

VIOLENCE AND THE RISING TIDE OF GLOBALISATION - A TEILHARDIAN PERSPECTIVE -

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Violence lies heavy on the conscience and consciousness of man today.¹ Not that violence had been absent from any epoch in the history of man. It seems that even more than physical nature, human nature is "red in tooth and claw". But undeniably violence seems to have struck a new pitch in both extent and intensity in our times. This is no doubt partly due to the sheer fact of great population increase within the last few decades, partly due again, as a consequence, to the opportunities and occasions of violence, and partly also due to the more powerful and deadly means of violence and destruction that Science and Technology have put into man's hands.

My own country Sri Lanka has been in the grip of violence for the past three or four decades, earlier sporadic, but severe and ongoing during the past ten years. Neighboring India is wracked by racial/ethnic and religious conflicts; so are a number of countries in Asia - Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Campuchea and the Phillipines - in varying degrees of scale and intensity. India has waged war with Pakistan three times and with China once during the past four decades. The Arab-Israeli conflict was a running sore till recently. Iraq and Kuwait were at war only two years ago with the involvement of the U.S., Europe, Russia and the Middle East. Iran and Iraq slogged each years in economic competition. The basic arguments are derived from the ecological theories of Frederick Barth and his associates....The economic model is, however, not without its weaknesses.²

All these explanations and models deal with the immediate and what I might term, "physical" causes of ethnic conflict. What is special and distinctive about Teilhard's thesis is that it takes a long distance, total and "metaphysical" or rather, "ultra-physical" view of the phenomenon of violence, in order to give it some constructive meaning. As Viktor Frankl has shown so poignantly, man cannot live without meaning: we are human because we ask questions about meaning. Does the widespread violence in the world today have any meaning? Is it just a meaningless episode in the total meaninglessness of human existence as some Existentialists believe. Or does it play some role in the progressive evolution of man into another stage of his future. These are not mere speculative questions; they touch our minds and hearts, our blood and bones. Our stand point and motivation for action will depend on our viewpoint. I can not think of a more dynamically challenging viewpoint on this question than that offered by Teilhard.

For Teilhard the whole of reality is evolutionary, in other words, the whole cosmos has always been, is, and will be in a process of ascent or progress from the simple to the complex, in increasing degree. In a gross way we can see that the living world of plants is more complex than the non-living world of minerals, and the world of animals is more complex than that of plants, and finally, the human world more complex than the animal world. Each of these represents a higher degree of complexity. This is certainly not an original, world-shattering observation. What is original in Teilhard is that he co-related complexity to consciousness; discovered the link between the two - one is a function of the other. We can understand this idea better if we start from the

wrong end, so to speak, from the end of the process rather than at the beginning. As stated earlier, man is at the end of the evolutionary line of complexity, the most complex being that arrived last on the scene. Here may I tarry a moment to let Teilhard explain what he means by complexity. It is, "the quality things possess of being composed, (a) of a large number of elements, (b) more tightly organized among themselves....it is not therefore a matter of simple multiplicity, not simple complication, but centrated complication."³

Now, going back to the main line of the argument, man is also at the same time the most conscious of all beings, at the end of the evolutionary line of consciousness. Man is the only being that is conscious that he is conscious; consciousness doubles back upon itself to become reflex consciousness. Going backwards we find a corresponding relationship at the animal level, a lesser degree of complexity (compared to man) coupled to a lesser degree of consciousness and so on. This is Teilhard's famous Law of Complexity/Consciousness. He says that in the whole evolutionary process there is a strict correspondence between complexity and consciousness. The measure of complexity is the measure of consciousness, or consciousness is a function of complexity. The consciousness aspect of a being is its "within" which is the result of its structural complexity, the "without". Going downwards from man we see decreasing degrees of consciousness with decreasing degrees of complexity, right down to the level of inert matter - molecules and atoms. At that low level the consciousness element is so weak that it is undetectable. Between simple inorganic matter at one end and man at the other we have a wide, continuous spectrum of complexity/consciousness.

Now the crucial question is: what of evolution and man? Does the evolutionary process stop with man or are there further stages ahead? This was indeed Teilhard's main pre-occupation, to peer into the future of humankind taking a cue from its origins. No wonder Teilhard appeals to modern man who is anxious about the future which seems both fascinating and frightening.

To understand Teilhard's thinking on the future of man we must first realize the full consequences of the difference between man and what went before him in the evolutionary process, the difference that reflex consciousness made. A reflexively conscious being becomes by that very fact a free center of action and reception, with the ability to discern, to analyze and control those activities. As Teilhard says, "The being who is the object of his own reflection, in consequence of that very doubling back upon itself becomes in a flash able to raise itself into a new sphere. In reality another world is born. Abstraction, logic, reasoned choice and inventions, mathematics, art, calculations of space and time, anxieties and dreams of love - all these activities of inner life are nothing else than the effervescence of the newly-formed center as it explodes on to itself....because we are reflective we are not only different (from animals) but quite another. It is not merely a change of degree, but a change of nature, resulting from a change of state⁴ ."

Because of this crucial difference the evolution of consciousness in man, in the Noosphere (sphere of the mind) cannot occur in the same way as it did in the biosphere. There is a radically new element which has entered the scene to play a decisive role in further development. Teilhard points out that during the million or so

years of man's existence on earth, the human species has not spread out into widely divergent groups, as happened in the stage below, among animal species. The human species has preserved somehow a certain biological homogeneity. In Teilhard's own words, "Under conditions of distribution which in any other initial phylum would have led long ago to break up into different species, the human verticil as it spreads out remains entire, like a gigantic leaf whose veins however distinct remain always joined to a common tissue." ⁵ So, the species Man, while admitting diversity of races, cultures etc., has covered the earth with an unbroken membrane of human stuff. Zoologically speaking, mankind is the only species that has proved itself capable of achieving this unity.

Contact and interaction between individual units of consciousness (i.e. individual persons) and between collectivities and socio-cultural groups is bringing about that psychic infiltration and interpenetration which expand and deepen the psycho-social aspect. Increasing external arrangements among persons and peoples are creating richer concentrations of inner energy. And curiously the roundness of the earth plays a vital role in this process. This geometrical fact forces proximity and convergence on the human mass upon the planet making closer and more frequent interaction among persons and groups inevitable with an expanding population. "Originally and for centuries there was no serious obstacle to the human waves expanding over the surface of the globe; probably this is one of the reasons explaining the slowness of their social evolution. Then, from the Neolithic onwards, these waves began (as we have seen) to recoil upon themselves. All available space being occupied the occupiers had to pack in tighter. That is how, step by step, through the simple multiplying effect of generations we have come to constitute as we do at present an almost solid mass of hominised substance." ⁶

Here we come to the crux of our question. If the evolutionary process has taken a psycho-social turn, the law of complexity/consciousness must also operate on that plane. What is increasing in complexity now is not the somatic structure of the individual, but the 'soma' of humankind. We see this happening before our very eyes through the rapid links and bonds that keep forming every moment between person and person, family and family, group and group, culture and culture, nation and nation across the face of the globe over enormous distances, through the vast network of criss-crossing communications at work in the modern world -- from the simple postal system to the sophisticated high-tech systems of satellite broadcasting, the mass media and the internet. This has been augmented by correspondingly rapid travel and transport. The fantastic development of travel and communication systems this century has literally shrunk the globe, jostling persons and peoples, compressing an ever-increasing population into "uncomfortable" closeness. The web or network of travel/transport and communication is to humankind what the nervous system is to the body of the individual.

According to Teilhard's principle this increase in complexification in the external social order must give rise to an increase of the "within", of consciousness. Is it possible to deny that the "compression", of the human mass mentioned above has thrown peoples and cultures, hitherto relatively isolated, into an inextricable mesh of interactions of all kinds - social, commercial, cultural, political - raising the psychic temperature or the intensity of corporate consciousness? There is a psycho-social in-folding of humankind

upon itself - the emergence of a kind of planetary collectivization, understood positively. In Teilhard's own words: "We are faced with a harmonized collectivity of consciousness, the equivalent of a sort of super-consciousness. The idea is that of the earth becoming enclosed in a single thinking envelope, so as to form, functionally, no more than a single vast grain of thought on the cosmic scale." ⁷

As I said earlier, the incredible developments in the technology of travel and communication are creating the external conditions and pressures for convergence and international, intercultural community. But, unlike in the pre-human phase of evolution, in the human phase or in the Noosphere, it will have to operate in a human mode, namely, in the mode of reflex consciousness, with the awareness and collaboration of man himself, now the subject of the evolutionary process. Man is, in a very striking expression which Teilhard borrowed from Julian Huxley, "evolution become conscious of itself". He therefore has to evolve himself, discerning the goal of his progressive journey. Though human consciousness was liberated from the constraints of matter at the first instance of its emergence into the state of homo sapiens, it has required the slow corporate reflection of the human species over millennia, first in isolated groups, then in larger aggregates, and now with greater intensity on a global scale, for man to recognize himself and his destiny. Greater psycho-social complexification is generating a correspondingly richer collective consciousness. Man is now being called upon to let himself go freely and consciously into his evolutionary "vocation", which is vocation of unity and convergence at every level from the personal to the global.

Given this situation Teilhard is not surprised that the initial outcome of, or the reaction to, convergence is one of suspicion, hesitation and even hostility. Behind this reaction lies the deep seated fear of loss of identity. Just as two strangers beginning to form a bond of friendship cannot escape the initial anxiety of opening out and trusting the other, so also nations and ethnic groups confronted with close relationships and interaction for the first time must necessarily experience the fear of losing their respective identities. These fears are either aggravated or attenuated by a number of other factors such as relative population strength, resource possessions, perceptions of economic and military power etc. Self-preservation is the primordial instinct of an ethnic group or nation as much as of an individual. The threat to self-preservation or survival brings out the strongest defensive mechanisms, one of which is attack or aggression.

Teilhard takes great pains to emphasize that in the Noosphere, in the sphere of mind and spirit, union does not obliterate but differentiates: "Man avoids communication with another because he is afraid that by sharing he will diminish his personality. He seeks to grow by isolating himself...but the very opposite is true. The gift we make of our being far from threatening our ego, must have the effect of completing it." ⁸

This principle is as valid of groups as of the individual. To quote Teilhard again: "The important thing to note is that if union truly super-personalizes, the collective entities whose birth and successive growths alarm us, are forming in the foreseen direction of evolution...one thing is certain: despite our fears it is in the direction of 'groupings' that we must advance." ⁹

One very remarkable fact that has been overlooked in the wars and conflicts of today is that they are almost without exception claimed to be defensive, namely, defensive of rights to human dignity, freedom, property and land, to justice, or conversely, liberation from oppression, exploitation etc. In the past, most wars were wars of aggression and declaredly so; for example, the waves of colonial expansion of western powers subjugating innumerable countries, cultures and tribes in Asia and Africa in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The stronger made no bones about subduing the weaker. But today peoples are fighting not so much to conquer and subdue others as to liberate themselves from servitude or defend themselves from aggression. This certainly does not mean that motives of greed, self-interest and expansionism are altogether absent in the wars and conflicts of today. The primordial sin of selfishness and egoism still bedevils the human condition resulting in unrestrained drives for power and wealth, at the expense of human rights, social justice and peace. Still I believe these are more readily recognized for what they are and resistance to them, in both violent and non-violent forms, are readily forthcoming. The rising cry for a collective affirmation of personalistic and communitarian values on a global scale is meeting with strong reactive resistance from the existing "non-liberated" power structures, be they political, social or economic.

Granted this premise, violence is the price that humankind has to pay to rise to a higher level of consciousness and convergence. The meeting of minds in a spiritual unity is a battle against the existing plurality. Ascending organization is a process which has to cope with lower levels of organization and their necessary disorganization. Growth of any entity comprises of periods of relative "sameness" and transitions to new higher states. At the point of transition a reconstitution of the elements takes place, usually with agitation and turmoil, like water boiling to become steam at 100 degrees Celcius.

A personalistic universe on the way to super-personalisation through aggregations of groupings cannot escape the turmoil of reconstructive transitions. As Teilhard says: "In order to unify in ourselves or unite with others, we must change, renounce, give up ourselves, and this violence to ourselves partakes of pain.....Every advance in personalisation must be paid for; so much union, so much suffering, This rule of equivalence governs all transformations of spirit-matter."¹⁰

From a psycho-moral point of view, violence is man's "refusal" to respond positively to his evolutionary destiny. As stated earlier, it is only at this point of historical time that the evolution of the human species is taking a turn from divergence to convergence, from isolation to communication. The change is naturally experienced as a threat, a threat to the accustomed security of the familiar. Hence reactions of distrust and suspicion are understandable. But man has to learn that what he is called upon to do, is not to give up security, which is psychologically impossible, but to trade in the old security of fences, boundaries, guns and bombs, for the new security of openness and trust in bonds of relationship, mutual support brotherhood and love. This kind of security is precisely the opposite of the other -- a security found in and with the other, and not in oneself, shutting out the other. This is the security which corresponds to convergence, unity and fellowship. But as Hourani says: "Teilhard recognized the present difficultiesAs the forces of convergence increase they are countered by strong tendencies which try to fortify the old sovereignties of a disjointed cosmos,

infused with the familiar worldviews based on competition....Such efforts are, for Teilhard, impossible to sustain much longer and will soon give way to new sensible arrangements of an eventual union which preserves the identity and authenticity of each".¹¹

We must therefore realize that if violence seems inevitable at this stage, it is so only as long as we fail to recognize the signs of the times. Teilhard opens his opus magnum "The Phenomenon of Man", by saying that it could be summed up "as an attempt to see and to make others see what is happening to man". The real tragedy is that we fail to see beyond our noses; our myopic sight blinds us to the larger vision. Unfortunately the penalty for this blindness is very heavy. We are all appalled by the enormity of human suffering caused by violence in our times.

And so Teilhard makes bold to declare: "The age of nations has passed; Now, unless we wish to perish, we must shake off our old prejudices and build the earth.....The more scientifically I regard the world, the less can I see any possible biological future for it except in the active consciousness of its unity. Life cannot henceforth advance on our planet (and nothing will prevent it advancing -- not even its inner servitudes) except by beaking down the partitions which still divide human activity, and entrusting itself unhesitatingly to faith in the future."¹²

I shall try to substantiate this crucial statement with reference to contemporary socio-political phenomena. Despite the evils of conflict and war in today's world, we cannot fail to notice the growing movements of convergence and unification. Major political disintegrations on a global scale have resulted in new integrations/associations of the same order in this century; for example, the League of Nations after World War I and the United Nations after World War II. The complex UN system, despite its shortcomings, is a vast network of subsystems bringing nations together in major areas of human concern--children food, health, labor, education, culture etc. Teilhard rejoiced wholeheartedly at the creation of the UN and its agencies which he saw as harbingers of noospheric structures. During the last few decades a number of regional associations have come into being to deal with issues of common interest such as the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the non-aligned Movement, ASEAN and our own SAARC. And there are innumerable world bodies, both governmental and non-governmental, which bring professionals and interest groups together across national boundaries, for dialogue and common action. A tissue of human interaction is growing and spreading in the Noosphere. Literacy and education coupled with the electronic media have made the transmission and exchange of ideas and information - the stuff of the Noosphere -- rapid and all pervasive. They have made it possible for thought to envelope the earth, and the tide is rising perceptibly.

A word of caution is in order regarding other apparently unifying forces operating at the global level, which in reality, are inimical to the kind of unity in diversity we are talking about. I refer to such phenomena as transnational organization/corporations and the neo-colonialism of western first world culture bearing down on the rest of the world, ably supported by the secularist ethos of Science and Technology. Though they incorporate elements of unification, they tend to generate strong pressure to conform to a single mind-set, to fit all peoples into a single socio-cultural straight-jacket. The

message seems to be: conform or perish. This is almost exactly the opposite of what the rising tide of a higher over-arching consciousness a la Teilhard points to; namely, a free coming together of diverse peoples in such wise that it not only preserves their particular and special identities but also enhances them in, paradoxically, a maximum unity in maximum diversity. We, therefore, have to be very discriminating about the phenomena we choose to support or oppose at the global level. Those of us in the East will have to be specially alert and vigilant in this regard.

Teilhard's thesis can also shed much light on the recent political disruptions, divisions and reconstructions in eastern and western Europe. The USSR as a State came into existence only around the beginning of this century. Previously independent ethnic and national entities were brought together in an artificial polity by enforced ideology and State dictatorship. The same could be said of eastern Europe as a political entity. Its principle of unity was entirely external, held together as a satellite bloc of the Soviet Union. The break-up of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union caught political analysts with their pants down. Marxist theory held that socialism would put an end to ethnic tension because ethnicity reflected the conditions of pre-socialist, traditional societies. Assimilation of minorities into the majority whole was seen as inevitable. But events have disproved such assumptions. From a Teilhardian perspective it is clear that pressures of growing personalisation in the human mass as a whole, impinging on internally cohesive groupings, would in the course of time disrupt artificial and externally constrained political entities of which they were a part. On the other hand, we see the same personalizing spirit of the earth bringing about new, free associations and aggregations of a political nature. The most obvious examples are the unification of Germany and the a-borning European Community. In line with what we could expect, those socio-cultural entities which feel secure in their cultural/national identity are able to come closer to each other to form larger voluntary groupings. Conversely, those ethnic entities, often minority groups, which feel insecure or repressed are struggling to free themselves to be themselves, as manifested by separatist movements the world over. The component States of the a-borning EC feel secure enough in their individual identities to come together without feeling threatened by the whole. Still we see what a struggle it has been over many years -- and it is still not over -- to overcome resistances of all kinds. But once accomplished the larger whole will not only not threaten the identity of component members, but even enhance them. Union differentiates.

In other words, what is called for is an enlightenment of mind and a conversion of heart. The present organization of the world, in its economic, social and political structures, born of an earlier level of consciousness, is revealing its discordance with the new and rising spirit of the earth by the violence those structures generate. Just as pain reveals pathology in the body, so violence manifests the pathology of the body of humankind, vis a vis its destiny. It is in need of healing; but healing of the spirit comprises both, enlightenment and conversion -- enlightenment about the truth of man's ascent to a more free and personalized, communitarian level of "being human", and conversion of heart from the petty ego of the self (individual and group) to universal personhood. Teilhard is very clear on this: "But let there be no mistake. He who wishes to share in this spirit must die and be re-born, to himself and to others. To reach this higher plane of humanity, he must not only reflect and see a particular situation intellectually, but make a complete change in his fundamental way of

valuation and action. In him a new plane (individual, social and religious) must eliminate another. This entails inner tortures and persecution. The earth will only become conscious of itself through the crisis of conversion".

If so, the transition of humanity to a higher plane is a religious endeavour -- a happening in the realm of spirituality. Then, a very pertinent question would be, are the religions playing their part in en-abling (making able) and facilitating the conversion required on the part of the people to rise to a higher level of spirituality. Before attempting an answer, a word about spirit and spirituality is in order. The word "spirit" has often been used in religious language as the opposite of matter, with the implication that spirituality is a movement away from matter and materiality. For Teilhard matter and spirit are not two different things; everything in the cosmos is a composite of spirit and matter. The matter end of the continuous matter-spirit scale is characterized by lower levels of consciousness, multiplicity and lesser complexity, while the higher end manifests greater complexity/consciousness and unity, culminating in the level of the human.

My submission is that the religions themselves are being challenged by the evolutionary rise of consciousness to conversion, to die to religion as traditionally understood in terms of rite and ritual, precept and doctrine, church and temple, to one of spirit and freedom, life and love. This is after all what the religions themselves have claimed to be central and fundamental. But in reality the spirit has been stifled by the shell of rite, doctrine and law, by which they acquired their distinct identities. As such they will be a hindrance rather than a help to the ascent of the spirit. The time has come when, in biblical language, God will be worshipped "neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth", namely, in the mind and heart.

It should be clear that Teilhard's vision about the future of Man is of a piece with his understanding of Nature and Man as an organic whole. It is not a question of juxtaposed elements but of constitutive elements forming organic wholes in differentiated connections. This means that each component element has a proper place and function which cannot be arbitrarily changed; one part cannot be replaced by another. As Teilhard puts it: "The world must be compared not to a bundle of elements in artificial juxtaposition, but to an organized system informed by a broad unity of growth proper to itself".¹⁴ And the other connected fundamental plank of Teilhard's thought is that the world is under construction, which could be best compared to gestation and birth.

Pain and suffering become unbearable if it is devoid of any meaning and purpose. The great merit of Teilhard's vision is that it invests suffering both personal and collective with substantial meaning, not merely as something meritorious in the traditional Christian sense, but as ontologically constitutive of the construction of the world. The liberal, democratic political order which prevails in most parts of the world today has conditioned us to take for granted that society is an atomized collection of individuals in a "each-one-for-himself-God-for-us-all" fashion. Equality, personal liberty and rights are the cornerstones of this philosophy. According to a metaphor Teilhard used often, this kind of society can be compared to a bouquet, say of roses, each rose carefully picked, of equal quality and put together artificially. The bouquet is a collectivity of equal and homogenous elements. But society is not a collectivity but an organic whole

like a tree which has differentiated parts - leaves, branches, flowers, fruits -- which are neither equal nor unequal, but complement each other in an inner structure of unity. While we expect a bouquet to be perfect and pretty, a tree will be quite imperfect and scarred because "it has had to fight against inner accidents in its development and the external accidents of bad weather, broken branches, torn leaves, parched sickly or wilted flowers are 'in place' -- they express the more or less difficult conditions of growth encountered by the trunk that bears them".¹⁵ I believe that our inability to comprehend pain and suffering as something meaningful and even necessary, is our enslavement to the individualistic mentality of the liberal democratic view of man and society which prevails strongly in the West. Inequalities, imperfections, failures, - the general "dukkha" of the world finds a natural and meaningful place in its organic structure and the communitarian nature of society. It is not a question of justifying pain, suffering and violence, but of realizing their "place" in the real order of Nature. Only those who find such meaning will have the courage to go through and beyond that pain to the peace and joy of a higher unity, Others should logically despair and give up.

If the urgent and insistent question on our minds is "what do we do?", Teilhard's vision gives us a sure guide to action. Firstly, to accept the pain of the world not as a meaningless absurdity but as the birth pangs of a new world struggling to see the light of day. At the present moment our pain and suffering are to a certain extent self-inflicted by our blindness and psychological resistance to evolutionary convergence. Hence all our efforts should be directed towards reinforcing those forces which are already at work to liberate persons and social groups to the security of their respective identities, so that they become free to come together in larger voluntary associations which will enhance their being. Teilhard warns us: "...beware above all of everything that isolates, that refuses to accept and that divides. Each along your own line, let your thought and action be 'universal' which is to say 'total'. And tomorrow may be you will find to your surprise that all opposition has disappeared and you can 'love one another'

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Conversely, we should work, therefore, for the weakening and elimination of the forces of constriction, separation and diminishment of any kind. Teilhard's vision of human development bestows value on human action, not only large scale action at national and global levels, but also on the humblest action, in the right direction, of every person. If evolution has delivered itself into our hands after aeons of automatic operation it is up to us to direct it towards a future which is in line with what it had achieved up to now. This is the grand but critical life-and-death option before us. The right decision will depend so much on how deeply we have interiorised the thrust of the evolutionary process of our planet, groaning and struggling to rise to higher levels of person and spirit -- a level of personalized, communitarian globalisation.

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NOTES

- (1) Dec.1993
- (2) Political Science Quarterly, Vo1.107, No.4
- (3) The Future of Man, Tr. Norman Denny, Harper & Row 1959, p.105
- (4) The Phenomenon of Man, Harper & Bros. 1959, pg. 165
- (5) Ibid. p. 241
- (6) Ibid. p. 240
- (7) Ibid. p. 266
- (8) Human Energy, Collins, 1969, p. 63
- [9] Ibid. p. 64
- (10) Ibid. p. 87
- (11) Hourani, Benjamin T., "Teilhard's Global Ecumene & the Politics of Peace", in "Humanity's Quest or Unity: A UN Teilhard Colloquium" edit. Leo Zonneveld, Mirananda-Wassenaar, 1985, p. 49
- (12) Human Energy, Collins, 1969, pp.37-38
- (13) Ibid. p. 38
- (14) Ibid. p. 49
- (15) Ibid.
- (16) Activation of Energy, Collins 1970, p. 95