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William J. Schmitt

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The Vision of Teilhard de Chardin

WILLIAM J. SCHMITT

NO Christian thinker of recent times has been the focal point of more controversy than Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. His writings have raised up many ardent disciples and an almost equal number of opponents. And this is only to be expected, for he has attempted a vast synthesis of our knowledge of the world, a synthesis that is breathtaking in scope, unorthodox in terminology and, above all, original in concept and development.

For readers in the Philippines Teilhard's synthesis has special significance. The Philippines bridges the culture of East and West; as the only Catholic nation in the Far East it provides a focal point of belief in the Revelation that is so consonant with Teilhard's synthesis; through *Operation Brotherhood* it has already provided a challenging instance of that universal awareness and concern which Teilhard uses with such conviction in pointing out the unique convergence of Man.

TEILHARD, THE MAN

Most of the world knows Pierre Teilhard de Chardin as a scientist. Born in 1881 in Auvergne, he early became interested in geology and mineralogy. When he entered the Society of Jesus at eighteen he continued his scientific studies, eventually concentrating on palaeontology. He was ordained a priest in 1912, won the Military Medal and the Legion of

Honor as a stretcher-bearer during the first World War, and then returned to his study of science.

His honors and distinctions were many, and his travels far-flung. He worked with outstanding paleontologists of many nations and took part in a number of expeditions, including the one which unearthed the remains of Peking Man. His scientific writings won him a wide reputation.

Father Teilhard was a scientist, but his fellow Jesuits and, indeed, all his colleagues and friends knew him as a good priest, a religious man. This is seen clearly in his faithful observance of obedience when told not to spread by speech and writing his speculative synthesis. A man, burning with the enthusiasm of a prophet, wanting to communicate his vision to the world, was obedient and silent. These were troubled times for the world and the Church. His extremely original thought and highly speculative synthesis could easily lead the unwary into error in matters of faith.

Theologians are understandably disturbed about the theory of Teilhard, for he describes the world and man in terms of evolution. Again, they find in his grand synthesis no mention of (and some would say no place for) original and personal sin, the special creation of the human soul, the Incarnation and Redemption. They find his thought and expression often akin to that of famous and influential atheists and agnostics. Yet none can deny his faithful and wholehearted living of the Faith. As his age and thought progressed he became ever more convinced of the validity of that Faith.

On his fellow scientists he had a remarkably good influence. Although those of other religious persuasions tended to pick only what they wanted from the vision of Teilhard, they were led by him to at least a partial understanding of his Faith. The following is a quotation from Julian Huxley's introduction to the American translation of his great work:

His influence on the world's thinking is bound to be important. Through his combination of wide scientific knowledge with deep religious feeling and a rigorous sense of values, he has forced theologians to view their ideas in the new perspective of evolution, and scientists

to see the spiritual implications of their knowledge. He has both clarified and unified our vision of reality. In the light of that new comprehension, it is no longer possible to maintain that science and religion must operate in thought-tight compartments or concern separate sectors of life; they are both relevant to the whole of human existence. The religiously-minded can no longer turn their backs upon the natural world, or seek escape from its imperfections in a supernatural world; nor can the materialistically-minded deny importance to spiritual experience and religious feeling.¹

THE VISION OF MAN

Teilhard's purpose is to describe man, the whole of man, in scientific terms. This must be clearly understood, for most of the negative criticism of his vision stems from a lack of appreciation of this fundamental point. He begins his preface to *THE PHENOMENON OF MAN* as follows:

If this book is to be properly understood, it must be read not as a work on metaphysics, still less as a sort of theological essay, but purely and simply as a scientific treatise.... This book deals with man *solely* as a phenomenon; but it also deals with the *whole* phenomenon of man.²

His point of departure is the phenomenon that man is, the facts about man that are knowable to scientific investigation. By concentrating on this plane of knowledge he does not wish to deny the existence and utility of a philosophical or theological view of man:

I have not tried to discover a system of ontological and causal relations between the elements of the universe, but only an experimental law of recurrence which would express their successive appearance in time. Beyond these first purely *scientific* reflections, there is obviously ample room for the most far-reaching speculations of the philosopher and theologian.³

The real difficulty seems to be that, by dealing with the *whole* phenomenon of man, and by extrapolating his scientific

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *THE PHENOMENON OF MAN*, English translation by Bernard Wall (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 26. Teilhard considered this work the most complete expression of his synthesis.

² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³ *Ibid.*

facts to construct a theory that embraces also the future of the phenomenon of man, he presents a vision that *looks* like a philosophy. Furthermore, by attempting a *general* scientific interpretation of the universe, he could give the impression to the undiscerning that he is trying to give a *complete* interpretation. His purpose is rather to interpret the world in scientific terms alone.

A final difficulty stems from Teilhard's forceful and imaginative style of writing. Despite frequent clarifications of this point, he is accused of presenting *theory* as scientific *fact*. Parts of his vision *are* accepted scientific facts; parts are the extrapolations of theory. Only the scientist, perhaps, can really discern the dividing line here. No wonder, then, that his writings make risky reading for the layman.

In addition, his effort is to communicate a vision, not to present a stepwise logical proof of each point. His is a synthesis of facts and conclusions and speculations—all on the scientific level of phenomenon. To judge his work differently is to do him wrong. He does not need to be told that his sweeping synthesis is not a proved fact:

The views I am attempting to put forward here are, of course, largely tentative and personal. Yet in as much as they are based on arduous investigation and sustained reflection, they give an idea, by means of one example, of the way in which the problem of mankind presents itself in science today.⁴

Teilhard's vision has been aptly summarized by Sir Julian Huxley as follows:

We, mankind, contain the possibilities of the earth's immense future, and can realise more and more of them on condition that we increase our knowledge and our love. That, it seems to me, is the distillation of THE PHENOMENON OF MAN.⁵

For Teilhard, man is not just matter nor just an animal, evolved like other animals. He is not an isolated unit lost in the cosmic solitudes, nor a static center of the world. He is essentially a thinking and reflecting being, and the axis and

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

leading shoot of evolution. When science considers him only anatomically or only according to his physiological mechanisms, science fails to see the importance of man in the universe, for it is neglecting an entire dimension. This dimension is the scientifically observable realm of thought.

When studied narrowly in himself by anthropologists or jurists, man is a tiny, even a shrinking, creature. His over-pronounced individuality conceals from our eyes the whole to which he belongs....And it is this that leads scientists to refuse to consider man as an object of scientific scrutiny except through his body. The time has come to realise that an interpretation of the universe—even a positivist one—remains unsatisfying unless it covers the interior as well as the exterior of things, mind as well as matter.⁶

Teilhard's picture of man, then, begins with scientific facts. It locates man in his proper space-time position in relation to the whole universe. This universe is seen by science as evolving and changing. Therefore, to understand man today, we must begin by considering his origin in the universe that is evolving. This evolution proceeds by stages, the essential ones being Cosmogenesis, Biogenesis and, finally, Noogenesis.⁷

COSMOGENESIS

Looking at the world about him, the scientist sees the stuff of the tangible universe as a vast plurality. There are the myriads of raindrops and grains of sand, the hosts of living things, the galaxies of stars and the apparently limitless ashes of the dead. Modern science has analysed this universal stuff into still smaller and more numerous entities and sub-entities.

Science sees further that this plurality of matter shows a definite tendency to unite, the elementary particles giving rise to the harmonic series of elements, and these in turn joining hands to form molecules of ever greater size and complexity.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷ For a more complete discussion of the thought of Teilhard, the reader is referred to C. Tresmontant, *PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, HIS THOUGHT*, Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1959.

This evolution of complex matter from simple particles takes place within the restrictions of the laws of thermodynamics: in every change the total energy remains constant, while, at the same time, some of this energy, in the form of heat, becomes forever unavailable for work.

In this way the earth was formed. The completely dissociated matter, as we find it in the incandescent stars, cooled and aggregated; the crystallizing world grew by simple juxtaposition of the same units to yield relatively few and simple compounds. The science of Chemistry can explain adequately and duplicate such processes. Yet a more involved process was also in progress and this resulted in the vastly complex compounds of carbon. Matter evolved in the direction of ever greater complexity.

Viewing this evolutionary process, Teilhard came to acknowledge, as a scientific law, this rise to greater complexity. He called it the Law of Complexity. And this evolution was not just a process but a process *with a direction*, and the direction of evolution was toward greater complexity.

Besides evolution toward complexity, science also finds in matter a unity that is much more than the unity of a pile of sand. For the whole that is formed is never reducible simply to its parts. The whole is in a sense greater than the sum of its parts. Atoms can not be fully explained by merely totaling up the properties of the electrons, protons, neutrons and other particles of which they are composed. The vast complexities of large molecules are not resolved simply by chemical analysis. And to go from the infinitesimal to the infinite, the vast circle of stars and galaxies are not merely a function of their components. These multiple parts of the cosmos are unique, each in its own way. We cannot pass from one to another by a simple change of coefficients.

Cosmogogenesis, then, is not a sudden thing, the immediate positing of a mature planet with its vast complexities. Rather we see a *gradual* growth in the direction of ever greater complexity. The degree of complexity is measured by the number and variety of the parts and by the types of arrangements

between the parts. The order of complexity follows with the chronological order: first there are sub-atomic particles, then atoms, then molecules of ever increasing size and complexity. Cosmogogenesis is a movement, not an instantaneous coming to be.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE "WITHIN"

Up till now science has only considered the "without" of things. In the eyes of the physicist, only the "without" is legitimate matter for consideration. The same is true of the bacteriologist, but this attitude is more difficult for the botanist and still more difficult for the zoologist. It is entirely impossible in the study of man. Here the "within" cannot be avoided.

The "within", for Teilhard, is consciousness, but consciousness taken in its broadest aspect to mean every kind of psychic activity. This aspect of the "within," or consciousness, he finds in the smallest particle of matter. Consciousness, it is true, has been treated by science as a queer exception found only in man, just as radium was classified as an abnormal substance. Yet where would modern physics be today if the *universal aspect* of radium had not been considered? So, Teilhard believes, we must consider the universal aspect of consciousness which extends from the perfection of human reflection down to the most rudimentary forms of interior perception. Precisely because of the "within," primitive matter is something more than the swarming particles analysed by modern science. This consciousness is so attenuated in the simple elements that we fail to notice it. Yet it must be there, for how else can we explain the cosmos of succeeding ages?

The "within" and the "without" parallel each other in many respects. Both have an atomic structure. The elementary particles of both are quite homogeneous among themselves. Only with greater growth and complexity do we find differentiated forms.

But there is more than a parallelism between the "within" and the "without." They are really two aspects of the same

phenomenon. They are always connected in such a way that the higher forms of consciousness are associated with the better organized material structures.

The scientific law proposed by Teilhard to explain the development from stage to stage, the law which explains the original invisibility, then the appearance, and then the gradual dominance of the "within" in comparison with the "without" of things, is the Law of Complexity/Consciousness.

This law gives the following description of two stages, A and B, of evolving matter. In stage A the centers of consciousness, because they are numerous and loosely connected (as atoms in a molecule), only reveal themselves by overall effects which are subject to the mathematical laws of statistics. We can describe scientifically only the activity of the mass of atoms, not the activity of the individuals. In stage B the centers of consciousness are less numerous and more highly individualised and more free from the slavery of large numbers (imagine a colony of paramecia). Here spontaneity (an obvious but rudimentary form of consciousness) reveals itself. Complexity and consciousness go hand in hand.

A complete scientific explanation of cosmogenesis, therefore, must make room for the importance of the "within." The earth as it was formed already carried consciousness within it. Stage by stage we can witness the path by which the "within" developed along with the "without." Consciousness increased with complexity. Both developed because of an involution or coiling up the molecule upon itself both physically and psychically.

BIOGENESIS

The mineral world and the world of life seem so different, but only when we view them in their extreme forms. We see, for instance, a large difference between life as manifested in a tree and in a dog. This is true because tree and dog are extreme forms. But between the one-celled animal and the one-celled plant there is no clear dividing line, for these forms are close together. In the same way, the difference between

life and non-life vanishes as we leave such extremes as man and stone and compare simple living protoplasm with dead proteins.

Life begins with the cell, the atom of life. The simplicity of cellular form, the structural symmetry, the infinitesimal size, the outer uniformity in character and behavior of the mass: all these properties make the cell merge with the world of the non-living. Considering just the "without" of things, the change from the non-living to the living was both gradual and hardly visible. But since a consideration of the "within" is vital to any complete theory of the universe, we must recognize that the change from non-life to life was so profound that it involved a change in the very *nature* of matter.

THE BREAKTHROUGH

In the warmth of the primeval oceans, where cosmogenesis had progressed to yield complex and very large molecules, life began. The process of growth and complexification reached the point where it could proceed no more. Like a living cell that is fully mature, further growth could only result in a rupture, a draining off of energy by a qualitative rather than quantitative change: the mega-molecule became alive. This life was very small, like the molecules from which it came, and soon was very numerous.

Life, as we know it, would have arisen from a single thread or from a multiple strand. But Teilhard strongly opts for the former position. For even if we consider the most extreme forms of life, we find a very fundamental and all-pervading similarity. There is the uniformity of basic cellular structure, identical chemical processes, identical solutions to the various problems of life: perception, nutrition, reproduction, etc. The vitamins are common to all living things. Only left-handed amino acids are utilized, although the right-handed ones are equally probable. These unnecessary and highly complex similarities could not be the result of chance, but rather suggest that the evolution of life from non-life was more probably a "once-only" phenomenon.

TENDENCIES IN CONFLICT

With the advent of life we notice the same two trends that marked the evolution of the mineral world, only here the trends are even more pronounced. The first trend is toward multiplication and diversification. On the unicellular level, life teems. But there is not just a simple multiplication of the same form, but also an irresistible diversification, noticeable even today. The second trend is toward unification and complexification. Simple mechanical aggregation leads to a more centered association. The life unit becomes bigger, more complex and yet more centered about itself, and capable of a greater variety of activities beneficial to the organism as a whole.

In the early state of profusion and unlimited multiplication, the individual unit does not count: life is more important than lives. By profusion, life takes precautions against mishap and multiplies its chances of progress. But as we progress to greater complexities, it is the individual that takes on greater and greater importance.

When evolution has proceeded to the development of higher forms we see more clearly the process of ramification or diversification. The various aggregates of growth give rise to phyla which, like the initial living things, break away from their parental strain and flourish autonomously. The phylum grows like an invention. First, the idea takes the shape of a **theory or a provisional mechanism**. Then follows a period of rapid modifications. Then a phase of expansion and growth. But there is also a tendency to split into secondary phyla because of the possibility of variants equally successful in solving the problems of existence. Eventually the fanning out declines and the final step is again one of association or rather of socialization.

Looking at the tree of life as we do from a great distance (in time), we can be fooled by two optical illusions. First of all, the phyla seem to be greatly dispersed. This is because many of the branches have been broken off and remain unknown despite the efforts of palaeontology to discover them.

Secondly, there is an apparent absence of origins. We cannot prove today the birth of even one species in terms of material traces. The missing links are all still missing. It is one of Teilhard's finest contributions to emphasize that nothing is so delicate and fugitive, by its very nature, as a beginning. The bud of anything is both fragile and indeterminate. Time destroys it. When anything really new begins we cannot distinguish it, for it can only be recognized in the light of its future maturity and by that time the bud has disappeared. Fetal forms lack discernible individuality. We should not be surprised, therefore, that everything seems to have burst into the world ready made.

For the scientist, life is one vast tree whose fundamental trunk has its roots in unity of origin, unity of structure and unity of progress from the simple to the complex. The branches reach up in vast numbers and types of forms. It is alive and growing and evolving. And over the whole is a unity that pervades and directs the diversification.

The fact of evolution is clear. Its *direction* is another point, and it is here that Teilhard's insight again flashes forth. In calling attention to the fact that the different solutions to the problems of life are not equivalent like the spokes of a wheel, but that there is a privileged axis of evolution, he states the fundamental insight of his vision of what man really is.

We have already seen how complexity indicates the direction of the evolution of non-living forms. The more complex, the more highly evolved. In the process of biogenesis another norm has to be developed: consciousness. The greater the number and complexity of psychic processes, the higher in the evolutionary scale. But there is a relation between the "within" and the "without" so we should be able to find structure complications associated with increase of consciousness; and we can. By classifying living things according to the development of their nervous system, according to their degree of cerebralisation, we find an order that is both chronological and *directed* according to the degree of consciousness.

Thus, in the Chordate branch of the tree of life we find the nervous system developing and concentrating through the ages. The tiny brain of the dinosaurs eventually gives rise to the large and convoluted brain of the mammals. Among the mammals there is a similar progression.

A similar development takes place among the arthropods and insects. The nerve ganglions concentrate; they become localized and grow forward in the head. At the same time instincts become more complex; and socialization appears.

No other structural feature, such as coloration, disposition of limbs or shape of teeth, gives such order to the biosphere. This coherence and inexhaustible fidelity in coherence could not be the result of chance. There we have the measure of the direction of evolution among the higher forms of life. Cerebralisation, the growth and complexity of the brain, is a measure of the progress of evolution. It is the link of the "within" with the "without."

NOOGENESIS

The degree of cerebralisation is a true measure of the total evolutionary process. It measures the development of the "within" as well as the "without", for it is connected, at least circumstantially, with the rise of consciousness. And as this rise becomes more pronounced we must recognize the advent of a new form of energy, Radial Energy, the energy of life. The tangential or mechanical energies that manifest themselves in the evolutionary process can never explain the irreversible advance towards higher psychisms and greater complexity. The only explanation seems to be in terms of psychological forces, not external forces. The struggle for survival and natural selection do not provide the whole answer. The carnivore's instincts do not develop because the animal's molars become cutting and its claws sharp. Rather the tiger elongates its fangs and sharpens its claws because it receives and hands on the soul of a carnivore.

Once again the importance of the "within". Fossilized remains may help us link various living creatures, but to follow the true history of the world we must follow it by noting the

progress of the "within". Thus, for example, we notice that the development of the Primates involves an evolution concentrated in the brain, the limbs are freed from the overspecialization which kills or at least incapacitates further development. The Anthroids are the bud at the end of this shoot. Here thought is born. Here biogenesis gives way to noogenesis, its natural prolongation.

THE BREAKTHROUGH

Several points are of vital importance in considering the birth of thought. The first that man is by nature different from those lower on the evolutionary scale. The perfection of consciousness, reflection, marks a whole new stage of life, for the thought of man is transcendent over the instinct of lower animals and could not have appeared *between* two individuals.

A second important point is that despite the difference *in nature* between man and animal, the morphological difference especially in the beginning, may have been small to the vanishing point. As we ascend in the animal kingdom to higher and higher forms of instinct, we reach, in the proximity of man, a psychical makeup that touches (but does not attain) the borders of intelligence.

Indeed, we find a whole group of factors linked together providentially. The creature from which man issued was a biped, his hands free in sufficient time to release the jaws from their grasping and holding function. Thus the thick band of maxillary muscles which had imprisoned the cranium could relax. The brain grew. The eyes, brought closer together on the diminished face, were able to converge and fix on what the hands held and brought before them—the very gesture which formed the external counterpart of reflection. Yet the great leap to reflection must have been as little visible externally in the first man as it is today in every newborn child.

A third significant point is the growing importance of the individual. No longer subject just to the laws of chance as are the atomic and molecular hoards, nor to the struggle for survival as among lesser phyla in the biosphere, the individual man,

the person who can reflect and choose, is capable of controlling his own future evolution.

Man, then, comes silently into the world. We look feverishly but in vain for the fossil remains of the initial point of hominisation. We cannot recognise man morphologically until after many years of further development. The bud is forever lost.

MAN, THE UNIQUE

Like other species man ramified. We see this in the remains of *Pithecanthropus* and *Sinanthropus*, and later in the Neanderthaloids. Finally we have modern man: *Homo Sapiens*. And here we have a great difference from other phyla, for *Homo Sapiens* does not branch out like a fan. The earliest remains of modern man indicate the same races: brown, white, yellow and negro, as we have today, with the same fundamental distribution and characteristics. We find a turning in of man upon himself. Because of the power of reflection, the process of socialization proceeds rapidly. This interfertilization results in many social experiments. The force of convergence appears as an overriding one, becoming more important than the divergence of man by the birth, multiplication and evolution of nations.

In animals, reactions between branches are limited to competition and conquest, followed by elimination. With man, however, even brutal conquest involves some assimilation rather than elimination, some turning in upon himself. Synthesis rather than replacement.

The modern earth, as we know it, is passing through an era of change. Ours is an age of transition. It is marked by the discovery of evolution in its widest meaning, not just as transformism. Man realizes that he is part of the development around him. Both his body and his mind are the products of this development. Man may not be the center of the universe, but he is something much more important, the arrow pointing the way to a final unification of the world in terms of life. Man is the last-born, the freshest, the most complicated of all the successive layers of life. Man can pass on his acquired spiritual

treasures by education and imitation, for man can freely dispose of himself. It is up to him to direct his own future evolution.

This last realization, that man is the player as well as the cards and the stakes, that nothing can go on if he leaves the table—this is a frightening thought. Courage to go on can only come from an absolute optimism based on the rational invitations that are offered to an act of faith. To bring us into existence the world has from the beginning juggled miraculously with too many improbabilities for there to be any risk whatever in committing ourselves further and following it right to the end.

Noogenesis began with anthropogenesis, but it does not stop there. Just as the elements coalesced to molecules and molecules united to form the first living cell, which in turn gave rise to more complex living beings and finally man, so we find a coalescence in man himself. Social phenomenon, the roundness of the earth, the press of human waves upon themselves, the improvement of communications, all these prevented the divergent branches of mankind from effectively separating. Like the veins of a giant leaf the human divergencies remained joined in a common tissue. Man differentiates, but coalescence is the stronger trend, and the overriding one. This trend toward union was invisible in the primordial cosmic process, but it is stronger here, reinforced by the activity of the now dominant "within". Noogenesis begins to proceed beyond anthropogenesis.

The future, as Teilhard sees it, involves a mega-synthesis by which all the thinking elements of the earth find themselves individually and collectively drawn to a super-union, a super-consciousness. A single vast grain of thought on the sidereal scale, the plurality of individual reflections grouping themselves together and reinforcing one another in the act of a single unanimous reflection.

FUSION AT THE OMEGA POINT

Since evolution is essentially an ascent towards consciousness, it should culminate in some sort of supreme consciousness—the illuminating involution of being upon itself. The result

is a hyper-reflection or hyper-personalisation. That is the obvious extrapolation of the forces we see operating in the world around us.

This personalisation of the Universe is more than just the collection of conscious beings. Rather there is a reassembling of all consciousness, each particular one remaining conscious of itself at the end of the operation, and even becoming more itself and thus more clearly distinct from others the closer it gets to them in Omega. This exaltation of the individual clearly opposes any form of pantheism. Like the cells of a body and the members of a society, this union *differentiates*. The parts perfect and fulfill themselves.

The energy for this union is love. Considered in general as the affinity of being with being, love is not peculiar to man but is a general property of life. It is more obscure among the lower forms of life, and most clear in man. Love alone is capable of effecting the union we contemplate. This is seen in the fact that lovers come into the most complete possession of themselves when they say that they are lost in each other. It is echoed in the ecstatic cry of the Apostle: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me."

A universal love is not only psychologically possible; it is the only complete and final way in which we are able to love. It is impossible to give oneself to anonymous number. But if the universe ahead of us assumes a face and heart, becomes personalized, then we can love all.

The Omega Point has as its cosmic function to initiate and maintain the progress of evolution. For this it must be loving and lovable *at this very moment*. Neither an ideal center nor a potential center would suffice. The Omega Point must also be independent since it directs all and will be the final "all" after the process of evolution has ceased. It is autonomous, the crown of all series, but outside of them.

Toward the end of evolution, then, we find the somatic transformations slowing down in favor of the psychic. Research will increase especially in the more fundamental areas. Man

himself will be the primary object of study. And, in this concentration on man, man will find himself increasingly face to face with religion. Science and religion will go hand in hand to help each other, for the same life animates both.

Religion and science are the two conjugated faces or phases of one and the same act of complete knowledge—the only one which can embrace the past and future of evolution so as to contemplate, measure and fulfill them.⁸

The end of this convergent movement will attain such an intensity and quality that mankind, *taken as a whole*, will be obliged, as happened to the individual forces of instinct, to reflect upon itself at a single point:

The end of the world: the wholesale internal introversion upon itself of the noosphere, which has simultaneously reached the uttermost limit of its complexity and its centrality...the overthrow of equilibrium, detaching the mind, fulfilled at last, from its material matrix, so that it will henceforth rest with all its weight on God-Omega.⁹

THE CHRISTIAN PHENOMENON

Led by the logic of the experimental laws of Evolution, Teilhard postulates a final center of convergence, called Omega, under whose influence the noosphere closes in upon itself. Omega already exists and is operative at the very core of the thinking mass. Were it only a remote and ideal focus destined to emerge at the end of time we would not know It today. And since It already exists and is operative we should find some traces of It, and precisely as a Person. Thus science is brought face to face with the importance of the Christian Phenomenon.

It is important to stress that Teilhard still speaks as a naturalist rather than as a convinced believer. The Christian fact has its place among the other realities of the world, especially since it brings us the crucial confirmation, by its creed and growth, of the vision of man.

How easy to compare the God of Faith with the Omega Point: Personal, Intelligent, Provident, Transcendent! Christ,

⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

the principle of universal vitality because sprung up as man among men, put Himself in the position (maintained ever since) to subdue under Himself, to direct the general ascent of consciousness into which He inserted Himself. All units of consciousness are eventually to be united in one Mystical Body, of which He is the head and we the members.

God, the Center of centers. In that final vision the Christian dogma culminates. And so exactly, so perfectly does this coincide with the Omega Point that doubtless I should never have ventured to envisage the latter or formulate the hypothesis rationally if, in my consciousness as a believer, I had not found not only its speculative model but also its living reality.¹⁰

Thus a man of science is stimulated and encouraged to develop his scientific theory of man by the knowledge that is his outside of science. Let no one say that theology is sterile for science.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

When one first faces the grand sweep of the Teilhardian synthesis, there is a noticeable tendency either to be blinded by its grandness or to gasp in horror at its possible implications. This is understandable, for only the outline is there and each one may fill in details to his own liking. For Teilhard the synthesis brought fresh insight to his religious convictions. For a man like Sir Julian Huxley this same vision bespeaks the need for a "religion without revelation".

Perhaps, then, the greatest difficulty with Teilhard's vision is its incompleteness, if not to his mind, at least to the mind of his readers. Just what does he mean by "consciousness"? In describing the divergence of mankind is he not methodologically inconsistent in omitting to consider the evidence for sin? Does he entirely omit the redemptive aspect of Christology, or is it implicit in his synthesis? In establishing the Omega Point does he not go into the plane of philosophy through his use of the principle of causality?

These questions go unanswered, and there are many others that could be and are asked. Yet they seem to have been at

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

least anticipated by Teilhard as he ends his book in the following manner:

Among those who have attempted to read this book to the end, many will close it, dissatisfied and thoughtful, wondering whether I have been leading them through facts, through metaphysics or through dreams.

But have those who still hesitate in this way really understood the rigorous and salutary conditions imposed on our reason by the coherence of the universe, now admitted by all? A mark appearing on a film; an electroscope discharging abnormally; that is enough to force physics to accept fantastic powers in the atom. Similarly, if we try to bring man, body and soul, within the framework of what is experimental, man obliges us to readjust completely to his measure the layers of time and space.

To make room for thought in the world, I have needed to 'interiorise' matter: to imagine an energetics of the mind; to conceive a noogenesis rising upstream against the flow of entropy; to provide evolution with a direction, a line of advance and critical points; and finally to make all things double back on *someone*.

In this arrangement of values I may have gone astray at many points. It is up to others to try to do better. My one hope is that I have made the reader feel both the reality, difficulty, and urgency of the problem and, at the same time, the scale and the form which the solution cannot escape.

The only universe capable of containing the human person is an irreversibly 'personalising' universe.¹¹

The vision of man seen by Teilhard de Chardin after years of study and thought is a vision that, in its construct, terminology, method and level of abstraction, is scientific. For Teilhard and many of his readers it is also a vision that marvelously harmonises with the Christian Faith.

The rise of complexity and even of consciousness has been admitted before. But with Teilhard it is a universal trend, found in all of matter. A universe in continual tension of doubling-back upon itself is the cosmic picture which forms the background for the appearance of man. Step by step by dint of billion-fold trial and error, the direction of evolution is toward the complex and the conscious. The first major threshold is the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.

appearance of life. The second is the emergence of reflection. After an initial ramification we see man today struggling in the throes of a social involution whose goal is the threshold of collective reflection and the final union with God-Omega.

Such a theory is incomplete, for the evidence is not cited; hypothetical, for many steps are unproved and some are incapable of proof; limited in scope, because only the scientific plane of knowledge is considered; strange and even disturbing, because of its broad sweep and daring newness; but for all that a theory of man that will continue to excite the thought and research of scientists and theologians for years to come.