

P. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

by

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DISCUSSION PAPER

on

Conrad Bonifazi's

SCIENCE AND RELIGION WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO P. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

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Conrad Bonifazi has clearly set forth the distinction between those of the Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions and those who represent the traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Sufism and Christian Mysticism. In the former tradition, God is seen as other than humans and as existing apart from the processes of the world. In contrast to this view, Buddhists, for example, see God and man as being identical. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are petitionary or contractual religions. The Ultimate is a giant Personage who cares for and disciplines his offspring and they in turn offer him worship and obedience.

Leibniz has spoken of philosophia perennis which stresses the divinity to be found in all creatures and things. The ultimate goal of life is to realize one's unity with the Ground of all being.

The contractual religious speak of being saved from pain, suffering, evil, and finally from death. According to the perennial philosophy, the major problem of human beings is the delusion of separateness and they need to come to the realization of their oneness with all of existence. History is understood in terms of the unfolding of human consciousness. The contractual religious develop creeds and rituals which they defend as though the word is the thing which it is not. The mystical religions are hesitant to make sure formulations and try to maintain a certain ambiguity. Mystical experiences are not conducive to creedal formulations. In general, mystical experiences witness to monism rather than theism.

Mysticism whether of the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, or Sufist variety does not resist the scientific method as does the doctrinally organized faiths. When reality is defined as the Totality of everything that is, then both physics and mysticism are parts of it. This means that interdisciplinary dialogue is possible. There is the hope that physics might at least be compatible with a mystical world-view. This does not mean that physics will confirm, prove or contradict such a world-view.

Historically there is good evidence that religions do evolve and change. Many Christians are coming to see that there is such a thing as genuine sanctity without having to subscribe to a particular set of doctrines. Contractual religions may be required to make a commitment to truth as living and relative in the place of assent to doctrine seen as absolute.

There has been a significant change in European consciousness over the past four centuries in regard to its perception of the nature of reality. There has been a move from out-there-ness of reality to the value of human inwardness, and from objectivity to subjectivity. Conrad Bonifazi does an excellent job of setting forth an account of this journey to the interior. Then he proceeds to note the worth of Teilhard's thought and testimony.

Teilhard understands the world in terms of the personal. This is a category which transcends those of body and mind, but without contracting the methods of his scientific discipline. It is Teilhard's opinion that

the sciences have been omitting human beings as such from their calculations. Human beings have not been considered by science as spiritual or personal wholes. Such an approach fails to consider personality as an aspect of evolutionary change. It was the aim of Teilhard to increase our understanding of evolution so that it includes the biological and spiritual dimensions of humankind.

What Teilhard calls hyperphysics is an effort to see the whole person in the context of an evolving universe. True physics as he visualizes it will one day include man in his wholeness as a vital part of a picture of the world. He understands science and religion as pointing in the same direction.

Teilhard sees evolution as including a movement of outwardness that reflects a growing physical complexity, and an inward movement or growing psychism. This dual-flow of energy which reaches a high point in human beings is in the direction of the integration of total human actuality in both its biological and spiritual aspects into the very structure of the universe. The ultimate condition of the whole process is called Point Omega. This represents a cosmic unity where individual awareness would continue and be heightened. What might be termed "the bottom line" of Teilhard's thinking is that there must be one energy operating in the world. Energy operates in a physical mode identified with complexity, and a psychical mode set forth as consciousness.

Evolution as a process of both physical expansion and psychic concen-

tration has produced self-reflecting creatures through whom the planet is now aware of itself. Since our thoughts are reflected in other minds and lives there is a shared human knowledge which has resulted in a psychic skin that now envelops the earth. This psychic skin which intermingles with the biosphere while remaining distinct is called by Teilhard the noosphere.

To genuinely understand Teilhard he must be seen as a mystic who sees the outward cosmic realities as the clothing of God. These cosmic realities are to be loved as God's presence. It is to this world as a part of the cosmos that Teilhard is most committed. Even if he were to lose his Christian faith, he would continue to live by his faith in the world.

Conrad Bonifazi is certainly to be congratulated for a job well done. It may well be an example of synchronicity that I was chosen as discussant for this particular paper since I am so much in agreement with the position set forth. Those who see the world in strictly materialistic terms can no doubt muster arguments against Teilhard's position which has such a mystical or spiritual dimension to it. When one such as Teilhard is thinking on both a material and a spiritual level it is very difficult to criticize the spiritual aspects of his thought. His emphasis on the unity of the cosmos is certainly in harmony with the religious experiences of the great mystics of both the west and the east.

Teilhard's emphasis on the movement toward Point Omega is in agreement with many who see meaning and purpose in the universe. This is of course a matter

of faith which one may or may not have. If one does not see meaning or purpose in the universe, then a person may either give his or her own meaning to it or try to exist in a world without meaning. Many of us prefer as did Thielhard De Chardin to affirm that there is meaning and purpose in the universe and in our own lives as well.