TALK: Chapter III Laudato Si' The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis.

Pope Francis reflects further, in this Chapter on the reasons he believes we are experiencing this ecological crisis. He believes strongly in an holistic, integrated vision of God, human beings and Creation and hence an interpretation of Scripture, a theology of creation and a theological anthropology. This is the 'lens' through which he sees the problems we are facing and interprets the "human roots of the ecological crisis."

Pope Francis points most directly to the "dominant technocratic paradigm" as the root of our crisis and the breakdown of this holistic vision of humanity and Creation. *Humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads. We are the beneficiaries of two centuries of enormous waves of change:* he says, and while rejoicing in this 'progress', e we know that *Technoscience, when well directed, can produce important means of improving the quality of human life. It can also produce art and enable men and women immersed in the material world to "leap" into the world of beauty, in the contemplation of such beauty, a quantum leap occurs, resulting in a fulfilment which is uniquely human.* Yet *it has given those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world. Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used.* The Pope goes on to say that it is extremely risky for a small part of humanity to hold such power. It is risky precisely because of the Pope's basic anthropological vision: we are sinful people and have not proven to use power well. But it is also risky because this technological growth has not been "accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience" (105). In other words, using technology for noble ends requires an ethical framework, a spiritual culture, and

a vision of the purpose of life, none of which our world seems to exude. We are left, in this technocratic paradigm, with this rather dark, ambiguous world where: *This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject (ourselves) who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object (nature, the world, even the Universe). It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation,* in order to serve our own needs.

We seek to exploit resources as if they are unlimited in order to gain more advantage and power. (106, 109, 116); Francis says '*This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the LIE that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.* In section 109 he continues; *'The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings. Finance overwhelms the real economy. We fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth.* Francis continues in section 116; *what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world, which gave the impression that the protection of nature was something that only the faint-hearted cared about.*

The Pope goes on to suggest that we tend to believe that science and technology and market forces will solve all problems, that they provide the very meaning of existence. He says; *Some circles maintain that current economics and technology will solve all environmental problems, and argue, in popular and non-technical terms, that the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough. Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion. A science which would offer solutions to the great issues would necessarily*

have to take into account the data generated by other fields of knowledge, including philosophy and social ethics; but this is a difficult habit to acquire today. Nor are there genuine ethical horizons to which one can appeal. Life gradually becomes a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence.

We operate within a highly specialized, fragmented, superficial, and rationalistic framework of knowledge (110, 117, 120); *The specialization which belongs to technology makes it difficult to see the larger picture. The fragmentation of knowledge proves helpful for concrete applications, and yet it often leads to a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationships between things, and for the broader horizon, which then becomes irrelevant. And, Life gradually becomes a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence. In Section 117 he says, Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble, for "instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature".* More specifically the Pope speaks in Section 120, *Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion. How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties? "If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of the new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away".*

We ignore any objective, natural order and begin to push boundaries of research and creativity (123, 131-134); *In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs, what limits can be placed on human trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds and the fur of endangered species?*

We focus exclusively on economic profit for a few and ignore humanity's search for meaning through work, the complexity of ecosystems and regional economies, and the plight of poor and future generations (134-135).

While the stark picture of the world might leave one feeling

pessimistic about our common home, the Pope also fills the chapter with repetitious challenges to humanity *"to develop a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments of recent centuries"* (121). He is not asking us to return to the Stone Age, but he is asking us to look at reality from our spiritual vision, recover the values and goals of our tradition, and with freedom and beauty, "*to generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm"* (111, 114). He even points to a couple of creative examples of this new synthesis: *Yet we can once more broaden our vision. We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral. Liberation from the dominant technocratic paradigm does in fact happen sometimes, for example, when cooperatives of small producers adopt less polluting means of production, and opt for a non-consumerist model of life, recreation and community.* These efforts and others will no doubt feel countercultural in today's world, but Pope Francis has helped us see that perhaps there's no greater call to Christians today than to discern what is ours to do.