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Vicente Marasigan, S.J.

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Planetization Problems

VICENTE MARASIGAN, S.J.

The name of Teilhard de Chardin is among the growing number of modern proponents of "planetization". According to this idea, mankind is globally coalescing into organic unity. The proponents are so fascinated by this idea that they have launched serious research programs aimed at implementing it. In so doing, they have also brought the problems of planetization into clearer light, clear enough to cause agony. Here are some instances.

NATIONALISM

"The age of nations is past", said Teilhard. "The task before us now, if we would not perish, is to shake off our ancient prejudices, and to build the earth."¹

Is nationalism *passee*? A visceral and vigorous negative is the answer of Filipinos. Jesuit historian Fr. de la Costa, commenting on the lives and writings of Rizal, del Pilar, Jacinto, Mabini, Bonifacio and Recto, has this to say about the Filipino national tradition:

We are told, of course, that this ideal is hopelessly out of date. Why cultivate nationalism in a world rapidly moving toward internationalism? If we must dedicate ourselves to an ideal, let it be to the brotherhood of man. As to that, we can readily agree that an international organization within which all men can live as brothers is a consummation devoutly to be wished. But we might point out that the very word "internationalism" presupposes nationalism. If nations are to be united, there must be nations to unite. Those who have already achieved full nationhood can afford to take their nationalism for granted, can even be high-mindedly apologetic about it. But we who, having been colonial subjects for four hundred years, are still seeking national identity and purpose, may perhaps be forgiven if

1. Teilhard de Chardin, *Building The Earth*, Dimension Books, 1965, p. 54.

nationalism is uppermost in our minds and boringly recurrent in our conversation.²

In an earlier essay,³ de la Costa also points out how internationalism eviscerates nationalism, implying that nationalism must be visceral if it is to be effective for earth building. A healthy planet is made up of well-built nations. Surely this must have been obvious to Teilhard.

Then how could Teilhard, writing in 1931, say that nationalism, as of that decade, is already *passe*?

One explanation that comes to mind is that Teilhard was thinking only of the nations of the First World, the "developed" nations, the peoples who look upon humanity as the "white man's burden". Did Teilhard himself fail to shake off his ancient (racial) prejudices? There are indications tending to support this view. An unsigned article in *Triumph* entitled "Teilhard and the Phenomenon of (Colored) Man",⁴ gives a selection of hitherto unpublished excerpts from Teilhard's writings, tending to show that he takes white supremacy for granted. And consciously so. According to him, the new human type, the Homo Progressivus, is "more numerous among the white peoples".⁵ Although he did not conclude from this that the brown Filipino, say, would therefore be excluded from noospheric participation, white supremacy would seem to be a permanent feature of the human race. Egalitarianism receives less emphasis in his writings than elitism. He would even pray as a priest "to be the first to become conscious . . . the first to seek . . . the first to become more widely human . . . than any of the world's servants."⁶ This elitism, though priestly in his consciousness, could also have been racial in his subconscious. This is reflected for instance in a letter⁷ to Pierre Lamare, dated 25 April 1941, where he says

2. Lakasdiwa, *Towards a Filipino Social Revolution*, Tambuli Press, 1972, p. 45.

3. H. de la Costa, S.J. *The Background of Nationalism and Other Essays*, La Solidaridad Publishing House, 1965, p. 9.

4. *Triumph*, Vol. VII no. 1, January 1972, p. 28ff.

5. Teilhard de Chardin, *Future of Man*, Harper & Row, 1964, p. 137.

6. Teilhard de Chardin, *Divine Milieu*, Harper & Row, 1960, p. 80.

7. R. Speaight, *Teilhard de Chardin*, Collins, 1967, p. 181.

that "the standard of the (Chinese) race as a whole is below the human average". This was in that decade when Chinese intellectuals (and peasants) were becoming disillusioned about Confucianism and Western Christianity and were searching for a more realistic "religion of earth", — or as formulated by Chou-En-Lai, for dedication to medical, educational and social services, independent of superstitious beliefs and rituals.⁸ It is strange that Teilhard, who wrote so lyrically about a "religion of earth",⁹ failed to notice its emergence among the Chinese people with whom he lived, and precisely in that decade of their socio-political ferment. Was it perhaps because unlike his friends the "missiologues"¹⁰ he never learned the native language?

The feature of white supremacy is again suggested by Teilhard in "the fact that from one end of the world to the other, all the peoples, to remain human or to become more so, are inexorably led to formulate the hopes and problems of the modern earth in the very same terms in which the West has formulated them."¹¹ This is true. And it hurts. When the all-Filipino delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1971 decided to reject Tagalog as the official language and to formulate their laws in an alien tongue, it was for reasons of necessity. It was also humiliating. It is not easy to accept this congenital self-alienation. For nationalist sentiments die hard.

Another possible explanation of Teilhard's underestimation of the present force of nationalism could be his belief in the future convergence of all creation — global society, the biosphere, the multitude of planets and stars. Since this was for him a

8. C. P. Fitzgerald, *The Birth of Communist China*, Penguin Book, 1966, p. 137.

9. Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*, Harper & Row, 1968, p. 120 ff.

10. Teilhard de Chardin, *Letters From a Traveller*, Harper & Row, 1962, p. 220. The context in which Teilhard uses this expression suggests that missionaries, not being trained in science, cannot appreciate the "biological evidence" favoring white superiority. But it does not explain what that "biological evidence" is.

11. Teilhard de Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, Harper Torchbooks, 1961, p. 211.

matter of personal faith, he would find the details of its historical unfolding less visceral. Nationalist movements for instance. But these he preferred to leave to the specialists situated in the field. He limited himself to the task of sketching the broad vision aimed in a general way at optimizing total human effort.

It is now our responsibility to explore (within a Teilhardian framework if possible) this neglected zone of "intermediate convergence", this aggrupation into geographic and ethnic units of the planet in its present phase of evolution.

CONSCIENTIZATION

An approach to this problem is indicated in the emergence of a process of conscientization. This rise of the level of social consciousness is likened by Teilhard to a rise in "psychic temperature" leading to a critical threshold where there occurs a radical change of state. Underdeveloped communities have to undergo a more radical change of state than the other communities participating in planetization. Can this be accomplished by crash programa? Hardly. It is necessary first to awaken the dormant potentials of the community. In concrete, this means intelligently identifying and assessing the options.

Some alternative options for the Philippines can now be identified.¹² Should we concentrate on economic development? or on social justice? or on a judicious merger of both objectives? Should geographical priorities be decided according to need? or to greatest potentials? In terms of institutions, should we choose according to permeability to influence or to strategic importance? In terms of strategy, will the target be the elite? or the poor? or the middle-class modernizers (e.g. university students)? In terms of instrument, should we choose schools? parishes? cursillos? community developers? Answers to these and many other such questions have to be empirical, and, if possible, quantified, in order to arrive at rational decisions regarding priorities. There follows the task of programming the temporal sequence of concrete steps to be taken, and proportioning the human and ma-

12. J. J. Carroll, S.J., "Toward Priorities for Church Participation," *Philippine Sociological Review*, January 1971, pp. 49-56.

terial allocations among the different operations of each step of the program.

Ideally, this activity is best done in an atmosphere of psychological freedom. This ideal does not exist — perhaps never even existed — in the Philippines. Perhaps the shock of martial law may awaken the collective Filipino consciousness to the new dawn dimly perceived by Rizal. That awakening is not yet. Minds are closed by emotional conflicts. Visibility is poor. There is a sad dearth of data so essential to conscientization.

EDUCATION

Here the real crux of the problem begins to manifest itself: education at the grass-roots level. According to Ivan Illich,¹³ schools have become dysfunctional: by producing sixteen classes of dropouts, they intensify social inequality. If this is true of Europe and America, it is even more true in their ex-colonies. Philippine schools have isolated the common *tao* from the schooled elite. The power elite produced by schools can no longer effectively conscientize, or even communicate with, their own people. Sensitive young Filipinos are alarmed by the lack of concern for the education of the disadvantaged.

At the Jesuit Educational Association of the Philippines convention of 1968, twenty-two Jesuit scholastics presented a signed manifesto questioning the relevance of Jesuit schools to present Philippine needs:

It has been said that we as Jesuit scholastics have lost our faith and interest in our educational work. Let it be understood that this is not true. We realize the paramount importance which education has in the social life of our country. What we question, however, is the priority we have always given to colleges and schools in our apostolate, if these institutions do not vigorously and effectively re-orient themselves so as to respond to the demands that are justly made of them today: "more intense concern for our poor and underprivileged brothers", "apostolic concern . . . for the Christian solution of the socio-political-economic problems of the Philippines", and a more conscious effort "to integrate the goals of professional competence and the aims of the Christian apostolate". If one or other of our schools becomes irrelevant to the Philippines, to the Filipinos and their real needs, if one or other of our schools turns out to be an institution where "the affluent have been strengthened in their class prejudices"

13. I. Illich, "De-Schooling Society", *America*, January, 1971, p. 12.

(Letter of Fr. General Arrupe, December 12, 1967), will our people not condemn our own lives and commitment to irrelevance? If our colleges and schools are largely dedicated to the socio-economic *status quo*, and to their mere self-perpetuation, should we not rather turn our efforts to labors which are more in keeping with our apostolic vocation, and with the desires which first brought us to give our lives to the Society of Jesus?¹⁴

A stronger condemnation of Philippine schools appeared in an editorial of *Philippine Panorama*:

Our schools have produced intellectual giants but who are Lilliputians emotionally; they are ruthlessly competitive, materialistic, pleasure seeking and self-oriented; they have a well-stocked computerized brain, but their emotions are those of the savage Neanderthal. No wonder, we have a chaotic society.¹⁵

If the net effect of educational effort is such massive alienation, can anything be more counterproductive?

POPULATION EXPLOSION

The problem is compounded by demographic factors. Even assuming dedication and expertise among the decision-makers, the task of educating multitudes, combined with lack of resources, simply staggers the mind. Like Toffler's "future shock", inability to cope with sudden overload paralyzes decision-making processes. On the one hand, long-range planning requires many years of research and of small-scale experimentation. On the other hand, accelerated growth of population demands immediate solutions today, not next year or next decade. And yet what guarantee is there that an emergency solution will not sabotage long-range planning?

INTERDISCIPLINARY COMMUNICATIONS GAP

These may be some of the many dilemmas of real life that forced Teilhard to prefer the cosmic scale in thinking out his vision of human evolution. Consider his concepts of planetization, personalization, hominization, socialization, etc. An interdisciplinary analysis of these insights can be of help to long-range

14. Convention Report of the Jesuit Educational Association of the Philippines, 1968, pp. 153-154.

15. *Manila Daily Bulletin*, July 2, 1972, magazine section, p. 2.

planning. This is becoming obvious to groups of made up of representatives of different specializations. However preliminary attempts at interdisciplinary dialogue reveal serious difficulties. One is ambiguity in the formulation of objectives. This is bad enough, for then dialogue degenerates into unrelated monologues and eventually fades away. But worse still is the communication barrier. Each specialization has its own technical jargon, its own categories of thought, its own set of assumptions unintelligible to others. The experience of the Ateneo university indicates that monthly meetings for one year are hardly enough to dent the surface of this barrier. At the moment, there exists a contradictory situation where it is both necessary and impossible for specialists to communicate with one another. How to resolve this contradiction? Only by intensifying effort. A growing awareness of the necessity to transcend specialized compartmentalizations and enshrined assumptions may yet dredge up communication channels. These are often clogged up with administrative matters, which, though necessary, impede intellectual communication within the "community of scholars" that a university is supposed to be. The number of opportunities for effective communication seems to vary in inverse proportion to the size of the institution. Big universities are reaching a point of diminishing returns in their avowed aim of raising the level of consciousness of society.

SOLUTION GUIDELINES

How do we solve such problems? Some insights of Teilhard contained in his essay "Formation of the Noosphere"¹⁶ may help as general guidelines in the search for specific solutions. Many of these are derived from biological models.

For instance Teilhard observed how in all other animals we find innumerable adaptations giving birth to as many phyla, and each ending in a "blind alley of specialization",¹⁷ but on this dangerous slope leading to "organic imprisonment"¹⁸ man alone

16. Teilhard de Chardin, *Future of Man*, pp. 155-184.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

pulled up in time. The lesson drawn is that over-specialization leads to enslavement. This is finding verification for instance in our over-specialized departmentalization of educational institutions, but similar trends can be seen in other community services. These are inhibiting the growth of the sense of collectivity.

What a waste. Like a system of chromosomes, bearers of biological heredity, our immense educational systems are in principle capable of "indefinitely storing and infallibly preserving the huge array of truths and systematized technical knowledge which represents the patrimony of mankind."¹⁹

The communication gap between over-specialized departments breeds the danger of mutual strangulation, because we are thereby "caught in the ramifications of a sightless mechanism".²⁰ The lack of collective consciousness and further enslavement mutually reinforce each other. The vicious cycle is complete. We are entangled in a loop of degenerative feedback. To break the loop it is necessary to halt the present trend towards over-specialization and explore possible links and areas of interdisciplinary research.

The phenomenon of research is itself an important insight of Teilhard. He explicitly connects this to the phenomenon of unemployment. Of course the connection can only be actualized by means of colossal programs of education at the grass-roots level. For research must not remain a luxury pursuit limited to an elite. It must become the "principal function of humanity."²¹

Education at the grass-roots level within an exploding population requires a very radical reorientation of public service on the part of our barrio public servants. At present this looks impossible. But for Teilhard, "seemingly impossible changes become easy and even inevitable directly there is a change in the order of the dimensions."²² One detects in these enigmatic words an insight into human potentials. Is it possible for the Filipino "extended family system" to be so noospherically oriented as to

19. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

accelerate social conscientization within the unit? If so, public service performed by the more conscientized individuals or groups of these units can evolve into the area of education at each unit's grass-roots level. A very difficult operation undoubtedly. But there are historical grounds (e.g. during times of disaster) for hoping that the "power of sympathy"²³ will inevitably pervade the native temperament of the barrio people long nurtured in the *pakikisama* life-style. A cellular noosphere in every barrio? Why not?

The rural barrios are complex enough. Much more complex are urban and suburban barrios, on account of the heterogeneity of their populations. These are rural migrants from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao areas, and their over-crowding together in slum ghettos in the inner city results in terrifying complexity. In such situations the Teilhardian parameter of "complexity-consciousness" seems to break down. Complexity numbs consciousness. The solution lies in intensifying social organization with a fervor proportional to the actual depth of their apathy and fragmentation. The situation here is serious but not hopeless. Hope for remedy is indicated by Teilhard's observation of the recurrent process of "patches of humanity growing steadily larger, overlapping, often absorbing one another, thereafter to break apart and again reform in still larger patches."²⁴ Urban planners are aware of this phenomenon in the formation of cities. Perhaps greater attention can be directed to the breaking-apart phase and the subsequent re-formation in larger groupings, with systematic planning playing a large part in the re-formation phase.

Systematic planning, whether in local planning or nation-building, or whether it concerns economic, social or political systems, has always had dictatorial overtones. For this reason, technological competence, though necessary, is hardly sufficient for mass credibility. Assurance of freedom is essential.

There is a need for shared decision-making combined with a high level of collective consciousness. Is this unthinkable? At

23. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

the moment, yes. But the dream is there. Read the poems and songs of the people. Feel the pulse of youth in their tantrums. They sense that for the present theirs is an impossible dream. But they also sense a growing "tremor . . . a shared impulse . . . visibly preparing."²⁵ Like the tiny beam of neutrons triggering a critical mass of uranium, such a "tremor" will inevitably shatter the cocoon of fatalism and liberate the collective consciousness of a people eager for life.

What form will this "tremor" take? Will it follow the age-old models of brute force? Or will creative intelligence be inspired to discover something new? The instinctive *bahala na* solution is to plunge blindly into violence. As though Bathala would bless irresponsible blindness. Civilizations are known to have become extinct because they failed to evolve their faculty of insight. "To see or to perish" is a Teilhardian formula that can well be applied to the development of peoples. No. There must be a humane alternative to violence. But it can be found only by conscientious search.

If the Filipino nation somehow escapes extinction, if it is not absorbed by any of the power blocs tempted or attempting to manipulate the human race, it will have the opportunity to discover its own native charisms. Then it will have something precious to contribute of its very own to the task incumbent upon all nations to build the earth.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 175.