

SEMINAR ON TEILHARD, LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Working papers for the seminar were available for participants in Atlanta. They contained some notes on liberation theology and Teilhard plus reprints of some pertinent Teilhard texts, taken for the most part from the suggested readings indicated prior to the meeting. What follows reports the first session presentation on these working papers, by Joseph Grau, along with the discussion for that day, and the second session presentation by Donald Goergen, focusing more directly on the implications for spirituality, with the ensuing discussion.

TEILHARD AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY: PRESENTATION BY JOSEPH GRAU

To provide background for the discussion, it seems best first to view briefly the broad context of theological inquiry in which liberation theology is located and after that further set the stage by outlining fundamental constitutive elements of liberation theology approaches. Pertinent materials from Teilhard's thought will then be viewed as they relate to these constitutive elements.

Today as theologians attempt to deepen their understanding of the human while they seek to penetrate the divine, we find intensified and broadened efforts to utilize insights from the human sciences, humanities, the arts and a range of life experiences. Styles of liberation theology have arisen in the particular context of the search for the meaning and implications of revelation as they can be derived from the experience of the struggle to meet the serious social problems of the modern world such as poverty, hunger, discrimination, political oppression and war.

For purposes of discussion, the constitutive elements of liberation theology may be considered to fall into two main divisions: theological vision and pastoral process. Immediately, however, some cautionary observations must be made in light of the fact that the notion of "praxis" plays such an important role in the liberation style of thinking. If we accept theory (vision) to mean consciousness of praxis, and praxis to signify action (process) infused with and made conscious by theory (vision), then what we are working with is not so much a chronological sequence whereby one charts out a vision and then proceeds to apply it in pastoral process, but rather a running dialectic with important components of the vision arising from and through the process, while the process concretizes the vision in a rhythmic flow where each feeds into the other.¹ It is in this ongoing experiential stream of thought informing

¹For clarification and comment on "praxis" in a theological content, see C. Davis, "Theology and Praxis," *Cross Currents* 23 (Spring 1973 - Winter 1974), 154-68.

action, and action permeating thought, that the constitutive elements may be said to be distinguishable, if not separable.

With these qualifications in mind, the components of the theological vision can be described as follows: (1) a Christology which views Christ as creative liberator of the material and social world; (2) an ecclesiology, wherein the Church as the People of God is seen as extending Christ's liberative creative work; and (3) a morality/spirituality which looks on the total spectrum of the Christian's faith-life in action as that of a creative co-liberator of the world, in union with Christ.

In the above, conjunction of "creation" with "liberation" is done designedly. It is necessary for comprehensive understanding of the thrust of liberation theological thought to go beyond freeing from oppression, in whatever form it is confronted, to constructive effort to design and build a more human social and material world. For social and historical contextual reasons, use of the term "development" does not sit well presently, at least in the Latin American sphere. With apologies for the awkwardness of expression, the terms have been repeated, again, intentionally, to stress the flowing continuity and integration of the components.

Pastoral process—or what we may describe as the "praxis of creative liberation"—embraces the following components: (1) social analysis, derived from research and experience, laying bare the character of oppressive social structures, especially those institutionalizing injustices regarding the distribution of property and injustices and inequities in the responsible exercise of decision making and implementational power; (2) prayerful reflective evaluation of the social situation in the light of the theological vision; and (3) the direction, employment and commitment of human activity and suffering towards eliminating the results and causes of oppression and building a more human world, with motivation informed by faith, hope and love.

Here it is important to keep in mind the cautionary remarks made above about chronological sequence. While it is true that all of the components cannot take place simultaneously, and that there is a certain discernible sequence in time as the process flows ahead, still it can be said that each component in a very real way permeates the other: the social analysis is going to be focused on the basis of the theological vision informing the consciousness of prayerful reflection; the reflection incorporates the analysis; and the committed action is directed and sustained by the analysis and the reflection, while it in turn brings the experienced awareness of the meaning of the vision as focusing the analysis.

Before examining some of the ways in which Teilhard's thought can be of value in a liberation theology setting, it is important to note some points about what he was trying to do in his theologically reflective writings and how he set himself to the task.

What he was trying to set out was a series of exploratory probes towards a valid development of dogma, particularly the meaning and implications for Christian living of Pauline thought on the Body of

Christ. He sought to do this in view of the implications of evolutionary scientific humanism as he saw and experienced it in the specific sub-culture of his working environment. For an understanding of what he was trying to do, the best text I know is one which can be found in the recently published collection (and the last to be issued of his essays) *The Heart of Matter*. It is a short piece from the early twenties entitled, "On My Attitude to the Official Church." With regard to the development of dogma, his basic understanding is:

... Dogma evolves in accordance with a much more complex logic, much slower, much richer, than that of concepts. It evolves as a man does: he is *the same* at the age of forty as he was at the age of ten but his shape at forty cannot be *deduced* from what it was at ten. The Church changes in the same way: she has a certain identity, but it is the identity of a person, of an organism; and it does not exclude—on the contrary it presupposes—a framework of truths that can be expressed in formulas. (They can practically all be reduced to this single one: Christ is the physical center of the gathering together of souls in God.) These formulas, however, express an invariable basis of truth *which will necessarily assume a continually new aspect* according as man becomes more conscious of his past and of his environment. In a sense, Christ is in the Church in the same way as the sun is before our eyes. We see the same sun as our fathers say and yet we understand it in a much more magnificent way.²

However, with regard to the methodology he himself was using in his attempts to work toward such a development, the point must be made that he never clarified with adequate analytic precision just what method he was using. He was aware he was not writing as the scientists, theologians and philosophers of his acquaintance, yet he affirmed in the *Phenomenon of Man* that he was writing scientifically. Most would agree, today, that he was certainly not writing empirical science as we understand the expression.

Furthermore, in order to work with his ideas about how we should act to build the earth with Christ (moral/spiritual ideas) it is frequently necessary to prescind from his confident and, as I see it, unproved or erroneous, extrapolations that this world is, and with "statistical necessity" will continue to be built. With regard to these facets of his writing, I maintain that it is practically necessary to read him in much the same spirit as Aquinas read Aristotle on the Prime Mover.

However, his failure to clarify his methodology, and his questionable use of analogy in extrapolating the human future, did not prevent him from arriving at some important insights, particularly in the areas of Christology and morality/spirituality. Hence, my focus will be on these positive contributions, their implications, and those aspects of his prayerfully reflective method that have demonstrable validity.

Teilhard's Christology is much in line with concepts in liberation theology and is considered to have had a formative impact on them. Coming from a Pauline and Johannine scriptural base, his approach

²R. Hague, trans., *The Heart of Matter* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1978), pp. 117-18.

looks to the cosmic and global dimensions. In so doing, he emphasizes the struggle to redeem, free and develop the total universe, rather than the specific struggle to liberate from oppression—as arises from the use of Exodus symbolism.

In his interpretation of Christianity, and its form as “The Religion of Tomorrow,” he lays special emphasis on the problems of the “religions” of science, with a universe “hopelessly icy, hopelessly closed,” but he also speaks of “the religions of the Above” by which he has in mind “classical Christianity” which he finds “lacking in an *Evangelism* infected with a *near-Manichaeism*, in which advances in Knowledge and Technology are presented not as a primary accompanying condition of human spiritualization, but simply as an added extra.”³

But way of summation he affirms:

It is here that the power of the “Christic” bursts into view . . . engendered by the progressive coming together, in our consciousness, of the cosmic demands of an incarnate Word and the spiritual potentialities of a convergent Universe. We have already seen how a strictly governed amalgam is effected, in the Divine Milieu, between the forces of Heaven and the forces of Earth. An exact conjunction is produced between the old God of the Above and the new God of the Ahead.⁴

Teilhard had relatively little to say on the Church as such. However, his Christological ideas have significant implications for the “Herald” and “Servant” models, in that the Church could be viewed as the channel through which the Good News of the meaning of life for our times would lead to servanthood by building the earth, with Christ.

It is when we reach the area of morality/spirituality that we find considerable material for analysis and further development. *The Divine Milieu* presents the most complete basic formulation of his stance toward total world development integrated with his Christological thought. Here we find an elaboration of his approach to the divinization of activity and of the passivities of growth and diminishment. In the particular text where he speaks of the intensification of the divine milieu through charity there is a good presentation of his understanding of the total unity of eucharistic consecration, which implies an understanding of an active Servant Church and a dynamic sacramentality for a more human society.⁵

How this could be channeled into the modern world in a way particularly significant for religious orders, but equally applicable for all Christians comes through when he treats of the consecration of life in the world:

Why should there not be men vowed to the task of exemplifying, by their lives, the general sanctification of human endeavor?—men whose common religious ideal would be to give a full and conscious explanation of the divine

³“The Christic,” *The Heart of Matter*, p. 98.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵*The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1965), pp. 142-45.

possibilities or demands which any worldly occupation implies—men, in a word, who would devote themselves, in the fields of thought, art, industry, commerce and politics, etc., to carrying out in the sublime spirit these demands—the basic tasks which form the very bonework of human society?⁶

While he obviously does not get down to concrete details as to how this type of consecration would come to grips with oppressive social structures, one does not have to make a giant leap of logic to connect what he does say about resisting evil, with God, and the meaning of true resignation, with such situations.

... if he is to practice to the full the perfection of Christianity, the Christian must not falter in his duty to resist evil, ... he must fight sincerely and with all his strength, in union with the creative force of the world, to drive back evil—so that nothing in him or around him may be diminished.⁷

Only when one has exerted himself to the full in this type of resisting action does he reach the point where true resignation enters in.⁸

How people might be given a suitable formative environment to so consecrate their work in the world, with sustained creative resistance as part of it, is indicated partially in one of his last essays, "Research, Work, and Worship," wherein he writes of the elements needed for the development of workers and scientists who will dedicate themselves to the task of dynamic change.⁹

His specific notion of the meaning of research, as directed towards creative, developmental action in the world, is important in this context, since he looks on it as involving the sublimation of aggression by human beings against each other and, instead, its direction towards a collaborative task of meeting the challenges that must be met to build the earth together.

No longer only to know out of curiosity, to know for knowing's sake, but to know out of faith in a universal development which was becoming conscious of itself in the human spirit, to know in order to create, to know in order to be.¹⁰

And it is precisely here that an important resonance appears, which calls for more development than we can give at the moment, between this understanding of research and the understanding of praxis dealt with above. One could paraphrase Teilhard's thought by saying, "The function of research—and particularly theological research—should not be to explain the world, but to change it!"¹¹

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹ R. Hague, trans., *Science and Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 218-20.

¹⁰ J. M. Cohen, trans., "The Mysticism of Science," *Human Energy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1969) p. 171.

¹¹ "The Mysticism of Science." For further discussion and comment on "research" in Teilhard's thought, see J. Grau, *Morality and the Human Future in the Thought of Teilhard de Chardin* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), pp. 200-15, 345-49.

In all of the above there underlies a notion of the meaning of matter and spirit in a dynamic, process way, by which he attempts to avoid the near-Manichean dualism referred to earlier.¹² Also, fundamental background material for how he thinks society should develop is his thought on "differentiating union." He considered it to be one of his key intuitions, and, in substance, it can be summarized as follows: "The true union of loving collaboration, as it grows, brings increased sharing and communion while at the same time those collaborating help each to develop his or her own unique personal traits, talents, and characteristics."¹³ It is with this as a base that he comes to grips with an important dilemma of modern society—the relation of the individual to society. As he sees it, working with this principle would enable organized collective work to proceed, while at the same time individual personalities can develop to the full. Hence, it provides a path to avoid both the depersonalization of the anthill collectivity and the fragmentation of dispersive individualism.

When we look at the specific texts on moral theory, as found in "The Phenomenon of Spirituality," what we have is, as I see it, a transposition into moral language of the central thought contained in the *tantum quantum* of the "First Principle and Foundation" of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.

For Teilhard, the fundamental evaluative moral norm was: "Good is whatever increases the growth and expression of dynamic love energy."¹⁴ Viewed in the context of his own Christological convictions, this can be seen as a reformulation of: "As creatures lead to the glory of God, they should be used; as they do not, they should be rejected."

Furthermore, the way in which he sees this approach to morality as distinguished from an immobilist, over-judicial approach, supportive of the status quo, leads quite easily into a basic moral stance critically evaluative of fixed social structures, ready to move for struggle and change against those judged to be oppressive and to create and develop more human structures.

The working texts from his essay on "The Essence of the Democratic Idea" and from his personal notes, correspondence, and transcribed conversation provide examples of how he directed his moral thinking into the political and economic spheres. What is important to note, in the context of his political thinking, is the way in which his moral/spiritual theory can be seen to underlie his observations on "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," and "The Technique of Democracies."¹⁵ Likewise, the way in which his critique of capitalism is expressed: "Capitalism has degenerated into a Religion of Money. Money has become the goal of effort, the god of well-being . . . the substitute for more-being." Also

¹² See "Sketch of a Personalistic Universe," in *Human Energy*, p. 58. Also "The Spiritual Power of Matter," *The Divine Milieu*, pp. 105-11.

¹³ "The Phenomenon of Spirituality," *Human Energy*, pp. 102-05.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-08. Also see J. Grau, "Moral Energy and Teilhard's Morality of Movement," *Morality and the Human Future*, pp. 308-21.

¹⁵ N. Denny, trans., *The Future of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 240-43.

important is his observation that: "The bourgeois is one who has chosen to *have*, instead of to *be*."¹⁶

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

What we have, then, in this overview of certain elements from Teilhard's thought in the context of liberation theology is, as I see it, a set of fundamental ideas which can profitably be integrated into the praxis of attempting to Christify modern society by freeing it from oppressive social structures and freeing it for positive creative growth. The elements, however, which we have looked at from Teilhard's thought, deal with only a part of the entire conscious process.

The developmental task that remains in clarifying, particularizing and rendering praxis effectively operational contains several further elements, drawn from our initial analysis in the sphere of pastoral process. There must be continuing effort to refine and improve the tools of social analysis available from a broad spectrum of disciplines in the social sciences, humanities and philosophy. Furthermore, the motivating Christological vision and the divinized human norms for critiquing social structures must be integrated into making the comprehensive range of agents of styles for change practically effective. (By "agents of styles for change" here, I am referring to at least six distinguishable ways of working towards social change directly or indirectly: (1) advocacy; (2) empowerment or enablement; (3) direct services; (4) life-style; (5) primary ideological or life-orientational; and (6) intra-structural.)

What can be drawn from Teilhard, then, for the development of liberation theology, is, I submit: (1) a Christological vision; (2) a motivating and sustaining activation of specific critical and constructive moral processes; (3) embodying certain political and economic normative values—all of which can benefit us as we strive to move more fully into the integration of theory and praxis in a comprehensive Christological context.

SUMMARY OF THE FIRST DISCUSSION

With regard to Teilhard's methodology and his use of the term "scientific" to describe his style of thought, the point was made that while it is true enough his approach is not in line with the thought patterns we ascribe to empirical scientific inquiry in our country today, it is also true that in France several generations ago the term "science" did, in many minds, apply to "philosophy of science" as well as strict empirical science. On that score, his claim to be writing "science" in *The Phenomenon of Man* can be given more benign interpretation.

The question was raised concerning the difference in the meaning of freedom as it is found in much of the literature of spiritual theology with its emphasis on interior freedom, as distinguished from the emphasis in liberation theology on social, external freedom.

¹⁶See P-L. Mathieu, *La pensée politique et économique de Teilhard de Chardin* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), pp. 189-90.

While John of the Cross and Teilhard might not seem at first blush to have much in common, attention was called to a study that had been made, comparing the two in their approach to spirituality. It has been shown that they shared the same tradition in their stance towards suffering and passivities, and that with both of them there was the conviction that it is only in the living out of life's responsibilities that one can grow and contribute. For both, the meaning of revelation is found in the experience of life. As soon as one specifies the focus of life's responsibilities on social change, the compatibility of their fundamental line of thinking with that of the liberation theologians and their concern with theory and praxis comes readily into view. Likewise, both stress the possibility of developing simultaneously the realities of interior and of social freedom mentioned above.

In the area of political thought, several points were made. Although Teilhard did not write much about political matters, still, he has had his impact, particularly by providing a dynamic humanistic social vision as an alternative to that of Karl Marx. In this context the essay by Leopold Senghor of Senegal was noted since it comments on the relevance of Teilhardian thought for African political development.¹⁷ This challenges us to look further into Teilhard's vision and to see its value for developing a picture of liberation theology. (What also should not be overlooked is the fact that Marxists such as Garaudy and Aptheker have been able to view Teilhard's thought as one base for dialogue with Christian humanists.)

Furthermore, in view of the importance of the notion of justice in the political arena, it was asked to what extent justice was a matter of concern for Teilhard. The observation was made that Teilhard says practically nothing about justice as such, but does provide, especially in his essay on "The Evolution of Responsibility in the World," a description of the organic ties binding human persons together in the common task of continuing evolution; hence there is a basis for developing a process theory of justice in this context.¹⁸

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY: PRESENTATION BY DONALD GOERGEN

When one looks at the material seen so far and asks what the implications are for Christian spirituality, observations in several areas come to mind, flowing out of the presentation and discussion in the first session.

An important underlying philosophical issue is that of the relationship between spirit and matter. Much Catholic spirituality has had a Manichaeian tinge, or at least been strongly influenced by a neo-Platonic dualism tending to distinguish sharply the two and put them in opposition to each other. Teilhard's views look to the complementarity of spirit

¹⁷See L. S. Senghor, "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine," *Cahiers Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* 3 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962), pp. 13-65.

¹⁸R. Hague, trans., *Activation of Energy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), pp. 207-14.

and matter, to an organic integrated growth relationship, rather than to opposition and dichotomy.

Moreover, his understanding of spirit fits in well with what is needed for a creation centered spirituality, of the sort, for example, advocated by M. Fox. Such a spirituality emphasizes strongly the goodness of creation, and while not denying the need for salvation, puts increasing weight on creation. Here it is important to ask what is the meaning of spirit in embodied being. Likewise, Teilhard's reflections on "What exactly is the Human Body?" as found in *Science and Christ* could well bear further examination. Definite correlation can also be drawn between the concept of radial energy and the action of the Holy Spirit. What is more, there is reason to say that in my body I possess the totality of the universe, partially: each of us has a cosmic body (particularly when we bear in mind Teilhard's thought on communion in the Eucharist and its cosmic extension). One should search for the implications of seeing the entire world as in some way, not cut off from me, but part of my embodiment.¹⁹

What the preceding leads to is a different conception of the relationship between spiritual mystical theology and political theology. If matter moves towards spirit, and if spirit is organically tied with matter in complementarity, then spiritual theology must be a theology of the world. Spiritualization, on these premises, has a close relationship to liberation, but not in a dualistic de-materializing sense. The focus is, rather, on the promotion of higher levels of human consciousness and awareness, the organization of human affective, intellectual and love energy, the growth of creative freedom in the constructive use of human powers. This would come to a total liberation, embodied and ensouled, a liberation in which spirit does not exclude matter, but is mutually inclusive of both matter and spirit.

At the same time it can be seen that with Teilhard this understanding of matter and spirit carries with it a close correlation between the *within* and the *without*. There is no way to really go more deeply *within* and not have important implications for the *without*. The correlation of Teilhard's thinking in this context with that of Sri Aurobindo can be fruitful and should be pursued.

Finally, Teilhard's way of viewing matter and spirit implies positive concepts of growth, creativity and development as integral to a theology of the world, and stands in contradistinction to the approach taken by Metz and Moltmann, which does not come clearly to grips with a crucial issue of process theology: the ultimate value of the world for God. If one can see, with Teilhard, that Christ is involved in evolution, and hence seriously involved in the world, then the theology of God speaks of a God who freely immerses himself in the world (granted he has no need to do so) and to whom the development of the world is of vital importance. This, in turn, has special significance for the theology of conversion, for it calls for a radical re-creation of the spirit in the world, not apart from it.

¹⁹See *Science and Christ*, pp. 11-13.

SUMMARY OF THE SECOND DISCUSSION

The focus for discussion and comment was on two principal areas: (1) the spirit/matter relationship; and (2) the complementarity of God and the world.

Regarding spirit and matter there were several observations. It was noted that the concepts of spirit and flesh in the Bible do not present the dichotomy that arises from Platonic and Manichaeian influences. Also noted was Karl Rahner's manner of speaking about concupiscence—his way of talking in terms of non-integration and freedom, of the tension which arises as one strives to integrate fragmenting drives with constructive freedom. Likewise, attention was called to the way Jung placed psyche in between the organic and spirit; he dealt with psyche as the all important energy of the cosmos in a manner suggesting a significant parallel with Teilhard's thought on radial energy as it operates in human consciousness. In a discussion on the meaning of the term "consciousness" in Teilhard, a clarifying comment was made regarding the term conscience in French, which can mean both "conscience" in the English sense and "consciousness." The consequence of this would be that the term is open, in English at least, to the connotation of awareness along with a sense of responsibility, and thus always carries with it an atmosphere of movement to action.

As for the complementarity of God and the world, emphasis was put on the value of the world arising from the fact that God has made it, has put it there. The role of process theology in raising this issue was highlighted. God freely chose to create; once he did so, then it can be said he longs for loving response from a loved creation. The value of the world is dependent on him, but he has, in a sense, a need for creation to be responsibly active in order to complete his intent. Creation has a special value to God, and in the present order of things we can understand God without creation as not the same as God with creation.

Teilhard's understanding of the pleroma fits into the above setting. He views God as having need of human effort, precisely because he hears Christ calling us to work with him to bring the totality of his Body to fulfillment.

A problem arose with regard to God considered as *Alpha* in Teilhard's thought. Teilhard focused almost exclusively on God as *Omega* and ultimately on Christ resurrected, with all the resonances and implications of the Mystical Christ.

Another question arose as to which world should be considered complementary to God—the world viewed as running down, dying of entropy, or the world as new heaven and new earth? Clarification is necessary. Most of the time, it would seem, it is the second sense of "world" Teilhard has in mind, but what should not be overlooked is the way he does talk of the "two hands of God" in *The Divine Milieu*, and hence deals with the other sense in the context of the passivities of diminishment.

Finally, the point was made about Teilhard's expressed thought on resisting oppression. In his World War I correspondence there is explicit

treatment of what he views as his Christian responsibility to resist what he judged to be the inhumanity of the enemy in that particular struggle.²⁰

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²⁰See R. Hague, trans., *The Making of a Mind* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 170-71. Also important in this context is his essay "The Priest," in R. Hague, trans., *Writings in the Time of War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 205-24.