

Change of Age as Change of thought

C2078646

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Summary

Today's world is marked by rapid social change. All sectors of social life are disrupted and disturbed. Socio-political changes around the world raise serious questions about the fundamental notions such as freedom, self-determination of peoples, democracy, etc. Through the Arab revolutions, it became clear that nowadays the power of social networks must be taken into consideration. Social networks can contribute positively and effectively to the transformation of modern society. However, it is still necessary to make good use of them certain practices such as cybercrime, misinformation, intimidation and different types of harassment, anxiety, addiction, depression, isolation, and radicalization are serious problems that accompany the misuse of social media. With the revolution of social networks, a big gap is widening between reality and the virtual world. Climate change is a serious global issue and requires collective awareness to safeguard our Common Home. International forums like COP27 represent a hope for humanity. In this regard, substantial resources must be allocated to countries with large tropical forests to preserve them because these forests are the lungs of humanity. Today more than ever the use of artificial intelligence is essential in everyday life. From aeronautics, through defense, marketing, automotive industry and medicine, the importance of artificial intelligence is proving to be vital for humanity. Faced with the fluctuations of the modern world, Teilhard believes in the ability of Man to find appropriate solutions. Far from sinking into pessimism, Man is capable, through the exercise of thought in honest, fair, and sincere dialogue, of achieving the mega-syntheses necessary for entry into the Super-human. Current social changes are new frontiers which modern man finds himself confronted and must make the right decisions to ensure a bright future for future generations. Thus, international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the International Monetary Fund, are called upon for regular and concerted renewal. Current armed conflicts and the management of certain pandemics around the world raise questions about their effectiveness.

The essay addresses the problem of rapid change in modern society and its consequences for humanity. My reflection is organized around two main points: modern revolutions and the change of age as a change of thought.

I. The revolutions of the modern world

From the Middle Ages through modern times, the modern world has undergone changes that affect all areas of political, economic, religious, social, and cultural life. Today's world is in an era of constant development, profound transformation, and major adjustment. The 21st century, for example, has been marked by booming economic globalization and rapidly changing international political and economic scenarios. These changes are often the fruits of revolutions. Etymologically, the word revolution comes from the Latin *revolver*, to roll backwards. Revolution can be understood as a change, a major and sudden upheaval in the life of a nation. It therefore affects several areas, namely: social, political, economic, cultural, moral, scientific.

Faced with these rapid changes, humanity as a body sometimes feels crushed, annihilated, helpless and lost. Nothing is the same as before. This situation generates a deep existential crisis, and the future sometimes becomes uncertain. Where is the world leading?

In every age human beings have believed themselves to be at a “turning point of history”. And as part of a rising spiral, to some extent they have been right. But at certain moments this impression of transformation is felt much more strongly and is particularly justified. And it is not exaggerating the importance of our contemporary existences in the least for us to say that there is a fundamental change of course for the world under way in us, and it threatens to crush us.¹

I.1. Modern Socio-Political Revolutions

According to the American sociologist and political scientist Theda Skocpol, a social revolution is a series of rapid and fundamental transformations of the state and of the group and class structures of a society, in the context of popular revolts². Making a comparative study of social revolutions in three different countries, France, Russia and China, Theda Skocpol thinks that a political and social revolution is never conceivable without the decisive influence of international factors on the national scene. In other words, social conflicts can therefore do nothing if at the same time the State and its repressive capacity are not weakened from the outside.

In 2010, the world was confronted with a new social phenomenon called “Arab Spring” known as a set of popular protests, variable in scope and intensity, which occurred in many countries in the Arab world from December 2010. It is important to point out the crucial role played by social networks in the Arab revolutions. Some go so far as to speak of a Facebook revolution, a Twitter revolution or even a 2.0 revolution.

December 17, 2010, is remembered as the start of the Arab Spring, with the outbreak in Sidi Bouzid of the revolution in Tunisia, which led Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali to resign. Other people took

¹ 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, p.148.

² Theda Skocpol. *Etats et révolutions sociales*. Fayard.1985, p.486.

up the slogan “Get out”! The Egyptian revolution provoked the resignation of Hosni Mubarak and a democratic transition, but the other protests did not have the same results.

In Libya, things turned into a civil war between forces loyal to the Jamahiriya regime of Muammar Gaddafi and the insurgents, supported by Western powers. In Syria, the Russian-backed Bashar al-Assad regime still controls power. A thorough analysis of these revolutions shows the main causes of these social movements which can be summarized as a lack of individual and public freedom, kleptocracy, unemployment, poverty, and the high cost of living. Despite the efforts of the international community, some regions of the world remain unstable due to strong pressure exerted by some superpowers. The case of Ukraine is apologetic. In November 2013, Ukraine found itself divided over the economic interests of the European Union and Russia. The decision of President Yanukovich generated violent protests which led to the so-called revolution “of dignity” (The Revolution of Dignity). Since 2014, the war in Ukraine has caused thousands of casualties.

Faced with the powerlessness of the international community and particularly of the United Nations (UN) to put an end to the various conflicts around the world, some believe that it is time to rethink the role of this international institution. Indeed, the world is changing. The context that led to the creation of the UN is no longer the same. Hence, reimagining a UN capable of addressing current international political crises would be beneficial for humanity.

1.2. The social media revolution

The Arab revolutions have shown how social networks are a powerful means to escape state control. The term “social networks” refers to social networking companies on the Internet and their users around the world. Applications designated as “online social networking services” serve to constitute a virtual social network by linking, not people, but virtual identities. Their users use hypertext links or databases about which they are sometimes unaware to facilitate the management of professional careers, distribution and artistic visibility or private meetings.

Among the benefits of social media, we highlight: the establishment of a dialogue with the community and the development of social interactions. In this sense, some social media have become real communication companies that can reach a very large audience. Among the best known are: Twitter, Facebook, Line, Tik-Tok, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube.

Social networks have considerable power to change the world or lead to interventions in certain hot spots of the globe through the dissemination of images or videos. From now on, state television channels no longer have the monopoly to communicate about events in the country.

Even though they bring many benefits, social networks, like the Internet, are capable of both good and bad. Cybercrime, misinformation, bullying and different types of harassment, anxiety, addiction, depression, isolation, and radicalization are serious problems that accompany the misuse of social networks. With the revolution of social networks, a great gap is widening between reality and the virtual world.

The famous filmmaker Guy-Roger Duvert shows in his film “virtual revolution” that in 2047, 75% of the population with the possibility of connecting to the Internet will spend most of their lives online playing video games. The ontology of the avatar, an electronic image that represents and may be manipulated by a computer user (as in a game) raises multiple ethical and legal questions³.

1.3. The revolution of climate change

Climate change is now at the center of international discussions. Today more than ever, the climate emergency resonates louder. The effects of climate change are felt across the world. Studies have shown that carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere has reached unprecedented levels in our modern time history, associated with record temperatures and heavy downpours.

The 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly referred to as COP27 led to the first loss and damage fund being created. The conference has been held annually since the first UN climate agreement in 1992. It is used by governments to agree on policies to limit global temperature rises and adapt to impacts associated with climate change.

Countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Brazil and Indonesia, with their dense tropical forests, are currently the lungs of the world. The international community is invited to provide substantial resources to preserve these forests, which are necessary to combat climate change. Indeed, the discovery of peat bogs in the Congolese tropical basin by researchers from the University of Leeds is good news for humanity. Indeed, the peat of the Congolese Central Cuvette contains 30.6 billion tons of CO₂.⁴

The pope in his encyclical *Laudato si* devoted to environmental and social questions, addresses the problem of integral ecology, and in general the safeguarding of Creation. Indeed, in this encyclical, the pope criticizes consumerism and irresponsible development while denouncing environmental degradation and global warming caused by human activity.

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world’s poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be

³ Guy-Roger Duvert – « Virtual Revolution », 2016.

⁴ BBC, le tourbe du Congo : les « poumons de l'humanité » en danger. Juin 2022.

building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.⁵

I.4. Artificial intelligence (AI) revolution

The significant advances recorded in the industrial field in the modern world have pushed Man to investigate the creation of machines capable of imitating human reasoning. The expression "artificial intelligence" dates to 1955. The honor goes to John McCarthy and his team who, during a conference entitled "Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence" in 1956, inaugurated the hour of machine learning, deep learning, predictive analytics and, more recently, prescriptive analytics.

The search for quality, optimization, interpretation of data and decision-making in complex situations require enormous human effort. Computers can calculate combinations and best possible permutations very efficiently, quickly to make the right decision. In this sense, AI represents the future of decision-making. Nowadays, AI is present in our daily life. It is used in many human activities. For example, financial institutions fraud detection services enable companies of all sizes to accelerate mission-critical applications, improve data visibility, optimize data protection, and improve functional agility (ONTAP software); the autonomous car uses several AI applications. With assisted operations, remote patient monitoring, smart prostheses, personalized treatments thanks to the cross-checking of an increasing amount of data (big data), the medicine of the future will undoubtedly be based on AI. At the industrial level, AI makes it possible, thanks to predictive maintenance, to detect anomalies on machines before they become too serious.

Several other sectors of national life such as defense, marketing and aeronautics cannot now do without AI. The different changes or revolutions presented here do indeed raise existential questions that deserve adequate answers. In the following section, I will try to give some orientations following the thought of Teilhard de Chardin.

II. Change of Age as Change of thought

Teilhard de Chardin names the different social phenomena described in the previous lines as age change. Indeed, our current world is entering a deep turmoil in search of a certain stability. This instability is precisely what the French Jesuit calls change of age.

At this very moment we are passing through a change of age. The future will decide on the best name for this new era we are entering the age of industries, the age of oil, electricity, and atom. The age of machine. The age of huge collectives, and of science. What we call it does not matter. What does count, on the other land, is the

⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* N° 13. Roma, 2015.

fact that we can say that at the cost of what endure, another step, a decisive step of life, is being made in and around us.⁶

Instead of losing hope, thinking that the world is heading towards certain doom, it is necessary and fundamental to stop, sit down and reflect on our existing situation. This is a path that has always characterized human beings throughout history. Teilhard de Chardin speaks of the deep meaning of hominization. We are evolving. In other words, the changes that the world is currently undergoing summon and provoke a change of thought. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin has complete confidence in humanity. Indeed, he says from a purely positivist point of view, Man is the most mysterious and confusing object encountered by science.⁷

Hominization being a purely evolutionary process implies a certain rise of consciousness which plays a primordial role of organization and synthesis. Two years ago, the corona virus COVID-19 pandemic upset our usual way of living on planet Earth. Thanks to the exercise of thought deployed through Science, Man has been able to find ways to fight this virus. This required enormous effort on the level of thought. In this sense, the complexity of the current global problem is an invitation to more awareness, more reflection. It is the characteristic of the Super-human to find solutions to complex problems.

Far from being a uniquely individual activity, the reflection of which Teilhard de Chardin speaks is collective. Indeed, the rise of consciousness engenders the Effect of Union. It is a mega-synthesis, a super-arrangement to which all the thinking elements of the Earth today find themselves individually and collectively subject.

Some would ask the question where and how does this mega-synthesis take place?

There are organizations at the global level that bring states together to reflect on the problems of the world. These organizations are indeed places or better laboratories in which the mega-synthesis takes place.

II.1. International organizations as laboratories of megasynthesis

Most international organizations like the UN, UNICEF, WHO, IMF, etc. were established to try to solve problems that can destroy or simply retard progress throughout the world. These organizations are therefore the fruit of history, and they were born in specific contexts. The United Nations as an organization was born after the second world war. Now, more than 75 years later, the United Nations is still working to maintain international peace and security, provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, protect human rights, and uphold international law.

The mission of the United Nations throughout the world raises questions that deserve serious reflection. For example, the conflicts that are happening in eastern Congo have already caused the

⁶ 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, p.149.

⁷ Ibid, p. 109

death of more than 10 million people. In other words, Congolese casualties exceed the death toll from World War II. The silence of the international community remains worrying to this day. The conflict in Ukraine could have been avoided if the UN were more effective. Several conflicts around the world clearly show the inability of this organization to put an end to armed conflicts and to impose peace. Thus, it is urgent to rethink how to make this international organization effective and more credible because it has a salutary vocation for humanity.

The emergence of certain deadly diseases, for example that of the corona virus pandemic or COVID-19 remains unclear. The loss of human life caused by these diseases is counted in terms of thousands. What is the international community doing to solve this problem? It is certainly true that WHO has already done a lot for human health. This work must be maintained, encouraged, and rethought to better adapt to the different health problems that arise around the world.

To speak of international organizations as laboratories of mega-synthesis supposes that there is a real dialogue between the members. The mega-synthesis of which Teilhard speaks is a true dialogue and not a monologue where the most powerful impose their will on the weak.

According to the philosophers Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel, in an ideal community, the ethics of discussion, communication and debate is a reflection of the conditions of minimum possibilities of mutual understanding of people in a situation of verbal exchange. It is necessary that the participants in the discussion have the same prerogatives. The question is whether in current international organizations all members have the same benefits. If this is not the case, the conditions for fair discussions are not established. Consequently, the consensus reached does not in any way reflect the will of all.^{8,9}

It is true that the most disturbing thing in a real dialogue is the possibility of losing. Gadamer expresses it best when he affirms that dialogue is a risk for the interlocutors. We don't know in advance who will win. By the way, maybe the other one is right.¹⁰ This would explain why certain sensitive issues are not discussed within international organizations.

II.2. Age changes as new frontiers

The meaning attributed to the word “border” has evolved throughout human history, and it has not been the same from one era to another. Indeed, a border is a space of variable thickness, from the imaginary line to a particular space, separating or joining two territories, two sovereign States. It is a line of demarcation that separates two spaces, better still two realities. In the military

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *De l'éthique de la discussion*. Paris, « champs », Flammarion, 1992.

⁹ Karl-Otto Apel, *L'Éthique de la discussion*, éd. du Cerf, p. 45-46.

¹⁰ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Vérité et Méthode. Les grandes lignes d'une herméneutique philosophique*, Paris, Seuil, 1996, p.98

sense, the concept of border is etymologically linked to the word front and initially designates a particular type of limit: the fortified, protected limit.

The social revolutions in which modern man finds himself immersed can, in a certain sense, be considered as frontiers. Man finds himself divided between the old and the new. He is called to choose. Hence the importance of reflection. The 35th General Congregation of Jesuits in the Second Decree describes this reality in apt words:

Serving Christ's mission today means paying special attention to its global context. This context requires us to act as a universal body with a universal mission, realizing at the same time the radical diversity of our situations. It is as a worldwide community – and, simultaneously, as a network of local communities – that we seek to serve others across the world. Our mission of faith and justice, dialogue of religions and cultures has acquired dimensions that no longer allow us to conceive of the world as composed of separate entities; we must see it as a unified whole in which we depend upon one another. Globalization, technology, and environmental concerns have challenged our traditional boundaries and have enhanced our awareness that we bear a common responsibility for the welfare of the entire world and its development in a sustainable and living-giving way.¹¹

Despite the many problems in today's world, it is necessary to believe in the capacity of Man to organize himself to find adequate solutions. Far from closing in on a pessimism that refuses to speak its name, the complexity of the modern world needs a time of deep spiritual renewal during which the questioning of previous decisions is necessary. Dialogue presents itself as a sure and certain way out.

III. Conclusion

The rapid changes in the modern world plunge Man into a deep existential insecurity. This situation is far from being irreversible because it is the fruit of evolution. It is the nature of Man to up to complex situations. Thanks to his ever-increasing consciousness, he has the instruments of thought capable of organizing himself into a kind of mega-synthesis specific to the Super-human.¹²

Thus, modern man finds himself facing new frontiers and he must discern well to make good choices. Dialogue remains a critical tool to ensure a bright future for future generations.

¹¹ CG35-Decr. 2: A fire that kindles other fires. Roma, 2008.

¹² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *Le phénomène humain*. Seuil. Paris, 1955, p.271.

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