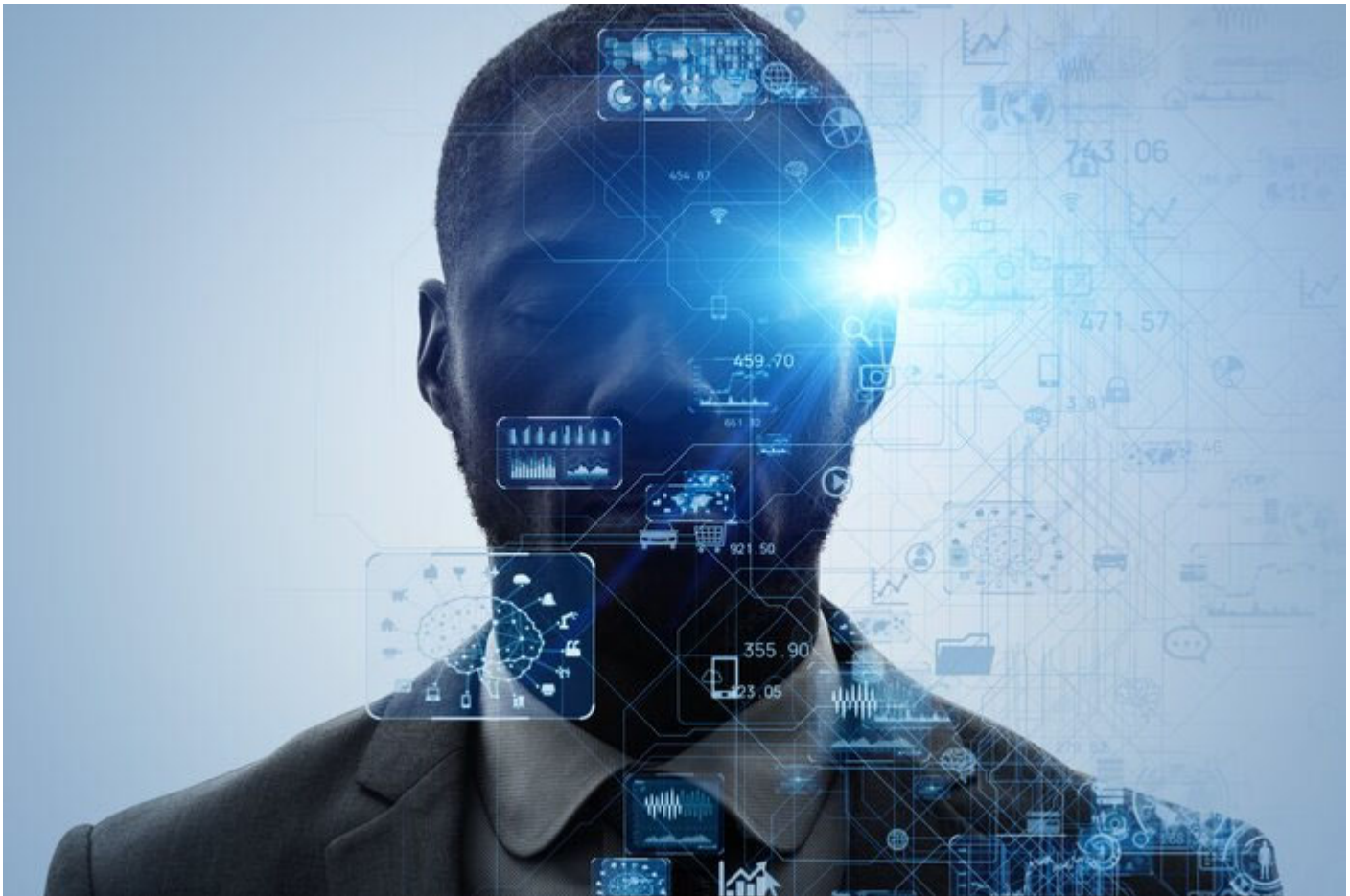


Analysis

Pope's Warning Raises Prospect Of AI, Faith Friction At Work

By [Anne Cullen](#) · May 27, 2026, 5:57 PM EDT · [Listen to article](#)

Pope Leo XIV's recent call for employers to deploy artificial intelligence humanely is the latest signal that companies should be ready for workers to seek faith-based exceptions to using the technology, experts said.



While many attorneys told Law360 that they don't interpret the pope's contribution to this conversation as basis for AI abstention, experts said workers may still use those remarks to support their arguments for a religious exemption to using this technology. (iStock.com/metamorworks)

In a significant papal teaching known as an encyclical that was introduced Monday, the pope addressed the dramatic impact of AI on workplaces, noting that AI is not "morally neutral" and urging employers to focus on the "protection of employment opportunities" and "the irreplaceable role of the individual" as they deploy high-tech tools.

Other faith leaders have shared similar pleas for conscientious AI use.

A coalition of Jewish and Christian religious leaders, scholars and advocates — including several rabbis, and representatives from the National Association of Evangelicals and The [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#) — issued a statement in 2025 declaring it is "incumbent" on companies to ensure AI remains "secure, safe, ethical, and under human control."

While many attorneys told Law360 that they don't interpret the pope's contribution to this conversation as basis for AI abstention, experts said workers may still use those remarks to support their arguments for a religious exemption to using this technology.

"There will be more requests after the pope's encyclical. How could there not be? One of the world's biggest religions took a stance on the topic," said Michal Shinnar, senior counsel at Joseph Greenwald & Laake PA and a veteran worker-side attorney.

Management-side lawyer Devjani H. Mishra, a shareholder at Littler Mendelson PC who is a member of its accommodations group, said her clients are already encountering AI pushback tethered to someone's faith.

"We are seeing requests from employees to somehow carve their work away from AI. This is not a theoretical thing," Mishra said. She later added that there are workers "who are definitely couching their requests in religious terms."

Other management and worker-side attorneys said it's still early days on the issue, and these types of disputes aren't yet crossing their desks. But they said companies should be gearing up to field them anyway.

"In my practice, I've not had a client call and say a person asked for a religious accommodation because of AI. However, when I am giving advice about implementing AI in a lawful manner, we always talk accommodations," said Adam S. Forman, an Epstein Becker Green employment partner and management-side attorney who co-leads

the firm's AI cross-practice working group.

Davida S. Perry, the co-founding and managing partner of employee-side firm [Schwartz Perry & Heller LLP](#), shared a similar perspective. "I haven't seen it yet, but I definitely think they might emerge," she said.

Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, employers are obligated to accommodate religious beliefs, practices and observances of their workers as long as the beliefs are "sincerely held," unless the specialized arrangement poses an "undue hardship" on the employer.

For decades, the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) had defined this burden as "more than a de minimis cost," but the justices [upped the bar](#) in [Groff v. DeJoy](#) in June 2023.

In that unanimous ruling, the nation's court said companies that reject faith-based accommodations now must show the change would impose "substantial increased costs in relation to the conduct of its particular business."

Groff made it harder for employers to turn down religious employees' accommodation requests, but attorneys told Law360 that workers will likely face an uphill battle when citing their faith as why they should be excused from using AI.

"I could definitely see some creative plaintiffs saying they have a religious objection to using AI, but I think those claims are going to fail miserably," said David J. Walton, a Fisher & Phillips LLP partner who chairs the firm's artificial intelligence team. "I see no legitimate connection between AI and religion."

The two hallmarks of a religious accommodation discussion are whether a worker's belief is "sincerely held," and whether the arrangement would impose enough of a burden on a company that they can lawfully turn it down.

The latter part of that discussion is going to be heavily influenced by the particular position in question and how much a role AI plays within it, said Joseph Greenwald and Laake's Shinnar.



"That's going to be very job-specific," she said.

The [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) has stated in its guidance on religious accommodations that an undue hardship could include reduced productivity. So if letting an employee sidestep AI significantly prolongs a routine task, Shinnar suggested that may contribute to a hardship showing.

She also noted that companies' increasing uptake of AI and the rapid development of the technology means that the accommodation discussions will also keep evolving, and will have to be closely tethered to the underlying facts.

Perry, of Schwartz Perry & Heller, said companies that use the technology only sparingly will likely have an easier time managing an employee's AI objection. It will be a far trickier issue for employers who have AI woven into many of their functions, she said.

"For some employers, it could be a big deal, and something they're going to have to thoughtfully consider," she said.

--Additional reporting by Vin Gurrieri. Editing by Amy Rowe and Nick Petruncio.