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Teilhard on Alienation

VICENTE MARASIGAN, S.J.

The Marxist phenomenon has been regarded in Christian circles as associated mainly with an atheistic posture and an opium theory of religion. Until recently its positive aspects have been largely ignored. Teilhard de Chardin, to whom everything in the order of phenomena was important, sought to understand the Marxist phenomenon in a way that would satisfy his personal demands for coherence and fruitfulness for creative activity.

That these demands have not been satisfied by the existing rationales of Marxism is seen in his disappointment in its having "systematically excluded from its hopes the possibility of a spiritual metamorphosis of the Universe",¹ an exclusion which he could not accept as realistic.

And yet he seemed convinced that the positive values of Marxism could be situated in a larger context and integrated into a more coherent and more fruitful vision of reality.

Meanings of Alienation

One of these positive values is the aspiration to transcend the limitations of human society, which limitations are labelled as "alienation." The concept of alienation, though important in Marxist thinking, is difficult to define. A recent study by

¹ *Building the Earth*, by Teilhard de Chardin, (Dimensions Book, Pa. 1965), p. 28.

Girardi² suggests that there are at least six distinct meanings of "alienation" in Marx's writings: privation, mutilation, estrangement, imaginary identification, contradiction and enslavement. The term is linguistically ambiguous. And yet the historical emergence of a vigorous *praxis* inspired by it is undeniable. It seems that the Marxist message is somehow coming through despite the ambiguity of the medium.

Ambiguity at the Threshold

Teilhard located such a phenomenon on the "critical threshold" of growth of a collective consciousness in the human race. At this threshold, a certain amount of ambiguity is inevitable. Ambiguity in thinking always slows down, and sometimes even prevents, the emergence of the consensus needed for collective creativity. Teilhard might have feared that the forward momentum of Marxism could be slowed down by this ambiguity at the threshold.

To understand this process whereby human societies pass through critical thresholds, Teilhard uses the analogy of a physical change of state associated with rising temperatures:

When water is heated to boiling point under normal pressure, and one goes on heating it, the first thing that follows—without change of temperature—is a (tumultuous) expansion of freed and vaporized (molecules) By these remote comparisons we are able to imagine the mechanism involved in the critical threshold of reflection.³

Then he describes the analogue of a critical threshold for society:

A second original point in my position in *The Phenomenon of Man* — apart from the interpretation of life as a universal function of the cosmos — lies, on the contrary, in giving the appearance on the human line of the power of reflection the value of "threshold" or a change of state. This affirmation is far from being an unwarranted assumption or based initially on any metaphysics of thought. It is a choice depending experimentally on the curiously under-estimated fact that, from the

² *Marxism and Christianity*, by G. Girardi, (Ireland, 1968), pp. 22-23.

³ *Phenomenon of Man*, by Teilhard de Chardin, (Harper Torchbook, New York, 1961) (hereafter to be abbreviated as *Phen.*), p. 168.

threshold of reflection onwards, we are at what is nothing less than a new form of biological existence, characterised, amongst other peculiarities, by the following properties:

a. The decisive emergence in individual life of factors of internal arrangement (*invention*) above the factors of external arrangement (utilisation of the play of chance).

b. The equally decisive appearance between elements of true forces of attraction and repulsion (sympathy and apathy), replacing the pseudo-attractions and pseudo-repulsions of pre-life or even of the lower terms of life, which we seem to be able to refer back to simple reactions to the curves of space-time in the one case, and to the biosphere in the other.

c. Lastly, the awakening in the consciousness of each particular element (consequent upon its new and revolutionary aptitude for foreseeing the future) of a demand for "unlimited survival." That is to say, the passage, for life, from a state of relative irreversibility (the physical impossibility of the cosmic involution to stop, once it has begun) to a state of absolute irreversibility (the radical dynamic incompatibility of a certain prospect of total death with the continuation of an evolution that has become reflective).⁴

Human society as a whole is in fact waking up to this demand for unlimited survival. At the same time it is painfully aware of its actual limitations. The tension between demand and actuality is another aspect of alienation included under the term "privation", i. e., the absence of something due, or the incompleteness of being. Human society is incomplete if it is deficient in intelligence or will, that is to say, if it is deprived of full consciousness or full freedom.

Privation of Consciousness

The evolution of consciousness is a central theme in Teilhard's thinking: In the foreword to *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard says:

The work may be summed up as an attempt *to see* and *to show* what happens to man, and what conclusions are forced upon us, when he is placed fairly and squarely within the framework of phenomenon and appearance.

Why should we want to see, and why in particular should we single out man as our object?

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 302-303.

Seeing. We might say that the whole of life lies in the verb — if not in end, at least in essence. Fuller being is closer union; such is the kernel and conclusion of this book. But let us emphasise the point: union can only increase through an increase in consciousness, that is to say in vision. And that, doubtless, is why the history of the living world can be summarised as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen. After all, do we not judge the perfection of an animal, or the supremacy of a thinking being, by the penetration and synthetic power of their gaze? To try to see more and better is not a matter of whim or curiosity or self-indulgence. *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. And this, in superior measure, is man's condition.⁵

To see or to perish. If the evolution of consciousness is aborted, death follows. The anguish of a dying organism that rebels against death — this is certainly one important aspect of alienation.

In truth, half our present uneasiness would be turned into happiness if we once make up our minds to accept the fact and place the essence and the measure of our modern cosmogonies within a noogenesis. Along the lines of this axis no doubt is possible. The universe has always been in motion and at this moment continues to be in motion. But will it still be in motion tomorrow?

Here only, at this turning point where the future substitutes itself for the present and the observations of science should give way to the anticipations of a faith, do our perplexes legitimately and indeed inevitably begin. Tomorrow? But who can guarantee us tomorrow anyway? And without the assurance that this tomorrow exists, can we really go on living, we to whom has been given—perhaps for the first time in the whole story of the universe—the terrible gift of foresight.

Sickness of the dead end — the anguish of feeling shut in. . . .

This time we have at last put our finger on the tender spot.

What makes the world in which we live specifically modern is our discovery in it and around it of evolution. And I can now add that what disconcerts the modern world at its very roots is not being sure, and not seeing how it ever could be sure, that there is an outcome — *a suitable outcome* — to that evolution.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

And yet technology has opened up such vast potentials for development that the ensuing "future-shock" boggles the imagination. This sense of unfamiliarity, this "estrangement", is terrifying, and in a real sense, alienating:

It is impossible to accede to a fundamentally new environment without experiencing the inner terrors of a metamorphosis. The child is terrified when it opens its eyes for the first time. Similarly, for our mind to adjust itself to lines and horizons enlarged beyond measure, it must renounce the comfort of familiar narrowness. It must create a new equilibrium for every thing that had formerly been so neatly arranged in its small inner world. It is dazzled when it emerges from its dark prison, awed to find itself suddenly at the top of a tower, and it suffers from giddiness and disorientation.⁷

Privation of Freedom

The promise of technological progress carries with it a threat to personal freedom, and such enslavement would be truly alienating. However Teilhard maintains that progress is in the direction of greater freedom:

If progress is to continue, it will not do so of its own accord. *Evolution, by the very mechanism of its syntheses, charges itself with an ever-growing measure of freedom.*⁸

While admitting that certain aspects of modern progress seem to be inimical to individual liberties, Teilhard insists that liberation can be ultimately won in the process:

Whether we like it or not, from the beginning of our history and through all the interconnected forces of matter and spirit, the process of our collectivism has ceaselessly continued, slowly or in jerks, gaining each day. That is the fact of the matter. It is as impossible for Mankind not to unite upon itself as it is for the human intelligence not to go on indefinitely deepening its thought. . . . Instead of seeking, against all the evidence, to deny or disparage the reality of this grand phenomenon, we do better to accept it frankly. Let us look it in the face and see whether using it as an unassailable foundation, we cannot erect upon it a hopeful edifice of joy and liberation.⁹

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁸ *Future of Man*, by Teilhard de Chardin, (Harper & Row, N.Y. 1964) (hereafter to be abbreviated as *Fut.*), p. 72.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

What is probably the most important phenomenon included in the concept of alienation is the master-and-slave relationship. People hesitate to enter into relation with others due to the fear of being enslaved by them, a fear that is well founded on the history of all societies. Consequently isolation appears as the only alternative wherein personal freedom is guaranteed. But isolationism is antithetical to the value of a "united front" or "human solidarity". This principal contradiction is still awaiting objective analysis. The anti-revisionists and conservatives who, in their uncertainty, try to suppress this alienation are merely delaying the synthetic phase of the dialectical process.

You may reply to me that this is all very well, but is there not something lacking an essential element, in this system which I claim to be so coherent? Within that grandiose machine-in-motion which I visualise, what becomes of that pearl beyond price, our personal being? What remains of our freedom of choice and action?

But do you not see that from the standpoint I have adopted it appears everywhere — and is everywhere heightened?...

Where it is a matter of unanimity realised from *within* the effect is to personalise our activities, and, I will add, to make them unerring. A single freedom, taken in isolation, is weak and uncertain and may easily lose itself in mere groping. But a totality of freedom, freely operating, will always end by finding its road. And this incidentally is why throughout this paper, without seeking to minimise the uncertainties inherent in Man's freedom of choice in relation to the world, I have been able implicitly to maintain that we are moving both freely and ineluctably in the direction of concentration by way of planetisation. One might put it that determinism appears at either end of the process of cosmic evolution, but in antithetically opposed forms: at the lower end it is forced along the line of the most probable *for lack of freedom*; at the upper end it is an ascent into the improbable through *the triumph of freedom*.¹⁰

Alienated people may be recognized by their unwillingness, in varying degrees, to relate positively to the human community. In other words, they are isolationists. To some isolationists, community is unnecessary. To others, it is impossible. The first type may be called egoists and the second apathetic. Egoism and apathy — these are the two outstanding types of alienation.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 182-183.

Egoism

Teilhard sees egoism as a dead-end in the evolutionary process. "No evolutionary future awaits man except in association with all other men."¹¹ It is ultimately depersonalizing:

Egoism, whether personal or racial, is quite rightly excited by the idea of the element ascending through faithfulness to life, to the extremes of the incommunicable and the exclusive that it holds with it. It *feels* right. Its only mistake, but a fatal one, is to *confuse individuality with personality*. In trying to separate itself as much as possible from others, the element individualises itself; but in doing so it becomes retrograde and seeks to drag the world backwards towards plurality and into matter. In fact it diminishes itself and loses itself. To be fully ourselves it is in the opposite direction, in the direction of convergence with all the rest, that we must advance—towards the 'others'. The goal of ourselves, the acme of our originality, is not our individuality but our person; and according to the evolutionary structure of the world, we can only find our person by uniting together. There is no mind without synthesis. The same law holds good from top to bottom. The true ego grows in inverse proportion to 'egoism'. Like the Omega which attracts it, element only becomes personal when it universalises itself.

There is, however, an obvious and essential provision to be made. For the human particles to become really personalised under the creative influence of union, they must not — according to the preceding analysis — join up together anyhow. Since it is a question of achieving a synthesis of centres, it is centre to centre that they must make contact and not *otherwise*.¹²

He then lays bare the principal contradiction implied in the egoist position:

Gone, too, (at least virtually and in aspiration), is the infernal circle of egocentrism, meaning the isolation, in some sort ontological, which prohibits our escape from self to share the point of view even of those we love best: as though the universe were composed of as many fragmentary universes, *repelling* each other, as the sum total of the centres of consciousness which it embraces. Who can measure the long chain of harmful, closely interlinked effects which this elemental separatism automatically creates and fosters, by an effect of mass and resonance, within the process of totalisation now taking place in Mankind?...

¹¹ *Phen.*, p. 246.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 263.

We must assume that under the rapidly mounting pressures forcing them upon one another the human molecules will ultimately succeed in finding their way through the critical barrier of mutual repulsion to enter the inner zone of attraction.¹³

Apathy

Apathy is likewise shown to be an evolutionary dead-end. Pessimistic prognostications tend to be self-fulfilling.

I feel and I am convinced of one thing: that nothing is more dangerous for the future of the world, nothing moreover less warranted in Nature, than 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.¹⁴

Optimism is an imperative in the evolutionary process.

First, the hope, This must spring to life spontaneously in every generous spirit faced by the task that awaits us; and it is also the essential *impulse*, without which nothing can be done. A passionate longing to grow, to be, is what we need. There can be no place for the poor in spirit, the skeptics, the pessimists, the sad of heart, the weary and the immobilists. Life is ceaseless discovery. Life is movement.¹⁵

People who justify their apathy with the plea of realism (based on data of a few centuries) are asked in the name of realism to open their eyes to the vaster process at work.

After all half a million years, perhaps even a million, were required for life to pass from the pre-hominids to modern man. Should we now start wringing our hands because, less than two centuries after glimpsing a higher state, modern man is still at loggerheads with himself? Once again we have got things out of focus. To have understood the immensity around us, behind us, and in front of us is already a first step. But if to this perception of depth another perception, that of *slowness*, be not added, we must realise that the transportation of values remains incomplete and that it can beget for our gaze nothing but an impossible world. Each dimension has its proper rhythm. Planetary movement involves planetary majesty. Would not humanity seem to us altogether static if, behind its history, there were not the endless stretch of its pre-history? Similarly, and despite an almost ex-

¹³ *Fut.*, pp. 211-212.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

plosive acceleration of noogenesis at our level, we cannot expect to see the earth transform itself under our eyes in the space of a generation. Let us keep calm and take heart.

In spite of all evidence to the contrary, mankind may very well be advancing all around us at the moment — there are in fact many signs whereby we can reasonably suppose that it is advancing. But, if it is doing so, it must be — as is the way with very big things — doing so almost imperceptibly.¹⁶

Cure of Alienation

Egoism and apathy then are the two traits of alienation. What about the cure? There must be a cure. On this, Teilhard is optimistic. From his own interior struggles, he knew that alienation could be cured. He himself underwent the alienation of living a double life.

There is a category of mind (known to every spiritual director) for which the difficulty takes the form and importance of a constant and paralysing perplexity. Such minds, set upon interior unity, become the victims of a veritable spiritual dualism. On the one hand a very sure instinct mingled with their love of being and their taste for life, draws them towards the joy of creation and knowledge. On the other hand a higher will to love God above all else makes them afraid of the least division or deflection in their allegiances. In the most spiritual layers of their being they experience a tension between the opposing ebb and flow caused by the attraction of the two rival stars we spoke of at the beginning: God and the world. Which of the two is to make itself more nobly adored?

Depending on the greater or less vitality of the nature of the individual, this conflict is in danger of finding its solution in one of the three following ways: either the Christian will repress his taste for the tangible and force himself to centre his interest on purely religious objects only trying to live in a world made divine by the exclusion of the largest possible number of worldly objects; or else, harassed by that inward conflict which hampers him, he will dismiss the evangelical counsels and decide to lead what seems to him a complete and human life; or else, again and this is the most usual case, he will give up any attempt to understand; he will never belong wholly to God, nor ever wholly to things; imperfect in his own eyes, and insincere in the eyes of men, he will become resigned to leading a double life. I am speaking, it should not be forgotten, from experience.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Phen.*, p. 255.

¹⁷ *The Divine Milieu*, by Teilhard de Chardin (Harper & Bros. N. Y. 1960), pp. 20-21.

By subjecting this contradiction to analysis, he discovered means of healing himself of this alienating malady. Therefore there must be hope for society.

Strangely enough the strongest intimations of hope come from two sources that have hitherto been thought to be mutually and absolutely antagonistic: Christianity and Marxism. In spite of serious differences, the two forces have both shown a dynamic faith in Man.

Take the two extremes confronting us at this moment, the Marxist and the Christian, each a convinced believer in his own particular doctrine, but each, we must suppose, fundamentally inspired with an equal faith in Man. Is it not incontestable, a matter of everyday experience, that each of these, to the extent that he believes (and sees the other believe) in the future of the world, feels a basic human sympathy for the other — not for any sentimental reason, but arising out of the obscure recognition that both are going the same way, and that despite all ideological differences they will eventually, in some manner, come together on the same summit? No doubt each in his own fashion following his separate path, believes that he has once for all solved the riddle of the world's future. But the divergence between them is in reality neither complete nor final, unless we suppose that by some inconceivable and even contradictory feat of exclusion (contradictory because nothing would remain of his faith) the Marxist, for example, were to eliminate from his materialistic doctrine every upward surge towards the spirit. Followed to their conclusion the two paths must certainly end by coming together: for in the nature of things everything that is faith must rise, and everything that rises must converge.¹⁸

Both are hampered by imperfections, as evidenced by "the dramatic growth of a whole race of 'spiritual expatriates' — human beings torn between a Marxism whose depersonalising effect revolts them and a Christianity so lukewarm in human terms that it sickens them."¹⁹ Nevertheless, both are open to renewal:

Every conversation I have had with communist intellectuals has left me with a decided impression that Marxist atheism is not absolute, but that it simply rejects an "extrinsical" God, a *deus ex machina* whose existence can only undermine the dignity of the Universe and weaken the springs of human endeavour — a 'pseudo-God', in short, whom no one in these days any longer wants, least of all the Christians.

¹⁸ *Fut.*, pp. 191-192.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

And on the other hand Christian faith (I stress the word Christian, as opposed to those 'oriental' faiths for which spiritual ascension often expressly signifies the negation or condemnation of the phenomenal world), by the very fact that it is rooted in the idea of Incarnation, has always based a large part of its tenets on the tangible values of the world and of Matter.²⁰

Christian Renewal

The case of Christian renewal is vividly portrayed in a meditation piece entitled "The Spiritual Power of Matter". Here Teilhard, well aware of Christian disdain for materialistic philosophies, presents Spirit and Matter engaged in a conflict which ends in union. As the battle mounts to climax, Matter is made to say:

"Son of earth, steep yourself in the sea of matter, bathe in its fiery waters, for it is the source of your life and your youthfulness.

"You thought you could do without it because the power of thought has been kindled in you? You hoped that the more thoroughly you rejected the tangible, the closer you would be to spirit: that you would be more divine if you lived in the world of pure thought, or at least more angelic if you fled the corporal? Well, you were likely to have perished of hunger...²¹

This ends with a reference to the Eucharistic mystery:

Never say, "Matter is accursed, matter is evil": for there has come one who said "You will drink poisonous draughts and they shall not harm you", and again, "Life shall spring forth out of death", and then finally, the words which spell my definite liberation, "This is my body."²²

This and other reflections of Teilhard seem to pinpoint the Christian's alienation to his failure to see the value of matter in his vocation as Christian. If man can be given the power to transubstantiate matter like bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, by pronouncing the words of consecration, can he not also be empowered to consecrate the entire created universe of matter, i.e. to Christify matter, by a dynamic *praxis* of faith? Can he not have this power without as yet being fully

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 266-267.

²¹ *Hymn of the Universe*, by Teilhard de Chardin, (Harper & Row, N. Y. 1965), pp. 63-64.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

conscious of it? And when this consciousness should finally emerge, would not the Christian then feel the same passion as any dedicated Marxist for involving himself in this material world and in all the socio-economic processes associated with it? Recent events indicate that this renewal is indeed happening.

Marxist Renewal

A parallel case of Marxist renewal may be anticipated. Earlier we have referred to Teilhard's disappointment with Marxism insofar as it "systematically excluded from its hope the possibility of a spiritual metamorphosis of the Universe". By implication, he would see genuine renewal if Marxists should open up to such a possibility. Are they opening up now? Yes, according to Marxist Roger Garaudy: "the transformation of the earth, as we see it . . . is also a profound spiritual metamorphosis of man."²³ Garaudy's ideas are not yet shared by the Marxist hierarchy (just as Teilhard's evolutionary Christogenesis was not accepted by most pre-vatican II theologians when Teilhard was still alive). But a trend seems to be emerging.

Marxist-Christian Dialogue

Marxist-Christian dialogue has been going on in the First World. There are indications that the Third World of the seventies, particularly Asia, will begin to witness the emergence of a Maoist-Christian dialogue. In the Asian Bishop's Conference held in Manila in November 1970, Cardinal Cooray of Ceylon referred to Mao's program as "the only realistic program" currently being undertaken in behalf of the poverty-stricken populations of Asia.

But first certain positions have to be clarified. Anti-revisionist anathemas and canonical interdicts are not about to be discarded. Politburos and hierarchies will not carelessly surrender their power to excommunicate deviationists. They assume that pluralism tends to dissipate energies or even lead to

²³ *From Anathema to Dialogue*, by R. Garaudy (Herder & Herder, 1966) p. 93.

chaos. A certain mixture of axiological tenacity and empirical deficiency tends to hinder moves towards political disarmament. It is not likely that the wounds of centuries will be completely healed in one decade. And with this clearly understood, the exploration for areas of cooperation may begin.

The aspiration common to both Christian and Marxist is for an ideal called a "personalist society" by one and a "classless society" by the other. The two have some basic values in common. The "classless society" would eliminate group conflicts by a wide sharing of power over the means of production. The "personalist society" would be united by a common vision and interpersonal love, both based on human dignity divinely graced.

Teilhard confronts this problem of unification from the point of view of an evolutionist.

If we decide, under the pressure of facts, in favour of an optimism of unification, we run into the technical necessity of discovering — in addition to the impetus required to push us forward and in addition to the particular objective which should determine our route—the special binder or cement which will associate our lives together, vitally, without diminishing or distorting them. Hence, belief in a supremely attractive centre which has personality.²⁴

But in spite of general agreement about the need for unity, there are forces of disunity which cannot be overlooked:

How are we to explain the appearance all around of us of mounting repulsion and hatred? If such a strong potentiality is besieging us from within and urging us to union, what is it waiting for to pass from potentiality to action? Just this, no doubt: that we should overcome the 'anti-personalist' complex which paralyses us and make up our minds to accept the possibility, indeed the reality, of some *source* of love and *object* of love at the summit of the world above our heads. So long as it absorbs or appears to absorb the person, the collectivity kills the love that is trying to come to birth. As such the collectivity is essentially unlovable. That is where philanthropic systems break down. Common sense is right. It is impossible to give oneself to an anonymous number. But if the universe ahead of us assumes a face and a heart, and so to speak personifies itself, then in the atmosphere created by this focus the elemental attraction will immediately blossom. Then, no, doubt under the heightened pressure of an infolding world, the formidable

²⁴ *Phen.*, p. 284.

energies of attraction, still dormant between human molecules, will burst forth.²⁵

He then explains the Christian ideal of unity, with the aid of analogies from science.

[According to the 'personalist' solution] a Centre about which everything will be grouped, a keystone of the vault, is precisely what we must look for and postulate with all our strength, in order that nothing in the human edifice may crumble. For by this theory if a real power of love does not arise at the heart of Evolution, stronger than all individual egotisms and passions, how can the Noosphere ever be stabilised? And if a nucleus of ultra-consistency does not emerge at the heart of the cosmic movement, by its presence ensuring the ultimate preservation of all the incommunicable sum of Reflection, sublimated through the ages by anthropogenesis, how shall we be persuaded (even under the external pressure of planetary shrinkage) to embark upon a journey leading to total death? Indeed, to fuse together the human multitude (even taken in its present state of super-compression) without crushing it, it seems essential that there should be a field of attraction at once powerful and irreversible, and such as cannot emanate collectively from a simple nebula of reflecting atoms, but which requires as its source a self-subsisting, strongly personalized star.

This, at least by implication, is the sense of Christian argument and feeling during two thousand years. I am convinced that it is a belief that the urgency of events will increasingly compel biologists and psychologists to adopt. So that the greatest event in the history of the Earth, now taking place, may be the gradual discovery by those with eyes to see, not merely of something but of *Someone* at the peak created by the convergence of the evolving Universe upon itself.²⁶

Does the Marxist ideal of a classless society coincide with this personalist society envisioned by Teilhard? No definite answer can be given as yet. Garaudy, who is in favor of enriching Marxist humanism with Christian values, still feels unable to affirm the reality of a personal God now present at the center of the evolving Universe. He can only affirm the exigency for such a reality. Beyond this, empirical verification is impossible. Human eyes can only see through a glass darkly. How can one believe the Christian who claims to see clearly even with dark glasses? The Marxist feels that were he to follow the Christian blindly, both would fall into a ditch of deeper alienations.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 266-267.

²⁶ *Fut.*, pp. 278-279.

Faith in Man

In spite of this fundamental impasse, both Marxist and Christian have shown missionary zeal in politicalizing or evangelizing all nations. For, says Teilhard, both have faith in man.

By 'faith in Man' we mean here the more or less active and fervent conviction that Mankind as an organic and organised whole possesses a future: a future consisting not merely of successive years but of higher states to be achieved by struggle. Not merely survival, let us be clear, but some form of higher life or super-life.²⁷

Such optimism for a bright future is not dimmed by our present alienations. Indeed, Faith in Man is a necessary ingredient for the cure of alienations.

And now, by the very fact that we have measured the truly cosmic gravity of the sickness that disquiets us, we are put in possession of the remedy that can cure it. 'After the long series of transformations leading to man, has the world stopped? Or, if we are still moving, is it not merely in a circle?

The answer to that uneasiness of the modern world springs up by itself when we formulate the dilemma in which the analysis of our action has imprisoned us.

Either nature is closed to our demands for futurity, in which case thought, the fruit of millions of years of effort, is stifled, still-born in a self-abortive and absurd universe. Or else an opening exists—that of the super-soul above our souls; but in that case the way out, if we are to agree to embark on it, must open out freely onto limitless psychic spaces in a universe to which we can unhesitatingly entrust ourselves.

Between these two alternatives of absolute optimism or absolute pessimism, there is no middle way because by its very nature progress is all or nothing. We are confronted accordingly with two directions and only two: one upwards and the other downwards, and there is no possibility of finding a halfway house.

On neither side is there any tangible evidence to produce. Only, in support of hope, there are rational invitations to an act of faith.²⁸

For thought, according to Teilhard, continues to draw together and even to reconcile everything that it pervades, despite all

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

²⁸ *Phen.*, pp. 231-232.

seeming divisions. "In the nature of things everything that is faith must rise, and everything that rises must converge."²⁹

Coercion Alienates

Therefore convergence can be achieved only by Faith in Man. But does this faith exist in reality? What are the facts of history? The world powers of both left and right have been persistently escalating their military-industrial technology. They seem to have summarily ruled out Faith in Man as their guiding principle. Coercion: this is all that they seem to recognize, naked or veiled coercion, brutal or refined coercion, sporadic or institutionalized coercion. Hence the huge investments in terror technology. Hence the proliferation of regional warlords and underground commanders. They reason, with some justification, that criminality must be suppressed by coercive measures. But unjust coercion is itself criminal, and criminality is self-escalating. The hairline difference that makes coercion unjust is always an explosive difference. This has been the lesson of history.

We see the sombre threat, still increasing despite the surgical operation of the second World War which was supposed to abate it, of so-called political totalitarianism. And on what is, in a sense, a higher level still we have the disquieting example of such animal groups as termites, ants and bees, our ancestors in the Three of Life, which, afflicted by an evil of which we seem to perceive the symptoms in ourselves, have lapsed into a state of social enslavement — the very fate towards which an implacable destiny seems to be impelling us. Evidence such as this, if it is insufficiently studied, must certainly cause us dismay.³⁰

We are dismayed because we cannot escape the feeling that *coercion is essentially inhuman*.

Everything is subordinated to the increase in industrial production, and to armaments. The scientists and the laboratories which multiply our powers still receive nothing or next to nothing. We behave as though we expected discoveries to fall ready-made from the sky, like rain or sunshine, while men concentrate on the serious business of killing each other and eating. . . . Surely our great-grandsons will not be wrong if they think of us as barbarians?³¹

²⁹ *Fut.*, p. 192.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

³¹ *Phen.*, p. 179.

If coercion is *infrahuman*, is the actual maintenance of massive powers of coercion an admission that human society is still infantile? So it seems. How many more decades will it take us to outgrow this infantilism? How much longer must we depend upon coercive powers growing out of the barrel of a gun, whether this gun be held on the left hand or on the right? When shall we break through our cocoon of armaments into authentic adulthood? An adult mind enslaved by infantile emotions suffers the most traumatic form of alienation. For we would then be painfully conscious of our fixation at the *infrahuman* levels of evolution, of our frustrated endomorphosis, of the wastage of our human traditions and cerebral genes.

Between animal branches or phyla of low "physical" endowment, reactions are limited to competition and eventually to elimination. The only slight exceptions to this brutal, almost mechanical law of substitution are those (most functional) associations of symbiosis in inferior organisms — or with the most socialized insects, the enslavement of one group by another.

With man (at all events with post-Neolithic man) simple elimination tends to become exceptional, or at all events secondary. However brutal the conquest, the suppression is always accompanied by some degree of assimilation. Even when partially absorbed, the vanquished still reacts on the victor so as to transform him. We might well borrow a geological word for the process — endomorphosis — and it is the more appropriate of course in the case of a peaceful cultural invasion, and yet still more if it is a question of populations, equally resistant and active, which interpenetrate slowly under prolonged tension. What happens then is mutual permeation of the psychisms combined with a remarkable and significant interfecundity. Under this two-fold influence, veritable biological combinations are established and fixed which associate and blend ethnic traditions at the same time as cerebral genes. Formerly, on the tree of life we had a mere tangle of stems; now over the whole domain of *Homo sapiens*, we have synthesis.³²

Personalism

In order that this communal synthesis may be authentically human, it is necessary that man must not cease to personalize himself. This is the whole problem and drama of anthropogenesis

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

The individual elements must group and tighten not merely without becoming distorted in the process, but with an enhancement of their 'centric' qualities, i.e., their personality. A delicate operation and one which, biologically, it would seem to be impossible to carry out except in an atmosphere (or temperature) of unanimity or mutual attraction. Recent totalitarian experiments seem to furnish material for a positive judgment on this last point: the individual, outwardly bound to his fellows by coercion and solely in terms of function, deteriorates and retrogresses: he becomes mechanised. To repeat what I have already said, under these purely enforced conditions the centre of consciousness cannot achieve its natural growth rising out of the technical centre of social organisation. Only *through* love and *in* love (using the word 'love' in its widest and most real sense of 'mutual internal affinity'), because it brings individuals together, not superficially and tangentially but centre to centre, can physically possess the property of not merely differentiating but also personalising the elements which comprise it.³³

The thesis (or synthesis) here being proposed is that human society can be truly classless and truly free from alienations only when it is truly personalist.

This personalist society that Teilhard is advocating — will it really come true? Or is it just a dream? We do not know for certain. But if we deliberately choose to remain in a state of doubt, it will never come true. "Weakened by this fundamental doubt . . . there is no determination to build the earth".³⁴ This is the attitude of philosophers of despair and of static immobility.

'There is nothing new under the sun' say the despairing. But what about you, O thinking man? Unless you repudiate reflection, you must admit that you have climbed a step higher than the animals. 'Very well but at least nothing has changed and nothing is changing any longer since the beginning of history.' In that case, O man of the twentieth century, how does it happen that you are waking up to horizons and are susceptible to fears that your forefathers never knew?³⁵

What are these fears of the man of the twentieth century? Mainly the fear of total death.

Our mind, by the very fact of being able to discern infinite horizons ahead, is only able to move by the hope of achieving through something of itself, a supreme consummation — without which it would rightly

³³ *Fut.*, pp. 234-235.

³⁴ *Phen.*, p. 142.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

feel itself to be stunted, frustrated and cheated. By the nature of work, and correlatively by the requirement (*exigence*) of the worker, a total death, an unscalable wall, on which consciousness would crash and then forever disappear, are thus 'impossible' with the mechanism of the activity of reflection (which would immediately break its mainspring).³⁶

And this "impossibility" is the principal contradiction in the human spirit, the source of all its alienations.

After that, 'positive and critical' minds can go on saying as much as they like that the new generation, less ingenuous than their elders, no longer believes in a future and in perfecting of the world. Has it even occurred to those who write and repeat these things that, if they were right, all spiritual movement on earth would be virtually brought to a stop? They seem to believe that life would continue its peaceful cycle when deprived of light, of hope and of the attraction of an inexhaustible future. And this is a great mistake. Flowers and fruit might still go on perhaps for a few years more by habit. But from these roots the trunk would be well and truly severed. Even on stacks of material energy, even under the spur of immediate fear or desire, *without the taste for life*, mankind would soon stop inventing and constructing for a work it knew to be doomed in advance. And, stricken at the very source of the impetus which sustains it, it would disintegrate from nausea or revolt and crumble into dust.

If progress is a myth, that is to say, if faced by the work involved we can say: "What's the good of it all?" Our efforts will flag. With that the whole of evolution will come to a halt — because we are evolution.³⁷

Summary

Alienation, although ambiguously predicated of a variety of phenomena, has stirred up a vigorous *praxis* in modern history. It seems to fit more coherently and more fruitfully into Teilhard's theory of cosmic evolution as applied to human society. Essentially, alienation is a partial and negative aspect of incomplete being evolving into fuller being, i.e., of humanity groping for fuller consciousness and fuller freedom. The groping sometimes leads to the blind alley of isolationism, characterized by egoism and apathy.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

Teilhard is optimistic about curing societal alienation through the forces of Christianity and Marxism. Both have practised missionary zeal in politicalizing or evangelicalizing all nations, thus showing their common Faith in Man. In contrast, the actual rulers of the world — the military-industrial blocs of both left and right — have little or no Faith in Man, but believe only in coercion. Coercion is inhuman and therefore alienating. Coercion hinders the emergence of the classless society insofar as it frustrates the evolutionary thrust towards authentic personalism.