

Teilhard's Proposition for Peace

Teilhard's Proposition for Peace:

Rediscovering the Fire

By

Jean Maalouf

“The day will come when, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”
(Teilhard de Chardin)

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I dedicate this book

to my beloved companions on the path to peace,
to those whose eyes perceive the inter-connection of all things in
the one earth, one universe, and one God,
to those who are or will be engaged in reconciling what seems
irreconcilable, in bringing love where hatred seems to
predominate, and in making peace prevail where
violence seems to have the upper hand,
and to those who are the peace they want to see around them.

With love, faith, and hope.

A new way of seeing, combined with a new way of acting – that is what we need.

— Teilhard de Chardin (AE, p. 295 -- VII, p. 308)

If we are to be able to love one another must we not first effect a change of plane?

—Teilhard de Chardin (AE, p. 74 -- VII, p. 81)

Indeed, at the rate that consciousness and its ambitions are increasing, the world will explode if it does not learn to love.

—Teilhard de Chardin (VP, p. 214 -- III, p. 300)

We are standing, at the present moment, not only at a change of century and civilization, but a change of epoch.

—Teilhard de Chardin (VP, p. 75 -- III, p. 107)

The age of nations has passed. Now, unless we wish to perish we must shake off our old prejudices and build the earth.

—Teilhard de Chardin (HE, p. 37 -- VI, p. 46)

We now have to accept it as proven that mankind has just entered into what is probably the most extensive period of transformation it has known since its birth. The seat of the evil we are suffering from is to be found in the very foundations of thought on earth. Something in the general structure of Spirit: it is a new type of life that is beginning.

—Teilhard de Chardin (SC, pp. 128-9 -- IX, p. 169-70)

And then, struck at its source, the conflict will die of its own accord, never to break out again.

—Teilhard de Chardin (AE, p. 20 -- VII, p. 26)

It will not be long before the human mass closes in upon itself and groups all its members in a definitively realized unity.

—Teilhard de Chardin (HM, p. 184 -- XII, p. 267)

To see or to perish.

—Teilhard de Chardin (PM, p. 31 -- I, p. 25)

Mankind is not only capable of living in peace but by its very structure cannot fail eventually to achieve peace.

—Teilhard de Chardin (FM, p. 157 -- V, p. 194)

The day will come when, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.

—Teilhard de Chardin (TF, pp. 86-7 -- XI, p. 92)

If the doors of perception were cleansed, then everything would appear as it actually is, infinite.

—William Blake.

What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God.

—Hans Urs von Balthasar

Love is the only future God offers

—Victor Hugo

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AE *Activation of Energy*. Trans. by René Hague. New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963 – *L'Activation de l'Energie*. Paris: Seuil, 1963. (VII)
- AM *The Appearance of Man*. Trans. by J.M. Cohen. New York: Harper & Row, 1965 – *L'Apparition de l'Homme*. Paris: Seuil, 1956. (II)
- CE *Christianity and Evolution*. Trans. by René Hague. New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971 -- *Comment Je Crois*. Paris: Seuil, 1969. (X)
- DM *The Divine Milieu*. Trans. by unidentified. New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, 1960 – *Le Milieu Divin*. Paris: Seuil, 1957. (IV)
- FM *The Future of Man*. Trans. by Norman Denny. New York: Harper & Row, 1964 – *L'avenir de l'Homme*. Paris: Seuil, 1959. (V)
- HE *Human Energy*. Trans. By J.M. Cohen. New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969 – *L'Energie Humaine*. Paris: Seuil, 1962. (VI)
- HM *The Heart of Matter*. Trans. by René Hague. New York: A Harvest/HBJ Book, Helen & Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979 – *Le Coeur de la Matière*. Paris: Seuil, 1976. (XIII), and 5 essays first appeared in the French edition of *Ecrits du Temps de la Guerre*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1976, and Editions Bernard Grasset, 1965.
- HU *Hymn of the Universe*. Trans. Gerald Vann. New York: Colophon Books, Harper & Row, 1965 – *L'Hymne de l'Univers*. Paris: Seuil, 1961.
- LF *Lettres Familières de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Mon Ami (1948-1955)*, présentées par Pierre Leroy. France: Le Centurion, 1976.
- LI *Lettres Inédites : Lettres à l'Abbé Gaudefroy et à l'Abbé Breuil*. France : Le Rocher, 1988.
- LIV *Lettres Intimes à Auguste Valensin, Bruno de Solages, Henri de Lubac, André Ravier (1919-1955)*. Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974.
- LM *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier*. Paris: Seuil, 1984.

- LT *Letters from a Traveller*. Trans. by William Collins Sons & Co., Ltd. New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, 1962 – *Lettres de Voyage (1923-1955)*. Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1956.
- LTF *Letters to Two Friends (1926-1952)*. New York: The New American Library, 1967 – *Accomplir l'Homme: Lettres Inédites (1926-1952)*. Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1968.
- LZ *Letters to Léontine Zanta*. Trans. by Bernard Wall. New York: Harper & Row, 1969 – *Lettres à Léontine Zanta*. Bruges, Belgique: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965.
- MM *The Making of a Mind: Letters from a Soldier-Priest (1914-1919)*. Trans. by René Hague. New York: Harper & Row, 1965 – *Genèse d'une Pensée: Lettres (1914-1919)*. Paris: Bernard Grasset Editeur, 1961.
- MPN *Man's Place in Nature*. Trans. by René Hague. New York: Harper & Row, 1966 – *Le Groupe Zoologique Humain*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1956 – and *La Place de l'Homme dans la Nature: Le Groupe Zoologique Humain*. Paris: Seuil, 1977. (VIII)
- PM *The Phenomenon of Man*. Trans. by Bernard Wall. New York: Harper Torchbooks. Harper & Row, 1959, 1965 – *Le Phénomène Humain*. Paris: Seuil, 1955. (I)
- SC *Science and Christ*. Trans. by René Hague. New York: Harper & Row, 1968 – *Science et Christ*. Paris: Seuil, 1965. (IX)
- TF *Towards the Future*. Trans. by René Hague. New York: A Helen & Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975 – *Les Directions de l'Avenir*. Paris: Seuil, 1973. (XI)
- VP *The Vision of the Past*. Trans. by J.M. Cohen. New York: Harper & Row, 1966 – *La Vision du Passé*. Paris: Seuil, 1957. (III)
- WTW *Writings in time of War*. Trans. by René Hague. New York: Harper & Row, 1968 – *Ecrits du Temps de la Guerre*. Paris: Bernard Grasset Editeur, 1965. Paris: Seuil, 1976. (XII)

INTRODUCTION

WHO IS SECURE?

Are there individuals so powerful that they feel totally safe and secure in any circumstances and at any time? Do the super-power nations, with all the most sophisticated weapons they possess, feel so safe and secure that no one can bring them any harm? Does militarism and massive might bring peace to the world? Why does war, temporary by its nature, seem not to ever end? Why do we need enemies in the first place? Why is war an easier choice than peace? What makes us afraid of peace? Can one uproot fear and distrust by a gun ready to shoot? Does a life lived in a deep underground bunker make us immune to attacks and terrorism? Then, and if this is the case, why is it that the safest city in the world is the one that does not need police officers in the street?

Like the other false gods, the illusion of a “militarism” mentality does not bring peace to an individual or to a nation, and much less to the world. The reality is that violence begets violence. No matter how much we would like to see it otherwise, the war on terror, for example, remains violence versus violence. Both sides invoke God, morality, justice, and peace, and both sides accuse the other of crimes against humanity. Yet, the end result remains the same: no peace.

What is wrong with this picture?

What is wrong is that the fight is taking place on the wrong battlefield; we are just fighting the symptoms. The real battlefield is far beyond. It is in the very depths of the human minds and hearts. That is why no matter how powerful we think we are with our muscles, wealth, positions, and weapons, we remain very vulnerable to any adversity, and our security remains a myth. The truth is that we are at war, declared or undeclared, at all times and on all fronts.

Indeed, we have wars of religions and ideologies, and wars of races, languages, and classes. We have economic wars, commercial wars, and technological wars. We have cultural wars, demographic wars, and generational wars. We have family wars, gender wars, and personal wars. We have legal and illegal wars, social and human rights wars, and partisan and prejudicial wars. We have nuclear wars, north-south wars, and world

wars. We have wars of necessity and wars of choice. We have wars for the control of energy sources and raw material and for power and domination. We have terrorism wars and wars on terrorism, wars for property, drugs, alcohol, and sex, and wars of values, priorities, and references. We have frictions, divisions, partitions, dysfunctions, and destabilizations – individual and collective. Nothing seems stable, definite, or definitive.

Think of the “forever” Middle East fights. Think of the millions of refugees in any country and continent. Think of the violence that strikes our biggest American and European cities. Think of the huge number of those who commit violent crimes for a reason or for no reason at all. Think of the dictators who are always ready to kill anyone who does not seem loyal enough. Think of the abusers. Think of “us” versus “others” mentality. Think of those who die simply because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The world is on fire.

In such a context, doesn't it look naive and childish to speak of peace? Yet, we all speak about peace and we prepare for war. We all preach peace and we make sure that the fighters have the necessary weapons to continue the fight. We sign peace treaties with each other and we hurry to break them at the surge of other interests. We form alliances to minimize the risk of an enemy attack and we find ways not to comply with our promises. We create international agencies to help create an atmosphere of reconciliation and understanding among all the peoples of the earth and we find ways to neutralize these agencies and make them ineffective. We urge others to work for reforms, transparency, and free elections, and we often fail to do what we urge others to do. We condemn the barbaric acts we see elsewhere and we forget that our history was not immune to these same acts.

Is this a hopeless situation for which there is no solution?

Paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) who also was a philosopher, theologian, poet, and mystic, did not believe that. He declared the final war – a war against all wars. He wanted the energy that was used for wars to be used for peace instead. Wars cannot be solved at the sociological and political levels; a discussion and agreement at these levels did not achieve much. Wars have their solutions at the philosophical, theological, and mystical levels. Wars begin in the mind and heart and they will end where they started. “... struck at its source,” Teilhard wrote, “the conflict will die of its own accord, never to break out again.”¹ Therefore a change of mind and heart will bring reconciliation to divided

¹ AE, p.20 -- VII, p. 26.

families, cities, nations, races, and civilizations, and will make bombs unnecessary, outmoded, and obsolete. When we change our way of thinking and we aim to a higher consciousness, the walls that separate us from our true selves and from each other will inevitably collapse of their own accord. Teilhard indicated clearly where the real battlefield was. He wrote in 1940: "I am more and more convinced that the real battlefield, today, is not in Dover, Egypt, or Rumania," (he would have certainly added 'or in the Middle East, or in Africa, or in any corner of the earth,' if he was writing this day), "but in Man's mind and soul."²

Humans seem bored because they don't have a purpose to justify what they are doing. They need to know why they are doing what they are doing, but they don't, and that is a big problem. In his book *The Search for Meaning*, Alfred Stern insightfully wrote:

In principle an individual life becomes meaningful when it is based on a *life project*, for then it has a *purpose*, the execution of which is its *justification*. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote the famous sentence: "Celui qui donne un coup de pioche veut connaître un sens à son coup de pioche » -- he who gives a blow of the pickax, wants to ascribe a meaning to the blow of his pickax. He can do it, by integrating this blow into the totality of a life project. Within this project, every blow of his pickax could gain a meaning. The great crisis of the search for meaning we are undergoing now comes from the fact that in spite of all the progress of science and technology, modern life does not seem to offer enough stimulating projects which would make it meaningful. One of the first modern men who became aware of this crisis was probably Friedrich Nietzsche. He called it nihilism. "What does nihilism mean?" he asked, and his answer was: "That the supreme values are depreciated.... The goal is lacking, the answer to the question: "What for?"³

André Malraux also thought that our civilization did not know the answer to the question: what are people doing on earth?

Teilhard disagreed. For him, "Man will never consent to labour like a Sisyphus."⁴ He knew why we were here for; he called for the formation of "a human front"⁵ to "build the earth"⁶ transforming it into "Super-

² LTF, p. 149 -- *Accomplir l'homme*, p. 179.

³ Alfred Stern, Ph.D., *The Search for Meaning: Philosophical Vistas* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1971), p. 12.

⁴ VP, p. 231 -- III, p. 323.

⁵ SC, p. 145 -- IX, p. 187.

⁶ HE, p. 37 -- VI, p. 46.

Humanity, Super-Christ, Super-Charity.”⁷ A radical transformation should take place at the deepest level of our being, first. From within, we will learn how to see. “*Seeing*,” wrote Teilhard, “We might say that the whole of life lies in that verb – if not ultimately, at least essentially.... *To see or to perish* is the very condition laid upon everything that makes up the universe, by reason of the mysterious gift of existence.”⁸

To build the earth or to destroy it; what are we going to decide? Humanity is at a crossroads and we have to choose. We must believe in the world, in life, in progress, in human beings. We must find ways to be more creative in order to reach our common goal. There is an exit to despair. There is an answer to our problems. There is a meaning, a sparkle of light, a twinkle of hope to our life. We should believe in that, as a first step. Teilhard offered the following striking comparison:

Imagine a party of miners, cut off when their roof collapses, and trying to regain the surface through a rescue tunnel. It is obvious that they will not continue to make their way towards the top unless they have reason to believe from some indication (a glimmer of light, a draft of air from above) that the passage is not blocked ahead of them. Similarly (though not sufficient attention is given to this) man would have no heart, no reason, to exert himself in causing mankind to advance beyond itself through unification, if the only effect of this fine effort were one day to bring it sharp, with added force and impetus, against an impossible wall.⁹

In fact, at the present time, we are like such prisoners living with all kinds of obstacles that block our roads and blind our views. If we don’t believe that it is possible to get out, there will be no exit. There will instead be despair and loss of taste for living and working.

We need to choose to build the earth. By faith, confidence, work, progress, personalization, socialization, and unification, we need to build the earth. Then, peace becomes not only possible, but also inevitable.

It is amazing how Teilhard, the prophet of this age, as he was called, the mystic of today, and the “pilgrim of the future,”¹⁰ seems so optimistic,

⁷ See SC, pp. 151-173 -- IX, pp. 193-217. With regard to the “Super-Christ” that could bring doubt and confusion, Teilhard was quick to clarify by saying: “By Super-Christ, I most certainly do not mean *another* Christ, a second Christ different from and greater than the first. I mean *the same* Christ, the Christ of all time, revealing himself to us in a form and in dimensions, with an urgency and area of contact, that are enlarged and given new force” (SC, p. 164 -- IX, p. 208).

⁸ PM, p. 31 -- I, p. 25.

⁹ AE, pp. 173-74 -- VII, p. 180. See also X, p. 239 and II, p. 361.

¹⁰ LT, p.101 -- *Lettres de voyage*, p. 61.

so sure of his vision, and so certain that something transformative is about to happen to the human race. He must have had grave and earnest reasons for believing in it that strongly. Let us see how he sees things. Let us see why his vision, in spite of obvious lacunae, is so attractive that it stirs every mind. Let us see how he builds by destroying, by letting go, by pushing beyond walls and frontiers, and by being creative. Let us see how he conceives the universal civilization by being more ethnic. Let us see how to unite with the whole by being more *one* and more *personal*. Let us see how to become citizens of the world by working to be more nationalistic. Let us see how love, the most difficult thing in the world, does not consist in clinging but rather in being *detached*. Let us see how he can conclude: “everything that formerly made for war now makes for peace.”¹¹ Let us see who we really are and where we are going.

No doubt, a shift – an about-turn – has to occur. We must change direction because “if you don’t change direction,” says a Chinese proverb, “you are most likely to end up where you are going” – an apocalyptic disaster. We must change. Peace cannot come as we are. We still glorify the most criminal and blood thirsty people the earth has ever seen in our history books, schools, and the mass media. We still spend most of our time on secondary things at the expense of the essential. We may prune here and there, change branches, location, culture, and society, and wear another mask, but nothing will really happen. What is needed is a deep transformation, another state of consciousness, and another way of seeing things. This deep transformation should take place especially at this time in human history where we are facing an “axial age,” as Karl Jaspers called it, a new state of evolution, and a “change of epoch,”¹² as Teilhard liked to say.

Does humanity have a future? Does God have a future? Do you have a future? Do I have a future? This is what this book is directly or indirectly trying to answer. It is a conversion to peace. It is a new awareness. It is a searching for a state of being where one feels at home. It is a new light on old truths and also new truths about old lights.

However, this book is not a package book by any means. Nor is it a prescription book. It is more than that. It describes a way of thinking. It portrays a life-style. It calls for a change in attitudes. It could provoke a kind of “nuisance,” “disturbance,” “confusion,” or “mess” situation. This is what a profound purification process does, especially when the process targets the aim of freeing oneself from all biases. If this “war” happens,

¹¹ FM, p. 156 -- V, p. 193.

¹² VP, p. 75 -- III, p. 107.

then this book will have achieved what it has been written for. It was intended to be “The Book of Peace,”¹³ indeed. Peace is a simple by-product of this “war.” It is the authentic “zest for living,”¹⁴ the “discovered fire”¹⁵ of love, and the true fullness of life.

¹³ MM, p. 143 -- *Genèse d'une pensée*, p. 184.

¹⁴ AE, p. 229 -- VII, p. 237.

¹⁵ TF, p. 87 -- XI, p. 92.

PART I

IS PEACE POSSIBLE?

CHAPTER ONE

IS PEACE POSSIBLE?

From the point of view of history, times of war were by far more numerous than times of peace. Even these three or four hundred years of peace during the entire history of humankind, as some historians would like to say, were just years of relative peace or maybe years of preparation for new wars. Our modern history is even worse. “The most obvious characteristic of our age,” as Thomas Merton observed, “is its destructiveness.”¹

But is this a reason that forces us to conclude that peace must be impossible and we will never see it realized? Some people came to such a conclusion. Teilhard de Chardin was not one of them. For Teilhard, peace is not only possible, but it is also certain, inevitable, whole, and cosmic.

Peace is possible

Teilhard clearly states: “In the first place I maintain that peace – I mean, some form of universal and stable peace – is *possible* in human terms.”² More than that, he even goes on to condemn “the affected resignation and false realism with which in these days a great number of people, hunching their shoulders and drawing in their heads, predict (and in so doing tend to provoke) a further catastrophe in the near future.”³ If war was a conceivable event, this was when humanity was in the period of expanding on the planet and when war was a means of solving a problem in a more decisive way. But, in a humanity that is of “converging branches,”⁴ war does not solve problems for the simple reason that it works from the outside when the real problem and the solutions are not from the outside. The real battlefield is elsewhere.

¹ See *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, edited by Brother Patrick Hart (New York: New Direction Publishing Corporation, 1981), p. 355.

² FM, p. 155 -- V, p. 192.

³ FM, p. 154 -- V, p. 191.

⁴ FM, p. 154 -- V, p. 193.

Peace is certain

We keep trying and trying to find an appropriate way to achieve a state of a highly desired peace, and we keep failing every time. Then we conclude that a lasting peace is out of reach and never certain. But this is not what Teilhard thinks.

Teilhard tells us that peace is not only possible but it is also assured. He wrote: “Do you not see that the peace which you no longer dare to hope for ... is possible and indeed certain, provided you will grasp what the word ‘peace’ means and what it requires from you?”⁵ He also wrote: “Peace therefore is certain: it is only a matter of time. Inevitable, with an inevitability which is nothing but the supreme expression of liberty, we are moving laboriously and self-critically toward it.”⁶ This certainty is based on the sequence of crises the universe has lived and experienced from the beginning. At each stage, when any impasse would have blocked any development, new solutions have emerged and a new push has occurred to enable the earth to organize itself, and humanity to develop and grow. Teilhard wrote in 1942:

Taken as a whole, the phenomenon of the present war (precisely because it can be seen to be total and universal) bears a positive mathematical sign. Whatever you may say, then – whatever appearances may suggest to me – whatever may happen – there remains a *fact* of a higher order than all other facts, in virtue of which I can only answer: after five hundred million years of mankind the earth is still developing its organicity: its psychic temperature is rising. Therefore it is still advancing.⁷

It is curious and fascinating at the same time to see an architect of the future, as Teilhard was considered by many, taking undeniable events from the past to consolidate his vision of a greater expansion of life for centuries to come. It is no less curious and fascinating to see an architect of peace using the war event as a possible way for a future peace. Such an approach, unless one puts it in the context of the big picture of Teilhard’s gigantic vision, remains for the short-sighted person shocking and completely “politically incorrect.” Indeed, if taken out of context, it might be so.

⁵ FM, p. 154 -- V, pp. 191-92.

⁶ FM, p. 158 -- V, p. 195.

⁷ AE, p. 91 -- VII, pp. 97-8.

Peace is inevitable

An attitude of total optimism and confidence in the future can be justified by a great vision. Teilhard had this vision. Completely convinced of it, he did not hesitate to write: “It is hard to escape the conclusion... that despite all appearances to the contrary Mankind is not only capable of living in peace but by its very structure *cannot eventually fail to achieve peace*.”⁸ Therefore, one should think that it is not war that is inevitable but peace.

In spite of the historical evidence against the possibility of peace – each generation having had its wars and all kinds of conflicts that give the impression that evil is rather increasing with the growth of civilization – humanity is nonetheless heading towards peace. That is because the human species shows a convergence into races, peoples, nations, and universalism. If, at a lower level, success comes through the elimination of opposition, the real success, at the human level, is the outcome of a “*union [that] differentiates*,”⁹ as Teilhard calls it. Then, he goes even further. While admitting, of course, that we are free and that everyone, individually, could say “No,” collectively, we cannot say, “No” because we cannot escape the tide of life.¹⁰ Teilhard is so adamant about that that he affirms without hesitation:

... the earth is more likely to stop turning than is Mankind, as a whole, likely to stop organizing and unifying itself. For if this interior movement were to stop, it is the Universe itself embodied in Man, that would fail to curve inwards and achieve totalisation. And nothing, as it seems, can prevent the universe from succeeding – nothing, not even our human liberties, whose essential tendency to union may fail in detail cannot (without ‘cosmic’ contradiction) err *statistically*.¹¹

⁸ FM, p. 157 -- V, p. 194.

⁹ PM, p. 262 -- I, p. 291; also VI, pp. 80-81, 129, 179,; VII, p. 122; X, p. 200.

¹⁰ Beatrice Bruteau observed that Teilhard “has renewed hope by projecting a vision of the future in which our dreams of unity, peace, and full development come true through an almost inevitable evolution. He has not, of course, delivered us from all insecurity, because the evolution is not absolutely inevitable, but depends upon our own actions. Man’s freedom constitutes the very path along which the forces of evolution now must pass – or in which they can be blocked. Teilhard admits that the issue may fall either way.” (Beatrice Bruteau, *Evolution Toward Divinity: Teilhard de Chardin and the Hindu Traditions* (Wheaton, Ill: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1974), p. 8.

¹¹ FM, pp. 157-58 -- V, pp. 194-95.

Peace is, therefore, inevitable – inevitable by structure. It is a structural peace. It is coming. “It is only a matter of time,”¹² as Teilhard clearly indicated.

Peace is indivisible

Coherence, harmony, suitability, congruity, unison, consonance, euphony are among the many names for peace. To live in peace is to live undivided as societies and as individuals at any level – physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. A shattered and fragmented mind shatters and fragments reality. The earth, as it is the case for the individual, will survive only if it keeps its integrity as a single organic reality. The elements of nature and the nations of the earth are important for the whole, as the body, mind, and soul are important for the human being. The earth is for every nation, and every nation is an indispensable and unique part of the earth. No nation can possess the air on earth, or the waters, or the light, or the temperatures.... Those things must circulate everywhere. They sustain the very life of the whole as well as every part of it. Partial air entails death. So it is for peace. Peace in pieces entails death, too. Air must circulate everywhere. Peace, too, must circulate everywhere. A divided peace, like a divided nation, a divided body, a divided mind, a divided heart... is no peace. Peace is “*the awareness of Unity*,”¹³ wrote Teilhard. In fact, we are on the march towards this unity, and soon we will be “one solid block.” This is how Teilhard put it:

It will not be long before the human mass closes in upon itself and groups all its members in a definitively realized unity. Respect for one and the same law, one and the same orientation, one and the same spirit, are tending to overlay the permanent diversity of individuals and nations. Wait but a little longer, and we shall form but one solid block. The cement is *setting*.¹⁴

Peace is dynamic

“The unity of the world,” wrote Teilhard, “rests on constructive work – work directed towards concentration and not release of tension.”¹⁵ In a converging effort, tension remains but changes direction. The energy that

¹² FM, p. 158 -- V, p. 195.

¹³ WTW, p. 110 -- XII, p. 148.

¹⁴ HM, pp. 184-85 -- XII, p. 267.

¹⁵ TF, p. 49 -- XI, p. 55.

was previously spent in war is channeled now toward unification, transformation, and progress. Teilhard says: "Everything that formerly made for war now makes for peace.... In short, true peace, the only kind that is biologically possible, betokens neither the ending nor the reverse of warfare, but war in a naturally sublimated form."¹⁶ He sometimes sees in wars "a crisis of growth,"¹⁷ and says that "Peace cannot mean anything but a *higher process of conquest*."¹⁸ In this sense, wars, especially when they are not frontier conflicts, or interest conflicts, can be for more universalization and more liberation, at least in their consequences. Peace, therefore, is a dynamic process not a static state; a stirring awareness not a passive calmness; and a transforming human convergence not an idle standstill.

Peace is cosmic

The cosmic dimension of peace adds a very important note to the dynamic condition of peace. That is because the human being is not only a social being, but also a cosmic being. Teilhard explained: "This, then is *the word that gives freedom*: it is not enough for man to throw off his self-love and *live as a social being*. *He needs to live* with his whole heart, in union with the totality of the world that carries him along, *cosmically*."¹⁹ He also said: "Indeed, we are called by the music of the universe to reply, each with his own pure and incommunicable harmonic."²⁰ This is how we prove practically that we are aware of our "cosmic sense" and that we are collaborating with the universe, and actively participating in it. Such an awareness of our "oneness" with the "all" must have a direct effect on reducing our fear or repulsion of others. This also puts us on the right path toward a realized peace.

If peace is possible, certain, inevitable, indivisible, dynamic, and cosmic, it is not by any means an easy matter to achieve in an overnight setting. Hard work is to be expected. Many obstacles, that are found in our backyards before other places, need to be removed. Our prejudices, our learning, our interpretations of the facts, and especially our biases, need to be carefully reconsidered, reexamined, and reevaluated.

¹⁶ FM, pp. 156 and 159 -- V, pp. 193 and 196.

¹⁷ WTW, p. 281 -- XII, p. 421 ; AE, p. 14 -- VII, p. 20.

¹⁸ LTF, p. 146 -- *Accomplir l'homme*, p. 176.

¹⁹ WTW, p. 27 -- XII, p. 33.

²⁰ HE, p. 150 -- VI, p. 186.

CHAPTER TWO

IMPEDIMENTS TO PEACE

Is there any secure place on earth? Where is it? Could it be a prison?

Paradoxically, a prison is supposed to be the most secure place on earth. In fact, it is much more difficult to murder a prisoner – at least in principle – than to murder a leader of a country. A prisoner must feel safer than a leader does.

A prison is a safe and secure place; in the “peace” of a prison, there is no danger. But who wants to live there? The reality is that safety and security can cohabitate with the lack of freedom, but not as much with freedom. In the open space of freedom, there are “risks,” “adventures,” “dangers,” and “insecurity.” But there is also deep faith and great hope.

No wonder we somehow create our own prisons, and we also are eager to escape from them.

We create our own protection tools and places with our minds; we build bunkers; we erect walls; we establish frontiers; we invent systems, categories, institutions, and laws; we fabricate refuges, masks, and covers; we manufacture armors, guns, and bombs; we rely on lies, deceptions, and hypocritical lifestyles; we escape through drugs, alcohol, and “spiritual fantasies.” We do all these things and much more because we are afraid – afraid of our reality. We looked for peace in these measures of protection but we found only another prison waiting for us, and we also found ourselves wanting to scream: “... we cannot breathe. We must have air.”¹

These things, in Teilhard de Chardin’s world, have particular names and they all are impediments to peace. They are: slavery to “words,” the “demon of immobilism,” “nostalgia for the snows of yesteryear,” “religion,” “loss of true values,” “fear and enclosure,” “boredom-impasse.” Teilhard thought that these were against life and they impeded the way to a real peace. How so?

¹ SC, p. 144 -- IX, 185.

Slavery to “words”²

“Words, words, words,”³ says Hamlet. We seem to live in a world of words. They are basic structures in our minds and in our culture. But do the same words mean the same things to everyone who uses them? Of course not. That is why a literal interpretation, as well as a literal way of thinking, and a literal mentality, should be rejected. This is what Teilhard did. The examples of his position are numerous in his writings. Look at this:

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. It was in 1789 that this famous slogan electrified the western world: but as events have shown, its meaning was far from clear to the minds of those it inspired. Liberty – to do *anything*? Equality -- in *all* respects? Fraternity -- based on *what* common bonds? ... Even today the magical words are much more felt than understood.⁴

Then Teilhard goes on developing what meaning to give to “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” which are “no longer indeterminate, amorphous and inert, but directed, guided, dynamised by the growth of a fundamental impulse which underlies and sustains them.”⁵ He also wrote: “I think I cried ... when I read the famous slogan, ‘Work, family, country!’ Where are our fathers of ’89!”⁶ Elsewhere, he went on to consider that the “old ideologies (democracy, communism, fascism) no longer have meaning”⁷ and that they cover growths that are completely heterogeneous.

When pushed to their extreme, liberalism and legalism become diseases that invade especially religions, traditions, politics, ways of thinking and living, and consequently rule our minds and behaviors. Words become a means of control and a way to power, prestige, and business. Human beings give their lives for words, for mere words. They

² MM, p. 201 -- *Genèse d'une pensée*, p. 261.

³ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 2. In response to an annoying question from Polonius: “What do you read, my lord?” Hamlet says “Words, words, words.”

⁴ FM, pp. 250-51 -- V, p. 312.

⁵ FM, p. 251 -- V, pp. 312-13.

⁶ LTF, p. 100 -- *Accomplir l'homme*, p. 122.

⁷ In a letter to l'Abbé Gaudefroy dated on 11 October 1936, Teilhard wrote: “Il me semble que toutes les vieilles catégories (démocraties, communisme, fascisme) ne signifient plus rien et couvrent des poussées absolument hétérogènes. Je conçois un nouveau mouvement ... qui opèrerait le ralliement sur les 3 mots suivants : non plus liberté, égalité, fraternité, mais universalisme, futurisme, personnalisme... » (LI, p. 114).

can kill for a mere word. A single word can provoke a profound disturbance and, sometimes, it can cause a war.

Literal thinking is stereotyped thinking. Literalism creates prejudices. It does not bring peace; it kills.

The demon of immobilism”⁸

People of our time and perhaps of all times are, according to Teilhard, divided into two categories. Some are very optimistic, perhaps too naïve, and think that humanity, in spite of its many contradictions and evils, is heading toward a radiant future. The others, on the contrary, are pessimistic, too pessimistic, and think that nothing changes, and the best is already behind. Thus, they think that the best thing to do would be to maintain the present order or make it conform to what was in the past. Since their model is in the past, progress for them has not only a real content, but it can be even dangerous. What there is, they may think, is at least known and experienced, and the new is a risk. The universe is closed. Period. Teilhard observes that “For the sake of human tranquility, in the name of Fact, and in defense of the sacred Established Order, the immobilists forbid the earth to move. Nothing changes they say, or can change.”⁹ Therefore, “immobilism” would be the ideal.

Such an attitude might be a fertile ground for certain hardliners, nationalists, sectarians, racists, integrists, chauvinists, or any kind of religious fanatics. However, being a person of principle is one thing, and being completely closed to the other and the universal is another thing. Paradoxically, if we keep the window open to the universal, the universal in return will make us more nationalist, more conservative, more sectarian; for unity is neither conformity, nor abolition of diversity. On the contrary, “*union differentiates*,”¹⁰ as Teilhard likes to say. So, keeping our door closed does not help world peace, and it does not help to win the theoreticians’ argument of these pessimistic attitudes.

Teilhard did not only dislike the immobilist attitudes, but he saw in them a cause for war. He wrote in 1941, for example: “I am convinced that the present war is, at bottom, a conflict between ‘mobilists’ and ‘immobilists’, and that it will stop the minute the mobilists, in each camp, will recognize each other and drop the political and religious immobilists.”¹¹

⁸ FM, p. 159 -- V, p. 196.

⁹ FM, p. 12 -- V, p. 24.

¹⁰ PM, p. 262 -- I, p. 196.

¹¹ LTF, p. 156 -- *Accomplir l’homme*, p. 189.

A few years later, he thought that if there was no agreement yet, that was because “the demon of immobilism”¹² was still there.

“Nostalgia for the snows of yesteryear”¹³

The so-called original harmony and stability of the past is like a dream – a fairy tale dream in which the heroes find themselves in peace ever after. This is a creation of the mind. Peace cannot be built on something that does not exist anymore. No wonder Teilhard says, “The past is left behind.... Our nostalgia for the snows of yesteryear is morbid. What has been has now no intrinsic interest.”¹⁴

Why is the past “morbid” when we can learn so much from the past and from history? Teilhard did not mean that we learn nothing from the past when he, himself, was a paleontologist who by definition deals with, and learns from, life forms from the past, especially prehistoric life forms. Teilhard wanted to draw attention to the present and the future because living in the past can never bring peace. We live in different times.

A single ideal model for anything no longer exists in our world today. We no longer have a well-defined reference center. We now think differently, live differently, and act differently. The individual no longer finds his or her identity through one simple belonging (family, village, church, company, organization), but through many belongings which intersect or lie parallel (ideology, conservatism, liberalism, intellectual pursuit, clubs, leisure places, electronic connections, etc.). More and more the social body is becoming so huge and differentiated that no one can pretend to have the last word on things. Everything seems to be becoming temporary and ephemeral. Pope Francis denounced many times this kind of what he called “the culture of the provisional.” He said, for example: “Contemporary society and its prevailing cultural models – the ‘culture of the provisional’ – do not provide a climate conducive to the formation of stable life choices with solid bonds, built on the rock of love and responsibility rather than on the sand of emotion.”¹⁵

In such a given context, no real peace can be based on principles received from the past that are already formed and finished products. On the contrary, peace must be developed through new reactions to continually moving structures caused rather by visions from the future.

¹² FM, p. 159 -- V, p. 196.

¹³ VP, p. 188 -- III, p. 265.

¹⁴ VP, pp. 187-88 -- III, p. 265.

¹⁵ See <https://zenit.org/articles/on-overcoming-the-culture-of-the-provisional/>

Teilhard seems to be saying that the interest of the past lies in seeing the evolution of things. So, learn from the past, but don't let the past lead and rule you.

Moreover, since the past is never objective because we usually perceive it as we wish to perceive it, there is a good chance, almost a certainty, one could argue, that the past creates prejudices. Prejudices and peace do not get along. The past, even if it is a source of beauty, honor, and dignity, can also be a colossal enemy as well. Triumphalism and "nationalisms" that are by-products of a glorious past are not really ways for peace. Teilhard would disgrace them with blunt terms. He does not hesitate to say that he hates nationalisms and "their apparent regressions toward the past,"¹⁶ while retaining the human part of it, "What is no more than national may well disappear, but what is human cannot be lost."¹⁷

Religion

Believe it or not, believing in God can be the most serious and, in a sense, most efficient, obstacle to peace. This is what would happen when we create our own god or gods, our own commandments, and our own codes of ethics and practices. Religion was not meant to be this way at all. It was meant to be for growth and not for destruction.

Strangely enough, God has probably become item number one in our technological and materialistic culture. Take a tour in bookstores. Listen to people in the street. Turn on the television. Browse web sites. There are always people talking about God. So, God has not died, even though one would have wished that this "god" we have created to fit our greed and desires would have died. We conduct holy wars in God's name. When we kill in God's name, we do it in many different ways, and not only with weapons. We can kill with words, oppressions, imposed systems, attitudes, sarcasms, and all kinds of intolerances. "Religion," when it allows us to create our own god, can be the most sophisticated weapon for killing people. It would be a great contribution to world peace if this kind of religion just vanishes. After all, the number one enemy of real religion is not heresy, or schism, or skepticism, or even atheism. Its real enemy is the "dogma" itself, when the dogma becomes an ideology, a dead idea, a conventional arrangement, and especially a political means for power. Then it becomes simply a tool for killing both humanity and truth.

¹⁶ In a letter to Père Valensin dated on 28 December 1933, Teilhard wrote: "Je hais les nationalisms, et leurs apparentes régressions vers le passé" (LIV, p. 261).

¹⁷ SC, p. 131 -- IX, p. 172.