

## GLOBALIZATION AND THE SOUL—ACCORDING TO TEILHARD, FRIEDMAN, AND OTHERS

by *Thomas M. King, S.J.*

*Abstract.* Thomas L. Friedman's recent book on globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, sees a religious value in globalization: "globalization emerges from below . . . from people's very souls and from their deepest aspirations" (1999, 338). Pierre Teilhard de Chardin made similar claims in 1920, calling globalization the "deep-rooted religious movement of our age" (Teilhard 1979, 211). He came to this awareness through his experience in World War I. There he began connecting globalization to its roots in evolution and to the mystics' desire for the "All," a desire he saw animating the work of believing and unbelieving scientists. He found confirmation of his ideas in the letters of Saint Paul, who told of God eventually filling all things. Teilhard used the vocabulary of mysticism to describe global developments in technology, industry, politics, and the environment, and the ardor of his texts has led to their being widely used for secular gatherings on global subjects.

*Keywords:* Kenneth Boulding; Michel Camdessus; contemplation; Thomas L. Friedman; globalization; Al Gore; Ignatius of Loyola; Marshall McLuhan; mystics; Saint Paul; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin; United Nations; World War I.

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Through most of the twentieth century international affairs were defined by the Cold War. But that war is over, and a global reality has emerged without anyone knowing whom to praise or blame. Ready or not, the fast-moving world of the Internet, global markets, and international politics has overtaken Chicago, Chechnya, and Chaing Mai. First worlds, second worlds, and third worlds have passed, and One World is emerging.

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[*Zygon*, vol. 37, no. 1 (March 2002).]

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## FRIEDMAN ON GLOBALIZATION

No one has considered the development with more clarity and wit than Thomas L. Friedman, foreign correspondent of the *New York Times*. His bestselling *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999) tells of changes in the past ten years and more rapid changes in the years to come—he claims it cannot be stopped. And the driving force behind it all is free-market capitalism where only the paranoid survive. One year Compaq is called the best-managed company of the year, and the following year the managers are fired. Prosperity has increased global wealth as never before. So Friedman calls upon the developing nations to get into line, drop their protective regulations, and put on the golden straightjacket: “One size fits all.”

Friedman’s brave new world is symbolized by the 66 human beings and 310 robots that turn out 300 Lexus sedans per day, while his “olive tree” is the symbol of stability, home, and family that cannot or will not fit into globalization. Love for the olive tree has fueled protests against the global economy in Seattle, Genoa, and Quebec and trashed MacDonald’s in the Roquefort region of France. Friedman tells of globalization with great enthusiasm only to end with a plea that people not forget their religion and traditional values—their olive trees. They are to develop a sense for God “in the olive groves of their parents’ home or their community, church, synagogue, temple or mosque” (1999, 470). I was surprised and heartened to find this recognition of God in Friedman’s fast-moving book. Yet I wonder: If God is to be found only in the “olive tree,” does this mean that globalization itself offers nothing for the soul? Globalization has often shown itself to be a brutal, inhuman process. Will what is global and future only chill the soul until we turn from the global back to what is local and past? This would seem to be Friedman’s message. On one occasion, however, he suggests that there is more to it, for he writes, “Globalization emerges from below . . . from peoples’ very souls and from their deepest aspirations” (p. 338).

## THE INFLUENCE OF TEILHARD

Friedman is not the first to associate globalization with the soul. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest, was writing of globalization and the soul during World War I. His texts would inspire Marshall McLuhan, a teaching fellow at St. Michael’s in Toronto, who read *samizdat* copies of Teilhard in the early fifties (*samizdat*, as Teilhard was not approved Catholic reading). McLuhan’s thoughts on communication became global, and he coined the expression “the global village.” He would even follow a theme in Teilhard to claim that the mystical Body of Christ is becoming “technologically a fact under electronic conditions.” Tom Wolfe, social critic turned novelist, characterizes McLuhan’s thought as a blend of Teilhard and the economic historian Harold Innis.

Kenneth Boulding was another global prophet who found spiritual meaning in Teilhard. He started in England and became an economist at the University of Colorado (and elsewhere) and was one of the first to outline the structures of the global economy. He also was a devout Quaker who often referred to Teilhard to explain how God related to it all. Robert Wright, a philosopher of evolution, judged the thought of Boulding to be a blend of Teilhard and the capitalist theoretician Adam Smith.

Even practitioners of globalization have found meaning in Teilhard. Al Gore quotes him in *Earth in the Balance* (1992); he had read Teilhard's *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959) while studying Divinity at Vanderbilt. But perhaps the leading practitioner of globalization is Michel Camdessus, who was Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund from 1987 to 2000. Camdessus reshaped the finances of Latin America and South Asia working from a global picture. He tells of using Teilhard in the process. He once said to me that thoughts from Teilhard were on his mind every day at the IMF: "Teilhard left a lasting impact on my life; he showed me the way forward." He too read a *samizdat* copy of Teilhard's *The Divine Milieu* (1960), "mimeographed pages bound in brown butcher-paper." It was a devotional text with a curious dedication: "For those who love the world." The first chapter told how building a better world can lead to sanctification. In this, Camdessus said he and his friends found what they were waiting for: "it was our challenge, and it was my challenge as well." He read additional works of Teilhard, and his enthusiasm grew: "For a student standing on the threshold of his professional life, *The Phenomenon of Man* shone forth like a beacon." Years later he would recall the "lyrical fervor" he found in Teilhard and quote from *The Divine Milieu*:

By virtue of a marvelous mounting force contained in things, each reality attained and left behind gives us access to the discovery and pursuit of an ideal of higher spiritual content. Those who spread their sails in the right way to the winds of the earth will always find themselves borne by a current towards the open seas. . . . The worker no longer belongs to himself. Little by little the great breath of the universe has insinuated itself into him through the fissure of his humble but faithful action, has broadened him, raised him up, borne him on. It is in the Christian, provided he knows how to make the most of the resources of his faith, that these effects will reach their climax and their crown. (Teilhard 1960, 72)

Camdessus often quoted Teilhard to secular audiences and told religious audiences that the genius of Teilhard was to "recapture for twentieth-century minds the dazzling insights of St. Paul." The insights center around passages in which Teilhard developed Paul's thoughts concerning the "Body of Christ," a term that involved all creation; Teilhard called on Christians to work for its formation so that eventually *God would be all in all*. Camdessus, following the gospel, claimed that rich nations must help poor nations, but he was a realist who pressured poor nations to reform their economies. He did not accept that globalization means "One size fits all"

and explained the difference by appealing to Teilhard: a proper union should enhance our differences. Camdessus called for nations to live in solidarity: “The survival of everyone depends on it.” He recognized that globalization has a dark side and could become a monster that would consume us. So he appealed to our souls in calling for a “development at the deepest level of consciousness of all the peoples of this world, of that still undeveloped sense of the universal [the global sense], which is the only source of the urgency that will open the eyes of political and economic decision-makers to their responsibilities as leaders of a world on the road to unification.”

Here an eminently practical economist calls for developing a sense of the universal “at the deepest level of consciousness.” But mystics have long appealed to a sense of the universal at the human depths. Teilhard did at the end of the First World War: “The deep-rooted religious movement of our age is characterized by the appearance in human consciousness of the Universe, seen as a natural Whole” (Teilhard 1979, 211). “This feeling of the importance of the Whole has its roots in the furthest and most secret depths of our being” (1971, 57).

#### WORLD WAR I AWAKENS TEILHARD TO THE GLOBAL

In 1914, while Teilhard was studying fossil history at the University of Paris, he wondered if the human species had finished its evolution. His answer would come not from the fossils but from the battlefields of World War I. In December he was drafted into the French army and after several weeks of training was sent as a stretcher bearer to the trenches outside Paris. There he would tell of discovering Humanity. In the spring of 1916 he wrote “Cosmic Life” (see Teilhard 1967), the first of the essays that would make him famous. In this essay he told Christians they could have a communion with God through their communion with the Earth; by their “passionate work” they might build the great body of Christ.

While digging battle trenches he noticed mushrooms and wildflowers that brought back memories of his childhood, so he told his family of a “nostalgia for the farm.” This could be seen as a nostalgia for the “olive tree,” for the quiet charm of rural life and the familiar happiness of his past. But soon he was aware of a different nostalgia, “nostalgia for the Front.” Late one evening, while behind the lines for a period of rest, he saw the distant sky lit by the flashes of war and heard the soft rumble of explosions, and he wanted to return to the battle line. To explain why, he resorted to “almost mystical considerations.”

As a Jesuit scholastic Teilhard had studied the writings of mystics and saints, and these provided his vocabulary. Yes, self-sacrifice was an ideal for both mystic and soldier. But there was more to it than that: in the heat of battle he felt free of his day-to-day burdens—as did the mystics. While seeing death all around him (two of his brothers died in the War), his own

life seemed more precious than ever; “Yet I would have abandoned it at that moment without regret [mystics would have it we are “to care and not to care”], for I no longer belonged to myself. I was freed and relieved even of my own self.” Again, indifference and being relieved of self were common themes among the mystics. They wrote abundantly of losing one’s self—and in the process finding a higher Self. So it was with Teilhard.

At the Front, Teilhard found “an extremely vivid feeling of Presence,” a “new and superhuman Soul which takes over from our own,” “a Soul greater than my own,” the everyday man effaced by “a Personality of another order” (1979, 172–75). This Presence, higher Soul, Personality of another order was summoning him to return to the Front. Mystics have told of finding a higher Identity within, and many explained it by quoting St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20 RSV). By surrendering their individual identities they had found a higher Soul (“Christ who lives in me”). The mystics told of the divine Visitation in moments of solitude when the world and its clamor were stilled. But Teilhard told of the Visitation as troops poured over trenches and terrain loaded with rations, flares, and hand grenades. Shells were exploding overhead as “the Soul of the Front was being reborn” (1979, 177). Teilhard would claim that World War I was the first time the globe as a whole was engaged in a common action. Globalization had begun! It began in war, but Teilhard envisioned a globalization of peace that might follow. (His term was *planetization*.) The World War was a totalizing action by which humanity was coming together; and together they might build a New Jerusalem. His “nostalgia for the Front” was calling him to resume the Great Work. In the global conflict “a window was opened onto the deep strata of what man is becoming. A region was created in which it was possible for men to breathe a heaven-laden atmosphere” (1979, 178). The discovery was made in war, but could it last? “When peace comes, everything will once more be overlaid by the veil of the former melancholy and trivialities” (1979, 178). He compared this with the melancholy the mystics knew as they returned to the trivialities of life. With demobilization Teilhard felt out of size and almost of a different species as he returned to familiar routines; he always seemed to be looking for something that others did not see; even his Jesuit friends were puzzled. He was looking for the “All” he had seen at the Front.

As a young Jesuit, Teilhard had been quiet and reserved, but in battle he found that friendships developed quickly as “men found a power of union, an impulse of common feeling, a capacity for sacrifice that for a moment swept away all differences and multiplied their energies tenfold” (Teilhard 1967, 282). “For a moment they knew real emotions, they were united, they were raised above themselves” (1967, 278). The experience seemed to answer the question he had wrestled with in Paris: Had the human species reached a stasis, or would it continue to evolve? In bonding with

others on the battlefield the soldiers seemed to rise above themselves and unite in a higher Soul. "We need only recall those moments in time of war when . . . we have a sense of rising to a higher level of human existence" (1964, 22). He took this as a revelation of the future: some day all people would share a common and global life. The friendships, the energy, and the exaltation convinced him that a great evolutionary change was occurring in the human species. He looked forward to the day when "the consciousness of all [would be] working together in a task as great as the world itself" (1967, 285).

#### TEILHARD'S VISION: ITS SOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT

Hundreds of millions of years ago there were only single cells living more or less independent lives, but in associating they began living a common life, and multicelled organisms were formed. Teilhard believed we now were entering a new phase in evolution when human individuals would come together to form a global organism of sorts. It was evidenced in simple things: food for a single meal might come from five continents, and thousands of individuals were involved in bringing that food to the table. Likewise the human mind sought nourishment from cultures all over the globe: "Is this not like some great body which is being born—with its limbs, its nervous system, its perceptive organs, its memory—the body in fact of that great Thing which had to come . . . ?" (1959, 246). This is the "Thing" that Christ assumes as his body and thus renders personal—the Thing becomes "Someone."

Saint Paul spoke of Christians forming the Body of Christ, a Body to be built up by love. In this tradition, Teilhard argued that Body of Christ involves education, the environment, industry, international cooperation, and above all scientific research; on the new and unifying earth God would bestow his Soul. This was the spiritual meaning Teilhard found in globalization. He wrote of it in the language of the mystics, and the ardor of his words resonated with others. At the United Nations, Secretary General U Thant sponsored two conferences on his own claim that the United Nations must be more than a place to air grievances, and he turned to Teilhard to provide a vision.

The texts of Teilhard have a spiritual appeal not found in most political, economic, and social discussions, and other globalizers recognized this. When Harvard held a Symposium on International Law in 1992, the defining motto was a text of Teilhard; in 1994 an international conference on the global environment was held in Hong Kong, and the defining motto was a text of Teilhard. *Wired*, a computer magazine, would quote Teilhard in telling of the World Wide Web. In each case a little "soul" was added to what was otherwise a secular endeavor.

Teilhard saw the development of radio and television as providing the nervous system needed for the global Body that was forming. Travel and international business, peace, and environmental restraints were all part of the process. A businessman was taken by the vision, yet he wrote to Teilhard concerned about his enthusiasm for secular work. Teilhard responded that the important thing was the euphoria itself; bread had felt good for us before we understood nutrition: "Since everything in the world follows the road to unification, the spiritual success of the universe is bound up with the correct functioning of every zone of the universe. . . . Because your enterprise (which I take to be legitimate) is going well, a little more health is being spread in the human mass, and in consequence a little more liberty to act, to think, and to love" (1960, 36). Even the humble work of drawing, sewing, or digging could advance the global unification: "By pressing the stroke, the line, or the stitch, on which I am engaged, to its ultimate natural finish, I shall lay hold of that last end towards which my innermost will tends" (1960, 64). The last end would be the Pleroma, the "All" spoken of by St. Paul, when the Body of Christ would include all things.

One could argue that globalization began in the Age of Discovery, the early years of the sixteenth century when Europe was awakening to Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In 1522 Magellan was the first to circle the globe, and this was the very year Ignatius of Loyola (founder of the Jesuits, Teilhard's religious community) had his religious awakening. Soon Ignatius had a recurring vision of a luminous golden globe. The psychiatrist Carl G. Jung, in a series of lectures on Ignatius, interpreted Ignatius' globe as an ancient symbol of totality, of the whole. At the time of Ignatius the world could first be seen as a "whole." Ignatius accordingly developed a global mission, sending Jesuits to India, Indonesia, Africa, Japan, and Brazil. Ignatius was called "a contemplative in action." The contemplative is one who rejects all limitations in seeking only the All, the Whole. This could be found in action only when the earth itself was known as a whole. In his *The Spiritual Exercises* (1964) Ignatius tells of the Trinity looking at the earth in its entirety ("the whole extent and space of the earth filled with human beings," p. 69), and the one making the Exercises was to do the same, that is, see "in imagination the great extent and space of the world where dwell so many different nations and peoples"—some at war and some at peace, some weeping and some laughing (1964, 69). For Ignatius and his followers, every action should be animated by this sense of the Whole: *Quo universalis, eo divinius*—the more universal, the more divine the action. As a Jesuit, Teilhard meditated on the texts of Ignatius every year.

Teilhard also presented a contemplation in action by consciously taking phrases from contemplatives and mystics and applying them to the active life—and always with a concern for the global context. He told of the asceticism and detachment needed to be a servant of earth: his "Mass on



the World” would make the “whole earth” an altar on which to offer the labors and suffering of humanity. He would see humility, chastity, and indifference as virtues needed for global development. He claimed that a Communion with God could be found in global action, and even the vacant feeling that followed this Communion was compared to the vacant feeling known by the mystic. Teilhard called for a congregation of religious dedicated to work selflessly in science, politics, industry, and commerce to exemplify the human ideal. He seemed to take the whole vocabulary of mysticism and apply it to the action that is consciously global. The image of the Whole runs through it all. In *The Human Phenomenon* (1999, 169) and elsewhere he rejoiced in “the roundness of the Earth” and told of “the Noosphere.” He worked with the same vision of the globe that Ignatius had known, and that enabled him to be a contemplative in action. The Whole was the earth itself evoking a response in the soul.

Teilhard wondered if a man could really love a woman if he did not see the universe reflected in her eyes (1971, 58). Likewise “one would find [a similar] worship sustaining the most unbelieving of scientists in his research” (p. 64). He himself did an abundance of scientific work—as a paleontologist he did much to develop the overall geology of Asia—and told of approaching scientific work as a “votary” (1979, 198). He saw other scientists around him divided within themselves, for they could find nothing total to which they could commit themselves. Their souls were seeking the All, and they could not find it. Mystics have called for *Todo y Nada*, All and Nothing. In the past, mystics had claimed that for the All to appear, finite things must be seen in their nothingness: Let grace come and this world pass away! When all finite things disappear or are banished from the mind, the All affirms itself. Such has been the contemplative vision. But Teilhard called for a different process. He loved the world too much to want it to vanish. Yet like all mystics he would speak abundantly of *Le Tout*, the All, the Whole, and see it at the basis of any mysticism. But the All of which he spoke was not apart from the world. It was the inner substance of what the world was coming to be: a global humanity animated by a single Soul, the Soul of Christ.

Teilhard, following St. Paul, saw the Body of Christ eventually embracing all things so that God “might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:10 RSV). The task of globalization is soul-sized, and that for Teilhard meant that contemplation can continue into action, and the deep religious urge of the soul can find fulfillment in human work. Yes, there still is need for time apart; we still need our “olive trees,” our times of silent recollection. But the work of globalization itself resonates with the soul. Friedman saw what was involved when he wrote, as quoted earlier, “Globalization emerges . . . from people’s very souls” (1999, 338).

Boulding used texts of Teilhard to add spiritual depths to his thoughts on the global economy. Camdessus used Teilhard to tell of his work at the



IMF; the United Nations has held conferences on his thought; he would be quoted at gatherings on international law and the global environment. Beyond the wearisome details of politics and commerce, his ardent texts speak to the soul. Amid the struggle of nations and the chaos of emerging markets, we, like the U.N., need a vision to sustain us. Globalization has become the defining reality of our times. Since it speaks to the soul we can be contemplatives in action as never before. We might consider again the vision of Teilhard so that the emerging world is shaped according to the hungers of the soul; otherwise we will have created a soulless monster that will consume us.

#### NOTE

Most of the quotes from Michel Camdessus were taken from a talk that he gave in Toulouse on 6 November 1997.

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