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Response to Comments

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Response to Comments

JOHN R. YUNGBLUT

It is a sobering if not altogether salutary experience for one to be told by his colleagues that he is barking up the wrong tree in the wrong key and (heaven help him!) in hot pursuit of the wrong prey. This is the message I infer from the responses made to my paper, ranging as they do from one which would break the news as tenderly as possible to one which seems bent on total demolition. Mustering as much courage as I can for what feels a little too much like an exercise in futility, I will speak individually to my respondents.

Chris Downing allows that I am after the right game (looking forward to a vision of future reconciliation) but am fore-ordained to failure because I'm searching in the wrong place at the wrong time. I find myself in agreement with a number of things she says. She is inclined to expect that if a vision should come it would come from a poet rather than a theologian or a philosopher, and she is repelled by the singularly unpoetic ring of some of Teilhard's coined words. I would concede both points. On the other hand, I am sure I could find considerable support for the contention that Teilhard is far more poet than theologian or philosopher, despite some of his offending words. When I ventured to mention to a Jesuit priest the suggestion many have made that Teilhard may be a modern Aquinas for the Roman Church, he made the very discerning reply that it is more likely that Teilhard will play Abelard to some future Aquinas. In any case, it is precisely the poet in Teilhard that appeals to me.

The evolutionary perspective is not the only one for our time, of course. It is however an inescapable one, affecting all others, including the Freudian and the Nietzschean, in a way that they cannot be said to affect it. Moreover, evolutionary process is not a theory or a metaphor, but a fact, though meta-

phors may be drawn from some of its aspects. I understand and agree with Chris Downing when she says that it is unbearable to search for meaning only in a hypothetical and potential end, though Christianity has long had the habit of talking in terms of some kind of eschatology. I further agree that this needs balancing with mysticism's affirmation of meaning in the present — a form of *realized* eschatology — by experiencing and celebrating the promise not only in the Teilhardian “within-ness,” but in her “with-ness.”

Hugh Barbour makes reassuring gestures of personal acceptance, but has no more confidence in Teilhard's capacity to speak to the condition of Quaker theology today. I value in his response the original efforts “to push several steps further in the direction Teilhard . . . meant to go.” I like especially the suggestion that the reflection of men exceeds that of animals in that they are able to “imagine not only what they could *do* but what they could *be*.” I further agree that our self-transcendence as men has to be related in part to our “ability to share experience with other men,” and that in this regard “both their sameness and their otherness to ourselves are vital.”

Hugh Barbour asserts that “it is God himself beneath and beyond us, and not the identity of divinity within us, which is ‘the ground of our dialogue’.” I would not deny this but would insist that we know about a God beyond us only because of the God we have known in ourselves and in other men.

It is indeed a pity that in all his years in China, Teilhard never learned Chinese nor Chinese psychology. It would however be a worse indictment had he not very clearly indicated at many points his own readiness to participate in dialogue with humanists and communists today. Is this not a seeing of the divine in “the strangeness of life with others”?

Kelvin Van Nuys also holds, but for other reasons, that Teilhard does not go far enough. He insists that divine omnipotence must relate “to imperfect becoming rather than to perfect being.” While I concur in seeing the evolutionary process as far more open-ended than it appeared to Teilhard, I do not see Teilhard as limiting God's present omnipotence or goodness along the way. Hugh Barbour reminds us of one of Teilhard's extraordinary words: “*tout ce qui arrive est ado-*

nable,” and I would recall that other, “*tout ce qui mont converge*” (“everything that rises must converge”). If the present omnipotence and goodness of God are not done justice to in Teilhard's logic, this is more than offset by his witness to the reality of present mystical experience:

Throughout my life, through my life, the world has little by little caught fire in my sight until, aflame all around me, it has become almost completely luminous from within. . . . Such has been my experience in contact with the earth — the diaphany of the divine at the heart of the universe on fire . . . Christ ; His heart : a fire : capable of penetrating everywhere and gradually spreading everywhere.¹

This does not seem to me to be postponing value to the terminus of the process. God is omnipotent now and is experienced as good in the present. Kelvin Van Nuys' point that full dynamism in the process requires that there should be no predestination of end products is well taken. The potential for Christ-life lay hidden in man as a seed. This fact need not predetermine the christification of man, much less the universe. Whether man becomes what he has it in him to be depends on whether he keeps his part of the covenant.

Vail Palmer judges me “ignorant” of Quaker history and “confused” in my suggestion of certain aspects of Teilhard's thought that may speak to our present theological condition. It is a little hard to know how to enter into a dialogue with another who disqualifies one at the outset. I would have no hesitation in acknowledging that at an earlier period I did draw a good deal of inspiration and direction in my thinking from Rufus Jones. Nor would I object either to the term “mystical” or to “liberal” as applied to my approach to Christology, however anathematic those terms may be to Vail Palmer. In suggesting I may be writing for the followers of Rufus Jones, he betrays a complete misunderstanding of my intent. I am quite aware of the extent to which Rufus Jones' thought did assimilate the evolutionary perspective and certainly acknowledged the immanence of God. I am trying to speak to those, like Vail Palmer, who do not seem to me to give adequate

place in their theology to the evolutionary perspective. (I am glad to learn from Vail Palmer that Fox was Augustinian rather than Thomistic in his thought, especially if he would allow that this would confirm the presence of a mystical strain in Fox, at least of an Augustinian kind.)

My apologies are in order for imputing to other Friends acceptance of the doctrine that there is that of God in all men. If it was not a major doctrine in Fox, it seems to me its presence cannot be denied in the familiar admonition to "walk cheerfully over the earth, answering to that of God in all men."

1. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu, An Essay on the Interior Life*. New York: Harper and Row, 1960, p. 14.