



## CHAPTER TWO

...

## A GROWING

## TECHNOCRATIC PARADIGM

20. In *Laudato Si'*, I offered a brief résumé of the technocratic paradigm underlying the current process of environmental decay. It is “a certain way of understanding human life and activity [that] has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us.”<sup>13</sup> Deep down, it consists in thinking “as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such.”<sup>14</sup> As a logical consequence, it then becomes easy “to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology.”<sup>15</sup>

21. In recent years, we have been able to confirm this diagnosis, even as we have witnessed a new advance of the above paradigm. Artificial intelligence and the latest technological innovations start with the notion of a human being with no limits, whose abilities and possibilities can be infinitely expanded thanks to technology. In this way, the technocratic paradigm monstrously feeds upon itself.

22. Without a doubt, the natural resources required by technology, such as lithium, silicon and so many others, are not unlimited, yet the greater problem is the ideology

underlying an obsession: to increase human power beyond anything imaginable, before which nonhuman reality is a mere resource at its disposal. Everything that exists ceases to be a gift for which we should be thankful, esteem and cherish, and instead becomes a slave, prey to any whim of the human mind and its capacities.

23. It is chilling to realize that the capacities expanded by technology “have 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 ... In whose hands does all this power lie, or will it eventually end up? It is extremely risky for a small part of humanity to have it.”<sup>16</sup>

### I. RETHINKING OUR USE OF POWER

24. Not every increase in power represents progress for humanity. We need only think of the “admirable” technologies that were employed to decimate populations, drop atomic bombs and annihilate ethnic groups. There were historical moments where our admiration at progress blinded us to the horror of its consequences. But that risk is always present, because “our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience ... We stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. We have certain superficial mechanisms, but we cannot claim to have a

sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint.”<sup>17</sup> It is not strange that so great a power in such hands is capable of destroying life, while the mentality proper to the technocratic paradigm blinds us and does not permit us to see this extremely grave problem of present-day humanity.

25. Contrary to this technocratic paradigm, we say that the world that surrounds us is not an object of exploitation, unbridled use and unlimited ambition. Nor can we claim that nature is a mere “setting” in which we develop our lives and our projects. For “we are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it;”<sup>18</sup> and thus “we [do] not look at the world from without but from within.”<sup>19</sup>

26. This itself excludes the idea that the human being is extraneous, a foreign element capable only of harming the environment. Human beings must be recognized as a part of nature. Human life, intelligence and freedom are elements of the nature that enriches our planet, part of its internal workings and its equilibrium.

27. For this reason, a healthy ecology is also the result of interaction between human beings and the environment, as occurs in the indigenous cultures and has occurred for centuries in different regions of the earth. Human groupings have often “created” an environment,<sup>20</sup> reshaping it in some way without destroying it or endangering it. The great present-day problem is that the technocratic paradigm has destroyed that healthy and harmonious relationship. In any event, the indispensable need to move beyond that paradigm, so damaging and destructive, will not be found

in a denial of the human being, but include the interaction of natural systems "with social systems."<sup>21</sup>

28. We need to rethink among other things the question of human power, its meaning and its limits. For our power has frenetically increased in a few decades. We have made impressive and awesome technological advances, and we have not realized that at the same time we have turned into highly dangerous beings, capable of threatening the lives of many beings and our own survival. Today it is worth repeating the ironic comment of Solovyov about an "age which was so advanced as to be actually the last one."<sup>22</sup> We need lucidity and honesty in order to recognize in time that our power and the progress we are producing are turning against us.<sup>23</sup>

## II. THE ETHICAL GOAD

29. The ethical decadence of real power is disguised thanks to marketing and false information, useful tools in the hands of those with greater resources to employ them to shape public opinion. With the help of these means, whenever plans are made to undertake a project involving significant changes in the environment or high levels of contamination, one raises the hopes of the people of that area by speaking of the local progress that it will be able to generate or of the potential for economic growth, employment and human promotion that it would mean for their children. Yet in reality there does not seem to be any true interest in the future of these people, since they are not clearly told that the project will result in the clearing of their lands, a decline in the quality of their

lives, a desolate and less habitable landscape lacking in life, the joy of community and hope for the future; in addition to the global damage that eventually compromises many other people as well.

30. One need but think of the momentary excitement raised by the money received in exchange for the deposit of nuclear waste in a certain place. The house that one could have bought with that money has turned into a grave due to the diseases that were then unleashed. And I am not saying this, moved by a overflowing imagination, but on the basis of something we have seen. It could be said that this is an extreme example, but in these cases there is no room for speaking of "lesser" damages, for it is precisely the amassing of damages considered tolerable that has brought us to the situation in which we now find ourselves.

31. This situation has to do not only with physics or biology, but also with the economy and the way we conceive it. The mentality of maximum gain at minimal cost, disguised in terms of reasonableness, progress and illusory promises, makes impossible any sincere concern for our common home and any real preoccupation about assisting the poor and the needy discarded by our society. In recent years, we can note that, astounded and excited by the promises of any number of false prophets, the poor themselves at times fall prey to the illusion of a world that is not being built for them.

32. Mistaken notions also develop about the concept of "meritocracy," which becomes seen as a "merited" human power to which everything must be submitted, under the rule of those born with greater possibilities and

## Chapter Two

advantages. A healthy approach to the value of hard work, the development of one's native abilities and a praiseworthy spirit of initiative is one thing, but if one does not seek a genuine equality of opportunity, "meritocracy" can easily become a screen that further consolidates the privileges of a few with great power. In this perverse logic, why should they care about the damage done to our common home, if they feel securely shielded by the financial resources that they have earned by their abilities and effort?

33. In conscience, and with an eye to the children who will pay for the harm done by their actions, the question of meaning inevitably arises: "What is the meaning of my life? What is the meaning of my time on this earth? And what is the ultimate meaning of all my work and effort?"