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EVOLUTIONARY THEOLOGY OF
PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN,
HIS CRITIICS AND A PERSONAL
EVALUATION

Robert Letalien

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CHAPTER I

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born in 1881, the son of a small landowner in Auvergne, France. He was the fourth in a family of eleven children. His father who was a gentleman farmer had a zest for natural history, and it was perhaps this that whetted the appetite of his son for his own field of endeavor. When he was ten years old, Teilhard entered a Jesuit college where he concentrated his studies in the fields of geology and mineralogy. At the age of eighteen he entered the Jesuit order and after his study of philosophy was sent to the Jesuit college at Cairo to teach physics and chemistry.

There is little doubt that the philosophy of Bergson had a great impact upon the thought of Teilhard. "Before being ordained priest in 1912, a reading of Bergson's Evolution Creatrice had helped to inspire in him a profound interest in the general facts and theories of evolution." ¹ While working at the Institute of Human Palaeontology he met Abbé Brueil, a man who was to become his life-long friend and who furthured his interest in the study of the evolution of man.

After World War I the direction of Teilhard's life

became more definitely aimed. By this time he had become convinced that man and all phenomena was the result of the evolutionary process. His goal was to develop a theory of evolution which would combine history and his deep-felt Christian faith. "And as a dedicated Christian priest, he felt it imperative to try to reconcile Christian theology with his evolutionary philosophy, to relate the facts of religious experience to those of natural science."²

From 1923 until the end of World War II Teilhard spent most of his life in China where he furthured his studies in palaeontology. When he finally returned to France he was asked by his superiors not to write any more on philosophical subjects, and his previous writings were banned from publication. The years 1951-1955 were spent in the United States where he continued to study and to lecture. In 1955 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin died, and it has been only since his death that his works have been published.

This paper will be an attempt to evaluate the life goal of Teilhard, namely, his reconciliation of the theory of evolution with the Christian faith. The emphasis will be placed upon his hopes for the future of man in the light of his philosophy. The future of man he labels as the

"Omega point." To see how this point is reached it will be necessary to briefly describe how Teilhard views the evolutionary process from the inception of matter until the fulfillment of all things at the Omega point.

CHAPTER II

PRE-LIFE IN THE THOUGHT OF TEILHARD

"To push anything back into the past is equivalent to reducing it to its simplest elements."³ With this statement Teilhard begins his best known work which best sums up his thought, The Phenomenon of Man. Teilhard sees both plurality and unity in all life. Its plurality is seen in the infinitesimal division of matter into more and more minute particles. Only a short time ago man believed that the atom comprised the smallest unit of matter. Today we know that the atom itself is composed of even smaller particles.

Like the tiny diatom shells whose markings, however magnified, change almost indefinitely into new patterns, so each particle of matter, ever smaller and smaller, under the physicist's analysis tends to reduce itself into something yet more finely granulated. ⁴

And yet in all this division of life Teilhard sees something of unity. There seems to be some common end and purpose in all the multiple elements of life. It is this unity that Teilhard labels, "homogeneity." Just what is this unity which all matter possesses? Teilhard

describes this as a kind of life force or energy which all matter possesses and which gives all things purpose. "The underlying assumption is that life has always been present within the deepest reaches of all matter. It did not suddenly burst forth at some definite instant and place."⁵

Here then we see the unity of all life, one form dependent on the other. Beginning with the most primordial matter to the most complex organism is a unifying life force which fulfills itself in each new step of evolution. Creation itself is not just an instantaneous act, but a gradual process of development and fulfillment of the life force. But at each new step of development something new is added that was not to be found in the former stage, and it is this newness that is the act of creation.

At each emergence something new appears that surpasses all that has gone before. There is creation. Contrary to its apparent homogeneity, there is ⁶ nothing linear in evolution; it is discontinuous.

It is here where Teilhard departs from traditional science and physics. Teilhard maintains that science is concerned with only the without of things, i. e., only with their exterior phenomena. But Teilhard maintains that there is also a within of things, and in the phenomenon of man this within is most clearly discernible.

In the eyes of the physicist, nothing exists legitimately, at least up to now, except the without of things. The same intellectual attitude is still permissible in the bacteriologist, whose cultures (apart from some substantial difficulties) are treated as laboratory reagents. But it is still more difficult in the realm of plants. It tends to become a gamble in the case of a biologist studying the behaviour of insects or coelenterates. It seems merely futile with regard to the vertebrates. Finally, it breaks down completely with man, in whom the existence of a within can no longer be evaded, because it is the object of a direct intuition and the substance of all knowledge. 7

The within of all things including pre-life in a word is consciousness. His definition of pre-life is not his own but borrowed from the world of science. For Teilhard life may be found in all things, for all matter is endowed with an energy which seeks to fulfill itself in consciousness. It is precisely here that we see the influence of Bergson upon Teilhard de Chardin. For Bergson the "élan vital" was the driving force behind all creation.

Life achieves and explains itself progressively. From the lowest to the highest stages of evolution the "élan vital" is the creative flood which is ever checked by the channels it has formed and is ever sweeping over its banks to stream out in new 8 directions.

CHAPTER III

THE ADVENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE

Teilhard is reluctant to pinpoint the advent of life. As we have noted he believed that all things were endowed

to a greater or lesser extent with a life force.

For a long time we have known how impossible it is to draw a clear line between animal and plant on the unicellular level. Nor can we draw one between living protoplasm and dead proteins on the level of the very big molecular accumulations. We still use the word "dead" for these latter unclassified substances, but have we not already come to the conclusion that they would be incomprehensible if they did not possess already, deep down in themselves, some sort of rudimentary psyche? 9

But the next stage of evolution becomes the biosphere with its origin, the cell. The cell is the natural granule of "life" as the atom is the natural granule of matter. The cell is the link between the science of physics and biology, for the cell is the simplest element of life which proceeds from matter. Teilhard holds that the development of the cell took an extremely long period, and in this period it is inevitable that something more complex and advanced should come into being. He describes the complexity of the cell with all its many components and arrangements.

In this cell (at the same time so single, so uniform and so complex) what we have is really the stuff of the universe reappearing once again with all its characteristics--only this time it has reached a higher rung of complexity and thus, by the same stroke (if our hypothesis be well founded), advanced still further in interiority, i. e., consciousness. 10

As a cell grows and becomes more structured it reproduces itself and the cell multiplies. But in this act of reproduction the cell takes on new dimensions, and the act

itself becomes a means of progress and conquest. The cell becomes more complex, a collection of cells, and finally, living organisms. Teilhard traces this progress through the Permian period all the way to the advent of mammalia. The end of these evolutionary processes appears gradually as the cerebralization of organisms in a more and more complex nervous system. In the primates we have a new turning point, for here the evolutionary processes manifest themselves wholly in the development of the brain.

In the case of the primates, on the other hand, evolution went straight to work on the brain, neglecting everything else, which accordingly remained malleable. That is why they are at the head of the upward and onward march towards greater consciousness. 11

With the advent of man consciousness reaches new heights, for this is no less than the birth of thought.

When we consider the recent past of the universe, the past flowing into the present, we come upon man. It is to Teilhard's credit that he recognized the impossibility of looking on man otherwise than as the summit of evolution, and that he realized that even when one takes a point of view that may seem exterior, even when one regards only the "phenomenon of man" the whole history of life and of the universe culminates in man. He is the high point of history, of complexity, and of consciousness. 12

With man consciousness reaches a new plane. The world has entered into a completely new era, from the biosphere to the noosphere. The process of psychogenesis has led

at last to man. It is now erased as it is absorbed in one of its own creations. "When for the first time in a living creature instinct perceived itself in its own mirror, the whole world took a pace forward."¹³

As we view the development of man we observe a development no longer of only physical qualities, but a development of man's greater consciousness of himself.

But from the moment humanity appeared, no human group has perceptibly altered its physical characteristics in order to profit better by its environment. Instead it produces for this purpose tools identical in function. "These are truly prolongations of man's physical organs as in the case of the altering animal species."¹⁴

CHAPTER IV

PLANETIZATION

As all living organisms man at first underwent the process of division and divergence. As we trace his development in Crô-Magnon man, Neanderthal, Java, Peking, etc., we seem to observe a breaking up of the human phylum into many sub-groups. There is also the divergence of race, language, nationality, and customs. As man became more numerous he tended to split off into more groups

so divergent from the other that they could no longer recognize one another. But in spite of the divergence there is also a unifying trend. The family, the tribe, the nation, all point out a desire to converge. And in this unity is a note of something spiritual as if it were of the very essence of man to do this.

To wish to escape from these communities is like resigning from the human race. One of the most eloquent phenomena expressing this convergence of humanity is the large metropolis. In spite of the seeds of corruption and depravity that are hidden in their midst, large cities are, nevertheless, the most brilliant centers of the life of the human spirit. 15

Teilhard feels that man has now passed through the stages of divergence and convergence. At the present hour in the course of world history mankind is going through a transition period. This new period he refers to as the planetization period, a period in which man himself will now control the evolution of the world. Man is passing from reflection to reflexion. From merely formulating concepts to using these concepts to guide the course of history.

What are some of the signs of planetization? One of these is the shrinking of the earth. This is not only geographical shrinkage with man's conquest of the remotest part of the earth and his future plans to conquest space, but more important is the psychological shrinkage of man's world.

Not only does our planet undergo a geographical contraction, but it also sustains a psychological compression by reason of the increasing speed

and ease of communication. Year after year the network of telephonic and telegraphic communications around the earth becomes denser.....Once a silent sphere of rock and water, the earth has now become an object of wonder, a droning hive wheeling through the silence of cosmic space. 16

The rapid means of communication are uniting man into a unified consciousness as we are more able to share with rapidity our thoughts with one another.

By "planetization" or "noosphere", Teilhard means that the world embracing electronic and jet networks are to the human race what neurocerebral complexification is to the individual. They are the organs of welding a single collective consciousness and of reducing the whole planet to a single Super Person. 17

Teilhard often uses the term "mankind converging upon itself." In the past man had room to expand as the surface of the earth allowed. But the point was reached where man could no longer avoid other men by moving away from them. It is very much like a globe. On one end is a pole. As we move toward the equator the lines of longitude become farther apart until they reach their greatest point of divergence. Then as we move toward the other pole the parallels of longitude become closer together until they all unite at the other pole.

By virtue of what Sir Julian Huxley calls "the banal fact of the earth's roundness," Teilhard sees mankind converging upon itself, for we no longer have an apparently limited surface over which to expand. We are already jostling one another, and the tension within the human phylum--or within the noosphere--which is the same thing--is mounting toward some definite boiling point...Teilhard suggests that out of our present confused agglomerations of individual selves, out of mankind's atomicity or molecularity, a new cellular structure of humanity,

composed of individuals united in organic bonds of love and brotherhood, is about to break forth.¹⁸

CHAPTER V

THE OMEGA POINT

We have hurriedly surveyed the evolutionary theories of Teilhard de Chardin tracing them through elementary matter to life in its simplest form, the cell, and finally to life in its most complex and conscious form, man. We now come to the point where Teilhard attempts to unite his views of science and history to the teachings of our Christian faith. His reinterpretation of the traditional teachings of the Faith is no less than revolutionary. So revolutionary is it that Teilhard at times lacks for words to express himself, and his meaning is not at all times clear.

We have examined the past and present of man in the light of Teilhard. What of the future? What is the destiny of man in the evolutionary process? Teilhard does not pretend to have all the answers, but he does attempt to offer us some of the answers to the questions which man in our time is asking himself.

The end of the earth defies imagination. But if it would be absurd to try to describe it, we may none the less--by making use of the lines of approach already laid down--to some extent foresee the significance and circumscribe the forms.

What the ultimate earth might be in a universe of conscious substance; what shape it might assume; and what are its chances of being--those are the questions I want to raise, coldly and logically, in no way apocalyptically, not so much for the sake as to give food for thought. 19

When we think of the end of the world we generally think of some great catastrophe. We think of colliding planets and exploding worlds. Is this not the picture we obtain from the Scriptures? How vivid is St. Peter's description of the very elements melting with fire. Physics offers us a different but no less catastrophic picture of a universe that is slowly but inevitably running down and a world that is gradually cooling off. We are promised a few hundred million years left on this planet and like King Hezekiah who having heard that his descendants would perish violently, we answer, "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken, for there shall be peace in my days." And in the age of the atom bomb it is not impossible for man to destroy himself without waiting for nature to do the job.

The future of man for Teilhard is by no means pessimistic. Is not the epitome of conscious life man? Has not this consciousness undergone many stages without destruction?

What we should expect is not a halt in any shape or form, but an ultimate progress coming at its biologically appointed hour; a maturation and a paroxysm leading ever higher into the Improbable from which we have sprung. It is in this direction that we must extrapolate man and hominisation

if we want to get a forward glimpse of the end of the world. 20

Let us begin by charting the future course of man. Teilhard does not foresee any further development of man (at least not to any appreciable extent) physically. Even in its individual capacities the human brain may have reached its limit of development. But this does not mean that evolution has stopped. Its progress may be found in other areas. Today it is evident in the humanization of man, in the development of the idea of mankind. The future studies of science will not be so much the study of nature as the study of man himself. "Man, the knowing subject, will perceive at last that man, the object of knowledge, is the key to the whole science of nature."²¹ As man learns to understand himself better he will learn to control his own development, e. g., in the field of eugenics.

The future of man contains one other important aspect. The past several centuries have seen a conflict between religion and science. It is now becoming apparent that one cannot exist without the other. Teilhard's whole argument on this score may be boiled down to the fact that man in order to progress must be prompted by a passionate interest, a goal. At the present time the goal of science is the progress of mankind. But today man is on the threshold of progressing not only individually, but as mankind. To do this we must have a binder or cement that will give our lives together cohesion. This belief must ultimately

be in a being which is a supremely attractive center and which has personality.

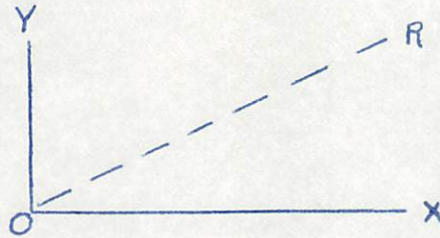
At the end of the analysis of the fourth stage, concerned with the near future of evolution, we come upon a new rebounding movement characterized by the awakening of the noosphere; this represents humanity's awareness of a new perspective to be attained in a planetary communion of minds drawn together by universal gravitation. What stands out most prominently in this analysis is the clear and inescapable necessity of a spiritual center of gravity. Humanity requires a center of unification, a focal point for evolution, which must be personal. 22

This is the end to which all mankind will be attracted, the end to which men will strive for until it is reached. This is Omega point, and this is God. "The end of the world: the overthrow of the equilibrium, detaching the mind, fulfilled at last, from its material matrix, so that it will rest henceforth with all its might on God-Omega." 23

It is at this point that the theology of the Incarnation comes into play. Christ came to earth and took upon himself our nature to subdue and purify it and to direct its ascent toward greater consciousness.

Christ, principle of universal vitality because sprung up as man among men, put himself in the position (maintained ever since) to subdue under himself, to purify, to direct and superanimate the general ascent of consciousness into which he asserted himself. By a perennial act of communion and sublimation, he aggregates to himself the total psychism of the earth. And when he has gathered everything together and transformed everything, he will close in upon himself and his conquests, thereby rejoining, in a final gesture, the divine focus he has never left. 24

The following diagram is most helpful in explaining in graphic form the substance of what Teilhard is trying to say.



- OY: Christian Faith, aspiring Upward, in a personal transcendency, towards the Highest.
- OX: Human Faith, driving Forward to the ultra-human.
- OR: Christian Faith 'rectified' or 'made explicit' reconciling the two: salvation (outlet) at once Upward and Forward in a Christ who is both Savior and Mover, not only of individual men but of anthropogenesis as a whole. 25

What we have here is not only a reconciliation of the humanistic idea of progress and the Christian Faith, but the attempt to rectify the traditional eschatological view of redemption. The eschatological view holds that the things of this world are not really very important and that the things of this world will pass away. Teilhard supports the incarnational view, the fact that God became man and that somehow all matter has become sanctified by that act. It cannot be entirely destined for destruction, for it is good both in creation and redemption.

The eschatological view, by emphasizing sin as a permanent human fact casting a shadow over all human accomplishments and by stressing the utterly supernatural character of God's kingdom of grace, seems in the eyes of many Christian thinkers

concerned with this question to lose sight of equally important aspects of the Gospel. Keenly appreciative of the truth that grace perfects nature and does not destroy it, these authors claim that the incarnational theory is in closer conformity to Christian tradition than is the eschatological.

It is quite evident that mere faith in man alone is not enough to move man forward. Teilhard also asks if the traditional Christian faith as it has so often been interpreted in the past is enough? Can the Faith which has given men faith and hope for the world to come give him faith for his present tasks in the world in which he lives now?

What is the end of the world for Teilhard? It is all mankind united in Christ who alone can make men one and reshape their lives into a higher type of existence.

For Teilhard the evolutionary process will achieve its final term only when the Christus Rex is acknowledged by the whole human race. Acknowledged not separately by individuals seeking private salvation, but acknowledged in unison by the whole species, members of one another, praising God in that full freedom which is theirs uniquely, and doing so on behalf of the whole Biosphere and Geosphere through which man has come to be.

27

What leads Teilhard to single out the Christian faith as the faith that will inspire man to progress until he reaches his goal? It is because Christianity embodies all the necessities for human progress and its attainment of unity. It affirms a personal God, a God who directs the universe with loving care. It also affirms a God

who communicates himself to man on the level of man's intelligence. It was this God who revealed himself to man through his words to the prophets and writers of Scripture, who took upon himself our nature to live in and share the world with its creatures. It affirms that its truth is not limited to one race or nation but takes into its embrace the whole family of man. Although Christianity was for a time startled by evolution, it now sees that it has only made man closer to God and the Incarnation.

At the present moment Christianity is the unique current of thought, on the entire surface of the noosphere, which is sufficiently audacious and sufficiently progressive to lay hold of the world at the level of effectual practice, in an embrace, at once already complete, yet capable of indefinite perfection, where faith and hope reach their fulfillment in love. Alone, unconditionally alone, in the world today, Christianity shows itself able to reconcile, in a single living act, the All and the Person. Alone, it can bend our hearts not only to the service of that tremendous movement of the world which bears us along, but beyond, to embrace that movement in love. 28

In his later writings Teilhard spells out his theory of the Omega point more clearly. The unity of the purely natural forces of evolution with God's supernatural action becomes better integrated. The end or purpose of the world becomes the physical incorporation of the faithful in Christ. This is the result of sanctification, of being made alive in a greater sense than natural life. This is God's grace which is the force guiding the course of this world.

By this first and fundamental contact of God with our kind (the Incarnation), by virtue of the penetration of the Divine into our nature, a new life was born, and unexpected enlargement and 'obediential' prolongation of our natural capacities: Grace...

The Incarnation is a renewal and a restoration of all the forces and powers of the universe; Christ is the instrument, the centre, the end of all animate and material Creation; by Him all things are created, sanctified, made alive. 29

This is the end of the world; it is the victory of our faith when God will be all in all. "Et cette coalescence des unités spirituelles de la Création sous l'attraction du Christ est la suprême victoire de la foi sur la Monde."³⁰

PART II: CHARDIN AND HIS CRITICS

CHAPTER VI

THE NEGATIVE SIDE

Some of the sharpest criticism of Teilhard de Chardin comes from within his own communion, as might be expected. Olivier Rabut is a conservative French Dominican scholar who gives a thorough and comprehensive examination to Teilhard's writings. As we shall see, Rabut is not completely negative in his critique of Teilhard, but for the most part he attempts to refute him, attacking the basis of his thought.

He begins by criticizing the scientific method used by Teilhard in arriving at his results. While he admits that there certainly must be a certain amount of intuitive thought used by men of science, he feels that Teilhard overweights his theories with too much intuition and not enough demonstrable data.

In this vision of the world there are some aspects that are classical, demonstrable; others, more personal, that are put forward as mere suggestions, although the author himself sets great store by them, even if he could not give a very definite outline to his thought. 31

Teilhard, says Rabut, believes that there is some type of psychism in all things, culminating in man but found in all matter even though rudimentary in form. But Teilhard makes the mistake of labelling this psychism as "conscious-

ness." Rabut admits that there is an amount of psychism in all things, but the psychism of a flower can hardly be compared to man's.

A molecule of carbonate lime, or even of protein, has no nervous system, no circulatory system, nor even a first indication of either; why, then, should it have any first indication of consciousness? 32

His chief concern is that Teilhard is so vague in his definition of terms, e. g., consciousness. Rabut does not believe that consciousness results merely from complexity. The computer is certainly a very complex machine, and yet it certainly does not have any consciousness. Rabut finally rejects Teilhard's theory of evolution for being too narrow if not altogether false. Teilhard omits the theory of natural selection and that the future of any species depends largely on its fertility.

The formula is exaggerated; there are other ways of defining the advance of evolution, and it is not certain that this definition gives the truest picture of the facts. 33

Life is not so simple as Teilhard would imagine it. It is not one great blueprint or a well-arranged conducted tour. We know by our own experience how life is full of freakish and unexpected turns. While it is true that the process of physical evolution seems to have slowed down recently, and while it is true that it may result in greater social aggregation, it is impossible to formulate a law on these

evidences.

The Omega point stands for the end of evolution as compared with its beginning, which is alpha. After man's second point of reflection (man's turning in upon himself), the human superorganism will come into existence. In another sense, Omega also stands for God who is the pre-existing center of this super-organism, and it also denotes Christ who is bound up with the cosmos through his Incarnation and who will finally take full possession of final human unity and supernaturalize it. The Omega point is based upon two lines of thought. First, evolution is infallible and it must go through to the end of what it has set out to do, i. e., mankind unified in one higher person. Secondly, this end could not be achieved if there were not some personal center to sum up all things within himself.

Teilhard's entire theory is based on the hypothesis of the coherence of the universe. If it is true that the universe is working, perhaps even blindly, toward this one end, then it is impossible that it will not achieve it. It is this very root of Teilhard's theory that Rabut attacks.

The weakest point of the argument lies at its very root. We are to assume that the universe has one aim alone--spirit; and that the whole universe fails if the spirit is balked of its natural desires..... It is arguable that the universe is tending in all directions at once, or, to take one possibility, in the direction which leads to more and more improbable

assemblages; the coherence of the universe is in no way at stake if the natural functioning of its laws wipes out all spirit tomorrow. 34

In other words, Teilhard gives us a choice between extreme optimism or extreme pessimism in limiting the coherence of the universe to his one aspect and purpose of its coherence. Moreover, when Chardin insists that evolution cannot fail he offers us no proof for this. It is likely that evolution will continue its same course, but this does not mean that it will result in any superorganism such as Teilhard de Chardin predicts.

The Mystical Body of Christ of which St. Paul speaks is not any brain of brains as Teilhard describes. Rabut feels that Teilhard places too much emphasis in the natural aspects and does not emphasize the supernatural character of this body to its proper extent.

Neither the Gospels nor St. Paul said anything about a brain of brains. What St. Paul had in mind was a supernatural unity, a texture woven throughout by grace. Nor was the heavenly Jerusalem of St. John held together by itself, but by Christ. 35

Rabut is not completely negative in his criticism of Teilhard. On the contrary, he has some very good things to say about him which we shall save for the next chapter. His main criticism is that Teilhard tends to exaggerate, to put too much weight upon his personal opinions, especially where he tries to synthesize the world of the scientist and the world of the theologian.

August Brunner, a German Jesuit and associate editor of Stimmen der Zeit, centers his criticism of Teilhard on his apparent neglect to deal with the problem of evil. Brunner is not alone in this criticism. Many accuse Teilhard of possessing a pollyanna view of the world, all men unselfishly putting their shoulders to the wheel for human progress until the messianic age is achieved. This is a valid concern in our day when the achievements of man can completely destroy society or make the world a better place, particularly when our generation has seen so much of the former.

Investigation into the origin of evil is almost completely absent. The question comes up only toward the end of the work, apparently in response to objections. Teilhard's explanation that all evolution involves suffering and possible missing of the goal may account for physical evil. It does not account for moral evil. 36

This is not Brunner's only concern. He is not convinced that Teilhard's theory will revive an appreciation of the spiritual amid a world gone material. In fact, Brunner sees a very real danger that Teilhard's spiritualism may be close to the brink of materialism.

Only a slight shift of accent is required to lead to the contention that soul and mind have evolved from the natural powers of matter through the conversion of quantity into quality. 37

Finally, Brunner rejects Teilhard's theory that union with God must come about through an evolutionary process. Brunner maintains that this union can only come about through the supernatural love of God for man and in return, man for God. It will not be an inescapable evolutionistic love, but love based on the freedom of the individual.

Decius Wade Safford, Protestant-Episcopal Priest-in-Charge at William and Mary Parish, Charles County, Maryland, and an Anglican authority on Teilhard, offers the same criticism.

Granting him the premise of a coming disjunction, I believe that this basic belief in the goodness and reasonableness of man has here led him to over-optimism. Teilhard never quite faces the fact of sin and greed, which, whatever their sources, are organically rooted in human nature. 38

Now that man, according to Teilhard, has discovered the process of evolution, "he must for the future assist in his own becoming." ³⁹ By applying his knowledge gained in every human field of endeavor man will assist the coming of Omega point.

Almost in the same breath with which he bids us prepare for a change of state, and to renew our belief in the Parousia, Teilhard calls for frenetically more scientific research.... But what he failed to see was that the fruits of their research might be put to the undoing of what they all believed in, by unscrupulous men who sought and obtained power over their fellow men for selfish purposes. 40

Wade bewails Teilhard's child-like faith in the goodness of man. While Teilhard believes that when man learns how to

control the genes this knowledge will be put to the use of improving man, Wade reminds us that there are many men today who are itching to get their hands on our genes.

But Wade uncovers another point which many critics fail to see. Perhaps this is because the underlying thought is so implicit in Teilhard's writing and never becomes explicit. If man is to reach Omega by his learning to control the processes of evolution then it would seem to follow that it is man's knowledge that will be the key to our salvation.

But there is running throughout The Phenomenon of Man an implication that it is through knowledge that we shall be saved. On Christian grounds I hold that it is through wholeness--which goes beyond cephalized knowledge and implies holiness--that we can see the light of our salvation. 41

Another point he raises is whether or not Teilhard's theory leaves any room for free will. If evolution is the means of God's grace then it would seem to follow that all men are to be recipients of this grace, for all men are caught up in the forces of evolution.

Is man free to accept or reject Omega point? At times Teilhard seems to suggest that all mankind will be automatically included. Later he has second thoughts, for as a Catholic he must allow for free will and reject every form of universalism. In The Divine Milieu he affirms his belief in hell but hopes it has no inhabitants. 42

Robert North, a Jesuit instructor at Marquette University, Milwaukee loses patience with Teilhard's ambiguity concerning

a precise definition of Omega point. He labels Teilhard's answers as "deplorably imprecise." He accuses Teilhard of formulating a system which apparently destroys the abyss between the natural and the supernatural. In Omega point, says North, we have a confusion of these two elements as God becomes a natural part of the universe. In fact, it was this very ambiguity which led the officials of the Roman Catholic Church to issue a monitum or warning, on the writings of Teilhard de Chardin.^{43.}

Strangely enough, Martin J. Heineken, Professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, finds something quite Romish in the theories of Teilhard, and more Greek than biblical thought.

One cannot help draw the conclusion that it is more Greek than biblical. The only love of which there is mention is undoubtedly "eros," the love of attraction by which men are drawn up into the mystic union. There is a primary emphasis upon thought, to which even love seems to be subservient. The fiery furnace of God's love (agape) which holds full communion with the sinner on this earth is lacking. All is of one piece with the whole Roman Catholic view of a quantitative increment toward blessedness through infusion of grace, rather than of radical discontinuity and decisive breakthrough.⁴⁴

This by no means exhausts the list of those who negatively criticize Teilhard, but it does sum up some of the main points where Teilhard's thinking differs from other theologians. Abbé Louis Cognet, a devoted student of ascetic

theology and one of the earliest critics of Teilhard, joins Rabut in chiding Teilhard for confusing science with theology. "Evolution, he argues, is a theory supported almost solely by palaeontologists."⁴⁵ Teilhard has no right to apply a theory so universally. Michael Stock joins Rabut in assailing Teilhard for not using proper methodology in building up his thesis.⁴⁶

CHAPTER VII

THE POSITIVE SIDE

This chapter is not intended to refute point by point the critics of Teilhard, but to point out what contributions Teilhard de Chardin has made to theological thought. Reference will most likely be made to some of the above objections, but not for the purpose of refutation. My object is only to give both sides of the picture in as an objective way as possible.

To be completely fair to Olivier Rabut whose negative criticism we have seen above, let us return to see some of his positive evaluation. There are many points where Rabut and Teilhard see eye to eye. Rabut praises Teilhard for

seeking to answer some of the questions which are being asked in our time.

Those who condemn Teilhard de Chardin have never seen what it is in him that makes him so attractive, nor the reason justifying one's final capitulation to him. He felt, very deeply, certain intellectual and spiritual needs of our time. The solutions he proposes, imperfect though they may be, are already such as can be used; at times they are excellent, if regarded simply as suggestions. 47

By his emphasis on the spirituality of man and evolution Teilhard beckons man to a higher nature, for spirit has the power to draw man back from the impulses of nature. He offers to the West something greater than the materialism that is so rampant in our society today; he calls for development of the soul of man, not just technical progress.

Teilhard also adds something to the theory of evolution that it has needed so much. Again, it is a spiritual quality founded upon the Christian faith.

The enormous problem that evolution sets us is that it seems to save all mankind. But in Teilhard's thought, salvation in the Christian sense is neither eliminated or replaced. It is the grace of Christ which saves, and not the forces of evolution. 48

Teilhard also renews the idea which St. Paul and the Greek fathers had of Christ, that Christ fulfills a cosmic function. For Teilhard it is the drawing of all things into himself through the process of divine evolution.

For J. Edgar Bruns, teacher of scripture and theology at St. John's University in New York City, Teilhard is a man who is convinced that Christian doctrine in its entirety has validity and tremendous meaning for Twentieth Century man provided it were lifted from its traditional expression in terms of "Cosmos" and restated in terms of "Cosmogogenesis." In "Cosmogogenesis" God is seen as more directly related to the world.

He has a relationship to the created world which is not purely external like that of a craftsman to his handicraft. Cosmogogenesis is a movement of convergence, of synthesis, of union, and therefore when God creates, He unites himself to, He plunges Himself into His creation. In a singular way this was historically and experimentally dramatized for man in the Incarnation. 49

Teilhard has given a new and richer meaning to the word "spirit", says Bruns. Teilhard moves closer to the Hebrew concept of man found in the Scriptures. Gone is the antithesis between soul and body as Plato taught, and restored is the harmony and unity between material and spiritual.

Bruns admits, as does Charles Raven, that Teilhard's picture of man leaves little room for our Judaeo-Christian interpretation. "When the direction of evolution is regarded as continuously progressive it is hard to correlate the elements of our "wounded nature" with it." 50

Cyril Vollert, dean of the Jesuit seminary at St. Mary's Kansas, answers those who would say that Teilhard equates evolution with salvation.

Obviously, salvation is not the natural fruit of biological ascent. The grace that is to transfigure the world is not the upward drive of evolution.

Christ's grace, not evolution, will save us. But in Teilhard's view Christ's grace makes use of evolution..... Thus we can say the Christian faith is destined, and is preparing, to save men and even to take the place of evolution.

For Georges Crespy, professor of Protestant Theology at Montpellier, Teilhard answers the ancient question of human suffering. The suffering of Christ on the cross bears not necessarily the weight of sin, but the weight of human progress. The death of Christ liberates a power which is hidden in all the world's suffering, the upward thrust of the world.⁵² The cross bears witness to men that human perfection is not to be found here below but beyond the present conditions of existence and through a total transformation.

Crespy admits that Teilhard is not concerned so much with what the Bible or tradition has to say. Like St. Paul and St. John, Teilhard's faith is not centered upon them, but upon Christ.

The suffering we endure is only part of the process of the total transformation which is to come. God is not hiding himself from us, but he must permit us to suffer because he cannot yet reveal himself. "And if he cannot, this is only because we are at the stage which the universe is now, incapable of more organization and light."⁵³

One of the best comments on the theology of Teilhard is found in Charles Raven, retired Professor of Divinity and Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University. Teilhard, he feels, expresses the theology of St. Paul in its fullest expression. In line with Harnack, Raven says that although many men have quoted the writings of St. Paul, from Clement to the present, there was really only one man who fully understood him, Marcion. The Church in general has failed to see that there is a definite link between St. Paul's writings on the cosmic Christ and the life and ministry of our Lord. The three passages which determine Paul's final, mature theology says Raven are Galatians 2: 19,20; "I have been crucified with Christ: yet I am alive; not I; but Christ lives in me;" Galatians 3:18; "There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female: ye are all one person in Christ Jesus." The third verse is Galatians 5: 22,23; which describes the fruit of the Spirit. These passages describe the fullness of life in

Christ and its universality which includes and integrates all the best in human activity and ethics. From here we can proceed to Romans where we see that all creation reveals God, and we see that its aspirations and travails are not apart from the spirit of God. In Ephesians we see the consummation of Pauline theology as man's coming into the totality and unity of Christ.

Hence in his final treatise, the so-called Epistle to the Ephesians, he can give us the full vision of Christ as the "Consummator" of all things, in whom the whole universe finds its integration and fulfillment and "we all come home unto the unity of our faith and our full knowledge of the Son of God, unto mature manhood, even the measure of the stature of the totality of Christ." Here is the vision of unity in diversity, universality enriched by but including all peculiarities, an all-embracing personality, the Christ that is to be.

54

The Omega point is not the loss of our individual personality in some Super-Soul, but a union of souls whose individualities are unimaginably enriched by their unity in Christ.

Raven calls C.H. Waddington to bear witness to the fact that science cannot be viewed separately from the subject. He insists that science must realize that along with the study of an organism, attention must be paid to the reactions and relationships in the life of the organism as a whole. Two psychologists, Dr. Karl Stern and Dr. James L. Foy, both condemn the exclusiveness which would reduce science to only technology.

Alois Guggenberger praises Teilhard for restoring meaning and purpose to scientific study, an element that has been lacking since Husserl separated the sciences, one from the other, resulting in a loss of coherent meaning. All of science must help us to understand man. Teilhard may be anthropocentric, but he is not naively anthropocentric. "There is no object free from the intervention of the subject. Teilhard simply wanted to aid in seeing the spiritual bond which holds the facts of experience and their consequences together and gathers them meaningfully around a center, around man."⁵⁵

Safford also insists that Teilhard's theology is no kind of pantheism where the Creator becomes so involved with the creation that the two are lost in one another.

Teilhard never confuses Creation with Creator; his God is both transcendent and immanent, but always transcendent in his immanence, God at the heart of but not conjoint with, every creature. 56

But there is one criticism which is common to both supporter and refuter of Teilhard. And this is the fact that in spite of the gaps and questions which he has left to the world, he has tried to synthesize the Christian faith with a world view that is becoming increasingly scientific and materialistic. Of him The Christian Century declares:

We do not believe that relating Christian theology to evolution is the only means or even the best means of relating Word to world, but it is a means. It is a necessary experiment for the emergent generations who breathe and think evolution's assumptions and cannot escape them.

57

And J. Edgar Bruns reasons that if we find the theology of Teilhard too revolutionary for our Christian faith than perhaps "it is ~~not~~ that our beliefs need to be altered; it is the frame in which we see them that must be changed."

58

CHAPTER VIII

A PERSONAL NOTE

Several years ago the officials of the Sacred Congregation of the Roman Catholic Church issued a monitum, or warning, concerning the writings of Teilhard de Chardin. The text of this monitum may be found on page 39. This was not a condemnation of Teilhard's views, but only a warning that these writings could not be read without proper discernment. Many of Teilhard's supporters claimed the monitum to be unjust. Teilhard was only attempting to reconcile the Christian faith to the modern world.

In my study of Teilhard de Chardin, I was always conscious of the monitum placed on his writings and concerned about the justice or injustice of the monitum. Now it was not because of what Teilhard said that the monitum was issued, rather it was more because of what he did not say, the ambiguities and lack of precise definition.

There can be little doubt of Teilhard's sincerity in attempting to make the Faith relevant and meaningful for Christians and for all men of our day. He has attempted to unite the sciences, natural, philosophical and spiritual

toward reaching ~~for~~ a common end and a common theory for achieving that end. He has also made the Incarnation more meaningful by helping to bring to light the cosmic Christology in the writings of St. Paul. He has reminded the Church that her mission is important in this world as well as the next, and that the dichotomy of natural and spiritual, body and soul, is not necessarily a Christian philosophy.

However, the fact does remain, as the monitum states, that in Teilhard we have many unanswered questions, many ambiguities. His evolutionary theory creates more problems than it actually attempts to solve. The scientific problems must remain problems for no evidence can ever be mustered to prove such a mystical theory. The theological problems are no less difficult. Traditionally we have believed in a world once created perfectly, a world which degenerated with the introduction of sin. Teilhard's theory of evolution would have us accept a world that is constantly improving. It leads ultimately to the rejection of the Genesis account of sin and its consequences. Although Teilhard never states this, it is the inevitable result of his theory. Charles Raven states Teilhard's view when he says:

The modern evolutionist, whether Teilhard or Sir Julian Huxley, sees it (the Fall) as the outstanding achievement

the present climax of the process--the point at which the living organism began to assume a dominant share in the control of its own development. He sees it as the birth of the noosphere, the beginning of a new and unique epoch, and as such the supreme example of real progress. 59

The Genesis account thus becomes less than myth, for even myth (according to Niebuhr) seeks to posit an essential truth. In Genesis we are told that man is morally responsible for his actions and that there is a consequent obligation for his actions.

Is this really such an important matter? Yes, for it affects the very heart of the Christian message. If Christ became incarnate and suffered death only to show man that sin is a necessary evil of progress, then his life was a terrible waste. This, at least is Georges Crespy's interpretation of Teilhard's theology.

Another ambiguity is the Omega point itself. This is explained in its greatest detail in The Divine Milieu. But in the entire book, filled with mystical cliches, there is no real attempt to synthesize Omega point with traditional Christian thought. We are never told our place in the parousia. He mentions only mankind in general who by this time will be super-man. He never answers the question of man's existence after death except that something of us passes on into the next generation. In short there is little comfort in Teilhard's Omega point for there is no mention of resurrection.

The value of Teilhard de Chardin, in my opinion, lies not in what he says but in what he attempts to do. It is the task of theologians to interpret the Christian faith to every generation. For his attempt to make the Faith more meaningful to our era, Teilhard is to be commended. Where he has fallen short of his goal, it^{is} our task to continue.

ACTA SS. CONGREGATIONUM*
SUPREMA SACRA CONGREGATIO S. OFFICII

MONITUM

Quadam vulgantur opera, etiam post auctoris obitum edita. Patris Petri Teilhard de Chardin, quae non parvum favorem consequuntur.

Praetermisso iudicio de his quae ad scientias positivas pertinent, in materia philosophica ac theologica satis potest praefata opera talibus scatere ambiguitatibus, immo etiam gravibus erroribus, ut catholicam doctrinam offendant.

Quapropter Emi ac Revmi Patres Supremae Sacrae Congregationis S. Officii Ordinarios omnes necnon Superiores Institutorum religiosorum, Rectores Seminariorum atque Universitatum Praesides exhortantur ut animos, praesertim iuvenum, contra operum Patris Teilhard de Chardin eiusque assecularum pericula efficaciter tutentur.

Datum Romae, ex Aedibus S. Officii, die 30 Iunii 1962.

Sebastianus Masala, Notarius

* Acta Apostolicae Sedis Commentarium Officiale. Vol. LIV: No. 9 (August 6, 1962), p. 526.

FOOTNOTES

1. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man (Le Phénomène Humain), translated by Julian Huxley (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), pp. 21-22.
2. Ibid., p. 22.
3. Ibid., p. 39.
4. Ibid., p. 41.
5. Cyril Vollert, "Toward Omega: The Vision of Man", Theology Digest, VIII (Fall 1960), 134.
6. F. G. Elliott, "The World Vision of Chardin", International Philosophical Quarterly, I (December 1961), 628.
7. Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon, p. 55.
8. Radoslav A. Tsanoff, The Great Philosophers (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 575.
9. Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon, p. 77.
10. Ibid., p. 88.
11. Ibid., p. 159.
12. Elliott, p. 629.
13. Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon, p. 181.
14. Robert North, "Teilhard and the Problem of Creation", Theological Studies, XXIV (1963), p. 582.
15. Elliott, p. 632.
16. Ibid., pp. 633-634.
17. North, p. 586.
18. Decius Wade Safford, "Teilhard de Chardin", Anglican Theological Review, XLVI (July 1964), p. 290.

19. Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon, p. 274.
20. Ibid., p. 276.
21. Ibid., p. 281.
22. Elliott, p. 641
23. Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon, p. 287.
24. Ibid., p. 294.
25. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Future of Man (L'Avenir de L'Homme), translated by Norman Denny (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 269.
26. Peter Riga, Catholic Thought in Crisis (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1963), p. 19.
27. "The Significance of Chardin", Blackfriars (March 1959), p. 128.
28. Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon, p. 297.
29. Teilhard de Chardin, Future, p. 304.
30. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Le Milieu Divin: Essai de Vie Interieure (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957), p. 184.
31. Olivier Rabut, Teilhard de Chardin: A Critical Study (Dialogue avec Teilhard de Chardin). (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p. 18.
32. Ibid., p. 36.
33. Ibid., p. 49.
34. Ibid., p. 119
35. Ibid., p. 217
36. August Brunner, "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: A Critique" Theology Digest, VIII (Fall 1960), p. 145.
37. Ibid., p. 146.
38. Safford, p. 146.

39. Teilhard de Chardin, Future, p. 145.
40. Safford, p. 291.
41. Ibid., p. 295.
42. Ibid., p. 296.
43. "Monitum on Teilhard", Commonweal (July 27, 1962), p. 412.
44. Martin J. Heineken, "The Phenomenon of Man", The Lutheran Quarterly XIII (February 1961), p. 78.
45. Charles E. Raven, Teilhard de Chardin: Scientist and Seer (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 199.
46. Michael Stock, "The Phenomenon of Man", The Thomist XXIII (April 1960), p. 296.
47. Rabut, p. 143.
48. Ibid., p. 167.
49. J. Edgar Bruns, "God Up Above or Up Ahead?", Catholic World 191 (April 1960), p. 26.
50. Ibid., p. 29.
51. Vollert, p. 135.
52. Georges Crespy, "Teilhard de Chardin on Evil and the Cross", Philosophy Today VIII (Summer 1964), p. 85.
53. Ibid., p. 94.
54. Raven, p. 168.
55. Alois Guggenberger, "Teilhard de Chardin: End or Beginning?" Philosophy Today VIII: 2/4 (Summer 1964), p. 101.
56. Decius Wade Safford, "Teilhard de Chardin and the Phenomenon of Man", Religion in Life (Summer 1961), p. 348.

57. "Premature Admonition", The Christian Century LXXIX
August 8, 1962, pp. 451-452.
58. J. Edgar Bruns, p. 26.
59. Raven, pp. 175-176.

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