

Building the world in the post-pandemic era:

The spiritual renewal of the earth

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Summary

Since the end of November 2019, planet Earth has been violently shaken by the presence of a new type of virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-Cov-2), which in two years has claimed more than 5 million deaths. The Covid-19 pandemic has emerged at a crucial time in human history. Despite the very advanced degree of current science and technology, the presence of this virus has paralyzed human activities on a planetary level. All sectors of social life have been affected. From religion, through economics, education and sport, everything is almost at a standstill. The world is agitated, jostled from everywhere in a kind of birth pain. This internal tension, as severe and violent as it is, is beneficial because it will lead to a renewal of the Earth. There is an invitation to see things differently, to put down new foundations and build a more beautiful world than before. Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic, far from being a fatality, is an opportunity for humanity to question itself. Arrived at the crossroads, the world as we know it does not hold any longer. Hence the need to revisit and engage in a true and constructive dialogue with the past in order to find new directions capable of leading the internal tension of the earth towards the birth of a new world that is more stable and radiates peace. To do this, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin' thought seems to be a safe path capable of leading us to our destination. Indeed, the outcome of the current global health crisis will depend on the firm commitment of all nations to work together in a kind of *megasyntesis* in the tangential. Values like justice, sincerity, honesty and mutual trust stand as solid foundations on which the post-pandemic world must be built. In fact, the lack of communication and transparency on the emergence of Covid-19 has caused enormous damage to humanity. This should serve as a lesson to us. Categorizing countries in terms of rich or poor is suicidal because the enemy is common: SARS-Cov-2. All should receive the same treatment and good vaccines. Science, the twin sister of humanity, has always helped solve the problems that human beings encounter. The speed with which energies are deployed to find new vaccines is extraordinary. This is a cause for consolation and hope. Thus, the vaccination program must be done in the same way all over the world. The best vaccines should not be reserved only for one category of people. Isolation, better excluding others because they are weak will not help solve the problem.

This present reflection is constructed of two main points: dialogue with the history of humanity and the construction of a new world through a new spirit, that of a *superhuman*.

0. Introduction

The corona virus pandemic has changed the way we live on planet Earth. In two years, the damage caused by the presence of SARS-CoV-2 virus is enormous: more than 2,000,000 deaths throughout the world. A global humanitarian catastrophe. This situation requires a fundamental questioning of our current way of preventing and managing crises at the global level. This is an invitation to more transparency, sincerity, justice and trust among nations. Indeed, the failure of a state to share timely information about the existence of a deadly virus can be considered as a crime against humanity. The experience of Covid-19 should serve as a lesson for us. Things have changed. Covid-19 has radically changed the way we inhabit the Earth. We have reached a point of demarcation: we are in the process of evolution. In terms of relationships between humans, the presence of the virus has altered our way of living together. Wearing a mask and other personal protective equipment has become necessary. Moving from one country to another requires vaccination as well as regular PCR testing. Thanks to science and technology, distance is no longer a problem. Men and women can interact virtually using the internet. All this to stop the spread of the virus.

The table as painted above is an invitation to think about the future of humanity. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin could help us to understand the situation in which the world is currently plunged and to suggest possible solutions that can guide the actions of decision-makers. To do this, a dialogue with the past seems necessary to better understand the present and to project oneself into the future. The history of mankind teaches us several things about the calamities that have struck planet Earth. As the book of ecclesiast points out, what has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, there is nothing new under the sun¹. Our planet has already experienced several pandemics and after each pandemic life on Earth has not been completely destroyed, however the way of living changes considerably. Thanks to the ever-increasing awareness, human beings have learned how to adapt to difficult situations.

The following lines are a proposal to start again on new bases, we want to build a new world. This exercise that we want you to associate with revolves around two main points. First, we will show that Covid-19 pandemic is added to the long list of pandemics in the history humanity. Second, we will talk about the need for a spiritual renewal of the Earth. In the light of the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, we will show that the presence of SARS-CoV-2 virus, far from being the end of the world, perhaps it is an opportunity for all nations to to prevent and manage similar crises in the future.

1. Nothing new under the sun: dialogue with the past

Human history shows us that the earth has suffered several waves of pandemics which have caused enormous loss of human life. Justinian's plague is the first known and documented pandemic between the 6th and 8th centuries. According to historians, the pandemic could have originated in

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:9.

Egypt or Central Asia². Commercial exchanges have been the vectors of transmission of this plague. Over 25 to 100 million people had lost their lives. In the European Middle Ages between 1347 to 1353, 25 to 34 million people died from the Black Death. After having raged in China, the black plague pandemic arrived in 1346 Central Asia, among Mongolian troops besieging the port of Caffa, on the Black Sea, held by Genoese merchants. Also nicknamed "the great plague", it decimated between a third and a half of the population of the time of the old continent³. At the start of the 20th century, just after the First World War, the Spanish flu appeared. It was the most devastating pandemic scourge in history, killing 25 to 100 million people worldwide⁴. Several other pandemics have caused or continue to kill thousands of people around the world. We can mention: yellow fever, AIDS, Cholera, Asian flu, etc. From the above, it is clear that there has always been one great pandemic every 600 years or less.

If modern societies fight against diseases mainly with the weapons of medicine, pre-industrial societies reacted to it very differently. Ancient peoples viewed great pandemics in both apocalyptic and metaphysical terms. In other words, they expressed divine punishment, and they were seen as the result of human transgression of divine law. This was a central notion in both Greek and Latin thought in Late Antiquity. Thus, times of pandemics were times of conversion, of renewal. Through these devastating and disastrous events, human beings have not given up on hope. Realizing the danger that threatens life, human beings take certain measures that allow them to survive.

Since the end of 2019, in China, more precisely in the city of Wuhan, the Covid-19 pandemic has appeared. In two years, more than 263 million cases and 5.22 million deaths have been confirmed, making the pandemic one of the deadliest in history. As in the past, people have realized the danger of this virus and therefore have adopted a series of measures to overcome it. Thus, life on earth was radically turned upside down: major sporting events suspended, universities and major education centers closed, churches remained empty, planes grounded. In two years, the economic crisis has been so deep that several large companies have gone bankrupt, leaving thousands of people unemployed. The big pharmaceutical companies are on the battle line to fight the virus. Several types of vaccines have been manufactured, opening the door to the survival of mankind. From now on, only a person who has been vaccinated is allowed to travel or take part in certain official ceremonies. A new type of passport that refuses to say its name.

Faced with these changes, some people have lost hope because they no longer recognize themselves in this world in which everything has become almost virtual. Others, on the other hand, believe that there is always a way out. This is the example of the Jesuit and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who thinks that in the face of such crisis situations, we must all have confidence in each other and look in the same direction to see the world differently.

² Stathakopoulos, Dionysios (2018), "plague, Justinianic (Early Medieval Pandemic) , The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity, Oxford University Press, doi:10.1093/acref/9780198662778.001.0001

³ Firth, John (April 2012). " The history of Plague-Part 1. The three great pandemics". *jmvh.org*.

⁴ Chris Patten, What Next ? Surviving the Twenty-first Century, Penguin UK, 2008, p. 121.

2. The spiritual renewal of the earth

The renewal that we want to address in this second point is a natural tension particular to the earth. It is on this that evolution is based. At a certain point in history, the thinking energies come together in a kind of *megasyntesis*⁵ to face the complexity of the problem that arises. The world of tomorrow will depend on the decisions we want to make today. Altogether, as one human family, we are invited to combine our efforts to deal with our common enemy: SARS-Cov-2. Any solitary approach, however brilliant it may be, does not solve the problems on a global level. Hence the need to always promote openness to others through frank and constructive dialogue. Indeed, it is only through dialogue that the possibility of confrontation between several *logoi* or rationalities is allowed. In this sense, openness to the other is already ethical, better still, the possibility of peace because it leads from the particular to the universal⁶. In other words, a kind of *megasyntesis* in the tangential. This is exactly what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin calls the hominization process: evolution = rise of consciousness.

The coalescence of elements and coalescence of branches. The spherical geometry of Earth and the psychic curvature of mind, harmonizing in order to counterbalance the individual and collective forces of dispersion in the world and to substitute for them unification: this, finally, is the whole driving force and secret of hominization⁷.

Covid-19 is an opportunity for all of humanity to realize the real threat that this virus represents to human life. This rise in consciousness should normally lead us to search for solutions that promote living together. In Teilhardian terms, we will say *effect of union*. This is an invitation to a collective awareness as children of the same mother, the Earth and to a “super-arrangement” and “re-arrangement” in which all the thinking elements of the Earth find themselves today individually and collectively united. Therefore, how to build together a post-pandemic world?

An experienced man is not dogmatic⁸. In other words, an experienced person is said to be wise. The history of mankind reveals that in difficult times, men have been able to let go of their *egos* to come together, look in the same direction and speak the same language. This assumes that there is the need to engage in an inclusive dialogue in which both developed and underdeveloped countries must find mechanisms capable of ending this deadly pandemic. This is what we can all understand by the concept of humanity, a kind of universal brotherhood⁹. It is an idea, a mind to be built up gradually. The process of hominization: to become more human.

The way out to the world, the gates of the future, the entry into the superman, will not open ahead to some privileged few, or to a single people, elect among all peoples. They will yield only on the thrust of all together in the direction where all can rejoin and complete

⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The human phenomon*. A new Edition and translation of le phenomene humain by Sarah Appleton-Weber. Sussex academic press. Portland. 2003, p172.

⁶ Lokadi Pierre Luhata. *Gadamer: dialogue entre tradition et rationalité*. Edilivre, Paris, 2016.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Hans Georg Gadamer. *Vérité et Méthode, les grandes lignes d'une herméneutique philosophique*, Paris, Seuil, 1996, p.376.

⁹ Pierre Teilard de Chardin. *Le phénomène humain*.Seuil. Paris, 1955.p.272

one another in a spiritual renewal of the Earth-it is this renewal we must deal with now, clarifying the manner of it and reflecting on its degree of physical reality¹⁰.

This is where the understanding of the human phenomenon leads us: to the superhuman who represents a state of mind that has reached a high level of complexity and organization. To avoid falling back into errors, certain values such as honesty, sincerity, justice and mutual trust are essential.

2.1. Honesty as foundation of the post-pandemic world

We understand by honesty, the quality of that which conforms to virtue, to morality or to a recognized convention. According to John Lock, honesty is a moral value which comes close to the notion of the “good”, as a consequence of the postulate according to which “what is just is good”: one affirms that to be the thing itself or that to say the thing as it is, that is what is right¹¹. On the other hand, when we define honesty as the “quality of that which conforms to morality or a convention”, we affirm that the belief in a principle which arises from an agreement between the individuals of the same community is a sufficient condition, if one acts in accordance with it, to speak the truth and do what one should, even if this implies no longer being able to be the thing itself.

The circumstances of the discovery of SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan, in November 2019 have never been clearly revealed. This lack of communication and transparency has directly resulted in millions of deaths around the world. It is the responsibility of each state to communicate in good time the existence of a danger which could cause enormous loss of human life. Some states refuse to inform the world about certain threats for fear of economic consequences. Hence, total silence on certain topics of global interest. This way of doing things is suicidal. The post-pandemic world should be built on certain values such as integrity, truthfulness, straightforwardness, including straightforward of conduct, along with the absence of lying, cheating, theft, etc. Honesty also involves being trustworthy, loyal, fair, and sincere. These qualities are necessary to build a world of peace. This should also apply to international conventions such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons, commonly known as the Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT, is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology. It is truly heartbreaking and disturbing that some states give themselves the luxury of carrying out basic research requiring billions of dollars in the manufacture of weapons capable of threatening world peace. And that, without being worried because having certain “rights” compared to the others. We believe that this way of doing things doesn’t lead to the construction of the new world.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹¹ J. Locke, *Essai philosophique sur l'entendement humain: Livres I et II, traduction par Jean-Michel Vienne.*, Paris, Vrin, 2002, p. Livre II, chapitre 8.

2.2. Isolation and exclusion: dead end to avoid

The losses caused by Covid-19 point to certain trends and ideologies that believe that the best way to fight this virus is to isolate oneself completely from others. Thus, we erect all kinds of physical and moral barriers to protect ourselves. The best vaccines, drugs or treatments are reserved for a “category of people” because they are considered superior to others. This is a form of disguised racism and Teilhard de Chardin does not share this point of view.

Another doctrine of « progress by isolation, » this one less theoretical and less extreme, and also much more insidious, has whole segments of humanity under its spell at this very moment: the doctrine that there are a few select and chosen races. Racism, since it flatters a collective egoism-something that is far more vibrant, exalted, and susceptible than any individual self-esteem-has the advantage of accepting and rigorously prolonging in its perspectives the lines of the tree of life they are¹².

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 in China, the world seems to be dividing into two big blocs. On the one hand, there are the rich or developed countries which have sufficient means to protect themselves against the virus. These countries are able to afford vaccines that have proven to be effective, such as Pfizer or Moderna. On the other hand, there are the so-called poor or underdeveloped countries. These are left behind. They do not have enough resources to vaccinate their people. As a result, the vaccination rate in some countries is too low or almost zero. With this situation, it is clear that the virus will not disappear from the planet. As long as there are pockets of the virus in some parts of the Earth, humanity will not be able to breathe peacefully. Indeed, this situation generates mistrust of each other. Hence, borders are being built up to prevent the circulation of the virus. Some countries find themselves automatically excluded from the life of the world because of the reported presence of the virus. Poor countries are often unfairly punished for their sincerity. This is the case of South Africa, which regretted the closure of many borders to its fellow citizens and travelers, arguing that the detection of the new Omicron variant, thanks to the excellence of the country's scientific teams, should not merit such a “punishment”. Why punish a state for its advanced genomic sequencing and its ability to detect new variants more quickly? Isolation or/and exclusion without helping someone in danger is contrary to the spirit of humanity.

False and contrary to nature is the egocentric ideal of a future reserved for those who have known egotistically how to reach the extremes of « everyone for himself ». No element can move or grow unless with and by means of all the others as well as itself¹³.

We believe that building the post-pandemic world must be based on honest relations between states. At this point in our thinking, it is time to talk about the good of science. In fact, thanks to scientific progress, the hope of dreaming of a better world is possible.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The human phenomon. A new Edition and translation of le phenomene humain* by Sarah Appleton-Weber. Sussex academic press. Portland. 2003, p173.

2.3. Science: the twin sister of humanity

Science has always stood beside humanity. She has always accompanied man on his journey on the earth. According to Teilhard de Chardin, science is the twin sister of humanity.

Taken in the full modern sense of the world, science is the twin of humanity. Born together, the two ideas (or dreams...) grew until in the course of the last century they acquired a quasi-religious value¹⁴.

If the presence of the virus imposes protective barriers, scientists have created the virtual world through Internet. A new world in which SARS-CoV-2 is excluded. Indeed, through the Internet, men and women can meet, discuss, plan activities. In short, interact without wearing masks or applying hydroalcoholic gel to disinfect the virtual lounge. The distance is reduced. Students and professors can interact thousands of miles from each other. This is exactly what the French Jesuit and scientist emphasizes in these terms:

I have already pointed it out many times. From yesterday's discovery of the railroad, automobile, and airplane, the physical influence of every human being, once restricted to several kilometers, now extends for hundreds of miles. Even better, thanks to the tremendous biological event that the discovery of electromagnetic waves represents, each individual from now on is simultaneously present (actively and passively) to the whole of the seas and continents- coextensive with the Earth¹⁵.

The progress observed in robotics and artificial intelligence brings us a deep admiration. The apologetic example is the sending to the red planet of Perseverance rover and the Ingenuity drone as well as the Zhurong by the Americans and the Chinese. Now, humans can interact with objects found in other planets in the solar system. The precision that accompanies the execution of the movements of these guided machines from the earth is extraordinary. This is what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin calls creation. Indeed, he says, intellectual discovery and synthesis are not merely speculation, but creation.

From an ontological point of view, science was born and developed with one goal: solving some problem of life. This can be understood as to be more powerful for the sake of doing more, but finally, and above all, doing more for the purpose of being more.

The different achievements of science plunge us into a kind of wonder if not worship. In fact, according to Teilhard de Chardin, the difference between research and worship is thin.

To those who have the courage to admit that their hopes extend this far, I say they are the most human of all- and that there is less difference between research and adoration than one might think. But let them clearly note the following point, and as we consider it, it will gradually lead us toward a more complete form of conquest and adoration¹⁶.

The way we all believe in decisions made by scientists corroborates de Chardin's point of view. Indeed, without wishing to understand in depth how vaccines are made, thousands and thousands

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.176

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.177.

of people are vaccinated every day, thus obeying the decisions proposed by science. The same attitudes are observed in the world of religion: liturgical celebrations are modified according to restrictions established by scientists. Everyone must respect them!

From the above, it appears that science is not an enemy of humanity, but on the contrary its twin sister. Together, hand in hand, they help human beings to live in confidence and serenity despite the difficulties they encounter on the roads of the earth. In this sense, the construction of the post-pandemic world must necessarily rely on the contribution of science.

3. Conclusion

Far from being inevitable, the phenomenon of Covid-19 seems to be an ever-growing occasion for awareness. Certainly, some people have lost their lives. Many have become unemployed. The world has changed. Some have lost hope and no longer recognize themselves. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is characteristic of man to be capable of change, better evolution. This ability to adapt has made it possible for humans never to lose hope. By realizing the danger that presents itself, the human being through science and technology can create a new world in which sincerity, honesty and mutual trust are pillars of interpersonal and state relations. Because it is by opening up to others through a true, constructive and continuous dialogue that the possibility of living together will become a reality of the post-pandemic world that we all want and desire. It is time to think about the spiritual renewal of the Earth. This is the sure path that will lead to the advent of the superhuman.

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