Vatican gardeners instead of using the traditional papal vehicle, suggest a commitment to humility and accessibility. With his experience serving in Peru and being a dual citizen of Peru and the United States, Pope Leo XIV brings a global perspective to the papacy, which may influence his approach to international relations and global issues.

²³ Meyer, Holly (May 9, 2025). "Wordle, White Sox and more: Fast facts about Pope Leo XIV". Associated Press News. <https://apnews.com/article/vatican-new-pope-leo-xiv-facts-chicago-peru-fe9e955bfc5c683311575b1b3cf079f5>

²⁴ Finley, Patrick; Esposito, Stefano (May 19, 2025). "'Good choice' — JD Vance brings Pope Leo XIV a Bears jersey". Chicago Sun-Times. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Sun-Times

²⁵ Cwik, Chris (May 8, 2025). "Inside Pope Leo XIV's surprising sports fandom: What we know about new pope's support of Villanova basketball, Chicago White Sox". <https://sports.yahoo.com/article/inside-pope-leo-xivs-surprising-sports-fandom-what-we-know-about-new-popes-support-of-villanova-basketball-chicago-white-sox-195819199.html> ; Waldstein, David (May 10, 2025). "A Pope Who Ministers to the Suffering? Yup, He's a White Sox Fan". The New York Times. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_York_Times

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Pope Leo XIV: Intersection of Pontifical Name and Vision

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, OSA



Introduction

Among the African people, a name can have a profound impact on an individual's identity, relationships, and even their self-perception and perception of others. Names are more than just labels; they are often deeply rooted in worldview, culture, history, sense of the future, and personal meaning, and can evoke strong emotions and associations. This is why the choice of a name by a pope has implications not only for himself but also for the entire church, and therefore, significant for reflection. A cursory glance at the history of papal names reveals that there are five most popular names: John, Gregory, Benedict, Clement, and Leo.

Upon his election as Pope, Robert Cardinal Prevost adopted the pontifical name Leo XIV, a title rich in centuries of religious heritage, thus becoming the 14th pope of the Roman Catholic Church to bear the name Leo after Pope Leo I, who had the nickname Leo the Great (440-461), Pope Leo II (682-683), Pope Leo III (795-816), Pope Leo IV (847-855), Pope Leo V (903), Pope Leo VI (928-939), Pope Leo VII (936-939), Pope Leo VIII (964-965), Pope Leo IX (1049-1054), Pope Leo XI (1605), Pope Leo XII (1823-1829), Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903). Notably, out of the thirteen popes who bore the name Leo, five were canonized saints (Leo I, Leo II, Leo III, Leo IV, and Leo IX), underscoring the significant roles of the Leonine popes in the history of the Church.

The choice of the name Leo XIV holds something significant about his vision and philosophy for the papacy. The question looming on the horizon is: What are the possible visions and philosophies articulated in the name of Pope Leo XIV? This work, therefore, will focus on the understanding of the pontifical name. An effort will be made to study the spirit that underlies the pontificates of the popes that have borne the name Leo and what the name symbolizes. The relationship between Pope Leo XIII, the immediate successor of Pope Leo XIV, with the Order of Saint Augustine will also be discussed. A connection will be established between the contexts of the

pontificates of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Leo XIV, which will provide further insights into his choice and value of the name.

The name “Pope Leo XIV” and what it symbolizes

Pope Leo XIV is not only a name. It is a symbol that represents continuity, balance, strength, leadership, the socio-political sphere, and affinity with the Order of Saint Augustine.

1. Continuity

The name Leo, before the emergence of Leo XIV, has been used by thirteen popes in the history of the Church, each leaving a distinct legacy behind. The first Pope to bear the name is Pope Leo I. He is recognized as one of the initial three popes in history to receive the title “the Great”, that is, alongside Saint Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), and Saint Pope Nicholas the Great (858-867). He ascended to the papacy on September 29, A.D. 440, during a pivotal period for the Church. As Catholicism expanded and doctrinal issues were debated, new ideas and inquiries regarding specifics emerged rapidly, resulting in the emergence of heretical factions. Pope Leo I promptly endeavored to eradicate these heretics and corresponded with bishops throughout the Roman Empire to stress the importance of unity¹.

Pope Leo I also presided over the Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in A.D. 451, where the Roman Catholic Church affirmed the dual nature of Christ as both divine and human. In addition to his contributions to the establishment of church doctrine, Pope Leo I confronted Attila the Hun in A.D. 452 and emerged victorious. Attila had invaded Italy with his coalition of Goths, Huns, and others, intent on conquering and plundering Europe. However, medieval accounts indicate that he spared Rome after Leo made a direct appeal to him. Furthermore, Pope Leo I holds the rare honor of being designated a Doctor of the Church posthumously in A.D. 461, a title reserved for saints whose writings possess significant authority within the Church².

After Pope Leo I came Pope Leo II. He is known for his holiness of life and role in consolidating the decrees of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, which condemned Monothelitism, a heresy denying the full humanity of Christ. Pope Leo III was yet another pontiff who presided over a pivotal period in Roman Catholicism. Elected in A.D. 795, he was the pope responsible for crowning Charlemagne as the first Holy

¹ Melissa Sartore. May 16th, 2025. *Why did the Pope pick Leo? Here's why the name is so important in the Catholic Church*. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/pope-name-pontiff-leo-meaning>

² Melissa Sartore. May 16th, 2025. *Why did the Pope pick Leo? Here's why the name is so important in the Catholic*

Roman emperor. Charlemagne played a significant role in disseminating Christianity throughout pagan territories. Pope Leo III's choice to designate the emperor as the head of the Church reinforced the bond between the papacy and the Frankish leaders, who would safeguard the Catholic Church from threats to its lands and rights³.

Leo IV (847-855) served as Pope during a period when Rome faced threats from the Saracens. In 846, a Muslim fleet attacked the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul outside the walls. It was Pope Leo IV who constructed fortifications, which remain visible today. He envisioned a united Christianity standing against external threats and achieved victory at the naval Battle of Ostia in 849⁴. Leo V (903) was ousted after one month of his papacy, having been imprisoned by his successor, Christopher, who was an antipope. Leo VI (928) and Leo VII (936-939) carried out their duties under the influence of powerful Roman families, such as the Theophylacts, who manipulated papal elections to serve their interests. Leo VIII (963-965) was elected with the backing of Emperor Otto I, but he was later deposed and subsequently restored amid a backdrop of rivalry between Rome and the Empire⁵.

Approximately 300 centuries later, Pope Leo IX, born Bruno of Egisheim, ascended as the leader of the Catholic Church and the ruler of the Papal States, which encompassed the area in and around Rome, in A.D. 1049. During this period, the relationship between Rome and Constantinople was fraught with tension. Following Emperor Constantine's decision to transfer the authority of the Roman Empire to Constantinople in A.D. 330, the city gained significant power and prominence over the ensuing centuries, ultimately earning the title of "New Rome". The Patriarch of Constantinople regarded himself as equal to the Bishop of Rome, leading to disputes regarding the true basis of primacy within Catholicism⁶. Catholics from both sides of the Mediterranean adopted differing practices, and numerous doctrinal issues between the two traditions remained unresolved. Cultural disparities further intensified the conflict, particularly in language, as the West continued to uphold the Latin Mass while the East embraced Greek⁷.

³ Melissa Sartore. May 16th, 2025. *Why did the Pope pick Leo? Here's why the name is so important in the Catholic*

⁴ FSSPX News. May 11 2025. *Leo XIV: The Symbolic Significance of His Name.*

<https://fsspx.news/en/news/leo-xiv-symbolic-significance-his-name-52394#:~:text=A%20first%20name%20that%20comes%20from%20the,symbol%20of%20strength%2C%20courage%2C%20and%20spiritual%20authority.&text=By%20affirming%20the%20dual%20nature%20of%20Christ%E2%80%94divine,orthodoxy%20that%20guided%20the%20Church%20for%20centuries.>

⁵ FSSPX News. May 11 2025. *Leo XIV: The Symbolic Significance of His Name*

⁶ Melissa Sartore. May 16th, 2025. *Why did the Pope pick Leo? Here's why the name is so important in the Catholic*

⁷ Melissa Sartore. May 16th, 2025. *Why did the Pope pick Leo? Here's why the name is so important in the Catholic*

The situation escalated when Constantinople closed all its Latin churches. In retaliation, Pope Leo IX dispatched a delegation led by Hubert of Silva Candida to Constantinople, ostensibly to resolve the disagreement with Patriarch Michael Cerularius. However, Hubert instead placed an excommunication bull for the patriarch on the altar of Hagia Sophia on July 16, 1054 A.D. Although Pope Leo IX had passed away by the time of the excommunication, it was not unknown to him⁸. Consequently, the Roman Catholic Church based in Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church centered in Constantinople evolved into two distinct entities following this Great Schism.

After Pope Leo IX was Pope Leo X, born Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici. He also encountered a divisive period within the Christian world. He occupied the papal see from 1475 to 1521 A.D. In the final year of his pontificate, Pope Leo X excommunicated Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation, which ultimately caused a further fragmentation of the faith. Following Luther's refusal to retract his assertions at the Diet of Worms, Pope Leo X was compelled to issue a bull of excommunication against him and his followers⁹.

Leo XI's papacy lasted a mere 27 days in 1605, marking it as one of the briefest in history. Although short-lived, his election was perceived as a beacon of reform for a Church grappling with the difficulties posed by the Counter-Reformation¹⁰. Pope Leo XII governed during a time when Europe was tumultuously affected by revolutions and the rise of secularism. He aimed to reestablish the Church's authority within the Papal States while opposing liberal ideologies¹¹.

Pope Leo XIII, who presided over the Holy See from 1878 to 1903, is regarded as one of the most influential individuals to have held the papal office. He was an intellectual who recognized the importance of science, modern concepts, and open-mindedness. Throughout much of his papacy, he championed the rights of workers, advocating for fair wages, equitable working conditions, and the right to form and join unions¹².

The emergence of Robert Cardinal Prevost as pope, and his choice of the papal name Pope Leo XIV, speaks of his disposition to continue with the vision of his predecessors, with their emphasis and commitment towards unity, bridge-building,

⁸ Melissa Sartore. May 16th, 2025. *Why did the Pope pick Leo? Here's why the name is so important in the Catholic*

⁹ Melissa Sartore. May 16th, 2025. *Why did the Pope pick Leo? Here's why the name is so important in the Catholic*

¹⁰ FSSPX News. May 11 2025. *Leo XIV: The Symbolic Significance of His Name*

¹¹ FSSPX News. May 11 2025. *Leo XIV: The Symbolic Significance of His Name*

¹² Melissa Sartore. May 16th, 2025. *Why did the Pope pick Leo? Here's why the name is so important in the Catholic*

and the protection of human dignity and rights. Addressing the College of Cardinals on 10th May 2025, he expressed this disposition: “Sensing myself called to continue in this same path, I chose to take the name Leo XIV”¹³. In his addresses at different occasions, he made several references to Pope Francis, his predecessor, on the need for the Church to be synodal, which calls for a church that listens and learns from each other; a church that seeks communion, participation, and mission¹⁴. He also expressed the importance of being “open to all, to all who need our charity, our presence, dialogue, and love.”¹⁵ His choice of words reveals his commitment to the Leonine spirit: *“Therefore, without fear, united, hand in hand with God and with one another, let us move forward.”*¹⁶ *“Humanity needs Him as a bridge to be reached by God and His love... help one another, to build bridges through dialogue, through encounter, uniting everyone to be one single people always in peace.”*¹⁷ *“I also wish to thank all the brother cardinals who have chosen me to be the successor of Peter and to walk with you as a united Church, always seeking peace, justice.”*¹⁸ *All this, underscoring the mission of the Church as a reconciliatory presence in a divided world, mirrors the pastoral priorities of his predecessors and namesakes*¹⁹.

2. Balance

The choice of the name Leo takes us back about a century, given that the last pope to take up the name died in 1903, that is, Pope Leo XIII. The idea of taking the Church back to about a century is not in a negative sense, given that the contemporary flavor of the Church is not lost. In this choice, Pope Leo XIV is striking a balance between those who want to carry on contemporary legacies and those who strongly believe in the traditional path. The Pope is, therefore, presenting himself as a balanced figure, which is the kind of figure that the church needs in our time. In his homily at his Inaugural Mass, he said:

¹³ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. Address of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV To The College Of Cardinals on Saturday, 10th May. Rome: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

¹⁴ Alex Groth & Maia Pandey. May 8th 2025. What the name Leo likely says about the pope's mission for his papacy and the Catholic Church. <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/2025/05/08/whats-the-significance-of-the-name-leo-and-its-tie-to-pope-francis/83517714007/>

¹⁵ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'.* <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/transcript-of-pope-leo-xivs-first-speech-after-election-peace-be-with-you/6256890>, p. 1

¹⁶ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*, p. 1

¹⁷ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*, p. 1

¹⁸ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*, p. 1

¹⁹ Daniel Esparza. 8th May 2025. *Pope Leo XIV: A name steeped in history and hope.* <https://aleteia.org/2025/05/08/pope-leo-xiv-a-name-steeped-in-history-and-hope>

In this spirit of faith, the College of Cardinals met for the conclave. Coming from different backgrounds and experiences, we placed in God's hands our desire to elect the new Successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome, a shepherd capable of preserving the rich heritage of the Christian faith and, at the same time, looking to the future, in order to confront the questions, concerns and challenges of today's world²⁰.

During the election, the College of Cardinals was in search of a pope who is “capable of preserving the rich heritage of the Christian faith”²¹, however, “at the same time, looking to the future, to confront the questions, concerns, and challenges of today's world”²². The election of Pope Leo XIV presents him as a pope who will truly be the successor of Saint Peter, with the job description of maintaining the unity and catholicity of the Church. His balanced disposition was already evidenced in his ability to work with different theological factions while he was a missionary in Peru.

3. Strength and Leadership

The name Leo in Latin means ‘Lion’. Lion is often associated with strength, confidence, creativity, courage, leadership, and spiritual authority. The previous popes, as we have seen especially in Pope Leo 1 (Leo the Great), Pope Leo IX, Pope Leo X, and Pope Leo XIII, were known for their strength, courage, leadership, and ability in guiding the church through challenging times. They are known for promoting social justice and addressing the concerns of their times with courage and confidence. Thus, during his homily on 11th May 2025 in the Crypt of Saint Peter’s Basilica, Pope Leo XIV encouraged the people to take courage, given that it is the only way to carry out the mission entrusted to us by God: “Take courage! Without fear! Many times in the Gospel, Jesus says: “Do not be afraid”. We need to be courageous in the witness we give, with the world and above all with life: giving life, serving, sometimes with great sacrifices to live out this very mission.”²³

Pope Leo XIV, in his capacity as Bishop Prevost, exhibited remarkable courage and leadership during his tenure as Bishop in Peru, where he openly criticized the actions of President Alberto Fujimori. He particularly courageously emphasized the plight of the victims of the Peruvian Army, including those affected by the Colina Group,

²⁰ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*. Vatican City, Rome, p. 2

²¹ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 2

²² Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 2

²³ Pope Leo XIII. 1981. *Homily of the Holy Father in the crypt of Saint Peter's Basilica*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

amidst a backdrop of corruption and a terrorism crisis in the country²⁴. His experiences in Peru granted him direct insight into the realities of political violence and social inequality, which compelled him to courageously navigate difficult terrains on horseback to carry out his missionary responsibilities in the isolated communities of the Lambayeque valleys. Furthermore, he became a vigorous advocate for the human rights of the people in the Norte Chico region²⁵, standing against the violence inflicted by the Shining Path guerrilla organization, thus showing admirable leadership.

Saint Augustine articulated that: “Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain as they are.” In this context, anger emerges from the belief that circumstances should not be as they currently are. Consequently, Anger serves as a fitting reaction to situations that are unjust in our society. This may pertain to issues such as corruption, injustice, violations of human rights, exploitation of the vulnerable and defenseless, as well as the degradation of the earth and its resources, among others. However, hope transcends mere anger, leading to a proactive response: the aspiration and motivation to effect change. This motivation is referred to as courage, which signifies “heart” or “heart-strength”. This principle lies at the core of the achievements of Pope Leo XIV.

4. Commitment to Social Questions

The choice of the name Pope Leo XIV is a direct reference to Pope Leo XIII, who played a pivotal role in shaping Catholic Social Teaching, particularly with his groundbreaking 1891 Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*,²⁶ which is the foundation for *Quadragesimo Anno*²⁷, and *Laborem Exercens*²⁸. It signifies a connection and continuity between the legacies of the two Roman Pontiffs. *Rerum Novarum* focused on the rights and dignity of workers during the period of industrialization, promoting a living wage,

²⁴ Horowitz, Jason; Dias, Elizabeth; Bubola, Emma; Pérez-Peña, Richard (May 9, 2025). "Pope Leo XIV Echoes Francis in His First Mass, Aligning Himself With 'Ordinary People'". The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/09/world/europe/pope-leo-mass-catholic-church.html>

²⁵ Horowitz, Jason; Dias, Elizabeth; Bubola, Emma; Pérez-Peña, Richard (May 9, 2025). "Pope Leo XIV Echoes Francis in His First Mass, Aligning Himself With 'Ordinary People'"

²⁶ Pope Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1-10

²⁷ Pope Pius XI. 1931. *Quadragesimo Anno*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1-20

²⁸ Pope John Paul II. 1981. *Laborem Exercens*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1-15

safe working environments, reasonable working hours, and the right to organize into labor unions.

This advocacy was essential as the Industrial Revolution had a profound effect on the dignity of workers, frequently compromising it due to severe working conditions and exploitation. While Pope Leo XIII addressed the issues faced by workers arising from the Industrial Revolution, Pope Leo XIV drew inspiration from Pope Leo XIII's approach, thus adopting the name Leo XIV, which signifies his commitment to addressing the ethical issues arising from the current Digital Revolution, particularly concerning artificial intelligence.

During his address to the College of Cardinals, Pope Leo XIV made a brief reference to the reason for his choice of the name Leo. He said:

There are different reasons for this, but mainly because Pope Leo XIII, in his historic Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution. In our day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice, and labour²⁹.

The choice of the name Leo, therefore, emphasizes the importance of the Church's responsibility in advocating for peace and justice, and thus, the ongoing relevance of *Rerum Novarum* in addressing contemporary challenges, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the rise of artificial intelligence.

5. Affinity with the Augustinian Order

Pope Leo XIII held a profound admiration and respect for Saint Augustine of Hippo. He greatly valued Augustine's teachings and spirituality, despite not being an Augustinian himself. During Leo XIII's pontificate, which lasted from 1878 to 1903, there was a notable focus on Augustinian theology and spirituality within the Church. This emphasis was reflected in his writings, actions, and the overall trajectory of his papacy.

His social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, can be interpreted as a manifestation of Augustinian social thought, which underscores the significance of charity, justice, and

²⁹ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. Address of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV To The College Of Cardinals on Saturday, 10th May. Rome: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

the common good. Although he did not directly cite St. Augustine in the encyclical, it is heavily influenced by his teachings and philosophical perspectives. The encyclical, particularly in its examination of the rights and responsibilities of capital and labor, addresses essential elements of Augustine's views on justice, social order, and the Church's role³⁰. Augustine highlighted the necessity of the common good and the requirement for social structures to promote the welfare of all societal members. *Rerum Novarum* resonates with this by advocating for a social framework that fosters equity and safeguards the rights of both employers and employees³¹. Augustine maintained that while charity is vital, it cannot replace justice. *Rerum Novarum* similarly contends that there must be a balance between charitable initiatives and the creation of just institutions and laws that guarantee fairness and avert exploitation³².

Augustine examined the connection between free will and divine grace, contending that while humans bear responsibility for their actions, they also require God's grace to lead a virtuous life. *Rerum Novarum* recognizes human freedom, yet it also highlights the necessity of moral limitations and social obligations³³. Augustine regarded the family as the fundamental unit of society, stressing the significance of robust family connections. Similarly, *Rerum Novarum* emphasizes the importance of family life and community in nurturing social harmony and stability³⁴. Augustine imagined the "City of God" as a paradigm for a just and orderly society, rooted in Christian values. *Rerum Novarum* builds upon this vision, promoting a social structure that embodies Christian principles and enhances the welfare of all³⁵.

Leo XIII was also recognized for his profound devotion to the Virgin Mary, especially under the designation of Our Mother of Good Counsel, a title linked to Saint Augustine. He demonstrated a strong affiliation with the Augustinian Order through various actions, including the restoration of the church in Pavia and the relocation of St. Augustine's remains to that site. Leo XIII's motto and coat of arms also honored St. Augustine. He played a crucial role in the canonization of two saints from the Augustinian Order: Clare of Montefalco and Rita of Cascia. Additionally, Pope Leo

³⁰ Pope Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum* (Encyclical on Capital and Labour). Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1-63

³¹ Pope Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum*, 1-63

³² Pope Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum*, 1-63

³³ Pope Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum*, 1-63

³⁴ Pope Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum*, 1-63

³⁵ Pope Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum*, 1-63

XIII sanctioned the purchase of the land directly adjacent to Saint Peter's Square for the Augustinian General Curia and the International House of Studies³⁶.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the profound theological, historical, and socio-political values in the name of Pope Leo XIV, especially concerning what it symbolizes within the context of continuity, balance, strength, leadership, the socio-political sphere, and affinity with the Order of Saint Augustine. It highlights the concern of the Vicar of Christ for the world's cultural shifts and the challenges posed by artificial intelligence and robotics. It also emphasizes his focus on ecumenism with other Christian denominations and synodality within the Catholic Church. He has expressed his commitment to continuing the path traced by the Second Vatican Council. Inheriting a church and a world that is beset with various challenges, he will be drawing inspiration from the legacy of the Leos in order to navigate the complexities of the present time. Pope Leo XIV's papacy marks a significant milestone in the Catholic Church's history, with his unique background and experiences shaping his approach to various issues. The name Leo offers a foundation and a beacon in Pope Leo XIV's mission as the Vicar of Christ.

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“I Am a Son of Saint Augustine”: Exploring the Augustinian Identity of Leo XIV

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Introduction

On Thursday, 8 May 2025, the Cardinal protodeacon, Dominique Mamberti, announced the name of the newly elected Roman pontiff, in Latin as usual. I was sure I heard the pope’s chosen name, *Leonem XIV*, but I did not catch the name of the Cardinal who had been elected Pope. This happened for two reasons. First, my Latin is quite bad, and I could not make out the sentences properly. Secondly, the Cardinal, now Pope-elect, was not one of the top candidates touted by the media days before the conclave. When I eventually found the name of the Pope-elect, Robert Francis Prevost, words could not describe how I felt. I recognized the name. I have seen his pictures. He has visited Nigeria on a few occasions. He is an Augustinian, like myself. An Augustinian, a Pope. The first in history.

If this was not enough, in his message that preceded his first *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, Leo XIV stated, “I am a son of Saint Augustine, an Augustinian, who said: With you I am a Christian and for you a Bishop”. This was a total presentation of his identity. This identification, as shall be made clear in this piece, is firmly rooted in the life and activities of Pope Leo XIV and the spirituality of the Order of Saint Augustine. His inspiration and formation are deeply influenced by the Saintly Bishop of Hippo, who lived between the 4th and 5th centuries of the common era.

This work seeks to analyse Pope Leo XIV’s statement of relationship to Saint Augustine. In order to do this, the work is structured into three segments. The first deals with the biographical information of Leo XIV. This serves as a portal that gives the reader an important perspective on his personal background and all the functions he carried out as an Augustinian. The second segment presents insights into the spirituality of the religious Order of Saint Augustine. It is a spirituality that is firmly rooted in interiority, community life, and service to the Church. We have decided to leave out the historical evolution of the Order of Saint Augustine to remain faithful to the aim of this piece. Finally, we deduce the implications of Leo XIV’s statement and its relevance to his exercise of the Petrine office and the Church today.

Biographic Context of Pope Leo XIV

To comprehend the statement of the Chicago-born Roman Pontiff, one must first reference some of his biographical details. The 267th Supreme Pontiff was born in 1955 to a Hispanic-French family¹. He began his academic formation at the Minor Seminary of the Augustinian Fathers and in 1977 earned a degree in Mathematics from Villanova University. In the same year, he was admitted into the novitiate of the Augustinians of the Province of Our Lady of Good Counsel of Chicago and professed his first vows in 1978. In 1982, he was ordained a priest at the Augustinian College of Saint Monica in Rome. In his educational curriculum, aside from the degree in Mathematics, he also holds a licentiate in theology and a doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Rome)².

As an Augustinian, he held various pastoral and administrative positions, notable among them are the office of Prior Provincial of the Augustinian Province of Mother of Good Counsel in Chicago (1999-2001) and, for more than a decade, the Prior General of the Order of Saint Augustine (2001-2013). In 2013, he returned to the Augustinian province of Chicago, but in 2014, Pope Francis appointed him as the Apostolic Administrator, and later in 2015, the Bishop of the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru. While in Peru, he was elected second vice-president of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference in 2018, and in 2020, he was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Callao, Peru. He was created a cardinal in the consistory of September 30, 2023³.

The instance of his statement after his election on the 8th of May, 2025, coincides perfectly with his own personal and biographic experience in such a way that we can posit that his life became intertwined with the Augustinian life and spirituality, a step that began definitively in 1977.

Being an Augustinian religious and undertaking certain tasks as a missionary in Peru, his pastoral experience in the Augustinian Province of Chicago, the Augustinian Curia in Rome, and his episcopal duties back in Peru, affords him the right to identify

¹ Cf. M. González Alonso, “Un pastor que ruge contra las injusticias desde San Pedro”, in: *Vida Nueva. León XIV: Reforma abierta*, 17-23/5/2025, 15.

² Cf. Vatican News, “Biography of Pope Leo XIV, born Robert Francis Prevost,” *Vatican News*, May 8, 2025, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/biography-of-robert-francis-prevost-pope-leo-xiv.html> accessed 27/05/2025; M. Becklo, “Pope Leo XIV: 'A Son of St. Augustine',” *National Catholic Register*, May 8, 2025 <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/pope-leo-xiv-a-son-of-st-augustine>, accessed May 27, 2025.

³ Cf. A. Pelayo, “León XIV: Un agustino misionero para apuntalar la reforma”, in: *Vida Nueva. León XIV: Reforma abierta*, 17-23/5/2025, 9-10.

himself as a son of Augustine. It is in this contextual framework that Leo XIV's statement must be understood – that till his election as Pope, he identified as an Augustinian and will continue to be an Augustinian.

Insights into the Augustinian Spirituality

The interest in analysing Leo XIV's Augustinian identity statement is also an opportunity to talk about the Augustinians and the spirituality they embody. It must be recalled that the need to succinctly and distinctively clarify a religious institute's spirituality came about at the instance of the Second Vatican Council.

It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore, let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them, as well as their sound traditions of which make up the patrimony of each institute-be faithfully held in honor⁴.

This desire to fulfil the mandate of the Second Vatican Council is manifested in the Constitutions of the Order of Saint Augustine. From this, it is necessary to state that the spirituality of the Order of St. Augustine has two sources. The first is the doctrinal and communitarian praxis that St. Augustine instilled in the monastic communities he founded, and secondly, is its mendicant experience through the canonical erection of the Order in the 13th century⁵.

For the discourse of the spirituality of the Augustinians to be fully comprehended, it is pertinent to draw our attention to the central objective which Augustine himself projected as the base for monastic life. This central objective is clearly outlined by Augustine: "First of all, since you have gathered together as a community for this purpose, live in the house in unity, and be of one mind and one heart, oriented towards God."⁶ This is coherent with everything Augustine thinks about God, and it is not different for him in the monastic community. Having this primary objective helps us to properly internalize the elements that characterise the Augustinian spirituality.

From this, we can highlight the important elements that make up the Augustinian spirituality, which are three: interiority, community life, and service to the Church.

⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965, n. 2, b.

⁵ Cf. M. Á. Orcasitas, "Con adn agustino", in: *Vida Nueva. León XIV: Reforma abierta*, 17-23/5/2025, 24-30.

⁶ San Agustín, *Regla a los siervos de Dios* I,2.

a. Interiority

This is one of the notable concepts which Augustine is associated with, to the extent that he is attributed to be the founder of the tradition of interiority, or looking inwards, in the West. This interiority, in Augustine's understanding, consists of three interrelated ideas: the inner self, turning inward, and outward signs as expressions of inner things⁷. The importance of this cannot be overstated for Augustine, and we can refer to various instances in his *corpus* where the intentionality of interiority is vividly present.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine heartily describes how futile his search for God was because he sought him in the wrong "place" and that his desires, at the time, were not aligned to God because he was far away from him and for this he bemoans, not just his lateness, but his deafness and blindness in his search for God:

Late have I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you!
And behold, you were within me and I was outside, and outside I sought you;
and deformed as I was, I threw myself upon the beauties of your creatures.
(*Conf.* X. 27, 38.)

The point here is that Augustine's recognition of God's presence had to do with interiority, with looking and listening inwardly. To find God, for Augustine, one must be able to make the inward journey⁸:

Do not seek to spill yourself outside; enter within yourself, for truth resides in the inner man; and if you find that your nature is changeable, transcend yourself, but do not forget that, as you rise above the peaks of your being, you rise above your soul, endowed with reason. Direct your steps, then, to where the light of reason shines (*De la verdadera religion*, XXXIX,72).

Various studies have been carried out on this particular Augustinian concept of interiority, and it must be stated that he was influenced by the works of Plotinus and the Neoplatonist tradition⁹ through which he understood the inward journey as a personal search that helps one in discovering their spirituality¹⁰.

⁷ Cf. P. Cary, "Interioridad", in: A. D. Fitzgerald (Dir.), *Diccionario de San Agustín. San Agustín a través del tiempo*, Burgos 2001, 739-741.

⁸ Cf. *Conf.* VII, 10, 16.

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cf. J. A. Berry, "What makes us human? Augustine on interiority, exteriority and the self", in: *Scientia et Fides* 5 (2017) 89.

The supreme desire for every human, for Augustine, is God. But God cannot be found in the externalities that surround us; rather, the search must begin from within, and here lies the importance of interiority.

Oh man, how long will you go round and round about creatures? Turn to yourself, look at yourself, contemplate yourself, examine yourself. You seek in the creature a set of three things that manifest themselves separately and work inseparably. If you seek it in a creature, seek it first in yourself. Are you not also a creature? (*Sermón* 52, 17).

In this search for God also lies the comprehension of the human person. In other words, interiority and its practice constitute the basis on which existential questions of human life can be answered. Berry believes that interiority is the fundamental principle on which Augustine founded his interest in searching for the credibility of his humanity before God and others¹¹. It is in the interior that God communicates with man, and this communication is geared toward the happiness of man, which can only be fully attained in God¹².

The act of interiority involves two movements: the first is the inward movement within man, and the second is the upward movement that connects to God. Berry explains these movements as having a hierarchical ontological dimension, whereas the inward movement tends to separate the soul from the external bodies that surround it, the upward movement, which is connected to God, signifies that God exists on a transcendental level that is superior to the soul.

As an important aspect on which the Augustinian spirituality is erected, interiority, therefore, does not just imply an act of introspection carried out in solitude. It is a process by which the human person gains knowledge of himself/herself and ultimately of God. The Augustinian interiority is a concept that underlines the fact that the human being is fundamentally always in the presence of God¹³, and that as a creature of God, the human person is a capable receptor of God's call, provided that there is an internal disposition to listen to the voice of God.

b. Community life

The emphasis of interiority in the Augustinian spirituality, as stated above, could be misinterpreted as an individualistic way of living out our identity and connection to

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 90.

¹² Cf. San Agustín, *Sermón* 53, 15; Curia General Agustiniana, "Constituciones de la Orden de San Agustín", n. 23.

¹³ Cf. A. G. Nino, *Ejercicios Espirituales con San Agustín*, Madrid 2016, 127.

God, but this is far from the Augustinian ideal. The practice of interiority begins with the individual, but its beauty lies in the communal sharing of the gifts each individual possesses. Here, then, we can talk about community life as one of the important aspects of the Augustinian spirituality.

The Constitution of the Order of Saint Augustine states that Augustine's preference for community life, as indicated by Possidius, came as a result of how the first Christian community in Jerusalem lived and carried out its activities (Acts 2:42-47)¹⁴. The community is an important reality in the Augustinian religious life, and this is evident because everything that pertains the life revolves around the community. This is its charism¹⁵. Augustine himself makes it clear that the reason for our gathering (or congregating) is to seek God, united with one heart and one mind¹⁶. This charism of community life is built upon the example of the life of the Trinity¹⁷ and its external display is crystallized in the sharing and communion of goods.

The desire to live in community was always present in Augustine even before his baptism. The intention, before his baptism, was to gather like-minded fellows who just wanted to separate themselves from the worries of the world and just live in the peace of their leisure. This did not see the light of day because of the wives of some and those who had plans to get married¹⁸.

It is interesting to read Pio de Luis' distinction of these terms - communion and community as they pertain to the Augustinian monastic life. He posits that while these terms are inseparable in the description of the Augustinian religious life and spirituality, they are quite different as to the concept each tends to portray. For the term "community", Pio avers that it describes the physical and sociological aspect that is enshrined in the common life of the monks, while "communion" refers to the religious-spiritual dimension. The use of the term community refers to the actual coming together to live in the same physical space and share in the common goods with each other. This is the external or physical manifestation of communion that is religious and spiritual, and is based on the "heart and mind intent upon God". Life in common (community) is the incarnation of communion¹⁹.

¹⁴ Cf. Posidio, *Vida de San Agustín*, 5,1.

¹⁵ Cf. Curia General Agustiniana, "Constituciones de la Orden de San Agustín", nn. 25-27.

¹⁶ Cf. San Agustín, *Regla a los siervos de Dios* I,2.

¹⁷ Cf. San Agustín, *Tratados sobre el Evangelio de San Juan* 14,9.

¹⁸ Cf. San Agustín, *Conf.* VI, 14, 24.

¹⁹ Cf. P. de Luis, Vizcaíno, *El monacato de San Agustín*, Madrid 2018, 224ff.

Augustine's desire for a communal way of life, as stated earlier, was inspired by the first Christian community in Jerusalem. The preference for this monastic structure lies in the Trinitarian reality of God. Augustine was not looking for a communion that was merely mental or based on physical interaction, and although he enjoyed it with the Manicheans²⁰, it lacked the theological foundation that would have made it true and sufficient²¹. The community life, which is the result of the union of the monks among themselves, is founded on the Trinitarian communion. This monastic union is the memory of the mystery of the Trinity,²² and it is channelled toward God²³.

The idea of community in the Augustinian spirituality, according to Theodore Tack, is a protest against indifference and inequality, vices that exist currently in our societies²⁴. But also, the Augustinian vision of community life is the guarantee of the dignity and distinctiveness of each individual, and not a practice of collectivism whereby the individual is just a part of the whole²⁵.

c. Service to the Church

The place and role of the Church in the spirituality of the Augustinian religious life can never be overstated. This follows from Augustine's love for the Church, one that requires our availability and generosity in helping out with her tasks²⁶. In the Constitutions of the Order of Saint Augustine, it is spelt out that the engagement and undertaking of apostolic activity has to come from the desire to transmit the ineffable riches of Christ's message, which the Friars experience and share in the community²⁷.

From Augustine's life, we know that his ordinations, first as a priest and later as a bishop, led him to change his desire to remain a contemplative, but his identity as a clergy did not stop him from being connected to the community. Augustine was able to combine his interest and his ecclesiastical responsibility without jeopardizing either. He did not choose between the community and the Church. We get the impression that he saw no need for this dichotomy, given that the Church is a larger expression of the monastic community²⁸. In his conversation with Leto, Augustine described the

²⁰ Cf. San Agustín, *Conf.* IV, 8, 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, *Conf.* IV, 4, 7.

²² Cf. P. de Luis, Vizcaino, *ibid.*, 229.

²³ Cf. A. Zumkeller, *Augustine's Ideal of the Religious Life*, New York 1986, 125.

²⁴ Cf. T. Tack, *Si Agustín viviera. El ideal religioso de san Agustín hoy*, Madrid 1990, 19.

²⁵ Cf. A. Zumkeller, *op.cit.*, 125.

²⁶ Cf. San Agustín, *Ciudad de Dios*, XIX,19.

²⁷ Cf. Curia General Agustiniana, "Constituciones de la Orden de San Agustín", nn. 35-39.

²⁸ Cf. C. W. Brockwell, "Augustine's ideal of Monastic Community: A paradigm for his doctrine of the Church", in: *Augustinian Studies* 8, (1977) 92; P. Grech, "The Augustinian community and the Primitive

Church as Mother, one to whom we owe allegiance and responsibility based on our relationship to her as children²⁹.

A global view of this pillar of the Augustinian religious life's spirituality, together with the other two: interiority and community life, provides us with a certain interwoven structure that makes it interesting. Recall that the primary objective of the Augustinian religious is the search for God, and this search begins with the inward journey to find God and find ourselves. But this journey is not merely an individualistic practice; rather, it is done in communion with others in the community where each person is united and animated by the love of God. The fruit and experience of this journey must have an outward manifestation, and this takes place through our apostolic tasks in the Church.

By this, it is only reasonable to be at the service of the Church, to assist in her missionary agenda, and contribute our strength and effort in bringing others into the ecclesial community, the body where Christ is the head.

Implications of Leo XIV's Statement

The exposition, albeit briefly, of the Augustinian religious life's spirituality was an attempt to give a concise base from which we can begin to comprehend the implications of Leo XIV's statement by reaffirming his Augustinian heritage. As a "Son", it is expected that he represents the "Father" in the exercise of his papal ministry. What then are the implications of his statement given the current situation in which the Church finds itself?

a. Defence/teaching of doctrinal orthodoxy

From his conversion and baptism into the Christian faith, Augustine devoted himself fully and sincerely to God, and this he practiced by searching tirelessly for the truth and defending it in his works and writings.

One of the most notable feats of St. Augustine in the history of the Church is his defiant contribution to the defence and catechesis of the Christian faith. We can refer to his famous apologetics writings that defend the Christian faith from being misinterpreted and his polemic writings against the heretical ideas of Priscillianism, Arianism, Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism that distorted the Christian faith. To a great extent, it could be stated that the comprehension of Augustine's

Church", in: *Augustiniana* 5, (1955) 459-470; L. M. J. Verheijen, *Saint Augustine's Monasticism in the Light of Acts 4:32-35*, Villanova, PA 1979, 65.

²⁹ Cf. San Agustín, *Carta* 243,8.

philosophical thought today has a lot to do with understanding his arguments in defence of the Christian faith. His titles as “Doctor of Grace”, “Vessel of divine wisdom”, “the Second Paul”, “the firmament of the Church”, and “Hammer of Heretics” depict the eulogies to the contribution and devotion of the Saintly Bishop of Hippo to the faith³⁰.

It is quite obvious that in his filial identification and relationship to St. Augustine, Leo XIV will walk the path of explaining, teaching, and defending the doctrines of the Catholic Church. It will be expected of him to be clear in his positions, interpretations, and commentaries. The need for theological and doctrinal clarity on matters that border on same sex unions, irregular marriages, the ordination of women, among others, will be crucial in defining the exercise of the Petrine office.

These moments, which call for deep reflection and discernment, point to the representation and image of the Church in our time. Any image of the Church that is adopted must be consistent with the revelation and identity of God. It is therefore fitting to suggest that Leo XIV’s papal agenda, echoing his self-identification as a son of Augustine, will, like Augustine, seek to direct our minds to God as the only true resting place for humanity. The Church will always have God as its ultimate goal, a truth that will continually be expressed through the faithful teaching and defense of its doctrines.

b. A Pastoral Pope

The bishop of Hippo reflected on Ezekiel 34:1-16 around 407-408. This sermon, titled *De pastoribus*, condenses Augustine’s idea of a pastor billed with the task of looking after the souls in his care. An important remark made by Augustine is that the pastor’s duty is fully expressed when the Lord’s flock is tended to properly. This is what makes a pastor good. A pastor who feeds himself instead of the sheep is a bad one³¹.

Augustine was not preaching and writing from a distant place; he was writing and counselling from his own experience as a pastor, and this he did with conviction, offering himself entirely for the growth of the spiritual life of the souls under his care. The Christological foundation of his pastoral ideas was never lacking, and he was intentional about his emphasis on Christ’s identity as the Good Shepherd³². The pastor must imitate the Good Shepherd, have him as a reference point, make him the

³⁰ Cf. T. C. Madrid, *San Agustín. Compendio de su vida y su obra*, Monachil 1978, 120ff.

³¹ Cf. San Agustín, *Sermón* 46.

³² Cf. San Agustín, *Tratados sobre el evangelio de San Juan* 45,6; 46,3-4; 47,3; *Sermón* 137, 1; 138, 4-6.

content of his proclamation and evangelization, and always be interested in the salvation of souls³³.

This last point, the soteriological interest of the faithful in the care of a pastor, seems to have been an underlying burden for St. Augustine, who would never want to be tempted or distracted by the honour attached to the episcopal office he occupies. Augustine stated this in his sermon on the anniversary of his episcopal ordination:

What, though, is to be dreaded in this office, if not that I may take more pleasure, which is so dangerous, in the honor shown me, than in what bears fruit in your salvation? Let me, therefore, have the assistance of your prayers, that the one who did not disdain to bear with me may also deign to bear my burden with me. When you pray like that, you are also praying for yourselves (Sermon, 340, 1).

Interestingly, many centuries later, Leo XIV repeated a statement from the same sermon: “For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian.”³⁴ Leo XIV, connected to St. Augustine as a spiritual son, calls to mind the enormous pastoral task set before him and, like his spiritual father, his identity, by his office as Pope and by grace, as a Christian. The pastoral significance of the Son repeating the words of his Father highlights that the connection is not just mental but ontological and spiritual.

Therefore, recognizing Augustine’s influence in the words and affirmations of Leo XIV, his pastoral identity and programme shaped by the Augustinian spirituality will have as its objective the proclamation of God’s salvific desire for all creation. It will emphasize not only the dignity of the human person but also the value of all creation, the necessity of conversion from sin, and the ongoing dialogue between the Christian faith and various cultures. This vision will be made concrete through continuous catechesis of the faithful on the essentials of the faith, its doctrines, liturgy, and sacraments, and will be reflected in the pastoral care and responsible administration of both persons and resources entrusted to the Church.

c. A Pope for the unity of the church

The unity of the Church, and by extension, all Christians, is an important theme of discussion that cannot be overlooked. This is because, as long as the human factor is present in the composition of the Church, there will always be dissenting tensions that naturally seek to fracture the bond that holds her together.

³³ Cf. San Agustín, *Sermón* 137, 11.14-15.

³⁴ San Agustín, *Sermon* 340, 1.

St. Augustine had his fair share of dealing with these dissenting tendencies that caused serious divisions in the Church. He was at the forefront of the defence of the Church's unity, an important aspect of his ecclesiological postulations that shaped and still shapes the Church's understanding of her identity and her inner life.

One of Augustine's theological definitions that sustained the defence of the Church's unity is his *Christus Totus* doctrine. According to Saint Augustine, there are three ways in which Jesus Christ is considered in prophetic proclamation, the apostolic letters, and the events narrated in the Gospel. The first refers to his state before assuming human flesh, that is, his existence as God, coeternal with the Father. The second pertains to his incarnation, the moment when He took on human flesh to become man, without ceasing to be God. In this mode, He is referred to as the Mediator and Head of the Church. The third way in which Jesus Christ is considered is in the fullness of His Church, the total Christ³⁵. Unity is the most essential of the Church's properties, and Saint Augustine never tires of calling his listeners to unity, especially those who conceive of the Church as divided. He even pronounces anathemas against those who have separated the Africans from the rest of humanity³⁶. The theme of unity between Christ and His body is central to Augustine's reflections on the persecution of the Church, as revealed in the conversion of Saul. He also highlights the intimate unity between Christ and His members through the image of the vine.

The unity of the *Christus Totus* is defined by Saint Augustine in such a way that we are Him, and He is us. The Gospel passage from Matthew 25:40 is used by the Saint to support this profound declaration³⁷. This union between believers and Christ, according to Saint Augustine, has the effect of making us not merely Christians, but Christ Himself; in Christ, it is not a matter of us and Him, but of Him alone³⁸.

How are Christ and His members united? Grace is the bond of unity between Christ and believers. Christ Himself is the author of grace, for it flows from Him, gives life, and unites Christians to Him. Grace is the one life that animates a single organism, and this organism extends from the Head, who possesses grace in its fullness, to the members who receive it by participation³⁹. Grace is fundamentally the illumination of the mind by the Divine Truth, the Word of God, and the movement of the will by

³⁵ San Agustín, *Sermón* 341, 1.11.

³⁶ Cf. T. Prieto, "Introducción", in: *Obras de San Agustín: Tratados sobre el Evangelio de San Juan XIII (1-35)*, Madrid 1995, 60.

³⁷ Cf. San Agustín, *Sermón* 133, 8.

³⁸ Cf. San Agustín, *Tratado sobre el evangelio de San Juan*, 21, 8.

³⁹ Cf. G. T. Arias, "La eclesiología agustiniana del Christus Totus", in: *Revista Agustiniana* 42 (2001) 1150.

Divine Love, the Holy Spirit⁴⁰. This grace is the love that flows from the Head, Christ, to His Body, the Church. Saint Augustine affirms: “As for charity, which is a virtue, it comes to us from God, not from ourselves, as Scripture testifies when it says: Charity comes from God; and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God, for God is charity.”⁴¹

The value of the unity of the Body of Christ was also emphasized by Saint Augustine in response to the schismatic situation the Church was suffering at that time. During this period, he reminded the Donatists and Pelagians that their doctrines were undermining the unity of the Church. Augustine advises that believers should rejoice in the unity of the Church and not take pride in division⁴². Unity is the root of all that is good, and everything that is truly good belongs to it so completely that it refuses to be separated from it. According to Saint Augustine, schismatics are murderers and deceivers because they bring about even spiritual death⁴³.

This leads us to understand how Saint Augustine conceived the unity of the Church. Unity in the Church is, first of all, a gift freely given by God; however, it also requires that the members, the believers, cooperate with this gratuitous gift. Whenever we fail to live according to what this gift demands of us, we not only harm ourselves but also the entire Body of Christ.

This is expected to reflect in Leo XIV’s demeanour and teachings, a complete defence of the Church’s unity and the promotion of its manifestation in all ramifications. His motto *In illo uno unum*, which is a statement of Saint Augustine⁴⁴, depicts his theological conviction about the Church’s unity in Christ. Leo XIV, in his first appearances, states the need for the Church to continue on the path of synodality and, in doing so, he also intimates the ecumenical responsibility of other Christian Churches. Being an Augustinian, the Pope will embody the aspects of the spirituality of the Augustinian religious order, which, as stated earlier, draws so much from its community life. Hence, the questions of synodality and ecumenism will be non-negotiable for the programme of the Roman Pontiff, because those are not mental concepts, but rather they are realities that have been lived by him in the various administrative positions he has held in the Church and in the Order of St. Augustine.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. P. Burns, “Gracia”, in: A. D. Fitzgerald (Dir), *Diccionario de San Agustín: San Agustín a través del tiempo*, Monte Carmelo 2001, 611.

⁴¹ San Agustín, *De la gracia de Jesucristo y del pecado original* I, xxi, 22.

⁴² San Agustín, *Exposición de los salmos*, 49, 4.

⁴³ Cf. San Agustín, *Sermón*, 54, 26.

⁴⁴ Cf. San Agustín, *Exposición de los salmos*, 127, 3.

d. A Pastor for social justice

In his first meeting with the college of Cardinals, sequel to his first public appearance on the balcony of the Basilica of St. Peter, Leo XIV confirmed that he chose the name Leo XIII, the Pope who published the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*: On Dignity and Labour in 1891. Leo XIII is considered the father of Christian democracy, a term that is understood in the light of the practical implication of the Social Doctrine of the Church and is based on these principles: social justice, dignity of the person, the recognition of human rights, communitarianism, solidarity, peace, and common good.

It is interesting to note that the first idea which Leo XIV referred to in his discourse after his election had to do with peace. There is no better way to announce the Pope's conviction in what he hopes to achieve in the exercise of the Petrine office, especially in a world that is bedevilled with conflicts of different scales, issues of migration, poverty, gender, and race. But starting with the proclamation of peace, which comes from Christ and is of Christ, there is no doubt in the belief that he wants to contribute positively to the health of the society in which the Church is called to evangelize.

But this is not dissociated from Augustine, the person whom the Pope considers a Father. Augustine, as bishop, yes indeed, was concerned about the salvation of the souls in his care, but this did not mean that he was not interested in their material and social welfare. In a society that was troubled by hunger and poverty, Augustine understood the Church's role as a beacon of help and assistance to those who needed. Augustine's intent on assisting the poor has a Christological foundation in that he invites us to see and love Christ, not only in the splendour of his glory above but also in the needy and the poor here on earth⁴⁵.

This idea is crystallized in Leo XIV's message for the 9th World Day of the Poor. According to the Pope, "[T]he poor can be witnesses to a strong and steadfast hope, precisely because they embody it amid uncertainty, poverty, instability and marginalization"⁴⁶. To this, he adds that the gravest form of poverty is not to know God. The Pope understands that material poverty in our society has structural causes that must be addressed and eliminated first of all by assuming our responsibility and bearing witness to Christian charity. The poor are creative agents who help us find new forms of gospel-inspired charity. This he repeats in his message to the Bishops of Madagascar: "I urge you not to take your eyes off the poor: they are at the centre

⁴⁵ Cf. San Agustín, *Sermón* 123, 4.

⁴⁶ Leo XIV, "You are my hope", *Message of the Holy Father for the 9th World Day of the Poor*, Message of the Holy Father for the 9th World Day of the Poor [16 November 2025] (13 June 2025) | LEO XIV

of the Gospel and are the privileged recipients of the proclamation of the Good News”⁴⁷.

We can perceive a convergence of influences shaping the agenda of Leo XIV. This convergence is rooted in his Augustinian heritage and identity, drawing from Saint Augustine, for whom the poor were always viewed through a Christological lens. Added to this is the significance of his chosen papal name, inspired by Leo XIII, and the continuation of the social theological programme initiated by his immediate predecessor, Pope Francis. As an Augustinian, Leo XIV has already signalled his commitment to peace and social justice, underscored by his repeated appeals for reconciliation in regions marked by conflict. All of this reflects his deep dedication to the Church’s social doctrine. His message is a prophetic call to build a more compassionate and peaceful world—an invitation that surely would have made our Holy Father, Saint Augustine, proud of one of his spiritual sons.

Conclusion

In this piece, we have reflected on the implications of the statement of Leo XIV on the day he was announced as the Bishop of Rome following the Conclave. We have gone through his biodata to point out his Augustinian connection and the reason why he considers himself a son of St. Augustine. This led us to dedicate space in this work to introduce the reader to the spirituality of the Order of Saint Augustine, the religious order from which Leo XIV came and of which he was Prior General for more than a decade.

The place of St. Augustine in the Church’s life and history cannot be overlooked; the immense amount of writings that cover a lot of topics only demonstrates this fact. Leo XIV, the first Augustinian pope, has made it possible for the Augustinian heritage and spirituality to be in the spotlight, and it is expected that he, as the son of Augustine, will lead Christ’s sheep to the Father, just as Saint Augustine did.

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⁴⁷ Leo XIV, *Address of the Holy Father to the Bishops of Madagascar*, To the Bishops of Madagascar (16 June 2025) | LEO XIV

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“I am ... an Augustinian”: Reflecting on the Spirituality of Pope Leo XIV

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Introduction

After his election and the selection of his papal name, Pope Leo XIV graciously acknowledged his fellow cardinals as he exited the Sistine Chapel¹. Cardinal Dominique Mamberti, the cardinal protodeacon, made the traditional Latin proclamation, *Habemus Papam*, introducing Pope Leo XIV to the public for the first time from the central loggia of St. Peter's Basilica². During this appearance, he said to the people gathered at the square, numbering about 150,000: “I am a son of Saint Augustine, an Augustinian.”³ This reflection will focus on a particular phrase from the first speech of Pope Leo XIV: “An Augustinian”⁴.

The word Augustinian articulates the identity and spirituality of the Augustinian Order as set by Saint Augustine of Hippo, the spiritual father, teacher, and guide of the Order of Saint Augustine. It is from Saint Augustine that the Order of Saint Augustine has received not only the *Rule* but also the specific teachings and spirituality that the Order holds in high esteem. The heart of this spirituality is neither altered by the changing conditions of each age nor the natural desires of individual members of the Order. It is this Augustinianness that positions the Order to retain the features proper to her specific function within the Church and keep to the mission entrusted to her. When Pope Leo XIV said, “I am... an Augustinian”, he not only identifies with this

¹ Deliso, Meredith; Forrester, Megan (May 8, 2025). *What we know about Leo XIV, the new American pope*. ABC News. Retrieved May 9, 2025. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/new-american-pope-leo-xiv-robert-prevost/story?id=121604332>

² Galeazzi, Giacomo (May 8, 2025). *Leone, nome forte contro i potenti. Un omaggio alla dottrina sociale. [Leo, a strong name against the powerful. A tribute to social doctrine]*. La Stampa (in Italian). https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/speciali/conclave/2025/05/09/news/leone_nome_forte_contro_i_potenti-15138555

³ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*. <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/transcript-of-pope-leo-xivs-first-speech-after-election-peace-be-with-you/6256890>, p. 1

⁴ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*, p. 1

spirituality but gives it a place in his papacy. And this is not a coincidence, given that he has lived a greater part of his life as a custodian of the Augustinian values.

The “Augustinian” Mission

The Augustinian mission is not a mission that the Augustinians entrusted to themselves. It was entrusted to the Order by the Church, which saw a need for a more eloquent manifestation of the Augustinian spirituality in the Church. In the bull *Incumbit Nobis* of 16th December 1243, which is the papal bull issued by Pope Innocent as a pastoral letter that exhorted the Tuscan hermits to unite and adopt the Rule and way of life of St. Augustine, effectively founding the Order of Saint Augustine. The bull essentially laid the foundation for the Augustinian Order, emphasizing their responsibility to live according to the rules and way of life established by St. Augustine⁵. It spelt out basic elements that cannot be compromised or omitted from whatever is considered the Augustinian way of life:

1. The first is that all who constitute this new body must follow the same way of life based on the *Rule* of Saint Augustine and other salient features of his form of monastic life⁶;
2. This body is to formulate her constitutions in such a manner that is not contrary to the monastic life as laid down by Saint Augustine⁷;
3. Through canonical election, they will provide for themselves a Prior General to whom they owe obedience and due reverence⁸;

In 1256, the Holy See decided to merge various hermit groups residing in northern and central Italy with the Tuscan Hermits, forming a new Order. This union was motivated by several factors, including the similarities in name and lifestyle, as well as the fact that all groups, except the Williamites and a few others, were already adhering to the Rule of St. Augustine⁹. The Pope summoned representatives to Rome to

⁵ Angel Martínez Cuesta, *Historia de los agustinos recoletos*. Vol. I, Desde los orígenes hasta el siglo XIX (Madrid, 1995), 35–101; Balbino Rano (tr. Arthur Ennis), *The Order of St. Augustine* (Rome, 1975), 1–29; Frances Andrews, *The Other Friars: The Carmelite, Augustinian, Sack and Pied Friars in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006); George Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his monastic Rule* (Oxford, 1987), 127–135 and 155–161; Angel Custodio vega OsA, *Notas histórico-críticas en torno a los orígenes de la Regla de San Agustín* (Madrid, 1963)

⁶ Pope Innocent. 1243. *Papal Bull, Incumbit Nobis*. 1243.

<https://exhibits.library.villanova.edu/archive/augustine/augustinian750/incumbit-nobis>

⁷ Pope Innocent. 1243. *Papal Bull, Incumbit Nobis*.

⁸ Pope Innocent. 1243. *Papal Bull, Incumbit Nobis*.

⁹ Pope Alexander IV. 1256. *Papal Bull, Licet Ecclesiae Catholicae*.

<https://exhibits.library.villanova.edu/archive/augustine/augustinian750/licet-ecclesiae>

convene a chapter (meeting) to deliberate on their acceptance of the papal directive and the foundational structure of the new Order. The bull *Licet Ecclesiae Catholicae*, promulgated by Pope Alexander IV in 1256, ratified the proceedings and effectively established the new Order, known as the Hermits of St. Augustine. With the consolidation of the Order, its nature transformed, adopting the characteristics of a mendicant order and initiating the establishment of new foundations in urban settings¹⁰. Based on the bull *Licet Ecclesiae Catholicae* of 9th April 1256 issued by Pope Alexander VI, the Order of Saint Augustine was placed among the orders of apostolic fraternity and mendicant orders based on evangelical poverty. The word “Augustinian” is, therefore, an articulation of the different dimensions of the spirituality and religious fellowship on which the Order of Saint Augustine stands.

Values that Characterize “Augustinian”

When Pope Leo XIV said, “I am... An Augustinian”, he was not just pointing to the religious Order to which he belonged. He was saying, “My life has been shaped by particular values that are at the heart of the Holy Father Augustine”. He was not just speaking of a name. He was speaking of a way of life. Apart from the mendicant and fraternal structures of the Order, the major pillars of Augustinianness that make the Augustinian include common life, interiority, apostolicity, love, and the search for God and the truth

i. Common Life

The first element of the Augustinian life, from which other dimensions must flow, is the charism of community life. The *Rule*¹¹ and *Constitutions*¹² of the Order of Saint Augustine considers the communion of minds and hearts the most important dimension of Augustinianness. Saint Augustine writes in his *Exposition of the Psalms*, “Many bodies, but not many spirits; many bodies, but not many hearts”¹³.

The documents published between the periods of the Little Union of 1243 and the Great Union of 1256 in the records of Mariano Ortega show that in founding the Order by the Church, she intended that all the scattered groups of hermits should live

¹⁰ Pope Alexander IV. 1256. *Papal Bull, Licet Ecclesiae Catholicae*.

¹¹ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, no. 3

¹² *Constitutions of the Order of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, no. 27

¹³ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Expositions of the Psalms*. Charlottesville, Va.: Intelix Corporation, 2001, 132, 6; *Constitutions of the Order of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, no. 27

a common life of brotherhood¹⁴. According to Jordan of Saxony, this communion involves: living together in the same place, oneness of spirit, communal possession of temporal goods, and proportional sharing of goods¹⁵. The *Constitutions* of the Order hold that this must include a “...unity of purpose, understanding and heartfelt affection”¹⁶.

The *Rule* of Saint Augustine holds that: “The main purpose for you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart.”¹⁷. It further holds that: “Let all of you then live together in oneness of mind and heart, mutually honoring God in yourselves, whose temples you have become”¹⁸. It is not a coincidence that the idea of common life is emphasized at the beginning of the *Rule*, and re-emphasized at the end of the section on the common life. It is to show the fundamental place that the value of common life occupies in the Augustinian way of life. Other sections of the *Rule* on prayer¹⁹, moderation and self-denial²⁰, chastity, and fraternal correction²¹, care of community goods, and the treatment of the sick²² asking for pardon and forgiveness²³, governance and obedience²⁴ and observance of the rule²⁵ are all meant to help the members of the Augustinian family keep to the charism of the Order: community life.

Pope Francis, during his address to Augustinian Recollects at their General Chapter in 2016, said to them:

At this particular moment, he is asking us to be “creators of communion”. By our presence in the world, we are called to create a society capable of recognizing the dignity of every person and sharing the gift that each person is to the other. With our witness of a living community open to what the Lord commands, by the breath of his Spirit, we can respond to the needs of each person with the same love with which God has loved us. There are so many people waiting for us to go out and meet them and look at them with

¹⁴ Karen Melvin. 2012. Building colonial cities of God: Mendicant Orders and Urban Culture in new Spain. California: Stanford University Press

¹⁵ Jordan of Saxony. 1993. The life of the brethren. Rome: Augustinian Press

¹⁶ *Constitutions of the Order of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, no. 27

¹⁷ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, 1. 3.

¹⁸ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, Ch. 1.9

¹⁹ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, II

²⁰ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, III

²¹ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, IV

²² *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, V

²³ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, VI

²⁴ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, VI

²⁵ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, VIII

the tenderness that we have experienced and received from our relationship with God. That is where our power lies: not in our ideals and our projects, but rather in the strength of his mercy, which transforms and gives us life²⁶.

Dear brothers, I invite you to hold fast to the dream of Saint Augustine to live as brothers with “one soul and one heart,”²⁷ with a renewed spirit that reflects the ideal of the first Christians and becomes a prophetic sign of communion in our world, so that we may rid ourselves of divisions, conflicts, and exclusion, and allow harmony and dialogue to reign²⁸.

To be an Augustinian is not only about being a product of this foundational value, but also one who appreciates it and places high value on it among other values.

ii. Interiority

St. Augustine's writings emphasize interiority as a key to understanding God and oneself. He believed that true knowledge and love of God come from turning inward, seeking truth in the interior man, and transcending one's changeable nature. He often used metaphors of returning to oneself, withdrawing from distractions, and exploring the inner, pleasant, private corner in your consciousness. Saint Augustine writes: “Return to yourself. Withdraw from all the din. Look inside yourself to find a pleasant, private corner in your consciousness...”²⁹ He writes further:

Always examine yourselves without self-deception, without flattery, without buttering yourselves up. After all, there is nobody inside you before whom you need to feel ashamed, or whom you need to impress. There is someone there, but one who is pleased with humility. Let Him test you. And you, too, test yourself.³⁰

It involves a constant and attentive listening to the Inner Teacher who speaks to our hearts and gently instructs us.

When teachers have explained, using words, all those subjects which they profess to teach, even the science of virtue and wisdom, then the ones we call pupils consider within themselves whether what they have heard is true. This they do by gazing attentively at that interior truth, so far as they are able.

²⁶ Pope Francis. 2016. Address to the General Chapter of the Order of Augustinian Recollects on Thursday, 20th October. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, p. 1

²⁷ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, No. 1, 2

²⁸ Pope Francis. Address to the General Chapter of the Order of Augustinian Recollects on Thursday, 20th October 2016. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, p. 1

²⁹ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermons*. USA: Yale University Press, 2001, 52, 22

³⁰ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermons*, 169, 18

Then it is that they learn, when within themselves they discover that what has been taught is true...³¹

Through this, we daily acquire a conscience that is clearer and more aware of the living presence of God within us. It helps us to encounter God, who, as a Trinity, has deigned to dwell within us. It is in this encounter that we find true peace as we seek God's will in every matter of our lives. This journey within is aided by contemplation, meditation, and the study of Scripture. The encounter lights a fire within and helps us grow in maturity and adulthood in our religious life.

Saint Augustine understands interiority as a natural vocation of the human person through which he or she realizes the self or discovers the self that is different from the man or woman. The realization of the self, the true self, helps the human person to discover his or her need for God. Through this spiritual activity, the human person identifies the self with God and becomes clothed in the sonship or daughtership of Christ. Thus, Saint Augustine prays: "Let me know myself that I may know You."³²

The consequence of this interior journey is that one becomes liberated from exteriority, which has infiltrated various aspects of human life under several subtle forms. Having been liberated from exteriority, the human person finds security in higher systems, such as the divine. In his Confessions, Saint Augustine found security in God and writes: "Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you. For see, you were within and I was without, and I sought you out there. Unlovely, I rushed heedlessly among the lovely things you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you."³³ This is a fundamental aspect of our Augustinianness.

iii. Apostolicity

The Augustinians came into existence at a time when the Church needed 'servants of God', who, being free from all commitments and completely consecrated to Christ, could meet its needs and devote themselves completely to evangelisation and the apostolate. The Augustinian life is, therefore, based on what Saint Augustine describes as *necessitas caritatis* (the compulsion of love). This compulsion of love leads to service as we realize that we are needed by 'the people of God'. It is this compulsion of love that made Augustinians go into the priesthood, move into urban areas to take up residences, to preach the good news from one town to another, administer the

³¹ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *The Teacher*. Charlottesville, Va.: Intelix Corporation, 2001, 14.45

³² Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Soliloquies*. Mount Vernon: Peter Pauper Press, 2001, 2,1,1

³³ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Confessions*. Mount Vernon: Peter Pauper Press, 2001, 10. 27. 38

sacraments, practice the works of mercy, urging the good and denouncing that which is evil, etc.

The concept of apostolicity within the Order of Saint Augustine underscores a commitment to service and evangelization, deeply rooted in the teachings of St. Augustine and the early Church. This entails the active dissemination of the Gospel, providing care for the impoverished and marginalized, and nurturing a community characterized by faith and love.

The Order endeavors to fulfill the apostolic mandate by maintaining a presence in the world, interacting with various communities, and serving as a testament to the Gospel message. The Order is dedicated to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ through preaching, teaching, and outreach efforts directed towards diverse populations.

The Order's dedication to poverty and humility compels her to assist those in need, whether through charitable endeavors, social justice initiatives, or advocacy for the vulnerable. Ultimately, apostolicity in the Order of Saint Augustine represents a summons to embody the Gospel message through a life devoted to service, evangelization, and community, inspired by the teachings of St. Augustine and the exemplary model of the early Church.

iv. Love

In the *Rule of Saint Augustine*, it reads: “The main purpose of you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of heart and mind.”³⁴ What is prayer if afterwards a man or woman cannot love his or her neighbor? What is the value of prayer if, after encountering God, a man or woman cannot love the neighbor in whom God abides? In the *Confessions*, Augustine writes: “And what was it that delighted me? Only this: to love and be loved.”³⁵ In another text in his *Sermon on First John*, he teaches:

Once and for all, a short rule is laid down for you: love and do whatever you will. If you keep silent, do it out of love. If you cry out, do it out of love. If you refrain from punishment, do it out of love. Let the root of love be within. From such a root, nothing but good can come³⁶.

A very significant concept in Augustine’s understanding of love in his *Sermon on First John* is the use of the word “root”: “Let the root of love be within. From such a root,

³⁴ *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, Ch. 1.1

³⁵ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Confessions*. Mount Vernon: Peter Pauper Press, 2001, 2.2.2.

³⁶ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermon on First John*. Charlottesville, Va.: Intelix Corporation, 2001, 7.8

nothing but good can come". A root is an important part of a plant that attaches the plant to the ground for support. It is from the root that water and nourishment are conveyed to the other parts of the plant through numerous branches and fibers. This will imply for us who are Christians that there is a need to have love as the central processing unit of all our actions, thoughts, and words. Saint Augustine knew that if love processes all that we do, say, and think about, our life will be a powerful manifestation of the love that abides within us. Thus, Augustine writes in the *Confessions*:

My weight is my love; wherever I go, I am driven by it. By the love of God, we catch fire ourselves and by moving up, find our place and our rest³⁷.

The expression of love for Augustine goes beyond the immediate and tangible, and, therefore, is a sacrament rooted in Christ or God. This means that our love points to something deeper and reflects a greater reality than our actions, thoughts, and words that are borne out of love. This reality is God, who is LOVE. Robert Dodaro explains further that love in Augustine is a sacrament because the love that we love and by which we love is known only partially³⁸. This is because, to love fully would mean to know God fully, who is Love. We, therefore, love God and our neighbor by entering into Love itself, which is God, who now becomes a force that gives vital impulse and direction to the activities of the human person³⁹. In Augustine, a connection is made between the lover (myself), the loved (my neighbor), and Love (God Himself). This is expressed in Augustine's instruction:

Let us love, and love without looking for reward, for it is God whom we love, and we can find nothing better than him. Let us love him for his own sake, and love ourselves in him, though again for his sake. For a man truly loves his friend when he loves God in his friend: either because God is in that friend, in other than that he might be in him. That is the nature of true love; if we love for any other true reason, we are hating rather than loving⁴⁰.

In the text from his Sermons, Saint Augustine, talking about love, says: "I am driven by it"⁴¹. Michael Cardinal Pellegrino points out the consequences of being driven by love in Saint Augustine:

³⁷ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Confessions*. Mount Vernon: Peter Pauper Press, 2001, 13. 9

³⁸ Dodaro Robert. 1995. "Sacramentum Caritatis as the Foundation of Augustine's Spirituality". *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 50(2). 1-55.

³⁹ William Schoedel, "Augustine on Love: A Response." *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986):183-85

⁴⁰ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermons*. USA: Yale University Press, 2001, 336. 2

⁴¹ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermons*. 336. 2

- a. *Love lightens the burden of the Christian life:* by this, Augustine means that love makes the unbearable bearable; the difficult easy. When a Christian loves, it becomes possible and easier to bear sufferings and pain. He writes in his *Treatise on the Good of Widowhood* that: “Toils are not a burden to him who loves”⁴². He, therefore, asks: “What do you love? For, when a man loves, he experiences no weariness or else he loves the weariness itself”⁴³.
- b. *Love makes a new man:* while sin makes a man become like the “old man”, love makes an “old man”, a new man. Christ came to make all things new. Thus, Saint Augustine prays to God: “Intensify my love that I may fulfil the commandment.”⁴⁴
- c. *Love brings peace:* when love becomes the deepest motivation of human action and gives it direction, anxieties and fears weaken, and such a soul is overtaken by peace and assurance, as such a soul seeks only to give and to give itself.
- d. *Love brings freedom:* love for Augustine is an action that flows from freedom and not slavery or fear; for no one can love if not he or she who dwells in freedom.
- e. *Love is the root of all good works:* while avarice is the root of all evil, love for Augustine is the root of all good works. “All the other gifts of God come together are not enough to give an action value, if the bond of love is missing.”⁴⁵. Saint Augustine writes further that: “is the only thing which binds all else together; without which all else is worthless; and which, whether it is, draws everything else to itself”⁴⁶.

As we continue our pilgrim journey in a world where there is so much hatred, pain, and unforgiveness, may God give us the grace to love to such a point where we would forget ourselves for love of Him. “The soul once forgot itself indeed, but in loving the world; now it forgets itself but in loving the World’s Maker”⁴⁷.

⁴² Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Treatise on the Good of Widowhood*. Charlottesville, Va.: Intelix Corporation, 2001, 41. 338

⁴³ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Treatise on the Good of Widowhood*, 41. 338

⁴⁴ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Charlottesville, Va.: Intelix Corporation, 2001, 68. 18

⁴⁵ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermons*. USA: Yale University Press, 2001, 209. 3

⁴⁶ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermons*, 354, 6

⁴⁷ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermons*, 11. 3

v. Search for God and Truth

From the Augustinian viewpoint, the quest for God is a core value that cannot be separated from the pursuit of truth, love, and community. It represents an inward journey, where one seeks God within oneself, and it is an ongoing process of both searching and discovering. Saint Augustine teaches that:

Let us seek him out in order to find him, and when we find him, let us continue searching for him. We must search for him, because he is hidden from us. And when we have found him, we go on searching because he is without bounds ... He fills those who seek him, insofar as their capacity permits; and he increases the capacity in those who find him, so that they might again seek to be filled.⁴⁸

We search for God in order to find him with greater joy, and we find him to keep on searching with greater love.⁴⁹

Augustine highlighted the significance of introspection in finding God, asserting that God is ultimately located in the innermost part of the soul. The quest for God is closely linked to the quest for self-discovery. The pursuit of God is inherently connected to the search for truth, as God is regarded as the ultimate truth. For instance, Augustinian educators advocate for the pursuit of truth through love to enhance students' understanding of the world through faith. The quest for God also involves seeking unity with God and others within a faith community, underscoring the significance of love and community in the pursuit of truth. Augustinian spirituality cherishes communal life, where individuals strive to forge a path to God while serving others. Augustine's philosophy underscores that the quest for God is intertwined with the comprehension of humanity, as humans are created in God's likeness and endeavor to understand themselves and the world in the context of God.

The Augustinian Heritage and the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV

The Augustinian Order is a centuries-old religious group focused on community and charity. Pope Leo XIV is a member of the Order of Saint Augustine, and having served in various capacities where he was a custodian of these values, offers a window into what type of Pontiff he may be.

⁴⁸ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *Sermon on the Gospel of John*. Ramsey Boniface (Ed.). New York: New City Press, 2013, 63. 1.

⁴⁹ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. *The Trinity*. Edmund Hill, OP (Trans.). New York: New City Press, 2012, 15, 2.2.

The Augustinian ideal, after the ethos of the fourth-and-fifth century thoughtful and empathetic theologian saint who was dedicated to specific family thought: unity, harmony, friendship, charity, and service, are ideals that Pope Leo XIV embodies. Quoting Saint Augustine, he said during his first address to the faithful gathered at Saint Peter's Square, and in fact to the whole Church: "With you, I am a Christian, for you a Bishop"⁵⁰. This reveals how he is not only steeped in the teachings of Saint Augustine but also his readiness to live it by listening not just to the higher-ups but also to individuals and the different threads in the world. This is the kind of Church that the world needs at this time, and the impact the Augustinian background will have on his pontificate.

These ideals must have influenced the Roman Pontiff's choice of the name Leo XIV. Leo the Great was known for promoting peace, building bridges, and showing that peaceful agreements can be reached without violence. This was also evident in the papacy of Pope Leo XIII. It is, therefore, not surprising that the first words of Pope Leo XIV to the People of God were: "Peace be with you."⁵¹ This greeting used by Jesus after His resurrection is an announcement of a new era for the Church.

The Augustinian values of the search for God and truth, which are connected to interiority, will also make a remarkable impact. Saint Augustine experienced God's presence as deep and mysterious, yet discoverable through faith and reason. This experience for Augustine is a spiritual journey characterized by an ascent to God, with the Trinity as a central aspect of this search. The promotion of peace and building bridges, which are at the heart of the Papacy of Pope Leo XIV, requires the discovery of God and cleaving to eternal truths, which is God. The Augustinian value of the search for God and truth is a formidable background for the achievement of this vision.

The concept of love in Augustine is also fundamental in a conversation on the influences of the Augustinian values. While avarice is the root of all evil, love for Augustine is the root of all good works. The experience of this love within the Augustinian family and the readiness to share it with the whole world are heavily manifest in the speeches of Pope Leo XIV. In his first speech, love moved him to refer to all present at Saint Peter's Square thus: "Dearest brothers and sisters"⁵². Speaking on the mission of the Church, a Church where love dwells, he described the Church he looks forward to as: "always open to receiving with open arms for

⁵⁰ Pope Leo XIV (May 8, 2025). *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*, 2

⁵¹ Pope Leo XIV (May 8, 2025). *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*, 2

⁵² Pope Leo XIV (May 8, 2025). *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*, 2

everyone, like this square, open to all, to all who need our charity, our presence, dialogue, love”⁵³.

There is a connection between love in Augustine and the Augustinian value of apostolicity. It is still within the influence of the Augustinian value of love for the Church and God’s people that Pope Leo XIV said: “We have to look together how to be a missionary Church, building bridges, dialogue...”⁵⁴. Right from his first speech on the day of his election, and in others, one continues to notice the influence of the Augustinian value of love, declaring a papacy that will be led by listening, reign by serving, and speak by being still. Like Augustine, who said about love: “I am driven by it.”⁵⁵ The Papacy of Pope Leo XIV is driven by love.

Conclusion

The Augustinian heritage has had a profound influence on the Church, shaping its theology, spirituality, and practices. It has a rich and diverse legacy that encompasses the spiritual, intellectual, and cultural contributions of St. Augustine of Hippo. Some key aspects of the Augustinian heritage, as enumerated above, include: common life, interiority, love, search for God, search for truth, and apostolicity. These different dimensions of the Augustinian heritage will not only be at the base of the papacy of Pope Leo XIV but also determine the identity of Pope Leo XIV.

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⁵³ Pope Leo XIV (May 8, 2025). *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*, 2

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PART II
THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF POPE LEO XIV

“With You I Am a Christian, For You I Am a Bishop”: Pope Leo XIV’s Understanding of His Role as Pope

Jude Aniobodom Ossai, OSA



Introduction

There is a palpable sense of joy and confidence in the air since the evening of 8th May, 2025, when Robert Francis Cardinal Prevost was announced as Pope Leo XIV, to succeed Pope Francis, who died on 21st April, 2025. The new pope has been very well received across cultural, religious, and generational divides. In the very first moment that the new Pope addressed the world, he declared that he was an Augustinian and a son of St. Augustine. He quoted St. Augustine, who in describing his duty and office as bishop of Hippo, declared: “With you I am a Christian, for you I am a Bishop”. He made this quotation within the context of his readiness to journey together with everyone as we work towards our heavenly homeland.

In this chapter, we wish to establish the fact that this simple quotation is a summary of St. Augustine’s understanding of the office and duty of a bishop. We intend to demonstrate that Pope Leo XIV has adopted this Augustinian concept of episcopacy as the fulcrum and foundation of his pontificate as the bishop of Rome. We wish to point out that the actions, words, and body language of Pope Leo XIV since the beginning of his pontificate have remained consistent with this adopted Augustinian perspective and spirituality of ecclesiastical leadership.

After recalling the emergence of Cardinal Robert Prevost as Pope Leo XIV, we shall give a brief profile of his life, especially his journey to the religious life and priesthood, and the different ecclesiastical responsibilities and missionary endeavours that prepared him for his current ministry as the supreme Pontiff. We shall then have a cursory look at the authority of the Pope, who is the supreme leader of the Catholic Church, as the personal successor of St. Peter and the Vicar of Christ. Our attention shall shift to St. Augustine’s understanding of the role of a bishop and then demonstrate in the last section that Pope Leo XIV’s understanding of his role as the Bishop of Rome is inspired by Augustine’s theological and pastoral understanding of the office of bishop. Drawing from the homilies of Pope Leo XIV so far, we shall highlight the implications of that foundational quotation on his pontificate.

Robert Prevost Becomes Pope Leo XIV

When Pope Francis died on Easter Monday, 21st April 2025, the atmosphere that pervaded the Vatican City and the entire world, especially the “catholic world”, was that of anxiety, uncertainty, anticipation and hope – hope for the Church remaining strong and as a sign of hope for the salvation of humanity. The tradition of the Church with regard to the state of the Church in periods of *sede vacante* was quickly activated and the processes that led to the burial of the Pope were begun, in compliance with the directives and decrees of *Universi Dominici Gregis*, the Apostolic Constitution on the Vacancy of the Apostolic See and the election of the Roman Pontiff.¹

In line with *Universi Dominici Gregis*, which stipulates that the deceased pope should be buried between the fourth and sixth day after death,² Pope Francis was buried on Saturday, 26th April, 2025.³ After the Pope’s burial, the nine consecutive days of funeral rites continued as is customary for popes.⁴ As the cardinals continued their Congregations, where different themes and subjects regarding the life of the Church were discussed, they announced that the conclave to elect Pope Francis’ successor was to begin on 7th May, 2025. With this announcement, the anticipation, anxiety, speculations, and permutations with regard to who was to become the next pope heightened.

As the conclave began on 7th May, after the celebration of the Votive Mass, *Pro Eligendo Papa*⁵ (in the morning) and the solemn procession of the cardinal electors into the Sistine Chapel⁶ (in the evening), the entire catholic world (and as a matter of fact, many non-Catholics) began to pray for the success of the conclave and the election of a pope after the mind of God. As expected, the first smoke to come out of the chimney of the Sistine Chapel, in the evening of the first day of the conclave, was black, indicating that no one had yet been elected as pope. The same black smoke was witnessed after the morning ballots of 8th May, 2025. The story was different, however, when at about 6:08 pm (local time), white smoke rose from the Sistine Chapel and continued to dissipate from the chimney, indicating that a new Pope had been elected.

¹ Pope John Paul II. Apostolic Constitution, *Universi Dominici Gregis*: On the Vacancy of the apostolic See and the Election of the Roman Pontiff. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996).

² Pope John Paul II, *Universi Dominici Gregis*, no. 13b.

³ The funeral Mass and other rites took place in St. Peter’s Basilica while his body was interred in the Basilica of St. Mary Majors, Rome, in compliance with his wish.

⁴ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, nos. 13b, 27.

⁵ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, no. 49.

⁶ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, no. 50.

The anxiety, anticipation, and uncertainty of the whole world were at their peak at this moment, and all eyes were fixed, expectantly, on the front balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, overlooking the square. At 7:13 pm (local time), the wait was over, as Cardinal Dominique Mamberti, the Cardinal Proto-Deacon, appeared and announced in Latin language the famous "Habemus Papam": He declared: "*Annuntio vobis, Gaudium magnum: Habemus Papam*". The Proto-Deacon continued and announced that the person elected Pope was Robert Francis Cardinal Prevost, and that he had chosen to be called Pope Leo XIV. With this announcement, those who had known Pope Leo XIV as Cardinal Prevost exclaimed and could not hold their joy and surprise at the same time. The exclamation and joy of the faithful and clergy gathered in St. Peter's Square was very tangible, emotional, and contagious when the red velvet curtain on the balcony gave way to the emergence of former Cardinal Prevost as the newly elected pope.

As it is customary, the newly elected Pope gave his first greetings *Urbi et Orbi* (to the city and the world). Pope Leo XIV began his greeting with the first words of the risen Christ to his disciples: "Peace be with you all!" He said it was the peace that is "unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering, a peace that comes from God, the God who loves us all, unconditionally" that he wished for everyone. After paying tribute to Pope Francis, he reminded everyone that "God loves us and evil will not prevail". He thanked the cardinals for choosing him to be the successor of Peter. And then he declared: "*I am an Augustinian, a son of Saint Augustine, who once said, 'with you I am a Christian, and for you I am a bishop'*". In this sense, all of us can journey together toward the homeland that God has prepared for us".⁷

These first words of Pope Leo XIV are very significant and quite indicative of his understanding of his role as the supreme pontiff. By starting his greetings with the Easter greetings of Jesus, Pope Leo XIV shows his great pastoral concern for peace in the world and in individual persons. By pointing everyone to the Love and presence of God, and to the fact that evil will not prevail, he expressed faith and hope that are established on a close connection with God. By asking everyone to "move forward, without fear, together, hand in hand with God and with one another!" he points to the importance of solidarity and synodality as we journey towards our salvation as a Church. Our attention shall later turn to a closer analysis of the implications of the Pope's assertions, particularly his allusion to his being a son of St. Augustine and as such one who is a bishop *for* the people but a Christian *with* the people.

⁷ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-xiv-peace-be-with-you-first-words.html>

The Profile of Pope Leo XIV

Robert Francs Prevost was born on September 14, 1955, in Chicago, Illinois, United States of America. He was the last of the three children (all sons) of Louis and Mildred Prevost; his father, Louis, was a school principal, and his mother, Mildred Martinez, was a Librarian. He attended a local catholic elementary school and served as an altar boy. He attended St. Augustine's Seminary High School in Holland, Michigan, and graduated from there in 1973. From there, he enrolled in the Augustinian-run Villanova University near Philadelphia, where he earned a B.A. in mathematics in 1977. He began his novitiate in the Augustinian Order that same year and made his simple profession of vows in 1978. After studying theology for three years, he made his solemn Profession of Vows in 1981 and was ordained an Augustinian Religious priest in 1982. He received a Master's in divinity in 1982 at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where he studied theology. He then headed to Rome, where he studied canon law at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum). He earned a license in Canon Law in 1984. He went on to do a doctorate in Canon Law and graduated in 1987. His doctoral thesis was on the role of the local prior in the Order of St. Augustine.

Prevost went to Peru in 1985 to begin missionary work with the Augustinians there, and he was quickly made chancellor of the territorial prelature in Chulucanas (from 1985-1986). From 1987-1988, he served as director of vocations and missions of the Midwest Augustinian Province in Chicago. From 1988, he spent about ten years in Peru as director of an Augustinian seminary in Trujillo. While there, he served in different capacities, including teaching canon law, serving as parish priest, serving as prefect of the diocesan seminary in Trujillo, and judicial vicar of the Trujillo archdiocese.

He returned to Chicago, where he served as Prior Provincial of the Augustinian Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel in 1999. He held this post for about two and a half years before he was elected as Prior General of the Order of St. Augustine in 2001, during the Order's General Chapter, which was held in Rome that year. His office as Prior General required him to live in Rome and to carry out official visitation of all the Augustinian Friars who are present in about fifty countries. He served for two terms of six years each as Prior General, and he earned a reputation as an effective administrator.

In 2014, he was appointed apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Chiclayo in Peru by Pope Francis, and he was made the bishop of the diocese the following year. He served as second vice president and as council member of the Peruvian Episcopal

Conference from 2018 to 2023. In January 2023, Prevost was appointed prefect of the dicastery for Bishops, an office that put him in charge of the selection of bishops and their affairs. He was also appointed president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. In September 2023, he was made a cardinal by Pope Francis.

The background of Pope Leo XIV is “very Augustinian” and “very catholic”. He comes from a deeply catholic family that is dedicated to service and simple life. His thought and theology, his spirituality and understanding of religion and religious life are Augustinian in taste and character. The Augustinian life and spirituality formed a strong platform from which his missionary zeal and endeavour developed, flowered, and bore fruit. His missionary endeavours in Peru prepared him for his current role as the supreme pontiff and the chief shepherd of the universal Church. His role as the Prior General of the Order of St. Augustine enriched his missionary experience because it gave him the opportunity to traverse different continents, to almost fifty countries, where he had practical experience of the different dynamics and life experiences of different local cultures and ecclesial realities.

It was not until he was elected Pope that his pedigree, ecclesiastical knowledge, universal appeal, and pastoral experience became known. Someone remarked after he was elected pope that if one were to “be qualified for the office of Pope” (alluding to the fact that the office is more by grace than human qualification), Pope Leo XIV was qualified and prepared for the job! I agree with that assertion because I believe that he was secretly and quietly prepared by the providential plan of God for His Church, especially when you take into consideration the way he rose through the ranks within a few years. It is quite interesting and also significant that within the space of ten years, from 2015 to 2025, he came from being a religious priest to becoming a pope!

The Authority of the Pope

Like any human society, the Church requires authority so as to maintain its identity, unity, and the ability to resolve internal conflicts. Where there is no structured and organized system of leadership, especially where there is no clear definition of authority – who has the power and mandate to do this or that, there is bound to be disorganization and even crisis.

The exercise of authority within the Christian community is distinct from other human groups. In the Church, authority is exercised as service (cf. Lk 22:24-27), in imitation of Jesus, who washes the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:1-17).⁸ The one who is

⁸ Howland T. Sanks. “Authority in the Church”, in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Joseph Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A Lane. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), p. 74.

entrusted with any responsibility in the church or who is ordained and assigned to any office is expected to act as a representative and a representation of Jesus who, instead of benefiting from the people, makes sacrifice of his time, treasure and talent for the Good of the people and the Church. In line with the teaching and life of Jesus, the early Church understood authority as a spiritual authority because it came from Jesus, who in turn received his authority from the Trinity.

Authority in the Church is always mediated: The Apostles derived their authority from Jesus Christ directly; the early disciples derived their authority from the Apostles. With the death of the Apostles, there were diverse ways the local Church structured itself and transmitted authority from generation to generation.

The authority of the Pope is based on the belief that he is the successor of St. Peter, the first Apostle and the first Pope. While all the bishops are successors of the apostles collegially, the pope is the personal successor of St. Peter. We believe that Peter holds supreme authority in the Church, and this authority extends to matters of faith, morals, Church discipline, and government. Right from the scriptures, we see that Peter had a special preeminence and predominance among the twelve apostles. From the Scripture, it is clear that Jesus intended Peter to be the foundation of the Church. Since the Pope is believed to be the personal successor of Peter, He is believed to have *plenitudo potestatis* (fullness of power).

Papal Primacy by Petrine succession was taken for granted from the first century by men who were in a position to know Christ's will in the matter. The Pope, as the successor of Peter, is, like Peter, the vicar of Christ. Peter can rightly be described as the vicar of Christ because he shepherds the flock of Christ as he was authorized and commissioned by Jesus to do. Asking Peter to "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17) clearly shows that the role of Peter as Shepherd is more of the work of a "steward who is in charge of his master's affairs until his master returns (cf. Luke 12:42-44)". This is the understanding of St. Augustine with regard to his role as the bishop of Hippo and also the role of the bishop of Rome: servant, shepherd, and vicar.

Though the Pope enjoys *plenitudo potestatis*, his authority is not absolute as it is exercised following the teachings of the Church and within the context of the collective wisdom of the Church. As the Vicar of Christ, he holds full, supreme, and universal power over the Church. Let us note the following points regarding the authority of the Pope:

- *His jurisdiction is universal:* The pope has immediate and ordinary jurisdiction over all Catholics; he has direct authority over each individual and the local churches worldwide.

- *Power to bind and loose:* As the personal successor of Peter, the pope has the authority to “bind and loose” on earth, which, according to the scriptural root, grants him authority over the spiritual realm.
- *Guidance and unity:* The Pope serves as a visible source of unity for the universal church; he strengthens the bond of the Church, and he ensures consistency in the teachings of the Church.
- *Infallibility:* The Pope, by his office, possesses a special gift of infallibility when, in his official capacity as teacher, he proclaims a definitive doctrine of faith or morals.
- *Not absolute authority:* Though the Pope has supreme authority, it is not an absolute authority. He must always act in accordance with the teachings of the Church, including the ecumenical councils, which, along with the Pope, are recognized as the supreme authority. The authority of the ecumenical council is greater than the authority of the Pope, even though without the Pope, the power of the ecumenical council is not supreme.

St. Augustine’s Understanding of the Role of the Bishop

When Pope Leo XIV declared during his first message to the world as Pope that “*For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian*,” he was quoting from the sermons of Saint Augustine. In these Sermons and other teachings of Saint Augustine, Augustine makes his thoughts and his understanding of authority, especially the authority of a bishop, very clear. In *Sermon 340*, Augustine describes the office of bishop as a burden, and this “burden” is the people entrusted to him, part of whom he addressed this sermon to, on the anniversary of his episcopal ordination.⁹ He, therefore, asks them to pray for him. Augustine believes that God carries our burdens with us, including the burden of his office as bishop. With the support of God and the people he is called to serve, the burden of being a bishop is made lighter. And so, he says that,

Where I am terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you, I am a bishop; with you, after all, I am a Christian. The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation.¹⁰

⁹ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon 340*, 1. The exact date of this sermon is not indicated. However, it is opined that from the tone of the sermon, Augustine would have been a bishop for a long time. Some think that this sermon would have been preached around 415 AD.

¹⁰ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon 340*, 1.

Augustine sees and interprets the office of the bishop as that of a fellow Christian, a fellow pilgrim, and a fellow servant, entrusted with the responsibility of caring for his fellow Christians, pilgrims, and servants. The office of the bishop should not make him forget where he is coming from and the basis of the office itself, which is baptism: baptism is the foundation of the episcopal office (or presbyteral office). “The bishop’s fundamental identity is found in his baptism, which is common to all Christians; in this way, he remains always *with* his fellow Christians. Augustine also notes, however, that a bishop is endowed with authority as a leader; in this role, he is to be a servant *for* his fellow Christians. The bishop is simultaneously both *with* his people and *for* his people.”¹¹

Augustine is very conscious of the fact that, after everything, on the last day, the basis of our judgement shall be primarily our lives as Christians. If a bishop does not live an authentic Christian life, he cannot truly be called a bishop. By this declaration of Augustine, he is saying that it is more important to him the fact that he is a Christian than that he is a bishop, in the sense that while baptism is necessary for salvation, episcopacy is not necessary for salvation in the strict sense of the word. It is in this fact and assurance that he finds comfort and assurance as a bishop, hence the necessity of being conscious of the fact that he remains a Christian despite being a bishop.

Identifying himself with the faithful as fellow Christians, for whom he fulfils the office of bishop, he asks them to support his duty and help him to bear the burden of the office “by both your prayers and your obedience”.¹² He says that when this is done, he will find pleasure not so much in being *in charge* of them as in being *of use* to them.¹³

Augustine calls the office of the bishop a danger: “The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation”.¹⁴ This clearly shows how Augustine perceived himself both as a leader and as a Christian, or rather, as a Christian leader should see his role as a leader of Christians. He sees the office of the bishop as a big responsibility, and the bishop should approach it as such.

¹¹ Brendan Augustine Baran, O.P. *What the Role of the Bishop means to Pope Leo (and to St. Augustine)*. americamagazine.org

¹² In his rule, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, he says that it is by showing obedience to our superior that we make his work easier by showing him mercy especially as his “higher rank among you exposes him all the more to greater peril” (Rule VII, 47).

¹³ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340, 3

¹⁴ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340, 1.

The office of bishop is a big burden because the bishop, unlike the faithful under his care, “are only going to render an account for yourselves alone, while I shall be giving one both for myself and you... But carried well it wins greater glory, while if it is handled unfaithfully, it hurls one down into the most appalling punishment”.¹⁵ This is why the office is a danger. For Augustine, the office is very sensitive because it is fraught with the temptations of being carried away by praise or by self-interest and aggrandizement to the detriment of the flock placed under his charge. What this portends is that at the end of the day, the bishop will not be able to account for the flock placed under his care.

Another reason why the office of the bishop is a burden is that, as he commented on Ezekiel 33:2-7, the bishop is called to be a “lookout” or “sentinel”; the bishop looks out to warn his flock of dangers. If he does not warn his flock of danger, by speaking the truth or warning them against false teachings, the “sinners” may perish because of their sins, but the bishop who did not warn them will share in the blame and punishment. If, on the other hand, the bishop, as a Sentinel, warns his flock against the dangers to their faith and they fail to listen, the bishop will not share in the blame. Augustine says in Sermon 339:

That is what he has wished me to declare to you. If I don’t declare it, I am going to have a bad account to render of my tour as a lookout. But if I do declare it, I have done my part. It is over to you now; as for me, I am reassured. But how can I be reassured if you are in peril and are going to die? I have no wish for my glory to be accompanied by your punishment. Yes indeed, I have been given my reassurance, but charity makes me anxious. Look, I am saying it, and you know I have always said it, you know I’ve never kept quiet.¹⁶

In other words, the bishop has to be obedient to the word of God, and he needs to transmit the same to the flock, taking responsibility for their souls’ salvation. The bishop is exonerated if he carries out his duties as a “lookout,” as the one who warns his flock of dangers to their souls. However, Augustine thinks that even if the flock is stubborn and so are facing danger, the bishop should still be worried about them.

Bishops should serve in Humility and shun Pride: In a sermon, Augustine preached at the ordination of a bishop, he highlighted the importance of humility and the danger of pride in the life of a bishop. He calls for bishops to be servants in imitation of Christ

¹⁵ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 339, 1.

¹⁶ Cf. St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 339, 2.

Jesus, who did not disdain to serve us. The bishop should be a servant because Jesus Christ came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (cf. Matt 20:28).

Addressing the faithful about the bishop being ordained, he said, “The man, you see, who presides over the people ought first of all to understand that he is the servant of many masters. And let him not disdain this role; let him not, I repeat, disdain to be the servant of many people, because the Lord of lords did not disdain to serve us”.¹⁷ In other words, the office of bishop should be identified with the attitude and character of *diakonia* = service; a bishop should be a servant of God and a servant of the people God has entrusted to him. The bishop should be a servant because when the Lord entrusted His flock to Peter, he called him to a life of service by asking him to feed his sheep. The one who feeds the sheep is rendering service. In the same way, the bishop is called to serve and feed the flock of the Lord entrusted to him in his local Church.

In what ways is the bishop a servant? Bishops are servants of their flocks, but they are also fellow servants with the flock that they are called to serve, since both the bishop and those under his charge are under Christ. Augustine says: “So, to put it in a nutshell, we are your servants; your servants, but also your fellow servants. We are your servants, but all of us here have one Lord and Master. We are your servants, but in Jesus, as the apostle says: ourselves, though, your servants through Jesus (2Cor 4:5)”.¹⁸

To emphasize the importance of service, Augustine asserts that the bishop who does not serve is only a bishop in name but not really a bishop. He asserts: “The one who enjoys his status more than the welfare and salvation of God’s flock, who at this pinnacle of the ministry seeks his advantage, not that of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:21). He’s called a bishop but he isn’t a bishop; it’s an empty name for him”.¹⁹ Added to the character of service, the bishop should also be willing to imitate Christ in suffering for his flock – he should be ready to drink the cup of suffering and shun grandeur, honour, and vainglory.

Augustine, therefore, identifies the virtue of humility as the most important virtue that a bishop should acquire and possess as he carries out his ministry of pastor. Augustine draws his teaching on humility from Matthew’s gospel (Matt. 18:1-5) where he admonished his apostles to embrace humility instead of arguing over who is the

¹⁷ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340A, 1.

¹⁸ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340A, 3.

¹⁹ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340A, 4

greatest among them. He says that the example Jesus gave to the apostles with a little child does not mean that the bishop should have the sort of mind that children have, but rather, that they should be babies in vice in such a way that they are adults in sense (cf. 1 Cor 14:20).²⁰ Bishops should therefore avoid the vice of pride, which Augustine describes as “a great vice, and the first of vices, the beginning, origin and cause of all sins”.²¹

Pope Leo XIV’s Understanding of His Role and the Bishop of Rome

When Pope Leo XIV quoted St. Augustine, who said “*for you I am a bishop but with you I am a Christian*”, on the very first day of his papacy, he was giving the manifesto of his papacy, in line with St. Augustine’s understanding of the role and authority of a bishop. Like St. Augustine who served as the bishop of Hippo for over thirty years, Pope Leo XIV understands his calling as the Bishop of Rome and the Supreme Pontiff, as one who is a bishop for the people of Rome and the whole world, but who is at the same time a Christian with the people he is called to shepherd. Pope Leo XIV understands and wants the world to know that he is primarily a Christian before becoming the Bishop of Rome.

This declaration of Pope Leo XIV, which is a quotation from Augustine’s sermon on the duty of a bishop, is a clear indication of his view of the papacy and the way he intends to practically carry out his ministry as the Supreme Pontiff. This quotation of Pope Leo XIV is a very beautiful summary of St. Augustine’s teaching and understanding of the role of a bishop. All that we have seen in the last section regarding Augustine’s insistence on the bishop as a humble servant, a fellow Christian, and a fellow pilgrim, and so on, is succinctly summarized in this simple statement: “*For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian*”. Let us look at the implications of this assertion and declaration of the Pope at the very beginning of his papacy.

Priority of Christian identity: This quotation of St. Augustine by Pope Leo XIV is a clear indication of his understanding of the place of baptism in the life of a Christian. The sacrament of baptism enjoys a certain primacy among the seven sacraments, and according to the teaching of the Church, it is necessary for salvation. The sacrament of Baptism is a gateway sacrament, the first of the three sacraments of Christian initiation, and the sacrament that makes us Christians. The catechism of the Catholic

²⁰ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340A, 1.

²¹ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340A, 1.

Church teaches that “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word’.”²²

Declaring that “For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian”, the Pope intends to highlight the fact that being a Christian is paramount, and being a Christian should drive and determine his service and ministry as a bishop, as the bishop of Rome. In St. Augustine’s Sermon from which Pope Leo XIV took this quotation, Augustine adds: “The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation.”²³ Like St. Augustine, Pope Leo XIV sees his status as a Christian as “a name” – “a name of grace”, and as “salvation”. Like St. Augustine, being a Christian mattered more to Pope Leo XIV because it is the basis of his office as Bishop of Rome. The bishop is a bishop because there are Christians to lead, and he cannot lead alone without them. This understanding of his role as the Bishop of Rome, that is, as the one with authority who, nonetheless, is part of the Christians whom he is called to lead, has inspired most of his homilies and discussions since assuming the office of the Supreme Pontiff.

Ministry as Service: He sees his ministry as Pope as a call to serve the universal Church and to make sacrifices for the Good of the Church and the salvation of all. Like St. Augustine, who sees his office of bishop as a “burden”,²⁴ Pope Leo XIV describes his ministry as a “cross” that he was called to carry. He highlighted this point in his homily at the Holy Mass *Pro Ecclesia*, celebrated with the cardinals in the Sistine Chapel the day after he was elected Pope. He said to the Cardinals: “You have called me to carry that cross, and to be blessed with that mission, and I know I can rely on every one of you to walk with me, as we continue as a Church, as a community of friends of Jesus as believers to announce the Good News, to announce the Gospel.”²⁵ Like St. Augustine, Pope Leo XIV rejoices at the assurance that he feels the cardinals will help him bear the cross and fulfil his responsibility. Here he hints at solidarity and synodality, which we shall give considerable attention to later.

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), no. 1213. See Council of Florence: DS 1314: *Vitae Spiritualis Ianua*; Roman Catechism II, 2, 5; CIC, Can. 204.

²³ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340, 1.

²⁴ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 399, 1.

²⁵ Homily at Holy Mass *Pro Ecclesia* Celebrated with the Cardinals in Sixtine Chapel, 9th May, 2025: <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250509-messa-cardinali.html>

He sees and understands his papacy as someone given authority to “preside in charity over the universal Church”.²⁶ For the Pope, he possesses an authority given to him by God through the Cardinals, and he has to be guided by love and charity, shown in sacrifice and selflessness, in discharging his duty as supreme Pontiff. Therefore, he has to “spend himself” and “move aside” so that Christ might be known and glorified. He states in his homily that his role as Pope is that of the one called “to move aside so that Christ may remain, to make oneself small so that he may be known and glorified (cf. Jn 3:30), to spend oneself to the utmost so that all may have the opportunity to know and love him.”²⁷ This disposition towards selfless service can be seen in his self-abnegation, availability, and the expending of himself for the sake of the universal Church of Christ since he assumed office as the Supreme Pontiff.

For Pope Leo XIV, love and service are the basis of his pontificate in imitation of St. Peter, who was entrusted with the task of “loving more and giving his life for the flock.” The ministry of Peter is distinguished by this self-sacrificial love. Therefore, for him, the task of presiding over the universal Church is “never a question of capturing others by force, by religious propaganda or power. Instead, it is always and only a question of loving as Jesus did”.²⁸ A strong call for love and unity at the inaugural Mass of his pontificate signaled that he takes his role as the principle and symbol of unity of the Church seriously. For him, the Church herself should become a leaven of harmony for humanity

Humility and Responsibility: This declaration of the Pope in his first address to the world shows that the Pope intends to tow the line of humility and responsibility in his pontificate. In other words, the Pope is very much aware that he is a Christian with the rest of the universal Church that he is called to lead, and at the same time he is aware of his role and office as supreme pontiff – as bishop, called to lead the way and take responsibility. Delivering the sermon at his official inauguration as Pope on 18th May, 2025, he showed humility by declaring that he was elected without his merits. He said: “I was chosen without any merit of my own, and now, with fear and trembling, I come to you as a brother, who desires to be servant of your faith and your joy, walking with you on the path of God’s love, for he wants us all to be united in one family”.²⁹

²⁶ Here Pope Leo XIV cites Ignatius of Antioch (Letter to the Romans, *Prologue*)

²⁷ <https://www.vatican.va/content.leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250509-messa-cardinali.html>

²⁸ Homily at the Official Inauguration of the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV:

<https://www.vatican.va/content.leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250518-inizio-pontificato.html>

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Pope Leo XIV is a real son of Augustine in this regard. Recall that Augustine had insisted on the need and necessity for a bishop to practice humility and shun the danger of pride. As we saw in an earlier section, Augustine identifies the virtue of humility as the most important virtue that a bishop should acquire and possess as he carries out his ministry of pastor.³⁰ There is the temptation for a bishop to get intoxicated by the power and authority attached to his office and to see himself as belonging to a higher class than his flock. Such bishops become bureaucratic, officious, and unapproachable to the people he is called to serve. Such bishops, according to Augustine, might be called bishops, but they are not bishops indeed.³¹ Pope Leo XIV, being a son of St. Augustine, has given very clear indications that he intends to follow the path of humility by identifying himself with the people's flock of Christ entrusted to him to “feed”.

Synodality: “For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian” is a declaration of a disposition towards synodality = walking together, listening together. This concept and principle of synodality permeated St. Augustine’s thought, teaching, and understanding of the role of a bishop. Like St. Augustine, Pope Leo XIV has proved repeatedly that he understands his pontificate as a synodal journey. In his discussions, addresses, and homilies, he keeps stressing the fact that we are called to walk together, to support each other as we live our Christian lives. As a matter of fact, in his first address to the world after he was elected pope, immediately after stating that “For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian” he added: “In this sense, all of us can *journey together* toward the homeland that God has prepared for us”.³² The day after he was elected pope, in the Mass he celebrated with the cardinals in the Sistine Chapel, he said “... I know I can rely on every one of you to walk with me, as we continue as a Church ...”³³

Delivering a sermon at the ceremony to mark his possession of the chair of the bishop of Rome (in St. John Lateran Basilica), he hinted at synodality when he said: “For my part, I would like to express my firm desire to contribute to this great ongoing process by listening to everyone as much as possible, to learn, understand and decide things together, as St. Augustine would say, ‘as a Christian with you and a bishop for you (cf.

³⁰ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon*, 340A, 1.

³¹ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340A, 4.

³² <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-xiv-peace-be-with-you-first-words.html> Italics mine.

³³ <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250509-messa-cardinali.html>

Sermon 340, 1)”³⁴ The process the pope is referring to here is the efforts made by the diocese of Rome to listen and respond to the challenges of the local community and the world, and their initiatives towards evangelization. He is expressing his readiness and disposition toward being a leader who carries the people along by listening to them. After the Eucharistic celebration inside the Lateran Basilica, he addressed the people of Rome from the central loggia of the basilica, and he concluded the address with a call to continue on the path of synodality. He said to them: “Thank you for walking together! Let us all walk together! Always count on me, as a Christian with you and a bishop for you”.³⁵

At the vigil of Pentecost, which coincided with the Jubilee for Ecclesial Movements, the pope recalls in his sermon that he was moved on the evening of his election, and he spoke of synodality, which, according to him, “aptly expresses how the Spirit shapes the Church”. He notes that “in a divided and troubled world, the Holy Spirit teaches us to walk together in unity.” He said that synodality is the ecclesial name for the fact that “God created the world so that we might all live as one”. Emphasizing synodality, he stated that “it demands that each recognize our poverty and our riches, that we feel part of a greater whole, apart from which everything withers, even the most original and unique of charisms”.³⁶

From how the pope quoted that same text on being a bishop *for*, and a Christian *with*, in his sermons and discussions, it is very evident that he understands this Augustinian assertion as a statement of solidarity and synodality. It is important to note here that Pope Leo XIV’s understanding of synodality, inspired by this Augustinian assertion, is not suggestive of a “democratic” or a “democratization” of the office of the supreme pontiff. He understands synodality in the context of “collegiality,” where the Pope remains the supreme leader, responsible and ready to give direction. He understands synodality in an Augustinian way because he is ready to “feed the sheep” with the truth and faith of the message of Christ, which he is called to uphold, teach, and transmit to the next generation, after the example of Apostle Peter. Like St. Augustine, Pope Leo XIV wishes to *lead* the sheep, cognizant of the fact that he is also a sheep of the flock of Christ. Like St. Augustine, he understands his role as a

³⁴ <https://www.vatican.va/content.leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250525-possesso-cattedra-laterano.html>

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ <https://www.vatican.va/content.leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250607-veglia-pentecoste.html>

servant who is also a fellow servant of the servants he is called to serve.³⁷ He walks together with the rest members of the Church, listening to them as *servus servorum Dei*.

Unity and Communion: We can summarize all the points noted so far as basic implications of Pope Leo XIV's assertion that he is a bishop *for* the people and a Christian *with* them, with the expression of unity and communion. From his homilies and discussions so far, his body language and practical pastoral actions since the day he was elected as supreme pontiff, one can see that the Pope is inspired by two central characteristics of the Church, namely, *unitas* and *communio*, and he feels called to uphold and promote them in the Church. These two characteristics were at the foundation of the Church, as St. Luke notes in the Acts of the Apostles; the early Christians had everything in common and there was hardly any social class distinction among them (cf. Acts 2:44-46; 4:32). St. Paul tells the Galatians that through faith in Christ Jesus and our baptism, we are all children of God, and there is no distinction - no Jew or Greek, no male or female, no slave or freeman... (cf. Gal 3:26-28).

Unity and communion are particularly dear to Pope Leo XIV as the son of Augustine, who centered his monastic rule on these two principles. The Order of St. Augustine to which Pope Leo belongs and within which he was shaped as a religious and as a clergyman, has unity and communion "as the pivot around which Augustinian religious life revolves".³⁸ As an Augustinian, Pope Leo XIV lived his life viewing everyone as brothers and sisters, even when he served as Prior General of the Order for twelve years. *Communio* is in the spiritual and religious DNA of Pope Leo XIV. It is not surprising, therefore, that he would approach his pontificate as a promoter of unity and communion. Therefore, he sees his office as the bishop of Rome, as someone who is one with the people, and at the same time, one called to preside over the people of God in Charity and a spirit of sacrifice.

Conclusion

The beginning of a journey or process is very critical and significant, as the rest of the journey or process depends so much on it. Much like the construction of a building, how the foundation is laid indicates how the building will turn out. When Pope Leo XIV announced to everyone that he was an Augustinian and a son of St. Augustine and went ahead to quote Augustine's beautiful saying on the role and place of a bishop within the Christian assembly, he was setting the tone for his pontificate. By quoting St. Augustine, who declared to his audience on the anniversary of his episcopal

³⁷ St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340A, 3.

³⁸ *Constitutions of the Order of St. Augustine*. (Rome: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 2008), no. 26.

ordination that for them he was a bishop and with them he was a Christian, at the very beginning of his pontificate, shows that he is going to model his pontificate after St. Augustine.

In this chapter, we have sought to demonstrate that the simple quotation which Pope Leo XIV took from the sermons of St. Augustine summarizes the very rich theological and pastoral vision of Augustine regarding the office of Bishop. Pope Leo XIV has demonstrated the influences of these Augustinian perspectives in his teaching, sermons, and admonitions since the beginning of his pontificate. This gives us the hope and confidence that Pope Leo XIV will lead the Church with a sense of balance, orthodoxy, and clarity of teaching about the catholic faith. We are encouraged by what we see already that the Pope will be a humble but responsible leader of the flock of Christ, a leader who listens, walks along, but at the same time, provides leadership and guidance to the entire world that looks up to the supreme Pontiff for inspiration and leadership.

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- St. Augustine of Hippo. *Sermon* 340, 1. The exact date of this sermon is not indicated. However, it is opined that from the tone of the sermon, Augustine would have been a bishop for a long time. Some think that this sermon would have been preached around 415 AD.

“We Are Disciples of Christ”: Pope Leo XIV’s Vision of Discipleship Vis-à-Vis Saint Augustine’s Anthropology

Michael Paul Pilani



Introduction

The question of what it means to be a disciple has remained central to the identity and mission of the Christian Church throughout history. In *Matthew* 28:19-20, commonly known as the Great Commission, Jesus commands His followers to “go and make disciples of all nations,” establishing discipleship as the Church’s primary vocation. This commission does not merely call for the expansion of the Church’s boundaries but demands a lifelong process of forming committed followers of Christ through baptism, teaching, and communal participation. Far from being an isolated command, the Great Commission is the culmination of Jesus’ ministry and the theological hinge upon which the Church’s global mission turns.¹ It invites a fresh reflection on the nature of Christian discipleship, especially in a world increasingly shaped by cultural pluralism, digital transformation, and secular fragmentation.

In this regard, St. Augustine of Hippo has earlier proffered deep insights into the nature of discipleship through his theological anthropology, particularly his understanding of the human heart as a restless space of desire, ultimately satisfied only by loving God.² His concept of *ordo amoris*, the right ordering of loves, positions discipleship as the reorientation of the heart from disordered attachments to a life properly directed toward God and neighbor.³ Augustine’s distinction between the *civitas Dei* (the city of God) and the *civitas terrena* (the earthly city) further frames discipleship as a way of life that actively resists the self-centered patterns of the world. For Augustine, the Church is not simply an institution but a pilgrim community of love, formed through divine grace and shaped by humility, charity, and communion.⁴

¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 56-83.

² Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Classics, 1961), Book 1, Chapter 1.

³ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), Book 19, Chapter 14.

⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 14, Chapters 1-4.

His thought continues to offer a rich theological foundation for reimagining discipleship as both an inward transformation and a communal journey toward God.

Pope Leo XIV draws extensively from Augustine's theological vision, placing discipleship at the heart of his ecclesiological and pastoral agenda.⁵ His emphasis on synodality, missional engagement, and fearless witness challenges the Church to rediscover its identity not in structures or cultural dominance but in the radical call to follow Christ. For Leo, discipleship is not a static affiliation but a dynamic life of attentive following, communal discernment, and embodied love in the world. His statement, "Christ goes before us,"⁶ echoes the closing promise of Matthew's Gospel "I am with you always, to the end of the age," and it signals his conviction that the Church's mission is grounded in the living presence of Christ.⁷ Leo's call to walk "united, hand in hand, without fear" urges the Church to address contemporary challenges with humility, courage, and unwavering trust in Christ's guidance.

This paper explores Pope Leo XIV's vision of discipleship in light of Matthew 28:19-20 and Augustine's theological anthropology, arguing that Leo's model offers a timely and compelling framework for the Church's mission today. By integrating biblical exegesis, historical context, and theological reflection, this study examines how Leo's Augustinian formation shapes his response to modern challenges such as pluralism, digital culture, secularization, social division, and environmental injustice.⁸ It contends that Leo's vision of discipleship is not simply a theoretical proposal but a concrete invitation to the Church to embody Christ's love in every aspect of life, namely, ecclesial, cultural, and social. In doing so, this paper contributes to the ongoing conversation about what it means to be a faithful, mission-oriented, and Christ-centered Church in a rapidly changing world.⁹

This study builds upon a threefold theological framework: first, the biblical mandate of discipleship in Matt 28:19-20; second, St. Augustine's doctrine of *ordo amoris* as the internal logic of discipleship,¹⁰ and third, Pope Leo XIV's Augustinian ecclesiology, which emphasizes communion, courage, and mission.¹¹ The Gospel commission is

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J.R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 235-250.

⁶ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: Peace be with you!*. <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/transcript-of-pope-leo-xivs-first-speech-after-election-peace-be-with-you/6256890>

⁷ Francis Martin, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 512-515.

⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-22.

⁹ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded edition (New York: Image Books, 2002), 204-226.

¹⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 19, Chapter 14.

¹¹ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election*.

not isolated divine instruction, but a continuation of Christ's *missio Dei*, given to the Church through the Spirit. For Augustine, to be a disciple is to reorient one's loves toward God, neighbor, and justice. Leo XIV's vision appropriates this tradition in urging the Church to walk together, hand in hand, without fear, trusting that Christ goes before.

Biblical Exegesis of Matt 28:19–20

a. Textual Context

Matt 28:16-20 serves as the immediate context for the final climactic scene of the Gospel, presenting the risen Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to His disciples. This passage captures a key moment where Jesus meets the eleven disciples in Galilee, a location of theological and narrative significance, fulfilling His earlier promise to appear to them there. The text emphasizes both worship and doubt among the disciples, illustrating the human complexity of faith even in the presence of the resurrected Christ.¹² Central to this passage is the Great Commission, where Jesus declares His universal authority and commands the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. This commission is paired with the promise of His continual presence, which reinforces the transition from Jesus' earthly ministry to the church's global mission.

Within the broader context of the Gospel of Matthew, this passage serves as the culmination of several major themes developed throughout the narrative. Matthew consistently portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and as one possessing unique authority, whether in teaching, healing, or over creation itself.¹³ The Great Commission extends this authority to the disciples, empowering them to continue His mission beyond the boundaries of Israel to the entire world. The focus on making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey Jesus' commands reflects the central Matthean emphasis on obedience, community, and the formation of a new covenant people. The assurance of Jesus' abiding presence (I am with you always) also echoes the initial proclamation of Jesus as "Emmanuel" (God with us) in Matt 1:23, creating a thematic *inclusio* that frames the entire Gospel.¹⁴

¹² R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1089-1095.

¹³ Dale C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 157-172.

¹⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 886-887.

From a literary perspective, the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel is carefully structured to lead readers from the resurrection to the commissioning of the disciples. The final chapter begins with the account of the resurrection (28:1-10), which highlights the angelic announcement and Jesus' direct communication with the women. This is followed by the soldiers' false report (28:11-15), which introduces a deliberate contrast between truth and deception, belief and rejection. The Gospel then closes with the Great Commission (28:16-20), which functions not only as the narrative's resolution but as its launching point into the ongoing mission of the church.¹⁵ This tripartite structure, resurrection, rejection, and commissioning, provides a comprehensive conclusion that balances both narrative closure and future anticipation. The deliberate literary design underscores the authority of the risen Christ, the reality of opposition, and the enduring task of making disciples among all nations.¹⁶

b. Historical and Cultural Background

The historical setting of the Great Commission in Matt 28:16-20 is situated within the post-resurrection period of Jesus' ministry, shortly before His ascension. This was a time of significant political, religious, and social tension. Judea was under Roman occupation, and the Jewish people were awaiting the fulfillment of messianic expectations, often interpreting these in terms of political liberation. Jesus' resurrection and subsequent commissioning of His disciples came in sharp contrast to prevailing messianic hopes that centered on immediate earthly power. Instead, Jesus commissioned a spiritual, global mission that transcended national and ethnic boundaries. His directive to make disciples of all nations would have been radical in a Jewish context, where the covenantal focus had historically centered on Israel as God's chosen people.¹⁷ This universal mission marked a fundamental shift toward the inclusion of Gentiles and the foundation of a worldwide Christian movement.

The concepts of discipleship and authority held particular cultural significance in both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts. In Judaism, discipleship typically involved close adherence to a rabbi, who provided not only doctrinal instruction but also a model for daily living. Authority in this context was often linked to adherence to the Torah and the traditions of the elders. In the Greco-Roman world, philosophical schools also had disciples, but these were usually focused on the pursuit of wisdom and ethical living under a particular teacher's guidance. Jesus' approach to discipleship combined

¹⁵ Frank J. Matera, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 545-548.

¹⁶ C. Lebechi. "Athanasius' Use of the Gospel of John: A Rhetorical Analysis of Athanasius' by Wijnand Adrianus Boezelman." *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, (2023), Vol. 31, No. 4, 581-582.

¹⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 245-270.

elements of both traditions but introduced a unique claim: His authority was not derived from human tradition or philosophical reasoning but from divine prerogative. His assertion of “all authority in heaven and on earth” positioned Him as the supreme teacher and Lord, surpassing all other claims to authority in both Jewish and Greco-Roman thought.¹⁸ His directive to make disciples involved a transformation of life, not just intellectual agreement or ethical improvement.

The command to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit introduced a practice that was rich in both Jewish and early Christian significance. In the first century, Jewish ritual washings were common for purification, but Christian baptism, especially as articulated in the Great Commission, took on a new covenantal meaning.¹⁹ It symbolized not just purification but initiation into the new community of believers unified by their allegiance to Jesus. Baptism in the triune name underscored the distinct Christian identity and the emerging doctrine of the Trinity, which, though not fully developed at this time, was foundational in early Christian practice and theology. The reference to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reflects an early Trinitarian framework that was becoming central to Christian self-understanding. The inclusion of all three persons of the Godhead in the baptismal formula signified the unity and co-working of the Trinity in salvation and mission, a concept that would later be more systematically articulated in the creeds of the early church.

c. Lexical and Syntactical Analysis

In the following discussion, the lexical and syntactical analysis of Matt 28:19-20 is carried out to underline the theological and grammatical significance of the Great Commission. The passage begins with the Greek participle *poreuthentes*, commonly translated as “Go.” While English translations often treat this word as a direct command, in Greek, it is an aorist passive participle.²⁰ Grammatically, this suggests that “going” is assumed as the disciples’ natural response to Jesus’ authority rather than the central imperative. In this structure, the act of going is necessary, but it is not the main focus of the command. The emphasis is on what must be done as they go. This subtlety shifts the focus from the mere act of movement to the deeper responsibility that follows: the making of disciples. The heart of the command lies in the imperative verb *matheteusate*, meaning “make disciples.” This is the primary directive in the passage and carries the weight of Jesus’ commission.

¹⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 89-105.

¹⁹ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 77-92.

²⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 645-650.

Discipleship in the first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman context implied more than transferring knowledge; it involved shaping a person's entire way of life under the guidance of a master or teacher.²¹ The use of this imperative highlights that Jesus' followers are not simply called to spread information or initiate religious rituals but to cultivate committed followers who adopt His teachings and way of life. Thus, the command establishes the mission of the church as a holistic endeavor aimed at life transformation, not mere conversion.

Supporting the primary command are two present participles, namely *baptizontes* (baptizing) and *didaskontes* (teaching). These participles describe how discipleship is brought about. The present tense suggests ongoing, continuous action, indicating that the processes of baptism and teaching are not isolated events but sustained practices in the life of the Christian community.²² Baptism serves as the initiation into the faith community, symbolizing repentance, new life, and allegiance to Christ. Teaching, on the other hand, emphasizes the lifelong journey of learning and obedience to all that Jesus commanded. The grammatical structure connects these activities to the core mission of making disciples, emphasizing that genuine discipleship involves both entry into the faith (through baptism) and continued growth (through teaching).

The Trinitarian formula, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit," is especially significant both lexically and theologically. The phrase "in the name" (*eis to onomon*) uses the singular form for "name" (*onoma*), suggesting a unified divine authority while listing three distinct persons.²³ This singular construction subtly reinforces the Christian understanding of the Trinity, one God in three persons. The fact that baptism is commanded in this name implies personal identification and submission to the Triune God, marking baptism as a moment of covenantal allegiance. Although full doctrinal expressions of the Trinity would be more systematically articulated in later creeds, this text already reflects an early and integral Trinitarian consciousness within the life and mission of the church. The explicit inclusion of all three persons in the baptismal formula would have distinguished the Christian movement from both Jewish monotheism and pagan polytheism, emphasizing the unique Christian identity.

²¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 42-58.

²² A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1121-1124.

²³ Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 89-98.

Syntactically, the structure of the Great Commission reveals a logical progression that binds the authority of Christ, the mission of the disciples, and the perpetual presence of Jesus. Jesus begins by declaring, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” providing the foundation for the subsequent command.²⁴ The imperative to make disciples is not a mere human initiative but is grounded in the comprehensive authority of the risen Christ. The grammatical arrangement, with the central imperative supported by the participles “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching,” shows a comprehensive, ongoing mission rather than a one-time event. Additionally, the final promise, “I am with you always, to the end of the age,” grammatically stands as a reassurance tied directly to the command. This presence of Christ ensures the success and continuity of the mission and links back to the initial theme of “Emmanuel” (God with us) from the opening chapter of Matthew. The entire passage, therefore, is a tightly structured commission that integrates movement, initiation, instruction, divine authority, and abiding presence into the life of the church.

A Theological Discourse on Matt 28:16–20

A theological perspective of Matt 28:16-20 reveals the depth of the Great Commission as the definitive conclusion of Jesus’ earthly ministry and as the launching point of the church’s mission. Central to the passage is “the authority of Christ,” explicitly stated in verse 18: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”²⁵ This declaration is the theological foundation for the commission that follows. Unlike earthly rulers whose authority is limited by geography or political reach, Jesus claims universal authority, spiritual, cosmic, and temporal. This divine authority, granted by the Father, legitimizes the mission of the church and assures believers that their commission carries the full backing of heaven. Without this authority, the task to evangelize all nations would lack both the mandate and the power required for its fulfillment.

Discipleship emerges as the core mission of the church in this passage, not merely evangelism or church expansion.²⁶ Jesus commands His followers to “make disciples of all nations,” indicating that the church’s purpose extends beyond superficial conversions to the cultivation of deep, lifelong commitment to Christ. Discipleship

²⁴ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1103-1107.

²⁵ Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 342.

²⁶ Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 89.

involves both baptism and teaching, signifying a holistic process that integrates initiation into the faith community and sustained instruction in Jesus' teachings. Theologically, this shifts the focus from numerical growth to spiritual formation. The church's mission, therefore, is not simply to increase its size but to nurture mature followers of Jesus who obey His commands and embody His character. This discipleship mandate stands at the heart of ecclesial identity and practice.

The "Trinitarian foundation of Christian baptism" is another critical theological element in this passage. Baptism is to be performed "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," a formula that highlights the unity and co-equality of the three persons of the Godhead.²⁷ The singular "name" underscores the oneness of God, while the threefold reference reveals the distinct roles within the divine relationship. This baptismal formula reflects the early church's emerging Trinitarian consciousness, even before the formal articulation of the doctrine in the fourth century. Theologically, baptism signifies not just individual repentance or cleansing but entry into the life and fellowship of the Triune God. It marks a believer's full identification with the relational nature of God, setting the Christian experience apart from other monotheistic and polytheistic traditions.

Another key theological aspect is the promise of Christ's continual presence. This assurance bookends the Gospel of Matthew, which introduces Jesus as "Emmanuel" (God with us).²⁸ Christ's enduring presence is not confined to His earthly ministry but extends to the church's global mission throughout history. This promise serves as a source of comfort, encouragement, and empowerment, especially in the face of persecution, hardship, and the daunting task of discipling all nations. It emphasizes that the mission is not carried out by human strength alone but in partnership with the living, ever-present Christ. His presence affirms the active involvement of God in the ongoing work of the church and sustains the faithful through every generation.

Finally, this passage has profound implications for ecclesiology and missiology. Ecclesialogically, the church is fundamentally a missionary community called to make disciples through baptism and teaching. Its structure, practices, and priorities must be aligned with this purpose. Missiologically, the Great Commission expands the church's horizon beyond ethnic, cultural, and geographic boundaries, embracing the

²⁷ Matthew Y. Emerson, *"He Descended to the Dead": An Evangelical Theology of Holy Saturday* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 156.

²⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1118.

universality of the gospel.²⁹ The inclusion of all nations challenges the church to engage in cross-cultural mission and to embody the inclusive scope of God's kingdom. Finally, the mission is not optional or secondary but integral to the church's identity. This commission requires the church to be outward-focused, centered on Christ's authority, reliant on His presence, and committed to forming faithful disciples who, in turn, continue the mission.

Implications of Matt 28:16–20 for Present Day Society

The missional implications for the global church drawn from Matt 28:16-20 remain foundational for Christian practice in the present-day world. The Great Commission challenges the church to adopt a truly global vision that transcends cultural, national, and denominational boundaries.³⁰ In a time marked by rapid globalization, migration, and technological interconnectedness, the church has unprecedented opportunities to engage with diverse peoples and contexts. The call to make disciples of "all nations" continues to demand active cross-cultural engagement, support for international missions, and sensitivity to cultural diversity within local congregations. The global church is reminded that its mission is not confined to its immediate geographical surroundings but extends to the ends of the earth, requiring ongoing commitment to evangelism, church planting, social transformation, and holistic ministry that addresses both spiritual and material needs.³¹

In practical aspects of discipleship today, the church is called to prioritize not just numerical growth but the formation of mature, faithful followers of Jesus.³² Modern discipleship must extend beyond Sunday gatherings or introductory courses to include intentional, relational, and lifelong learning. This includes mentoring, small group accountability, community service, and biblically grounded teaching that equips believers to live out their faith in everyday life. In a contemporary context often marked by consumerism and individualism, the church faces the challenge of cultivating disciples who embody humility, service, and Christlike character. Additionally, digital platforms and social media offer new spaces for discipleship, but they also require discernment to ensure that the depth and relational integrity of

²⁹ Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 167.

³⁰ Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 122.

³¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 278.

³² Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples A Few at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 43.

discipleship are not lost in virtual environments.³³ The Great Commission reminds the church that the essence of discipleship involves both proclamation and transformation.

The passage also continues to contribute meaningfully to ecumenical discussions on baptism and the Trinity. The Trinitarian baptismal formula provided in the Great Commission is a unifying theological element across most Christian traditions, yet differences in baptismal practice (infant vs. believer's baptism, mode of baptism) continue to spark dialogue among denominations.³⁴ This shared formula offers a point of theological convergence for ecumenical conversations, inviting diverse Christian communities to reflect together on the nature of Christian initiation, identity, and unity. Furthermore, the Trinitarian foundation of the commission serves as a theological anchor in ongoing discussions about the nature of God, especially in contexts where misunderstandings of Christian monotheism persist. The explicit invocation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continues to call the global church to a deeper embrace of its Trinitarian heritage while providing a common ground for fostering unity within the broader body of Christ.³⁵

Augustine and the Discipleship of Love

St. Augustine's vision of discipleship is fundamentally entrenched in his theological anthropology, which understands the human heart as inherently restless until it finds its ultimate satisfaction in God.³⁶ This restlessness, as articulated in his *Confessions*, reflects the soul's deep longing to be rightly ordered, a longing that can only be fulfilled when love is directed toward its proper object: God Himself. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine famously writes, "Every Christian is a disciple of love, and to love rightly is to live rightly." For Augustine, this is not merely moral instruction but a profound description of the human journey toward God. Discipleship is not about superficial conformity or external practices; it is about *transformatio cordis*, the conversion of the heart.³⁷ Augustine's focus on the heart's reordering underscores that discipleship involves a radical interior transformation, one in which the

³³ Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2020), 156.

³⁴ Susan K. Wood, ed., *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 78.

³⁵ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 234.

³⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Classics, 1961), 1.1.

³⁷ James Wetzel, *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89.

disordered loves of the human heart are redirected toward the divine, shaping both character and community.

In *The City of God*, Augustine deepens this vision by contrasting two loves that give rise to two cities: the *civitas terrena* (the earthly city), which is dominated by self-love to the point of contempt for God, and the *civitas Dei* (the city of God), where the love of God governs and rightly orders all things.³⁸ Discipleship, in Augustine's framework, is the mode of life appropriate to the heavenly city, a life shaped by grace, humility, and charity. The pilgrim nature of the church, a community in transit toward its eschatological fulfillment, highlights the communal aspect of discipleship.³⁹

For Augustine, discipleship is participation in what he describes as the *divine pedagogy*. In this vision, Christ is the supreme teacher, the Church is the school of love, love itself is the curriculum, and grace is the enabling force.⁴⁰ The Christian life, then, is a lifelong educational journey where the disciple is continually formed by the love of God through the communal practices of the Church. Augustine's understanding integrates doctrinal learning, sacramental life, and moral formation as essential dimensions of discipleship.⁴¹ It is not simply about acquiring theological knowledge but about entering into a formative relationship with Christ and the Church that gradually reorients the whole of life. This pedagogical model, drawn from Augustine's integration of scriptural exegesis, philosophical inquiry, and pastoral care, provides a deeply holistic and relational account of what it means to be a disciple.⁴² It remains a compelling framework for contemporary Christian formation, particularly as Pope Leo XIV applies it to a church traversing modern challenges such as pluralism, digital culture, and the need for communal renewal.

Pope Leo XIV: A Discipleship Pontificate

Pope Leo XIV's pontificate presents a compelling vision of discipleship that is deeply informed by Augustinian theology and resonates powerfully with the contemporary challenges facing the Church. For Leo, following his inaugural speech, the future of the Church does not depend on institutional robustness or ideological alignment but

³⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 14.28.

³⁹ Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 167.

⁴⁰ Tarcisius J. van Bavel, "The Divine Pedagogy According to Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2012): 78.

⁴¹ C. Lebechi "Discipline Inflamed by Love: A Critical Analysis of Augustine of Hippo's Epistle 93 on the Exercise of Episcopal Ministry," *Nigerian Journal of Church History and Missiological Studies*, (2021) Vol. 5, 61-82. 70.

⁴² John C. Cavadini, *Visioning Augustine* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 145.

on a radical return to the heart of Christian identity: to be disciples of Christ.⁴³ His inaugural speech highlights that authentic discipleship involves more than formal membership or cultural affiliation; it is a life of attentive following, active listening, and embodied witness to the living Christ. Leo's Augustinian formation is evident in his emphasis on the transformation of the heart, the communal journey of faith, and the centrality of love in shaping ecclesial life. This vision calls the Church to shed complacency and rediscover its primary vocation as a community of learners who pattern their lives after Christ.

The phrase "Christ goes before us,"⁴⁴ which Leo employed, encapsulates his theological insistence that discipleship is fundamentally God's initiative. Echoing the Great Commission's promise in Matt 28:20 (I am with you always), Leo emphasizes that the Church does not lead itself; it is led by Christ through the Holy Spirit. Disciples are not pioneers charting their path but followers responding to the prior movement of grace. This Christocentric humility is the foundation of Leo's advocacy for synodality, a church that "walks together" in shared discernment and mutual accompaniment.⁴⁵ It can be supposed that for Leo, synodality is not merely a structural or procedural approach but a spiritual posture that recognizes Christ's presence at the center of ecclesial life. It is a communal journey where hierarchical authority and lay participation are integrated in a dynamic, Spirit-guided process that deepens both unity and mission.

Leo's call to move forward "without fear" directly addresses the hesitancy and anxiety that often accompany the Church's mission in an increasingly pluralistic, secular, and fragmented world. He challenges the Church to resist both defensive isolation and triumphalist aggression. Instead, Leo envisions disciples who evangelize courageously yet humbly, particularly in emerging contexts such as digital culture, public witness amid suffering, and interreligious engagement. His pastoral concern encourages Christians to engage the world not as conquerors but as those who bear the presence of Christ, trusting in His promise to accompany them through all challenges. This fearless discipleship, grounded in the confidence of Christ's abiding presence, invites the Church to embrace its mission with hope, openness, and a profound trust that the risen Lord continues to lead and sustain His people.

⁴³ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: Peace be with you!*. <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/transcript-of-pope-leo-xivs-first-speech-after-election-peace-be-with-you/6256890>

⁴⁴ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election*:

⁴⁵ M. P. Pilani, "Synodality in Numbers 11: 24-30: An Archetype for Participation in Community Life," in *The Bible on synodality: Walking together in communion, participation, and mission. Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN)*, vol. 14 (2023): 24-42.

Contemporary Challenges to Discipleship

Contemporary discipleship, as may be envisioned by Pope Leo, faces significant challenges shaped by the complexities of the modern world. Issues such as religious pluralism, digital transformation, secularization, social fragmentation, and environmental crises demand that the Church reimagine how it embodies and proclaims the gospel today.

a. Pluralism and Evangelization

In contemporary multicultural societies, the proclamation of the gospel often risks being perceived as triumphalist, imperialistic, or culturally insensitive. The exclusivity of the Christian claim, to make disciples of all nations, can appear to contradict modern values of religious diversity and tolerance.⁴⁶ Pope Leo XIV addresses this tension by reframing evangelization not as an act of conquest but as an invitation to encounter the universal love of God. For Leo, evangelization is deeply relational and grounded in humility, where the goal is not to impose doctrine but to propose the life-giving way of Christ through authentic witness. He draws heavily from Augustine's vision of ordered love, reminding the Church that it is love, not power, that animates the missionary task.⁴⁷ True discipleship, in this light, respects the dignity and freedom of the other, seeking dialogue that is marked by patience, compassion, and mutual learning.

This approach significantly challenges the Church to reassess its missionary posture in pluralistic contexts.⁴⁸ Leo XIV encourages a model of evangelization that embraces listening as a central practice, recognizing that the Holy Spirit is already at work in every culture and individual heart.⁴⁹ His pastoral vision insists that dialogue and witness must coexist, where proclamation is coupled with genuine openness to the stories and beliefs of others. Rather than retreating from public discourse or diluting its message, the Church is called to engage courageously but humbly, trusting that the beauty of the gospel speaks most powerfully through lives shaped by love and service. In this way, evangelization becomes a credible and attractive invitation rather than an unwelcome intrusion.

⁴⁶ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 142.

⁴⁷ Terrence W. Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus: Christology as Reconciling Practice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 89.

⁴⁸ M., Muonwe, & Lebechi, C. "Effects of Gendered Christian Missionary Education Policy in Southeast Nigeria (1857-1970). *Estaga: Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (2024). Vol. 1, No. 2, 146-164. 155.

⁴⁹ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 298.

b. Digital Discipleship

The rapid expansion of digital reality reshapes how communities are formed and how the Church carries out its mission. Pope Leo XIV acknowledges that the virtual realm is now part of the “all nations” to which the Church is sent.⁵⁰ Digital discipleship involves more than using technology for outreach; it calls for the intentional cultivation of virtual spaces where authentic faith formation, community, and sacramental imagination can thrive. Leo’s pastoral guidance warns against superficial engagement with digital platforms that prioritize visibility over depth. Instead, he advocates for thoughtful catechesis, digital hospitality, and creative sacramental expressions that reflect the incarnational reality of the gospel. The challenge is to ensure that virtual discipleship does not lose the embodied, communal nature of Christian life.⁵¹

One can safely affirm that Leo’s vision urges the Church to approach the digital world with discernment and theological depth. Thus, it is important that while digital tools can extend the Church’s reach, they must never substitute for the embodied practices of baptism, Eucharist, and lived community. Discipleship must be holistic, integrating online interactions with face-to-face fellowship and sacramental participation.⁵² Leo’s concern is that digital discipleship risks becoming disembodied, consumer-driven, or algorithmically fragmented unless it is carefully anchored in the relational and incarnational ethos of the gospel. The digital mission field, for Leo, is both an opportunity and a responsibility, requiring the Church to creatively bridge the virtual and the tangible in ways that remain faithful to the heart of Christian discipleship.

c. Secularization and the Crisis of Meaning

In a world increasingly shaped by secular ideologies, many individuals experience a profound sense of disconnection and meaninglessness. Modern secular frameworks often strip life of its transcendent dimensions, reducing existence to material or pragmatic concerns as “previously accepted symbols, doctrines and institutions lose their prestige and influence.”⁵³ Regarding this, Pope Benedict XVI speaks directly into this existential vacuum in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, affirming that humanity needs

⁵⁰ Heidi Campbell, *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 76.

⁵¹ Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 134.

⁵² Tim Hutchings, *Creating Church Online: Ritual, Community and New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 187.

⁵³ “Secularization: the fate of faith in modern society,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed June 13, 2025, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/secularization-the-fate-of-faith-in-modern-society/>.

Christ as the bridge to reach the fullness of life.⁵⁴ For Benedict, discipleship is not merely a religious obligation but a transformative way of life that re-enchants existence with divine purpose and relational belonging. In the face of pervasive disillusionment, discipleship offers a counter-narrative that roots human identity in Christ and invites individuals into a story larger than themselves.

Benedict's theology insists that the Church must embody this alternative vision, offering spaces where seekers can rediscover beauty, hope, and sacred meaning. The Church's catechesis and witness must confront the crisis of meaning not with abstract propositions but with lives of joyful witness, sacramental depth, and compassionate presence. As Charles Taylor demonstrates in his analysis of the secular age, the challenge facing Christianity is not mere unbelief but the loss of transcendent horizons that give life ultimate meaning.⁵⁵ Benedict challenges the Church to offer discipleship that speaks to the heart's deepest longings, presenting the gospel not as a retreat from the world but as the fulfillment of what it means to be truly human. In this way, discipleship becomes a remedy for the modern malaise, a path that reconnects people with God, with others, and with their inherent dignity and purpose.

d. Social Division and Christian Unity

The fragmentation of modern societies along political, economic, and racial lines poses a serious challenge to the Church's witness as a community of unity. The Second Vatican Council declared that "the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council"⁵⁶ calling the Church to resist the forces of tribalism and polarization by embodying a reconciled community that transcends social divisions. Drawing from Augustine's vision of the *civitas Dei*, Vatican II teaches that baptismal identity supersedes all other markers of affiliation, and the Church must serve as a prophetic sign of unity in a fractured world. Discipleship, therefore, is not a private journey but a communal vocation that requires radical solidarity across social boundaries.

⁵⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, encyclical letter, December 25, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, encyclical letter, December 25, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html.

⁵⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3-22.

⁵⁶ "Vatican II and the Ecumenical Movement," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed June 13, 2025, <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/vatican-ii-and-ecumenical-movement>.

The Council's *Unitatis Redintegratio* emphasizes that Christian unity is not uniformity but a reconciled diversity grounded in love and mutual service. The Church's mission includes engaging "in timely ecumenical initiatives and activities, both within the Catholic Church and in relations with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to restore unity among Christians."⁵⁷ This vision of discipleship demands concrete action: fostering spaces of intercultural dialogue, practicing economic solidarity, and advocating for the marginalized. In a world where division often seems inevitable, Vatican II's ecclesiology insists that the Church's most powerful witness is its ability to "walk together" as a diverse yet unified body. Discipleship, in this framework, is inseparable from the Church's mission to model communion in the midst of a divided society.

e. Environmental and Social Justice

Contemporary discipleship powerfully integrates the call to environmental stewardship and social justice, positioning these concerns at the heart of authentic Christian living. Pope Francis insists in *Laudato Si'* that "everything is connected" and that true discipleship cannot remain indifferent to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.⁵⁸ In Francis's theology, following Christ necessarily involves a commitment to the well-being of creation and the defense of human dignity, especially for those who are marginalized and oppressed. Discipleship, therefore, is not limited to personal piety or church-centered activities but extends to the active transformation of unjust social structures and the healing of ecological wounds. Drawing upon Augustine's notion of rightly ordered love, contemporary Catholic social teaching calls the Church to reorder its relationships with the environment, the poor, and all of humanity in ways that reflect God's universal and redemptive love.⁵⁹

Francis's teaching decisively challenges disciples to move beyond passive concern to concrete advocacy and action, calling Christians to be "protectors of creation."⁶⁰ He critiques both consumerist apathy and spiritual escapism, urging Christians to embody what it means to be repairers of the world. For Francis, discipleship demands responsible care for creation as an act of reverence for the Creator and solidarity with those most affected by environmental degradation. Likewise, disciples are called to

⁵⁷ "Dicasteries Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity Profile," Vatican, accessed June 13, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/romancuria/en/dicasteri/dicastero-promozione-unita-cristiani/profilo.html>.

⁵⁸ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), §91, 138.

⁵⁹ C. Lebechi. Option for the Poor in the Church's Life and Thought: Historical and Theological Survey. *African Journal of Contextual Theology*, (2014), Vol. 5, No. 1, 9-32.

⁶⁰ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §217.

stand with the poor, not out of paternalistic charity but through active pursuit of justice, systemic change, and economic solidarity. The Church, in Francis's vision, must be visibly engaged in addressing issues such as climate change, poverty, forced migration, and inequality, thereby demonstrating that the gospel speaks powerfully to the urgent concerns of the modern world. In this integrated discipleship, environmental care and social justice are not peripheral concerns but essential expressions of the Church's mission to manifest God's holistic love in the world.

f. Toward a Discipleship Ecclesiology

Contemporary discipleship ecclesiology calls the Church to recover its essential identity as a community of Christ-followers rather than an institution primarily concerned with self-preservation. As Pope Francis emphasizes, "the Church's vitality does not depend on institutional security, social influence, or cultural dominance, but on its fidelity to Christ and its missionary outreach."⁶¹ Discipleship is the foundational lens through which the Church must see itself as a people continually called to follow the One who first sent, taught, suffered, died, and rose again. This Christ-centered orientation ensures that the Church's structures, ministries, and practices are always subordinate to its core vocation of imitation and participation in Christ's mission. This re-centering on Christ's precedence prevents the Church from becoming static or self-referential and instead anchors it in a dynamic relationship with the living Lord who continually goes before His people.

A discipleship ecclesiology necessarily compels the Church to engage the world missionally. The Church cannot retreat into isolation or view itself as a fortress against secular society; rather, it is sent to "all nations" in the fullest sense: geographical, cultural, social, and digital. Vatican II's *Ad Gentes* insists that disciples are not spectators but active participants in the *missio Dei*, called to carry the gospel into every corner of human life.⁶² In the contemporary context, this includes digital spaces, where virtual communities and cultural discourses shape lives and worldviews. This emphasis challenges the Church to expand its missionary imagination to encompass not only traditional evangelization but also digital discipleship, social justice, environmental advocacy, and intercultural dialogue. The Church's mission is not merely to grow in number but to faithfully witness to Christ's love in ways that transform societies, heal divisions, and invite others into the life of the kingdom.

⁶¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), §27.

⁶² Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), §2.

Central to discipleship ecclesiology is the practice of baptismal solidarity, where to be baptized is to belong to Christ, to the Church, and a shared vocation of discipleship. Baptism is not a private ritual or a cultural marker but the sacramental entry into a new community that transcends race, class, nation, and ideology. Drawing heavily from the Augustinian vision, the baptized are citizens of the *civitas Dei*, united not by blood or political allegiance but by their common life in Christ. This solidarity calls the Church to embody a radical inclusivity, where every baptized person is recognized as a co-disciple and a co-laborer in the mission. Such solidarity confronts the divisions of modern society and the temptation to fragment the Church along ethnic, economic, or political lines. Baptism establishes not only personal belonging but also communal responsibility, a shared vocation to walk together in humility, justice, and love.

Finally, discipleship ecclesiology insists that the Church must live the teachings of Christ and trust His abiding presence. As Matthew 28:20 promises, “I am with you always, to the end of the age”, a foundation that sustains the Church’s mission even amid opposition or cultural marginalization. Discipleship is not an intellectual assent or passive affiliation but an active obedience to Jesus’ commands. The Church’s credibility in the world depends on its ability to embody the gospel in concrete ways, through justice, mercy, service, and communal life shaped by the Beatitudes. This promise is the source of the Church’s courage and perseverance, especially in the face of opposition, secularization, or cultural marginalization. Trusting in the presence of Christ does not mean passive waiting but an active journey of communion, where the Church moves forward in mission not with fear or triumphalism, but with the humble confidence that Christ always goes before His people.

Conclusion

Pope Leo XIV’s vision of discipleship, deeply connected to the Great Commission and Augustine’s theological anthropology, calls the Church to reclaim its foundational identity as a community of Christ-followers shaped by love, humility, and mission. By integrating Augustine’s emphasis on the restlessness of the human heart and the reordering of love, Leo presents discipleship as both an interior transformation and a communal vocation. His insistence that “Christ goes before us” reminds the Church that its mission is not self-initiated but Spirit-led, grounded in the abiding presence of Christ who continually guides His people. In Leo’s vision, discipleship transcends institutional maintenance, urging the Church to walk together with courage and openness, particularly in the face of contemporary challenges such as pluralism, secularization, digital transformation, and social fragmentation.

This study has shown that Pope Leo XIV's Augustinian vision offers a holistic framework for understanding discipleship that speaks directly to the needs of the modern Church. It is a call to move beyond passive belonging toward active participation in God's mission of love, justice, and reconciliation. By framing discipleship as a lifelong journey of learning, service, and communal solidarity, Leo challenges the Church to embody a witness that is both credible and transformative. His vision situates the Church as a living, relational body that is not afraid to engage the complexities of the world but does so with humility, integrity, and fearless trust in Christ's enduring promise: "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

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“We Have to Work Together on How to Be a Missionary Church”: Reflecting on Pope Leo XIV’s Missiological Vision

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Introduction

That which is perfect expresses itself through perfect acts, just as what is abundant naturally pours itself out. Perfect knowledge, for example, is manifested in its ability to communicate clearly. In the same way, Christ, being perfect, reveals His divine fullness through generous and abundant self-giving. As Scripture says, “From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16). This fullness is made visible through His mission (John 20:21). Mission is the temporal unfolding of eternal processions, the Son proceeding from the Father as Word, and the Spirit from the Father and the Son as Love. Christ’s being sent reveals His eternal origin, especially in the Incarnation and the Eucharist. Procession describes the eternal origin of divine Persons within the Godhead. The Son proceeds from the Father as the eternal Word (intellectual generation), while the Spirit proceeds from both as their bond of Love. These processions are intrinsic to divine life, timeless and independent of creation. A mission occurs when divine Persons are sent into creation. The Son’s mission is the incarnation (Word made flesh); the Spirit’s is Pentecost and sacramental presence. As Aquinas states, mission is “procession with a new mode of existence.”¹ The same eternal Person now exists as a creature. Thus, processions (internal and eternal) are revealed through missions (external and temporal), inviting us into God’s life. The Church, too, shares in this dynamic of fullness because she receives Christ’s fullness (Eph. 1:22-23). She is conformed to Him and participates in His mission. Just as Christ reveals the inner life of God through His being sent (mission), so too the Church reveals that divine life by being sent into the world (Mark 16:15). Her missionary identity flows not from her initiative, but from the divine abundance she has received and is called to share.

¹ Aquinas, *STI*, q.43, a.2, co.

Pope Leo XIV's homily at his inauguration painted a "fisher of men" imagery, revealing mission as Trinitarian self-giving: Christ's call to the disciples mirrors the Son's eternal procession from the Father, not from need but from divine abundance. As Christ was sent by the Father, so the Church is sent by the Son (John 20:21), becoming a sacrament of God's love by participating in this overflow. The Church's mission depends not on human zeal but on receiving and reflecting the Father's *agapē*, shown when Christ calls Peter beyond *philēō* to self-giving love (John 21:16).² The Spirit, as the bond of Trinitarian love, empowers this mission, conforming the Church to Christ's sacrificial love. Thus, the Holy Father "presides in charity," making visible the Trinity's inner life through merciful witness.

Pope Leo XIV speaks not only as a theological teacher but as one who has personally encountered the trials of mission. He understands the complexities and challenges faced by those engaged in evangelization. Accordingly, this study will proceed by first examining the specific problems and obstacles he identifies as hindrances to effective missionary activity in the modern world. It will then explore the practical and spiritual remedies he proposes, culminating in a reflection on the goals and fruits of being a missionary Church, as articulated throughout his teachings and papal addresses.

The Challenges Facing the Missionary Efforts of the Church

The Personnel Challenge

In his *Address to the Pontifical Missionary Societies*, Pope Leo XIV offers a sobering yet necessary analysis of the obstacles impeding the Church's missionary mandate. These challenges, both internal and external, substantially hinder the effectiveness of evangelization across many regions, echoing longstanding concerns within the Church's magisterial tradition. Central to the Holy Father's assessment is what he terms a critical diminishment of missionary consciousness among the baptized, which he describes as a condition of "spiritual fatigue or missionary amnesia."³ Many Christians, although sacramentally initiated, have grown indifferent to the call to evangelize, remain unaware of their missionary identity, or have forgotten it entirely. This diagnosis resonates with the earlier warning of Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, wherein he laments that "a crisis of missionary zeal"⁴ threatens the Church's evangelical vitality. This erosion of missionary fervour underscores the urgent need for renewed catechesis. Pope Paul VI emphasized this foundational truth in *Evangelii*

² Leo XIV, *Homily for the Beginning of the Pontificate*.

³ Leo XIV, *Address to the Pontifical Missionary Societies*.

⁴ John Paul II, RM. 2.

Nuntiandi, asserting that "the Church exists to evangelize".⁵ Yet in many instances, Catholics remain a "silent and ineffective presence" in the world.⁶ In continuity with this vision, Pope Leo XIV calls for a revitalization of missionary formation, reiterating the principle articulated in *Catechesi Tradendae* that catechesis must form "witnesses before being teachers".⁷

The Holy Father also acknowledges the "burden of discouragement" borne by missionaries—whether lay, religious, or ordained—who often contend with cultural resistance, logistical hardships, and a perceived lack of fruit. This mirrors Pope Benedict XV's acknowledgment in *Maximum Illud* of the "immense difficulties"⁸ confronting missionaries, alongside his call for more robust institutional support. Particularly noteworthy is Pope Leo XIV's identification of a "feeling of underappreciation" among missionaries,⁹ who frequently labour without sufficient emotional, pastoral, or financial reinforcement from their local ecclesial communities. This neglect, he notes, contributes to burnout, a concern similarly addressed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he cautions against "pastoral fatigue"¹⁰ and calls for the "accompaniment"¹¹ of those engaged in the mission. The Holy Father's reflections evoke John Paul II's meditation in *Vita Consecrata* on the "dark nights"¹² endured by missionaries, highlighting the necessity of perseverance in the face of adversity.

A further structural impediment identified is the acute shortage of well-formed clergy, religious, and lay leaders, especially within young Churches where the faith is still in the process of inculturation. Inadequate formation often results in a superficial Christian identity, rendering communities vulnerable to syncretism, relativism, or even reversion to pre-Christian religious expressions. This challenge is not novel. The Second Vatican Council's *Ad Gentes* explicitly warns that without indigenous clergy, the faith risks remaining "foreign" and thus failing to take deep cultural root.¹³ Pope John Paul II reiterates this concern in *Ecclesia in Africa*, where he cautions against "incomplete inculturation"¹⁴ that cannot sustain mature discipleship. Likewise, Pope

⁵ Pope Paul VI, *EN*. 14

⁶ *Ibid.* 15.

⁷ John Paul II, *CT*. 6.

⁸ Benedict XV, *MI*. 3.

⁹ Leo XIV, *Address to the Pontifical Missionary Societies*.

¹⁰ Francis, *EG*. 277.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 24.

¹² John Paul II, *VC*. 85.

¹³ Vatican Council II, *AG*. 19.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *EA*. 63.

Francis, in *Christus Vivit*, emphasizes the need for "better formation of lay leaders" to ensure the Church's vitality in developing contexts. Pope Leo XIV articulates these challenges not as grounds for despair, but as a call to a renewed collective pastoral response. His appeal echoes John Paul II's call for a "new missionary ardour"¹⁵ and aligns with Pope Francis's insistence on a "missionary conversion" of ecclesial structures.¹⁶ Absent such renewal, the Church risks not only institutional stagnation but the "fading of her evangelical witness" in an increasingly fragmented world. This concern finds further expression in *Gaudium et Spes*, which exhorts the Church to "scrutinize the signs of the times"¹⁷ and to respond with missionary dynamism rooted in the Gospel.

Critical Areas of Challenge

In his *Address to the Pontifical Missionary Society*, the Holy Father identifies a critical shortage of pastoral resources in mission territories, noting how disproportionate minister-to-faithful ratios result in inadequate spiritual accompaniment and weakened ecclesial communion.¹⁸ This concern directly echoes Vatican II's *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, which warns that priestly shortages create "grave difficulties in the pastoral ministry",¹⁹ while *Pastores Dabo Vobis* explicitly addresses the "uneven distribution of clergy" that leaves some regions "deprived of the Word and Eucharist".²⁰ The resulting "diminished sacramental life" reflects the Council's teaching in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that full, conscious participation in the liturgy requires stable pastoral conditions.²¹ The Pontiff's theological treatment of church buildings as incarnational signs develops conciliar teaching in important ways. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*'s declaration that sacred spaces "make present the mystery of Christ"²² finds concrete application in the critique of temporary worship spaces. *Lumen Gentium*'s ecclesiology of local churches as "visible expressions of the universal Church"²³ undergirds the argument for proper worship facilities, while *Ecclesia in Africa*'s lament about "grass-thatched chapels"²⁴ provides a magisterial precedent for this concern. The connection

¹⁵ John Paul II, *RM*. 86.

¹⁶ Francis, *EG* 27.

¹⁷ Vatican Council II, *GS*. 43.

¹⁸ Leo XIV, *Address to the Pontifical Missionary Societies*.

¹⁹ Vatican Council II, *PO*. 3.

²⁰ John Paul II, *PDV*. 5.

²¹ Vatican Council II, *SC*. 59.

²² *Ibid.* 7.

²³ Vatican Council II, *LG*. 26.

²⁴ John Paul II, *EA*. 88.

between poverty and unstable infrastructure reflects *Populorum Progressio*'s insight that economic development creates "conditions for authentic worship".²⁵

The Pope's treatment of healthcare and education as essential to evangelisation develops *Evangelii Nuntiandi*'s foundational principle that "evangelisation includes health and education".²⁶ *Deus Caritas Est*'s teaching on charitable institutions as "essential expressions of ecclesial mission"²⁷ provides theological depth to the healthcare discussion, while *Gravissimum Educationis* declares Catholic schools "privileged environments for evangelisation".²⁸ The analysis of resource limitations extends *Mater et Magistra*'s call for wealthier Churches to "share personnel and goods"²⁹ with mission territories. Leo XIV also shed light on vulnerable children and adults with particular urgency.³⁰ *Christus Vivit*'s demand for "concrete protection policies"³¹ and *Dignitas Infinita*'s condemnation of child neglect as "a scandal undermining Gospel credibility"³² provide authoritative support. The theological connection between mercy and mission reflects *Evangelii Gaudium*'s declaration that "mercy is the missionary's credentials",³³ rooted in Matthew 25:40's eschatological imperative.

From Crisis to Kairos: Mission as Ecclesial Necessity

Pope Leo XIV articulated in his address to the *Pontifical Missionary Society* with prophetic clarity the urgent missionary imperative, insisting that "our world, wounded by war, violence, and injustice, needs to hear the Gospel message of God's love and to experience the reconciling power of Christ's grace". This statement reflects the Church's mission of proclaiming truth and embodying mercy, as articulated in *Deus Caritas Est*: "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity".³⁴ The contemporary crises, armed conflicts, systemic poverty, and moral relativism are not merely social challenges but obstacles to the reception of the Gospel, obscuring the transcendent dignity of the human person. Yet, as Pope Leo XIV emphasises, the Church does not respond with mere spiritual consolation but

²⁵ Paul VI, *PP*. 14.

²⁶ Paul VI, *EN*. 31.

²⁷ Benedict XVI, *DCE*. 22.

²⁸ Vatican Council II, *GE*. 2.

²⁹ John XXIII, *MM*. 182.

³⁰ Leo XIV, *Address to the Pontifical Missionary Societies*.

³¹ Francis, *CV*. 242.

³² *DI* 13.

³³ Francis, *EG*. 181.

³⁴ Benedict XVI, *DCE*. 25.

with the transformative power of Christ's Paschal Mystery, similar to the echoes of St. John Paul II, which has already inaugurated the Kingdom of God.³⁵ The Holy Father draws from Pope Francis' theology of the Cross, affirming that peace is not an abstract ideal but a reality achieved through sacrificial love: "The Lord has overcome the world and its constant conflict 'by making peace through the blood of His Cross'" (Col 1:20).³⁶ This echoes *Redemptoris Missio's* teaching that "the Church's mission flows from the mystery of the Trinity"³⁷, and that the Cross stands as the definitive revelation of divine mercy. The urgency of evangelisation, therefore, is not merely a reaction to external crises but an ecclesial necessity—because the Church exists to continue Christ's ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19). As *Lumen Gentium* declares, she is "the universal sacrament of salvation",³⁸ and any neglect of mission would constitute a failure of her divine mandate.³⁹ Pope Leo XIV reaffirms that the Church's mission is not one of cultural imposition but of witness to divine love, a principle enshrined in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "The Church evangelises not by force but by attraction".⁴⁰ The universality of mission ("to all peoples, indeed to all creatures") reflects the cosmic scope of redemption⁴¹ while remaining personally transformative, offering "a hope that does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5). The Pope's invocation of Pope Francis' "field hospital" imagery⁴² underscores that the Church must prioritise mercy in mission, binding wounds through both proclamation and works of charity.⁴³ This missionary renewal must permeate every pastoral initiative, theological reflection, and structural decision, ensuring the Church fully embodies her identity in this "favourable time" (*kairos*) of grace (2 Cor 6:2).

The Eastern Church Challenges

Pope Leo XIV's address to the *Participants in the Jubilee of the Oriental Churches* presents a profound theological and pastoral analysis of the crises facing these ancient Christian communities.⁴⁴ Drawing deeply from the Church's magisterial tradition, the Holy Father articulates how the forced migration of Eastern Christians constitutes not merely a humanitarian tragedy but an ecclesiological emergency that threatens the very

³⁵ John Paul II, *RM*. 18.

³⁶ Francis, *EG*. 68.

³⁷ John Paul II, *RM*. 1.

³⁸ Vatican Council II, *LG*. 48.

³⁹ Vatican Council II, *AG*. 5.

⁴⁰ Paul VI, *EN*. 79.

⁴¹ Francis, *LS*. 83.

⁴² Francis, *EG*. 49.

⁴³ Francis, *MV*. 12.

⁴⁴ Leo XIV, *Participants in the Jubilee of the Oriental Churches*.

catholicity of the Church. As Benedict XVI warned in *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, the exodus of Christians from their ancestral homelands risks creating "a serious threat to the very existence of the Church" in regions where Christianity first took root.⁴⁵ This concern echoes Vatican II's teaching in *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* that the Eastern Churches "have the right and duty to govern themselves according to their disciplines",⁴⁶ making their dispersion a violation of ecclesial integrity. The erosion of Eastern Christian identity in diaspora represents a second dimension of this crisis. As Pope Leo XIV observes, displaced communities risk losing not only their geographic roots but their spiritual patrimony - a concern previously voiced by John Paul II in *Oriente Lumen*, which emphasized the need for Eastern Christians to "preserve and pass on their patrimony".⁴⁷ This patrimony includes not only ancient liturgical traditions but unique theological insights that, as *Ut Unum Sint* notes, contain "precious theological and spiritual riches" essential for the whole Church.⁴⁸ The practical challenges of maintaining these traditions in diaspora are addressed by the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, which mandates that migrant communities must have access to clergy and liturgy of their tradition.⁴⁹

The missionary implications of this crisis are particularly grave. Eastern Christians have historically served as bridges for interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam, a role recognized.⁵⁰ Their diminishing presence weakens the Church's capacity for engagement in regions where, as *Redemptoris Missio* teaches, local Churches must remain vibrant to sustain missionary activity.⁵¹ This crisis ultimately challenges the Church's fundamental nature as both one and catholic. As *Lumen Gentium* teaches, the particular Churches manifest the universal Church's catholicity in diverse cultural forms.⁵² The preservation of Eastern Christianity is thus not merely an act of cultural conservation but a fulfillment of the Church's missionary mandate to be truly universal. In our era of mass migration and cultural homogenization, the Church must develop both immediate pastoral responses and long-term strategies to safeguard these vital expressions of Catholic tradition, recognizing with *Oriente Lumen* that the Christian East and West are called to "breathe with both lungs" of the Church for the sake of authentic evangelization.⁵³

⁴⁵ Benedict XVI, *EIMO*. 9.

⁴⁶ Vatican Council II, *OE*. 5.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *OL*. 21.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *UUS*. 59.

⁴⁹ *CCEO*. 40.

⁵⁰ Vatican Council II, *NA*. 3.

⁵¹ John Paul II, *RM*. 37.

⁵² Vatican Council II, *LG*. 23.

⁵³ John Paul II, *OL*. 1.

Proposed Solutions to these Challenges

The Gospel: A Solution Towards a Wounded World

Pope Leo XIV develops a profound theology of mission rooted in the very nature of God as perfect, self-giving love. In his address, *The Sower*, the Holy Father presents Christ's parable (Mark 4:1-20) as revealing the essential pattern of divine communication - the Father's abundant self-gift through the Son in the Spirit.⁵⁴ This Trinitarian dynamic finds its perfect expression in the incarnation, where "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), and continues sacramentally through the Church's missionary activity. The image of the sower who "scatters the seed without discrimination" manifests God's radical generosity in a wounded world, reflecting what *Dei Verbum* calls God's "plan of sheer goodness".⁵⁵

At the heart of this missionary theology lies the fundamental connection between the Trinity's eternal processions and temporal missions. The Son's procession as Word becomes visible in His mission as incarnate Saviour, just as the Spirit's procession as love is manifested at Pentecost. As Pope Leo XIV insists, authentic evangelization must imitate this divine logic: "We are to evangelize not based on perceived receptivity but out of the overflowing abundance of divine generosity, and indiscriminate love".⁵⁶ This teaching finds deep confirmation in Vatican II's *Ad Gentes*, which declares that missionary activity flows from God's nature as "the fountain and origin of all mission",⁵⁷ and in John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, where we read that "the Church is missionary by her very nature, for Christ's mission is the source and center of her whole life".⁵⁸

The Church's missionary identity derives from her conformation to Christ through the power of the Spirit. Pope Leo XIV emphasizes that missionary effectiveness comes not from rhetorical skill but from authentic Christian witness: "We become effective missionaries through the witness of our lifestyle".⁵⁹ This principle echoes *Gaudium et Spes*' declaration that Christians must "bear witness to Christ by the example of their lives"⁶⁰ and develops Paul VI's insight in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers".⁶¹ This witness is

⁵⁴ Leo XIV, *The Sower*.

⁵⁵ Vatican Council II, *VD*. 2.

⁵⁶ Leo XIV, *The Sower*.

⁵⁷ Vatican Council II, *AG*. 2.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *RM*. 18.

⁵⁹ Leo XIV, *Address to the Mayor of Rome*.

⁶⁰ Vatican Council II, *GS*. 43.

⁶¹ Paul VI, *EN*. 41.

fundamentally ecclesial, as seen in the Holy Father's reflection on how saints like Thérèse, Vianney, and Eudes emerged from "living Christian communities",⁶² reflecting *Lumen Gentium's* teaching on the universal call to holiness⁶³ and Benedict XVI's emphasis that "the saints are the true interpreters of Holy Scripture".⁶⁴

Pope Leo XIV's vision culminates in the Church's call to be "signs of the hope and peace of Christ"⁶⁵ in a world marked by division and violence. This develops *Ecclesia in Africa's* call for Christians to be "artisans of peace and reconciliation"⁶⁶ and *Fratelli Tutti's* vision of social friendship.⁶⁷ The Holy Father thus presents an integrated missionary theology where the Church's activity flows from the Trinity's inner life, is conformed to Christ's incarnate witness, empowered by the Spirit, and manifested through the holiness of her members. This vision calls the Church today to generous, Christ-like sowing of the Word through lives transformed by and witnessing to God's abundant love.

Truthful Communication: The Role of Media in the Church's Mission

In his address to media professionals on 12 May 2025, Pope Leo XIV presents a compelling theological framework for understanding the media's role in the Church's evangelizing mission. Against the backdrop of what he terms our modern "Tower of Babel" - characterized by global fragmentation, moral relativism, and the erosion of human dignity - the Holy Father articulates a vision where media becomes an instrument for proclaiming the Gospel and building a culture of peace. This teaching develops the Second Vatican Council's declaration in *Inter Mirifica* that mass media are "gifts of God"⁶⁸ that should serve human progress and unity. The Pope's analysis particularly resonates with *Communio et Progressio's* warning about media potentially becoming "instruments of division"⁶⁹ rather than communion, while offering a constructive path forward rooted in Gospel values. At the heart of Pope Leo XIV's teaching is a radical call to transform contemporary media culture. He urges communicators to reject the prevailing paradigms of sensationalism and ideological warfare, instead embracing a model of communication that embodies Christian truth and charity. This vision builds upon Benedict XVI's principle in *Caritas in Veritate* that

⁶² Leo XIV, *Address to French Bishops*.

⁶³ Vatican Council II, *LG*. 40-42.

⁶⁴ Vatican Council II, *VD*. 48.

⁶⁵ Leo XIV, *Greeting to African Pilgrims*

⁶⁶ John Paul II, *EA*. 117.

⁶⁷ Francis, *FT*. 6.

⁶⁸ Vatican Council II, *IM*. 2.

⁶⁹ Vatican Council II, *CP*. 19.

"truth needs to be sought, found and expressed in love",⁷⁰ as well as Francis' critique in *Fratelli Tutti* of "the aggression present in today's social communication".⁷¹ The Holy Father emphasizes that authentic Christian communication begins with fundamental interpersonal dispositions: "in the way we look at others, listen to others, and speak about others." This approach transforms media engagement from mere information exchange to what Paul VI termed "the testimony of life".⁷²

The Pope's teaching takes special note of journalists working under perilous conditions, explicitly calling for the release of those imprisoned for truth-telling. This stance embodies *Gaudium et Spes'* teaching that society must "provide journalists with protections"⁷³ and reflects the Church's longstanding defence of press freedom articulated in *Pacem in Terris*.⁷⁴ By honouring these modern martyrs for truth, Pope Leo XIV underscores that media work, when properly understood, participates in the Church's prophetic mission to defend human dignity and promote justice. Theologically, this address makes significant contributions by rooting media ethics in the very nature of God as communicative love. Developing *Dei Verbum's* theology of divine revelation, the Pope presents Christian communicators as participating in God's own communicative action in history. Digital spaces become modern *areopagi* for evangelization, as envisioned in *Redemptoris Missio*.⁷⁵ The address also incorporates an ecological perspective on media culture, echoing *Laudato Si's* call for "an integrated approach"⁷⁶ to technological development. Ultimately, Pope Leo XIV's teaching offers both continuity with Catholic tradition and prophetic renewal for the digital age. It provides systematic theological foundations while offering concrete guidance for Christian engagement with media. As *Evangelii Gaudium* envisioned, this represents "a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything"⁷⁷ - in this case, transforming how the Church inhabits and sanctifies the world of communications. The address thus constitutes an important development in Catholic social teaching, applying perennial principles to one of the most pressing pastoral challenges of our time.

⁷⁰ Francis, *CV*. 2.

⁷¹ Francis, *FT*. 42.

⁷² Paul VI, *EN*. 41.

⁷³ Vatican Council II, *GS*. 59.

⁷⁴ John XXIII, *PT*. 12.

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *RM*. 37.

⁷⁶ Francis, *LS*. 141.

⁷⁷ Francis, *EG*. 27.

Safeguarding the Eastern Catholic Heritage: A Vital Contribution to the Universal Mission of the Church

In his *Address to the Participants in the Jubilee of the Oriental Churches*, Pope Leo XIV reaffirms the Catholic Church's solemn commitment to the preservation and flourishing of the Eastern Catholic Churches, grounding his teaching in both historical precedent and contemporary pastoral necessity.⁷⁸ The Holy Father draws particular attention to the legacy of Pope Leo XIII, who in *Orientalium Dignitas* declared the protection of Eastern rites to be of paramount importance, decreeing that any Latin-rite missionary who encouraged Eastern Catholics to transfer to the Latin rite should be "removed from office".⁷⁹ Pope Leo XIV renews this imperative with fresh urgency, recognizing that the challenges facing Eastern Christians today—including war, persecution, poverty, and forced migration—threaten not only their geographical stability but also the integrity of their spiritual and liturgical traditions.

The Pope's insistence on the preservation of Eastern traditions is deeply rooted in the Church's magisterial teaching. Vatican II's *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* affirms that the Eastern Churches, as living witnesses to apostolic tradition, possess an equal dignity within the communion of the one Catholic Church and must be preserved without alteration.⁸⁰ This principle is further codified in the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, which guarantees Eastern Catholic faithful the right to maintain their liturgical, theological, and spiritual heritage, even in diaspora.⁸¹ Pope Leo XIV's call for the establishment of Eastern ecclesiastical jurisdictions in diaspora contexts reflects the Church's broader pastoral concern for migrant communities, as articulated in Paul VI's *Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* and the Pontifical Council's *Erga Migrantes*, which emphasizes the need for "special care" for Eastern Catholics displaced from their homelands.⁸² The Holy Father's vision, however, extends beyond mere structural support; he envisions a deeper *theological and spiritual exchange* between Eastern and Latin traditions, whereby the distinctive gifts of the Christian East, its mystical theology, ascetical practices, and sacramental worldview, might enrich the entire Church. Central to Pope Leo XIV's address is a profound appreciation for the unique spiritual and liturgical heritage of the Eastern Churches. He highlights the Eastern tradition's "sense of mystery," its ability to "awaken awe at the beauty of salvation," and its deeply incarnational sacramental theology—qualities that John Paul II,

⁷⁸ Pope Leo XIV, *Address to the Participants in the Jubilee of the Oriental Churches*.

⁷⁹ Leo XIII, *OD*. 3.

⁸⁰ Vatican Council II, *OE*. 3.

⁸¹ *CCEO* Canon 40.

⁸² Pontifical Council, *EM*. 54.

in *Orientale Lumen*, described as "a treasure for the whole Church".⁸³ The Pope's emphasis on *mystagogical formation*—the gradual initiation into the sacred mysteries—finds resonance in the recent *Directory for Mystagogical Catechesis*, which draws heavily on Eastern Christian pedagogy in sacramental preparation. Moreover, the Holy Father underscores the ascetical disciplines characteristic of Eastern spirituality: unceasing prayer, fasting, and *penthos* (the grace of compunction). These practices, he argues, possess a "medicinal quality" for the modern world, offering healing in an age marked by spiritual desolation. This theme echoes Benedict XVI's observation in *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* that Eastern Christian spirituality serves as an "antidote to secularism"⁸⁴, as well as Pope Francis's acknowledgment in *Christus Vivit* that Eastern monasticism remains profoundly relevant for contemporary youth.⁸⁵

Pope Leo XIV issues a solemn warning against the dilution of Eastern traditions for the sake of assimilation or convenience. Such adaptation, he insists, risks severing these communities from the very sources of their spiritual vitality. Instead, he calls Eastern Catholics to a *faithful stewardship* of their heritage—one that resists the pressures of consumerist culture while remaining dynamically engaged with the modern world. This fidelity, however, is not mere traditionalism; it is oriented toward *renewal in hope*. The Pope invokes the Paschal mystery as the heart of Eastern Christian witness, citing St. Ephrem the Syrian's depiction of the Cross as the "bridge from death to life" and St. Isaac of Nineveh's exhortation that "the greatest sin is not to believe in the power of the Resurrection." Here, the Holy Father aligns his teaching with John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae*, which describes Eastern catechesis as a "journey toward the Kingdom",⁸⁶ and Benedict XVI's *Spe Salvi*, which highlights the eschatological hope embedded in Eastern theology.⁸⁷ Pope Leo XIV's address stands as both a reaffirmation of magisterial tradition and a bold summons to ecclesial renewal.⁸⁸ By safeguarding the Eastern Catholic Churches, the universal Church not only honours their rightful place within Catholic communion but also receives from them indispensable spiritual gifts. As *Lumen Gentium* teaches, the particular Churches manifest the catholicity of the whole,⁸⁹ and thus the flourishing of the Eastern traditions is not a marginal concern but essential to the Church's mission.

⁸³ John Paul II, *OL*, 5.

⁸⁴ Benedict XVI, *EIMO*, 19.

⁸⁵ Francis, *CV*, 247.

⁸⁶ John Paul II, *CT* 23.

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, *SS*, 37.

⁸⁸ Pope Leo XIV, *Address to the Participants in the Jubilee of the Oriental Churches*.

⁸⁹ Vatican Council II, *LG*, 23.

Education as a Missionary Response to the Crisis of Youth Culture

In his *address to the Brothers of the Christian Schools* on 15 May 2025, Pope Leo XIV offers a profound and timely reflection on the urgent challenges confronting young people in today's world.⁹⁰ Grounded in the Church's rich educational tradition and supported by contemporary magisterial teaching, the Holy Father articulates a vision that responds both pastorally and prophetically. He identifies a complex array of cultural and moral crises affecting the youth, including what he terms a pervasive "culture of superficiality" and widespread "emotional instability." These are not isolated problems but symptoms of a broader cultural malaise shaped by moral relativism, technological overexposure, and the weakening of traditional social bonds. Echoing Pope Francis' assessment in *Christus Vivit*, Pope Leo draws attention to the spiritual and psychological toll this environment exacts on the younger generation, marked, as Francis noted, by "isolation and loneliness" amid constant digital connectivity.⁹¹ These challenges are further compounded by what Pope John Paul II described in *Veritatis Splendor* as the "loss of the sense of God"⁹², which results in deep moral confusion, evident particularly in the normalization of ideologies that contradict Christian anthropology. In the face of this cultural and moral fragmentation, Pope Leo XIV proposes a return to the educational model of St. John Baptist de La Salle as a timeless and deeply relevant solution.

De La Salle's pioneering approach revolutionized education by shifting from one-on-one tutoring to classroom instruction, integrating the use of vernacular language, and instituting what has come to be known as the "educational triangle", a collaborative relationship between school, family, and student. This model, far from being outdated, exemplifies the very principles of Catholic education as envisioned by the Second Vatican Council in *Gravissimum Educationis*, which urges Catholic schools to remain "adapted to the needs of the times"⁹³ while remaining steadfast in their commitment to truth. Pope Leo highlights how La Salle's Sunday schools for working-class children represented the Church's preferential option for the poor, thus prefiguring the principles found in the Congregation for Catholic Education's document *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*, which insists that Catholic education must be "open to all, especially the least advantaged".⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Pope Leo XIV, *Address to the Brothers of the Christian Schools*.

⁹¹ Francis, *CV*. 66-70.

⁹² *Ibid.* 84.

⁹³ Vatican Council II, *GE*. 8.

⁹⁴ *ETCS*. 12.

Moreover, the Holy Father strongly emphasizes the need for Catholic education to offer a countercultural witness. In an age increasingly dominated by ideologically charged narratives, he warns against the infiltration of “ideological distortions” into educational frameworks. This concern builds upon the magisterial trajectory set by documents such as *Humanae Vitae*, which defends the moral order against prevailing cultural trends;⁹⁵ the Congregation for Education’s *Male and Female He Created Them*, which offers a theological and anthropological response to gender theory; and *Donum Veritatis*, which calls educators to uphold doctrinal integrity.⁹⁶ Pope Leo XIV insists that Catholic schools must be more than mere institutions of intellectual instruction; they must be missionary spaces, environments of evangelization that shape not only minds but also hearts and consciences.⁹⁷ This holistic vision reflects the foundational insight of *The Catholic School*, which describes the role of Catholic education as fostering the integration of faith with culture and life. Such an integrated approach is the Church’s answer to what Pope Francis has called “ideological colonization” that threatens the sanctity of family and the integrity of the human person.⁹⁸

At the heart of Pope Leo’s message is a renewed emphasis on the *integral formation* of young people—formation that is rooted in the Gospel and ordered toward authentic human flourishing. The Pope envisions Catholic education as a transformative journey in which the young are accompanied to rediscover their inherent dignity and unique vocation. This echoes the teachings of *Catechesi Tradendae*, which describes catechesis as “education in the faith”,⁹⁹ and *Veritatis Gaudium*, which speaks of education as forming students in “the joy of truth”.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* stresses the necessity of helping youth discern their calling and purpose in life.¹⁰¹ By pointing to the courageous and innovative example of St. John Baptist de La Salle, Pope Leo encourages modern educators to become pioneers in their own right, developing “new paths for transmitting the Gospel” while remaining anchored in the unchanging truth of Christ. This call is consistent with the enduring mission outlined in *Gravissimum Educationis*, which urges Catholic education to enable students to “relate human affairs to the news of salvation”.¹⁰² Pope Leo XIV’s address represents a significant and creative development in the Church’s theology of

⁹⁵ Paul VI, *HV*. 17.

⁹⁶ *Don. Ver.* 6.

⁹⁷ Pope Leo XIV, *Address to the Brothers of the Christian Schools*.

⁹⁸ Francis, *AL*. 50

⁹⁹ John Paul II, *CT* 36.

¹⁰⁰ Francis, *VG*. 3.

¹⁰¹ Francis, *CV*. 254.

¹⁰² Vatican Council II, *GE*. 8.

education. By retrieving the La Sallian tradition and situating it within the Church's magisterial response to modern ideological and cultural crises, he offers a dynamic and forward-looking vision. This vision not only affirms the anthropological foundations of Catholic education but also presents it as a privileged context for the New Evangelization. In this light, Catholic educators are called to form students not merely as future professionals, but as joyful and courageous witnesses to the Gospel. As *Veritatis Splendor* so powerfully reminds us, this mission is ultimately about manifesting "the splendor of truth"¹⁰³ in a world darkened by confusion. Pope Leo XIV's message, therefore, is both a challenge and an invitation: to reclaim Catholic education as a radiant beacon of hope for the next generation.

The Church's Diplomatic Mission for Global Peace and Justice

In his *address to the Diplomatic Corps* on 16 May 2025, Pope Leo XIV sets forth a profound and comprehensive vision for Catholic diplomacy, rooted in three inseparable and mutually reinforcing principles: peace as both divine gift and human responsibility, justice as the necessary structural condition for the common good, and truth as the incarnate foundation of all authentic relationships and societies.¹⁰⁴ This tripartite framework arises not only from sustained reflection upon the Church's extensive social magisterium but also from a clear-eyed engagement with the complex and urgent challenges of the contemporary global order.

The Holy Father situates peace squarely within the Christological horizon, drawing on Jesus' words: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). For Pope Leo XIV, peace is not merely a geopolitical or psychological state, but a relational reality, one rooted in Christ's presence and mission. This theological foundation develops the teaching of Saint John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*, where peace is defined as an order "founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity".¹⁰⁵ The Pope expands this vision by addressing the subtle yet devastating rise of verbal hostility in public discourse, warning that words, when weaponized, fracture the bonds of communion and obscure the path to reconciliation. His analysis deepens Pope Francis' diagnosis in *Fratelli Tutti*, where "verbal violence" is described as having replaced thoughtful dialogue in many spheres of life.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Pope Leo XIV underscores the indispensable role of interreligious dialogue in global peacebuilding. He reaffirms the vision of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, which declares that the Church

¹⁰³ John Paul II, *VS*. 83.

¹⁰⁴ Leo XIV, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*.

¹⁰⁵ John XXIII, *PT*. 37.

¹⁰⁶ Francis, *FT*. 44.

“rejects nothing of what is true and holy” in other religious traditions.¹⁰⁷ In a world increasingly polarized by ideology and suspicion, the Holy Father presents the spiritual heritage of humanity as a common resource for solidarity and healing. By fostering encounters marked by mutual respect and truth-seeking, religious traditions can become powerful agents of reconciliation.

Pope Leo XIV anchors justice not only in moral obligation but in the very fabric of social existence. He recalls the pioneering work of Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, which exposed the moral failures of unchecked industrial capitalism and laid the groundwork for Catholic social teaching on labour, wages, and the rights of workers.¹⁰⁸ The current Pope applies this legacy to contemporary economic injustices—such as exploitative labour practices, dehumanizing conditions, and rising inequality, arguing that systemic sin must be confronted through courageous reform. Central to his vision is the family, which he presents as the “first and vital cell of society,” in continuity with Saint John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio*.¹⁰⁹ The family, according to Pope Leo XIV, is not only a private unit but a social and moral foundation upon which broader structures of justice must be built. His defence of human dignity is sweeping in scope, extending from the unborn to the displaced, from the elderly to the marginalized. He echoes the Second Vatican Council’s *Gaudium et Spes*, which affirms that “whatever insults human dignity... poisons human society” and must be opposed with prophetic clarity.¹¹⁰

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Pope Leo XIV’s address is his insistence that truth is not an abstract principle but a person: Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). This Christocentric foundation shapes the Church’s entire diplomatic posture. Citing *Dei Verbum*, the Pope reaffirms that Christ is both “the mediator and the fullness of all Revelation”.¹¹¹ From this perspective, truth is not a mere philosophical proposition but a divine self-communication that carries moral and political implications. This incarnational understanding of truth empowers the Church to speak prophetically on contemporary issues. Pope Leo XIV applies this logic to pressing challenges such as migration, artificial intelligence, and ecological degradation. He draws upon Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate*, which warns that without truth, love degenerates into sentimentality and social action loses its moral

¹⁰⁷ Vatican Council II, *NA* 2.

¹⁰⁸ Leo XIII, *RN*. 3.

¹⁰⁹ John Paul II, *FC*. 42.

¹¹⁰ Vatican Council II, *GS*. 27.

¹¹¹ Vatican Council II, *DV*. 2.

compass.¹¹² In a time when truth is often reduced to opinion or manipulated for power, the Pope calls the Church to be a "truth-telling community" that proclaims, in the words of Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "the truth about man," even when that truth is unwelcome or countercultural.¹¹³

Pope Leo XIV's diplomatic theology is not confined to abstract declarations but seeks concrete international engagement.¹¹⁴ He develops the vision of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, in which John Paul II affirms that true peace among nations requires "solidarity and cooperation" rooted in the recognition of shared humanity.¹¹⁵ In this light, the Pope calls for multilateralism that transcends national self-interest, and for political structures that uphold the dignity of the poor, the displaced, and the voiceless. He further echoes Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti*, urging that politics must be rediscovered as a "lofty vocation"¹¹⁶ capable of serving the common good. Pope Leo XIV sees diplomacy not as a technocratic art of negotiation but as a vocation of moral leadership, a form of service animated by spiritual depth and ethical conviction. By integrating theological principles with diplomatic practice, he revitalizes what *Pacem in Terris* describes as the Church's responsibility to interpret "the signs of the times" in light of the Gospel.¹¹⁷

Ultimately, Pope Leo XIV's vision for Catholic diplomacy flows from the Church's own missionary identity. As *Gaudium et Spes* proclaims, the Church is called to be "a sign and safeguard of the transcendent dimension of the human person".¹¹⁸ In bearing witness to peace, justice, and truth, the Church does not retreat into sectarianism but engages the world with a missionary spirit, confident that Christ is already at work in every culture, every heart, and every search for meaning. The address concludes with a call to all people of goodwill to join in what *Fratelli Tutti* describes as "a new dream of fraternity",¹¹⁹ a dream rooted not in utopian idealism but in the reality of God's love made manifest in Christ and mediated through the Church. In this vision, Catholic diplomacy becomes not only a response to crises but a spiritual witness to the divine plan for human history: a civilization of love founded on the truth that every person is made in the image of God.

¹¹² Benedict XVI, *CV*. 3.

¹¹³ Paul VI, *EN*. 29.

¹¹⁴ Leo XIV, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*.

¹¹⁵ John Paul II, *SRS*. 26.

¹¹⁶ Francis, *FT*. 180.

¹¹⁷ John XXIII, *PT*. 39.

¹¹⁸ Vatican Council II, *GS*. 76.

¹¹⁹ Francis, *FT*. 8.

Evangelization Through the Church's Social Doctrine

In his address to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation on 17 May 2025, Pope Leo XIV presented Catholic Social Doctrine (CSD) not merely as a static body of teachings but as a living, evangelical proclamation—an intellectually rigorous and pastorally grounded framework through which the Church engages the most pressing crises of our time.¹²⁰ Drawing from the vision of Saint John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*, where CSD is described as “a valuable instrument for evangelization”¹²¹, the Holy Father underscored its missionary dynamism. For Pope Leo XIV, Catholic Social Doctrine is not imposed from above rigidly or dogmatically; rather, it is offered in the spirit of respectful dialogue, as a contribution to the ongoing search for justice, peace, and human flourishing in a fractured world. This approach is deeply consonant with the vision of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Gaudium et Spes*, which calls the Church to discern and interpret “the signs of the times”¹²² in light of the Gospel. Far from retreating into doctrinal insularity, Pope Leo invites the Church to speak meaningfully into contemporary debates on climate change, economic inequality, digital manipulation, and technological disruption—not by diluting her convictions, but by engaging others with humility, clarity, and a profound sense of shared human responsibility.

A central theme of the address was Pope Leo XIV's insistence that authentic doctrine is dynamic, dialogical, and rational—never coercive or ideologically rigid.¹²³ He proposed a compelling definition of doctrine as “a form of knowledge, akin to 'science,' 'discipline,' or 'systematic understanding,'” evoking the epistemological confidence of *Fides et Ratio*, which teaches that “truth cannot contradict truth”.¹²⁴ Here, the Pope makes a crucial distinction between authentic doctrinal teaching and ideological indoctrination. The former respects human freedom and reason, inviting assent through persuasion; the latter suppresses intellectual inquiry and stifles conscience formation. This distinction reflects the teachings of *Donum Veritatis*, which affirms that doctrinal development occurs through “deeper understanding” across time,¹²⁵ and it draws support from *Dignitatis Humanae*'s defence of religious liberty as rooted in the dignity of the human person and the freedom to seek truth without coercion.¹²⁶ Thus, Pope Leo articulates a vision of Catholic Social Doctrine that is

¹²⁰ Leo XIV, *Address to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation*.

¹²¹ John Paul II, *CA*. 54.

¹²² Vatican Council II, *GS*. 4.

¹²³ Leo XIV, *Address to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation*.

¹²⁴ John Paul II, *FR*. 34.

¹²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Don. Ver.* 6.

¹²⁶ Vatican Council II, *DH*. 2.

faithful to tradition while intellectually open, one that remains rooted in divine revelation yet adaptable to new contexts through theological discernment.

Turning to the cultural crises of the present, Pope Leo XIV stressed the urgent need for the Church to help form consciences capable of critical thinking, especially among young people who are increasingly vulnerable to the rapid emotionalism and algorithmic manipulation of digital media. His critique of “emotional manipulation” and “ideological noise” expands on Pope Francis’ warning in *Fratelli Tutti* against the “diabolical rhetoric” that distorts public discourse and sows division.¹²⁷ In an age where truth is often reduced to subjective feeling and reasoned debate is supplanted by outrage-driven content, the Pope called on the Church to be a beacon of clarity, compassion, and coherence. This intellectual formation, he argued, is not a luxury but a necessity. It corresponds to the call of *Veritatis Splendor*, which emphasizes the moral responsibility to form conscience through truth.¹²⁸ Pope Leo’s insights also align with the prophetic vision of *Communio et Progressio*, the post-conciliar pastoral instruction on media, which warned as early as 1971 of the ethical consequences of mass communication, including the risk of emotional saturation and the manipulation of public opinion.¹²⁹ In this context, the Church’s mission includes not only proclaiming the Gospel but also teaching people how to think, how to discern, to evaluate, and to judge wisely in a world flooded with competing narratives.

One of the most theologically rich and pastorally daring moments in the address came when Pope Leo XIV declared that “the poor are not merely recipients of doctrine but are themselves its living witnesses and practitioners.” With this affirmation, the Pope decisively shifted the Church’s posture from one of didactic superiority to one of reciprocal encounter. He echoed the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, which called the Church to allow itself to be evangelized by the poor,¹³⁰ and he drew on *Laudato Si’*, which acknowledges that the excluded possess unique insights into the interconnectedness of creation and the moral imperatives of integral ecology.¹³¹ This perspective reframes the Church’s preferential option for the poor—from an act of charity directed toward them to an act of learning and partnership *with* them. By urging the Church to “let the voice of the poor be heard,” Pope Leo builds upon the legacy of *Populorum Progressio*, which emphasized that development must involve the active

¹²⁷ Francis, *FT*. 44.

¹²⁸ John Paul II, *VS*. 64.

¹²⁹ Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *CP*. 11–14.

¹³⁰ Francis, *EG*. 198.

¹³¹ Francis, *LS*. 139.

participation of the poor,¹³² and *Octogesima Adveniens*, which called for the full integration of the marginalized in shaping social policy and ecclesial life.¹³³ In this light, the poor are not objects of pastoral attention but subjects of theological insight, teachers in the school of Christ. The address culminated in Pope Leo XIV proposing a transformative methodology for the Church's social mission: one in which doctrine emerges through "accompaniment and conversion," rather than mere instruction or imposition. This method, deeply Christocentric, resonates with *Dei Verbum's* affirmation that Christ is not only the content of revelation but its living centre,¹³⁴ and with *Caritas in Veritate's* insight that truth must always be mediated by love.¹³⁵ By reimagining "doctrine as dialogue," the Pope integrates the spirit of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which insists that authentic evangelization begins with witness,¹³⁶ and *Gaudium et Spes*, which advocates for a dialogical Church that listens to the joys and anxieties of the world.¹³⁷ This dialogical model does not relativize doctrine; rather, it animates it with the vitality of relationship. Doctrine, in this view, becomes a journey, a shared pilgrimage toward truth, undertaken with those inside and outside the Church alike.

Pope Leo XIV's address makes three major contributions to contemporary Catholic thought and practice:

1. **It repositions Catholic Social Doctrine** not as a static compendium of norms but as a dynamic and dialogical process of evangelizing engagement—an instrument for moral discernment and public witness in an ever-changing world.
2. **It elevates the poor** from passive recipients to active participants in the Church's theological reflection, affirming that social doctrine must be shaped from the ground up, informed by lived experience, and expressed in solidarity.
3. **It offers a theological and pastoral response** to the challenges of digital culture by emphasizing conscience formation, critical thinking, and media literacy within the context of evangelization and catechesis.

¹³² Paul VI, *PP.* 30.

¹³³ Paul VI, *O.A.* 23.

¹³⁴ Vatican Council II, DV 2.

¹³⁵ Benedict XVI, *CV.* 1.

¹³⁶ Paul VI, *EN.* 41.

¹³⁷ Vatican Council II, *G.S.* 43.

In light of these contributions, the Church is invited to renew the classic “see-judge-act” method of Catholic social action, reframed through this dialogical understanding of doctrine. Such a renewal has immediate implications for Catholic education, parish formation, and even Vatican diplomacy. By forming consciences, listening to the poor, and engaging culture with both truth and charity, Pope Leo XIV offers a hopeful and credible path forward—a vision rooted in tradition yet open to the future.

Evangelization Through Ecclesial Administration

In his profound address to employees of the Holy See and Vatican City State on 24 May 2025, Pope Leo XIV articulated a transformative vision of ecclesial administration that elevates bureaucratic service to the dignity of sacred ministry. The Holy Father emphasized that the Roman Curia's work constitutes far more than mere organizational management - it serves as the living institutional memory of the Church, safeguarding and interpreting the deposit of faith to support the Pope's universal ministry. This perspective builds upon Pope Francis' constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, which defines curial service as fundamentally ordered toward "communion and evangelization".¹³⁸ The Pope's theology of ecclesial memory offers particularly rich insights. He described memory not as static archival preservation but as a dynamic, life-giving force - an understanding deeply rooted in *Dei Verbum's* teaching on Tradition as "the living transmission of the word of God".¹³⁹ This living memory nourishes the Church's present mission while guiding her future path, preventing what *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* called "the loss of direction" that comes from forgetting one's roots.¹⁴⁰ The curia's role in maintaining this continuity reflects *Verbum Domini's* beautiful description of Scripture and Tradition as "the living memory of God's people".¹⁴¹

Central to Pope Leo XIV's address was the intrinsic connection between curial service and support of the Petrine ministry. He developed *Lumen Gentium's* teaching about the papal office as "the perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity",¹⁴² showing how administrative work facilitates the Pope's service of communion. This builds upon *Ut Unum Sint's* profound insight that the Petrine ministry constitutes fundamentally a "ministry of memory",¹⁴³ with the curia serving as custodian of that sacred memory. Every curial employee, the Pope emphasized, shares in this mission

¹³⁸ Francis, *PE*, Preamble.

¹³⁹ Vatican Council II, DV 8.

¹⁴⁰ John Paul II, *TMA*. 11.

¹⁴¹ Vatican Council II, DV 13.

¹⁴² Vatican Council II, *LG*. 23.

¹⁴³ John Paul II, *UUS*. 95.

according to their particular charisms and responsibilities - a vision that beautifully applies *Lumen Gentium's* theology of diverse gifts to the context of Church administration.¹⁴⁴ The spiritual dimension of the address proved especially moving. Pope Leo XIV's metaphor that "faith and prayer are like salt for food" - transforming ordinary work into spiritual nourishment - finds its biblical roots in Matthew 5:13 and its magisterial development.¹⁴⁵ This resonates powerfully with *Laborem Exercens'* teaching that human work participates in God's creative activity¹⁴⁶ and *Gaudium et Spes'* declaration that through work, humanity cooperates with the Creator.¹⁴⁷ The Pope's vision elevates even the most routine administrative tasks to what *Christifideles Laici* calls "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God".¹⁴⁸

This address makes three substantial contributions to Catholic theology and practice. First, it sanctifies bureaucratic service by situating it within the Church's evangelical mission, developing *Praedicate Evangelium's* vision while grounding it in a robust theology of ecclesial memory. Second, it provides a theological anthropology of institutional work, synthesizing *Laborem Exercens'* theology of human labour with *Dei Verbum's* theology of living Tradition. Third, it offers a practical spirituality for Church employees, applying the universal call to holiness¹⁴⁹ to the often-overlooked realm of administrative service. The implications are both profound and practical. Understood theologically, every document processed, every meeting coordinated, every administrative decision made can become what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* terms "spiritual worship".¹⁵⁰ This vision challenges all ecclesial institutions to reconsider their bureaucratic practices through the lens of evangelical mission and ecclesial communion. Ultimately, Pope Leo XIV's address transforms our understanding of Church governance from mere organizational necessity to sacred participation in the Petrine ministry of unity and truth - a calling that dignifies every act of service, no matter how small, in the great work of preserving and proclaiming the Gospel.

Family as a Fertile Ground for Evangelization

In his profound and pastorally rich reflections on the Church's evangelizing mission, Pope Leo XIV identifies the Christian family as the irreplaceable locus of initial evangelization and sustained discipleship. For the Holy Father, the family is not

¹⁴⁴ Vatican Council II, *LG*. 12.

¹⁴⁵ John Paul II, *RM*. 26.

¹⁴⁶ John Paul II, *LE*. 24.

¹⁴⁷ Vatican Council II, *GS*. 34.

¹⁴⁸ John Paul II, *CL*. 17.

¹⁴⁹ Vatican Council II, *LG*. 39.

¹⁵⁰ Vatican Council II, *SC*. 12.

simply a social unit or private institution but the original school of faith, a place where the experience of divine love is first received, nurtured, and transmitted. This understanding draws deeply from the Church's magisterial tradition, particularly the teachings of Saint John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, which proclaims: "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called 'the domestic Church'".¹⁵¹ By calling the family a "domestic Church," Pope Leo XIV reaffirms that Christian households participate in the Church's identity and mission, forming the foundational structure through which the Gospel is lived and shared daily. Grounding his theology of the family in Scripture and the Fathers, Pope Leo XIV invokes the words of Saint Augustine: "As we have the source of life in you, O Lord, in your light we shall see light".¹⁵² This patristic citation enriches the theological grounding of family life in divine revelation. The Pope aligns this vision with *Dei Verbum*, which teaches that God reveals Himself as Father through His Word and that revelation is meant to be experienced and shared within the community.¹⁵³ Thus, the family becomes a privileged space in which God's paternal love is mirrored and made visible, particularly through spousal fidelity, parental care, and the education of children in the faith.

The Holy Father does not shy away from acknowledging the serious pastoral challenges that face families today. He highlights a growing spiritual estrangement within families, particularly among the youth, who often appear indifferent to faith and ecclesial life. Yet, Pope Leo perceives beneath this disaffection a hidden longing for authentic community and meaningful connection. This resonates with the insight of *Christus Vivit*, which observes that "young people want a Church that listens more",¹⁵⁴ even when their exterior behaviour suggests disengagement. Pope Leo diagnoses the privatization of faith among youth as antithetical to the Church's nature as "a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people".¹⁵⁵ In a culture that often promotes individualism and relativism, young people are left vulnerable to secular ideologies that fail to satisfy the human thirst for truth and belonging.

This trend is exacerbated by what Pope Leo calls a crisis in sacramental marriage. He laments that many couples now choose cohabitation over marriage, not necessarily

¹⁵¹ John Paul II, *FC*. 21.

¹⁵² Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII, 16.

¹⁵³ Vatican Council II, *DV*. 2.

¹⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, *CV*. 218.

¹⁵⁵ Vatican Council II, *LG*. 1.

out of defiance, but due to a diminished understanding of the power and beauty of sacramental grace. This concern echoes *Familiaris Consortio*'s early warning about the “growing uncertainty regarding the stability of marriage and family institutions”,¹⁵⁶ as well as *Amoris Laetitia*'s observation that marriage is frequently seen as “a mere formality”.¹⁵⁷ Against this backdrop, the Pope proposes a pastoral solution rooted in witness rather than argument: holy married couples who embody the joy and strength of Christian marriage. These couples become living homilies, incarnating the love of Christ and serving as what *Sacramentum Caritatis* calls “living icons” of the nuptial mystery.¹⁵⁸

Pope Leo XIV's reflection culminates in a prophetic appeal to rediscover the family as a vocation to love and a mission of life, echoing Saint John Paul II's affirmation of “the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life”.¹⁵⁹ This summons invites the Church to reorient her pastoral strategies and invest in the renewal of family life as the cornerstone of the New Evangelization. Concretely, the Pope urges three key pastoral priorities:

1. **Renewed Marriage Preparation:** Catechesis and formation must present marriage not merely as a human arrangement but as a divine calling—a covenant rooted in God's plan. This reflects *Amoris Laetitia*'s exhortation to present marriage preparation as a path of vocational discernment and spiritual formation.¹⁶⁰
2. **Parish-Based Support for Families:** Parishes must become communities of accompaniment, especially for young couples and families in crisis. This echoes *Familiaris Consortio*'s insistence that “family pastoral care must be continuous, permanent and progressive”.¹⁶¹
3. **Intergenerational Faith Transmission:** Faith must be handed on not only through formal catechesis but through lived experience, especially in the home. Pope Leo thus renews the call of *Catechesi Tradendae* for parents to become “the first heralds of the Gospel” to their children,¹⁶² and the family home to become a living catechism.

¹⁵⁶ John Paul II, *FC*. 6.

¹⁵⁷ Francis, *AL*. 34.

¹⁵⁸ Vatican Council II, *SC*. 27.

¹⁵⁹ John Paul II, *FC*. 1.

¹⁶⁰ Francis, *AL*. 205.

¹⁶¹ John Paul II, *FC*. 86.

¹⁶² John Paul II, *CT* 68.

In an age marked by fragmentation, cultural confusion, and spiritual apathy, Pope Leo XIV's teaching restores confidence in the Christian family's missionary potential. The family, when faithful to its vocation, becomes a sanctuary of love, a school of prayer, and a beacon of hope. As *Lumen Gentium* envisioned, the household that embodies Christ becomes a radiant centre of evangelization, where "Christ is encountered, love is cultivated, and evangelization begins." Indeed, *Amoris Laetitia* rightly reminds us that "the family is a domestic Church radiating the light of the Gospel"¹⁶³, and Pope Leo XIV's magisterial teaching powerfully invites the entire Church to believe anew in the transforming power of faithful families.

Conclusion

In light of the reflections offered throughout this study, it becomes evident that the Church's mission of evangelization is deeply rooted in the mystery of divine communion. As Pope Leo XIV reminds us, "As societies committed to sharing in the missionary mandate of the Pope and the College of Bishops, you are called to cultivate and further promote within your members the vision of the Church as the communion of believers, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, who enables us to enter into the perfect communion and harmony of the blessed Trinity." This vision of unity is not merely structural or strategic; it is theological, flowing from the very heart of the Trinitarian God and finding its expression in the life of the Church. The call to mission is, therefore, a call to unity in Christ, in whom all divisions are overcome: "...Christ is our Saviour and in Him we are one, a family of God, beyond the rich variety of our languages, cultures and experiences." This family of God is entrusted with the sacred task of making Christ known, to share with every nation and people the hope and surpassing richness of the knowledge of Jesus Christ". In a fractured and restless world, Christ remains the solution to the deepest human crises. The word of Jesus, as the Pope beautifully affirms, "*fascinates and intrigues*." It meets individuals where they are, penetrating hearts according to their unique experiences and circumstances. "Among the people there are obviously many different situations. The word of Jesus is for everyone, but it works in each person in a different way." Such is the beauty of evangelization: a divine word that is both universal and deeply personal, capable of transforming lives and renewing societies. In this lies the Church's enduring mission—to witness, to proclaim, and to embody the love and truth of Jesus Christ in every time and place.

¹⁶³ Francis, *AL*, 290.

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“Evangelization as the Infinite Grace That Radiates from Lives Transformed”: Implications of Pope Leo XIV’s Theology of Evangelization for Africa

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Introduction

Africa is a complex and diverse region with a rich history, vibrant cultures, and significant economic and political transformations. It is a home to a vast array of people, traditions, and languages, making it a tapestry of experiences. As Africa is increasingly integrated into the global economy and society, it is also witnessing a mix of traditional practices and contemporary influences, with changing social norms and evolving cultural exchange¹. However, associated with contemporary Africa are complex issues ranging from syncretism, gender, technology, globalization, management of diversity, to different shades of fundamentalism, which continue to beg for conversation.

Why is the nexus between Pope Leo XIV and evangelization in Africa significant? First, it is because the Successor of the Prince of the Apostles is the visible head of the Church. He is the spirit that inspires; he is the light of hope². At his Inaugural Mass, the choice of the reading from John (21), on the post-resurrection encounter between Jesus and Simon Peter, during which Christ invites the disciples to be fishers of men³, is indicative of the premium priority Pope Leo XIV places on evangelization. It is, therefore, *apropos* that such a conversation in relation to Africa begins even at the start of his pontificate.

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² William Shakespeare. 1623. *Hamlet*. Oxford University Press

³ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*. Vatican City, Rome, p. 2

The connection between Pope Leo XIV and Africa is also not out of place because in his first address from the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica on 8th May 2025, he introduced himself as a Spiritual Son of an African Saint: "I am a son of Saint Augustine, an Augustinian."⁴ In this sense, it can be said that Pope Leo XIV is an African by his spiritual affiliation or association with Saint Augustine. Saint Augustine was born in Tagaste⁵, Algeria, here in Africa. He taught in Carthage⁶, here in Africa, and later Bishop of Hippo, here in Africa⁷. It is to this great African saint that Pope Leo XIV is a son.

It is, therefore, not surprising that as a Spiritual son of an African Saint, Pope Leo XIV had a strong affinity with Africa when he served as the Prior General of the Order of Saint Augustine. He was present at major events in Tanzania, Kenya, Algeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nigeria. I doubt if Africa has ever had a Pope this close, especially to sub-Saharan Africa. He visited Nigeria on several occasions. In 2001, he was present for the Canonical Erection of the Province of Saint Augustine of Nigeria in Jos. In 2003, he was present at the Mid-Chapter of the Province of Nigeria in Jos. In 2007, he was in Nigeria for the Ordinary Chapter of the Province of Nigeria in Jos. He was in Nigeria in 2008 for the Ordinary Chapter of the Province in Jos. In 2012, he attended the Ordinary Chapter of the Province of Nigeria in Jos. In 2016, he was in Nigeria for the Mid-General Chapter of the Order of Saint Augustine in Abuja.

What this means for us in Nigeria and the entirety of Africa is that as we grapple with the challenges of evangelization, Africa has in Pope Leo XIV a father and an elder brother who will walk with the Church in Africa with care, love, and as a companion on the journey. Paraphrasing the words of our Holy Father, Saint Augustine: "For Africa, Pope Leo XIV is a bishop, with the people of Africa, he is a brother."

As we celebrate the emergence of Pope Leo XIV, the issue of evangelization remains central in theological and non-academic conversations in Africa. The question looming on the horizon of this chapter is: What contribution will the papacy of Pope Leo XIV make to evangelization in contemporary Africa? This reflection will be based

⁴Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: 'Peace be with you'*. <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/transcript-of-pope-leo-xivs-first-speech-after-election-peace-be-with-you/6256890>

⁵Kanu I. A. 2014. "The Life of Aurelius Augustine". In Chidili, B. and Kanu. A. I. (Eds). *Augustine through the ages: Passionate reflections of his African spiritual sons at their 75* (pp. 3-16). Jos: Augustinian Publications, 3

⁶Kanu I. A. 2014. *The Life of Aurelius Augustine*, 4

⁷Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. 2001. *Confessions*. Mount Vernon: Peter Pauper Press.

on Pope Leo XIV's vision of evangelization expressed in his words on June 7th in Saint Peter's Square: "Evangelization, dear brothers and sisters, is not our attempt to conquer the world, but the infinite grace that radiates from lives transformed by the kingdom of God".

Implications for Evangelization in Africa

There are several implications of the life, thoughts, spiritual background, and postures of Pope Leo XIV for evangelization in contemporary Africa.

1. Interiority/Encounter with the Interior Teacher

Saint Augustine teaches that: "In vain do men and women toil with all their might from without, unless the Creator works in a hidden fashion from within."⁸ An encounter with the Interior Master or Teacher is fundamental for the success of evangelization in contemporary Africa. Moses began with an encounter in the burning bush (Exo 3:1-14). Isaiah began with an encounter in the temple (Isaiah 6:8). Paul began with an encounter on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-42).

Reflecting on the encounter between Jesus and Simon Peter by the Sea of Galilee, Pope Leo XIV interprets this experience as fundamental to the mission of Peter as 'fisher of men'. He believes that the success of the mission entrusted to the disciples will be determined by the quality of their encounter with God and the quality of time spent in His presence. Being academically equipped or naturally smart does not take the place of this moment of encounter between the Sender and the sent. Pope Leo XIV, therefore, teaches:

How can Peter carry out this task (Evangelization)? The Gospel tells us that it is possible only because his own life was touched by the infinite and unconditional love of God... For this reason, when Jesus addresses Peter, the Gospel uses the Greek verb *agapáo*¹⁰.

Agapáo for Pope Leo XIV takes place within the context of an encounter which reveals the profundity of God's love and the enormity of His self-offering, without reserve and calculation. This is the experience that, in turn, moves the evangelizer to offer himself or herself without reserve or calculation.

⁸ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. 2001. *De bon vid*. USA: Yale University Press, 22

⁹ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 1

¹⁰ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 1

Reflecting further on Jesus' question to Peter: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (Jn 21:16), Pope Leo XIV teaches that,

It is as if Jesus said to him, "Only if you have known and experienced this love of God, which never fails, will you be able to feed my lambs".¹¹

The task of evangelization, therefore, begins from the experience within, an inner touch that propels commitment and sustains zeal for the gospel message. At a time when politics has much value in the world, Pope Leo XIV will wish that the Church in Africa distinguishes itself by listening more to the Inner Teacher- Christ, rather than to the voices from without.

2. Evangelization as Service in Humility

An Evangelizer is both a messenger and a message. According to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses... It is, therefore, primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world.¹²

Fundamental to being a message is the virtue of humility, which is borne out of the realization of our nothingness and the need for self-emptying so that God's presence in our service may become more visible. Saint Augustine writes: "Unless humility precedes, accompanies, and follows whatever we do, we will find that we have done little good to rejoice in. Pride will bereft us of everything."¹³

Called to the service of the Universal Church, and recognizing the centrality of humility in evangelization, Pope Leo XIV takes off in a spirit that reinforces the indispensability of humility in evangelization. At the Inaugural Mass, he spoke in the words that demonstrate profound humility:

I was chosen, without any merit of my own, and now, with fear and trembling, I come to you as a brother, who desires to be the servant of your faith and your joy, walking with you on the path of God's love...¹⁴.

Through his humility, Pope Leo XIV becomes a message and, therefore, models a new path for evangelization in contemporary Africa. Saint Augustine teaches that: "The way to Christ is first through humility, second through humility, third through

¹¹ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 2

¹² Pope Paul VI. 1975. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 41

¹³ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. 2001. *Letter*. USA: Yale University Press, 188, 22.

¹⁴ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 1

humility.”¹⁵ When pride and arrogance comfortably reside in the evangelizer, it undermines the very message that he or she preaches. It is like building with one hand and razing down what has been built with the other hand.

3. Unity in Diversity

The motto of Pope Leo XIV is: *In Illo Uno Unum*, which means *In Him who is One, We are One*. This powerful phrase is based on the *Rule of Saint Augustine*, which says: “The main purpose of you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart.”¹⁶ It unveils Pope Leo XIV’s theology of the Church and philosophy of a successful mission, which understands the *ecclesia* as a people of many hands but with one mind.

The choice of this motto points to Pope Leo XIV’s vision of the Church as the people of God united not by uniformity, but by love in Christ, which is strong enough to overcome even the deepest divisions. In his homily at his Inaugural Mass, Pope Leo XIV considers this the first and greatest desire of his papacy. He said:

Brothers and sisters, I would like our first great desire to be for a united Church, a sign of unity and communion, which becomes a leaven for a reconciled world...¹⁷

Pope Leo XIV, therefore, believes that those who bear the gospel of Christ have a responsibility towards preserving unity within the Church and beyond. In Chinua Achebe’s *The Trouble with Nigeria*, the problem of toxic ethnic solidarities is a major concern¹⁸, not only for Nigeria but for the whole of Africa. It is very significant that the pastoral agents in Africa manage their differences in such a manner that these differences celebrate God, who is a Trinity of one substance, and thus, bear witness to the Gospel of Christ.

4. African Theology of Technology

The choice of the name Pope Leo XIV is a clear indication of the direction of his papacy. Pope Leo XIII played a pivotal role in shaping Catholic Social Teaching, particularly with his groundbreaking 1891 Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*¹⁹ which laid the

¹⁵ Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. 2001. *Letters*. USA: Yale University Press, 118:22

¹⁶ The Rule of the Order of Saint Augustine. Order of Saint Augustine: Rome, Italy, 2012, no. 3

¹⁷ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 2

¹⁸ Chinua Achebe. 1983. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Nigeria: Heinemann Books, pp. 1-68

¹⁹ Pope Leo XIII. 1981. *Rerum Novarum*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1-10

foundation for Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*²⁰, and Saint Pope John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*²¹.

Rerum Novarum addressed the rights and dignity of workers amidst industrialization, advocating for a just living wage, safe working conditions, reasonable hours, and the right to form labor unions. This was necessary as the Industrial Revolution significantly impacted the dignity of workers, often undermining it due to harsh working conditions and exploitation.

While Pope Leo XIII addressed the concerns of workers during the Industrial Revolution, Pope Leo XIV will not be silent about the ethical concerns emerging from the present Digital Revolution, especially those related to artificial intelligence. During his address to the College of Cardinals on 10th May 2025, he said:

Sensing myself called to continue in this same path, I chose to take the name Leo XIV. There are different reasons for this, but mainly because Pope Leo XIII in his historic Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* addressed the social question in the context of the first great Industrial Revolution. In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice and labour²².

In the face of neurocolonialism, data exploitation, and information manipulation with techno-anarchists holding us to ransom and forcing down our throats with narratives that are at variance with reality, Pope Leo XIV will expect the Church in Africa to ask: What is the gospel saying to the people of Africa about the developments in technology? The Church in Africa cannot ignore the ethical challenges arising from the present Digital Revolution. There is a need for the development of a theology of technology or a techno-theology, which will look at the use of technology according to the mind of the gospel, thereby establishing a nexus between the Word of God and technology²³.

²⁰ Pope Pius XI. 1931. *Quadragesimo Anno*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1-20

²¹ Pope John Paul II. 1981. *Laborem Exercens*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1-15

²² Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Address of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV To The College Of Cardinals on Saturday*, 10th May. Rome: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

²³ Thomas L. E. 2001. Theology and Technology. <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/thomas-l-ereksn/theology->

Furthermore, such a reflection will investigate how theology and African traditional values can partner towards providing a unique framework for the ethical use of technology in Africa. This partnership of theology and African traditional values will be based on the theological frameworks of Clement of Alexandria with a concept of culture as a *preparation evangelica*²⁴ (Preparation for the Gospel), and Justin de Martyrs understanding of culture as a *Spermatikos Logos*²⁵ (Seed of the Word of God).

5. Self-Sacrificing Love

The inspiration we get from Pope Leo XIV on evangelization is that it is not about personal comfort, but moving out of our comfort zones. Pope Leo XIV was ordained a priest for the Augustinian Province of Chicago on June 19, 1982,²⁶ and he willingly moved out of Chicago, which was a comfort zone, for the Augustinian mission in Peru, where he served the poor and marginalized²⁷. His service was about people and touching lives. In his sermon during his inauguration, he described Peter's call to be a fisher of men within the context of self-sacrificing love²⁸. He said that, "The ministry of Peter is distinguished precisely by this self-sacrificing love, because the Church of Rome presides in charity and its true authority is the charity of Christ."²⁹

The inspiration we get from Pope Leo XIV is that evangelization is not an opportunity or a privilege for the self, but a sacrifice for others and the Kingdom of God. During his first ordination at Saint Peter's Square, he said to priests: "Consecrate yourselves to them (laity), without... turning the gift you have received into a privilege....

technology/#:~:text=Theology%20provides%20a%20value%20structure%20for%20developing,effectiveness%20of%20the%20operation%20of%20the%20Church.

²⁴ Clement of Alexandria, 203. *Stromateis*, Books 1-3. Wayback Machines on Fathers of the Church 85. Washington DC: Catholic University of America; Kanu A. I. 2021. *Igwebuike: An Operative Condition of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture*. Autograde: Abuja, pp. 52-53.

²⁵ Oskar Skarsaune. 1987. *The proof from prophecy: A study in Justin Martyr's proof-text tradition, text-type, provenance, theological profile*. Brill; Kanu A. I. 2021. *Igwebuike: An Operative Condition of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture*. Autograde: Abuja, pp. 52-53.

²⁶ Ruff, Joe. May 16, 2025. *As a seminarian, Pope Leo XIV lived 3 months in Minneapolis*. <https://www.thecatholicspirit.com/featured/as-a-seminarian-pope-leo-xiv-lived-3-months-in-minneapolis>

²⁷ Christopher Wells. 2025. *Leo XIII's Times and Our Own*. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-05/leo-xiii-s-times-and-our-own.html>; Taylor Romine, Matthew Rehbein. 2025. *Pope Leo XIV has Creole lineage; New Orleans genealogist says*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20250509101432/https://edition.cnn.com/2025/05/09/us/pope-leo-creole-lineage-hnk>; Lauren Fitzpatrick. 2025. *From the south suburbs to helping choose the next pope*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20250508173008/https://chicago.suntimes.com/religion/2025/05/03/robert-prevost-pope-francis-conclave-catholic-church-dolton-saint-mary-assumption-parish>.

²⁸ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 2

²⁹ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 2

Because self-centeredness extinguishes the fire of the missionary spirit.”³⁰ The pastoral agents in Africa will need to reflect more on their call to evangelize not as an honor to the self, not as an elevation of the self, but as a responsibility, a surrender, and a daily dying. This was the understanding and spirit of the early missionaries who evangelized Africa.

6. Gender Question

During the speech of Pope Leo XIV on the day he was announced, he emphasized the importance of “working together as women and men.”³¹ While rejecting the doctrine of ‘gender ideology’, which exaggerates gender potentials, Pope Leo XIV employs an inclusive approach and acknowledges the vital contribution of women to God’s service. His approach is inspired by Saint Augustine’s recognition of the profound role of women in the Church. Augustine echoes this in his description of his mother, Saint Monica, as a devoted and faithful Christian woman, tireless in prayer, and a powerful influence in his spiritual journey³². The greatness of Saint Augustine, after the grace of God, is owed to the tears and prayers of his mother.

In Africa, women played a pivotal role in the early spread of Christianity, and their contributions continue to be vital in shaping the Church’s development. The model of Pope Leo XIV, which emphasizes the significance of balance and building bridges, highlights the need for continuous effort in overcoming the challenges our patriarchal African culture imposes on our understanding of the female gender. This is a form of inculturation, which allows the gospel to sanctify our culture, and thus evolve our culture to become gospel. There is a need for the incorporation of their voices in decision-making processes, especially in matters that concern them.

7. Restoration of Hope

At his Inaugural Mass, Pope Leo XIV described the mission of the disciples thus: “... to bring the hope of the Gospel into the ‘waters’ of the world”³³. The African continent is full of problems: real poverty, political instability, violence, ethnic and religious conflicts, wars, terrorism, migration, refugees, bad governance, corruption, environmental degradation, trafficking in arms and drugs, as well as people. These challenges have led to despair among the African people.

³⁰ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily during Priestly Ordination at the Basilica of Saint Peter*. *Vatican News*.

³¹ Pope Leo XIV. May 8, 2025. *Speech after the election: ‘Peace be with you’*, p. 1.

³² Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. 2001. *Confessions*, 9.

³³ Pope Leo XIV. 2025. *Homily of Pope Leo XIV during the Mass of Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, p. 2

There is a need for the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, which is hope, peace, joy, harmony, love, and unity³⁴, in such a manner that it manifests joy, restores unity, and gives hope to the hopeless. We need to be intentional in bringing the gospel to people with a very limited tendency of undue pressure of all kinds, especially those we may impose by ourselves. The bearer of the gospel needs to have this joy and hope in his or her heart to be able to communicate it to his hearers. There is an old Latin adage that says *Nemo dat quod non habet* (No one can give what they do not have”).

8. Socio-Political Transformation

A crucial area that necessitates transformation is the socio-political landscape of contemporary Africa. The choice of the name Pope Leo XIV is an invitation by the Vicar of Christ to bring the dividends of the gospel message to the socio-political space of people.

Mater et Magistra teaches that the Church does not remain indifferent or neutral regarding the formation and actions of the political community³⁵. Thus, the 1974 *Dublin Document* of the Order of Saint Augustine declares that:

We can never stray from the way in which the world is going, nor become mere spectators, since we experience in our own person the hopes and anxieties that belong to humanity³⁶.

There is, therefore, a need for the gospel to speak to the concrete historical circumstances of the people of Africa.

There is also a pressing need to strategically form the Lay Faithful, particularly those endowed with skills for socio-political transformation. *Gaudium et Spes* teaches that these men and women should be formed on the values of the gospel to set aside their personal convenience and material interests to promote the common good³⁷. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Christifideles Laici* teach that they need to perceive their

³⁴ Ngala Killian Chimtom. July 23, 2024. *Cardinal Ambongo praises Church in Africa while urging reconciliation for a fragmented continent*. <https://thecatholiceraid.com/cardinal-ambongo-praises-church-in-africa-while-urging-reconciliation-for-a-fragmented-continent>

³⁵ Pope John XXIII. 1961. *Encyclical Letter on Christianity and Social Progress* (*Mater et Magistra*- Mother and Teacher. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 180

³⁶ Dublin Document. 1974. Acts of the Intermediate General Chapter of the Order of Saint Augustine, Dublin Ireland. Chapter IV, Section 8.3; Emeka Xris Obiezu. 2014. “Community and Empire: The Catholic NGOs / United Nations Relationship in an Augustinian Perspective,” *Journal of Catholic Social thoughts*, 11:1, (2014), 153 of 151-177.

³⁷ Pope Paul VI. 1965. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*). Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 73

participation in politics as a divine calling, which involves the mission of sanctifying the world³⁸. In this way, the laity will serve as witnesses of Christ in the socio-political order³⁹, incensing this sphere with the Catholic Social Teaching. Thus, while the clergy serve in the sacred space, our lay faithful need to be consciously, conscientiously, and strategically prepared to serve in the political order following the mind of Christ.

9. Inculturation of the Gospel Message

Pope Leo XIV has a diverse African, French, Italian, and Spanish heritage⁴⁰. While his mother, Mildred Agnes Prevost, was born in Chicago into a mixed-race family of Louisiana Creole descent, his father, Louis Marius Prevost, though a native of Chicago, had Italian roots and French ancestry. This transcultural background is part of the basis of his emphasis on building bridges. And one of the areas that requires building bridges in evangelization in Africa is building bridges between the gospel message and the African culture.

The Greek and Roman worlds played significant parts in shaping the character and influencing the history of Christianity, in the sense that while Greek philosophy and culture shaped early Christian theological formulations, the Roman world, with its rich organizational structures, shaped the organizational dimensions of the life of the church⁴¹.

The partnership between the Greek and Roman worlds with Christianity was based on the theological frameworks of Clement of Alexandria with a concept of culture as a *preparatio evangelica*⁴² (Preparation for the Gospel), and Justin de Martyrs

³⁸ Pope Paul VI. 1965. *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (Apostolicam Actuositatem). Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2, 7; Pope John Paul II. 1988. *Post-Synodal Apostolic exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 16

³⁹ CBCN. 2022. *The Threshold of a New Dawn in Nigeria*. A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Sacred Heart Pastoral/Retreat Centre, Orlu, Imo State, 8 – 16 September

⁴⁰ Lauren Fitzpatrick, From the south suburbs to helping choose the next pope. 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20250508173008/https://chicago.suntimes.com/religion/2025/05/03/robert-prevost-pope-francis-conclave-catholic-church-dolton-saint-mary-assumption-parish>

⁴¹ Kanu, I. A. (2015). African traditional democracy with particular reference to the Yoruba and Igbo political systems. *International Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 2. No. 3. pp. 147-160; Kanu, I. A. (2015a). *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Nigeria: Augustinian Publications; Kanu, I. A. (2010). Towards an African cultural renaissance. *Professor Bassey Andab Journal of Cultural Studies*. Volume 3, pp. 146-155.

⁴² Clement of Alexandria, 203. *Stromateis*, Books 1-3. Wayback Machines on Fathers of the Church 85. Washington DC: Catholic University of America; Kanu A. I. 2021. *Igwebuike: An Operative Condition of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture*. Autograde: Abuja, pp. 52-53.

understanding of culture as a *Spermatikos Logos*⁴³ (Seed of the Word of God). These frameworks can be used for the partnership of African culture with the Gospel message, in such a manner that the Gospel message becomes culture, and the African culture, having been transformed, becomes gospel.

This notwithstanding, Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu warns against the radicalization of inculturation, which precipitates tribalism and division rather than deliver the dividends of inculturation expressed in *Ecclesia in Africa* of 1995 and *Africae Munus* of 2011.

Conclusion

The emergence of Pope Leo XIV presents a unique moment of renewal, particularly for the Church in Africa. His deep ties to the continent, his Augustinian spiritual heritage, and his emphasis on humility, unity, and service all point to a papacy that understands both the joys and the complexities of evangelization. In an age fashioned by technology, cultural diversity, and social change, Africa does not stand alone. Africa now walks this journey with a Shepherd who not only knows its challenges but has walked its soil and believes in its future. The insights drawn from Pope Leo XIV's words and witness are not merely ideas, they are an invitation: to deepen our interior life, to serve with humility, to build bridges where there are divisions, and to proclaim the Gospel joyfully, not just with words, but with the whole of our lives.

As Africa advances in this direction, we pray that God gives the Church in Africa a heart that truly loves Him, a mind that thinks of Him, and a will that rests on His will. Amen!

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⁴³ Oskar Skarsaune. 1987. *The proof from prophecy: A study in Justin Martyr's proof-text tradition, text-type, provenance, theological profile*. Brill; Kanu A. I. 2021. *Igwebuike: An Operative Condition of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture*. Autograde: Abuja, pp. 52-53.

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PART III
POPE LEO XIV'S VISION FOR THE WORLD

“Disarmed Peace and Disarming Peace”: An Augustinian Insight to Pope Leo XIV’s Paradigm for Global Peace

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"Peace be with you all!" This is the first greeting spoken by the Risen Christ, the Good Shepherd. "I would like this greeting of peace to resound in your hearts, in your families, and among all people, wherever they may be, in every nation and throughout the world."¹

Introduction

That the Pursuit of Peace would be a hallmark of this papacy was very obvious from the onset. According to Joshua McElwee of *Reuters*, Peace is one of the three big clues about Pope Leo XIV’s pontificate revealed in his first appearance. The other big clues include his choice of name and attire.² Again, in his audience with the Holy See Diplomatic corps on May 16, 2025, Peace, along with justice and truth, according the Holy Father are the “three essential words” and pillars of the Church’s evangelical mission and outreach and “the aim of the Holy See’s diplomacy” with states and sovereignties.³

Before entering the conclave, Pope Leo XIV was very much aware of the urgent need for lasting peace as a panacea for an agonized world rift by wars and varied conflicts. Indeed, a ‘heartfelt appeal for peace’ in reaction to the conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East, and other parts of the world was the cardinals’ last request to the world before they entered the conclave on May 07, 2025.⁴ In his first meeting with diplomats on

¹ Pope Leo XIV, ““Peace be with You,” <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-xvi-peace-be-with-you-first-words.html>; 08/05/2025; accessed May 16, 2025.

² Joshua McElwee, “Pope Leo’s first appearance reveals three big clues about his papacy,” May 9, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/his-first-appearance-pope-leo-offers-three-big-clues-about-his-papacy-2025-05-08/>; Accessed May 17, 2025.

³ See Leo XIV, Audience with the Holy Diplomats, in Kristina Millare, “Pope Leo XIV to Diplomats: Peace and Justice can be Achieved by Investing in the Family,” May 16, 2025.

⁴ Joshua McElwee, “Pope Leo’s first appearance reveals three big clues about his papacy.”

Wednesday, 14/05/2025, he pledged to make "every effort" for peace and offered the Vatican as a mediator in global conflicts, saying war was "never inevitable."⁵

Seeking to understand his conceptualization of peace, the trajectory and strategies for its pursuance turn gaze to varied directions. Starting this search with his choice of the name Leo, with emphasis on direct inspiration from Leo XIII, reveals his conceptualization of peace as the one that hinges on justice, fairness, and equity. Identifying classicism and inequality associated with the raging industrial revolution as the threat of the peace of the late 19th and early 20th, Pope Leo XIII's papacy was distinguished by his headlong pushback on the industrial revolution through sustained advocacy for the rights of workers, fair pay, fair working conditions, and the right to join unions. This fits into Leo XIV's peace, which he describes as an intertwine of justice. In his first audience with the Holy See Diplomats on May 16, 2025 the Pontiff stated, "working for peace first and foremost "requires acting justly." He quickly reminded the Diplomats that in fulfillment of their grave responsibility to "build harmonious and peaceful civil societies" government leaders must ensure their approaches incorporate upholding the dignity of every person.⁶

Being the son of Saint Augustine, as he proudly introduced himself on his first appearance, Augustine's concept of peace and how it is increased or decreased offers a significant trajectory to the discourse of Pope Leo XIV's peace project. It not only helps to understand and assess the kind of peace the world pursues, but most importantly, it exposes some structural issues at the root of the world's inability to deliver on this promise, which only "a disarmed peace and a disarming peace" that is "humble and persevering"⁷ can achieve. Our reflection in this chapter focuses on the global peace program, key themes in Augustine's Peace, and words of Pope Leo XIV discerned from his speeches on his election day, audience with the Eastern Church leaders, the diplomatic corps to the Holy See, and their kindred. Insights from the experiences of his Augustinian background also provide a guide for our effort here.

Global search for universal peace: At different times, the world has always witnessed varied, complex, and challenging situations that threaten the peace it so much deserves. Many could conjure that at no time has the world known any peace. In most cases, a threat to world peace is linked to violent conflicts with their associated causes, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity, summarized

⁵ <https://www.deccanherald.com/world/pope-leo-says-he-will-make-every-effort-for-world-peace-3540162>

⁶ See Leo XIV, Audience with the Holy Diplomats, in Kristina Millare, "Pope Leo XIV to diplomats: Peace and justice can be achieved by investing in the family," May 16, 2025.

⁷ Leo XIV, "Peace be with You."

by Pope Leo XIV as socio-political factors.⁸ Others like G. Bradley and D. Whitehouse use different summations of “need, greed, or creed.”⁹ In all these situations, various attempts and efforts have been made by various actors to restore peace in the world. Something particular about the diverse and numerous attempts and efforts is that most times they start with good intent and principles and set out goals with measurable indicators, but in the end, it seems they are insolvent in the face of challenges of a lack of peace. One example of such efforts bearing the testament of the aforementioned reality is the United Nations (UN). The UN is of interest to us in this reflection because it holds together and helps us to understand the dynamics of Pope Leo XIV’s peace project in its complexity, especially why the church is bound to support the global vestments in world peace despite their shortfalls. “Despite its limitations and fragility,”¹⁰ the UN had won the support of the Church, especially the popes of the mid-20th and early-21st century, beginning with John Paul II and including Pope Leo XIV, since when he was the Prior General of the Order of St. Augustine.

Following the background of its birth (October 24, 1945), namely the precarious state of the world and the fear of anarchy precipitated by World War II, the United Nations was conceived, on the strength of the interdependence of nations, to build the conditions for and ensure world peace. Its founding universal values and spiritual principles, which are enunciated in the Charter, give hope to a similar Judeo-Christian vision of a peaceful world that is described as the reign of God in the prophecy of Isaiah. This is a world where lion and lamb lie together in peace, and nations cease all warfare and turn their weapons into farming implements (Isaiah 11:7-9; 65:25). Such a world, envisioned by both the founders of the UN and the Judeo-Christian scriptures, would be characterized by universal human rights, enhanced human dignity, justice, good neighborliness and freedom.¹¹

The message at the core of the purposes and principles of the UN, as contained in Articles 1 and 2 of its Chart, is the maintenance of international peace and security by non-violent means. This is epitomized by the giant sculpture standing in front of the General Assembly in the New York Headquarters of the UN, a gun with the barrel

⁸ Pope Leo XIV, “Pope Leo XIV to Diplomats: Peace and Justice can be Achieved by Investing in the Family.”

⁹ Gunilla Bradley and Diana Whitehouse, “Challenges to Peace in the 21st Century: Working towards a Good Information and Communication Society,” September 2012, IFIP Advances in Information and Communication Technology, 386:274-284, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-642-33332-3_25; Accessed 12/6/2025.

¹⁰ Emeka Obiezu, *Seeking Global Justice and Peace: Catholic-Inspired NGOs at the United Nations*, (Washington DC.: Pacem in Terris Press, 2019), 13.

¹¹ See Basic Facts – About the United Nations (New York: United Nations Publications, 2005), 5.

twisted into a knot. That says it all – ‘never again, shall the world’s disputes be settled through war’. To be able to achieve this peace, the Chart recommends that the UN must be poised to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, demonstrated by the sovereign equality of all its members.¹² In other words, international peace must be sought only through equality, justice, respect, and international friendliness, without any coercion, intimidation, or domination. The indices for measuring this peace include economic, social, cultural, development, and stability; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of race, sex, language, or religion.

As experiences of wars, genocides, terrorism, hunger, wanton disrespect of human rights and dignity continue to pervert our world today, these call into question the capability of the UN and similar humanity’s efforts to deliver peace to the world. For instance, after saying “never again” to genocide at the end of WWII, the world, the UN sat and watched helplessly as 95 countries of the world deteriorated in peacefulness in 2022,¹³ as unspeakable events unfolded in Syria, Sudan, Central Africa Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Mali, Haiti, Ukraine, Gaza – Israel-Palestine, Myanmar, India-Pakistan, Iran-Israel, etc. According to the Global Peace Index 2023, “over the last 15 years the world has become less peaceful, with the average country score deteriorating by five per cent... and the total number of conflict-related deaths rising by 45 per cent between 2020 and 2021.”¹⁴ The numbers have increased in 2024 with over 92 countries engaged in conflict beyond their border, the death toll from the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts alone reaching 162,000 in 2023; and world refugees and internally displaced persons due to violent conflicts numbering 110 million.¹⁵ Again, we are experiencing more disparate economic development and exploitation, more hunger, more suffering, more hurtful division among citizens and migrants, and more death in the 20th and 21st centuries than before.¹⁶ About 1.1 billion people live in multidimensional poverty, accounting for

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Peace Index 2023: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*, (Sydney, June 2023), 2; <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>, Accessed 11/6/2025.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Institute for Economic & Peace, *Global Peace Index 2024: Brief*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-briefing-web.pdf>, Accessed 12/6/2025.

¹⁶ See Ida Urso, “The New World Order and the Work of the United Nations,” A talk given at the World Goodwill Symposium. *Let the Future Stand Revealed: Envisioning the World We Choose*. New York City (October 28, 1995). 5.

18% of the world population, while over \$19.1 trillion was lost to conflicts in 2023.¹⁷ Only ten percent of the world population participates fully in various institutions that determine their lives.

It is to this world that Pope Leo XIV's first words announcing his papacy were: "Peace be with you all! Dear brothers and sisters, these are the first words spoken by the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for God's flock. I would like this greeting of peace to resound in your hearts, in your families, among all people, wherever they may be, in every nation and throughout the world. Peace be with you!"¹⁸ To many who are familiar or affected by the inefficiency of the various efforts to achieve world peace, they might be hearing these words with skepticism, as beautiful but the same old words. To others, soaked in the euphoria of the moment, of getting a new pope, it just matters to hear the new Pope's first words. And to those desiring to hear a new commitment to the global peace project, these are soothing words, maybe a breath of newness, hope for a new path. However, from a critical mind perspective, it is worth unpacking these words to gain a deeper understanding so as to find entry for critical and collaborative engagement with the pope in this commitment to peace, because it is obvious that he is serious about peace enduring in the world. This leads us to re-listen to those words of his, and we do this with the help of insights from the thoughts of St. Augustine, to whom he is a son, and the Augustinian heritage, in which he shares.

Understanding Pope Leo XIV's Peace: In his words and Augustinian heritage

Peace is not the absence of war: Unpacking his peace project, the Pontiff, in his first audience with the diplomatic corps to the Holy See, began delineating what peace means by confronting and denouncing the populist notion that simply associates peace with war. "All too often we consider it a 'negative' word, indicative only of the absence of war and conflict, since opposition is a perennial part of human nature, frequently leading us to live in a constant 'state of conflict' at home, at work, and in society."¹⁹ Within this general parlance, peace (*pax*), is often considered to denote the nonexistence of dissension and strife in an environment of absolute unity, "a world

¹⁷ World Vision, "Global Poverty: Fact, FAQs, and How to Help," <https://www.worldvision.org/sponsorship-news-stories/global-poverty-facts>, Accessed, 11/6/2025.

¹⁸ Pope Leo XIV, "Greetings to Rome and to the World," <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-xvi-peace-be-with-you-first-words.html>, Accessed 12/6/2025.

¹⁹ Pope Leo XIV, Audience with the Holy See Diplomatic Corps, May 16, 2025.

of ‘one’ and not ‘many.’”²⁰ In Augustine’s understanding, the better word for that kind of peace which is won with the elimination of strife is victory. As he asks, “*Nam quid est aliud victoria nisi subiectio repugnantium? quod cum factum fuerit, pax erit*” – “For what else is victory than the conquest of those who resist us? And when this is done, there is peace.”²¹ Unity in this manner precludes diversity, rather subsumes all in one melting pot. This is the kind of peace pursued by many, especially where dominant nations, races, tribes, and opinions want to subdue and hem in the weak.

St. Augustine defines peace as the ultimate goal of every human person. “Whoever gives even moderate attention to human affairs and our common nature, will recognize that there is no man who does not wish to be joyful, neither is there anyone who does not wish to have peace... And thus we may say of peace, as we have said of eternal life, that it is the end of our good.”²² Augustine stresses the importance humanity attached to peace by once alluding that people will never be bored listening to him discuss the topic, no matter how long he keeps them.²³ In this context, peace is more than the absence of dissension and strife. It includes the provision and the enjoyment of true happiness, “*eudaimonism*.” For Augustine, *eudaimonism*, as a correlation of its “antecedent beatitude (*beatitudo*), is an objectively desirable state of well-being which represents the fulfillment or the realization of human nature.”²⁴ This would include the enjoyment of human rights and freedom, and the opportunity to realize one’s full potential.

Either as an absence of dissension and strife or achievement of true happiness, peace is not won on the strength of an army or the sophistication of a bureaucracy, but, as Augustine would say, on the “‘oneness of heart’ (*concordia*) rooted in the goodwill ordered by the love of friendship.”²⁵ Pope Leo XIV would include, pursued in humility and perseverance. This is a product of harmony that eliminates jealousy and conquers greed.²⁶ That peace, Pope Leo XIV reminds us, is “the first gift of Christ,” an “active and demanding gift” necessary for building relationships.²⁷

²⁰ See Donald X. Burt, “Peace,” *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 629.

²¹ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 19.12

²² *Ibid*, 19.12.1; 11.

²³ *Ibid*, 19.11.

²⁴ See Augustine in John Bussanich, “Happiness, Eudaimonism,” in *Augustine Through the Ages*, 412-414.

²⁵ See Donald X. Burt, “Peace,” *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, op. cit. This does not deny the fact that Augustine believes that peace can be possible through war, just as he writes in *De Civitate Dei*, 19.12.1: 19.13.1.; 19.17 he writes,

²⁶ See Augustine, exp. Gal. 52. See *ibid*, 629; *De Civitate Dei* 19.13.1.

²⁷ Pope Leo XIV, “Peace be with You.”

Unfortunately, the way to peace is often very difficult. Because human beings are selfish and everyone wants to be the lord of the world, it becomes hard for them in the present circumstance to maintain such *concordia* – “oneness of heart” – by which peace is possible.²⁸ Citing example again with the UN, the closest attempt of the modern society in the pursuit of peace, when individuals constitute a community such as the UN, though it might be intended to provide for world peace, the tendency is for people to act in their selfish interests and welfare rather than that of others. This is expressed by the non-communitarian idea of society in the philosophy of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean Jacques Rousseau. It is the defense of one’s property and person from encroachment by others and not the common good that compels people to enter into a commonwealth, a social contract.²⁹ In this case, the peace they seek must be on their terms. Such peace is fraught with fear because it does not rest on mutual trust, harmony, or *concordia*, and respect for the rights of others, but on self-interest.³⁰ In this situation, which is more apparent the situation today, the world is sunk into “the morass of selfishness, individualism and indifference towards the fate [of large numbers of the world citizens who] survive submerged in hunger and poverty.”³¹

Pope Leo XIV’s model for achieving global peace and its Augustinian framework

Pope Leo XIV’s model for peace is very clear in what makes for peace and how such peace can be pursued. According to him, “War is never inevitable. Weapons can and must be silenced, for they do not resolve problems but only increase them. Those who make history are the peacemakers, not those who sow seeds of suffering.”³² To Pope Leo XIV, the first approach in seeking peace is to identify the cause of its lack. And for him, the cause of lack of peace in the world stems largely from political-economic systems that exploit the earth’s resources and marginalize the poor. Thus, any approach to peace must target these indices of lack of peace, that is to say, not in armory, not in isolated securitized diplomacy, but in actions of promotion and fair distribution of the common good, which are expedient roads to true peace in the world. This thought is influenced by Augustine. In his theory of just war, Augustine

²⁸ See Augustine, exp. prop. Rm. 13-18: en. Ps. 122.12, in Donald X. Burt, “Peace.”

²⁹ William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (New York: T & T Clark, 2002, 2004 reprint), 21.

³⁰ See Augustine, In *Evangelium Johannis Tractatus*, 77.5, *ibid*, 630. Lockean peace “requires a single undisputed power, but not necessarily a continued majority consensus which may not be forthcoming.” See William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 40.

³¹ See “H.E. Father, Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann: Acceptance Speech upon His Election as President.”

³² Pope Leo XIV, Audience with Holy See Diplomats, May 16, 2025.

maintains that peace can be an end of war, yet peace is most possible without war, just as life is possible without pain. “As, then, there may be life without pain, while there cannot be pain without some kind of life, so there may be peace without war...”³³ Recognizing the ontological sociality of our human nature as beings in relation, Augustine believes more in the peace that comes through goodwill towards others and God.³⁴ As he writes, “In its pilgrim state the heavenly city possesses this peace by faith; and by this faith it lives righteously when it refers to the attainment of that peace every good action towards God and man.”³⁵

As Leo XIV embarks on his global peace mission and engages agents of peace, particularly those of sovereignties and international establishments, we expect these Augustinian emphases to come to bear. Thus, to the protagonists of coercive means or any form of intimidation to enforce peace, favoring the increment in military strength³⁶ Leo XIV would advance for increase in economic and social development instead. Should he address the UN or its subsidiary, Pope Leo XIV will be seeking the shift in security discourse from an exclusive stress on national security to a greater emphasis on people’s security, from security of armaments to security through human development, from territorial security to food, employment, and environmental security. As advocated by Douglas Roche, former Canadian Ambassador to the UN, in the procurement of peace, what the world needs is “bread and not bombs.” By this expression, he insists that peace understood in terms of human security is possible only by the “extension of social and economic development throughout the world and the elimination of nuclear weapons from military arsenals.”³⁷ Speaking with the Diplomatic corps to the Holy See, Pope Leo XIV said, “Every effort should be made to overcome the many imbalances and injustices that lead, not least, to unworthy working conditions and increasingly fragmented and conflict-ridden societies; the global inequalities – between opulence and destitution – that are carving deep divides between continents, countries and even within individual societies.”³⁸ He went on, without hesitation, to mention key but controversial issues at the cause of global friction in our time, namely, migration, the ethical use of artificial intelligence, and the protection of the planet Earth. This may be indicative of the fearless advocacy that will be expected through this papacy.

³³ See Augustine in Donald X. Burt, “Peace.”

³⁴ *Dei Civitate* 19.13.1

³⁵ *Dei Civitate* 19.17

³⁶ Dore Gold, *Tower of Babel: How the United Nations has Fueled Global Chaos* (New York: Crown Forum, 2004), 8.

³⁷ Douglas Roche, *Bread not Bombs: A Political Agenda for Social Justice* (Edmonton: University of Calgary Press, 1999), 33.

³⁸ Pope Leo XIV, Audience with the Diplomatic Corps to the Holy See.

Viewed from the above prism, Pope Leo XIV would advise the UN and sundry international institutions to look inward to the internal flaws within their structures, that may, even if unwittingly, provide for tyranny of the strong in a “tension between sovereignty and internationalism.”³⁹ Within this environment, more and more nations are returning to an old, narrow nationalism, forfeiting the spirit of global cooperation, leading to a widespread increase in “international mistrust, aggression, greed, and protectionism.”⁴⁰ In this place, the UN and its kindred institutions, charged with promoting global peace, should work to increase opportunities for openness, friendship, tolerance, goodwill, hospitality, and reconciliation that break down barriers of suspicion, fear, prejudice, and bigotry. What is advocated by the Pontiff is that in the quest for true and lasting peace, peace, truth and justice must be embraced. These are intertwined in an inseparable manner that neither can be achieved without the other. The Holy Father goes further to underline the intersection of peace with three core Augustinian values: *veritas, caritas et communitas*, ‘truth, love and community,’ stressing that “truly peaceful relationships cannot be built, also within the international community, apart from truth. Where words take on ambiguous and ambivalent connotations... truth can never be separated from charity, which always has at its root a concern for the life and well-being of every man and woman.”⁴¹

In these three and their organic intermix, he said, is what the Church brings to its diplomatic relations with sovereignties and international institutions.⁴² Relating to peace and justice, Augustine states, “the pole to which all directions tend and in which they come together is peace. Justice is the road leading to it.”⁴³ This non-combatant peace venture, he muted, also demands ecological stewardship intersecting with human fraternity. All this falls within Augustine’s theology of love, which expands the horizon of neighbor to include care for the earth.

Pope Leo XIV’s Guidelines for his Model of Peace

Pope Leo XIV has laid out a few typical Augustinian guidelines of this proposed model of peace that focuses not on an increase in warheads but on opportunities for

³⁹ See Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present and Future of the United Nations*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) xiv; Dore Gold, *Tower of Babel*, 15, 17.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

⁴¹ Pope Leo XIV Audience with the Holy Diplomatic Corps.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ See Augustine in Mario Mendoza Rios, OSA, “Christian Presence in the World,” *Our Journey Back to God: Reflections on Augustinian Spirituality*, (Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, Roma, 2006), 269 of 255-270.

equal but differentiated responsibility to the promotion and distribution of the common good in solidarity and subsidiarity.

Universalities of peace project: Pope Leo XIV's stance is that the peace project is not a prerogative for a few but belongs to all. "No one is exempted from striving to ensure respect for the dignity of every person, especially the most frail and vulnerable, from the unborn to the elderly, from the sick to the unemployed, citizens and immigrants alike."⁴⁴ The road to peace, he advises, begins with us, with a perception and attitudinal change, particularly the way we look at and see others, talk with others, and talk about others. This arises from a journey inwardly that Augustinians refer to as interiority, where we encounter, confront, and work on ourselves to eliminate all that obstructs us from seeing the other as the locus of our encountering love. This is what Pope Leo XIV means when he refers to peace as "an active and demanding gift. It engages and challenges each of us, regardless of our cultural background or religious affiliation, demanding first of all that we work on ourselves. Peace is built in the heart and from the heart, by eliminating pride and vindictiveness and carefully choosing our words. For words, too, not only weapons, can wound and even kill."⁴⁵ "Our neighbors are not first our enemies, but our fellow human beings; not criminals to be hated, but other men and women with whom we can speak."⁴⁶ Relying on his Augustinian influence, he decries the prevalent trend of dissension as "Manichaean notions," which he said only perpetuate violence and division.⁴⁷ Within this universality of peace project, is required to pull all resources, valuing all actors in their diverse and varied contributions.

The Church is an ally in the Global Peace Project: Within the universality of the peace project, the Pontiff specifically referred to the role of religion in this project. In his words: "I believe that religions and interreligious dialogue can make a fundamental contribution to fostering a climate of peace. This naturally requires full respect for religious freedom in every country, since religious experience is an essential dimension of the human person."⁴⁸ His position on this goes beyond formal religious dialogue to include contributions of those who "in silence, prayer and self-sacrifice, are sowing seeds of peace." Matching his words with action, Pope Leo XIV offered to host or facilitate peace talks among countries at war, calling for world leaders to "meet, talk,

⁴⁴ Leo XIV

⁴⁵ Pope Leo XIV, Audience with the Diplomatic Corp to the Holy See.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See Camillo Barone, "Peacemaker pope? Leo XIV offers to mediate disputes in global wars," Rome — May 14, 2025, <https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/vatican-news/peacemaker-pope-leo-xiv-offers-mediate-disputes-global-wars>, Accessed 6/24/2025.

⁴⁸ Pope Leo XIV, Audience with the Diplomatic Corp to the Holy See.

negotiate" during an address to Eastern-rite Catholics at the Vatican on May 14, 2025. "For my part, I will make every effort so that this peace may prevail. The Holy See is always ready to help bring enemies together, face-to-face, to talk to one another, so that peoples everywhere may once more find hope and recover the dignity they deserve, the dignity of peace."⁴⁹ Not even the threat of being misunderstood can stop this commitment as he states, "For her part, the Church can never be exempted from speaking the truth about humanity and the world, resorting whenever necessary to blunt language that may initially create misunderstanding."⁵⁰

Pope Leo XIV's thought on why the church must be visibly and actively present in the enterprise for global peace has much to draw from his Augustinian heritage. In Chapter IV, section 8.3 of the Outcome of the Augustine Intermediate Chapter 1974, dubbed "the Dublin Document, the Augustinians state, "We can never stray from the way in which the world is going, nor become mere spectators, since we experience in our own person the hopes and anxieties that belong to humanity."⁵¹ The *Dublin Document* concludes that it would be wise to "become more involved in the formulation of those social policies, so that it fosters structural change – a matter of justice – and thereby substantially reduces the need for exercising charity."⁵² In this stance, the Augustinians do not pretend that we are called to rebuild the world that others have destroyed, the hatred that others have sown. Instead, this determination is a humble recognition that we have contributed to both the lack of peace and must seek the way to peace in solidarity with others. This echoes the humility and perseverance that Pope Leo XIV interjected that the seeking of peace requires.

Peace sought in the three levels of existence: His first words to the crowd, the first of his election, were greetings of peace that covered the home, nations, and the world. "Peace be with you all!"...I would like this greeting of peace to resound in your hearts, in your families, and among all people, wherever they may be, in every nation and throughout the world."⁵³ Speaking with the diplomats on the urgency of making peace in the world, he proposed an approach that must begin within the family. "This can be achieved above all by investing in the family, founded upon the stable union between a man and a woman, 'a small but genuine society, and before all civil

⁴⁹ Pope Leo XIV, Address to the Eastern-rite Catholics at the Vatican, on May 14, 2025.

⁵⁰ Pope Leo XIV, Audience with the Diplomatic Corp to the Holy See.

⁵¹ Document and Decisions of the Ordinary General Chapter 2001 of the Order of St. Augustine, (Roma: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 2001), 17-18.

⁵² Document and Decisions of the Ordinary General Chapter 2001 of the Order of St. Augustine, (Roma: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 2001), 17-18.

⁵³ Pope Leo XIV, "“Peace be with You,” <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-xvi-peace-be-with-you-first-words.html>; 08/05/2025; accessed May 16, 2025.

society.”⁵⁴ This is modeled in Augustine’s perception of the search for global peace based on his three-level conception of community. Augustine does not see community in its ontological nature as an exclusive club or a life pattern only for those drawn to religious life. Rather, he sees community as the comprehensive reality of the three levels in which all human life is lived: “...the home; then the state; finally the whole world.”⁵⁵ In these three levels of communities, Augustine recognizes both the connectedness of our societal reality and its complexity. What is local may and does have a global impact, the converse being true as well. Policies made in the international communities are lived out locally, just as questions raised in local situations generate international policies. Thus, responses to today’s social questions demand that agents of social change be involved in all three levels of community in which we live: the home, the state, and the whole world.

Peace in the world as transient: In those opening words of his papacy, Pope Leo XIV was crystal clear about the peace he is promising the world and pledges to work for. “It is the peace of the risen Christ. A peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. A peace that comes from God, the God who loves us all, unconditionally.” In John’s gospel, in his promise of his peace to the disciples, Jesus states, “I give you peace now, it is my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14: 1-2). This promise of peace is concluded with another of Jesus’ promises, namely that he goes to prepare a place in his Father’s house, where there are many mansions, and that he will return to take his disciples there, so that they may be where he is.” This knowledge is obvious in Pope Leo, emphasizing that it is the Peace of God that he pledges to the world. Thus, to seek this peace in humility and perseverance,⁵⁶ as he stated, is not only a recommendation of how to pursue peace but also an invitation to the faith that hopes for the perfect peace in eternal life.

This Johannine theology, reflected in Pope Leo XIV’s stance, resonates with Augustine’s position that perfect peace is eschatological, belonging to the hereafter, and is a gift of God alone. It also illustrates why Augustine does not promise a cheap optimism that claims that perfect peace is achievable in this world by the means of any human institution. Augustine also believes that even with the best of government, “to a greater or lesser degree, rulers no less than their subjects are fallen creatures driven by the lust for power.”⁵⁷ Pope echoes this limited reality of human endeavor

⁵⁴ Pope Leo XIV, Audience with Diplomats May 16, 2025.

⁵⁵ City of God, 19.7; 18.2.

⁵⁶ Leo XIV, “Peace be with You.”

⁵⁷ R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, reprinted 2003), xx.

to engender perfect peace as says, ““Peace then appears simply as a respite, a pause between one dispute and another, given that, no matter how hard we try, tensions will always be present, a little like embers burning beneath the ashes, ready to ignite at any moment.”⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Augustine would not advocate for apathy in the face of suffering due to the structural injustice of various governments instead a dialectic of the contrary Augustine advises a “radicalism which will not permit to dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of a justice we know to be unattainable here: to a quest which is doomed, and yet, is an inescapable duty.” He asks for the collaboration of all in taming the occasions for the reign of *cupiditas* and the activation of the lust to dominate, on one hand, and the other hand, he calls for the maximizing of the space within which *caritas*, love, operates. This in itself justifies the Pope’s declaration of the Church’s participation in the global, even in the reality of its weaknesses, contradictions, and failures, even as warheads are stockpiled, old wars linger, and new war drums are echoing.

Conclusion

We reiterate that Peace and its pursuit will be a hallmark of Pope Leo XIV’s Papacy. This is very well articulated and communicated from the very first time he appeared to the public through his first and continuous engagements with the international community, even the religious community. His understanding of the peace concept and how it may be pursued is significantly influenced by his Augustinian heritage and its alignment with the inspiration from Leo XIII, who, though he lived in different times, shares in a similar socio-economic milieu and its consequences for global peace. From what we have explored in this chapter, it might be possible to conclude with some thoughts that suggest that the success of his papacy, particularly from the global peace perspective, depends on his capacity to translate the core elements of his Augustinian heritage into mechanism that advances “the disarmed peace and disarming peace,” his model of the global peace project realizable only through building bridges for the protection of the most vulnerable. We have no doubt he would do well in this regard. Nevertheless, we join him in invoking the spirit of love and peace, that He may open borders, break down walls, dispel hatred, and help us live as children of our one Father who is in heaven.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Pope Leo XIV, Audience with the Diplomatic Corp at the Holy See.

⁵⁹ Pope Leo XIV, Pentecost Sunday: Holy Mass in the Jubilee of Movements, June 08, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250608-omelia-pentecoste.html>, Accessed 06/24/2025.

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“Peace Be With You All”: Pope Leo XIV’s Commitment to Peace, Dialogue, And Human Dignity

Gabriel Tumba Hassan, OSA



Introduction

From the earliest whispers of creation to the echoes of contemporary conflict, humanity has yearned for peace—a state not merely of silence or stillness, but of harmony, justice, and right relationship between individuals, communities, and nations.¹ Peace has never been a passive ideal. It is an active pursuit, a sacred labour that spans generations and transcends borders. It is both a divine calling and a human responsibility.² In his first words as Pope, Leo XIV, the first American pontiff, extended a message of profound peace, echoing the greeting of the risen Jesus: “Peace be with you all.”³ This salutation was not merely ceremonial; it encapsulated the essence of his papacy—a commitment to fostering peace through dialogue, justice, and the dignity of every human being.

St. Augustine viewed peace as a divine mandate rooted in the eternal order of God’s creation. In his seminal work *The City of God*, he describes peace as “the tranquillity of order,” where each being fulfils its proper place within the hierarchy established by God. For Augustine, true peace begins with the soul’s alignment with God’s will—a harmony that extends to family, society, and ultimately to the city of God itself. This divine peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of justice and right relationship with the Creator. Thus, peace reflects divine order and grace, a goal that humanity is called to seek not just socially or politically, but spiritually.⁴ However, Augustine also recognized the brokenness of human nature due to original sin, which makes the full realization of divine peace in the earthly realm a profound challenge.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1997), 2304.

² Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), The Holy See, 7 December 1965, 78.
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

³ Leo XIV, “Peace be with all of you”, First address, The Holy See, 8 May 2025.

⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. W. Babcock & R. Coleman (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2021), Book XIX, Chapter 13.

He acknowledged that in the “earthly city,” peace is always partial and fragile, requiring human endeavour marked by patience, humility, and the pursuit of justice. Civil authorities, while imperfect, play a role in maintaining a form of temporal peace that reflects, however dimly, the peace of the heavenly city. For Augustine, then, peace is both a divine gift and a human responsibility: a mandate from God that must be pursued with effort and moral integrity, even as believers await its perfect fulfilment in the life to come.

In every age, religious traditions, especially Christianity, have spoken of peace not as a luxury for the privileged few but as a mandate entrusted to all (Jn 20:19). Within the Christian worldview, peace is deeply rooted in God Himself—offered by Christ, the “Prince of Peace,” and entrusted to the Church as part of its mission to reconcile a fractured world (Is 9:6; Eph 2:14). Yet, while peace may begin in the heart of God, it must be cultivated in the hearts of people. It is shaped by choices, policies, and the daily actions of individuals and institutions.⁵ This theme found renewed urgency and clarity in the first address of Pope Leo XIV upon his election to the papacy. In words that were both gentle and urgent, traditional yet forward-looking, he called upon the global community to recognize peace as both a gift and a task—a grace we receive and a mission we must fulfil.⁶ His voice joins a long line of prophetic witness, echoing the teachings of his predecessors, such as Pope Leo XIII, who wrote extensively on justice, social order, and the moral duties of nations.⁷

In a world torn by war, inequality, and polarization, the call of Pope Leo XIV rings out with profound relevance: to build peace rooted in truth, sustained by justice, animated by love, and achieved through tireless human endeavour.⁸ This article explores the theological depth and human demand of peace, drawing from the wisdom of the Church, the moral clarity of Pope Leo XIV’s first words, and the timeless conviction that peace is not only possible—it is imperative.⁹

⁵ John XXIII. *Pacem in Terris* (Encyclical Letter on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty), The Holy See, 11 April 1963. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.

⁶ Leo XIV, “Peace be with all of you”.

⁷ Leo XIII. *Rerum Novarum*. (Encyclical Letter on Capital and Labour), The Holy See, 15 May 1891. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html.

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Message for the Day of Peace*, 1 January 1972. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19711208_v-world-day-for-peace.html

⁹ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, (Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship), The Holy See, 3 October 2020. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

Peace as a Divine Mandate

As a divine mandate, peace demands more than passive coexistence; it calls for active participation in God's plan for harmony and righteousness. St. Augustine teaches that the highest form of peace is found in the "heavenly city," where God reigns fully and perfectly, but he also affirms that believers are called to seek and foster peace within the "earthly city," despite its flaws and limitations. This peace is not utopian or purely political; rather, it reflects a deeper spiritual truth—that God desires order, justice, and love to prevail among His creation. Human efforts to cultivate peace in governance, community, and family life are not merely civic duties but expressions of obedience to God's will. Therefore, peace is both a divine reflection of God's eternal order and a moral imperative that Christians are commanded to pursue in their earthly lives.¹⁰

Peace is not merely a noble ideal or a pragmatic goal for stable societies; within the Christian tradition, it is a divine mandate—rooted in the very character of God and inseparable from the mission of faith. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture consistently affirms that peace is part of God's creative and redemptive will for the world. It is not optional. It is commanded, modelled, and entrusted by God to humanity as a sacred responsibility. In creation, God establishes order out of chaos, setting the pattern for a world intended to flourish in harmony. The Hebrew concept of *shalom* conveys not just the absence of conflict but the presence of wholeness, justice, and right relationship—with God, others, and creation. The prophetic vision of Isaiah speaks powerfully to this divine longing: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares... nation shall not lift up sword against nation" (Is 2:4). This is not mere poetry; it is prophetic mandate, grounded in God's justice and holiness. His ministry of reconciliation—restoring broken relationships between humanity and God, and among people themselves—becomes the model for Christian discipleship. The Church, as Christ's body on earth, is therefore commissioned not only to proclaim peace but to embody it, bearing witness to God's kingdom where true peace will ultimately reign in fullness.

The New Testament deepens this understanding through the person and mission of Jesus Christ, who is proclaimed as the "Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6). Christ not only teaches peace but embodies it, offering reconciliation between God and humanity through the cross. After His resurrection, Jesus' first words to His disciples were not commands of conquest or victory, but the gentle greeting: "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). This greeting, echoed by Pope Leo XIV in his inaugural address, is not

¹⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX, Chapters 11–14.

incidental. It reflects the divine desire that peace be the first and final word among His followers. Christians, then, are not simply encouraged to be peaceful; they are commanded to be peacemakers. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” says Jesus in the Beatitudes, “for they shall be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). This beatitude is not passive—it calls believers to active engagement in reconciliation, justice, and compassion. Peace, in this sense, becomes a sign of authentic discipleship.

The Church, as the Body of Christ, is tasked with continuing this mission. Popes throughout the centuries—from Leo XIII to John XXIII, from Paul VI to Francis—have emphasized that peace is part of the Church’s moral duty to the world. It is not limited to spiritual consolation but extends into economic justice, human dignity, the sanctity of life, and the care of creation. As Pope Leo XIV reminded the world in his first speech, peace must be built intentionally—through families, communities, and policies that reflect the Gospel. To accept peace as a divine mandate is to understand it as a non-negotiable aspect of Christian life. It is to listen, as Pope Leo XIV said, to the “voice of conscience” and respond not with apathy but with courage and conviction. In this way, peace is more than a spiritual sentiment. It becomes a divine imperative—God’s will entrusted to our hands, to be cultivated with faith, sacrifice, and love.

The Role of the Family in Peacebuilding

In a world increasingly fragmented by division, distrust, and alienation, the family remains a foundational institution for the nurturing of peace. It is within the family—the first and most intimate human community—that values of love, respect, discipline, and compassion are first taught and lived. Pope Leo XIV, in his first address to the Church and the world, reaffirmed this timeless truth: “Governments must prioritize the family, the first and most sacred society”.¹¹ In doing so, he underscored the essential role of the family not only as a private reality but as a public force for peace.

The family is often called the “domestic Church,”¹² a phrase that reminds us that the home is a sacred place where the seeds of faith and virtue are sown. Within this sacred setting, children learn to listen, to forgive, to cooperate, and to serve—skills essential not only for personal flourishing but also for social harmony. It is here that the principles of peace—justice, patience, humility, and mercy—are not merely taught,

¹¹ Leo XIV, “Peace be with all of you”.

¹² Paul VI. *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), The Holy See, 21 November 1964, 11. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

but embodied and experienced. Parents, in their role as the first educators of their children, become living witnesses to the Gospel, modelling Christlike love in everyday interactions.¹³ Through shared prayer, acts of kindness, reconciliation after conflict, and the consistent practice of mutual respect, the family becomes a training ground for peace that extends far beyond its walls. When the home reflects God's order and grace, it not only strengthens the individuals within it but also contributes to the moral and spiritual health of the wider society.¹⁴ In this way, the family plays a vital role in fulfilling the divine mandate for peace, forming peacemakers who will carry these values into the Church, community, and world.

When a family is rooted in mutual love and stability, it becomes a small school of peace. The daily interactions between spouses, siblings, and generations model how to live in right relationship with others. Pope Leo XIV emphasized that this peacebuilding dynamic is anchored in the stable union of marriage between a man and a woman,¹⁵ a union that creates a secure and loving environment for children to grow into morally responsible adults. In a time when the structure of the family is often challenged or redefined, the Church insists that strengthening the family is not a retreat into conservatism but a bold act of building a more just and peaceful society.

Furthermore, the family serves as the first place where diversity is encountered—not in theory, but in practice. It is where different personalities, temperaments, and perspectives must coexist in proximity and interdependence. These daily interactions are often the first school of dialogue, self-sacrifice, and reconciliation. Within this domestic setting, children and adults alike are called to bear with one another in love, learning the art of compromise, forgiveness, and empathy.¹⁶ As St. Paul exhorts, “Bear with one another and forgive one another... as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Colossians 3:13). These virtues, cultivated in the family, reflect the communal nature of the Trinity—a divine communion of love and unity in diversity.¹⁷ In this light, the family becomes not only a moral and emotional training ground but also a theological model of peace rooted in communion. It is a microcosm of the

¹³ John Paul II. *Familiaris Consortio*, (Encyclical Letter on the Role of the Christian family in the Modern World), The Holy See, 22 November 1981, 17. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html.

¹⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2207-2208.

¹⁵ Leo XIV. *Audience to members of the Diplomatic Corp accredited to the Holy See*, Clementine Hall, 16 May 2025.

¹⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1657.

¹⁷ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace).https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html, 211.

wider human community, where the Church's social mission begins. Peace within the family, then, is not a private good but a public witness, a living blueprint for the peace that God wills for all humanity.¹⁸

When families are strong, communities thrive. When families are wounded—by poverty, violence, abandonment, or injustice—societies suffer. Thus, any serious effort toward peacebuilding must begin with policies that support and protect families: fair wages, quality education, accessible healthcare, and the freedom to practice one's faith.¹⁹ Pope Leo XIV, following the long tradition of Catholic social teaching, urged leaders to recognize that neglecting the family is not merely a moral failure—it is a failure to secure the foundations of peace.²⁰

In a broader sense, the family plays a prophetic role in the world. It stands as a living testimony to the possibility of unity in diversity, fidelity in an age of disposability, and self-giving love in a culture dominated by self-interest.²¹ Through this witness, families become agents of transformation—quietly yet powerfully resisting the forces of violence and division by embodying the daily heroism of love.²² The family is not only the first school of virtue but also the first school of peace.²³ By building peaceful families, we lay the essential groundwork for peaceful societies.²⁴ Pope Leo XIV's affirmation of the family is not an exercise in nostalgia; it is a strategic and theological conviction: if peace is to endure, it must be born and nurtured in the heart of the home. Yet, the family today faces severe threats—ravaged by violence, conflict, and war, and further undermined by poverty and state corruption.²⁵ In such a context, peace becomes a costly and fragile commodity within the family sphere, demanding intentional protection, formation, and renewal.²⁶

¹⁸ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family), The Holy See, 19 March 2016, 66.

https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

¹⁹ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 213-214.

²⁰ Leo XIV, "Peace be with all of you".

²¹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 57-58.

²² John Paul II. *Gratissimam Sane* (*Letter to Families*), The Holy See, 2 February 1994, 4. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_02021994_families.html.

²³ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 209.

²⁴ Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*, 52.

²⁵ United Nations, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, Report of the Special Representative, 1996; Caritas Internationalis, *Families and Conflict: A Global Crisis*, 2020.

²⁶ Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*, 230.

From Corruption to Conflict: Civic Spaces under siege

Endemic state corruption has emerged as a central driver of systemic dehumanisation and mass impoverishment, enriching and empowering a narrow segment of elites globally through mechanisms such as kickbacks, state capture, bribery, and budgetary manipulation.²⁷ This entrenched pattern of socioeconomic exclusion has been widely associated with the proliferation of structural violence and the perpetuation of conflict cycles, particularly in contexts such as Nigeria and other areas of conflict and war.²⁸ A striking manifestation of this form of corruption is the increasing impunity with which political and governing elites establish and finance fictitious civil society organisations (CSOs). These entities are often created either directly or via digital platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp.²⁹

Pseudo-CSOs are meticulously designed to simulate grassroots legitimacy, while their purpose is to defend ineffectual or authoritarian regimes and to discredit legitimate forms of dissent and civic mobilisation.³⁰ In Nigeria, as well as in other countries marked by elite dominance and weakened democratic accountability, this phenomenon has become increasingly prevalent. Ruling elites routinely sponsor such organisations to bolster perceptions of state legitimacy, suppress opposition voices, and extend clientelist networks under the guise of civic engagement.³¹ These developments point to a more insidious form of institutional degradation; whereby civic space is not only co-opted but strategically weaponised for elite consolidation and authoritarian entrenchment.³²

This manipulation of civil society represents a dual threat: state interference in public discourse and the complicity of certain CSOs willing to trade independence for financial or material benefits.³³ As part of a broader propaganda apparatus, these organisations are often managed by intermediaries—political aides, proxies, or party

²⁷ Rose-Ackerman, S., & Palifka, B. J. (2016). *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform*. Cambridge University Press.

²⁸ Ojo, J. S. (2020). Governing “Ungoverned Spaces” in the Foliage of Conspiracy: Toward (Re)ordering Terrorism, from Boko Haram Insurgency, Fulani Militancy to Banditry in Northern Nigeria,” *African Security* 13 (1), 101; Ukeje, C. (2011). “Violence, Identity and the Post-Colonial State in Africa: The Case of Nigeria.” *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 20(1), 10–28.

²⁹ Ayo, S. & Ojo, J. (2020). *Social Media, Fake News, and Political Manipulation in Nigeria*. African Journal of Demonocracy and Governance, 7(1), 45 – 62.

³⁰ Gyimah-Boadi, E., & Prempeh, H. K. (2012). “Civil Society and Democratic Development.” *Journal of Democracy*, 23(3), 94–105.

³¹ Hassan, I. (2021). *Nigeria's Counterfeit Civil Society*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

³² Youngs, R. (2017). *Global Civic Activism in Flux*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017.

³³ Adebaw, W. (2017). *A Nation Betrayed: Corruption and Patronage in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

agents—who operate through both formal channels and informal community networks.³⁴ Their role extends beyond online spin; they are embedded in grassroots settings such as religious communities, town union meetings, and educational institutions, where they mobilise support and stifle criticism through interpersonal and digital influence.³⁵ This undermines not only democratic participation but also long-term peacebuilding, as it erodes trust in genuine civic actors and institutions.

In parallel, economic deprivation and social inequality have contributed to a landscape ripe for conflict. While there is ongoing academic debate about the extent to which poverty alone causes terrorism or violent extremism, there is consensus that persistent inequality and lack of social welfare are critical enablers of organised violence.³⁶ In Northern Nigeria, where over 65% of the population—approximately 86 million people—live in multidimensional poverty,³⁷ frustration over unmet developmental promises has intensified public disillusionment. In a field study conducted among university undergraduates and civil society groups in Northern Nigeria, respondents consistently pointed to socio-economic marginalisation as a central driver of political frustration and violent resistance.³⁸ This supports broader global findings that structural injustice and systemic inequality are often precursors to armed conflict.³⁹

This point is tragically illustrated in testimonies from figures such as Adamu Alero and Abu Sani, notorious leaders of armed bandit groups. Both described their resort to violence as a response to government neglect, failed promises of development, and the absence of meaningful welfare provisions.⁴⁰ While their actions cannot be justified, their motivations underscore the direct link between unfulfilled social contracts and the emergence of violent resistance. Ultimately, what begins as a grievance about economic exclusion can evolve into a struggle for power and self-enrichment, particularly when avenues for peaceful redress are blocked. Here, the

³⁴ Uadiale, M. & Aluko, O. (2023). “Proxies of Power: Political Surrogates and the Erosion of Civil Society.” *Journal of African Politics*, 14(2), 77–95.

³⁵ International Republican Institute (IRI). (2021). *Disinformation and Influence in Nigerian Elections*. <https://www.iri.org/> (accessed 12th May 2025).

³⁶ Krueger, A. B., & Malečková, J. (2003). “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 17(4), 119–144.

³⁷ National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2022). *Multidimensional Poverty Index Report for Nigeria*. Abuja: NBS.

³⁸ Field data from author’s interviews with selected civil society groups and university undergraduates in Northern Nigeria, May - November 2022.

³⁹ Stewart, F. *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

⁴⁰ Amnesty International. (2023). *Voices from the Margins: Banditry and Breakdown of Trust in Northwestern Nigeria*. <https://www.amnesty.org/>; BBC News Africa, “The Bandit Warlords of Zamfara – BBC Africa Eye documentary”, July 25, 2022, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-fPEHUqhyA> (accessed 10th September 2022).

moral call to peace as a divine mandate is not merely theological; it is a human responsibility that demands accountable governance, economic justice, and the protection of civil space.

Upholding Human Dignity

At the heart of any lasting peace is the unshakable conviction that every human person possesses inherent dignity—a dignity not conferred by status, wealth, nationality, or ability, but by the very fact of being made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). To uphold human dignity is to recognize, protect, and affirm the worth of every person, from conception to natural death, regardless of condition or circumstance. As Pope Leo XIV made clear in his inaugural address, any effort to build peace must begin with this foundational truth: “The dignity of the human person is not negotiable. From the child in the womb to the elderly abandoned, from the sick and the unemployed to the migrant and the prisoner—each is a bearer of God’s image”.

This theme of human dignity is not only a moral principle; it is a call to action. It demands that individuals, governments, and societies build structures and cultures that reflect this dignity. When people are treated as means to an end—as commodities, burdens, or threats—peace is impossible. But when each person is treated as a subject of rights and a recipient of love, the groundwork for true peace is laid.⁴¹ Upholding human dignity means protecting life at every stage. In an age where violence often begins with the devaluation of life—whether through war, abortion, euthanasia, or neglect—the Church stands as a prophetic witness that peace and the sanctity of life are inseparable.⁴² Pope Leo XIV, like his predecessors, reminded the world that indifference to the most vulnerable is not a private sin but a social wound, and that the measure of a civilization is found in how it treats its weakest members.

Dignity also means recognizing the fundamental rights of every person—to work, to education, to healthcare, and to meaningful participation in the social, political, and cultural life of their communities. Catholic social teaching insists that peace is unattainable without justice, and justice itself demands a wholehearted commitment to the full flourishing of everyone, regardless of their social or economic status. This commitment especially includes the rights of the poor to be heard with dignity and respect, the rights of refugees and migrants to be welcomed with compassion, and the rights of all people to live free from exploitation, racism, and systemic oppression.

⁴¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1930-1931.

⁴² John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (Encyclical Letter on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life), The Holy See, 25 March 1995, 3. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

Yet, the stark reality for many across the globe remains one of profound inequality, where entrenched class divides and systemic injustices perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalization.⁴³ Too often, organized elites maintain power by treating the vulnerable not as persons made in the image of God⁴⁴, but as mere means to their own economic or political ends. Such structural sin violates the inherent dignity of the human person and obstructs the path to authentic peace. The Church, following the example of Christ's preferential option for the poor, calls all people—especially those with influence—to actively dismantle these unjust systems, to promote solidarity, and to build societies where justice and peace truly flourish for all.⁴⁵

From the perspective of St. Augustine, upholding human dignity is inseparable from recognizing humanity's creation in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and its ultimate orientation toward union with Him. Augustine teaches that the human soul, rational and capable of knowing and loving God, possesses a dignity that surpasses all material creation.⁴⁶ This dignity, however, is not based on social status, wealth, or power, but on the soul's capacity to participate in divine truth and love. Sin may distort this image, but it never destroys it. For Augustine, the work of Christ—particularly His incarnation, death, and resurrection—reveals the profound value God places on each human being. As such, to violate another's dignity through injustice, exploitation, or neglect is not merely a social offense but a moral rupture that defies the divine order. Therefore, upholding human dignity involves both personal virtue and social responsibility, as every act of justice, mercy, and compassion reaffirms the sacred worth of the human person and reflects the peace and order of the City of God.⁴⁷

Moreover, recognizing human dignity calls for a culture of encounter. Pope Leo XIV's vision of peace is not abstract—it is deeply relational. He urged believers to go beyond the boundaries of ideology, nationality, and social class, and to see in the face of the other—especially the stranger—the face of Christ.⁴⁸ This is not sentimentalism; it is

⁴³ Hassan, G. (2021). "The Burden of Antidevelopment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Toward an Integral Human Development." *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, 18 (2), 241-68.

⁴⁴ Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate*, (Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth), 29 June 2009, 23. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html; John Paul II. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. (The Social Concern), 30th December 1987, 38. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html.

⁴⁵ Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

⁴⁶ Clark MT. (2001). *De Trinitate*. In: Stump E, Kretzmann N, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. Cambridge Companions to Philosophy. Cambridge University Press, 91-102.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 17.

⁴⁸ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 85.

radical discipleship. As he emphasized, even our speech should reflect this reverence for others: “Words too, not only weapons, can wound and even kill”.⁴⁹ Thus, upholding dignity also means speaking with integrity, disagreeing with charity, and refusing to reduce others to labels or enemies. In a world where division often takes the form of dehumanization—where people are spoken of in numbers, categories, or statistics—the Christian is called to name and honour each person as a brother or sister.⁵⁰ This is the basis of human solidarity, and it is the moral backbone of any serious peace effort. As Pope Leo XIV warned, peace built on political expediency or technological progress alone will not endure. Only a peace that springs from the recognition of every person’s God-given worth will withstand the storms of history.⁵¹ In short, upholding human dignity is not a secondary or optional part of peacebuilding. It is its very soul. It is the truth that binds policies to people, systems to souls, and laws to love. To defend the dignity of every person is to draw near to the heart of God—and to take the first, essential step toward a world made whole.

The Power of Words in Promoting Peace

In a time when communication travels faster than ever and words can reach millions in an instant, the power of language to shape the world—for better or worse—has never been more evident. Words can heal or divide, build bridges or walls, inspire courage or incite violence. In his first address as Pope, Leo XIV offered a poignant and timely reminder: “Words too, not only weapons, can wound and even kill.”⁵² With this statement, he underscored the crucial role that language plays in either sustaining peace or undermining it. Peace begins not only in policies or treaties, but in the daily conversations we hold—in families, classrooms, communities, parliaments, and on screens. The tone and content of our words reveal our intentions and shape our relationships. Language has the unique ability to recognize dignity, affirm truth, and foster understanding. But it also holds the terrible potential to inflame hatred, deepen divisions, and justify injustice. In promoting peace, words play several essential roles:

1. Words as Instruments of Reconciliation

Peace-making often begins with dialogue—honest, patient, and respectful conversation. Words possess a unique capacity to open hearts, correct misunderstandings, and express both remorse and forgiveness. St. Augustine understood this deeply, viewing speech not merely as a means of communication but

⁴⁹ Leo XIV, “Peace be with all of you”.

⁵⁰ Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

⁵¹ Leo XIV, “Peace be with all of you”.

⁵² *ibid*.

as a moral and spiritual act. In his *Confessions*, Augustine demonstrates how language, when rightly ordered toward truth and love, becomes a path to healing—not only between individuals but within the soul itself.⁵³ He emphasizes that truth is not only to be spoken but to be loved,⁵⁴ and that reconciliation can never be achieved through coercion or flattery, but only through a shared commitment to the good.⁵⁵ For Augustine, this good is rooted in the *tranquillitas ordinis*—the “tranquillity of order”—which reflects the harmony that arises when all things, including speech, are properly aligned under divine love.⁵⁶ Even correction, he insists, must be motivated by charity: “Let love be in the root, for from this root can only spring good.”⁵⁷ Listening, too, is essential in this framework; humility begins in silence, in the willingness to hear the other before speaking. In a world often fractured by accusation and division, Augustine calls us back to a more sacred use of language: not as a weapon to win arguments, but as an instrument of reconciliation. When we speak truth in love and listen with the ears of the heart, we imitate Christ—the Word made flesh—who entered our world not to overpower, but to heal.

2. Words as Defenders of the Vulnerable

Pope Leo XIV, echoing the Church’s long-standing tradition,⁵⁸ affirmed that peace is inseparable from justice, and that justice demands a voice for the voiceless. In this view, language becomes not merely a means of communication but a moral instrument—capable of advocating for the oppressed, exposing injustice, and upholding the inherent dignity of those marginalized by society. Throughout Scripture and Church history, the refusal to remain silent in the face of evil is seen not as a political act alone, but as a theological imperative. As the prophet Isaiah declares, “Seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Is 1:17), and again in Amos: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). Silence, in this moral framework, is not neutral. As St. Augustine observed, silence in the presence of wrongdoing can itself become a form of complicity—an unspoken consent to

⁵³ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book IX.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. W. Babcock & R. Coleman (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2021), Book XIX, Chapter 12.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Letter to Proba* (Epistula 130), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

⁵⁸ Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*, 78.

injustice.⁵⁹ The prophetic use of words, therefore, is essential to the Christian witness. Saints, reformers, and martyrs throughout history have wielded speech as a means to awaken the conscience of society and inspire moral transformation—from St. Ambrose confronting emperors to Dorothy Day confronting systems of poverty and war.⁶⁰ In such examples, language transcends rhetoric; it becomes a sacrificial offering, a defence of the vulnerable, and a participation in Christ's own mission to liberate the oppressed (Luke 4:18). When rightly used, words carry not only meaning, but moral weight.

3. Words as Architects of Culture

Language is not neutral. It shapes the moral and cultural environment in which ideas, attitudes, and assumptions are formed and normalized. The stories a society tells—through media, politics, education, and everyday discourse—contribute to the collective imagination, either nurturing empathy or reinforcing division. Repeated narratives, even subtly expressed, can desensitize the public, erode compassion, or entrench fear and exclusion. As St. John Paul II noted, the "culture of death" is not imposed solely by law or violence but often begins with language that reduces human beings to problems or threats.⁶¹ Peacebuilders, therefore, must be vigilant stewards of language. They are called not only to critique harmful narratives but to actively construct counter-narratives rooted in truth, hope, and solidarity. The words we use to describe others—immigrants, prisoners, the poor, the elderly, or the "other"—either affirm their dignity or diminish it. In the Christian tradition, the Word became flesh (John 1:14), affirming that language participates in the sacred. Thus, to speak of another person is never merely an act of description; it is always an act of moral and spiritual significance.⁶²

4. Words as Prayers for Peace

Lastly, words shape our inner life. In prayer, worship, and meditation, language is elevated from mere communication to communion with God. The Church's liturgical and scriptural language forms a people who are not only peaceful in action but steeped in a spirit of peace. The Psalms, the Gospels, and the prayers of the saints all reveal that words—when lifted to God—become channels of divine grace that can

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Sermon 88*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992).

⁶⁰ Ellsberg, R. (1997). *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad Publishing).

⁶¹ John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*, 12.

⁶² Williams, R. (2012). *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury), 82–84.

transform hearts and renew societies.⁶³ In a world saturated with noise, the Christian is called to speak differently—to use words with purpose, gentleness, and courage. Pope Leo XIV’s warning about the weaponization of words is not abstract. We see its effects in online vitriol, political polarization, and casual cruelty. But we also see hope in voices that speak truth without rancor, challenge injustice without hatred, and declare peace without compromise. As peace is both a divine mandate and a human endeavour, so too must our words be both truthful and merciful. Every word we speak has the potential to either stir conflict or sow peace. The question is: which will we choose?

A Commitment to Dialogue and Unity

True peace is not forged in isolation, nor does it emerge from uniformity or silence. It arises through dialogue—a courageous, patient, and often uncomfortable process of encountering the other, listening with humility, and seeking common ground without compromising truth. In his first address as Supreme Pontiff, Pope Leo XIV reaffirmed the Church’s enduring commitment to dialogue and unity, building upon the vision of the Second Vatican Council and the legacy of his predecessors: “We must walk together—bishops and faithful, clergy and laity, the Church and the world—not in perfect agreement, but in mutual respect and shared hope.”⁶⁴

In an age marked by polarization, mistrust, and ideological tribalism, this commitment is radical. Dialogue demands more than conversation; it requires the disposition to understand rather than to win, to heal rather than to dominate. It invites people to enter the spaces between differences—not to erase them, but to transcend them in pursuit of a greater unity rooted in the dignity of every person.⁶⁵ Pope Leo XIV’s episcopal motto, *In illo Uno unum* (“In the One, we are one”), reflects a profoundly Christian understanding of unity—not as conformity, but as communion. Just as the Trinity is a unity of distinct Persons in perfect love, the Church is called to mirror that mystery: a diverse body made one in Christ.⁶⁶ This theological foundation compels Christians to resist the temptation to withdraw into enclaves of sameness and instead to extend hands across divisions—within the Church and beyond it.

⁶³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2639.

⁶⁴ Leo XIV, “Peace be with all of you”.

⁶⁵ Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*, 92.

⁶⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 813-822.

1. Unity Within the Church

The internal unity of the Church is not automatic. It requires constant tending, particularly in times of moral, doctrinal, or pastoral disagreement. Pope Leo XIV's call to dialogue within the Church is a call to conversion: to listen deeply, to discern carefully, and to seek fidelity to Christ together.⁶⁷ It is a reminder that unity is not uniformity; the Catholic Church has always been enriched by the diversity of its rites, cultures, charisms, and theological traditions. Dialogue between bishops and laypeople, between generations, and among theological perspectives strengthens the Body of Christ, not weakens it—when grounded in love and truth.⁶⁸

2. Dialogue With the World

The Church's dialogue with the world is not a political strategy or a public relations effort. It is an essential part of her mission to witness to the Gospel in every age. Pope Leo XIV, following the footsteps of John XXIII, Paul VI, and Francis, affirmed that the Church must not retreat from the public square, but must engage it—bringing the light of Christ into the darkness of despair, confusion, and conflict.⁶⁹ This dialogue includes engagement with science, culture, politics, and other religions—not as a surrender of Catholic identity, but as a confident invitation to seek truth together. Such dialogue is particularly urgent in a world where people are increasingly divided by race, religion, nationality, and ideology. The Church is called to be a bridge-builder—to create spaces where difficult conversations can occur, where wounds can be acknowledged, and where shared values can be discovered. As Pope Leo XIV indicated, this kind of dialogue is an act of peacebuilding. It is a refusal to accept division as inevitable or desirable.⁷⁰

3. Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue

Unity also extends beyond the Catholic Church to our separated Christian brothers and sisters and to followers of other faiths. The wounds of Christian division are not merely theological—they are deeply human and historical, and they compromise the

⁶⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (Apostolic exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World), The Holy See, 24 November 2013, 226.

⁶⁸ Paul VI. *Lumen Gentium*, 13; Pope John Paul II, John Paul II. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Apostolic Letter on the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000), The Holy See, 6 January 2001, 45. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html.

⁶⁹ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* (Encyclical Letter on the Church), 6 August 1964, The Holy See, 63-65. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html.

⁷⁰ Leo XIV, "Peace be with all of you".

credibility of the Christian witness to peace. Pope Leo XIV reaffirmed the Church's commitment to ecumenical dialogue—not as a political truce but as a genuine effort to restore the unity for which Christ prayed: “That they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). Likewise, dialogue with other religious traditions—especially Judaism, Islam, and Eastern religions—is essential in a world where religion can be manipulated as a tool of division or violence. The Church seeks to walk the path of mutual understanding, recognizing the presence of truth and goodness wherever it is found, and collaborating in the pursuit of justice, environmental stewardship, and human solidarity.⁷¹

Conclusion: Peace—Our Shared Calling

Peace is not an abstract ideal reserved for distant diplomacy or solemn prayer; it is a living mandate from God and a daily work entrusted to humanity. As Pope Leo XIV so powerfully reminded the world in his inaugural address, peace is both gift and responsibility—a divine mandate that calls each person to be an active participant in God's vision for a reconciled world.⁷² It is a grace we must receive with humility, and a task we must carry out with courage. To build peace is to commit ourselves to the deep work of justice, to uphold the dignity of every human life, to speak with integrity, and to live with compassion. It is to nurture families as sanctuaries of love, to engage in dialogue even when disagreement is difficult, and to refuse to allow fear or hatred to shape our relationships or policies.⁷³ It is to act, not out of political convenience, but from moral conviction and spiritual fidelity.⁷⁴

The path of peace will always be demanding. It requires sacrifice, patience, and the willingness to love beyond boundaries. Yet, it is also the path of hope, the path that reflects the very heart of God. In choosing this path, we do not walk alone. We are led by Christ, the Prince of Peace (Is 9:6), and we are accompanied by the Church and all people of goodwill who believe, even in the darkest hours, that peace is possible—and necessary. Peace is not merely what we desire; it is what we are called to embody. Let us, then, answer that call with faith, with action, and with unwavering hope. For in pursuing peace, we do not only fulfil our human duty—we fulfil God's will for His creation (Matt 5:9).

⁷¹ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), The Holy See, 28 October 1965, 2-3.

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

⁷² Leo XIV, “Peace be with all of you”.

⁷³ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 231-232.

⁷⁴ Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace 2012*, 5.

Peace is not an optional ideal within the Christian tradition; it is integral to the divine vision for creation. It is, at once, God's mandate to humanity and a vocation that invites our deepest moral and spiritual engagement. From the opening chapters of Scripture, where order is drawn out of chaos, to the prophetic call to "seek peace and pursue it" (Ps 34:14), the biblical witness makes clear that peace is both gift and task (Ps. 34:14). As a divine mandate, peace flows from the very nature of God—who is not only the Creator but the sustainer of harmony, justice, and mercy (Is. 9:6). As a human endeavour, peace calls forth the full exercise of conscience, courage, and compassion. It demands action from individuals, communities, and nations—not merely the cessation of violence, but the building of relationships grounded in truth, equity, and love.⁷⁵ In this light, peace must be understood as fundamentally relational. It cannot be sustained where lies are institutionalised, where injustice is normalized, or where the dignity of the human person is systematically denied. Whether it is the co-optation of civil society for political propaganda,⁷⁶ the deliberate spread of misinformation, or the widespread poverty that breeds frustration and extremism,⁷⁷ these realities are not simply political challenges. They are deeply theological crises. They call for the Church—not only as a spiritual institution but as a moral witness—to speak clearly and act boldly.

In the context of Nigeria, where ethnic and religious tensions have frequently led to violence and division, religious freedom emerges as a critical panacea for peace. When individuals and communities are free to worship without fear of persecution, suspicion, or state interference, the foundations for mutual respect and peaceful coexistence are strengthened. Religious freedom not only protects the dignity of conscience but also fosters environments in which dialogue and reconciliation can flourish. In a multi-religious society like Nigeria, ensuring equal rights for all faiths—Christian, Muslim, and indigenous traditions—is essential to national stability and social cohesion. The suppression or politicization of religion breeds resentment and extremism; conversely, the affirmation of religious liberty affirms the humanity of every citizen and creates space for healing, justice, and collaboration across divides. This is no less true on the global stage. From Myanmar to India, from the Middle East to parts of Eastern Europe, religious freedom remains a vital cornerstone of lasting peace. Where it is upheld, societies are more resilient, inclusive, and just. Where it is denied, the resulting fractures often escalate into broader conflicts. As such, defending

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 2002;

⁷⁶ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 15–16.

⁷⁷ Ejiofor, P. F. (2022). "Beyond Ungoverned Spaces: Connecting the Dots between Relative Deprivation, Banditry, and Violence in Nigeria", *African Security* 15, no.2,127; Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate*, 27.

and promoting religious liberty must remain a moral and diplomatic priority for governments, faith leaders, and international institutions alike.⁷⁸ When effectively implemented, it contributes to the establishment of a viable and peaceful community.

The concept of civil society in Africa is deeply rooted in the enduring bond of community. This communal ethos is encapsulated in the term *Ubuntu*—“I am because we are”—which illustrates the interconnectedness and mutual dependence characteristic of African societies. Chinua Achebe, the renowned literary icon, underscored the significance of communal bonds in his novel *Things Fall Apart*, writing: “When we gather in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so...”⁷⁹ Similarly, Ikechukwu Kanu, a scholar of African philosophy, expands on the principles of *Ubuntu* and Achebe’s reflection through the Igbo philosophical concept of *Igwebuike*, which translates as “strength is number” or “power is unity.”⁸⁰ This concept emphasizes the value of solidarity and complementarity—core elements essential to the vitality, resilience, and harmony of the African community, and by extension, its civil society. Such an approach can be adapted and applied across global contexts to foster peaceful and viable communities.

St. Augustine’s vision of peace as *tranquillitas ordinis*—“the tranquillity of order”⁸¹—remains profoundly relevant. But this order must be just. True peace is not maintained by fear or enforced silence; it is cultivated through right relationships: between persons and the state, between neighbour and neighbour, and above all between humanity and God.⁸² In contexts marked by violence, corruption, and exclusion, the Church’s task is to proclaim a peace that does not compromise with injustice but confronts it with the hope of the Gospel. At the heart of this task is the human family—the first and most intimate school of peace.⁸³ The family teaches children to trust, to forgive, to respect, and to hope. It is within the home that the foundations of peaceful societies are laid. When families are broken by war, poverty, or moral collapse, the wounds ripple far beyond their walls. Conversely, when families are nurtured by love, truth, and mutual care, they become powerful agents of social transformation. Thus, peace must be both a public responsibility and a personal

⁷⁸ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Religious Freedom Conditions in Nigeria,” 2024 Report.

⁷⁹ Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann), 145.

⁸⁰ Kanu, I. A. (2017). “Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Modality of Peace and Conflict Resolution”. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy* (1) 1, 35.

⁸¹ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 13.

⁸² Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*, 78.

⁸³ John Paul II, *Gratissiman Sane*, 1994.

discipline.⁸⁴ It must be legislated in law and embodied in daily life; preached from the pulpit and lived at the table.

Pope Leo XIV's inaugural address further illuminated the Church's commitment to peace, emphasizing that "peace is first and foremost a gift" from Christ, yet it is also an active and demanding call to engage in dialogue and reconciliation. He described this peace as "unarmed and disarming," highlighting its humble and persevering nature. This perspective challenges the conventional notion of peace as merely the absence of conflict, urging instead a proactive approach rooted in love and humility. Pope Leo XIV's vision aligns with the Church's mission to be a "small leaven of unity, communion, and fraternity within the world," striving to build a new world where peace reigns through collective effort and divine guidance. The pursuit of peace, therefore, calls for an integrated response. It invites theologians to reflect deeply, policymakers to legislate justly, civil society to act ethically, and families to live faithfully. Above all, it calls for a renewal of our common vocation to be peacemakers—those who not only mourn the brokenness of the world but participate in its healing. As Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Mt 5:9). Peace, then, is not only what we seek—it is what we become, when we respond to God's call with integrity, courage, and love.

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⁸⁴ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 231–233.

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“Peace Be With You”: Pope Leo XIV on Peace in a Conflict-Ridden World

Michael Paul Pilani



Introduction

In an age marked by deepening geopolitical conflict, ecological crisis, and ecclesial fragmentation, the longing for peace remains both a perennial aspiration and an urgent necessity. Yet, peace is often reduced to a vague ideal or a mere cessation of violence, stripped of its theological richness and moral substance. This paper contends that a robust, peace-centered vision must be retrieved from the heart of Christian tradition, specifically, from the convergence of Scripture, patristic theology, and contemporary ecclesial witness. Anchored in John 20:19, where the risen Christ declares, “Peace be with you,” and illuminated through the theological prism of St. Augustine’s *tranquillitas ordinis*, this study interprets the inaugural address of Pope Leo XIV as a prophetic articulation of peace not as passivity, but as redemptive reordering. It explores how Leo XIV, drawing on Augustinian insights, reclaims the Church’s vocation as a reconciler in a conflict-ridden world.¹

Methodologically, the study employs an interdisciplinary theological framework integrating biblical exegesis, historical-patristic theology, and contextual ecclesiology. It begins with a literary and theological analysis of John 20:19 within its first-century and Johannine context, demonstrating the performative power of Christ’s greeting as both absolution and apostolic commissioning.² The paper then engages Augustinian political theology, particularly Augustine’s understanding of peace as the right ordering of love and justice, contrasting it with imperial and contemporary distortions of “peace.” Finally, the study conducts a contextual theological analysis of Pope Leo XIV’s inaugural address, examining how his Augustinian formation shapes his vision of synodality, justice, and global reconciliation. Through this tripartite methodology,

¹ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), XIX.13; Pope Leo XIV, “Inaugural Address,” Joshua McElwee, Full text of Pope Leo XIV’s first speech: ‘Peace be with you’, Reuters, May 8, 2025.

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 1038–1040.

the paper constructs a theological paradigm wherein peace is not merely a doctrinal motif but a dynamic, sacramental mission of the Church.³

This paradigm is critically situated within today's global context, characterized by war, displacement, ecological degradation, and the erosion of moral and institutional trust. The paper argues that Pope Leo XIV's ecclesiology offers a timely response to these crises, positioning the Church as both the bearer and embodiment of Christ's peace. His call for a synodal Church that listens, heals, and walks in solidarity with the suffering echoes Augustine's vision of the *civitas Dei*, a pilgrim people ordered by love and animated by eschatological hope. Ultimately, this introduction sets the stage for a theological inquiry that does not seek peace as political appeasement, but as divine initiative – one that calls the Church to enter locked rooms, name deep wounds, and proclaim again: "Peace be with you."⁴

This study operates within a theological-ecclesiological framework rooted in *Augustinian political theology*, *Johannine Christology*, and the *performative theory of language*. Drawing on St. Augustine's *tranquillitas ordinis* (tranquility of order),⁵ the framework explores peace not as the absence of conflict but as the right ordering of relationships grounded in divine justice and love. Simultaneously, the performative function of divine speech in John 20:19, wherein Jesus' greeting of "Peace be with you" enacts existential transformation, aligns with theories of speech acts⁶ and sacramental theology, portraying peace as an effective divine intervention rather than a passive ideal. Pope Leo XIV's theological vision, shaped by Augustine and contextualized in a world marked by global, ecological, and ecclesial crises, functions as the contemporary embodiment of this ancient framework. Thus, the study interprets peace as a theological and moral reality constituted by divine action, ecclesial witness, and eschatological hope within a fractured world.

Concept of Peace

This research conceptualizes peace as a "multidimensional theological construct" expressed in three interrelated categories: *Christological peace* (rooted in the risen Lord's pronouncement in John 20:19), *Augustinian order* (where peace is the result of rightly ordered love),⁷ and *ecclesial mission* (where peace is embodied and enacted by the

³ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.12–14.

⁴ . Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Resurrection in Johannine Faith," in *Jesus Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 101–103.

⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, 13.

⁶ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.1; XIV.13.

Church as *sacramentum pacis*). These concepts interact through the symbolic narrative of the locked room (John 20:19), the Church's pilgrim identity (Augustine's *civitas Dei*),⁸ and Pope Leo XIV's practical theology of synodality and reconciliation.⁹ The disciples' fear-to-mission transformation becomes a conceptual model for the Church's movement from interior woundedness to global peacemaking. Peace is thus understood not only as a theological theme but as an active ecclesial vocation in response to political violence, environmental degradation, and institutional disunity, integrating biblical exegesis, historical theology, and contemporary praxis.

Scriptural Perspective: Exegesis of John 20:19

a. Literary and Narrative Context of John 20:19

The literary and narrative context of John 20:19 situates the scene at a critical moment of theological and emotional rupture. The disciples are depicted as huddled in fear behind locked doors, a powerful symbol of their psychological and communal disintegration following Jesus' crucifixion. The narrative emphasizes that it is the evening of the first day of the week, invoking both the Jewish liturgical rhythm and the eschatological overtones of new creation (cf. Gen. 1:1–5; John 1:1). When the risen Christ appears among them and speaks the words "Peace be with you" (*eirēnē hymin*), this greeting serves not as a casual salutation but as a performative theological act. Repeated three times in John 20:19, 21, and 26, the phrase initiates a narrative of restoration and empowerment. As Sandra Schneiders argues, these words "function as both absolution and commissioning," linking the forgiveness of the past with the charge for future mission.¹⁰ Thus, the literary structure of this passage reveals peace not as a static emotional state but as a dynamic, redemptive intervention that reframes the disciples' fear in light of the resurrection.

Moreover, the repetition of "*eirēnē hymin*" within this pericope operates as a theological hinge between crucifixion and resurrection, despair and mission, fragmentation and renewal. This narrative device echoes with John's broader theological motifs, in which Jesus' death and resurrection are portrayed not as separate events but as one continuous movement of glorification (John 12:23–24; 17:1–5). The risen Christ's greeting is thus charged with eschatological and ecclesiological significance.

⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.1; XIV.28.

⁹ In his speech, while switching back to Italian, he stated "To all of you, brothers and sisters of Rome, of Italy, of the whole world, we want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close especially to those who suffer."

¹⁰ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 215.

According to Marianne Meye Thompson, the peace offered by Jesus “is the reality of the resurrection, the gift of the Spirit, and the inauguration of the disciples’ mission.”¹¹ The greeting becomes a covenantal reaffirmation, namely a divine initiative that not only reconciles the past but propels the community into apostolic witness. In this light, the locked doors are not merely physical barriers but metaphors for the disciples’ paralyzing fear and theological disorientation, both of which are overcome by the embodied presence of the risen Lord and his repeated invocation of peace.

b. Historical and Socio-Political Background of John 20:19

The historical backdrop of John 20:19 is deeply entrenched in the traumatic realities of first-century Palestinian Judaism, where the concept of *shalom* carried profound theological and social significance far beyond mere cessation of hostilities. Jewish peace traditions encompassed wholeness, completeness, and divine blessing, often associated with messianic expectations that anticipated God’s ultimate restoration of Israel.¹² The Gospel of John was likely composed in the aftermath of the Temple’s destruction in 70 AD, a catastrophic event that shattered Jewish religious and social structures and left communities grappling with questions of divine presence and covenantal faithfulness.¹³ This post-70 AD context illuminates the tenderness of Jesus entering the disciples’ locked room with his greeting of peace, which offers divine presence precisely when traditional mediating structures had collapsed. The sectarian tensions between emerging Christian communities and Pharisaic Judaism, coupled with the oppressive reality of Roman occupation, created a complex environment where competing visions of peace coexisted: the imperial *pax Romana* that promised stability through military domination versus the Johannine understanding of peace as a divine gift transcending political arrangements.¹⁴

The Johannine community’s distinctive social location as a diaspora Jewish-Christian group experiencing synagogue expulsion (*aposynagōgos*) profoundly shaped their reception of Christ’s peace proclamation.¹⁵ This community faced the dual trauma of separation from their Jewish roots and ongoing conflicts with Docetist tendencies that threatened to spiritualize Christ’s incarnation and diminish the reality of his

¹¹ Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 426.

¹² Gerhard von Rad, “εἰρήνη,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 400-402.

¹³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 22-24.

¹⁴ Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 7-54.

¹⁵ J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 45-62.

physical resurrection.¹⁶ Within the broader Greco-Roman context, the term *eirēnē* carried rich philosophical connotations from Stoic concepts of cosmic harmony to Platonic ideals of ordered beauty, while mystery religions offered peace as a divine gift accessed through ritual participation.¹⁷ However, the Johannine presentation of peace diverged sharply from these cultural parallels by grounding peace not in philosophical contemplation, imperial power, or cultic initiation, but in the personal encounter with the crucified and risen Christ who bears the wounds of suffering love. This theological innovation positioned the Gospel's peace greeting as both a critique of prevailing peace ideologies and an invitation into a radically alternative community founded on divine grace rather than human achievement or political arrangement.

c. Literary and Theological Analysis of John 20:19

The lexical analysis of *eirēnē* (peace) in John 20:19 reveals a complex theological development that transforms a conventional greeting into a profound theological statement. Throughout the Johannine corpus, peace functions not merely as a social pleasantry but as a distinctive gift of the risen Christ, building upon the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which encompasses wholeness, completeness, and divine blessing.¹⁸ This theological evolution is particularly evident when comparing John 20:19 with Jesus' earlier peace pronouncements in John 14:27, where he declares "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives," and John 16:33, where he promises peace amid tribulation.¹⁹ The performative dimension of Christ's peace greeting in the resurrection narrative demonstrates the creative power of divine speech, similar to God's creative word in Genesis; Christ's declaration of peace constitutes and creates the reality it proclaims.²⁰ This performative quality distinguishes Johannine peace from mere wish or benediction, establishing it as an effective divine act that transforms the recipients' existential condition from fear to faith, from paralysis to mission.

The narrative function of John 20:19 serves as a crucial hinge in the Gospel's plot structure, facilitating the disciples' transformation from terrified fugitives behind

¹⁶ Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 109-123.

¹⁷ Hans Conzelmann, "εἰρήνη" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 411-412.

¹⁸ Gerhard von Rad, "εἰρήνη," 402-406.

¹⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 630-631, 1023.

²⁰ For the concept of performative divine speech, see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 4-11, and its theological application in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 37-42.

locked doors to commissioned apostles empowered for global mission.²¹ The symbolic dimensions of the passage are particularly rich: the locked doors represent the disciples' psychological and spiritual imprisonment by fear, while Christ's ability to enter despite physical barriers demonstrates the resurrection's power to transcend all human limitations.²² The theological irony reaches its climax as Christ displays his crucifixion wounds; the very marks of apparent defeat become the credentials of ultimate victory, and the instruments of death become the foundation of life-giving peace.²³ This Christological peace carries unique authority precisely because it emerges from the crucified and risen Lord who has conquered death itself, while the pneumatological dimension becomes explicit in verse 22 when Jesus breathes on the disciples, connecting the gift of peace with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for mission.²⁴ The ecclesiological implications are profound, as this peace becomes the constitutive element of the Christian community, not a human achievement. Rather, it is a divine gift that both forms and sends the Church into the world with the same mission Christ received from the Father, creating an eschatological tension where present peace coexists with the ongoing reality of worldly conflict.

Saint Augustine's Theology of Peace

St. Augustine, one of the greatest Church Fathers, has to his credit a reflective interpretation of peace in both personal and political theology. In *The City of God*, he defines peace as *tranquillitas ordinis*, translated as "the tranquility of order."²⁵ For Augustine, true peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the right ordering of relationships: between humans and God, among individuals, and within societies. This notion stands in contrast to classical Roman understandings of "*pax*", which prioritized political subjugation and imperial control. Augustine reorients peace toward the divine will, emphasizing that without a foundation in God's justice and love, peace degenerates into domination masked by stability. Augustine writes, "The peace of all things is the tranquility of order. Order is the distribution which allots things equal and unequal, each to its own place" (*City of God*, XIX.13).²⁶ Thus, peace is not merely social stability but divine harmony, established in justice and love. He

²¹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1019-1020.

²² Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 690-691.

²³ Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1027-1028.

²⁴ For the pneumatological dimensions of John 20:22, see Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 114-125.

²⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei* [*The City of God*], trans. Marcus Dods, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), XIX.13.

²⁶ Ibid.

insists that any peace not anchored in God is unstable, subject to domination and false security. The peace of the “earthly city,” driven by pride (*superbia*) and self-love, contrasts with the peace of the “heavenly city,” which is governed by humility and charity (*caritas*).²⁷ For Augustine, peace becomes a diagnostic tool for discerning the moral orientation of a society or polity, whether it seeks true justice or mere self-preservation.

This theological vision challenges modern notions of peace as neutrality or compromise. Augustine’s peace is moral, spiritual, and eschatological; it looks forward to the ultimate reconciliation of all things in Christ.²⁸ Rather than a negotiated settlement between rival interests, peace is a divinely ordered reality that reflects the will of God and anticipates the fulfillment of history. This eschatological dimension means that peace is always in tension with the fallen world; it must be pursued not only through diplomacy or political reform, but through the conversion of hearts and the reformation of institutions toward justice, mercy, and grace. Moreover, Augustine’s theology underscores the critical role of the Church as the *sacramentum pacis*, the sacrament of peace.²⁹ The Church, as the earthly manifestation of the City of God, participates in Christ’s redemptive mission by embodying and promoting right order in a disordered world. This involves both an inner life of charity and prayer and an outward engagement with social, political, and cultural structures. The Church is not merely a sanctuary from conflict but a leaven within it, called to mediate, heal, and transform through its witness to divine peace. As such, Augustine lays the groundwork for what would later develop into Catholic social teaching on the just society, the common good, and the moral foundations of peace.³⁰

Finally, Augustine’s vision of peace as *tranquillitas ordinis* offers a valuable critique of contemporary approaches to global conflict resolution. In a world where peace is often reduced to ceasefires, containment strategies, or technocratic management of crises, Augustine reminds us that true peace must be integrally tied to moral truth and divine justice. Peace without justice is an illusion; order without love is oppression.

²⁷ Augustine develops this distinction between the two cities throughout *The City of God*, particularly in Books XIV-XIX. See Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.28.

²⁸ For Augustine’s eschatological understanding of peace, see *City of God*, XIX.11-17.

²⁹ The concept of the Church as *sacramentum pacis* emerges from Augustine’s ecclesiology as developed in his anti-Donatist writings and throughout *The City of God*. See also C. Lebechi “Discipline Inflamed by Love: A Critical Analysis of Augustine of Hippo’s Epistle 93 on the Exercise of Episcopal Ministry.” *Nigerian Journal of Church History and Missiological Studies*, (2021) Vol. 5, 61-82. 79.

³⁰ For the influence of Augustine’s political theology on later Catholic social teaching, see Charles T. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 58-85; M., Muonwe, & Lebechi, C. “Effects of Gendered Christian Missionary Education Policy in Southeast Nigeria (1857-1970). *Estaga: Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (2024). Vol. 1, No. 2, 146-164. 160.

Augustine thus calls peacemakers – whether ecclesial leaders, statesmen, or ordinary citizens – to examine not only the structures they build, but the loves that animate them. In this way, Augustine’s theology remains profoundly relevant, offering a timeless yet radical call to reorder society toward the peace that flows from God alone.

Pope Leo XIV’s Vision of Peace in a Conflict-Ridden World

Pope Leo XIV’s Augustinian formation is central to understanding his vision of peace.³¹ Trained in Augustinian monastic life, steeped in patristic theology, and forged in ecclesial service, Leo XIV entered the papacy at a time of global war, ecological breakdown, ecclesial polarization, and humanitarian displacement. His early writings³² and episcopal ministry demonstrated a commitment to Augustine’s core teachings on grace, justice, and ordered love (*ordo amoris*),³³ which profoundly shaped his theological anthropology and public theology. His preference for contemplative discernment over “quick fixes” signaled a return to an ancient wellspring of Christian wisdom: peace begins not in policy, but in interior conversion and rightly ordered desire.

In his first speech, Leo XIV declared: “Christ the risen Lord comes into our locked fears and says again: Peace be with you, not a peace of comfort, but a peace of courage; not the stillness of indifference, but the stillness of divine order.” This echoes both John 20:19 and Augustine’s *tranquillitas ordinis*.³⁴ Peace, for Leo XIV, is not a passive state, but a mission of repair, a divine mandate to reorder the world through love, justice, and sacrificial solidarity.³⁵ The rhetorical structure of his address reflected Augustine’s pedagogical style, beginning with human anxiety, acknowledging disorder, and directing the audience toward the transcendent peace of God. Leo XIV positioned himself not as a sovereign ruler imposing order, but as a fellow pilgrim pointing toward the peace found only in Christ, the risen Lord who enters locked rooms and breathes peace into wounded communities. Thus, in his inaugural speech, he affirmed thus, “I too would like this greeting of peace to enter your heart, to reach

³¹ In his inaugural speech, Robert Prevost ensured he aligned his approach to life through the prism of Augustinian Spirituality when he states, “I am a son of Saint Augustine, (an) Augustinian...”

³² Prevost, Robert Francis. “The Office and Authority of the Local Prior in the Order of Saint Augustine.” PhD diss., (Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum, 1987).

³³ Augustine develops his concept of *ordo amoris* (ordered love) throughout his works, particularly in *De doctrina christiana* 1.27-28 and *De civitate Dei* XV.22. See Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson Jr. (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 1.27.

³⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei*, 13.

³⁵ See his inaugural speech: “I also want to thank all the fellow cardinals who chose me to be the Successor of Peter and to walk with you, as a united Church always seeking peace, justice.”

your families, to all people, wherever they are, to all peoples, to the whole earth. Peace be with you!”³⁶

Leo XIV’s Augustinianism is especially evident in his ecclesiology and global diplomacy. Like Augustine, who envisioned the Church as the *civitas Dei* journeying amidst the *civitas terrena*,³⁷ Leo sees the Church’s role not as a political power broker but as a moral conscience and spiritual reconciler. His preference for synodality–structured listening, communal discernment, and mutual accountability–mirrors Augustine’s emphasis on the Church as a community of love oriented toward the common good.³⁸ Internationally, Leo XIV has emphasized multilateral cooperation, ecological stewardship, and restorative justice, seeing these not as peripheral to the Gospel but intrinsic to its mission of peace. Thus, he averred in his speech, “So I would like to pray together with you. Let us pray together for this new mission, for the whole Church, for peace in the world, and let us ask for this special grace from Mary, our Mother.” This an approach to global disorder that seeks not simply a ceasefire, but the right order.

Moreover, Leo XIV’s insistence that peace cannot exist without justice and truth echoes Augustine’s rejection of false peace built on coercion or illusion. Just as Augustine critiqued the Roman Empire’s so-called peace (*pax romana*) as a mask for domination,³⁹ Leo XIV has challenged systems of economic exploitation, racial injustice, and geopolitical manipulation that parade as instruments of peace while perpetuating inequality and violence. His appeal is not to abstract ideals, but to concrete expressions of ordered love, where the vulnerable are given their due and the earth is cherished as a common home. In an age tempted by cynicism and moral relativism, Leo XIV’s Augustinian conviction offers a prophetic stance: peace is not negotiated in boardrooms alone – it is birthed through sacrificial love, truth-telling, and the courageous reordering of human affairs toward the will of God.

Synthesis of Biblical, Augustinian, and Pope Leo XIV’s Theology of Peace

³⁶ See Full Speech: Joshua McElwee, Full text of Pope Leo XIV’s first speech.

³⁷ Augustine’s distinction between the *civitas Dei* (City of God) and *civitas terrena* (earthly city) is developed throughout *The City of God*, especially Books XI–XXII. See particularly *City of God*, XIV.28 and XVIII.54.

³⁸ Augustine’s critique of Roman peace appears throughout *The City of God*, particularly in Books II–V and XIX. See especially *City of God* IV.4 and XIX.12–13.

³⁹ See his Italian statement in his speech earlier cited here. Meanwhile, for Augustine’s ecclesiology emphasizing love and community, see his *Sermones* on 1 John and *De civitate Dei* XIX.17. Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, trans. H. Browne, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888).

From the foregoing, the peace paradigm that emerges from the interplay of biblical revelation, Augustinian theology, and Pope Leo XIV's pastoral vision constitutes a robust theological framework for engaging a world in desperate need of reconciliation. It does not approach peace as a static or merely diplomatic concept but as a dynamic, theologically grounded reality. At the center of this paradigm is the "Christological peace" declared in John 20:19. When the risen Jesus enters the locked room and proclaims, "Peace be with you," he is not offering sentimental consolation but inaugurating a new ontological reality. This peace is born from his victory over sin and death; it is a peace that transforms wounded disciples into missionaries. The Johannine context makes clear that Christ's peace is both the fruit of his sacrificial love and the precondition for apostolic mission.⁴⁰ Thus, in the Christian vision, peace is inseparable from the presence of the risen Christ who breathes the Holy Spirit into the fearful and commissions them for the work of reconciliation.

Building upon this foundation, Augustine of Hippo extends the understanding of peace through his notion of *tranquillitas ordinis*, the "tranquility of order."⁴¹ In Augustine's theology, peace is not merely the cessation of hostilities but the right ordering of relationships – first with God, then with others, and finally within societies and political structures. This moral order, deep-rooted in love and truth, serves as the basis for justice and dignity. Augustine's critique of the Roman Empire's so-called peace (*pax romana*), which he saw as little more than coercive quietism, resonates deeply with contemporary concerns about peace founded on power, profit, or political expediency.⁴² True peace, for Augustine, arises from the alignment of human desires with divine will, and this alignment requires interior conversion, societal justice, and eschatological hope. Without this moral anchor, peace becomes hollow, vulnerable to collapse under the weight of injustice. The third element of the paradigm is ecclesial responsibility. For Augustine, the Church is not simply a recipient of divine peace but its sacrament and agent in the world. It is the visible sign of the heavenly city journeying amidst the earthly one, called to bear witness to the peace of Christ through word, sacrament, and social engagement.⁴³

Additionally, the study has shown how Pope Leo XIV reclaims this ecclesial vision by positioning the Church as a reconciler in a world fractured by war, economic

⁴⁰ See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1019-1025, for analysis of the Johannine understanding of peace and mission.

⁴¹ Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei* XIX.13.

⁴² Augustine's critique of Roman peace appears throughout *The City of God*, particularly Books II-V and XIX. See especially *City of God* IV.4 and XIX.12-13.

⁴³ For Augustine's ecclesiology as the visible sign of the *civitas Dei*, see *City of God* XVIII.49-54 and XX.9.

inequality, and cultural alienation. The Italian portion of his speech says: “To all of you, brothers and sisters of Rome, of Italy, of the whole world, we want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close especially to those who suffer.” Thus, his promotion of synodality, as a process of communal listening and discernment, is not merely administrative reform; it is an ecclesial praxis of peace. In synodality, the Church becomes a school of dialogue, learning to listen across divides and to respond with humility and courage.⁴⁴ This corresponds with Augustine’s vision of the Church as a community shaped by *caritas*, where peace is cultivated through the shared pursuit of truth and the mutual recognition of dignity.⁴⁵

Peace, then, is not only a theological gift but also a missional imperative. This fourth component of the paradigm, missional healing, recognizes that the peace received from Christ is never hoarded; it must be enacted and extended. In John’s Gospel, Christ’s greeting of peace is immediately followed by a commissioning: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). This inseparability of peace and mission reflects a Church that must not only preach reconciliation but embody it – particularly in contexts of historical trauma, systemic injustice, and moral failure.

The peace paradigm in question also challenges the Church to confront ideologies of indifference, which masquerade as tolerance but foster fragmentation and moral relativism. In a world where truth is often sacrificed on the altar of expedience or ideology, Pope Leo XIV insists on a peace that is anchored in truth, however uncomfortable. This aligns with Augustine’s conviction that peace without truth is a deception – a false unity that conceals injustice.⁴⁶ In this sense, the Church must reject peace-as-avoidance and instead embrace peace-as-prophecy: a peace that names wounds, seeks justice, and calls all parties into conversion. This demands spiritual maturity, theological depth, and pastoral sensitivity – qualities that Pope Leo models by blending patristic insight with contemporary discernment.

In summary, Pope Leo XIV’s peace model, grounded in Scripture, developed through Augustinian theology, and lived in ecclesial praxis, offers a comprehensive vision for

⁴⁴ M. P. Pilani, “Synodality in Numbers 11: 24-30: An Archetype for Participation in Community Life,” in *The Bible on Synodality: Walking Together in Communion, Participation, and Mission*. Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) 14 (2023): 24-42.

⁴⁵ Augustine develops his understanding of the Church as a community of *caritas* in his *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* and throughout *The City of God*. See Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, trans. H. Browne, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888).

⁴⁶ For Augustine’s understanding of the relationship between peace and truth, see *City of God* XIX.13 and his *Confessions* XIII.9.

a Church and world in crisis. It unites Christological presence, moral order, ecclesial mission, and prophetic engagement into a coherent framework. This is not peace as passivity, but as courageous reordering. In an age marked by global instability and moral uncertainty, Pope Leo XIV's papacy calls the Church to become a credible and active sacrament of peace, one that confronts wounds not with platitudes but with the risen Christ's own words: "Peace be with you."

Peace in a Conflict-Ridden World: A Contextual Application

In the current global context, peace remains one of the most elusive and yet most urgently needed realities. War and militarism continue to ravage regions from Eastern Europe to the Middle East, where civilian populations bear the brunt of geopolitical rivalries and ideologically driven violence. The ongoing war in Ukraine, for instance, has led to tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions, while further straining global political and economic systems.⁴⁷ In the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has erupted into cycles of violence that not only devastated human lives but also deepened religious and ethnic polarization.⁴⁸ These conflicts do not merely destroy infrastructure; they corrode the moral fabric of humanity and echo the Augustinian claim that true peace is absent where justice is not rightly ordered.⁴⁹ Pope Leo XIV addresses these crises with a Christ-centered approach, calling for disarmament of both weapons and hearts. His diplomatic outreach, grounded in a theology of nonviolence and restorative justice, insists that peace must begin with the rejection of vengeance and the cultivation of mutual dignity embedded in the *imago Dei*.⁵⁰

Africa presents further compelling evidence of the urgent need for authentic peace. In Ethiopia, the civil war in Tigray resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, gross human rights violations, and a humanitarian catastrophe.⁵¹ In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency and the ongoing violence between herders and farmers in the Middle Belt have claimed thousands of lives, displaced millions, and shattered

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Russia/Ukraine: War Crimes in Kyiv, Chernihiv Regions* (April 21, 2022), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/21/russia/ukraine-war-crimes-kyiv-chernihiv-regions>.

⁴⁸ B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, *Fatalities* (accessed May 29th, 2025), <https://www.btselem.org/statistics>.

⁴⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), XIX.13.

⁵⁰ Genesis 1:27; see also Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Books XII–XV.

⁵¹ International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate* (June 2022), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/ethiopias-tigray-war-deadly-dangerous-stalemate>

intercommunal trust.⁵² Moreover, recent increases in banditry and kidnapping across northern Nigeria illustrate a deeper collapse of public order and a crisis of justice, governance, and human dignity.⁵³ Theologically speaking, such violence represents a profound rupture in the *tranquillitas ordinis* that Augustine speaks of – disorder not just in political structures, but in human hearts estranged from the peace of God. Pope Leo XIV's vision, shaped by Augustinian realism and grounded in the redemptive peace of the Risen Christ, calls the Church to act as a reconciler, not a mere observer.

In parallel with military unrest, the ecological crisis stands as a deep and widening wound in the moral conscience of humanity. Pope Leo XIV, building on his predecessors' environmental teachings, frames ecological degradation not merely as a scientific or economic concern, but as a spiritual and theological crisis.⁵⁴ Climate collapse, he warns, reflects humanity's disordered relationship with creation – an extension of Augustine's insight into disordered loves (*amor perversus*).⁵⁵ In Africa, desertification in the Sahel and rising sea levels affecting communities in Lagos and the Niger Delta exemplify the direct relationship between ecological degradation and socio-economic instability.⁵⁶ The poor, indigenous communities, and future generations suffer disproportionately from environmental harm, making it not only a crisis of stewardship but also a violation of justice and peace.⁵⁷ The Pope's call for "ecological conversion" integrates peace with the land, creatures, and climate into the Church's mission of reconciliation. For Leo XIV, peace with creation is intrinsic to

⁵² I. A. Kanu, M. P. Pilani, M. B. Bazza, P. H. Kamai, P. B. Kanyip, and M. Onukwuba, "The Role of Education in Countering Boko Haram's Grip on Northeast Nigeria," *International Journal of Religion* 5, no. 7 (2024): 139-150, <https://doi.org/10.61707/x8h4jn62>. See also: Nimi Princewill, "Boko Haram Has Killed More than 35,000 People in Nigeria," *CNN Africa*, February 20, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/20/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-deaths-intl/index.html>.

⁵³ I. A. Kanu, M. B. Bazza, and P. M. Paul, "Banditry's Toll on Tomorrow: Exploring the Consequences on Youth in Northwest Nigeria," *International Journal of Religion* 5, no. 6 (2024): 111-117, <https://doi.org/10.61707/82rrmh09>. See also: International Crisis Group, *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem* (May 2021), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/violent-banditry-northwest-nigeria>.

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, "Laudato Si. On the Care of the Common Home," no. 128 (2015) http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (accessed May 4, 2025)

⁵⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, Books XIV–XV.

⁵⁶ United Nations Environment Programme, *Desertification: Threats in the Sahel*, <https://www.unep.org/resources/desertification-sahel>.

⁵⁷ M. P. Pilani, "Environmental Stewardship and Dignity of Labour in Gen 2:4b-15 and Its Challenges for Nigeria," *Theology and Science* 22, no. 4 (2024): 774–789, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2399901>; C. Lebechi. Option for the Poor in the Church's Life and Thought: Historical and Theological Survey. *African Journal of Contextual Theology*, (2014), Vol. 5, No. 1, 9-32.

the larger mission of healing the world, as both human and non-human lives depend on a just, sustainable order that reflects God's original harmony.

Economic injustice, too, plays a corrosive role in undermining global peace. In a world marked by staggering wealth disparity, systemic poverty, exploitative labor practices, and unjust trade policies, Pope Leo XIV speaks clearly and forcefully about the need to correct structural inequalities. In Nigeria, nearly 63% of the population lives in multidimensional poverty, while political elites and corporate actors amass wealth, often through corrupt practices.⁵⁸ Echoing Augustine's belief that true peace cannot exist without justice,⁵⁹ the Pontiff denounces market ideologies that prioritize profit over human dignity. He warns against what he terms "economic pacification," the illusion of social harmony that masks deep injustices. His encyclical writings stress the moral imperative of equitable distribution of resources and the prioritization of the common good. Peace, in this view, cannot be reduced to economic stability for the few but must involve shared dignity and the actualization of human potential across all sectors of society. This economic vision is rooted not in ideology, but in the Gospel's preferential option for the poor⁶⁰ and the Augustinian call for rightly ordered communities.

By and large, Pope Leo XIV's Augustinian vision of peace offers a profound counter-narrative to the prevailing currents of cultural nihilism, relativism, and religious nationalism. In a world where peace is often equated with security or social quietude, Leo redefines it as the fruit of divine order – a peace that flows from Christ, reconciles enemies, protects creation, and lifts the poor. His theology of peace is not abstract, nor is it utopian. Rather, it is deeply incarnational, rooted in the mystery of the Risen Christ who enters locked rooms and says, "Peace be with you." It is a peace that costs, that confronts, and that sends. Through this prism, the Pope calls the Church and world alike to rediscover peace not as comfort, but as mission – an active work of love, justice, and restoration that must begin anew in every generation.

Challenges in the Contemporary Context

The peace paradigm, though noble in its aspirations and deeply rooted in both philosophical and theological traditions, faces notable challenges in contemporary contexts. One of the most prominent is political co-optation, whereby the language

⁵⁸ National Bureau of Statistics (Nigeria), *Multidimensional Poverty Index Report 2022*, <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>.

⁵⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.21.

⁶⁰ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), §182–184.

of peace is appropriated by political regimes to suppress dissent or maintain unjust systems under the guise of stability.⁶¹ In many historical and modern contexts, the term “peace” has been used not to denote the absence of violence or the presence of justice, but rather to preserve the status quo and delegitimize voices of protest. Such manipulation undermines the transformative potential of authentic peace, reducing it to a rhetorical tool that serves power rather than the common good. The peace paradigm must, therefore, distinguish between imposed tranquility and genuine peace rooted in justice, dignity, and freedom.⁶²

Equally challenging is the issue of cultural fragmentation in the postmodern era. Contemporary societies, shaped by pluralism and a deep skepticism of grand narratives, often resist universal conceptions of peace that appear authoritarian or top-down.⁶³ This fragmentation fosters a heightened sensitivity to relational dynamics, prioritizing local identities, dialogue, and mutual recognition over hierarchical imposition. Postmodern thought challenges the traditional peace paradigms that might assume a single, authoritative source of truth or order. In this context, peace must be reimagined as a dialogical process – something negotiated in the interplay of diverse worldviews rather than imposed from a centralized authority. It must accommodate multiplicity and dissent as integral aspects of a peaceful society.

In response to these dual challenges, the vision of peace as articulated in the thought of figures like Leo XIV would prioritize moral and spiritual authenticity over mere political utility. Such a vision emphasizes dialogue as a means of encountering the other, transparency in governance and intention, and conversion, not as coercion, but as an inner transformation that comes from freely embracing truth and justice. Peace, in this light, is not a product but a process – something that must be earned through mutual respect, patient engagement, and the continual pursuit of the common good. It resists both the manipulation of peace for power and the fragmentation that rejects all unity, offering instead a relational and participatory model grounded in human dignity.

⁶¹ Oliver P. Richmond, “Critical Edge and Legitimation in Peace Studies,” *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* (2010), accessed May 29, 2025, <https://journals.openedition.org/rccsar/77>.

⁶² C. Lebechi. “Athanasius’ Use of the Gospel of John: A Rhetorical Analysis of Athanasius’ by Wijnand Adrianus Boezelman.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, (2023), Vol. 31, No. 4, 581-582.

⁶³ Postmodern theorists concentrate heavily on contemporary social and cultural fragmentation, as discussed in academic literature on postmodern social theory. See various discussions on postmodern fragmentation in sociological contexts.

Conclusion

This study has argued that the convergence of Johannine Christology, Augustinian theology, and Pope Leo XIV's inaugural vision offers a compelling and timely paradigm of peace for the contemporary world. Rooted in the performative power of Christ's greeting in John 20:19, "Peace be with you," the Church is summoned to receive and embody peace not as sentimental consolation, but as transformative commission. Augustine's *tranquillitas ordinis* reframes peace as the right ordering of love and justice, providing a moral and theological anchor in an age adrift in relativism, coercion, and disorder. Pope Leo XIV's Augustinian formation and pastoral emphasis on synodality, ecological stewardship, and social reconciliation rearticulate this vision for a world fractured by violence, inequality, and moral fatigue. His pontificate models an ecclesial identity deeply attuned to the wounds of humanity, yet rooted in the eschatological promise of divine peace. In retrieving and recontextualizing these ancient theological insights, the Church is invited to rediscover its mission as *sacramentum pacis*—a visible sign and active agent of Christ's reconciling love. Peace, as this paper has shown, is neither the avoidance of tension nor the quietism of inaction, but a redemptive process of reordering human and cosmic relationships according to God's justice and mercy. From locked rooms of fear to corridors of global diplomacy, the Church must now carry forward the risen Lord's commission: to speak peace, to live peace, and to risk peace in a world longing for restoration. Pope Leo XIV's vision is thus not simply a papal message; it is a prophetic summons to conversion, communion, and courageous witness in the name of Christ, whose wounds still speak peace to a wounded world.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

"Pope Leo XIV: Son of Saint Augustine" stands as an eloquent testament to the enduring legacy and relevance of Saint Augustine and the ongoing quest for meaning and purpose in an ever-changing world. This is one of such works to be published in these early days of this papacy, witnessing to the audacity of the authors' expertise and privileged fraternal experience of Leo XIV. The authors of this work, from a variety of academic and apostolate backgrounds but with one common Augustinian patrimony, share points of view and challenge us to think critically about the past, present, and future in a unique manner. They have made a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation on the papacy of Pope Leo XIV, his connection with Saint Augustine of Hippo and Pope Leo XIII, and how the teachings of Saint Augustine and Leo XIII continue to resonate with contemporary debates on social justice, the role of the Church in the world, and the pursuit of peace and reconciliation.

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