

Techno-Anxiety and Spiritual Anchorings: Psychological Perspectives on the 2026 Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence, digital platforms, robotics, and algorithmic systems has created new possibilities for human flourishing while also intensifying uncertainty, loss of control, psychological exhaustion, and concerns about human identity. These experiences may be understood through the concept of techno-anxiety, not simply as fear of technology but as a psychological response to technological acceleration, insecurity, information overload, and changing human relationships. Pope Leo XIV's 2026 encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, which addresses safeguarding the human person in the age of artificial intelligence, provides a significant theological framework for understanding these challenges. Although the encyclical is not a psychological treatise, its emphasis on human dignity, freedom, work, relationships, truth, prayer, and hope offers important resources for interdisciplinary reflection. This article argues that *Magnifica Humanitas* presents the possibility of "spiritual anchoring" amid technological transformation. Such anchoring involves recovering human dignity, interior freedom, meaningful relationships, moral agency, transcendence, prayer, and hope. Drawing upon psychological perspectives on stress, coping, technostress, and digital culture, the article explores how spiritual resources may contribute to psychological resilience without replacing necessary social and technological responses.

Keywords: techno-anxiety, artificial intelligence, spirituality, psychological resilience, *Magnifica Humanitas*

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented integration of technology into the ordinary conditions of human life. Artificial intelligence, algorithmic systems, social media, robotics, and digital communication increasingly shape how people work, learn, communicate, make decisions, and relate to one another (Hassani et al., 2021). While these developments offer significant opportunities for human progress, they also generate uncertainty concerning employment, privacy, autonomy, identity, and the future (OECD, Recommendation of the Council on Artificial Intelligence, OECD/LEGAL/0449). Technology, therefore, is no longer merely an external instrument; it has become an influential part of the psychological and social environment in which human beings form their identities and understand their lives (Bingley et al., 2026, pp. 354–355).

It is within this context that Pope Leo XIV's 2026 encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* offers a significant theological reflection on artificial intelligence and the human person. Rather than considering technological advancement solely in terms of efficiency and innovation, the encyclical places questions of human dignity, freedom, responsibility, relationships, work, and hope at the centre of technological discernment (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 3–10). Although *Magnifica Humanitas* is not a psychological study, its concerns correspond closely with contemporary discussions of technostress and techno-anxiety (Torales, 2026). Research indicates that technological overload, complexity, insecurity, invasion, and uncertainty can contribute to psychological distress and exhaustion (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008).

This article examines techno-anxiety through a psychological and theological reading of *Magnifica Humanitas*. It argues that anxiety arising from technological transformation is not merely a problem of adapting to new devices or systems but may also reflect a deeper uncertainty about human identity, purpose, and agency. In response, the article proposes the concept of spiritual anchoring, understood as the cultivation of human dignity, interior freedom, meaningful relationships, moral responsibility, transcendence, and hope. The central contention is that psychological resilience in an increasingly technological world requires not only technological competence but also a stable understanding of what it means to be human.

Understanding Techno-Anxiety: From Technostress to Existential Uncertainty

Techno-anxiety broadly refers to apprehension, uncertainty, or psychological discomfort that may arise from the increasing presence and demands of technology. It should not be equated with a clinical anxiety disorder or understood simply as a fear of machines. Rather, it represents one dimension of the broader phenomenon of *technostress*, which includes technological overload, complexity, insecurity, invasion, and uncertainty. Ragu-Nathan et al. demonstrate that such technological stressors can negatively influence job satisfaction and organisational commitment, suggesting that technology-related distress is shaped not only by individual limitations but also by the environments in which technologies are introduced and used (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). More recent research similarly identifies techno-anxiety as an emerging psychological concern, particularly in contexts where individuals must continually adapt to rapidly evolving digital and artificial intelligence systems (Alsudays, 2026).

The psychological experience of technological change can be further understood through Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress, which holds that stress arises from the interaction between environmental demands and an individual's appraisal of those demands and available coping resources (Zhao et al., 2020). Thus, the same technological development may be experienced as an opportunity by one person and as a threat by another, depending upon competence, perceived control, social support, previous experience, and expectations. Artificial intelligence intensifies this uncertainty by increasingly performing tasks associated with human intelligence, raising concerns about employment, professional competence, privacy, decision-making, and the future of human relationships (Boyd & Markowitz, 2026). These concerns are not necessarily irrational; they reflect genuine changes in social and economic structures. *Magnifica Humanitas* recognises this uncertainty and calls for the evaluation of technological development according to its consequences for human beings and the kind of future humanity seeks to create (Leo XIV, 2026).

Consequently, techno-anxiety cannot be adequately addressed through technological literacy alone (Liu & Li, 2026). A person may be technically competent and nevertheless experience anxiety concerning loss of autonomy, employment insecurity, surveillance, digital

dependency, or the changing meaning of human identity (Mirkhil, 2026). At its deepest level, techno-anxiety may therefore become existential, affecting a person's sense of purpose, belonging, worth, and future (Liu & Li, 2026). This perspective raises a fundamental question: how can individuals remain inwardly grounded when technological change outpaces their capacity to assimilate it? In this context, *Magnifica Humanitas* provides a basis for considering spiritual anchoring, the cultivation of dignity, meaning, relationship, moral agency, transcendence, and hope as a possible resource for maintaining human orientation amid technological uncertainty.

***Magnifica Humanitas* and the Recovery of the Human Person**

A central contribution of *Magnifica Humanitas* to the discussion of techno-anxiety is its recovery of the human person as the primary reference point for technological development (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 15–16). The encyclical's opening contrast between the Tower of Babel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem provides a theological framework for understanding technological power (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 1). Babel symbolises the pursuit of self-sufficiency and power. In contrast, Jerusalem points toward communion, shared responsibility, relationship, and hope (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 7 & 9). Technology, therefore, cannot be evaluated merely by its efficiency or capacity; it must be considered according to the kind of human life it promotes.

This anthropological emphasis is particularly significant in relation to artificial intelligence. *Magnifica Humanitas* recognises the benefits of technology while cautioning against allowing technological systems to determine the meaning and value of human existence. It emphasises that human conscience, freedom, compassion, responsibility, and hope cannot be reduced to computational processes or delegated entirely to automated systems (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 102–105). This concern resonates with Pope Francis's critique of the "technocratic paradigm" in *Laudato Si'*, where technological power is questioned when it becomes a dominant framework for interpreting reality (Pope Francis, 2015, paras. 101–102). Similarly, *Dignitas Infinita* affirms that human dignity is intrinsic and cannot be measured by usefulness, ability, productivity, or social status. (*Dignitas Infinita*, n.d., para. 1,6,22).

This distinction has an important psychological dimension. When personal worth is defined primarily by efficiency, competence, productivity, or technological adaptability, technological advancement can become a source of insecurity. Artificial intelligence may then be

experienced not merely as a tool but as a threat to identity and self-worth. Conversely, an understanding of dignity as intrinsic provides a more stable foundation for the self (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 50). *Magnifica Humanitas* thus offers an anthropology capable of challenging performance-based identity and encouraging a deeper understanding of human worth. Such a foundation can help address the existential dimension of techno-anxiety by affirming that technological progress may transform what human beings do without determining who they are (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 50–53).

Technology, Attention, and the Erosion of Interior Freedom

A significant psychological concern in contemporary digital culture is the increasing competition for human attention. Notifications, social media, personalised recommendations, and continuous digital stimulation can fragment concentration and challenge the capacity for intentional attention (Wilmer et al., 2017). Nicholas Carr’s *The Shallows* raises important questions about how sustained engagement with digital environments may influence patterns of reading and concentration. However, his broader claims should not be interpreted as evidence that technology uniformly damages cognition (Carr, 2020). Sherry Turkle similarly observes that technological connectivity does not necessarily produce genuine human communion; individuals may remain digitally connected while experiencing loneliness and diminished interpersonal presence (Ekbja, 2012).

Magnifica Humanitas develops this concern by discussing the “digital attention economy,” warning that technological systems can exploit human vulnerabilities and weaken interior freedom (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 170). From a psychological perspective, this highlights the importance of environments in shaping self-regulation. Spiritual practices such as prayer, silence, contemplation, and reflective reading can create spaces for deliberate attention amid continuous technological stimulation (Marcus & McCullough, 2021). Their significance, however, extends beyond productivity. Spiritual anchoring seeks to preserve an interior freedom in which individuals can reflect, discern, and encounter meaning without allowing technology to become the ultimate determinant of their attention, identity, or purpose (Kaewkitipong et al., 2023).

Work, Automation, and the Psychology of Human Worth

The growing use of artificial intelligence and automation has intensified anxiety concerning employment, professional competence,

surveillance, and the future of work. Because employment contributes not only to financial security but also to identity, social belonging, competence, and purpose, technological disruption can threaten a person's sense of worth and stability. *Magnifica Humanitas* therefore approaches work beyond the categories of efficiency and economic productivity, emphasising its relationship to human creativity, participation, cooperation, and dignity (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 148–152). Its concern is especially relevant when technological systems begin to measure workers primarily through performance and measurable output.

The psychological challenge of automation consequently extends beyond possible job displacement to what may be called anthropological displacement, the fear that human contribution itself is becoming less valuable (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 150–152). *Magnifica Humanitas* responds by insisting that technology should remain oriented toward the human person rather than making human beings subordinate to technological efficiency (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 9–10, 15–16). This perspective resonates with *Laborem Exercens*, which presents work as an important expression of human participation and dignity (John Paul II, 1981, paras. 6–9). From the perspective of techno-anxiety, technological progress should therefore enhance human agency rather than merely increase productivity (Lee et al., 2026). Spiritual anchoring can strengthen this perspective by affirming that human worth ultimately exceeds occupational performance, technological competence, and economic usefulness.

Digital Relationships and the Need for Communion

A significant paradox of contemporary digital culture is that increased technological connectivity can coexist with loneliness and weakened interpersonal presence. Digital platforms facilitate communication across geographical boundaries, yet they may also encourage comparison, self-presentation, and fragmented attention (Candiottio, 2022). Sherry Turkle observes that technology can reshape expectations of intimacy and availability, raising questions about whether constant connection necessarily produces meaningful relationships (Ekbja, 2012). The issue, therefore, is not whether digital communication is beneficial or harmful in itself, but what forms of human interaction it cultivates.

Magnifica Humanitas responds to this tension by emphasising communion, solidarity, fraternity, and the common good. From a

psychological perspective, such relational belonging is important because human well-being is shaped significantly by supportive relationships and a sense of community. Spiritual communities can provide shared practices, meaningful narratives, interpersonal support, and opportunities for belonging, thereby offering resources for resilience amid technological uncertainty. Spiritual anchoring, however, should not be equated automatically with religious participation. Its value lies in fostering relationships characterised by dignity, compassion, acceptance, and hope (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 59–62, 73–75). In this sense, the encyclical's emphasis on communion offers an important counterbalance to forms of digital individualism that can leave persons connected technologically yet emotionally isolated.

Spiritual Anchoring: Meaning, Hope, and Transcendence

The central thesis of this article is that *Magnifica Humanitas* can be interpreted as offering a form of spiritual anchoring, “a firm relationship with God” (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 11) for persons living amid technological uncertainty. The term “anchoring” is deliberately chosen because it suggests stability without implying immobility (Sumaiya et al., 2025).

Similarly, spiritual anchoring does not prevent technological change. It enables individuals and communities to engage with technological change without allowing technology to become the ultimate source of identity and meaning.

Five dimensions of spiritual anchoring can be identified in the encyclical.

Human dignity. The first anchor is the conviction that human dignity precedes technological usefulness. A person does not become more valuable just because artificial intelligence cannot replace them. Nor does the person become less valuable when a machine performs a task more efficiently (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 50–53). This principle is psychologically significant because it separates identity from performance. It creates a stable foundation upon which achievement can be appreciated without becoming the basis of self-worth.

Relational belonging and communion. The second anchor is relational. Human beings are not autonomous units but persons whose identity is formed through relationships. *Magnifica Humanitas* repeatedly emphasises communion, solidarity, fraternity, and shared

responsibility (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 11–13, 73–75). This is particularly important in a digital culture that can produce both hyperconnection and loneliness. Spiritual communities can provide embodied relationships that are not governed entirely by algorithms or commercial incentives.

Conscience and Interior Freedom. The third anchor is conscience. The encyclical insists that human intelligence must retain responsibility for technological development and that automated systems cannot replace human moral judgment (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 146). Psychologically, this corresponds to a sense of agency. The person must not experience the future as something that happens to them. Even within technological constraints, the possibility of moral choice remains.

Meaning and moral agency. The fourth is meaning and moral agency. *Magnifica Humanitas* emphasises that technological progress must remain subordinate to the human person's capacity for freedom, conscience, responsibility, and meaningful choice. It warns against reducing human beings to data, performance, or outcomes that can be measured and optimised. AI may assist human decision-making, but it cannot replace human conscience or assume moral responsibility. Human beings must therefore retain the ability to reflect, discern what is good, and make responsible choices. The encyclical also connects human purpose with relationships, freedom, and openness to transcendence (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 97, 102–105, 128). Thus, technological advancement should serve human flourishing rather than determine the meaning or direction of human life.

Transcendence and Hope. The fifth is transcendence and hope. The Christian understanding of the person extends beyond immediate technological, economic, and social circumstances. Human beings are not exhausted by what can be measured, predicted, or optimised (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 128). The conclusion of *Magnifica Humanitas* explicitly connects prayer with hope and presents the Christian response to technological transformation not as despair but as participation in a future oriented toward communion and the good (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 243–245). The encyclical identifies prayer as a pillar of Christian life alongside faith, love, and hope. Psychologically, hope is not identical with optimism. Optimism may involve the expectation that circumstances will improve. Hope can remain meaningful even

when outcomes are uncertain because it provides a reason to continue acting toward a valued future.

Prayer as Psychological and Spiritual Practice

The relationship between prayer and psychological well-being requires careful treatment. Prayer cannot be reduced to a psychological technique, because Christian prayer is fundamentally a relationship with God rather than merely a method for emotional regulation. Nevertheless, prayer can have psychological dimensions that deserve attention (Francis & Evans, 1995). The practice of prayer can create regular intervals of silence, reflection, gratitude, confession, petition, and attention. Such practices may interrupt patterns of constant technological stimulation (Adams et al., 2017). Prayer can also provide a language through which fear and uncertainty can be expressed rather than suppressed.

Magnifica Humanitas places prayer near the culmination of its argument. After discussing technological power, truth, work, freedom, social control, war, peace, and the common good, it turns toward praying and hoping (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 241–245). This sequence is significant. Prayer appears not as an escape from social responsibility but as a practice that sustains responsibility.

The psychological value of such a practice may therefore be understood in terms of meaning-making. When individuals encounter situations they cannot control, they often attempt to interpret them within a broader narrative (Park, 2010). Spiritual traditions provide narratives through which suffering, uncertainty, limitation, responsibility, and hope can be interpreted. Nevertheless, psychological research should not be used to “prove” the truth of theological claims. That would constitute a category error. Psychology can investigate the effects and functions of prayer, spirituality, community, or meaning-making (Francis & Evans, 1995).

From Individual Coping to Social Transformation

One of the most important strengths of *Magnifica Humanitas* is its refusal to locate the technological problem solely within individual psychology. The encyclical repeatedly emphasises governance, responsibility, economic structures, education, work, privacy, social justice, and the common good (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 58–62, 73–75, 97–105, 130–152, 163–175).

A psychologically and socially responsible response must therefore operate on multiple levels. At the individual level, people need skills for emotional regulation, technological competence, healthy boundaries, and reflective decision-making (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 50–53, 97, 102–105, 127–129). At the relational level, people need supportive families, friendships, communities, and professional networks (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 59–75). At the organisational level, institutions need ethical technology policies, realistic workloads, participatory decision-making, privacy protections, and mechanisms to address technology-related stress (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 148–169). At the social level, governments and technology companies have responsibilities concerning transparency, algorithmic accountability, data protection, access, discrimination, and human oversight (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 71–72, 102–108). At the spiritual level, communities can provide meaning, ritual, belonging, moral discernment, compassion, prayer, and hope (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 11–16, 241–245).

This multilevel model is compatible with *Magnifica Humanitas* because the encyclical does not advocate a private solution to a public problem. Its repeated emphasis on the common good indicates that technological transformation must be evaluated by its effects on the whole human community (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 59–62).

Toward an Integrative Model of Spiritual Anchoring

The preceding discussion suggests that spiritual anchoring can be understood as a multidimensional framework for maintaining human orientation amid rapid technological change. Its first foundation is human dignity, which affirms that personal worth cannot be reduced to productivity, efficiency, intelligence, or technological competence (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 50–53). Second, interior freedom involves the capacity to pause, reflect, make deliberate choices, and resist excessive technological influence (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 170). Practices such as silence, contemplation, and intentional limits on digital engagement may strengthen this capacity (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 146).

Third, relational belonging emphasises the importance of meaningful human relationships and communities in an increasingly mediated world (Leo XIV, 2026, para. 73). Fourth, meaning and purpose enable individuals to understand technological change within a broader vision of life rather than measuring themselves solely through professional achievement or digital recognition (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 11, 51). Fifth, moral agency requires that human beings retain responsibility for

decisions assisted by automated systems (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 102–105). Finally, hope enables individuals to face an uncertain technological future without surrendering purpose or meaning (Leo XIV, 2026, paras. 243, 245). These dimensions should not be regarded as a psychological treatment programme but as a conceptual framework linking psychology and spirituality.

Conclusion

The emergence of artificial intelligence represents not merely a technological development but a broader psychological, cultural, ethical, and spiritual transformation. Techno-anxiety arises not only from difficulties in using technology but also from deeper concerns about work, identity, freedom, relationships, purpose, and the future. *Magnifica Humanitas* offers a significant response by directing technological development toward the dignity of the human person and the common good. The contrast between Babel and Jerusalem provides a meaningful framework for discerning whether technological power will contribute to domination and fragmentation or to communion, solidarity, and shared human flourishing.

Psychological perspectives further demonstrate that technological demands, personal appraisal, perceived control, uncertainty, social support, and wider organisational conditions shape techno-anxiety. Within this context, spiritual anchoring can provide an orientation through human dignity, interior freedom, relational belonging, moral agency, transcendence, prayer, and hope. These resources should not be understood as a substitute for psychological care or structural reform, nor should spirituality be reduced to a technique for managing anxiety. Rather, spirituality offers a broader understanding of human identity that is not dependent upon productivity, technological competence, data, or performance.

Ultimately, *Magnifica Humanitas* invites neither unconditional technological optimism nor technological pessimism, but a more genuinely human approach to technological progress. Technology should serve human flourishing, strengthen rather than diminish human agency, and remain accountable to ethical and social responsibility. Spiritual anchoring, therefore, does not mean withdrawing from the technological world; it means ‘remaining human within it’. The decisive question is not whether humanity will become increasingly technological, but whether technological civilisation will become more

deeply human, grounded in dignity, relationship, freedom, responsibility, prayer, and hope.

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