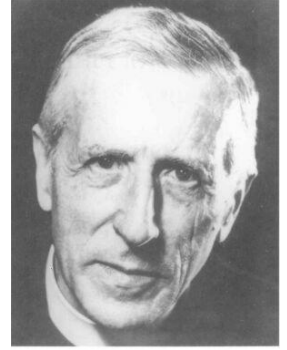


# THE TEILHARD NEWSLETTER

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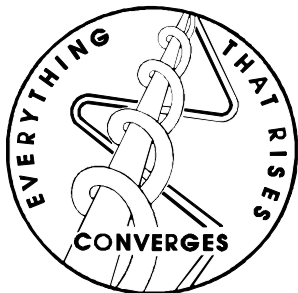
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## Editorial

### Important Announcement to Readers

Since we started as the Editorial team for the Teilhard Newsletter two issues around our distribution list have become clear. Firstly, the membership list is somewhat out of date. Secondly, the cost of printing and posting paper copies is very high.

Our newsletter distribution list includes current paying members of the BTA, recent former members, and those who have recently expressed an interest in the BTA.



Because of the heavy cost of the paper version of the Teilhard Newsletter (now 3 issues per year & in colour), we have decided that from 2011 only e-mail copies of the TN will be sent to non-members of the BTA.

If you are a **non-member** who receives the paper version of the TN, and now wish to receive the TN by e-mail please send details of your name and postal address (by e-mail) to [bta.masterlist@gmail.com](mailto:bta.masterlist@gmail.com). The deadline for this is 30 November 2010. Unless we hear from non-members by that date we will assume you no longer wish to be on our contact list.

We also urge **members** of the BTA to send us their e-mail address to help keep membership subscriptions low.

**ROSEMARY & STEPHEN**

## Members -- News

We have been informed that Carolyn Zachary of Currie in Edinburgh has died (2009).



Our sincere condolences are extended to her family.

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### Recent events

At the time of preparation for distribution of this newsletter the **Assisi International Colloquium on Teilhard de Chardin** with the theme: '*Francis of Assisi and Teilhard de Chardin: a great love for Life, for Nature, for Man and for the Spirit of God*' will have taken place (15-17 Oct). We aim to include a report on this in our next issue.

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### Future events

(The following information is taken from the website of the **American Teilhard Association**)

#### Conference: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin for a New Generation

Venue: Santa Clara University  
**500 El Camino Real**  
**Santa Clara, CA, USA**

Thursday - Sunday, November 18-21, 2010

**Further details/Registration via:** <http://www.teilhardforanewgeneration.com/>

This **4-day Conference**, held on the campus of Santa Clara University, explores the contemporary impact of the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

**Teilhard for a New Generation** serves as the first joint conference of the Jesuit School of Theology of Berkeley and Santa Clara University. It commemorates the historic integration between JST and SCU in the summer of 2009 as well as the 75th and 40th anniversaries of the one institution. The two schools bring together unique treasures and capacities in responding to the needs of contemporary society, together they seek to develop greater unity while preserving their diversity - key themes in the thought of Teilhard.

#### Conference Goals:

**Academic:** Explore the interdisciplinary implications of the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin for developing a more integrated and meaningful global culture.

**Ecclesial:** Provide a forum for scholars to discuss the current and possible status of the person and thought of Teilhard in the life of the Church.

**Institutional:** Further the collaborative work of the Jesuit School of Theology and the University of Santa Clara in their professional integration.

**Conference Speakers:** Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker \* Dr. Ilia Delio, OSF \* Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC \* Dr. David Grumett

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### Also Coming in 2011: 28th International Teilhard Conference

Venue: All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney, Nr St. Albans. Friday 24-26 June 2011 (Details to be announced).

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## In the Footsteps of Teilhard...

### Teilhard in Oxford by Rod White

What does it mean to follow the footsteps of Teilhard? For over 50 years we have studied his thoughts and ideas, but what do we know about his daily life? What about his daily life, his surroundings? A lot of changes have occurred over the past 100 years since he was in England but the landscape remains essentially the same. Teilhard wrote of the English landscape:

...the extraordinary solidity and intensity I found then in the English countryside, particularly at sunset, when the Sussex woods were charged with all that 'fossil' life which I was then hunting for, from cliff to quarry, in the Wealden clay. There were moments, indeed, when it seemed to me that a sort of universal being was about to take shape suddenly in Nature before my very eyes.<sup>1</sup>

What was so special about the Sussex landscape? Why was it different to the Auvergne? It seems that Teilhard was learning more about the landscape the more he understood about natural history. It should encourage us to go out and try to re-trace his steps.

Why is it that as human beings we have a natural affinity to certain places, we return to them, we visit them, we go on pilgrimages to them. I remember the first time I travelled to Brooklyn Bridge and the impact it had on my life. What were the places that Teilhard travelled to?

We know from one of his letters that Teilhard visited St Mary the Virgin church in Oxford:

'St. Mary's was especially attractive to me because of its memories of Cranmer and Newman, and Christ-Church College, in particular, filled me with admiration.'*(Letters from Hastings p.168-169)*

Teilhard had read Newman's 'Essay on the Development of Doctrine' and in it we find the following quote:

'To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often.'

This is certainly a sentiment that would have inspired Teilhard.



What about Cranmer? Thomas Cranmer was the first Archbishop of Canterbury under King Henry VIII. After Mary I came to the throne Cranmer was tried for treason and heresy in St Mary's and then executed.

St Mary the Virgin (SMV) has one of the most beautiful 13<sup>th</sup> Century spires and together with Christ Church it has a fascinating history with numerous characters.

John Henry Newman was appointed vicar in 1828 and it was here in 1833 that John Keble gave the 'National Apostasy' sermon that started the Oxford Movement. The influence of the movement spread and affected the practice and spirituality of the Church of England. There was controversy when in 1845 Newman converted to Roman Catholicism. Religious divides although they still exist are not as evident in England. It is in N. Ireland, where I live that this divide still exists. Things were no different in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Oxford to Belfast. In Newman's novel '*Loss and Gain*' he describes how the Dean would bribe

students with the offer of an evening meal in exchange for information about fellow students who may be showing 'Roman tendencies'

<sup>1</sup> 'The Heart of Matter', in *The Heart of Matter* (San Diego: Harvest, 1974), pp. 25–26.

It must be remembered that pressed on Teilhard's mind at this time was the forceful removal of the Jesuits from France - the influence of politics on religion. Could this be something that Teilhard was debating in his mind at this time?

Cranmer lived in a political world; he had close connections with Henry VIII. He suffered when the new Marian government attempted to force him to convert back to Roman Catholicism. It was Cranmer who wrote most of the *Book of Common Prayer* and worked out the Forty-Two articles which were modified to become the Thirty-Nine Articles that Newman caused controversy with when he tried to explain that the identity of the Church of England was Catholic rather than Protestant. After Tract 90 Newman soon converted to become a Roman Catholic.

In conclusion we can see how from one small mention in a letter, that by following the footsteps of Teilhard there is a great deal to learn.

Picture from Wikipedia; used by permission of the GNU Free Documentation License ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SMV\\_High\\_St.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SMV_High_St.jpg))

**Rod White**

### Teilhard in Google Earth

**Your Newsletter editors asked Rod White for an update on his 'Teilhard in Google Earth' project. It would appear that fatherhood is presenting some challenges to progress, as Rod replied 'Unfortunately the Teilhard in Google Earth project has stalled. Isabella has started to draw all over my books and I have to keep them in the attic'. Rod is trying to soldier bravely on, adding the information he has at the moment...but...please do try and assist him by responding to his request for material for this very worthwhile project – here is a reminder from Rod of how you may be of help:**

*What help am I looking for?*

**Locations** – Do you know of a specific place where Teilhard visited or worked? All you need to do is describe it to me, where it is near, or a distinctive feature and I should be able to locate it and record it. I know that members of BTA will be familiar with Teilhard's time in Hastings. I don't mind about any sort of information you wish to send me, large or small it is all important. It would also be good to reference the location – how did you find out about it, does Teilhard mention it in a letter? Also on what date did he visit this place?

**Photographs** – Perhaps you visited somewhere that Teilhard was known to be. First of all, describe the location to me and send the photographs to me in whatever format you wish. The quality or size is not important. I can even scan photographs that are sent to me by post. Again a reference as to how you located it and a date would also be useful. If you have technical issues please contact me and I will be keen to help.

I hope that members of BTA can help me with this project. No detail is too small and it is important that we record this information for future generations. Let us all work together and we can learn and share about Teilhard as we go.

**You can contact me by my email address:**

**igneosgeos@googlemail.com**

**or by post:**

**4 Grays Park Avenue  
Belfast BT8 7QE  
Co Down  
N. Ireland**

**Thank you, *Rod White***

## **St. Francis of Assisi & Teilhard de Chardin – Centuries Apart but Close in Their Vision of Christian Life!!**

A reflection by Alan Sage

For so long in the Church we have been used to thinking of God as our saviour that we forget that the first saving act of God was CREATION. God created us, the world, the entire universe and we should thank God for this great gift above all. But we can only thank God if God is part of our lives in prayer. Our starting point must be meeting God in prayer and in God's Word, the scriptures.

Two very different people – one from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and one from the 20<sup>th</sup> - in their different ways show us how we can come to appreciate the gift of God's creation in our lives.

**St Francis of Assisi:** Francis was praying in the little church of San Damiano near Assisi when he heard God's call to re build his church. Francis took this literally and began begging for stones to repair the old church. Later he came to realize that he and his brothers were to be part of a renewal process for rebuilding the whole Church. This was the beginning of Francis' conversion, which changed his life completely. An important event which followed soon after was when he heard the Gospel at mass in the little church of Portiuncula on Feb 24<sup>th</sup> 1208. What he heard changed his life completely and became the basis of his life and of the Franciscan brotherhood from there on.

The text of Matthew's Gospel (10.7-14) was about Jesus' sending of the disciples out to take his message to the world and read thus:

“Jesus said: As you go, proclaim the good news. The kingdom of heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food.” Again Francis took this literally and from then on he lived a life of complete poverty.

Soon afterwards, meeting a leper, he was at first repulsed by the very sight of the man but quickly

was filled with remorse, turned back and embraced him. From that time on he cared for lepers and spent much of his time in the local leprosarium. Francis, then, lived his new way of life as a life of complete service to others; he began to see others as his brothers and sisters because they all had the same heavenly Father. In time he came to realize that this brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity extended beyond his fellow humans to embrace the whole of creation. The animals and birds, the flowers of the field all spoke to him of God and they were thus to be revered because they had a dignity given by God. He was sensitive to nature and to his use of nature's gifts and always reminded his brothers to thank God for what they received from nature's storehouse.

Shortly before his death Francis wrote the Cantic of Brother Sun or the Cantic of the Creatures in which he praises God in and through the entirety of creation. He speaks of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Fire and Sister Earth. Every single thing speaks to him of God and he thanks God for his gift of creation. It is a beautiful prayer and apparently one of the first pieces of poetry in the Italian language.

So, Francis begins in prayer and in reading the scriptures which leads him to follow Christ by loving all human beings as his brothers and sisters; through his service to God and humanity he is brought to the awareness of all God's creatures and of creation itself as God's supreme gift. St Bonaventure, the great Franciscan theologian and interpreter of Francis' vision would later speak of going to God through creation as a central feature of Christian life.

**Pere Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** was a Jesuit priest and scientist who died in 1955. In very different circumstances Teilhard had a similar vision to Francis.

As a student Teilhard was studying the theology of the Bible and became captivated by the Letters of St Paul and particularly the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians. In his reflection and prayer, what struck him, was the way St Paul talks about Christ as the purpose and end of creation. This summoned up a marvellous vision for Teilhard:

Col. 1.15ff. “He is the image of the unseen God and the first born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, everything visible and invisible.....all things were created through him and for him. Before anything was created, he existed, and in him all things hold together.....because God wanted all perfection to be found in him.”

These and other texts made a tremendous impression on Teilhard and throughout his life it was this Cosmic Christ, the Christ of the Universe, the Universal Christ who was the driving force of everything he did. The phrase “In him all things hold together” was particularly striking because it put Christ at the very centre not just of our human life but of the entire creative enterprise, the whole universe.

He began to study at university but his studies were interrupted by the Great War. Although as a cleric he was exempt from war service he volunteered for service and became a stretcher bearer at the Front. Later he would be decorated for his bravery. During the battles of the war he, like St. Francis, gave himself to others selflessly. He learned a deep compassion for others and this selflessness marked the rest of his life of service in the Church.

Although he was a scientist, he believed that his main aim in life was to help others to *SEE* God in the world, to share his own vision, to realize that all human activity was part of what he calls “building God’s world”, preparing for the final fulfilment at the end of time when Christ would return and God would be All in All. At the heart of this process of preparation for God’s fulfilment at the end of time, is LOVE, the Love of God made visible in Jesus Christ. We, as followers of Christ, have to make this love a reality in our world. Everything we do must be inspired by and motivated by the love of Christ so that this love can gradually permeate the whole world and bring about the fulfilment of God’s plan.

Thus, for Teilhard, all human activity has intrinsic meaning for it is a sharing in God’s own continuing creative work. We are literally co-creators with God - a great dignity and a great responsibility. He speaks of a spirituality of effort – every single thing we do in life has

significance in relation to this sharing in the creative work of God. He reminds us that if we do everything in this spirit and fulfil our human responsibilities to the full then we will face challenges and have to make sacrifices. We don’t need to go looking for penances and mortifications. If we do what we ought to do and carry out our responsibilities to the full – at home, at work, in all our activities - we will have to give of ourselves unselfishly and without reserve. So Teilhard’s view of the Christian life is one of doing the ordinary things extraordinarily, as though they were all that mattered. It is a positive and forward looking form of Christian spirituality.

So, St Francis and Teilhard remind us of the importance of starting with meeting God in prayer and in the Scriptures. From there we are able to grow in love – of ourselves, of others and of the whole of creation.

Both Francis and Teilhard had a great reverence for everything created. We should remember that all that has been made by God has its own purpose – nothing is superfluous or meaningless, it is all part of God’s plan. If we understand the importance of creation and that we have an essential part to play in God’s continuing creativity, then nothing will be unimportant and everything will have real meaning. As Christians with this knowledge we should be at the forefront of human care for the earth – we should be leading the way and be a beacon for the rest of humanity. In today’s world we should be giving an example of care for others, reverence for creation, caring for the environment. Francis and Teilhard both show us the way to be true environmentalists. We have to Love God in the depth of our heart, love and reverence others as brothers and sisters of the same Father, love and reverence the world – the entire universe – Brother Sun and Sister Moon - the Brotherhood of Creation - as God’s greatest gift.

Alan Sage

## The Evolution and Planetization of Political Life (Part II)

By Professor Wayne Parsons

[BTA Editor: Our thanks again to Professor Parsons for this excellent paper. If you missed Part I which was published in TN28, it may be viewed via: [http://www.teilhard.org.uk/downloads/British\\_Teilhard\\_Association\\_Newsletter\\_28.pdf](http://www.teilhard.org.uk/downloads/British_Teilhard_Association_Newsletter_28.pdf) The talk was also recorded at our 2009 Conference – for audio file please visit <http://www.teilhard.org.uk/teilhard-association/podcasts> ]

**NOTE: Quotes of Teilhard (page references given) in this paper are taken from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin *The Future of Man*. London: Collins, 1964.**

Today, ‘globalization’ is often seen as a ‘problem’: I have students who define themselves as ‘anti-globalizationists’. But when we read Teilhard, we are reminded that if the problem is globalization, the solution is about promoting global consciousness. We should not be ‘anti-globalizationists’ but planetizationists! As a species we have to become more and more aware of the processes of ‘enfolding’ and ‘centering’ which is shaping our planet. Writing in an age of world wars Teilhard is constantly trying to get us to think about forces which are at work, and which human beings have to channel into the development of a global consciousness.

His piece on ‘Life and the Planets’ is a brilliant exposition of this belief in the need for us to understand the global forces at work. It is an epic reflection on the future at a time when many would have seen little to be optimistic about. Teilhard on the other hand, sees an earth which is ‘trembling’, ‘splitting’ as *full* of potential for human progress. And what does this involve? For Teilhard is that we have to see war in a much wider context: a cosmic context! Teilhard urges us to zoom out of the conflict on planet Earth, and look at it from the position of distant planets and stars. If we are to understand where we are, we have to try and understand where we are in the universe. We have to have the imagination to see our beautiful little planet amidst the vastness of the cosmos. A global war requires us as human beings to think on a global level: step back and see our planet as a whole. We have to appreciate the unique nature of a life form which is conscious and knows that it knows. Only when we take a new perspective which is cosmic rather than earth-bound can we begin to appreciate what we are doing to ourselves and to the planet.

Man is, he argues, the most *complex* collection of molecules on earth living in a complex universe. That is how we make sense of what is happening - understand human beings as complex living organisms. This is the key: understand the

significance of complexity as a quality to be defined in terms of ‘a large number of elements, which are more tightly organized among themselves.’ This insight into the role of complexity is truly remarkable. Even more remarkable is that his definition of complexity is entirely consistent with modern usage. For Teilhard evolution - of the universe, matter, life, and consciousness - was all about complexity. The universe was not simply complicated: it was complex. It was comprised at all levels of numerous elements or component parts which interacted with one another. He posited that the greater the degree of interaction between parts, the more complex was a given aspect of the universe, and the more complex that part of the universe was, the higher was the degree of consciousness. Human beings were complex biological systems, but they were also complex conscious systems that interacted with other complex conscious systems. This level of complex interaction was generating new kinds and forms of complexity. In other words, what he was saying was that we have to understand that the same powerful forces which created the universe were operating on our planet, and in our heads and in our interaction with other human beings.

The Second World War was for him the manifestation of the huge forces of human compression - which has resulted from the growing complexification of the human species. And the compression of the mankind was every bit as earth shattering as that which took place on the lithosphere millions of years ago. So, if we wanted to understand what was going on in our own time, we had to start using a new kind of GMT, *geological* mean time.

The earth was going through a period of volatile and volcanic change. The planet was becoming ever more complex: ever more compressed and interconnected. Out of this complexity was emerging a new fabric comprised of a ‘tightening network of economic and psychic bonds’. This ever tightening network marks the emergence of a new (super) ‘organism’. It looked as if this new organism which was embracing the world would destroy, ‘submerge’ and ‘mechanize us. And, he argues, the war does feel like an embrace of death: complexity and globalization can destroy us all. But, from a cosmic perspective, we can understand this tightening less as a strangle hold, but as a process which can ‘raise us’ to a high level of complexity.

Teilhard does not say that complexification is easy, or painless. But it is a process which the human species

has to understand if it is to progress. This is the defining challenge of modern – planetizing – humanity:

...The modern world, with its prodigious growth of complexity, weighs incomparably more heavily upon the shoulders of our generation than did the ancient world upon the shoulders of our forebears. (p 117)

We have to realize that we are now experiencing the ‘planetization of life’. We are experiencing a new phase of human evolution in both war and peace, the ‘constant extension and deepening of terrestrial consciousness itself’. This ‘terrestrial consciousness’, he maintains, is emerging from war, but it is also emerging from the growth of ‘common spirit’, human ‘affinity’ and ‘sympathy’. The challenge for humanity is how we respond to this growing complexity: how do we respond to a world which is becoming increasingly interconnected. How do we respond the powerful and oftentimes violent embrace of complexity? Teilhard asks us to exercise our imagination and consider the possibilities:

...Imagine men awakening at last under the ever-tightening planetary embrace, to a sense of universal solidarity based on their profound community, evolutionary in its nature and purpose. The nightmares of brutalization and mechanization which are conjured up to terrify us and prevent our advance are at once dispelled. It is not harshness or hatred but a new kind of love, not yet experienced by man, which we must learn to look for as it is borne to us on the rising tide of planetization. (p 119)

The more aware we are of the process, the less we will feel that planetization is a matter of enforcement. Planetization is happening - and cannot be stopped:

Economically and psychically, mankind is under inexorable pressures of events owing to the prodigious growth and speeding up of communications. The wars have shown that the world is being bound and mingled together in an inextricable knot. Confined within the geometrically restricted surface of the globe, the human particles do not simply multiply in numbers at an increasing rate, but through contact with one another automatically develop around themselves an ever denser tangle of economic and social relationships. As the earth grows older, so does its living skin contact, and even more rapidly. The last day of Man will coincide for Mankind with the maximum of its tightening and infolding upon itself. (pp 127-8)

So, alongside the volcanic eruptions of global war, we also have to appreciate the more sedimentary, or organic processes at work:

The growth of a collective memory in which a common inheritance of Mankind is amassed in the form of accumulated experience and passed on through education; the development, through the increasingly rapid

transmission of thought, of what is in effect a generalized nervous system, emanating from certain defined centers and covering the entire surface of the globe; the growth, through the interaction and ever-increasing concentration of individual viewpoints, of a faculty of common vision penetrating beyond the continuous and static world of popular conception into fantastic but still manageable world of atomized energy. (p 132)

Thus, at one level, human beings have to realize the potential of destruction and war to facilitate planetization and global consciousness, but at another level, human beings have to appreciate and cultivate the more organic processes which have happening, because: ‘All around us, tangibly and materially, the thinking envelope of the Earth - the Noosphere - is adding to its internal fibers and tightening its network.’ This organic process is the subject of another substantial chapter, in *The Future of Man* ‘The formation of the Noosphere - a biological interpretation of human history’. The noosphere for Teilhard is the thinking sphere: and clearly, how human beings define and construct their public problems in *global* terms is a major aspect of the noosphere. He likens the formation of the global brain as similar to the human brain itself. It is, he says, a ‘cerebroid’ organ:

Between the human brain, with it milliards of interconnected nerve-cells and the apparatus of social thought, with its hundreds of millions of individuals thinking collectively, there is an evident kinship... (p 166)

Until recently it was difficult to imagine what this process could look like. However, attempts to map the growth of the internet - such as the ‘Internet Mapping project’ began at the Bell Laboratories in 1998, and later at Lumeta show curious resemblance and striking likeness to the human brain. The internet appears as a ‘cerebroid’ structure, as Teilhard argued. It shows itself as in ‘a state of compression’ and ‘organized interpenetration, in which each element is linked with every other.’

No one can deny that a network (a world network) of economic and psychic affiliations is being woven at ever increasing speed which envelops and constantly penetrates more deeply within each of us. (p 171)

Teilhard saw the formation of a noosphere as an inevitable stage in the evolution and the complexification of human life and the planet itself. But we must remember that in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the internet has only just begun to grow. We ain’t seen nothin’ yet! The internet still only reaches a very small proportion of human beings on the planet. The maps we have of the emerging global

brain will become infinitely more complex in another 10 years.

However, it is not inevitable that the internet will be a force for planetization. It is not inevitable that it will provide a way of creating a more unified world. It is not inevitable that it will enhance human creativity and communication. The internet has all the capacity to do the opposite. The noosphere created by the internet may well enhance the capacities that human beings have for destruction and control rather than communication. In just the same way, globalization does have the potential to make the world a smaller place, but it also has the potential to make the world a scarier place: as terrorism and the world economic crisis which began in 2008 has made all too apparent. And this is why what Teilhard says in *The Future of Man* is so relevant to our current fears and anxieties about the future. Human beings have to shape the future: evolution is in our own hands. A critical task for humanity is to ensure that the internet and economic globalization evolve in ways which facilitate the potential of human beings to be communicative, creative, and cooperative. Here, like in the case of the atomic bomb, we should look to the 'ever more numerous institutions and associations of men where in the search for knowledge a new spirit is silently taking place around us.' And again, from a public policy point of view, we should seek to promote and facilitate this process at local, national and global levels.

The noosphere is a kind of psychological or mental compression. It is sphere wherein ideas and information flow across the planet. But the other area of compression which is an equally important aspect of planetization is the physical compression of the human race.

...the grouping and organization of the human mass has in the past been broadly governed far more by the principle of expansion than by that of compression. Diverse civilizations were able to grow and rub shoulders on a sparsely populated planet without encountering any major difficulty. But now, following the dramatic growth of industry, communications and populations in the course of a singular century, we can discern the outline of a formidable event. The hitherto scattered fragments of humanity, being brought into close contact, are beginning to interpenetrate to the point of reacting economically and psychically upon each other; with the result, given the fundamental relationship between biological compression and the heightening of consciousness...Under the influence of forces compressing it within a closed vessel, human substance is beginning to 'planetize' itself, that is to say, to be interiorized and animated globally upon itself... (p 294)

To some extent Teilhard takes quite a deterministic view of the processes of planetization? The forces of compression – which we are now experiencing through the massive movements of population - are manifestly at work. But, Teilhard always stresses that human beings can work with these forces, or we can work against them.

Planetization can reduce human freedom - or it can increase it. What this means is that it is up to us to see migration as a positive aspect of planetization – or whether we see it as a negative process. The compression of humanity into more multi-racial and multi-cultural ways of life can be seen as a threat, or an opportunity. Teilhard would urge us to see it as an opportunity. It should be emphasized as a matter of policy that, the process of compression, ('that envelops' us) both mentally and physically 'does not threaten to crush us, neither does it seek to rob us of our soul.' Quite the opposite: the forces of compression can enlarge us and renew our spirits. They should give us reason for faith in the future, not a politics of despair.

But, of course, Teilhard never said that planetization will be without pain and difficulty. The experience of complexity is complex. Complexity is confusing, disturbing, and challenging. Complexity is very threatening, which is why the kind of planetization we have experienced in recent decades has provoked reaction with a potent and dangerous blend of 'anti-globalization', 'anti - modernism' and religious fundamentalism.

And here the role of public policy is critical. And this does not simply mean 'government'. Public policy is really about the study of human beings when they are engaged in trying to solve those problems they consider to be public; that is they require forms of collective reflection and action. In this sense, religion is itself a form of problem solving life. (Karl Popper, of course, said that 'all life is problem solving'.) Teilhard saw religion as a part of human evolution: a method by which human beings seek to make sense of their world. He believed that Christianity was a way of making sense and acting upon the world. Teilhard invites us to think about the role of religion as form of problem solving. Indeed, he argues that:

...it may be said that the historic rivalry of mysticisms and creeds...represents a prolonged groping of the human soul in search of a conception of the world in which it will feel itself to be sensitized, more free and active. This surely means that the faith which finally triumphs must be the one which shows itself to be more capable than any other of inspiring man to action. (p208)

How effective are religious institutions at ‘inspiring action’ in respect of all the problems and opportunities which are being generated by the process of planetization? It is clear that some religions see these processes as dangerous and threatening and are openly hostile to globalization in all its forms. In many parts of the world religion has become politics. Political life and religious life have become one and the same. But if these forms of religious life are against compression, and want to halt it, we have to ask what kind of role should Christianity play in these the politics of compression?

The first point is that Christians should fully take on board the enormity of Teilhard’s idea that we have to think in evolutionary terms: the entry of Jesus into human history is an event of *evolutionary* proportions. However, the incarnation was not a phase in the genetic evolution of mankind. I think we can better grasp what Teilhard was saying by using the distinction provided by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*: Teilhard is arguing that human evolution is now in a *memetic* stage. The emergence of human consciousness means that it is ideas that get into the head that are more important to development of our species, than the biological or genetic aspects of our evolution. Jesus is the word made *meme*. He shows us an alternative direction for human development: Jesus shows us what this new kind of humanity can look like. He is the meme that takes away the sin of the world: he wants us to imitate and copy what we see. (Monkey see, monkey do.) This memetic process is, however, a matter of human choice: we can choose to be Christ-like. He gives us a new memetic code: a new gospel. We can choose to love one another. We can choose to see ourselves as all belonging to the same human family. We can choose to regard all human beings as our neighbour. Or, we can choose to hate and fear one another. We can choose to live as if we are ‘us’ and they are ‘them’. We can choose to ignore the needs, pain and suffering of our fellow humans. In short, we can harness our capacity to love, or we can be consumed and destroyed by our capacity to hate. The evolution of planet earth is in our hands.

That was Teilhard’s message, it seems to me. Christianity is *fundamentally* a way of thinking which is – or rather should be – evolutionary. Human beings have a choice in how they evolve. Jesus points the way to a new evolutionary direction. And that way of thinking should, from Teilhard’s standpoint suggest that Christians have to play an active – and indeed proactive - role in making the case for planetization. That means being active in supporting a globalization process which actually improves the lot of human beings and the planet,

rather than actually makes life on earth worse off. Christianity should embrace its truly catholic mission: its *universalism*. This involves a commitment to the unity of the planet, and an understanding of the dynamics of globalization. It should be in the vanguard of supporting planetization, and in the forefront of criticizing forms of globalization which are not embracing the planet, but *choking* it. The mission of the church as the universal body of Christ is to cultivate the growth of a planetary consciousness but be always ready to condemn the kind of destructive forms of globalization which we can see all around us in the world today. Christians should always be alive to promoting forms of human problem solving which foster the growth of pro-social and cooperative human behaviour and which can stimulate productive networks of trust and sympathy at local and global levels.

Teilhard saw religion as a form of human problem solving that, over time, would become more relevant. Sadly, in many ways it has become less and less relevant as a way of thinking and acting on the human condition. But, he also saw technology itself improving the capacities of human beings to think, feel and act. For Teilhard there is an important relationship between the human mind and the tools which it fabricates. The mind invents tools, and tools extend the capacities of the mind to formulate new problems and thence new tools. And new tools give us new ways of seeing the world:

In a mankind becoming unified under pressure...it is inevitable that the mechanical equipment of society will become all pervading and enormous. But the change of scale is not enough in itself to explain the sudden and irreversible rise of the industrial society. What has really let loose the machine in the world, as for good, is that it facilitates and indefinitely multiplies our activities. Not only does it relieve us mechanically of a crushing weight of physical and mental labour; but by the miraculous enhancing of our senses, through its powers of enlargement, penetration and exact measurement, it constantly increases the scope and clarity of our perceptions... (p 229)

His prediction about the ‘all pervading’ and ‘enormous’ influence on unifying humanity has, of course, come to pass. Human beings now travel around the planet in unprecedented speed and numbers and communications technologies enable us to communicate with the most distant parts of our world. But if travel and communications have ‘unified’ the planet, they have also served to create disunity and new kinds of global conflict and tension. If technologies have enabled us to know more about the world, it has also dis-abled us in terms of our capacity to understand our world. Technological

development has made the world a smaller place, but also a more dangerous place. If it can facilitate the growth of a sense of our shared humanity – of sense of species – it can also facilitate the growth of a sense of separateness and a dislike and fear of ‘the other’. It can create a greater sense of ‘us’, but also of ‘them’. It can feed the human propensity to demonize and dehumanize, and it can nourish our belief in the oneness of our species.

It is when we endeavour to solve our public problems that we have the opportunity as a species to work with the grain of planetization rather than against it. And, so many of the problems we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are issues of global public policy. It is a formidable list of problems which are increasingly global in nature and need global approaches, and they include: economic problems; environmental problems; health problems; social problems; migration problems; crime; terrorism; and drugs. As problems are increasingly inter-national and inter-connected, and as the problems of one country can very quickly spill-over to others it becomes increasingly important for humanity to develop ways of thinking and acting at a global level. This means policies and institutions which can contribute to the building a noosphere - a level of global thinking which in turn can lead to planetary action. A (policy) noosphere that works with complexity rather than works against it: that understands interconnectedness rather than ignores it. A noosphere which is woven from the multiplicity of research organizations, universities, think tanks, knowledge banks, and all other modes of knowledge production. In short, a global public policy network facilitating knowledge sharing and exchange between neighbourhoods, communities as well as local, regional and national institutions: a noosphere which facilitates an exchange of ideas and information between north and south, east and west.

Is such an idea pure fancy? I think if we read our Teilhard we can understand that this is not piece of wishful thinking: it is happening. There are now numerous examples of global public policy networks which are trying to do precisely what I have said above: facilitate the production, utilization and dissemination of knowledge which is relevant to our problems on a global scale. Here I will simply mention a few: the Global Development Network; the World Bank’s ‘Knowledge Bank’; and the Brookings Institute project on Global Policy Networks. Such networks are actively promoting better understanding of ‘enforced compression’ and a sense of species. They are a manifestation of the process of planetization which Teilhard identified in the early decades of the last century.

Teilhard himself – in Chapter twenty five of *The Future of Man* - stresses the need for developing a more global approach to public policy when he writes about the need for us to care for the world’s environment and natural resources, and warns that we must stop plundering the planet. He notes the importance of health policy to build a ‘healthy mankind’. But he also emphasizes that we have to pay close attention to the way in which human beings can self-organize and respond to the challenges of compression through the evolution of ‘attraction’ and ‘sympathy’ between human beings. The noosphere is not just a thinking sphere: it is also a sphere of *feeling*:

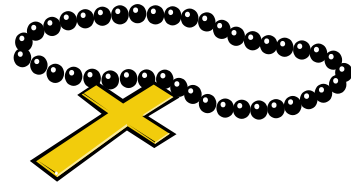
...The pervasion of the human mass by the power of sympathy. It may in part be passive sympathy...but above all a state of active sympathy in which each human element, breaking out of the its insulated state under the impulses of tensions generated in the Noosphere, will emerge into a field of prodigious affinities...(p 177)

It follows that alongside the creation of global policy networks, we must also consider the formation of networks of human sympathy. We live in a world in which we can no longer be ignorant of the pain and suffering of human beings and other life forms in far-away places with strange sounding names. The existence of a system of global communications now means that we can feel for people who may live thousands of miles away. The most dramatic examples of this are the evolution of organizations all over the world which try to relieve the sufferings of those afflicted by war, and natural disasters. The first *Band Aid* concert was in 1984 – which was prompted by a BBC news broadcast of hunger in Ethiopia. Since then, we have grown used to the idea of generating mass (global) sympathy for human beings – and other life forms – that are suffering. The noosphere was not just about the evolution of a global brain: Teilhard also argued that it could lead to humanity developing a global *heart*!

And so, the process of planetization involves the continued evolution of *zoon politikon*: the realization that our problems are no longer confined to the agora of a small town or city, or the agora of a nation. Political and economic life on earth increasingly takes place on a planetary level. The *future of man* is therefore inextricably linked to the evolution of political life: to the evolution of the *global agora*. Whether mankind can develop a sense of a common humanity and adapt to the powerful evolutionary forces which are compressing and shaping our planet is something which will ultimately depend on our will to develop a global perspective on the problems which we face. In a world in which so many of our

problems are complex and global in nature, Teilhard's vision as a scientist and a priest appears to me to be increasingly more relevant to public policy as well as religious and theological debate. Teilhard can help to influence the formation of a new politics of hope and faith in the future, and inspire us with a vision of the possibilities for life on earth. It is vision which we so urgently need in the world today.

Professor Wayne Parsons



## In the Words of Teilhard...

The following quotation is taken from *The Making of a Mind: Letters from a Soldier Priest 1914-1918*. Teilhard was replying to a letter from his cousin Marguerite, who had expressed to him something of the difficulties she was finding in 'living in the world as though not being of the world'.

This is what he had to say:

Above all, trust in the *slow* work of God. We are, quite naturally, impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being *on the way* to something *unknown*, something *new*. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability – and that may take a very long time.

...And so, I think it is with you. Your ideas mature gradually – let them grow; let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to 'force' them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you surely through the obscurity and the 'becoming', and accept, for love of him, the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

Letter of 4<sup>th</sup> July 1915.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *The Making of a Mind*. London: Collins, 1965, pp. 57-59.

May the abiding peace of our Lord dwell within you...Your vocation is taking shape and your place in life is gradually being prepared. (Ibid. P97).

## In the Words of Blessed John Henry Newman...

### *One Step at a Time*

Act up to your light, though in the midst of difficulties, and you will be carried on, you do not know how far. Abraham obeyed the call and journeyed, not knowing whither he went; so we, if we follow the voice of God, shall be brought on step by step into a new world, of which before we had no idea.

This is His gracious way with us: He gives, not all at once, but by measure and season, wisely.

To him that hath, more shall be given. But we must begin at the beginning. Each truth has its own order; we cannot join the way of life at any point of the course we please; we cannot learn advanced truths before we have learned primary ones.

(*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, viii.)

John Henry Newman *Prayers, Poems and Meditations*. Selected and Introduced by A. N. Wilson. Second Edition. London: SPCK, 2007, p.104.



Google - Maryann Shores From Human Energy by Teilhard de Chardin - page 150  
<http://maryann.enigmadream.com/Noetic3/we-are-called.gif>

Used with thanks to Maryann Shores.

## Sacred Evolution

**The following quotes from Teilhard are given as an introduction to aid our reflection on Jane Bingeman's article 'Reflections on Ascension Island' – a 'tiny triangular dot...set in the... vast Atlantic Ocean' - part of this, our beautiful planet Earth, which Teilhard encourages us to see as being 'borne ever onwards in the stream of universal becoming'. ROSEMARY CATTELL**

As early as 1916, writing even during leave from the trenches, in his essay *Cosmic Life* Teilhard sought to communicate the message that the '...inexpressibly wonderful work...' that is being carried on in the whole of nature is to be appreciated through '*sacred evolution*' ('Cosmic Life' 1916, *Writings in Time of War*, p.17.)

The Incarnation is a making new, a restoration, of *all* the universes forces and powers; Christ is the Instrument, the Centre, the End, of the *whole* of animate and material creation; through Him, *everything* is created, sanctified, and vivified. ('Cosmic Life' p.58.)

Teilhard desires to communicate the reconciliation of God and the world:

By the Incarnation, which redeemed man, the very Becoming of the Universe, too, has been transformed. Christ is the term *of even the natural* evolution of living beings; **evolution is holy**. There we have *the truth that makes free*, the divinely prepared cure for faithful but ardently moved minds that suffer because they cannot reconcile in themselves two almost equally imperative and vital impulses, faith in the world and faith in God. ('Cosmic Life' p.59.)

### Reflections on Ascension Island by Jane Bingeman.

Photographs by John Bingeman

**“Evolution sits there and looks at you”** – that is how I described Ascension Island to Rosemary Cattell. The island is a tiny triangular dot, 7 miles by 5, set in the middle of the vast Atlantic Ocean, 8° south of the Equator and fifteen hundred miles from Brazil and Angola, the nearest land masses. Simon Winchester in his book “Outposts” described Ascension as:

“...indeed an eerie place. It is a volcano, placed on the very crest of an Abyssal suture line, the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, and is in consequence very new. .... Geologists explain it by asking one to imagine a mid-Atlantic conveyor-belt moving islands out and away from the ridge. Those on it - Ascension, Tristan da Cunha, Iceland – are still being formed; those away from it – the Canaries ...St Helena – are old, and have drifted miles since their formation.

Ascension looks as though it should still be smouldering. “Hell with the fire put out,” someone called it – and it looks rather like a gigantic slag-heap, with runs of ashy rubble, piles of cinders and fantastically shaped flows of frozen lava. Nothing – at least, not among the peaks and plants I saw as I drove from the airport – had been carved by weather, nor has anything had its outline smoothed by millions of years of erosion. Ascension is the earth in its raw state, unlovely and harsh, and grudging in its attitude to the life that clings to it.”



The Sisters Peaks  
from the road to English Bay



Green Mountain in the distance

Ascension Island is, in fact, 40 volcanoes, Green Mountain at 2,817 feet being about a million years old and the most recent erupting five or six hundred years ago. A writer in 1962 stated that it would take thousands of years for the island to become green like St Helena. We have been visiting since 1979 and recognise his description of the barren hills apart from the top of Green Mountain, but each year since then greening has been fast and noticeable. As recently as 1991 the volcanoes were beautiful conical hills in shades of rust, maroon and ochre. Most now are supporting plants, some being completely green making it difficult to recall why Red Hill was ever called red. Green Mountain is green down to the clinker plains; and the road running south east, the direction of the trade winds, past the full length of Green Mountain is now completely green.

How such an isolated island is colonised is an infinitely fascinating subject and the Ascension Island Government now runs a Conservation Department to research the history of such a young natural environment and monitor and protect what is there. The feral cats have been eradicated so that seabirds can return to the Island to nest, rather than all crowding on to Boatswainbird Island and a few other isolated stacks. The seabirds include fairy terns, three species of boobies, two tropicbirds (known as boatswainbirds) and two noddies.

The frigatebird (*Fregata Aquila*) is endemic; as are sooty terns (known locally as Wideawakes) which have an unusual nesting cycle of 9½ months. There are endemic shrimps and crickets, and even the mouse which is doing well since the eradication of the cats, is endemic.

#### Sooty Terns nesting on Wideawake Fairs

Seven plants are endemic, 5 ferns, a grass and the Ascension spurge, and they are being propagated to ensure survival. Other tropical plants have been brought in over the years, mainly from Kew Gardens and the Botanical Gardens at Capetown, to attract more rain to the Island. Green Mountain, now a rain forest, is an internationally recognised National Park. Although many species of land birds have been imported, only four have become established.



My particular interest is the fish - John and I have written the definitive book, *Inshore Sea Life*. Many of them are endemic probably amounting to as many as fourteen species - angelfish, blennies, crabs, damselfish, gobies, hawkfish, razorfish and seabream have all adapted and evolved. Marine biologists have been arguing over the St Helena Wrasse (*Thalassoma sanctaehelenae*) as it is considered to be just one wrasse, but colourings which are significantly different make that difficult to believe. An international scientific paper suggests that the Ascension Wrasse has only recently split off from the St Helena Wrasse – evolution in process!

#### Ascension Wrasse *Thalassoma ascensionis* (the striped fish)



Fish are also swimming into the area – since 1998, the almaco jack (*Seriola rivoliana*) and greater amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*); and only last year the whitespotted filefish (*Cantherhines macrocerus*). No one knows why, every few years, fish are found dead in considerable numbers on beaches all round the island; this changes the underwater balance of species. It is thought that slightly increased water temperature could be the cause. An underwater volcanic black smoker is only 40 miles away.



And then there is the wonder of the Green Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) which travel 1500 miles from Brazil to mate, come ashore through the rollers and lay their eggs in the sandy beaches. It is a sobering thought that these animals have been around for 200 million years, when South America and Africa were much closer to each other. It must have been a relief to some of them to find Ascension Island a million years ago when volcanic action raised this mountain peak above the surface of the sea.

The story of how Man adjusted to living on an isolated island which does not support life - there is no natural source of water - is an inspiration. Initially the Island was HMS Ascension, the Royal Marines being sent there to make sure Napoleon wasn't sprung from St Helena, 700 miles away. It developed as a supply base for ships enforcing the anti-slavery laws. The Great Warehouse, the largest building in the southern hemisphere at the time, was surrounded by smaller buildings to sustain ship maintenance and repair. In Breakneck Valley there are still beautiful, straight Norfolk Island pines (*Araucaria excelsa*) awaiting the need to replace masts for sailing ships! At the same time a hospital and sanatorium were built as places of healing in Ascension's pure air for sailors suffering from fevers contracted whilst serving on the West Africa coast (and there are many graves of those who didn't survive).

To solve the water problem rain catchment areas were built around the shoulders of Green Mountain. Donkeys were used to bring the water down to Garrison (now called Georgetown), the settlement on the west coast which had the most sheltered bay for ships to anchor. Sheep were imported for meat and have now split into the well-nourished mountain sheep living in lush rain forest, and plains sheep living in volcanic desert conditions on a very sparse diet. One may not think of tough Royal Marines being farmers and shepherds, but they tended flocks of sheep and herds of cows as well as growing their own produce whilst living initially in caves in the harshest conditions.

Nowadays water is desalinated and the descendants of the donkeys are wild. Green Mountain's rain forest has descended its steep slopes, and plants once cultivated by the farm are wild.

The somewhat improbable history of life on an island described by Lawrence G Green as: "a grim, unlovely island with an atmosphere as weird as anything you will find on the face of the oceans" is a story of remarkable courage and achievement against the odds. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century closed, an underwater telephone cable was laid from South Africa to Cornwall via Ascension Island by the Eastern Telegraph Company (now Cable & Wireless) to carry news of the Boer War. Today, the BBC relays her World Service to Africa and South America; communications in this isolated place remain a reason for people to live there.

And now? On this tiny island in the middle of a vast ocean, Man is monitoring the depths of the planet for seismic action and tectonic movement; and tracking both American and European satellites as they curve beyond this planet into the space of the Universe.

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Our thanks again to Maryann Shores for permission to share her 'Noetic Art' in this newsletter.  
See <http://maryann.enigmadream.com/Noetic3/index.php> for so much more!

## Contributions for the February 2011 Newsletter

The Editorial Team would be pleased to receive  
contributions for the June Newsletter

*by 31 January 2011*

Please send hard copy to Rosemary Cattell at  
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West Sussex, RH13 0AL

E-mail contributions, in Word, are most welcome.  
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