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## Comments on "Teilhard de Chardin and the Aggiornamento of Quaker Theology"

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## Comments

### KELVIN VAN NUYS

I am a little fearful that the labor of "aggiornament-ing" Quaker theology to the dynamic world-view may miscarry if we go only as far as Teilhard, Baltazar, or John Yungblut. Their position seems to me still a half-way house, one foot still, if you please, in Greek, Aristotelian staticism.

My thesis begins with an acute consciousness that, in accepting the sheer fact that all reality is dynamic, evolutionary, "processual," we have not yet given a reason *why* it is so. We have not yet shown why divine omnipotence relates to imperfect becoming rather than to perfect being. So far, process theology has tended to say, "Process just happens to be the case, therefore God has to conform to it." This is a sort of Platonic dualism, with God opposed not by matter but by process — still facing a fact which He is not shown to have intended or created, and *why*. My thesis arises from dissatisfaction with such a limited God and from taking omnipotence seriously. But it is a *good*, omnipotent God that we want; that is, one who has been able to make reality just as it must be in order to embody good. God, then, must be limited by only one thing: not the sheer blank fact of process, but by value, or good.

In other words, we must derive, deduce, our dynamic reality from a concept of value. And the only concept of value it can be derived from is a dynamic concept of value. And this is: value is the satisfying feeling of organizing, resolving, creative process, *while it is happening*. It must be asserted that value cannot exist except *in process*; not prior to process, as pre-existent essence, nor posterior to process as achieved essence.

If one concedes that value is preeminently related to the terminus of process, e.g., to an Omega point, one is inevitably left with the question, "Why doesn't God institute such good-

ness immediately, and permit such a state to **exist permanently?**" If good can exist in a perfect final state, **then any God** who delays that state is either impotent or non-benevolent. God-is-dead-ists accept this conclusion as unquestioningly as Mill, Lucretius or Democritus. One is also tempted into glib talk about God eventually succeeding in "final consummations," and then, as the millenia go by and problems **keep coming**, such promises come home to roost, and the talk of Omega points may seem sentimental at best, embittering at **worst**. Besides, a nagging question has been raised: if only the **remote future** is going to experience perfect good, how come it is so favored, while *we* are cheated out of it? To place **value in** an eternal resolving process obviates these questions.

So much for the correction as regards the relation of dynamic *fact* to *value*. One other correction **apparently** must be made, in the light of recent interpretations of evolution and existence, on the *factual* side as such. **The point** is perhaps fully apparent in the phrase "non-preformationist creativity." Pre-existent essences, "seeds," are **being dispensed** with, so that "creativity" is coming to be opposed to any notion of "uncovering," "discovering," "unrolling" of **what** is already existent in any sense. Creativity cannot mean an imitation or repetition of a predestined divine blueprint. Hartshorne sees this age-old notion as making all present **experience** a pointless reduplication of what has already been **done once** in God's mind. Creativity inherently means a new, **experimental** resolution of a problem right here and now. **The dynamic** enjoyment of value, properly observed, can be **seen** to require, besides, that the solution not be foreordained, **guaranteed**, but subject to real risk and chance of failure. **Tension**, anxiety could not otherwise exist, nor could good, if **it is the feeling** of successfully solving tension and anxiety.

On this basis, then, I would accept **much of John Yungblut's** paper, but would be wary whenever **talk** of "seed," "potentiality," "omega point," etc., comes **in**. The "seed" metaphor can refer only to the secondary **matter** that creativity does make use of *some* former solutions, does **not** always start from scratch, builds up some retained stability out of the past. But the total pattern of the new event is **unique**, not merely

the "fulfillment" of a pre-existent plan. And if dynamic good implies the necessity of *solving* real problems, then all "omega point," "final consummation" terminology must shift to relative degrees of consummation. Insofar as Teilhard and John Yungblut allow themselves to use such terms, they remain Aristotelian-Thomistic in their thought. All significance is put in prior- or post-process states, rather than in the process itself. But if only the process really exists, as science is telling us, we'd better get the significance into it.

Some specific examples of changes in terminology the fully dynamic view might prefer follow:

The characterizations of creation as something still in process are right, but the phrase "tending toward an objective" should not be interpreted as meaning a single, final objective, but limited objectives for each epoch. The term "seed" would not mean a hidden pre-existence of the Christ-like in man beforehand. In full dynamism, the Christ-like would have to be understood as creatively developed here and now through experience, as we work it up out of poorer solutions to the living of life. In this light, christification could not matter if it was already present as seed. It can only matter if it builds itself now, resolving a present need and emergency.

It is important to recognize that the seed will not *inevitably* bear its fruit. Failure is a real possibility. This cannot be harmonized with the traditional static conception of God's omnipotence. But the dynamic idea of value *requires* God to permit the possibility of failure. Seriousness could not otherwise exist. If success were guaranteed, there could be no real importance in the struggle. It would be only an idle wafting along on the wave of mechanical success. John Yungblut is ahead of Teilhard in accepting this and rejecting the Aristotelian certainty that the seed will produce its final fruit.

I agree with John Yungblut's rejection of "return of Christ." All "re-" words are inadequate to creativity: redemption, renewal, revival, etc. Creativity is not going backwards to any former state, nor merely repeating former events.

"What we have to be is what we are by promise." This is straight Aristotelian "We must become what we are," and is just as self-contradictory as it looks. Existentialism is correct

here: existence precedes essence. We create ourselves (or are created) as we experimentally live in the time process.

"Creation is still going on and the essential meaning of reality will be revealed only at the end of the process." This is a terrible thought, which reveals the perniciousness of the half-way house type of dynamism. No such wait before one knows for sure about divine meaningfulness is involved *at all*. That would mean we could never be sure. Meaning is experienceable *within* process by anyone right now. It is the prevalence of the sort of belief here (Utopianism) that is killing God in the twentieth century.

In summary, I have sought to show how one must go further than Teilhard or John Yungblut, if one means to take omnipotence seriously in a dynamic world.

T. VAIL PALMER, JR.

John Yungblut's thesis seems to be, in broadest terms, that the thought of Teilhard de Chardin can be drawn upon for a major updating of Quaker theology. In order to establish this thesis, he has to show: first, the genuine insights to be found in Teilhard's writings; second, the points in historical or contemporary Quaker thought which are ripe to be updated; and third, the relationship between the two. I am convinced that John Yungblut has failed to demonstrate an understanding of either historical or contemporary Quaker thought, and has therefore provided no meaningful route through which Teilhard's thought can be related to Quakerism.

He refers to "our Christology and our understanding of 'that of God in every man'" as the key points in Quaker thought which need updating. He develops this point by referring to "the Light Within, . . . the Light of Christ, . . . and the Seed" as some Quaker phrases equivalent to "that of God." The use of this terminology makes it clear that he must be writing within the context of the Quaker thought which derives its inspiration from Rufus M. Jones. Most Friends within this

school of thought would unhesitatingly call themselves mystical and liberal in their views. No other group of contemporary Quaker thinkers would accept these terms as being equivalent. And if the most recent generation of Quaker historical scholarship has accomplished anything, it is the proof that these terms were *not* equivalent in the thought of George Fox and the early Quakers.

John Yungblut refers to the "pre-Darwinian connotation" of "the metaphor, 'the seed'." This reference is completely puzzling, if *not* misleading. He implies that, even before Darwin, "the seed" was a *botanical* metaphor in Quaker thought. But in the thought of the early Friends "the seed" was *not* a botanical metaphor. Fox used the term to describe Christ as "the seed of the woman that bruises the serpent's head" (an obvious reference to Genesis 3:15) and "the seed of Abraham" (as in Galatians 3:16). Fox and the King James Bible were simply using "seed" in the sense of "offspring" or "descendant(s)" — a meaning of the word which has since largely dropped out of the English language. The reinterpretation of "the seed" into a botanical metaphor was primarily the work of Rufus Jones and his generation of Friends — hardly a pre-Darwinian development!

And, indeed, if John Yungblut is writing primarily for the followers of Rufus Jones, how can he say that "our Christology and our understanding of 'that of God in every man' have not yet adequately begun to follow" the curve of evolution? It is impossible to take seriously the suggestion that Rufus Jones, for instance, ignores the idea of evolution in his religious thought; the final chapter of his *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers* should be ample evidence to the contrary! How, too, can he suggest that his proposed updating will make one "become attentive to the immanent God"? Rufus Jones has long since insisted on the immanence of God within the soul.

Perhaps, then, John Yungblut did intend to make early Quakerism, and/or the views of those "reconstructionist Quaker scholars" (as R. W. Tucker calls them) who wish to recapture the religious vision of George Fox, his "jumping-off" point. If so, I have already suggested that he has gone far astray by equating "that of God" with the Inward Light and the Christ

Within, and by construing the Seed as a botanical metaphor. To be able today to write of "the doctrine that there is that of God in every man" as part of Fox's thought or to affirm that for Fox such a doctrine "does... presuppose the immanence of the supernatural in the form of grace" is simply to display one's ignorance of the past forty years of scholarly study of Quaker origins. Moreover, John Yungblut demonstrates his complete failure to understand Fox when he says that Fox's "philosophic undergirding... was not fundamentally different from the Aristotelian-Thomistic one." He does demonstrate his awareness of the deep distinction between Augustinian and Thomistic thought. He should therefore have been able to recognize that Fox's theological presuppositions, like those of Luther and Calvin, were clearly Augustinian. In the Augustinian framework, such concepts as the "bridging" of the world of nature (creation) and the supernatural world are simply irrelevant.

In short, John Yungblut demands an updating "of our only Quaker dogma." He does not define that dogma in the immediate context. However, I have heard some Friends say that "belief in that of God in every man is our only Quaker dogma," and this interpretation would make sense in the larger context of the paper. The only Friends who raise this belief to the status of dogma are those of the liberal-mystical variety. John Yungblut, however, has not really proposed a radical updating of liberal-mystical Quaker thought, but only a working out of some strands already strongly present in Rufus Jones' thought. If he is trying to update other types of Quaker thought — evangelical or reconstructionist — he will have to recognize that most such Friends do not even "believe in" That of God in Every Man, much less accept the idea as a dogma. He has therefore failed even to establish a point of contact with these Friends. Until he can demonstrate that he is not simply confused about the nature of Quaker thought, past or present, he certainly will be unable to establish the thesis that the thought of Teilhard de Chardin is relevant to Quaker theology. The more the pity, since a theologian of Teilhard's stature may well have a great deal to offer in the way of enriching the thought of even the most orthodox of evangelical or reconstructionist Friends.

## HUGH S. BARBOUR

The spark of joy in God's creation which John Yungblut has shared with us in his vision of "the christification of man" centers above all on his sense of the wonder at the creativity within men. He shows the depths of mysticism and symbolism, of dream experience and human love that are part of each of us. Granted that "divinization of man," to the point where "that of God in every man" becomes "our only Quaker dogma," are phrases to enrage an evangelical. Granted that to the liberal Protestant the alliance of evolution and Christian faith has not been news since Henry Drummond in the 1890's. Nevertheless, we all — and not just the Catholics — find our heartbeats speeding at the renewed hope that science, theology, and human history may once again be seen as one whole focussing on Christ. Since simple progress-ideas faded, we have hungered for a theology of history more affirmative than Barth's.

Yet we may need to push several steps further in the direction Teilhard and John Yungblut meant to go. They talk about evolution as having "progressed by means of expanding forms of consciousness," not just of biology; so that through the human mind — and the inherent possibilities for its emergence even in lower forms of life — the earth itself can be called the "noosphere." In Teilhard's *Phenomenon of Man* this makes mind a new mechanism of evolution, by which (just as in the Marxist theory of class struggle as the mechanism of history) men's awareness of events shapes events. This is what Teilhard means by man's capacity for "reflection." Thought becomes a "feedback mechanism" within the process, for guiding the process, like a thermostat. Unfortunately, Teilhard may confuse the issue in trying to identify reflection with a much more universal kind of "withinness" which he senses mystically, by which creatures at all levels unfold their potentiality. Can we say more about what reflection means without falling back on inner feeling?

Teilhard ties evolution up with reflection but also with "complexification," the increasingly high-order (as well as more inclusive) interactions of the atoms, molecules, cells, nerve-chains and limbs as one goes up the ladder of living creatures.

This might have led him to ask more sharply what goes on in human awareness and self-consciousness.

What higher animals show is a special kind of response by reflection, awareness of their own action as a whole, for instance when a dog expects to be praised or blamed for what he has done, or a fox seems able to imagine what he *might* do to cover his tracks by running down a stream. A monkey gets more excited when he "sees" the answer to a problem, than even when he acts out the solution and gets the reward. We can call this insight, or awareness. It is the visible sign that seems to be linked to consciousness within. Men seem to be able to go a step farther, and imagine not only what they could *do* but what they could *be*. We are self-aware and self-conscious; and while I doubt if we can draw as sharp a line as Teilhard does between Adam's self-consciousness and the mere awareness of animals, human self-awareness is more than "linear feedback" by which we can correct the course of our evolution.

Self-awareness means self-transcendence, and not just in the sense of transcending the level of animal awareness. We, as it were, jump out of the boat of our lives and see it sail by "from outside"; but where is this "outside" to be located? We lack any perch from which to look back as we transcend ourselves. Thus (as Tillich says) self-consciousness means embarrassment and a sense of isolation. Clearly identification with a social group and its ideals, or with a personal ideal such as christification, may give us such an anchorage for self-transcendence. In practice, certainly, we achieve more objectivity when we learn to "see ourselves as others see us," or measure ourselves by "the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Yet to identify ourselves with a larger group, though it may quiet our self-doubts, is no guarantee of higher response or of higher manhood, as the Nazis demonstrated. Self-awareness in the form of self-judgment was as fully lost by the Nazis' immersion in German "blood and soil" as nowadays Americans can lose self-transcendence in alcohol or drugs which only seem to produce wider experience beyond the self. John Yungblut's clue-in-passing is his own desire to *communicate* (by words like divinization) with the humanists. He sees our need for a dialogue of experiences. If christification is our goal, do we

really know how a community of Christs would speak to each other, how they would live together? Paul (in I Cor. 12) calls us all limbs or members of one body, but how does a hand speak to a foot? In fact, we speak to each other as self-aware individuals.

Our self-transcendence as men, then, has to be related to our ability to share experience with other men: for this, both their sameness and their otherness to ourselves are vital. To recognize the strangeness of someone else's experience calls for imagination, for a certain partial ability to share in it. That we can partly so share in what is strange to us makes real our objectivity, our self-transcendence, as even the sharing of identical experiences could not do. To share demands sympathy, trust, love in the concrete (as against general, diffuse benevolence and sense of unity in all life). It requires and produces humility. Thus in place of Teilhard's vision of the convergence of all men upon one "Point Omega" which is Christ, I have to posit a Kingdom of God in which we will always remain distinct, limited, and different. It is God himself beneath and beyond us, and not the identity of divinity within us, which is "the ground of our dialogue."

In various ways, sensitive doctrines of sin have seen human evil as man's self-centeredness, his inability to transcend himself (to paraphrase Augustine), his inability to respond to God or men. In the Middle Ages pride was called the ultimate of deadly sins. Teilhard de Chardin knew the depth of suffering, both in the first World War and in Chinese floods and epidemics. Without solving the problem of evil, he saw it as a step to greater wholeness, so that "*tout ce qui arrive est adorable*" ("everything that happens is worthy of praise"). A saint himself, he was selfless in relation to God and his Jesuit Order. He was presumably no stranger to either the good or the sinful within himself. Yet he was accused his life long of not recognizing the power of sin, and identifying (like Baltazar) creation with redemption. His weak spot was perhaps his inability to recognize man's radical fear of self-transcendence (as Niebuhr for one spells it out), and thus man's rebellion against dialogue. (Teilhard himself, in all his years in China, never learned Chinese, nor Chinese psychology.) As Luther

said, when man sees the divine in his own christified image, not in the strangeness of life with others, he thereby becomes an idolator.

This goes much deeper than the contrast of an immanent versus a transcendent role for God, or even than the difference between a static substance-philosophy and a modern process-philosophy. Baltazar, for example, by assuming that man's goal is given from the beginning, seems to be urging an Aristotelian telic world-view, not a truly dynamic and open one in the spirit of Whitehead. Teilhard does the same, as is shown, for instance, by his assumption that Point Omega also represents a highly unified and collective human society, rigorously uniform. Real grace, which God gives gratuitously and individually, plays no role here. God's freedom as well as man's are much circumscribed, when christification of the universe becomes merely the fullness of creation.

Here John Yungblut does break free, and sees that "love is an interpersonal union, and hence operates within the uniqueness of individual, the personal." I think that one can only do justice to his concern for the divine within us out of such a perspective. George Fox's "ocean of darkness and ocean of light" are within us (look up the passage), and are only secondarily cosmic. Whether they reflect a static or dynamic cosmology is irrelevant since they are dynamic powers in Fox's life and in history. The darkness represents within Fox and us "the natures of dogs, swine, vipers, of Sodom and Egypt, Pharaoh, Cain, etc.; the natures of these I saw within, though people had been looking without." And at once Fox sees that at least his self-awareness on these dark matters is related to his ability to "speak to all conditions" of other men, and to "sense their conditions." We must add that the inner ocean of darkness is the root of our inability to transcend ourselves toward other men and God, and that the inner ocean of light is also only real if it genuinely carries us beyond ourselves to the strangeness of shared personal understanding. The divine works through us as the ground of our daily dialogue, not simply as "mystical consciousness of identification with all men, all nature, and with nature's god." In relation to God, we may find that openness to the group in Quaker Meeting goes hand

in hand with ability to listen to a word from beyond. Thus, as Auden says it, the ground of our dialogue becomes also "the ground of our beseeching."

### CHRIS DOWNING

I am grateful to John Yungblut for his insistence that in this time of broken-ness we must look forward to a vision of a future reconciliation, even though for me Teilhard's vision does not have the power that it has for him. It may be that we do not so much choose our symbols as find ourselves chosen by them, and I have not yet been so claimed by any vision. I am perhaps more likely to look for one from a poet than a theologian or philosopher, but this is mostly because I share with John Yungblut a sadness about what theology and philosophy have in our time mostly become. And even the poetry that speaks with power to me is still mostly the poetry that issues from a wrestling with the present broken-ness — that can move beyond that only so far as to bring that broken-ness itself to poem, to form. My own speaking, too, is one that knows more of the present confusions than of a future resolution — but John Yungblut is right that in this time we need a seer.

Perhaps part of the reason why for me Teilhard does not serve as that seer is that I miss in him a sense of his having gone through this present which lies between any new reconciliation and the optimisms of Darwin's century. We *are* all post-Darwinians but post- so much else besides — I think especially of Nietzsche and Freud and Auschwitz and Hiroshima. I am struck by the fact that for John Yungblut evolution is *the* revolutionary discovery, biological space-time *the* perspective. Evolution in Darwin's sense means so much less to me — the survival of those who survive. (The "fittest" has no other sense in his system.) As in Hegel's philosophy of history, that which succeeds is by definition that which is worthy. In itself evolution gives us no criteria for determining *which* future, which potentialities, to commit ourselves to. For me

the Nietzschean revolution is the more radical one. To recognize the world as our symbol-work is to see even evolution as a perspective we choose to adopt, to see it, too, as a metaphor. To posit a static world as the Greeks perhaps did, or a cyclic one as the Egyptians and Indians did, or an ever-rebalancing one as the Chinese do, or an evolving one as we in the West have done — is not so much to say what is "really" so, but what we choose to emphasize, what we see as valuable, meaningful — these are each interpretations of the world. And each, as I see it, both enriches and impoverishes. For instance, to put the locus of meaning at the end, always beyond, is unbearable — so unbearable that it almost demands to be balanced by mysticism's affirmation of the presence of the meaningful. And think of how nirvana eventually arose as a way of escaping from the endless cycle of karma, though that had originally been a way of escaping from the meaninglessness of finitude.

I don't find that the symbol language of science, physics or biology, has any more authority than any other. We have to ask what human purpose it serves. Today's students tend to reject this particular mode of word because it has been used so often for dehumanizing purposes, and so they are suspicious of any new reconciliation which suggests subservience to science or the language of science. Yet I appreciate that Teilhard sought to bridge the gap between science and poetry, the gap between nature and history so insisted upon by neo-orthodoxy, and I agree to the need for such bridging. Teilhard is right that nature as well as man is to be redeemed, and I understand this to call for a different relation of man to nature, replacing the objectifying relationship of science with an erotic one. But Teilhard's word for this, christogenesis, doesn't speak to me; I find myself, no matter how much I try to overcome it, turned off by these word-coinages which remain for me clumsy and unpoetic, without metaphoric power.

And, of course, the difficulty with trying to formulate a theology on the basis of a symbolics borrowed from evolution is that it doesn't really help much toward overcoming the apparent dichotomy between nature and history. The differences between the logics of cause-language and purpose-language have to be explored and hopefully transcended, not simply

ignored. It has to be recognized how difficult it is to fit things like freedom and responsibility and surprise into a nature-oriented schema. John Yungblut seems aware of the difficulties of trying to take over the language of evolution to call for a moral revolution; there is an audible difference between his insistence that there is "no guarantee" and Teilhard's conviction of the certainty of christification. Either it's necessary, inevitable, determined, or it isn't; either it really depends on man or it doesn't.

So far I have been speaking of different interpretations of the world, and of what I find important and what unsatisfying in Teilhard's interpretation. But Marx told us that it was time now to go beyond interpretation, time to *change* the world. Part of what disappoints me in Teilhard, and in Jung, is the onesidedness of their focus on transforming consciousness — and then the jump to the cosmic perspective, with so little account of tomorrow, earth, deed, history. What is called for must surely be not only a transformation of consciousness but also of practice and world. The adoption of the biological space-time perspective seems to imply a cosmological time-scale which overleaps human time, historical time, political time, time with husband and brother and children. And I think here of how Jesus refused to paint a picture of what the Kingdom of God would be like or of how and when it might come, but spoke instead of what commitment to its coming demanded of us now.

This involves also John Yungblut's emphasis on the interior, on solitude, on within-ness. Not that I would want to deny the importance of these but that I feel there has to be more than this, there must also be a plea for more with-ness. Doesn't a new consciousness mean a new con-sciousness, a new knowing-with? One can't choose Buber *or* Jung — not if one is trying to point forward to a reconciling vision — not if one really cares about transforming the world and not merely our vision of it.