



SESSION THREE

The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis

101 We have looked at symptoms of the ecological crisis, but we must now study the human origins of this crisis as well.

I. TECHNOLOGY: CREATIVITY AND POWER

102 We humans have seen enormous change over the past two hundred years in transportation, communication, energy, medicine, and information. Technology has boomed and expanded, and we rejoice in this. Through these advances, life has been made easier for people, countless ills have been remedied, and we are grateful for the people working in these fields. **103** Well-directed technology serves the human family incredibly well! **104** But these same technologies can also be used to destroy human life. Humanity has tremendous power over itself, and we have not always used it for good.

105 There is a tendency to believe that every advance in technology and power is good for society. But this is true only if there is also an advance in human responsibility values, and conscience. The risk is that we may use this power against each other or even ourselves. Freedom isn't real if it is blinded by self-interest, greed, or violence.

II. THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE TECHNOCRATIC PARADIGM

106 Our current way of thinking about how we extract resources from the earth is based on a fundamental lie. The lie is that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods. The lie leads us to believe that we can squeeze the earth dry and somehow—magically—it will renew itself. This basic assumption (or technocratic paradigm) is just false. **107** If we allow technology to drive the values of our human community, then human values will be lost. **108** We have reached a point where technology has become dominant and it would be difficult to live “outside the grid” of technology. The goal of this technology is power, of course. Its purpose is to give us humans power over nature.

109 These same basic assumptions (or technocratic paradigm)—that technology is always good, that the cost of progress is that we must lose our natural environment, and that giving up our personal power is acceptable—also carry over to economics and politics. In economics we see only the possibility of profit from technology. The world's financial systems are collapsing, just as our natural environment is, but leaders in technology continue seeking profit even as global hunger and poverty continue.

110 It's very difficult for the average person to see the larger picture because technology occurs in very specialized areas. It's difficult to see how

the environment and the poor fit into our techno-centered world; they're on the margins. People feel on edge about this; they see the environment being exploited; and they sense a loss of meaning and community in their daily lives.

111 We need to develop a distinctive way of seeing all this in order to counter the power of the technocratic paradigm. 112] We can work together to direct and limit technology. We see examples of this working when cooperatives are formed—polluting less and caring more for the people involved. Deep within us is a desire for a more authentic life, not one driven by profit and selfishness. 113] People are beginning to see that having blind trust in a “better tomorrow” is unfounded unless technology is used at the service of humanity. Technology continues to offer us great and wonderful possibilities, but we must direct it at the same time to a deeper, more beautiful contribution. 114] We need a bold cultural revolution; we do not suggest returning to the Stone Age but we do need to steer technology toward human good in this age.

Group or Personal Process

Reflect: What is your response to articles 106–108? Are we being enslaved by technology? In your own words, what is the “technocratic paradigm”? (Use the glossary if needed.)

III. THE CRISIS AND EFFECTS OF MODERN ANTHROPOCENTRISM

115 The view that humans have a higher value and are more central to creation than plants, animals, and the rest of the created order is known as “anthropocentrism.” Under this thinking, we tend to see nature as a mere tool or object that we manipulate in order to make a profit. 116] Another way our overly human-centered view affects us is that we

come to believe that everything can be used and exhausted for us, regardless of the worth of the plant, animal, ocean, air, earth, or other resource. 117] Everything is connected, as I have said repeatedly; yet we fail to hear the cry of nature, just as we fail to hear the cry of the poor, of the human embryo, or of a person with disabilities. Instead of “tending and keeping” creation, we set ourselves up in place of God; nature rebels against this!

118 If we follow this way of thinking, pretty soon human beings will also be considered as less than technology. 119] The ecological crisis we face is but one small sign of the larger spiritual crisis today. We can only heal the wounds in nature if we also at the same time heal all human relationships. 120] We cannot offer protection for all creatures in our environment, however small and unseen, unless we also protect the human embryo as it moves toward birth. 121] We now reflect on all these matters for the modern times and are seeking a new way of bringing all these ideas together.

Group or Personal Process

Reflect: What do you think: are humans in command of the earth or not? Are we the center of the universe?

Reflect: What is your response to article 117? How do you see this playing out in your nation or community?

Practical relativism

122 Our overly human-centered view also results in people thinking that *everything* around them—every plant and animal, every product no matter how much waste was involved with its manufacture—is valuable only relative to their needs. 123] This also allows people to take unfair advantage of each other, because other people are also relative and dis-

possible. But if all we seek is to satisfy our own individual needs, ignoring everyone else around us, then there are no ethics or values to govern us, and chaos results. We live in a “use and throw away” culture and humans are thrown away as easily as garbage.

The need to protect employment

124 Human labor is valuable to the prudent care of the world. **125** Work is a sacred activity that connects us with God. **126** St. Benedict helped us see human labor as spiritually meaningful. **127** We must protect the ability of men and women to work as a means of finding their livelihood, their value, and their contribution to the human family. **128** Our objective is to help everyone, including the poor, find work that results in earning their own way. We should not sacrifice workers for mere economic gain. Business will succeed when it brings these values into the mix. **129** Business is a noble calling and should be directed to supporting producers of food and goods, even small, local ones. Many times, small producers are edged out by larger ones, but they should be protected by local governments.

New biological technologies

130 When developing biological solutions and medicines, experimentation with animals should always be within reasonable limits. **131** We support advances in molecular biology and genetics, provided the ethical limits of such work are followed. **132** All genetic modification should be aimed at enhancing creation as God intended. **133** Genetic modification has been with us for many ages, as when selective breeding of plants and animals is done. It’s natural; nature itself selects certain species over others. Such modification done in a lab, however, speeds up this process significantly. **134** Genetic modification is advancing, but the result is that farming is concentrated in the hands of a few at the cost of jobs and lands among the poor. **135** We need a broad debate on this complex issue, including both the scientific and social dimensions of it. **136** And

even more so, we must limit and guard experimentation on human embryos. The worth of a person transcends his or her development as an embryo. We cannot sever ethics from technology and science.

Group or Personal Process

Reflect: The pope is saying that business is a noble profession and that keeping jobs is essential. How can we take steps to preserve the environment while also having a robust economy?

Reflect: What is your response to articles 122–123? How much stuff do you “use and throw away” each week? Look back over the past week and share about it.