
BUILDING THE EARTH, REBUILDING LEBANON FROM TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND GIORGIO LA PIRA EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Teilhard de Chardin developed a perspective of faith and Science synthesis, based on the scientific investigation on cosmic and biological evolution. A result was the proposal of building the Earth to permit the final path of humankind toward the second incoming of Christ. This perspective found a common ground in the long activity, both theoretical and practical, developed by many Roman Catholic thinkers related to social engagement. Among them the Bishop of Pisa Cardinal Maffi who, as Teilhard, was also a scientist, and the Major of Florence, Giorgio La Pira, who developed a vision of politics based on the concept of human person.

He also developed activities of dialogue among the Mediterranean men and women of culture, which could be useful for opening a new season of dialogue.

Keywords: Teilhard de Chardin, La Pira, personalism, Mediterranean

1. Introduction

In these years, we dedicated a large part of our attention to the problem of Environmental ethics and to the Teilhard de Chardin perspective of building the Earth [1, 2].

These general papers introduced the topic starting from Teilhard de Chardin synthesis between modern science and Christian theology. Teilhard de Chardin was mainly a palaeontologist and a mystic, but he had also the theological and philosophical preparation, derived with his training in the Jesuits order, to propose a new synthesis between the scientific perspective of Evolutionary biology and Christian religious tradition.

These perspectives started from the scientific observation, based on the results derived from his palaeontological inquiries, of the evolution as a *moving towards*: of matter toward complexity and of life toward increasing complexity and at least in animals toward cerebralization [3, 4].

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This is the general law of evolution denominated by Teilhard de Chardin as the complexity consciousness law. Nevertheless, this perspective opens to the future. As a matter of fact, Teilhard de Chardin deduced from his observations of the past, an audacious theology of the future of humankind centred towards the second incoming of Christ.

The starting point was a general investigation of the problem of evil, which was not related only to the original sin but to the more general vision of a matter, which is *moving towards* an increasing order. This is a cosmic perspective because all the matter of the Universe is *moving towards* complexity and local order is progressively increasing in the limits posed by thermodynamic laws. The Christ incarnation gets also a cosmic meaning with new hints, also discussed on the side of the Theology of original sin [5].

Anyway thanks to the alliance freely accepted by humankind represented by the biblical person of Abraham and reopened by the Christ suffering (here also the problematic of evil and suffering in the world is reopened by Teilhard de Chardin [6]) the future is open again to hope, and the hope is to building the Earth thanks to humankind activity in order to get a new humanity ready for the second incoming of Christ. Building the Earth means to put new values into the humankind action on this very Earth. And this implies not only the individual salvation in the Heavens but also to work to help humankind in his/her path towards the future. Moreover, there is the necessity of a clear political perspective. The task of building the Earth asks also to preserve this very Earth: this very biosphere with all its links and control systems, developed thank to evolution. On the other side, the presence of the thinking creature implies a new necessity: that of guiding evolution.

Teilhard proposed the investigation of the Biosphere as a complex evolving object for a better understanding of evolutionary laws. On the other side, he developed the idea of the Noosphere, the sphere of thinking creatures. Noosphere must cooperate with the Biosphere with a symbiotic relationship to maintain Biosphere stability and to allow the *moving towards* humankind. This *moving towards* will reach its final point in the Omega point, the moment in the history of the Cosmos when the second incoming of Christ will be realised.

Of course, we do not wish to go further inside this Teilhard utopia. We wish only to underline the necessity of an attention on humankind politics and conservation of the Biosphere. With Teilhard, for instance, Environmental ethics becomes an essential part of Moral theology. For these reasons, we published a common perspective with Teilhard and the Jews philosopher Hans Jonas [7] and we underlined the fair trade perspective as one of the tool for building the Earth [8].

2. Roman Catholic social engagement

On the other side, another political perspective was built by the Roman Catholic philosophers and social activists as an answer to Pope Leo XIII encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*. The result was the development of theoretical and practical activities related to the possibilities of Christian Democratic movements. The social activity gave rise to Trade Unions, pleasant leagues and cooperatives movements and organisations. The theoretical activities were developed towards the theorisation of a Christian Democratic model of society [9].

One of the places in Italy where these activities were developed was Pisa. In the local University, Professor Giuseppe Toniolo, a philosopher who was among the theorists of the Christian Democratic movement, had his chair and in the same years, Cardinal Pietro Maffi was the bishop of the Pisa Archdioceses. He was an astronomer enrolled in Pisa archdioceses to look to the new activities of the Vatican Astronomical Observatory: Specola Vaticana. The intent of Rome was to have an astronomer Bishop in the city of Galileo. He was enrolled by the Pope Pius X as the president of the Vatican Observatory and thank to his work, the Observatory became what today is: one of the most important Centre for astronomical research in the world.

Two were the attitudes of Bishop Pietro Maffi towards Science. As an astronomer and president of the Vatican Observatory, he worked actively to insert the Observatory among the best Observatories in the World. The good work made by the Observatory in the international project of the Stellar Catalogue was mainly due to his organising capacity. He was one of the few examples of a Bishop who also as a Bishop went on with his scientific activities. He showed that not only the Catholic Church had no fear about Science but on the contrary was able to develop the scientific researches at the highest level. The results of the Observatory activities were presented in the Vatican City space in the Universal exhibitions [10]. He was a bishop and a scientist. But he used also Science as a tool for promoting scientific culture among common people, developing a high level activity of publishing papers and books in order to diffuse the astronomical novelties.

A short comment on this point: Pietro Maffi was not the only scientist and bishop in the history of Roman Catholic Church.

Tuscany was the country where the activity of another scientist who became bishop: Niels Stensen (perhaps known in Latin countries with his Latin name: Nicolaus Steno), took place.

He was the first scientist to propose a theory on evolution in time of the geological landscape. Then he was appointed bishop of Titiopolis and sent in North Germany to follow the small Roman Catholic communities that survived to the reform movement.

And only few people remember that one of the two greatest biologists of the XIX century, side by side with Charles R. Darwin, Johann Gregory Mendel was elected to bishop dignity when he became abbot of the Augustinian abbey in Brno, where he had performed his experiments on the heredity of characters.

All this tradition of scientists who were elected to bishop dignity started with Albert the Great, in medieval times, bishop of Köln.

Bishop Maffi was also conscious of his role of bishop in the city of Galileo. In the new seat of the Observatory, still inside the Vatican City, he had a memorial tablet posed to remember that pope Clement VII held a talk about the Copernican System and then gave as a gift to the astronomer a precious Greek code to encourage the prosecutions of researches [11].

In Bishop Maffi's opinion, this was the actual attitude of the Church and only the mistake of Pope Urban VIII put clouds in a day of splendid discoveries. But now (and this is reported in a letter he sent to the director of Oxford Observatory) those clouds were completely removed.

The Roman Catholic Church was looking with enthusiasm to Science for two main reasons. The first was that God as the Creator could be fully understood only thank to the work of scientists. Moreover, scientific investigation was a common task for all the humankind and a strong dialogue instrument. Finally, Science was a way to diffuse culture also among not scientists and for this reason was a potent instrument of humankind promotion and to remove superstition and a magic vision of nature.

Bishop Maffi was one among the many priest and scientists who wrote popular books to diffuse scientific knowledge. This was the best way to eliminate superstition creeds.

Among the others, we wish to remember Antonio Stoppani, Italian geologist and priest of the end of the XIX century, a follower of Antonio Rosmini. His book 'Il Bel Paese' was a book on geography and geology of Italy and it was published to be an instrument to develop a common feeling of peoples of a country unified from few years. In addition, this attitude was present in the Italian priests and scientists [12].

Anyway, in Bishop Maffi's activity there was another aspect: that of social engagement. Together with Toniolo, in the year 1907, in Pisa and Pistoia, he was able to organise the first social week of Italian Catholics, where economists, scientists, philosophers, theologians, but also social organisers and trade union activists and founders of co-operative societies discussed together how to realise the hints and suggestions of the *Rerum Novarum*.

During a research mainly devoted to publish a catalogue of the documents of Maffi Archive related to the Vatican Observatory, we were able to find the minute of the sermon he gave to the Sunday service during the social week. Bishop Maffi commented the Gospel of the breads and fishes, and he underlined that Christ first of all preached the good novel and then looked after the corporal necessities of the crowd. However, Bishop Maffi said that we could not do the same: in the situation of social injustice, we have first of all to give breads and fishes and then we will be allowed to preach the Gospel. It was a

strong recall to the social engagement of Catholic to remove social injustices [13].

We found in bishop Maffi many aspects we need for our paper: scientific attitude and social engagement.

Among opened the perspectives we have also that of Giorgio La Pira, a professor of law, who developed a vision of politics based on the centrality of human person. His papers could be a good starting point for a dialogue on politics, such as those of Teilhard de Chardin are for a dialogue on Science and the future of humankind. .

3. Christian Democratic perspective

It is so far not surprising then that, after bishop Maffi, in Tuscany started a strong social movement among Catholics from which the La Pira papers and actions came out.

In Pisa operated also Giovanni Gronchi who first of all was a trade union organiser and a Christian Democratic exponent. After the Second World War was also President of Italian Republic. His most important theoretical papers are the so-called 'American talks' [14].

During an official visits to the USA he stated clearly that the task of the Western world was to reconcile freedom and social justice and that European perspective should be that of the solidarity among classes in order to eliminate social injustice. And of course, the Italian agrarian reform was a splendid example of the realisation of these programs when the large estates of few large landowner, thanks to the political activities of the Christian Democratic party where substitute by the properties of thousands and thousands small landowners.

Giorgio La Pira was one among these groups of thinkers and social activists. He was major of Florence again for the Christian Democratic Party. The idea was to develop a political project based on religious values, but then presented in a general ways so that it could be accepted also by non-religious politics.

La Pira made also of Florence the Centre of a dialogue with different countries and cultures: in the same time when De Gasperi developed the paths toward the European Union, La Pira opened to the Mediterranean cultures with the 'Florence dialogues on the Mediterranean' and his project started from his visit to the city of Beirut [15].

Between the Toniolo and Maffi engagements and that of La Pira there was a new philosophical approach, that of Christian personalism. The two main philosophers were Jacques Maritain and Emanuel Mounier. In their system, the main philosophic object to be taken into consideration is the human person, i.e. the individual plus all those relationships that makes possible for the individual to become person [16].

One of the characteristics of the person are his/her relationships inside the community. Therefore, side by side with the idea of the Christian personalism came out also that, mainly developed by Mounier, of the communitarian personalism [17].

These two elements were the start point for a political project that reached the main results after the terrific experience of the Second World War. They were the building of Europe and the Italian constitution. With pride, La Pira affirmed that the Italian constitution was written by politicians of many different ideologies. Anyway, they found their common point in the Christian personalism [18].

Moreover, even the Universal Declaration of Humankind Rights, written by experts of the United Nation Organisation, had in Jacques Maritain one of its outstanding philosophers [19].

On the other hand, the presence of prime ministers or foreigner ministers of the Christian Democratic movement in the six countries, which started the project of the European Union, was the start point of European Union. In particular the presence of Adenaur, De Gasperi and Schuman in Germany, Italy and France respectively, allowed to start that process of the European Community for coal and steel.

The Schuman declaration started from the necessity to stop the reason of wars between European nations mainly Germany and French. The only way was to put under the control of a supranational authority for the coal and steel production, the instruments necessary to weapons building. This was considered a first step toward a peaceful integration of European countries. While other movements, mainly looking to the other side of European Iron Curtain spoken and manifested for peace, together with the approval of a strong-arm race. On the contrary, the Christian Democratic Europe developed instruments to build an actual peace [20]. And gradually, the increasing enlargement of the Union brings peaceful relationships between the member countries.

A communitarian vision was present also in Latin America, with the experience of the Christian Democratic parties that reached its apex in the Chile experience. Here started the *pensamiento comunitario* (the communitarian thought) which had its very basis in the works of Maritain and Mounier but with a peculiar attention to Latin American situation [21] and Africa [22].

Mounier had also the capacity to open to a general vision of the world and he stated the necessity to open the research of the personalistic philosophers to a general vision of humankind evolution and at this point he referred to Teilhard de Chardin papers, which were in that years still very few known in reason of the lack of the permission by the Roman Catholic authorities for their publications. With the diffusion of Teilhard de Chardin papers and books, a new potent perspective joined that of personalistic philosophers [23]. This perspective, as we have previously written, was based on the idea of the general evolution on the Universe and of life and that this evolution was a *moving towards* - *moving towards* of matter towards complexity and of life towards complexity and cerebralization. The *moving towards* doesn't stop with

humankind but it is going on in order to build the Earth and changing humankind for the second coming of Christ. This vision, strongly utopic, was anyway the final step towards the general attitude of the political action of the Christian towards the future, a perspective that started with *Rerum novarum* and bishop's Maffi and Toniolo's engagements.

Moreover, the synthesis of Teilhard de Chardin, strongly rooted in the science vision of evolution, will be a strong tool for the dialogue among religions and cultures.

The experience of Bishop Maffi joined the Science attitude and the social engagement and in the same way, Teilhard developed from the scientific investigation of evolution a potent tool for the political engagement toward the future of humankind.

His papers were the demonstration that the dialogue between cultures and with the results of modern Science was a potent tool of enrichment of the Roman Catholic experience. In addition, his papers were, together with those of Maritain and Mounier, among the starting points of the *Gaudium et Spes* declaration. This was the document of the Vatican Council II opening the Church to the dialogue with the modern world. The dialogue with cultures and Science was the instrument to reach a correct vision on humankind, necessary to help the walk of the Church. Moreover, in the Vatican the Second council documents, the Church was intended not anymore as a hierarchical society but as the people of God moving towards the future [24].

In relation to the other cultures, Maritain was known and studied in Latin America and he was the start point of some of the Christian Democratic experience which gave some good results at least in Chili; and the travel diary of Mounier in Africa is still a strong document to analyze the connections between Europe and Africa just during the end of the colonialist era; Teilhard is worldwide known and we have summarised in this journal his connections with Europe and North and South America [8].

4. Teilhard de Chardin and Lebanon

In this paper regarding the dialogue with the Lebanese culture, we wish to underline finally Teilhard de Chardin connections with Lebanon. In a mimeographed report diffused during the UNESCO 1981 celebrations for the first centenary of Teilhard de Chardin birth, Professor Sobhi AL-Saleh reported his first encounter with Teilhard de Chardin's ideas and works in the Lebanese Cenacle, in Beirut, in the year 1964 and there he discovered the possibility given by Teilhard de Chardin thoughts for a dialogue among monotheistic religions.

It is the scientific synthesis, which could be of great interest for the dialogue. On the contrary, it is considered outside the possibilities of the dialogue Teilhard's Christology. A part from this aspect, the main point is that the scientific endeavour is considered also an act of faith.

The common devotion in God's hands is linked together with the aptitude to discover the unknown in life and Universe, also in the perspective of accomplish the humankind for the God glory [25].

Again, Teilhard is proposed as the man of dialogue for his faith, his scientific investigation, his perspectives opening to the future. Giorgio La Pira received in Florence Leopold Sedar Senghor and addressed him a welcome related to Teilhard de Chardin [15]. He underlined Teilhard' hint to build the Earth with a common planetary civilisation, based on the common paternity of God and fraternity among humankind.

Step by step, from La Pira and Teilhard de Chardin theological scientific and political papers and perspectives, we can trace again a percouse on both the sides of Mediterranean, which could be taken into consideration as a percouse for the dialogue and a perspective for the future of building the Earth with a common humankind fraternity.

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