In the 1950s, critics of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin did not foresee the impact that his thoughts on *evolution* would have four decades later. There are two particular areas where this impact is now being widely felt: (1) in theology and (2) in cybernetics.

**IN THEOLOGY**

In 1988, Hans Urs von Balthasar published some of the insights of Gregory of Nyssa (d. 386) about “infinite becoming” as exemplified in the “evolution of earth” within a “divine milieu.”¹ In 1996, Pope John Paul II, in his message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, recalled how Pius XII had spelled out the conditions on which evolution would be “compatible with the Christian faith,” and added his own observation:

> It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favour of this theory.²

**IN CYBERNETICS**

Teilhard’s impact on cybernetics is somewhat ambiguous but

1. See “Balthasar’s ‘Infinite Becoming’” in section on Review Articles in this issue of *Landas*.
more exciting. His dreamlike concepts of the "planetization of consciousness" and of the planetary "noosphere" have somehow influenced the technology of electronic communication. This is developed quite extensively in more than 900 sites on the Internet. One particular article is entitled "A Globe Clothing Itself with a Brain" by Jennifer Cobb Kreisberg. Another article on Internet is by Anodea Judith who says:

The noosphere is a planetary thinking network — an interlinked system of consciousness and information, a global net of self-awareness, instantaneous feedback, and planetary communication. At the time of his writing, computers of any merit were the size of a city block, and the Internet was, if anything, an element of speculative science fiction. Yet this evolution is indeed coming to pass, and with a rapidity, that in Gaia time, is but a mere passage of seconds. In these precious moments, the planet is developing her cerebral cortex, and emerging into self-conscious awakening. We are indeed approaching the Omega point that Teilhard de Chardin was so excited about.

The long-term maintenance of electronic communication on a global scale can be expensive. But since this is particularly useful to financial globalization, very recently, the World Bank and other institutions have pooled together their vast financial resources in a project for facilitating global communications. They describe the project on Internet as follows:

Global Knowledge 97 is an ongoing global dialogue on how to harness knowledge and information as tools of sustainable and equitable development. Its focal point is an international conference on Knowledge for Development in the Information Age, co-hosted by the World Bank and the Government of Canada in June 1997, in cooperation with a broad range of public and private partners. This Web site serves as the source of information on that conference, as the site of an ongoing virtual conference that will enrich and extend the dialogue that occurs in Toronto in June, and as the focal point

of an emerging global partnership to harness knowledge and information for development.⁵

Electronic mail from the “broad range of public and private partners” immediately poured in and continue to pour in. Within hours, these are being quickly displayed online for viewers. Some are enthusiastic, others are frankly skeptical. The skepticism may have arisen from the historical origin of the World Bank: it was born from the Bretton Woods cabal of 1944. But more optimistic observers now see the World Bank and multinational investors as considering a transformation from pork-barrel politicking to a preferential option for the poor.

Still some pessimism persists in the irrational belief that business cycles, with their fluctuations between booms and recessions, are inevitable and cannot be remedied. Consequently, marginalized economies with large populations, for whom even a minor recession can now be genocidal, would have no alternative between a genocidal defeat and suicidal terrorism. The perceived relation between global terrorism and the business cycle evokes pessimism about projects of economic globalization.

The dialectic between pessimists and optimists was foreseen by Teilhard. His failure to discover tangible evidence in favor of either side led him to say:

Between these two alternatives of absolute optimism and absolute pessimism, there is no middle way because by its very nature progress is all or nothing . . . On neither side is there any tangible evidence to produce. Only, in support of hope, there are rational invitations to an act of faith.⁶

It was an act of faith that led Bernard Lonergan to initiate a massive educational effort in formulating and proposing a rational alternative to the business cycle.⁷

Will the technicians of cyberspace accept Teilhard’s “rational

invitations to an act of faith”?

THEOLOGY IN CYBERSPACE?

Will faith enter into cyberspace? Perhaps not divine faith as defined by theologians, but some sort of human preamble to it. Although the secular mindset is uneasy about religions, still, within its horizon of measurable data, it sees a high probability of a favorable outcome or “cost-effectivity” in its plans for a “global dialogue on how to harness knowledge and information as tools of sustainable development.” Religious openness to transcendent reality and to a broader definition of “development” recognizes the practical need for a starting point for “globalization.” This is thoroughly discussed by Ursula King in her Internet article where she says:

At present, the global paradigm is mostly used in international finance, trade, science and ecology rather than culture or religion. Conferences and publications range from global banking to global warming, from global deforestation to global human resources, to mention just a few examples. We now also find references to global theology and global spirituality. . . . (These indicate) a different kind of consciousness which takes into account a new order of complexity in which the particular and the universal, the local, regional and international interact in quite a new way. There is also a search for new identities, personal, social, and transnational, sometimes described as corporate, critical self-consciousness which expresses itself in the search for a new collective will and a new global order characterised by greater unity, peace and social justice. 8

From this it may be inferred that there is a broad spectrum of options between minimum and maximum openness to a new order of complexity. Complexity can be mystifying to underdeveloped consciousness. For Teilhard, proportion is needed for a balanced growth of complexity and consciousness. 9 Networking on Internet may be very complex but much more complex is

the task of constructing the network of linkages between the immanent and the transcendent components of human consciousness.\textsuperscript{10} Both sets of components are appearing on Internet in overwhelming profusion and present a very challenging task. This task must be included in any viable development of global knowledge beyond 1997.

10. Ibid. 263-66.