

THE BRITISH TEILHARD ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Charity No. 313682

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AUGUST 1996

EDITORIAL

First, thanks to all those who responded both generously and rapidly to our appeal for subscriptions for the current year. At the end of June 1996, we had a total of 115 paid-up members including 16 life members. Of the 16 life members, 10 were resident in the UK and 6 resident abroad. Of the 99 annual members, 80 were resident in the UK and 19 resident abroad.

In January 1996 we wrote to more than 600 people at home and abroad who had either been members of The Teilhard Centre or expressed interest in joining the new Association. By the end of June no more than 1 in 6 had joined the new Association. Sadly many well-known faces were not among them.

A small number of people wrote to tell us they would not be joining the Association. Most of these spoke of age or money difficulties. Few expressed negative views on The British Teilhard Association. This is encouraging but more encouraging, of course, would be a membership of 400 or more.

At the present level of membership our long-term prospects are not good, even though we benefit from the generosity of a handful of members who pay more - one or two pay considerably more - than the minimum subscription. We need to quadruple the present membership if we are to survive into the next century.

But does it really matter if we do not survive? We think it does. We think we still have work to do. In the next Newsletter we should like to initiate a discussion on the contribution Teilhard can still make at a popular level to the science-religion debate.

In the first Newsletter we said we needed "to know what members expect of the Association, what they would like to see in The Newsletter - and what they can do to help the Association spread teilhardian ideas." We await your suggestions with eager anticipation!

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CONFERENCE REPORT

The Fifteenth International Teilhard Conference - "A Divine Milieu for the New Millennium" - at London Colney on 19-21 underlined the inadequacy of classical scientific and theological language to respond to the challenge of Quantum Physics. Diarmuid O Murchú reports:

The emerging cosmology is opening up new horizons of meaning and possibility. This new emergence requires novel and creative responses from all fields of learning and particularly from those who seek to promote a deeper dialogue between science and religion.

Scientifically, Quantum Theory provides the most creative context for exploring the challenge and vision of the new cosmology. Inviting us to move beyond the mechanistic and deterministic view of classical science, the quantum vision invites us to explore wholism and inter-relatedness as the basis of all reality. This shift of focus has enormous consequences which many scientists do not yet appreciate or understand.

Theologically, we need to engage with the challenge of the new cosmology which claims that creation itself (and not the formal religions) is the primary revelation of God to us and for us. This

claim catapults theology into the quantum realm, no longer a sacred reserve of individual denominations but "faith seeking understanding" in the open and creative environment of the universe itself.

Teilhard de Chardin's vision may be understood as a premonition for what we now call *Quantum Theology*, a scientific-theological synthesis, which bursts asunder the old atomistic understandings (in both science and religion) and challenges us towards a new spiritual formulation with wholism and inter-relatedness as the central ingredients. Teilhard's engagement with that transition can be gleaned from the text we used as a centre-piece for the 1996 Conference:

"All around us the physical sciences are ceaselessly discerning new relationships between elements of the universe... Is the Christ of the Gospels imagined and loved within the dimensions of the Mediterranean world, capable of still embracing and still forming the centre of our prodigiously expanding universe? Is not the world in process of becoming more vast, more close, more dazzling than the God we believe in? Will it not burst our religions asunder? Will it not eclipse our God?" (*The Divine Milieu*, 1927, Collins (hardback), pp. 13, 14; Fontana and Harper Torchback (paperback), pp. 45, 46).

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SOME RECENT EVOLUTIONARY REFLECTIONS

Monogenism or polygenism? The debate continues. Michael Le Morvan sees an important place for Teilhard's vision of hope for the future.

A recent edition of the magazine *Earth* (February 1996) contained three articles of evolutionary interest. The first two presented the opposing sides of the debate on the origins of our own species *Homo sapiens*. The background is as follows: 1-2 million years ago *Homo erectus* began to migrate from Africa into the Middle East, Europe and Asia. These forms included both Java Man and Peking Man. About 30,000 years ago only *Homo sapiens* remained. The "Multiregionalists" believe that *Homo erectus* migrated out of Africa and spread populations of *Homo erectus* around Europe and Asia and from these separate populations of *Homo sapiens* arose. The "Out of Africa" group contends that we modern human beings emerged as a completely new species in Africa between 100,000-200,000 years ago and migrated fully formed as *Homo sapiens* to spread across the globe. The debate is heated and it is probable that it can never be fully settled.

The third article of interest was entitled *The Future Evolution of Homo Sapiens* by Colin Tudge. Naturally this was of great interest in view of Teilhard's extensive writings on the subject. In this light the article was somewhat disappointing. It contained two strands. The first was the possibility that physical and more specifically genetic evolution would continue. Such change would be dependent on the gene pool. Would it be possible to change it to such a significant degree that at some stage in the future our descendants would form a new species? Colin Tudge suggested that although there is now a massive gene pool Natural Selection, the agent of neo-darwinian evolution, "is simply not acting forcefully and consistently upon that variation." The human condition is such that short of any gigantic catastrophe, such as an enormous meteorite impact, which would produce small isolated communities or groups, that species change is unlikely to occur.

The second strand concerned the length of time that *Homo sapiens* was likely to survive. Colin Tudge believes that we have the potential to survive as a species for at least a million years. Of course, much can happen which will prevent this but he sees that this time has been in our sights.

Unfortunately there is no concept in the article of the spiritual side of humanity. The author appears to be agnostic at least about the existence of God, and about a humanity made in the image

of the Creator. He has therefore no concept of spiritual development either in individual or in community terms. To take the picture of the future as he describes it is deeply depressing. This kind of sceptical and materialistic philosophy linked with the generally depressing emphases that we receive daily from the news media makes it essential for us to return to the vision of hope for the future that we find in the writings of Teilhard.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

5-8 September 1996. "La Convergence spirituelle de l'Humanité, un oecuménisme élargi avec Teilhard" - annual conference of the French Teilhard Association at the Abbaye de Sylvanès, Aveyron. Further details: Association des Amis de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 38 rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, 75005 Paris (tel. + 33.1.43.31.18.55).

11-13 October 1996. "The Love that moves the Sun and the other stars" - a retreat on Creation and the Cosmic Christ in Eastern and Western Christianity led by Siôn Cowell at Belmont Abbey. Further details: Dom Brendan Thomas OSB, Belmont Abbey, Hereford HR2 9RZ (tel. 01432.277388 ext. 223).

23 November 1996. "Quel accomplissement pour nos libertés?, la vision teilhardienne entre science et mystique" - a one-day school with Guy Lepoutre SJ and others at the Centre Spirituel du Hautmont, 31 rue Mirabeau, 59420 Mouvaux. Further details: Maître Bernard Casset, 56 avenue Barrois, 59700 Marcq en Baroeul, France (tel. + 33.20.72.78.25).

30 November 1996 (10.30-16.00). Annual General Meeting of the Association at the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 49 Fitzjohn's Avenue, London NW3 6PG (tel. 0171.794.4972). Open to all paid-up members. Please do your best to attend. Agenda and further details: Siôn Cowell, Plas Maelog, Beaumaris LL58 8BH (tel. 01248.810402 or fax. 01248.810936).

18-20 April 1997. "Jung and Teilhard" - an exploration in complementarity. Sixteenth International Teilhard Conference at All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney, St Albans, with Bronwen Astor, Emily Binns, Robert Faricy SJ, Fabio Mantovani, Richard Temple and John Woodcock. Chairman: Siôn Cowell. Further details: Caroline Cowell-Unsworth, Plas Maelog, Beaumaris LL58 8BH (tel. 01248.810402 or fax. 01248.810936).

Monthly meetings. The "Centre-to-Centre Group" meets regularly in Central London. New members are always welcome. Further details: John Woodcock, 9 Gurney Close, Caversham, Reading RG4 7LE (tel. 01734.478156) or Barbara Hogg, Flat 3, 9 Hendon Avenue, London N3 1UL (tel. 0181.346.5222).

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A GOOD READ

André Dupleix, Prier 15 Jours avec Teilhard de Chardin, Nouvelle Cité, 1994, pbk, 124 pp.
An invaluable resource book for those wishing to make their own a fifteen-day retreat. Merits early translation into English.

Giulio Haas, Die Weltsicht von Teilhard und Jung, Gegensätze, die sich vereinen, Walter-Verlag, 1991, pbk, 156 pp.

A comparative study of the complementarity between two great spiritual masters of the twentieth century. Merits early translation into English.

Ursula King, The Letters of Teilhard de Chardin and Lucile Swan, A Personal Interpretation, Teilhard Studies No. 32, American Teilhard Association, Fall 1995, pbk, 21 pp.

A thought-provoking study by a leading theologian.

Winifred McCulloch, Teilhard de Chardin and the Piltdown Hoax, Teilhard Studies No. 33, American Teilhard Association, Spring 1996, pbk, 23 pp.

A very useful overview of an issue that has long cast a shadow over Teilhard's scientific bona fides.

David Peat, Blackfoot Physics, A Journey into the Native American Universe, Fourth Estate, 1996, pbk, 322 pp.

A look at the Native American Weltanschauung which will resonate deeply with anyone drawn to the Celtic Christian tradition.

Elizabeth Roberts and Ann Shukman, edds., Christianity for the Twenty-First Century, SCM, 1996, pbk, 226 pp.

An absolute must for anyone interested in the potential for the development of doctrine in the (Russian) Orthodox Church and the life and work of the priest and martyr Alexander Men who was murdered in 1990.

Rupert Sheldrake and Matthew Fox, Natural Grace, Dialogues on Science and Spirituality, Bloomsbury, 1996, hbk, 181 pp.

An exploration of ways of bringing together a sense of the sacred, science and spirituality.

Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry CP, The Universe Story, A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992, hbk, 305 pp.

A powerful basis for developing a myth for our time in the sense, not of fiction, but of deep cultural wisdom. An important challenge to conventional thinking.

John Woodcock's recommendation: *Gravity's Fatal Attraction* by the Astronomer Royal, Sir Martin Rees, published by W.H. Freeman. He also tells us *The Philosophy of Conscious Energy* by Joseph P. Provenzano which attracted so much interest at the 1995 London Colney Conference is now available in the UK through Pepukayi Book Distribution Services, 34 Church Road, London N17 8AQ (tel. 0181.8010205).

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TEILHARD LIBRARY

Friends in Scotland, Northern England and Wales will be glad to know a full library of books by and about Teilhard will be available to members and the public at the Bar Convent, York, by the end of September. Anyone wishing to use the library should contact in the first instance: Sister Gregory Kirkus IBVM, Librarian, Bar Convent, Blossom Street, York YO2 2BD (tel. 01904.629359)

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WE, THE REFUGEES

VENETIA CARSE

We, the victims
of ethnic cleansing,
our lives exposed
to untold horrors;
grief laden,
we cling to life
within the dark
of these stone walls.
And overhead, the tanks roll on.

Refugees, we,
from power-seeking warlords.
(How cold these stones
how dank this cellar!)
We ask no more, now, than
the sigh of the stranger,
the rise and fall of the
breast that is dear to us.
And Silence -
to nurture the dormant seed
when the tanks cease to roll.

© Venetia Carse

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Mulhouse (68)
Nantes (44)
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AFTERTHOUGHT

We often hear members say they do not know how to convey to people they meet the sense of wonder and excitement they feel when they try to communicate Teilhard's vision of an evolutionary universe - "a vision in cosmogenesis". We find one helpful way of doing so is to take Teilhard's own "Credo" first drawn up in 1934 and revised and expanded in 1950:

I believe the universe is in evolution
I believe evolution is towards spirit
I believe spirit is completed in human beings in the personal
I believe the supreme personal is the Cosmic Christ ¹

¹ *How I Believe*, 1934, in *Christianity and Evolution*, p. 96; *The Heart of Matter*, 1950, in *The Heart of Matter*, p. 78. We have intentionally used the expression "Cosmic Christ" rather than "Universal Christ". The expressions are synonymous in Teilhard's thought. The Cosmic Christ of Teilhard is identical with the Cosmic Christ of St John and St Paul.

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