

STICHTING TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

Lecture, held April 1997 by its president, Henk Hogeboom van Buggenum

OUR OBJECTIVES

Teilhard de Chardin's work is not easily accessible in Dutch. One of the tasks of our Foundation should be to provide a new translation and edition of his writings. Unfortunately we operate on a small scale. In order to grow we need to bring in new members and subscribers to GAMMA, our magazine. Advertising is expensive, we have tried it in the past, without much success. It is a great mystery: Teilhard de Chardin, who in the sixties was proclaimed a new Galilei by many, as inaugurating a new era in the history of mankind, has fallen into oblivion. The Vatican's obstruction appears to have been effective. But, as I see it, this is not the only reason. Teilhard expressed himself in not-too-easy readable language. And the fact that he could not be classified as being (only) a philosopher, a theologian, a biologist or a physicist or a mystic, saw to it that he could not be put into a specific pigeon-hole. He simply is too all-round, too universal in his thinking, in an epoch, like ours, where specialization and narrowmindedness reign supreme. Those of us who sought to disengage from this parochial way of thinking often fell victim to an uncritical New Age holism, intent on navel-staring and indiscriminate body-culture. Although Teilhard is often quoted in these circles his name and ideas get bandied about with no in-depth knowledge of his teachings.

And now I come to the point where I would like to see more attention and engagement for our Foundation Teilhard de Chardin in the Netherlands. The denial of human values, of which we can see examples every day in the press and on TV, goes directly against the Teilhardian way of thinking. He claims that every human being carries within him/herself a spark of divinity that may be experienced at all times in relation to others. Not by denial, but by affirmation of the other person - each one at a different level of consciousness - do we contribute towards more empathy, thus enriching our mutual state of awareness. In GAMMA 3 - 4 an account (report) was given about a scientific congress on New Age held in Amsterdam on the first of April 1996. An attempt was made to speak to each other on a basis of equality. The established churches should be worried about the fact that so many people resort to all kinds of other, more or less spiritual movements. Isn't it so that organized religions have failed to translate their belief-systems into an understanding for ordinary people needing warmth, spirituality and compassion?

We can only engage somebody's sympathy when we affirm his/her skills and values. This theory of affirmation, found in doctor Anna Terruwe's book 'Songs of the New Love', by no means implies an unconditional acceptance of everything people do or say. The secret of affirmation and appreciation is the enhancement of what is positive in a person. This requires careful attention and concentration. Patience and effort are needed. Everywhere we can find people who by nature and/or from religious motifs have realised this very talent. Any Christian, Muslim or Buddhist should, because of their inner conviction, carry this virtue into practice.

In my opinion this is what Teilhard meant when he spoke about 'anthropogenesis' developing into 'christogenesis' in the course of evolutionary progress. He was speaking as a Christian, of course, but the same holds true for other streams and religions. We all, individually, have the responsibility to take care of our 'neighbour', so that (s)he may

feel well and is able to be him/herself in order to grow and develop. Circumstances where this is not the case sadly draw our attention. I speak of war, poverty, starvation, etc. Is it possible that our large-scale solutions fail because we fail on a small scale? Human beings are microcosms, which means we are reflections of the macrocosm. What we do on our own level in our direct environment is reflected on a global scale. This is very clearly expressed in the policy of an expanding economy, which takes place not only at the expense of people in the poorest countries but more and more so in our western affluent society. Therefore an economy based on sufficiency is needed. It calls for our personal support as long as the bare necessities of life are still lacking everywhere.

There are all kinds of organisations trying to improve the social climate and the environment in many different ways. Because of their efforts people in our countries become more conscious of having lost balance by (over)stressing material prosperity. But how will people be motivated to change their life-styles when scientists stick to their theories based on neo-Darwinism? And declare that man only appeared accidentally in the course of evolution? That a Creator as an explanation for the existence of the universe is unnecessary and that death always has the final word?

The final word, not only in regard to us, humans, but, according to the second Law of Thermodynamics - entropy - also for the universe. For the Teilhard Foundation it is important to support scientists like Prigogine who pointed out the relativity of this law, or who, like Tipler and Wheeler, recognize the anthropic principle. It restores our prospect of a meaningful life.

It seems very important to me, on the basis of personal conviction and knowledge, to counterbalance materialism in whatever form, however well meant. Whereas this counterbalance is evident in many enthusiastic people everywhere, it easily becomes scattered (or: fragmented) through differentiation into sections like ecology, economy, religion, peace-movements, anti-starvation groups and so on. In my opinion there is an urgent need for an all-inclusive philosophy, a 'connecting story'. The connective element in Teilhard's philosophy is not a static 'cut-and-dried' system, but rather an appeal to all of us to go our way together, learning from and respecting each other. Putting our faith in the inherent direction of evolution, towards point Omega.

Nowadays the humanities are proportionally underdeveloped in comparison with technology and science. Perhaps another proof that we pursue only materialism! For instance, in this context we read in the newspaper that the microprocessor-industry expects to be able to put ninety-million transistors on one silicon plate the size of a stamp, in 2010.

Thus the opportunity of making connections will be refined and accelerated enormously. Whether this boon will be of great value for the essence and soul of the human being remains to be seen. In other words: the technological development of communication-webs is no guarantee for better relationships between people, more mutual understanding. Even the opposite might be true: as technological development has proceeded much faster than the humanities, a great alienation is taking place. One example is the language-laboratory. In the seventies they were introduced on a large scale in Dutch schools. But at present hardly any are left. Teachers were not ready yet to handle the innovation. Whether the computer and the electronic highway will follow a similar course remains an interesting question. After the gap between 'poor' and 'rich', a

new gap is looming up between the 'whizzkids' and the 'ignorants'. And as the poor people revolt and are claiming their rights to a humane existence, so the 'ignorants' may also do.

The objective of the Teilhard Foundation therefore is to help close the gap between the humanities and science, between the alpha subjects and the beta ones as we say here. This is why we offer an opportunity to representatives of both sides to join in the discussion. *GAMMA* as a reconciliation between the two in name as well as in function. Aware of our unique place in the evolution from the beginning and on our way to Omega.

A book like *The quantum Self* written by physicist Danah Zohar (William Morrow, New York, 1990) constitutes an answer to our purposes. She, too, tries to raise science from its position of isolation by connecting it with meaningful questions of life and death. In doing so she concurs with Teilhard and process theology. She mentions them in one and the same breath. Let me read out a passage from this book:

"When we contemplate this quotation, the words "God as incorporated in the physical laws", and "God who can (might?) be identified with the primary feeling of direction", we do not infer careless borrowing in order to make a statement. Danah Zohar indeed experiences the findings of science as a woman, a mother and housewife. We find passages like: "I am the person who was a child in the arms of my mother, who was a teenager, a young woman, etc., but every earlier aspect of my life was also like I am now. My re-experienced past can no more be separated from the present as my present can be separated from the past".

In other words she is trying to translate more and more complex science into language and situations of everyday life - life as experienced by every one of us. Nor is she trying to over-simplify in making it sound popular. On the cover of the book we read:"The issue at stake is not so much quantumtheory, as the question how we can fathom ourselves with the new insights".