

**FATHER DE BREUVERY
AND
TEILHARD**



by Robert Muller

*Cover photo of Father Emmanuel de Breuvery
by United Nations*

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*The great truths of visionaries always
irradiate the fabric of society.*

Father Emmanuel de Breuvery was one of the most remarkable men I have known at the United Nations. An entire book could be devoted to him but, alas, his U.N. friends and colleagues have so little time, pressed as they are by urgent world problems. Unlike his compatriot Teilhard de Chardin, with whom he served as a Jesuit in China and later shared quarters in New York, he did not leave any writings, except for his considerable work embodied in United Nations publications and achievements.

After his expulsion from China in 1951, Father de Breuvery joined the French delegation to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris and later to the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. He was an economist of fine repute, well-versed in matters of economic development, finance and natural resources. He attracted the attention of the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs which offered him a post. He made his presence felt very rapidly and became Director of the Natural Resources Division.

There his deputy was a no less brilliant man, Joseph Barnea, an Israeli, with whom he formed one of the most dynamic and pathbreaking teams of internationalists the United Nations has ever known. If the human story of this most unusual collaboration could be written, it would show what two men of totally diverse origins and beliefs can achieve when they are bound by a common concern for the fate of mankind and of our planet.

As a Special Assistant to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, I had frequent dealings with Father de Breuver. We became close friends. He baptized two of our children and later, when he retired, he prompted me to return from Geneva to New York to become Associate Director of his Division, at the helm of which Barnea had succeeded him.

He often invited me for luncheon at one of his favourite restaurants: the Toque Blanche, the Cheval Blanc or just across the street from the U.N., Ferdi's. There, after his customary Manhattan cocktail, he would talk to me about the world, its people, its resources and the future. The tall, wiry aristocrat who could have been a great political leader or a very successful businessman, had for the United Nations the same love and devotion he had for his church. The U.N. was his family and the fulfilment of his dreams. His colleagues were his friends and teammates. Very few international civil servants did as much as he to advance some of the greatest causes of our time, such as a new order for the seas and oceans, an inventory of the world's water, energy and mineral resources, exploration in

the poorer countries, development of international river basins, and so on and so forth. Who remembers today that as early as 1957 he foresaw the energy crisis and convened the first U.N. conference on new sources of energy in Rome in 1961? Five big volumes on solar, geo-thermal, aeolian and sea energy were then published by the U.N. and later reproduced in technical journals of various countries when the energy crisis broke out.

After discussing planetary issues for a while, Father de Breuverey would return to Earth and test me on some of his more immediate plans and ideas.

"Muller," he said to me one day, "the post of Deputy Executive Secretary of the U.N. Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East is vacant and has been offered to me. I am deeply tempted to accept it and resume work in Asia where there is so much to do. But one thing troubles me: I have built up the U.N. Natural Resources Division and I would hate to leave it just like that. I know a young Jesuit in France who is a great expert in natural resources. I would like to see him join the Division if I leave for Asia. What do you think? I know Hammarskjold well from the days when we were both delegates to the OECD in Paris. I am tempted to ask him for an appointment and tell him that I would accept the Asian position if my young Jesuit friend can be recruited."

Knowing perfectly well that he would do it in any case, I answered:

"You do not risk anything. All Hammarskjold can do is turn you down and your options will still be open."

"You are right. I must try my best. As for the outcome, it lies entirely with God. He is the master, I am only his earthly servant."

Two days later he asked me again to luncheon and reported to me the outcome:

"Before entering Hammarskjold's office I crossed myself and reminded God that it was essentially His affair. The Secretary-General received me with great friendliness. We discussed a few current international issues and then I broached the question I had come to ask.

" 'Mr. Secretary-General, as a priest I find almost complete harmony between the aims of the United Nations and those of my religion: peace, justice, progress, racial equality, non-violence, a world-wide brotherhood for the advancement of all peoples.'

"After these preliminaries, I was about to present my plea when Hammarskjold interrupted me and said:

" 'Father, how right you are! I could not agree with you more. As a matter of fact, if you should accept the position which is offered to you in Asia, I am thinking of a Buddhist to replace you here at Headquarters. . . .'

"That was obviously the end of my demarche! He had perfectly guessed the reason of my visit and seemed to enjoy himself tremendously! He elaborated on his offer and I politely asked for a period of reflection. Of course, I will remain at Headquarters, for I cannot lose face."

Hammarskjold did not know that his wish would become true but in a different way. In the same

office where he spoke, at his own desk, in the same chair where he sat, amid the same furniture he had selected and ordered from Sweden, *he* was going to be succeeded, after his dramatic death, by a Buddhist and probably the most religious Secretary-General the United Nations has ever known: U Thant. Perhaps God was indeed present at the meeting between the two men and was smiling at their self-assurance and ignorance of their fate.

He may have also been present when later in the same office I sat so often with U Thant, whose aide I had become, discussing the world and its peoples, while being both so utterly ignorant of our own fate. Dag Hammarskjold, Father de Breuver and U Thant are dead today and I find myself alone with my thoughts and sentiments, trying to preserve an echo of the past and of its cherished memories. . . .

* * *

Father de Breuver was a great, dynamic and skilled man, but I was sometimes perplexed that his mind could reach so far into the future. To study and assess the world's resources was of course his job, but nobody at the U.N. and in government at that time was thinking more than a few years ahead. Futurology and the extension of the time horizon of man came only later. How was it then possible that an eminently practical, down-to-earth man could have foreseen the energy crisis and launched an international study programme on new sources of energy as early as 1957? The

thought often crosses my mind that Father Teilhard de Chardin may have influenced him. They shared an apartment in Manhattan, they confessed each other, read mass together and saw each other every day. Father de Breuvery often discussed with Teilhard his work at the U.N. He once quoted to me Teilhard as saying:

“**Mon Père**, someday people will understand that the sun, and only the sun, from which most other forms of energy are derived, is our great clean source of energy. Among the civilizations in the universe, the Earth is a very primitive one, since it uses the energy of its own planet. Others utilize the energy of their sun, and still others harness the energy of the universe. You must take a very long-term view, a view of hundreds of thousands of years and prepare the minds of the political leaders to think in terms of solar energy. . . .”

On another occasion, de Breuvery told me:

“Last night I exploded in front of Teilhard against the U.N. bureaucracy. He looked at me with his kind eyes and said: ‘**Mon Père**, you must be patient. Mankind is still very young. Give it another five hundred thousand years and the problem of bureaucracy will also be solved.’ ”

Such remarks often made me wonder by what mysterious ways the visions and perceptions of exceptional human beings irradiate the fabric of society. Teilhard de Chardin influenced his companion who inspired his colleagues who started a rich process of global and long-term thinking in the U.N. which affected many nations and people

throughout the world. I have myself been deeply influenced by Teilhard, although I have never been able to assimilate his tough, philosophical writings.

When years later Ellen and Mary Lukas, the authors of Teilhard's biography,* interviewed me on the relations between Teilhard and Father de Breuver, they hinted to me that my own views on mankind's future were to a large extent a reflection of Teilhard's theory of convergence and fulfilment of the human race. There is however one difference: I firmly believe that the process will take less than a hundred years and will not require the hundreds of thousands of years forecast by Teilhard. Father de Breuver, the eminent man of action and change, would certainly have agreed with me.

**Teilhard, a Biography* by Mary and Ellen Lukas, Doubleday, New York, 1977.



Teilhard de Chardin

by Mazzone