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D. GARETH JONES, B.SC., PH.D.

The Phenomenon of Teilhard de Chardin*

'Teilhard de Chardin was a great evolutionary thinker, comparable with Marx and Darwin; he was at the same time a mystic with a vision as great as St. Augustine's'.[1]

'The greater part of *The Phenomenon of Man* . . . is nonsense, tricked out by a variety of tedious metaphysical conceits, and its author can be excused of dishonesty only on the grounds that before deceiving others he has taken great pains to deceive himself'.[2]

The world of Teilhard de Chardin, like the world of his admirers and critics, is characterized by extremes. A priest of the Roman Catholic Church, but accepted far more warmly by evolutionary humanists, he has been variously described as a 'genius',[3] an 'apostle of evolution',[4] a 'mystic visionary'.[5] The influence of his writings since his death in 1955 has been enormous, so much so that one writer was led to remark that in some quarters they were treated as though inspired writ.[6]

His critics with just as little restraint have described *The Phenomenon of Man* as anything from 'a hodgepodge of semi-materialistic, naturalistic speculations',[7] to 'tipsy, euphoric prose-poetry'.[8]

*Abbreviations used in the references:
P *The Phenomenon of Man* by Teilhard de Chardin (Fontana Books, 1965).
L *Le Milieu Divin* by Teilhard de Chardin (Fontana Books, 1965).
C *Teilhard de Chardin* by C. Cuenot (Burns and Oates, 1965).
R *Teilhard de Chardin Scientist and Seer* by C. E. Raven (Collins, 1962).

[1] From a leaflet issued by 'The Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Association of Great Britain and Ireland'.
[2] P. B. Medawar, *Mind*, 1961, **70**, p. 99.
[3] *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25/5/1962, p. 366.
[4] C., p. 383.
[5] W. H. Thorpe, *Science, Man and Morals* (Methuen, 1965), p. 56.
[6] *The Times Literary Supplement, op. cit.*, p. 365.
[7] R. Hooykaas, *Free University Quarterly*, 1963, **9**, p. 55.
[8] Medawar, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

As for the man himself, he evoked universal warmth and affection, even in those who disagreed with his views. And so one critic has described him as 'a great soul, a kindly man and a subtle mystic'.[9] To one admirer his personal quality was so precious that he could only describe it as 'a state of pre-beatitude'.[10]

Teilhard's self-description is revealing: 'I am a pilgrim of the future on the way back from a journey made entirely in the past'.[11] With his craving after the imperishable and with his desire to see all the elements of the world synthesized in Christ, his spiritual mission was to give back to Christians a true sense of the earth and so he devoted himself to 'manifest and exalt the divino-Christic power contained in the unitary development of the tangible world'.[12] In the light of this it does not surprise us to learn that he considered it the priest's duty to 'Christify' evolution.[13]

Life

Born in 1881 in Auvergne, he was the fourth of eleven children in a devout Roman Catholic family. At the age of 10 he went to a Jesuit college where he became very interested in geology and mineralogy. At 18 he entered the Society of Jesus. During the early part of his training with the Society, the community was expelled from France and went to Jersey. On completing this part of his studies in 1905, he was sent for three years to Cairo where he taught chemistry and physics, after which he came to England to complete his studies for the priesthood. It was during his stay in England that his view of the world began to expand.

During the First World War he served as a stretcher-bearer, distinguishing himself by his fortitude and courage. The importance of this period for his world-view lay in the development of a feeling of oneness with the whole of mankind, some-

[9] G. G. Simpson, *Scientific American*, 1960, **202**(4), p. 207.
[10] C., p. 382.
[11] Quoted by N. Braybrooke (Ed.), *Teilhard de Chardin: Pilgrim of the Future* (A Libra Book, 1966), p. 7.
[12] Quoted by C., p. 395.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 368.

thing he had not previously experienced and which was to form an essential part of his evolutionary cosmology. It was also during this period that he experienced a vision of Christ, in which he saw the outlines of a painting of Christ merge into the rest of the world.[14]

In 1919 he returned to his scientific career and in 1920 became Professor of Geology at the Catholic Institute of Paris. 1923 saw him making his first visit to China, where he went on a palaeontological mission. Here in the vastness and isolation of Mongolia he saw that everything in the world could be described in terms of one single activity, and this gained expression in his *Mass on the World*, in which he, as God's priest, offered up to God 'on the altar of the entire earth, the travail and the suffering of the world'.[15]

On his return to France in 1924, he experienced his first clash with his superiors. He was forbidden to continue teaching because his ideas about original sin and its relation to evolution were considered unorthodox. After a period of unhappiness he returned to China in 1926, where he lived and worked for the best part of 20 years, with only occasional visits to Europe.

His next important work to be written was *Le Milieu Divin* in 1927. This he described as 'an essay on the interior life', and in it he attempted to 'recapitulate the eternal lesson of the Church in the words of a man who, because he believes himself to feel deeply in tune with his own times, has sought to teach how to see God everywhere, to see him in all that is most hidden, most solid, and most ultimate in the world'.[16]

In 1938 he was appointed Director of the Laboratory of Advanced Studies in Geology and Palaeontology in Paris, but his return to France was prevented by the outbreak of the Second World War. During the Japanese occupation of China his scientific work was considerably reduced, and it was at this period that his ideas reached their zenith. This was reflected in

[14] *Christ in Matter*, in Braybrooke, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 19. It is difficult to assess the importance of this incident in the development of his world-view. Although it emphasises the close relationship between Christ and matter, it does not feature as such in his thought.

[15] Quoted by C., p. 50.

[16] L., p. 46.

the production of *The Phenomenon of Man* in the late 1930's, with revisions of it during the first half of the 1940's.

Overall, however, his many years in China were very productive ones in the sphere of his palaeontology. His best known contribution was his association with the finding and description of Sinanthropus (Peking Man), which is an important example of one form of early man. In addition to this he completed several important monographs on the late Cenozoic mammals of China, and played an invaluable part in the organization of Chinese palaeontological and geological research.

The attitude of his superiors to his views had not changed by the time of his return to France in 1946, and not only was he forbidden to publish or teach on philosophical subjects but he also had to refuse a very important chair in the Collège de France.

In spite of these rebuffs he never once considered leaving the Society of Jesus, for the greater freedom he could have enjoyed as a secular priest. He was convinced that to do this would be synonymous with cutting himself off from the will of God. To him the Society was his 'divine milieu' and he accepted the restrictions imposed upon him with no outward sign of rebellion. However, he did ensure that the necessary arrangements had been made for the publication of his writings after his death.[17]

Before moving to New York in 1951 he travelled widely, making many contacts in the scientific world including the formation of a deep friendship with Sir Julian Huxley.

In New York, until his death four years later, he worked at the Wenner-Gren Foundation where he was instrumental in the formulation of anthropological policy. His position also gave him opportunity to elaborate and disseminate his views on the future rôle of man in the universe.

At the time of his death, Teilhard's influence was limited to individuals, those who had been in his presence and who had been affected by his radiant personality, and by his stirring message to optimism and action.

It was with the publication, by an assorted group of sponsors, of *The Phenomenon of Man* (the French edition in 1955 and its

[17] C., p. 307.

English counterpart in 1959) that Teilhard burst upon the intellectual scene; and Teilhardism was born.

In discussing Teilhard's thought I will have to recourse at various points to the interpretations and views of his followers. Without this I would have to omit much that is essential to an understanding of his position, for the simple reason that Teilhard presents his synthesis only as an introduction to,[18] or as one aspect of, a complete explanation of the world.

Difficulties arise when we realize that from this *limited* starting-point he reaches *unlimited* conclusions. Whatever may have been his original intentions, he achieves the most all-embracing synthesis imaginable. Because of this we are forced to analyse all aspects of his message – as his synthesis is sometimes called – and not simply the aspects which he specifically mentions.

An added difficulty is due to the constant development of his thought, or perhaps more appropriately, to the continued enlargement of his vision. Consequently, it is hazardous to accept any one work as a definitive expression of his thought, although *The Phenomenon of Man* undoubtedly comes nearest to being this. In addition, we must also bear in mind, at the least, *Le Milieu Divin*, *The Future of Man*, *The Mass on the World* and his many letters.

Science

The principle which he stressed as being the foundation of *The Phenomenon of Man*, and which has been the centre of so much controversy, is *science*.

Although it has been suggested by one writer[19] that *The Phenomenon of Man* was described as science, rather than theology, to give it a chance of being passed by his superiors, this seems hardly likely and not at all in character with the whole tenor of Teilhard's life. There is no doubt that he meant it as science, and not as metaphysics, theology or philosophy. His subject was man, man *solely* as a phenomenon, but the *whole* phenomenon.[20]

[18] P., p. 31.
[19] F. H. Cleobury, *The Modern Churchman*, 1966, **10**, p. 18.
[20] P., p. 31.

The question is, 'what did he mean by science?' Most of his critics have not paused to ask this question, but assuming his science to be the same as theirs have plunged headlong into their literary tirades. Hence the ruthless criticisms by such eminent scientists as Professor G. G. Simpson,[21] Sir Peter Medawar[22] and Sir Alistair Hardy,[23] and of the historian of science and evangelical, Professor R. Hooykaas.[24]

Now it is clear from what we may term his orthodox geological and palaeontological articles[25] that in his scientific work he rigorously applied the principles of careful observation and experimentation to check foregoing hypotheses, and to suggest possible useful avenues for future work. He was a modern scientist of a very high calibre.

Science in this sense can be termed 'analytical'. It approaches problems by reducing them to their simplest known constituents, and with increasing knowledge gradually building up a more satisfactory picture of the system concerned. This is the approach of modern science.

For Teilhard, however, this was science at its *elementary* level, a level which had to be outgrown to enable it to pass on to its far more advanced task of 'synthesis'.[26] According to Teilhard science can, and science must, see things whole. If this is accepted, the most profitable way of seeing man, for instance, is not as a collection of cells – however much might be known about the cells themselves, nor as a system of interacting organs and tissues, nor as a social animal, nor as a mechanism capable of highly complex learning patterns, nor even as a combination of all four plus many other descriptions. Man must be seen in his relation to the whole of the universe, from the atoms at its beginning to its culmination when the synthesis and completion of all things in God-Omega will finalize evolution. Inevitably there is much in this which is not open to direct

[21] G. G. Simpson, *Scientific American*, 1960, **202**(4), p. 207.
[22] P. B. Medawar, *Mind*, 1961, **70**, p. 99.
[23] *The Living Stream* (Collins, 1965).
[24] R. Hooykas, *Free University Quarterly*, 1963, **9**, p. 55.
[25] E.g., many of the articles reprinted in *The Appearance of Man* (Collins, 1965).
[26] P., p. 312.

observation and experiment. Teilhard surmounts these 'trans-experimental' obstacles by a mixture of analogy from the rest of science,[27] faith[28] and logic.[29]

In such an approach he was not original. He was following in the steps of such people as Bergson, Lloyd Morgan and Smuts, who in their differing ways as emergent evolutionists strove to bring out the character, direction and significance of evolution.[30] Their religious and their evolutionary views were closely dependent upon each other.

The many apparent absurdities in Teilhard's works can now be seen in a new light. To say, for example, that inorganic matter has a 'within' and a form of consciousness, is something about which empirical science can say nothing. But to a vitalist, as Teilhard was, it does have meaning. In order to arrive at this conclusion, Teilhard argued that every mass is modified by its velocity; we do not see this change, that is, there is no absolute appearance of a new dimension; therefore, by analogy, consciousness recognized only in man is present in a veiled form throughout the cosmos.[31]

This example is typical of Teilhard's approach. Having started with *empirical* science he abandons it in favour of *synthetic* science when it can take him no further. When the senses can no longer help him, he resorts to logic and reason, *still in the name of science*. In his eyes this is science because it is still within the realm of material phenomena.

He is consistent then in claiming on the one hand that *The Phenomenon of Man* contains 'purely scientific reflections,'[32] and on the other confessing that a conclusion he has come to is 'strictly undemonstrable to science.'[33] What is most unfortunate is that he uses (or is the translation in part to blame?) the same word to signify different things. This interpretation is, I think, supported by O'Connell when he claims that the word

[27] P., p. 61.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 311.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 68.
[30] R., p. 145.
[31] P., pp. 59–61.
[32] P., p. 31.
[33] P., p. 311.

'mémoire', translated 'treatise' in the preface to *The Phenomenon of Man*, carries the suggestion that the scientist, when he reflects on the meaning of his ordinary practice of science, becomes aware that his approach has been only a partial one.[34]

The question which we should be asking ourselves is this: how useful is a vitalistic approach, such as the one Teilhard adopted, to the forwarding of empirical science?

Bernard Towers looked upon Teilhard as a scientific pioneer and generalizer, who propounded 'truly creative hypotheses'.[35] Now hypotheses are essential to scientific advance, but only those hypotheses which are open to rejection or verification. Although Towers stated that Teilhard's 'law of increasing complexity/consciousness' fell within this category, I am afraid I cannot follow him. To say as he does that this 'theory allows for the probability . . . of intelligent beings on other planets' and that 'it has relevance to proven phenomena in the field of extrasensory perception',[36] is an example of making statements which are so general as to have little, if any, value. I find it difficult to see how the majority of Teilhard's generalizations can, or ever will, be tested. If this is the case, are his hypotheses of any scientific usefulness? If they are not, is it science of any reputable kind? To this I think the answer must be 'no'.

To what then can we ascribe the attraction and power of his writings, when we bear in mind their influence on eminent scientists as well as on ordinary laymen?

The testimonies of the scientists concerned – including Sir Julian Huxley,[37] Dr. Joseph Needham[38] and Dr. W. H. Thorpe[39] – are revealing. Each of them holds an evolutionary world-view incorporating religious ideas – albeit in one case 'without revelation'. What distinguishes them from some of the scientists who oppose Teilhard's position, is that their religious or neo-religious views form an integral part of their evolution-

[34] *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 1966, **18**(3), p. 80.
[35] *The Listener*, 15/4/1965, pp. 557, 558.
[36] *Idem*.
[37] Introduction to P.
[38] *New Statesman*, 7/11/1959, pp. 632, 633.
[39] W. H. Thorpe, *Science, Man and Morals* (Methuen, 1965), p. 56.

istic system, which in turn forms the basis of their detailed thinking about the future of man and his universe.

To such people Teilhard's immense evolutionary thinking, with its great originality of expression when describing his vision of the future, is bound to prove stimulating and exciting. To them the details of his vision are not important, nor whether it incorporates scientific precision. For instance, to Thorpe 'much of his greatness lies in his ability to demonstrate . . . the existence, in regard to the animal kingdom, of an overall tendency towards increasing complexity and the development of mind'.[40]

To these men it is his vision which carries the day, and this is equally true in the case of the majority of his followers. He brought together science, philosophy and theology (as even Raven[41] and Le Morvan,[42] two ardent disciples, admit) in order to construct a vast picture of the world.

The essence of his vision is that the whole universe is of an evolutionary nature, and that it is absolutely necessary to adopt an evolutionary approach to nature. So convinced is he of this that he identifies a positive knowledge of things with the study of their development.[43] He is able to hold such a view because to him evolution is much more than a theory, 'it is a general condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must bow and which they must satisfy henceforward if they are to be thinkable and true'.[44] Is it any wonder then that, for Teilhard, 'evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow'[45]?

As if this were not sufficient, he proceeds to equate the recognition and spreading of evolutionary ideas with 'the most prodigious event, perhaps, ever recorded by history'.[46] As a rider to which I would ask: more important even than the incarnation of Christ?

[40] W. H. Thorpe, *Science, Man and Morals* (Methuen, 1965), p. 56.
[41] *Op. cit.*, p. 206.
[42] *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Catholic Truth Society), p. 15.
[43] P., p. 51.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 241.
[45] *Idem.*
[46] *Idem.*

Here we have the problem posed by Teilhardism. A priest of the Roman Catholic Church presents us with a thorough-going, all-inclusive, evolutionistic philosophy; a man to whom evolutionism is the central pivot of the universe.

Theology

Of what nature was his theology to allow him to move so far in this direction?

There are, I think, three main strands of importance for an understanding of this problem.

The first concerns the overall approach to theological matters, basic to his position. For this I will have to follow Raven, one of whose chief characteristics appeared to be an intense dislike of all who are anything other than zealous liberals. Belief in the transcendence of God, in the Fall and in the Atonement, concentration upon sin and treating the Scriptures as God's chief means of revelation are all designated by him as the 'blight'.[47] This is due to the fact that such ideas are, to him, pessimistic, denying reality to the concept of progress and value to human reason and effort. They also tend to place little store by natural religion, anticipating the establishment of the Kingdom of God with the literal, physical return of Christ at the Second Coming.

Raven's liberalism appears somewhat outmoded today, with its intense optimism – which can see in Belsen and Auschwitz only the valour and endurance of the resistance movements,[48] with its anticipation of a better social order and with its resolute faith in the capacity of man.

And yet it is this type of theology which lies at the heart of Teilhardism, and without which Teilhardism could not have prospered in religious circles. In actual fact Teilhard's optimism far exceeds that of Raven's. We have only to look at his reaction to the first atomic bomb explosion to have this demonstrated. That event showed to him that 'the atomic age is not the age of destruction but of union in research'.[49] The

[47] R., pp. 26, 27.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[49] *The Future of Man* (Collins, 1964), p. 147.

explosions themselves 'herald the birth into the world of a Mankind inwardly and outwardly pacified. They proclaim the coming of the Spirit of the Earth'.[50]

There is, however, one way in which Teilhard is represented as being fully in line with at least some Scriptural teaching. This concerns the similarity of his thought to certain of the views of Paul, and to a lesser extent, of John. It is Raven again who reminds us that 'Teilhard in his whole Christian vision of the process of Cosmogenesis and Christification is . . . restating for us the theology of St. Paul as this came to its fullest expression'.[51]

By this he means that Paul, in his three last epistles, Philippians, Colossians and Ephesians, presents a vision of Christ as the consummator of all things, in whom the whole universe finds its integration and fulfilment.

It is true that on a number of occasions throughout *Le Milieu Divin* Teilhard alludes to those words of Paul dealing with the extent and power of Christ's influence, and there is little doubt he was deeply moved by these ideas.

The most important one for Teilhard is that 'God shall be in all',[52] which I imagine he takes from Colossians iii:11, where we are told that 'Christ is all and in all'. This he links with the anticipation of a unity of all things in an all-embracing personality, the Christ that is to be, based on Ephesians iv:13 which looks forward to our coming 'in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'.

This sounds harmless enough, until we realize that it provides Teilhard with his vision of the cosmic Christ, the Christ who is the organic centre of the universe and the motive power of evolution. The statement, 'Christ is in all', signifies to Teilhard that the resurrected body of Christ is coextensive with the cosmos.[53] Further, as evolution progresses, mankind is moving towards a Christian community. In short, 'Christ is become

[50] *The Future of Man* (Collins, 1964), p. 147.
[51] R., p. 159.
[52] P., p. 322.
[53] C., p. 122.

cosmic, the cosmos is being Christified'.[54] This is the result of integrating the two visions of a mystic, universal Christ and a cosmic goal for evolution.

It is a pity that in order to obtain such an organismic synthesis, Teilhard has lost completely the spiritual Christ. Unfortunately he was concerned with only one aspect of Paul's thought, the one which appeared to coincide with ideas previously reached by rational means. His similarity to Paul is non-existent, even their universal Christs are totally dissimilar. For the one Christ delivers individuals from sin and its consequences uniting them one to another and to Christ as their Head, while for the other Christ's function is to advance the noospheric evolution of mankind.

This difference reflects the more fundamental difference in their starting-points. For Paul this was God and His revelation, for Teilhard it was man and his awareness of the rôle he has to play in advancing his self-evolution.[55]

Thirdly, there is one feature of Teilhard's 'theology' which even many of his followers find inadequate. This is his view of evil.

In spite of Teilhard's very brief treatment of the subject, even in *Le Milieu Divin* where he might have been expected to give it detailed consideration, his remarks on it are unusually clear.

To him, evil is a by-product of evolution. This is because evolution advances by means of groping and chance, with the result that checks and mistakes are always possible. Furthermore, for every one success in evolution there are many failures.[56] Kopp has expressed his position admirably: '. . . if we see the universe as being in a state of becoming, imperfections must obviously be a part of the process, since anything arranging itself must necessarily include some disorder at every stage. Thus evil is structural stress of evolutionary creation. It counts for nothing in itself'.[57]

In speaking of suffering, Teilhard remarked that 'sufferers . . . are merely those who pay the price of universal progress and

[54] R., p. 173.

[55] Cf., J. J. D. De Wit in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, P. E. Hughes (Ed.), (Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 407–450.

[56] P., pp. 339–341.

[57] *Teilhard de Chardin Explained* (The Mercier Press, 1964), p. 65.

triumph'.[58] This is inevitable, if evil is viewed as a by-product of a dynamic and progressive movement. So, too, is his view of death which is that it 'is the regular, indispensable condition of the replacement of one individual by another along a phyletic stem'.[59] Why? Because it is 'the essential lever in the mechanism and upsurge of life'.[60]

The reason for Teilhard's sparce treatment of evil stems from his interest in the positive, rather than the negative, side of evolution.[61] In part, this may be due to the way in which in his own life he seems to have been so taken up with the love of God that little place was left for considerations of sin. However, his references to sin as 'a weakening or deviation caused by our personal faults', or to bad actions as being 'positive gestures of disunion'[62] are most disquieting. Even if it may be argued that in these quotes he was not speaking theologically, we are left wondering what can be the value of any system, whatever its nature, which regards sin within a purely human framework.

The logical outcome of making evil a part of the evolutionary process is that as scientific knowledge increases, evil decreases. The consequence of this is that when scientific knowledge will have reached its maximal point, evil will have been obliterated. And this is what Teilhard envisages when he describes the final convergence into Omega as taking place in peace.[63]

His overall picture of sin and evil is devoid of any connection with God and His holiness, or with the way in which this is expressed in the laws and commands He has given to men. But this is not surprising when we recall that in Teilhard's eyes juridicial symbols sufficed only for society prior to the dawn of the modern, scientific-industrial stage.[64]

Having dealt with the primary scientific and theological considerations underlying the Teilhardian system, we are now able

[58] *The Meaning and Constructive Value of Suffering*, in Braybrooke, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[59] P., p. 340.
[60] *Idem.*
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 339.
[62] L., p. 80.
[63] P., p. 316.
[64] Quoted by C., p. 194.

to give some thought to a few of the remaining concepts basic to his system.

The great conflict of Teilhard's inner life was to resolve the problem of how the man who believes in heaven and the cross can continue to believe seriously in the value of worldly occupations.[65] In other words he was faced with the classical dilemma of the radical dualism of matter and spirit, of body and soul. For Teilhard this was not simply an intellectual difficulty. For him it had profound personal implications, and the answer he arrived at met his deepest mystical aspirations as well as providing the background to his thinking.

His solution lay in seeing the universe, and everything in it, as comprising a single whole.[66] Hence he substituted a monistic approach to reality for a dualistic one. This allowed him to postulate on the one hand that Christ can and should transform matter, and on the other that we approach Christ through matter.

As a result he can say, in the first place, that the function of the Christian 'is to divinise the world in Jesus Christ',[67] and in the second, that the arms and the heart which God opens to him 'are nothing less than all the united powers of the world which, penetrated and permeated to their depths by your will . . . converge upon my being to . . . bear it along towards the centre of your fire'.[68] This centre where all the elements of the universe meet is for him the 'divine milieu'.[69] Consequently for Teilhard the world became the body of Christ,[70] this being just one aspect of the union which he saw between God, the transcendent personal, and the universe in evolution.[71]

There can be no doubt that this is the heart of Teilhard's mysticism, the origins of which are probably to be found in the sacramentalism of the Roman Catholic Church.

What Teilhard did was to increase yet further the physical

[65] L., p. 51.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[71] Quoted by C., p. 293.

aspect of dogma, incorporating this simultaneously into an evolutionary scheme.

Teilhard's mysticism it seems to me is of exceptional importance as it highlights fundamental aspects of his science. It explains why he was content to confine himself in his science to phenomena. As man's power to explain nature increases, so his knowledge of God increases. Furthermore, as man increases his control over nature, man himself becomes greater, creation as a whole becomes more beautiful, the more perfect is adoration and the more Christ finds a body worthy of resurrection.[72] The evolution of the cosmos, that is cosmogenesis, is the Christification of all things as everything is moving towards the supreme personal centre, which is Omega or God.

Teilhard's mysticism ensures that science is essential for God to be disclosed.

To go a step further, in such a system there can be no place for, or need of, any specifically theological or philosophical concepts. This, of course, does not mean that such ideas are not present in his writings as undisclosed presuppositions. What it does mean is that he recognized no necessity to discuss such issues. A by-product of this procedure is that it enables one to adopt almost any theological interpretation to fit in with one of his phenomenal principles. For example, to account for the origin of man one can hold a 'special creation' or 'evolutionary' theological view and still adopt his 'infinite leap forward'.[73]

The extent and some of the *implications of Teilhard's evolutionism* should have become clear by this stage, but we are still left with some further implications to discuss.

The first concerns Teilhard's view of God. As his evolutionism was all-embracing, his view of God is inevitably one tinged with evolutionism.

In Teilhard's language, after the earliest stages in evolution, the biosphere came into existence in the form of a living film over the surface of the earth. This in turn was followed by one of the greatest advances of all – the leap from instinct to reflection. With the development of this new layer, the 'thinking

[72] Quoted by C., p. 123.
[73] P., pp. 187, 188.

layer', the noosphere made its appearance. This occurred with the rise of man, and it represented the beginning of a new age; the earth 'gets a new skin' to use Teilhard's poetic phrase.[74]

Due to the earth being round, men with their thought and consciousness have been forced together and prevented from spreading apart in an unlimited fashion. As a result the evolution of man, which is the evolution of the noosphere, has been and will continue to be convergent. Further evolution will be in the direction of hyper-reflection and hyper-personalization, and due to its being convergent will eventually become involuted to a Universal and Personal point, termed Omega. Omega, in turn, is envisaged as 'a distinct Centre, radiating at the core of a system of centres; a grouping in which personalization of the All and personalization of the elements reach their maximum'.[75]

Omega does, however, have two further characteristics, which in terms of the evolutionistic logic he has followed, are surprising. Firstly, although it is 'the last term of its series, it is also outside all series',[76] and secondly, while it emerges from the rise of consciousness, it has already emerged.[77] In other words, as he admits a little further on in his treatment of this subject, Omega is God.[78]

These two surprises are most significant because they mean that Teilhard's God fits in with orthodox beliefs – in a general way at least, whereas his premises do not permit such a conclusion to be drawn. If he had remained faithful to his premises, he would have arrived at a natural god, complete only at the end of the universal process. At the present time such a god would be incomplete – a pre-god perhaps.[79] He rejects this conclusion, and has been forced to accept a dualistic solution to his problem, having previously rejected the premise of dualism.

His orthodox conclusion also means he escapes from the pantheist camp, as his God is more than the fusion of the centres

[74] P., p. 202.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 288.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 297.
[77] *Idem.*
[78] *Ibid.*, pp. 316, 322.
[79] J. Macquarrie, *The Expository Times*, 1961, **72**, p. 337.

resulting from the ultimate convergence of the universe.[80] In addition, he took great care to make clear that together with the concentration of creatures within God-Omega, there was also a differentiation between them.[81] From his conclusions, therefore, the charge of pantheism cannot be levelled against him.

Sir Julian Huxley found Teilhard's thought on point Omega not fully clear.[82] This it appears to me is a gross understatement. The matter is a crucial one for Teilhard's whole phenomenal system. On his own criteria it stands or falls on its coherency.[83] We are faced with two alternatives. If we accept his system as a fully coherent one, it amounts to no more than evolutionary naturalism. If we allow his introduction of a transcendent God, his system as a system has little value. It is internally self-contradictory, and all that remains of it are a number of instances of evocative terminology.

The second implication of his evolutionism concerns the meaning it bestows upon salvation.

In his vision of the future he pictures only two alternatives – either absolute optimism or absolute pessimism. Between these two extremes there is no middle way 'because by its very nature progress is all or nothing'.[84] And so, either all men will finally converge into Omega, or none will. Hence he has dispensed with the necessity, or even relevance, of individual redemption. This is brought out in a different way in his discussion on 'hell' at the end of *Le Milieu Divin*, in which he attempts to reconcile his own belief in the virtual impossibility of any man ever having been damned, with the official Roman Catholic belief in the reality of hell.[85]

This position has two consequences. In the first place the incarnation of Christ has only a universal evolutionary significance, with no meaning for individuals as individuals. In the second place salvation is dependent upon the efforts of mankind as a whole, efforts to complete the mystical body of Christ. This

[80] P., p. 338.
[81] L., p. 116.
[82] *Op. cit.*, p. 19.
[83] P., pp. 58, 268.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 256.
[85] pp. 147–149.

explains the emphasis Teilhard laid upon the socialization of mankind, directed towards preventing the waste of human potential and with the object of speeding up the supreme development of mankind. This led him, and has since led his followers, into their dialogue with Marxists, whom they respect because of their concern for the social conditions of men and with whom they wish to find common ground. This is essential for Teilhardists as human socialization is man's hope of achieving the ultra-human condition necessary before Omega can be achieved.[86] We find we have travelled full circle and are back at Raven's theology.

Finally, the details of his evolutionary scheme must be compared with general evolutionary views today.

Characteristic of his evolutionism is its Lamarckism and orthogenesis, the scant attention paid to genetics, and the presence of critical points.

Lamarckism is generally understood as the doctrine of the heredity of acquired characters, although it also involves an orthogenetic development due to an upward urge within the organism concerned. Teilhard specifically repudiates a view of evolutionary change using natural selection as a mechanism, and replaces a Lamarckian explanation.[87] Whatever may be the status of natural selection as a mechanism, there is no convincing evidence in favour of, for example, a tiger 'handing on the soul of a carnivore',[88] as Teilhard would like us to believe.

Following on from this Teilhard sees orthogenesis as the only complete form of heredity.[89] Orthogenesis in the sense of evolution along a straight, and predetermined, line has definite metaphysical overtones, and understandably is in disfavour with biologists. Teilhard claims not to use the word in this sense, but for the manner in which terms succeed each other in a historical sequence towards 'increasing degrees of centro-complexity'.[90] If by this he means that everything has a direction of change, it explains nothing. If on the other hand he

[86] Cf., C., p. 235.
[87] P., p. 166.
[88] *Idem.*
[89] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[90] *Idem.*

means that everything has a *specific* direction of change towards Omega, he is virtually using the term in its classical sense. In spite of his denial, his use of the term suggests he is endeavouring to signify a process directed from above, that is, from Omega – the motive power of cosmogenesis.

With respect to genetics, Teilhard thought this subject did not concern him directly, even in *The Phenomenon of Man.*[91] This is disconcerting as it strongly suggests that when referring to the rates of evolutionary change he was influenced by factors more philosophical than scientific. His vagueness about these rates of change, for example, when he mentions the 'almost explosive acceleration of noogenesis' in one paragraph, and our 'almost imperceptible advance' in the next,[92] confirms our fears.

His use of the concept of critical points is essential to his whole system. The two most important points are those responsible for the birth of life[93] and for the birth of reflection.[94] At the first, the cell was born and at the second, thought. It is the second which is the crucial one for Teilhard, as he must find a radical difference between man and the rest of the animal kingdom, a difference which does not involve any anatomical discontinuity. With genetics behind him, he imagined the birth of thought occurring at a single stroke, 'a mutation from zero to everything',[95] one particular being lacking the ability to think and the next possessing it.

The ease with which he could postulate this emanated from the emphasis he placed upon the 'within' as opposed to the 'without' of organisms. A critical point is a feature of the 'within', and may be accompanied by no discernible change in the 'without'. The initiative lies with Teilhard's followers to demonstrate the value of this hypothesis for evolutionary thinking, as it corresponds to no demonstrable evidence.

Without penetrating any further into all aspects of his evolutionary scheme, we can see that it is more in line with philosophical evolutionism than with any genetically-orientated,

[91] pp. 152, 153.
[92] *Ibid.*, p. 280.
[93] *Ibid.*, p. 112.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 187.
[95] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

mechanistic approach to evolution. We might expect even vitalists to take seriously that part of their whole which is empirical science. But it seems that in Teilhard's case this was not so.

Conclusion

With the exception of his vision of the future, there is little that is completely original in Teilhard's work. Different aspects of his thought have affinities to such diverse people as Duns Scotus, the medieval scholastic, the philosophers Alexander and Whitehead, to Lloyd Morgan, an emergent evolutionist and to Huxley, an evolutionary humanist. What Teilhard did present to the world was two-fold – a synthesis of a form of evolutionism and a form of mystical Christianity, together with the personal testimony of a very remarkable and very devout man, a mystic and a scientist.

The mysticism he presented overrode both empirical science and Biblical Christianity. While giving the appearance of being a prophet for the mid-twentieth century, he rejected the science of today and the only faith relevant for today and clung instead to the science and philosophy of the Greek heritage.

The divine milieu. Such is the phenomenon of Teilhard de Chardin.