

Teilhard's Concept of Religion and the Religious Phenomenon of Our Time

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We are pleased to publish this significant paper by Ewert H. Cousins, a past-president of the American Teilhard Association and emeritus professor of theology at Fordham University. The paper was delivered in September, 1981 in Paris at a UNESCO conference marking the centennial of the birth of Teilhard de Chardin. Introduced first at this conference, Dr. Cousins' concept of a Second Axial Period of a global religious florescence has gained considerable currency. Although heretofore unpublished, this paper strikes a timely note as religions of the First Axial Age become engulfed in clashes among themselves and with modern secular civilizations. Of similar relevance is the connection Cousins makes between Teilhard's sense of a complexifying biosphere and noosphere and an emerging earth-centered spiritual consciousness.

According to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the human community is undergoing a radical transformation of consciousness. We are evolving from a state of tribal-national awareness to global consciousness. Through a process which he calls "planetization," the forces of evolution have shifted from divergence to convergence.¹ When humankind first appeared on the earth, groups diverged into separate tribal units. However, the spherical shape of the earth, the increase in population and the rapid development of communication in recent times have caused consciousness to converge and intensify. Out of the process, global consciousness is emerging. What effect will this have on religion? What role will religion play in the process of planetization? Can Teilhard's concept of religion help us understand the religious phenomenon of our time? Is this religious phenomenon a specific manifestation of the larger human phenomenon which Teilhard describes as a process of planetization? My paper will examine these questions, exploring the religious phenomenon in the light of Teilhard's concept of religion and his study of the human phenomenon.