TEILHARD'S REFLECTIONS ON EASTERN RELIGIONS REVISITED

by Ursula King

Abstract. References to Eastern religions are found throughout Teilhard's work. Often considered to be mainly negative, these need to be critically reassessed within the wider context of Teilhard's experience and thought. Primarily interested in the renewal of Christianity (criticized more sharply than Eastern religions), he emphasized the living branches of religion and the need for a gradual convergence toward a religion of action in order to bring about a global transformation of life and thought. He spoke of the "road of the West" or a "new mysticism" which, however, cannot come into existence without the contribution of Eastern religions.

Keywords: Christianity in contemporary world; evolution of religion; new mysticism; "road of the West"; spiritual contribution of Eastern religions.

Forty years after Teilhard de Chardin's death, we are reminded daily through world events reported in the media that all of us are interconnected and must learn to live together in an increasingly global environment. The scale and power of Teilhard's experience, vision, and thought were such that he was far ahead of his contemporaries in critically reflecting on the significance and destiny of humankind within a global, planetary, and cosmic context. As a deeply religious person with a profoundly spiritual vision of the world and the vocation of a priest-scientist, to which he remained faithful throughout the numerous vicissitudes of his life, he asked many searching questions about the significance of religion, spirituality, and mysticism for the transformation of the modern world. What is their importance and contribution in shaping our present and

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future? In maintaining human energy and zest for life? In orienting us toward something/someone greater than ourselves? In uniting our efforts toward a common goal?

Teilhard de Chardin is one of the great, yet often ignored, Christian thinkers and mystics of our century. Most of his thought is concerned with Christianity in the contemporary world, yet his attention was directed early toward the East so that throughout his published works and letters we find references to Eastern religions and thought. Many commentators, writing primarily from an exclusively Christian standpoint, tend to either ignore these mostly cursory remarks or judge prematurely that Teilhard's thoughts on Eastern religions are merely negative and not worth investigating. I met with such an attitude among a number of otherwise very knowledgeable Jesuits and several theological scholars when I first began my research in the early seventies. The starting point of my investigation then was the following question: What knowledge and experience did a Western scientist-theologian who spent so many years working and traveling in the East acquire of Eastern religions at a time when few Western theologians took to going East or were given to reflecting on what we in the West might possibly learn from the East?

That is a question which deeply motivated Teilhard, and his answers, though intensely critical, are highly nuanced, as I have demonstrated at length in my book *Towards a New Mysticism: Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions* (King 1980). It is impossible to reproduce the detailed analysis and argument of that book in one article, but I would like to reconsider here some of the key texts, take into account more recent publications of letters and studies, and then sum up Teilhard's views on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese religions while reflecting critically on them from today's perspective. To do this, it is important to clarify first the context of what is meant by the "East" and "Eastern religions" in Teilhard's work.

The East and Eastern Religions in Teilhard—The Wider Context

The "East" is often taken, rather misleadingly, as a unitary concept. Teilhard was certainly prone to this—but the charming simplicity of the word *East* hides profoundly pluralistic meanings. It refers to contrastingly different continents and ethnically markedly different populations with differing histories, societies, and cultures which include a very wide range of different religious beliefs and practices. No one, not even the most knowledgeable scholar, could know them

all in the same detail or depth. The East which Teilhard knew through his work and travel included Egypt in the early part of this century, South Asia, South East Asia, and the Far East, where his most prolonged contact was with China. He lived there from 1923 to 1946, first in Tientsin and later in Peking, with frequent travels to other Eastern and Western countries.

From his early years on, Teilhard was much attracted to the East and always sensitive to Eastern influences, an attraction to "the glorious East" (LTS, 255)[1] mentioned throughout his life. It was often the country and its natural scenery which first impressed or even overwhelmed him, more than the people and its culture. His first encounter with Egypt, where he lived from 1905 to 1908, was vividly described more than forty years later in his autobiographical essay "The Heart of Matter": "The East flowed over me in a first wave of exoticism. I gazed at it and drank it in eagerly—the country itself, not its people or its history (which as yet held no interest for me), but its light, its vegetation, its fauna, its deserts. . . ." (TCA, 36).[2]

Lucile Swan, who knew Teilhard so well during his years in China, made the same distinction when later describing his interests. She wrote, "He had no great interest in the Chinese people; it was the country, and the rocks and what they contained, that spoke to him. And he expressed his appreciation of the landscape in beautiful descriptions" (Swan 1962, 8). She also mentions that "he had endless vivid and fascinating tales about birds and beasts" when explaining life and its habits to her. But she added that more and more, however, "his heart and thoughts were centred in religion" (Swan 1962, 11).

The kind of religion he was interested in was rooted in the cosmos, in close contact with "old mother Earth"[3] whose power, beauty, and splendor always energized him—a religion that could point to ultimate oneness and unity within the process of the evolution of both matter and spirit. It is from this perspective that he approached the religions of the East, but also those of the West, for he was critical of both. However universal the promises and visions of different religions, none of them allow any explicit room for "a global and controlled transformation of the whole of life and thought" (AE[a], 240). The Teilhardian texts which refer to the East and Eastern religions can be divided into three groups. To the first belong those written *before* 1923, when he first went to China, while the second group consists of all of the texts written between 1923 and 1946 when he lived *in* China. The third and last group were written *after* he returned from China to the West (1946–55), when he devoted further time to reading, reflecting, speaking, and writing about Eastern religions.

Teilhard's earliest interest in the East was probably kindled through family contacts,[4] reading and friendships as a student and, most of all, through his experience of working for three years as a teacher in a Jesuit college in Cairo (1905–8). It was in Egypt, especially in the desert, that his earlier mystical experiences of nature, so vividly connected with the rocks and the sea of the island of Jersey (where he had lived between 1901 and 1905), became intensified and his reflections on pantheism, monism, and mysticism further developed.

These experiences found their first literary expression in "Cosmic Life," the earliest essay (written in 1916), supplemented by other essays written during the time of the First World War. From his first essay in 1916 to his last in 1955, we find brief references to Eastern religions, mostly to Hinduism and Buddhism, whereas occasional references to Confucianism and Taoism occur mainly after his arrival in China in 1923.

The first group of essays, written *before* Teilhard went to the Far East, contain only very general remarks, but the essays of the second period, contain more explicit comparisons between Eastern and Western religions, especially Christianity as he saw it. The primary context of Teilhard's experience of the Far East was that of his scientific research, but he went to the East with great expectations: he hoped that he might find there sources of spiritual renewal for the West. One senses something of this great hope and initial excitement when reading his correspondence with Abbé Gaudefroy and Abbé Breuil (LGB). In these letters, he described in considerable detail the physical aspects and surroundings of his research in China, but also his obvious disappointment that in searching for "a certain religious view of the world—a certain mysticism" (LGB 30; my translation) the East had not been able to give him what he expected. With better knowledge and more travel he somewhat modified this view later, and more detailed comparisons are found in the essays written during the 1930s.

However, the only essay with the East in the title belongs to the writings of the third period, *after* his final return to the West in 1946. Interestingly entitled "The Spiritual Contribution of the Far East" (TF, 134–47), it was written in 1947 at a time when Teilhard had close friendships with several orientalists in Paris, such as René Grousset, Louis Massignon, and Solange Lemaître.[5] He also spent time studying Eastern art and philosophy at the Musée Guimet and wrote several essays for the Union des Croyants, the French branch of the World Congress of Faiths, whose early activities in interfaith dialogue he much supported.[6] More than anywhere else, he made

greater allowances in this essay for the diversity of the East by recognizing the differences between the cultures of India, China, and Japan, but he could still write in a letter to Lucile Swan in 1949: "I am so thrilled by the idea that you might go to India next winter. Yes, I am sure: Artistically and spiritually you would learn a lot down there,—if only to appreciate more definitely, and at the same time, the need of the West on the East, but also the superiority of the West on the East. . . ." (*sic;* LTS, 249).

We need to examine some representative key texts to see what Teilhard saw and sought in Eastern religions, how he assessed and misjudged them, and what overall importance they have in his thinking. I have first looked at the wider context in which he wrote about the East and Eastern religions in order to situate his texts and make them more comprehensible to us. It is clear that Teilhard did not have a specialist's research interest in Eastern religions; for he was no orientalist scholar with linguistic expertise nor an empirical fieldworker in cultural anthropology, nor was he primarily motivated by what we now call interfaith dialogue. He clearly situated himself always within his own tradition of Western Christianity, which he found nonetheless far too narrow, static, and constricting. In his new, dynamic vision of the world, he was looking for a renewed understanding of Christianity, one which would bear witness to the palpable presence and power of God in the concrete workings of the world, in one unifying experience where, as he wrote in a letter of 31 December 1923, the figure of Christ is no longer presented and understood as "fully given, fully fashioned (in the Latin mode), but as the object never fully attained of a passionate search" (LGB, 33; my translation).

Some Key Texts on the East and on Eastern Religions

The rather general references to Eastern religions found in the first group of essays, written *before* Teilhard's arrival in China in May 1923, occur primarily within the context of discussions on pantheism, monism, and mysticism which are not the main focus of the present paper.[7] Of greater interest to us are the comments and reflections in essays and letters of the second period, when Teilhard lived and traveled extensively throughout the Far East, but particularly in China. However, it is simply impossible to provide an exhaustive analysis of all available texts within one article.[8] I propose instead to look at some representative texts from the second and third periods, namely, texts written between 1923 and 1946 and

between 1946 and 1955. None of these claim to be systematically researched studies; they are rather circumstantial, arising out of contexts and experiences which caused Teilhard to ask personal questions that often led to more universal reflections.

Texts of 1923–46: First Impressions of the East. After his first long journey to China, traveling by boat via Suez, Colombo, Penang, Malacca, Saigon, and with stops in Hong Kong and Shanghai before reaching his destination in Tientsin, he described his impressions a bare fortnight after his arrival in a letter to Abbé Breuil. He found the multiplicity of human elements and points of view revealed by such a journey to the Far East simply "so *overwhelming*" that "one cannot conceive of a religious life, a religious organism, assimilating such a mass without being profoundly modified and enriched by it." He also referred to "the uprooting from my own world" which had left him rather dazed and incapable of digesting "the mass of strange impressions and outlooks" encountered so far. His strongest feeling was that the human world "is a huge and disparate thing, just about as coherent, at the moment, as the surface of a rough sea." Yet for reasons imbued with mysticism and metaphysics, he believes that this incoherence prepares for some kind of unification (LGB, 127; also LFT, 73), and he mentions with approval the expression "the spiritual unity" of humanity (LGB, 125).[9]

After his four months' expedition to the Ordos desert, he expressed the hope "to get on paper a literary fantasy of my impressions of Mongolia, but with philosophical undertones" (LFT, 90). He later did write such reflections under the title "Choses Mongoles" (LV, 52–62; LFT, 91–103) where he asked himself the question, "What gain has there been to my innermost being during this long pilgrimage in China? Has the great continent of Asia any profound message for me?" (LFT, 99). This question arises out of a clear orientation toward the future, as is evident when he continues to say, "What better opportunity to initiate myself and associate myself with the building-up of the future could I hope for than to go and lose myself for weeks on end in the fermenting mass of the peoples of Asia? There I could count on meeting the new currents of thought and mysticism in process of formation, which were preparing to rejuvenate and fertilise our European world" (LFT, 100). Yet he was deeply disappointed and felt distressed that he found nothing in his travels but the traces of a vanished world, "nothing but absence of thought, senile thought, or infantile thought" (LFT, 100 f.). Mongolia seemed to be asleep, perhaps even dead, so that at a personal level he came to the deep insight expressed in the often-

quoted phrase, "I am a pilgrim of the future on my way back from a journey made entirely in the past" (LFT, 101). Moving from personal insight to a general conclusion, his rash judgment rings to us falsely triumphant, even shockingly mistaken: "If we want to understand the Far East, we must not look at it at dawn, nor at high noon; we must look at it at dusk when the sun, bearing the spoils of Asia with it in its glory, rises in triumph over the skies of Europe" (LFT, 103).

"Choses Mongoles" are general reflections based on first impressions, but they express something of Teilhard's fundamental orientation toward the East. Similarly critical comments are found in the *Letters to Léontine Zanta* (LLZ), written to his philosopher friend back in Paris. He expressed to her how, through travel and activity, he wanted to become a better master of his Christian faith, stronger in putting it forward. He also compared the long and lonely expedition through the vast regions of the Mongolian desert with his formative experience of the First World War:

> Though I have less leisure than during the war, and perhaps less freshness too . . . in the last two months I have found myself in similar isolation and confronted with realities equally vast. And both these conditions are eminently favourable for meditating on the great All. Now, in the vast solitudes of Mongolia (which, from the human point of view, are a static and dead region), I see the same thing as I saw long ago at the "front" (which, from the human point of view, was the most alive region that existed): one single operation is in process of happening in the world, and it alone can justify our action: the emergence of some spiritual Reality, through and across the efforts of life. (LLZ, 52)

In the same letter, written on 7 August 1923, he refers to his "Mass on the World," which found its definite formulation in the Ordos desert and which he repeats for lack of any other mass. He exclaims: "What a beautiful Host this ancient Asia is—a dead Host for the time being (I think)—but bearing, in its dust, the traces of that so long labour from which we are now profiting!" (LLZ, 52 f.). Even though he describes the Mongols as "in gradual process of disappearance" and their lamas as "coarse and dirty monks," he acknowledges "that in time gone by these people *saw something*, but that they allowed this light to be lost—and that we can rediscover it. I was positively moved by the serenity and majesty of a Buddha in Peking: we have no finer representation of Divinity!" (LLZ, 53).

It is Teilhard's search for God in the midst of life, across cosmic and human realities in their evolutionary unfolding, which underlies all he says. Compare his comment in another letter from that time: "This period in Mongolia, like the war, is rather like a 'retreat' for

me, in that it leads me to the heart of the unique greatness of God" (LFT, 83). More specific comments about Eastern religions, that is, about Buddhism and Confucianism, can also be found, as in the letter of 3 October 1923 to Léontine Zanta, worth quoting at length. Teilhard explains how through the fortunate meeting with a missionary, "a remarkable expert on Tibet," he was able to discuss his thought and thus to understand more about the East for the first time. The missionary

> managed slightly to raise the veil of coarse materialism beneath which I had lost all hope of finding in China the faintest spark of true mysticism. He showed me how the Chinese have been coarsened by their Confucianism, which is a mere code of practical ethics for the establishment of a comfortable social life, without any appeal to a living ideal of any kind. But side by side with this empiricism, suited for brutes, he assured me that there existed (even now in the hearts of some Chinese philosophers and lamas) the old Buddhist preoccupation to sound the rhythm of the world, to establish a perspective of its countless evolutions, to await the supreme Buddha who is to redeem all things. Such assurances, coming from a man who has an intimate knowledge of China, confirmed me in my old hope that we could perhaps learn from the mystics of the Far East how to make our religion more "Buddhist" instead of being over-absorbed by ethics (that is to say Confucianist), and at last discover a Christ who is not only *a model of good conduct* and of "*humanity*" but the *superhuman* Being who, for ever in formation in the heart of the world, possesses a being capable of bending all, and assimilating all, by vital domination. (LLZ, 57 f.)

This passage expresses clearly that Teilhard had a long-cherished hope that not only he personally, but Western Christians in general, might learn something from the insights and experiences present in Eastern religions, a source of renewal which might help us to reinterpret and transform our understanding and practice of Christianity. I think it is important to keep this specific perspective always in mind when reading and interpreting particular texts by him. It is also quite clear from all of his writings that his approach was always a comparative one, inquiring and assessing where the most appropriate, most dynamic, and most powerful spiritual resources could be found in order to enable us to build the future here and now and create a more unified, more loving world drawn toward and attracted by a spiritual divine center.

Texts of 1923–46: More Systematic Comparisons with Eastern Religions. This comparative and evaluative stance became more clearly focused and articulated as the years went by. The comparison between Western and Eastern religions recurred as an important theme, reiterated again and again, but first most strongly stated in the essay of 1932, "The Road of the West," found in *Toward the Future*

(TF, 40–59). Written nine years after his first arrival in China as well as after his important and arduous "Yellow Expedition" across Central Asia, which left him with many deep and varied impressions, it is structurally comparable to the earlier, much more informal "Choses Mongoles." Like the earlier text, "The Road of the West" was an attempt to sort out the many thoughts and experiences of a long and distant journey, made to similarly isolated regions, but in the company of more people. He worked closely with French engineers, researchers, and technical personnel from a largely non-Christian, secular background and came in contact with different Eastern populations and Chinese warlords of the time. After his return, he wrote to his friend Léontine Zanta, on 20 March 1932, that at the first possible opportunity, "I propose to write something new on the fundamental metaphysical and religious question: 'What is the multiple, and how can it be reduced to Unity?' (the eastern solution and the western solution)" (LLZ, 108). The essay turned out to be a much more systematic attempt to examine these different approaches, which he, quite misleadingly, summed up by introducing the two phrases the "road of the East" and the "road of the West." From then on, this terminology was permanently adopted and recurs in many of his subsequent essays throughout the remaining twenty-plus years of his life.

I undertook a detailed study of the occurrence and meaning of these comparisons in *Toward a New Mysticism: Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions* (King 1980). Here I can only highlight a few examples. The starting point for Teilhard in "The Road of the West," written in September 1932, is, as always, the concern with the unification of the universe, "the One and the Many," and he contrasts past religions with the modern religious attitude toward the world. The "road of the East" functions almost as an ideal type of what religion *has* been, with the original and strongest current of mysticism found in Indian religions, in both Hinduism and Buddhism. He recognizes, however, that the revival and renaissance movements of *modern* Hinduism and Buddhism, including the current of theosophy, represent a new response to the modern conditions of the world. Thus the "road of the West" is not restricted to the West and to Christianity, although the latter represents the most fully developed form of such a response. What he is especially interested in are "the living branches of modern religions" and "the basis of their gradual convergence: a convergence of all, from Christianity to the new forms of Islam and Buddhism" (TF, 47).

He expresses his insight by using the polarities of East and West, but what he wants to highlight in particular are two different forms

of unity or of dealing with the multiple realities of the world. For him, Eastern and Western mysticism are simply the religious pursuit of the divine in one or the other of two directions: by seeking unity through impoverishment or, alternatively, through concentration and enrichment. Thus there exist unities of either simplicity or complexity.

The same ideas are further developed in his essay "Christianity in the World," written in May 1933 (SC, 98–112). There he speaks of the biological function of religion within the evolution of humankind. Religion provides "a foundation for morality," "a dominating principle of order," "an axis of movement," "something of supreme value, to create, to hold in awe, or to love" (SC, 99). However, born to give a form to the psychic energy of the world, to animate and control the overflow of spirit, religion itself must "grow greater and more clearly defined in step with . . . and in the same degree" as humanity grows (SC, 100).

For Teilhard, "mankind today is undecided and distressed, at the very peak of its power, because it has not defined its spiritual pole. It lacks religion" (SC, 102). Seen from this perspective, all religious ideas and practices of the past are "put to the test" to see how far they provide seeds for development and renewal. It is essential to understand that Teilhard assesses Eastern religions entirely from this dynamic, developmental perspective which encourages research, effort, and a religion of action. This is clear from some of the following remarks in the same essay. The East is the first shrine, "the ever-living dwelling place of the Spirit" "where so many from the West still dream of finding shelter for their faith in life" (SC, 105), but its mighty constructions cannot help us to build the future:

> The very moment we come into fundamental contact with Asia there can be no question of doubt. Those impressive columns are utterly incapable of supporting the drive of our world in these days. The incomparable greatness of the religions of the East lies in their having been second to none in vibrating with the passion for unity. . . . However, the Hindu sages thought that if man is to attain this unity he must renounce the earth, its passions and cares, and the effort it demands. . . . We must never allow ourselves to be run away with by the vast sophism of the East. We must follow straight along our own path, and so discover whether some other divinity than the Nirvana awaits us on the road to the West. (SC, 105 and 106)

For Teilhard, "divine unity is attained by sublimation, not by negation, of the world" (SC, 107), through a religion that is implicit in the developments of life. Religion is not primarily something individual, national, or racial, but a human reality which, like

science or civilization, is coextensive with the history of humankind itself. One can see here the powerful and important position Teilhard assigns to religion within universal human and global development; one can also understand why he pleads for a "convergence around a *religion of action.*" But from our contemporary perspective it seems rather shortsighted that he completely ignores the spiritual power and action-oriented elements in Eastern religions, expecting that the much needed religion of action "will gradually be seen to be identical with, and governed by, *Christianity faithfully extended to its utmost limit*" (SC, 112).

Of course, if one carefully scrutinizes this sentence, one realizes it implies that Christianity has not yet realized its full spiritual potential either and does not yet represent the "new mysticism" and new spirituality needed in our contemporary world. Like the religions of the East, Christianity needs reform and reinterpretation, but Teilhard was certain that the affirmation of world and life had their strongest current in Christianity. However, some of his remarks also indicate that not everything in the East was ancient, but that the modern reform movements already implied a greater acceptance and positive attitude toward the world. A passage like the following, written over sixty years ago, makes little sense to us today:

> It would appear that no one who has been deeply influenced by modern culture and the knowledge that goes with it can sincerely be a Confucian, a Buddhist or a Muslim (unless he is prepared to live a double interior life, or profoundly to modify for his own use the terms of his religion). On the other hand, such a man can claim to be and believe that he is completely Christian. (SC, 106)

These contrasts are gathered and expressed in even stronger, more clearly structured form in the important text "How I Believe" (CE, 96–132). This text emphasizes faith as a general human attribute that is also deeply rooted in personal experience. Outlining the elements of his own faith, Teilhard describes this faith first as grounded in "faith in the world," which is "a particularly live sense of universal relationships of interdependence" (CE, 100). For Teilhard the world constitutes a *whole* and religion forms part of its essential structure: "The religious phenomenon is only one of the aspects of 'hominization'; and, as such, it represents an irreversible cosmic magnitude" (CE, 119 n.). His own personal inquiry is not enough; he must plunge himself resolutely into "the great river of religions" (CE, 119) which consists of apparently opposed currents. He reduces these to three possible types of belief: "the group of Eastern religions, the humanist neopantheisms, and Christianity" (CE, 121).

Here a schematic characterization of Eastern religions follows and is rejected: "The great appeal of *Eastern religions* (let us, to put a name to them, say Buddhism) is that they are supremely universalist and cosmic." Teilhard acknowledges that his own individual faith "was inevitably peculiarly sensitive to Eastern influences" and he had felt the power of their attraction. But according to him "the Hindu sage" understands spirit as a homogenous unity and matter as dead weight and illusion, while for Teilhard spirit is unity by synthesis and matter is loaded throughout with sublime possibilities:

> Thus the East fascinates me by its faith in the ultimate unity of the universe; but the fact remains that the two of us, the East and I, have two diametrically opposed conceptions of the relationship by which there is communication between the totality and its elements. For the East, the One is seen as a suppression of the multiple; for me the One is born from the concentration of the multiple. Thus, under the same monist appearances, there are two moral systems, two metaphysics and two mysticisms. (CE, 122)

While the earlier quotation refers to Eastern religions in the plural, this passage speaks simply of "the East" in general. It does not seem to matter which part of the East or which religions are meant in particular, whether Buddhism, Hinduism, or anything else. Teilhard does not specifically consider their different conceptions of transcendence, or their teachings on the nature of humanity and its different paths to salvation—no, all he is interested in are "the venerable cosmogonies of Asia," which he dismisses: "I rejected the East because it left no logical place or value for the developments of nature" (CE, 124). He also recognizes in a footnote that he is only concerned with the fundamental concept of *spirit* in Eastern religions "and not in the form they assume in fact in the varieties of neo-Buddhism, under the influence of an approximation to Western types of mysticism" (CE, 122 f.). The three currents—Eastern, human, Christian—are still at cross-purposes, yet there are indications "that they are coming to run together. The East seems already almost to have forgotten the original passivity of its pantheism" (CE, 130).

Thus, modifications are acknowledged, as are experiences of doubt. While arguing for a "general convergence of religions upon a universal Christ who fundamentally satisfies them all" (CE, 130), and the infinite possibilities which such a universalization opens up for religious thought, he humbly recognizes in the epilogue to his essay that the clarity and security of his own faith are not absolute: "Certain though I am—and ever more certain—that I must press on in life as though Christ awaited me at the term of the universe, at the same time I feel no special assurance of the existence of Christ.

Believing is not seeing. As much as anyone, I imagine, I walk in the shadows of faith" (CE, 131). This expression of self-doubt foreshadows similar sentiments articulated more than twenty years later in his final essay, "The Christic" (HMA, 80–102; see especially 100).

I have examined four key texts on Eastern religions from Teilhard's period in China—one of 1923, the year of his arrival, and three from the creative years of the early 1930s (1932, 1933, 1934). Their all too brief and rather schematic, if not to say shallow, generalizations recur throughout the following years, including in his main work, *The Phenomenon of Man* (PM), without adding anything new. It now remains to consider whether any different thoughts were introduced *after* Teilhard left China in 1946 and wrote further essays in the West.

Texts of 1946–55: Eastern Religions Reassessed. Besides his prolonged experience of living in China between 1923 and 1946, Teilhard had made brief visits to India in 1935, to Indonesia in 1936 and 1938, to Burma in 1935 and 1938, and to Japan in 1931, 1937, and 1938. During the postwar years of 1946 to 1951, spent in Paris, he continued to reflect on similar themes as before, but his letters, unpublished diaries, and especially his *carnets de lecture*—the notes on his reading—show us that he continued to reflect on Eastern religions. In fact, he spent time studying at the library of the Musée Guimet, the oriental museum in Paris, and he especially read detailed studies on Indian Advaita Vedanta (see King 1980, 241–47, for an analysis of this reading). He also attended the Orientalists' Congress in Paris in 1948 and participated in several interfaith meetings and discussions organized by the Union des Croyants between 1948 and 1950.

Thus one would expect that the essays of this period and their references to Eastern religions would be based on more detailed knowledge than his earlier writings. There are some nuances, but on the whole Teilhard remained faithful to his earlier thoughts. A very brief, two-page sketch on "Ecumenism" (SC, 197–98), written in December 1946, refers again to the three "great mystical currents of today" which are not immediately reconcilable: the "Eastern current" and the "Western-Christian current," which is then further subdivided between those who either "accept or reject a certain faith in man at the root of their religious faith." The convergence of religions around a privileged central axis is also reaffirmed "around a Christ who is incommensurable (in cosmic dignity) with any prophet or Buddha" (SC, 197). In order to work together ecumenically, between different Christians as well as between all people, Teilhard considers it essential to have as a foundation a

common human "faith" in the future of humankind. What is needed most of all to achieve greater unity is "the clear perception of a sharply defined (and real) 'type' of God, and an equally sharply defined 'type' of humanity" (SC, 198).

Teilhard was well aware that different human groups have their own "type," their own understanding of God and humanity, and that these are not easily harmonized. In an essay of 1947, "The Spiritual Contribution of the Far East" (TF, 134–47)—the only essay among his numerous writings to include the East in its title—more concrete acknowledgment is given to the diversity of Eastern religions and cultures. The title expresses another important point, namely that the East has a spiritual contribution to make and that we have to ask ourselves what this consists of.

Teilhard wrote this essay with a sense of urgency: humankind is experiencing a critical period which includes simultaneously a sense of power, a feeling of inner disintegration, and a desperate search for a soul. Many Western people are directing their search to the East, of which they have on the whole only a fairly vague and distant picture. These remarks of more than forty years ago apply perhaps even more today. In attempting a sensitive response to the needs of his contemporaries, Teilhard draws on his long experience of the East but states clearly that he himself has "no special competence in the history of Asiatic thought" (TF, 134). Yet he feels it his task to comment on what spiritual contribution people in the West might justifiably expect from their fellow human beings in the Far East, what "indispensable role" and "essential function" (TF, 147) the Far East has in the development of a new spirituality and mysticism, so much needed today.

The contribution of the Far East is thought of in the plural: by distinguishing three major cultural blocks—India, China, and Japan—Teilhard characterizes three different forms of spirituality. India is outstanding through its extraordinary sense of unity, its monism, as expressed in the Upanishads and Vedanta, but this is accompanied by an exaggerated feeling of the "unreality of phenomena." Buddhism in particular is linked with "the intoxication of emptiness" (TF, 135). He describes the Indian attitude also as theist and pantheist, whereas China is characterized as fundamentally naturalistic and humanistic, with an ever-present sense of the tangible. This is even visible in Chinese Buddhism where the place of Nirvana is taken by "the attractive, compassionate, and so human figure of Amida" (TF, 136). China's particular strength is the appreciation of the human, whereas India is attracted by the transcendent. In Japan, by contrast, it is the attraction of the social,

the heroic sense of the collective, visible in its "warrior mysticism," where, through the development of Zen Buddhism, renunciation and antirealism are reformulated "into a code of chivalrous violence and self-sacrifice" (TF, 136).

Teilhard considers these three forms of "Mysticism of God, mysticism of the individual confronted by the world, social mysticism" as three separate components which, taken together, would cover "the complete field of a perfect spirituality" (TF, 137). Though still separate, he envisages their possible coming together, a confluence of East and West. This will occur through the opening up of a new road in human consciousness and social organization, a road first built in the West. While Europe is looking to Asia for wisdom, Asia is turning to the West for new scientific, technological, and political developments. In Teilhard's understanding, "the East is yielding from within to an emancipating instinct, and slowly getting under way with its whole spiritual mass, to join up, not only technologically but mystically too, with the road of the West" (TF, 145). At present, the "three main currents of the Far East" have not yet found a point of confluence among themselves, but Teilhard foresees a time when they will come together and meet with some of the religious aspirations of the West, providing "a deeper innate foundation, and a greater vigour," adding volume and richness "to the new (the human-Christian) mystical note rising from the West" (TF, 146).

Here, as elsewhere, Teilhard's perspective remains clearly, and unreformedly, Western. What he is after is what he called in his essay, "My Fundamental Vision" (TF, 163–208), "the very essence of modern mysticism," and by this mysticism he meant "the science and the art of attaining simultaneously, and each through the other, the universal and the spiritual" (TF, 199). A powerful mysticism which he also describes as a "mysticism of centration, summed up in the total and totalizing attitude of a love of evolution" (TF, 205), which culminates for him in the figure of the universal Christ. He speaks about "the Christic, or the Centric" with great power in the autobiographical essay "The Heart of Matter" and in his last essay, "The Christic" (HMA, 39). Both unfurl before us the dynamic of his "divine milieu" wherein cosmic and human evolution unfold from the depth of matter to the peak of the spirit in a vision of great splendor and warmth. It is the spirit of the living God whose presence animates and permeates every fiber of being and every level of reality. In "The Christic" (HMA, 80–102), written a few weeks before his death, a whole section is devoted to "The Religion of Tomorrow," the "religion of evolution." The key question here is,

What kind of faith, what kind of energy is needed for the human world to progress to a more satisfactory, a more unified and more centered "planetary arrangement"? Teilhard calls this "a problem of spiritual *activation* (HMA, 96) and he assesses the religious reserves of humankind according to their potential to provide such activation. His approach is therefore a very specific and evaluative one which explains, at least in part, his attitude toward Eastern religions. After examining the experiential context of Teilhard's "East" and analyzing some representative key texts on Eastern religions, it now remains, by way of conclusion, to attempt an overall interpretation of his thought on Eastern religions.

Teilhard's Approach to Eastern Religions: An Interpretation

To understand Teilhard's thought, one has to be inserted into it. One needs to approach it empathetically, as well as critically, without falling into the trap of taking his sentences at their face value, merely literally, without comprehending their wider context. I shall sum up what this approach to Eastern religions was, then try to explain why he held the views he did, and finally, I shall ask what significance his thought may still have for us today.

The Views of a "Chance Passerby." The first non-Christian religion Teilhard encountered during his early years in Egypt was Islam. However, there are few direct references to it in his work, and they are mainly critical. Most of his statements on Eastern religions relate to Hinduism and Buddhism, followed by Confucianism and Taoism. None of these religious traditions were ever assessed from within, on their own grounds; they were always approached from a Christian background. Yet, by and large, Teilhard's comparative and evaluative comments are not made from a narrowly denominational or dogmatic point of view. Their perspective is largely universalist, concerned with seeking a richer, more adequate spirituality for humanity at the crossroads, on its way to the future.

Not only Islam but the historical riches of Confucianism and Taoism were also mostly ignored. It was the pantheistic monism of Indian thought which always exercised the greatest fascination for Teilhard. He pointed out more than once that the birth of pantheism and first appearance of mysticism must be located in India. Personally, he encountered Hinduism only briefly and rather late, but he did not feel attracted to its varied forms. On the whole, Teilhard seems to have sympathized more with certain aspects of

Buddhism than with Hinduism. It was in particular the universalist and cosmic perspective which appealed to him in Buddhism, not so much the contemplative one. During his first visit to the Far East, he expressed the hope that Christianity might become renewed through contact with Buddhism. Later, however, he judged Buddhism to be dead in China, although he was aware of the existence of forces of renewal, the "varieties of neo-Buddhism," which were seen as developments linked to Western influences.

Teilhard's approach to Eastern religious thought must be criticized for its all too summary assessment as well as his undifferentiated use of the term "Eastern religions." Not unlike certain earlier Western scholars, he often subsumed both Buddhism and Hinduism under this term without distinguishing their beliefs and practices. For example, he refers to the great appeal of Eastern religions and writes, "Let us, to put a name to them, say Buddhism" (CE, 121). But then he goes on to talk about India and especially Indian monism, which contrasts most sharply with his own understanding of the spirit. For him, the "venerable cosmogonies of Asia" do not reveal a God who is "a saviour of man's work" (CE, 123). At an earlier stage, Teilhard first thought that he "could discern him in the East" but, by the early thirties, he was convinced that a new path had been opened to human mysticism by the new "road of the West." Although it implies "a contagious faith in an ideal to which man's life can be given," this new "road" is far from being clearly signposted; it may, in turn, offer the choice of several possibilities (CE, 123).

Teilhard's wide experience of the East was primarily related to scientific research, not to the investigation of religious thought. Yet his life and travels brought him into contact with numerous aspects of Eastern religions and, given his own religious commitment, his thoughts frequently turned to the significance of religious phenomena within the course of human evolution. While Teilhard did not claim any particular competence in Eastern religions, he nontheless acquired more knowledge than is generally assumed. However, one can describe his knowledge of Eastern religions in the same way in which he referred to himself after arriving in China: he remained a "chance passerby." For most of his life, he did not fully grasp the importance and intrinsic value of Eastern spirituality per se. Yet it is equally apparent that, from the beginning of his stay in the Far East, he was looking for certain aspects of complementarity and, in spite of strong criticisms, wished for a mutually enriching encounter of East and West.

From the beginning of his philosophical reflections, Teilhard

argued against monistic pantheism, for which he had initially felt so strong an attraction. Yet he subsequently transcended this by reconciling his experience of "cosmic consciousness" with theistic and personalist beliefs. He always considered the height of monism to be found in Indian religions. Their ultimate aim, in his view, is the search for pure interiority without corresponding external action. Searching for a harmonious balance between inner and outer life, Teilhard sharply rejected what he perceived as Indian religious thought. He always maintained a strongly antagonistic attitude toward Hinduism, still visible in his late letters to Lucile Swan, and always emphasized the fundamental difference between his own and Hindu thought in the understanding of matter, oneness, and evolution. The differences, but also similarities, between Teilhard's and Hindu thinking have been studied in great detail by Beatrice Bruteau (1974) and Jan Feys (1973). Particularly noteworthy are some significant parallels with the modern Hindu thinker Sri Aurobindo, who, like Teilhard, though in a different manner, has emphasized the great importance of evolution for contemporary religion. This comparison was explored early in R.C. Zaehner's study, *Evolution in Religion* (1971).

When one examines his criticisms, it becomes clear that they always relate to specific positions of Advaita Vedanta rather than to Indian religions in general. His brief visit to India in 1935 did little to modify the views on Indian thought formed early in his life. Prior to any other descriptions of Hinduism, Teilhard first came across Advaita Vedanta, which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was better known in the West than other Indian teachings due to the work of Western orientalists and the missionary activity of the Ramakrishna's Mission. For most of his life Teilhard remained ignorant of the great diversity of the Indian religious tradition. Yet from 1945 onwards, if not before, he became familar with the main outlines of the historical development of Hinduism and some major schools of Buddhism. He also recognized the significant difference between modern reinterpretations of Vedanta, explored the classical teachings of Shankara and Rāmānuja, and realized the strong belief in and devotion to a personal god present in Hinduism. If only Teilhard had known the extraordinary parallelism of insight between the world as divine body seen and praised by the eleventh-century Hindu theologian Rāmānuja and his own vision of the cosmic Christ, a deep affinity of insight and perception beautifully brought out in Anne Hunt-Overzee's study, *The Body Divine: The Symbol of the Divine Body in the Works of Teilhard de Chardin and Rāmānuja* (1992).

As to Buddhism, his assessment of the Buddhist goal of Nirvana

s an "easier" way, implying less effort, was profoundly mistaken. He did not recognize that the search for Nirvana requires the greatest effort of concentration and is, in this sense, positive and dynamic. The negative way of Buddhism is primarily one of method and not one of ultimate nihilism. The initial pessimism with regard to the impermanence of all things is balanced out by a fundamental optimism as to the final goal of humanity. Besides negative connotations, both Nirvana and Sunya—emptiness—also have positive associations of which Teilhard remained unaware.

Thus, his criticisms of Eastern religions are often inaccurate when examined in detail. Sometimes they are harsh and unjust because he criticized them as an outsider and, due to his basic lack of knowledge and intimate participation, he underestimated their inner resources. This is nowhere more evident than in his attitude toward Islam, nor has he much to say on Confucianism or Taoism.

An Attempt to Explain Teilhard's Views on Eastern Religions. What are some of the reasons for these deficiencies in Teilhard's views on Eastern religions? One of the most important ones is that the major focus of his religious thought was never historical, phenomenological, or simply academic. The past development of religions was of little interest to him. His inquiry always centered on the relevance of central religious insights for human beings living in the present, confronted with the task of building the future. In his view, humankind today, more than ever before, is in need of a spirituality that includes a positive orientation toward the world and human action. Many specific details relating to Eastern religious beliefs and practices were of no interest to Teilhard's world- and action-orientated approach. Furthermore, what he learned about Eastern religions through reading was always mediated through Western sources and never included accounts by adherents of Eastern religions themselves.

Equally important, his direct contact with Eastern religions was restricted by the nature of the milieu in which he lived in the East. In China, the foreign concessions in Tientsin and the international diplomatic and savant community in Peking provided a barrier which effectively sealed off most Westerners from the indigenous population. This applied perhaps less to Teilhard than to others; he had enormous opportunities to travel throughout the country and worked in close collaboration with the Chinese. However, his major contacts were always with the Western-educated, or at least with members of a Western-orientated, scientific elite, often alienated from their own religious and cultural tradition. The opportunities for

him to see Eastern religious life in an active and dynamic situation were rare. For this reason, he may well have underestimated the intrinsic strength and dynamic qualities of Eastern religions in meeting the problems of the modern world, though judging from all accounts, Chinese religious life seems to have been at a very low ebb during Teilhard's stay in the country. One wonders whether his views on Eastern religions would have been significantly different had he spent a major part of his life in India or Japan rather than in China.

Yet, in spite of all of his criticisms, his sometimes ill-informed and rash judgments, it is undeniable that the influence of the East as a general geographical and cultural phenomenon was decisive for the development of Teilhard's own thought. It was in the Far East that he grasped the immensity of the earth and its peoples, realized to the full the cosmic roots of the human, and developed his dynamic and universalist perspectives. He called this "the spirit of the earth," "the note of China," "the note of the All." One might argue that this does not necessarily represent a specifically religious experience. Yet if one accepts his fundamental premise that religion cannot be divided from human life in general, it becomes apparent that the experience of China exercised a considerable influence on the direction of his thought.

Teilhard's insistence on our insertion in nature, on the organic interdependence of all living beings, and the universal solidarity of humankind rejoins the thinking on human beings and nature found in several Eastern religions. This harmonious and balanced approach has some particularly striking parallels in classical Chinese thought, with which Teilhard unfortunately hardly came into contact. Occasionally, he expressed his admiration for the humanistic and realistic orientation of the Chinese, as in his essay, "The Spiritual Contribution of the Far East" (SCF); but little did he realize how close certain classical Chinese insights were to his own perspective. Classical Chinese parallels to Teilhard's thought have been studied by Marie-Ina Bergeron, *La Chine et Teilhard* (1976), and Allerd Stikker, *The Transformation Factor* (1992), and it is particularly striking how his holistic vision bears a great affinity with some of the deepest insights of Taoism, which he knew least about and ignored almost completely. It is deeply regrettable that he never recognized and acknowledged the great resources of insight and wisdom found in this ancient Chinese tradition.

But Teilhard was primarily a scientist and explorer, not an academic. As a scientist, he was gripped by a very particular, integral understanding of the human being and the cosmos, characterized by the blending of a modern scientific worldview with personal religious

and mystical insights. Like an explorer, he lived much of his life in the open air, pursuing his scientific research with a team of other people, drawn from widely different cultural backgrounds. Given this experience, his approach to religion and mysticism was of necessity different from that of the religious specialists or theological scholars whose thought develops in the confines of their study. In fact, it is possible that Teilhard's views on Eastern religions were so critical because he lived in the East for so long. Unlike others who single out and praise particular features of Eastern spirituality in a one-sided manner, he saw the religions of the East much more in their wider social and cultural context, which he had personally experienced.

It is in comparison with other Christians of his time, and their attitudes toward Eastern religions, that his thought must be assessed. In spite of inherent limitations, Teilhard's views imply an interest and openness to religions other than his own which, on the whole, was rare among his contemporaries. Furthermore, his critical remarks concerning Eastern religions must be seen in relation to his far more frequent criticisms of static and outdated forms of Christianity. He criticized Christianity more rigorously than any Eastern religion because he possessed a much closer inside knowledge of it. Thus, there is always a certain polarity in his attitude: on one hand, there is the tension between criticizing his own religion and that of others; on the other, while criticizing Eastern religions, he also expected a specific contribution and enrichment from them. Especially in his later years, he increasingly stressed the need for a synthesis that would transcend the limitations of both East and West, the need for a creative breakthrough toward a new kind of mysticism linked to the awareness of a new period in human history.

Yet Teilhard's understanding of religion and mysticism was also due to a particular religious temperament. Fired by visual and tangible experiences, by a deeply religious attitude and sharply reflective mind, his mystical sense grew stronger through the scientific study of nature and expanded through the encounter with particular people. The blending of these different elements produced a unique personal synthesis. His ideas on religion must be seen as primarily linked to this rich web of experience rather than a rational-logical deduction or a system of thought.

From the vantage point of a traveler between different worlds—that of East and West, as well as from the recesses of the past to the threshold of the future—Teilhard realized, earlier than most, the revolutionary impact of contemporary scientific, social, and cultural change on the traditional teachings of the major world religions,

which originally was developed in a static universe now redundant. During his travels, he observed that, in many respects, humanity already possesses a common global culture in a material sense. With an acuity rare for his time, he pointed to the urgent need for sharing ideas and spiritual values which, if accomplished, can provide people with a coherent view of reality and give maximum meaning to all aspects of their life, resources which can energize human beings into action to bring about a greater unity of humankind.

Teilhard emphasized that the need for reform and reinterpretation exists today in all religious traditions. Religiously speaking, humankind is still living in the far-away past, at a level of development which general human evolution had reached at the time of the Tertiary. For example, certain religious beliefs and practices of the West represent a "paleo-Christianity" that Teilhard wished to see replaced by a "neo-Christianity." Yet no religion is free from fossilized forms today. Generally speaking, Teilhard's inadequately named "road of the East" stands for all past forms of religious "other-worldliness," for any outdated spirituality, whether Eastern or Western. The need for developing an altogether new "road" exists, therefore, in all religious traditions. It is not surprising, then, that Teilhard's reformist approach to Christianity is most akin to that of modernistic thinkers in Eastern religions, whether they are Sri Aurobindo in Hinduism, or Muhammad Iqbal in Islam, or Hu Shih in the Chinese Renaissance.

What ultimately mattered to Teilhard was the transformation of one's own religious heritage so as to reach its central insights and point to a universal level of truth and unity which can be shared by people from different backgrounds. In the 1930s, when a friend discussed the question of conversion with him, he is said to have replied:

> One should never, or almost never, change the religion of one's forefathers. . . . One must always try to carry the past with one, but carry it with greater understanding and deeper revelation.
>
> Perhaps foolishly, I said: "Do you mean if you are a Buddhist or a Hindu you should not become a Christian?"
>
> He hesitated. "Well, I really meant if you are a Christian. But even so, if you were of another religion altogether, it would be better to try to carry its truth with you and transform it if you could, though of course sometimes this might not be possible." (Personal information obtained by the author)

If anything, Teilhard's openness to religions other than his own grew in later years, especially from the mid-1940s onwards. The evidence of his reading notes (*carnets de lecture*) and late diaries (*carnets*) is invaluable here. The latter, in particular, show an ongoing interest

and inquiry into Eastern religions. This increased after his return to the West at the end of the Second World War. Perhaps it was the experience of Western society in the postwar situation of social and cultural turmoil that made him realize the growing need for an open religious quest. Perhaps he then also became more aware than ever before how certain experiences of the East had influenced his own way of thinking.

Contemporary Assessment of Teilhard's Thought on Eastern Religions. Teilhard's references to Eastern religions are insufficient and incomplete, sometimes plainly wrong. But they must not be taken in isolation; their value consists in belonging within the larger context of a relentless search for greater unity: a closer unity of the diversity of humanity, the union of humanity with its divine goal, and also the unity of interdependence of humanity with all creation within the cosmos.

Teilhard was not a thinker in the traditional mold. Though trained in philosophical and theological thinking, his reflections arose out of a deep personal search primarily developed through his very concrete being-in-touch with the tangible—with the soil of the earth, with rocks and stones and bones which he studied as a geologist and paleontologist. Feeling quite literally the dust of the earth, and the rise and rhythm of life through all living forms, made him experience creation as an ongoing process that uplifted him spiritually to ever higher planes.

His discourse is that of a scientist-poet, a visionary realist who was more a mystic than a scholar. He spoke of his total immersion into cosmic and human realities, but such immersion was far from including the religious worlds of the East in their fullness. In speaking about Eastern religions he did not describe them in their own terms or explore their depth dimension with the same attention to detail that he applied to his scientific data. No, he was only interested in answers to some very specific questions as to the destiny and future development of humankind. So often his images are drawn from nature; they are more biological than historical or specifically human. Interested in the organic pattern of growth, the dynamism and direction of movement, he spoke of "the great rivers" of religions, their "currents." It is in the powerful dynamic and direction of these currents that he was interested, in their power to activate and energize humanity on a global scale.

It seems to me misleading to judge Teilhard's references to Eastern religions on their own, as he never set out to systematically study and interpret them. He stated quite clearly that he possessed

no competence in the history of Asiatic thought (TF, 134); instead, he wanted to convey his own reflections, which were developed through personal and scientific contacts with the East, within his overall vision of human evolution.

If Teilhard still lived today, he would have to substantially qualify his statements on Eastern religion, as they remain far too Eurocentric and also remind one of an earlier Christian fulfillment theology developed by Western missionaries who saw all Eastern religious aspirations fulfilled and crowned in Christianity. If people in the West were only interested in Eastern religions in terms of their spiritual contribution to Western development, this would be yet another example of an exploitative stance toward other cultures which are plundered for those resources we need most, irrespective of their own needs. Yet we are beginning to learn, though at considerable cost, that we need to respect the autonomy and intrinsic value of other religions on their own terms without preconceptions and extraneous judgments. In this sense, we are learning to be more truly pluralistic, recognizing the genuine otherness of the other.

Teilhard's thought on Eastern religions and mysticism remains important, not on its own, but within the overall context of a much larger vision whereby Teilhard was looking for the spiritual unity of humanity, for its spiritual pole, and for the important role of religion—all religions—in providing the emerging world society with a soul, in giving all people the necessary energy to develop the spirit of one earth. Here the East is as indispensable as the West!

Religion is implicit in, and interwoven with, the immense cosmic process that is life. For Teilhard, the important points were not the details but the overall general flow of evolution, its dynamic and direction. The human phenomenon in all its amplitude arises in and out of nature but is not coextensive with it; it transcends it. An intrinsic and essential part of the human phenomenon is the phenomenon of religion, spirituality, and mysticism, the very center of which is a mysticism of transformative action and the unitive force of love that unites and binds together all realities throughout the cosmos. It is this inspiring vision of the power and fire of love that is so central to all of Teilhard's thinking, as Trennert-Helwig (1993) has shown in great detail. It is this love as the central force of union which he misses most in Eastern religions, since he could not see it there in the way he understood it, so deeply rooted and linked up with the stuff of the universe, with matter.

Teilhard himself had seen a vast spiritual reality—an overreaching, all-encompassing vision of cosmic and human unity, first at the front of the First World War, then in the deserts of Mongolia

and in China. He found the "sense of evolution, the sense of the species, the sense of the earth, the sense of man" (TF, 202) most acutely developed in the West, but he recognized that many Westerners look for spiritual inspiration and uplift to the East and that West and East need each other.

The ambiguity and ambivalence of many of Teilhard's remarks can hurt; the oppositional mode of his use of "East" and "West" is rather out of keeping with his planetary vision of one earth and one human family. Yet there is no need to harmonize his contradictory views artificially; one has to accept Teilhard for what he is, shaped by a particular background and milieu, but inspired and energized by the mystic's love for God in and through the whole world, all of creation in its cosmic dimensions. That was the "divine milieu" which the visionary mystic saw and praised, but at another level Teilhard might be compared with the sociologist Weber in asking about the origin, nature, and significance of the modern world with its feverish activity and creativity. Where is it going? What is its significance and direction, not primarily in material and economic terms, but in spiritual terms? This question is still with us. It can only be answered by the religious and secular world, East and West together. All religions today face similar questions—questions Teilhard summarized in his essay on "The Spiritual Contribution of the Far East" as "God and his transcendence; the world and its value, the individual and the importance of the person; mankind and social requirements" (TF, 141). In trying to answer these today, the shape of the questions will mean that religions will influence, critique, and mutually enrich each other in a situation of increasing interdependence, encounter, and dialogue without which we cannot develop the urgently needed global "spirit of one earth," for which Teilhard pleaded from the 1930s onwards.

NOTES

1. Initials refer to abbreviations used throughout this issue of *Zygon,* as shown in the key on pp. 7–8.

2. The translation of this excerpt from the *Teilhard de Chardin Album* (TCA), published over ten years before the English translation of the full text of "Le Coeur de la Matierè" (HMA), captures the excitement of his experience much better than the officially published text.

3. He referred more than once to *"terra mater,"* "mother earth," to which he had a very living, physically concrete contact that he missed in some Western theologians, for example in Romano Guardini, as he remarked to Jeanne Mortier (LJM, 89; see also LTS, 285).

4. He was strongly influenced by his eldest brother Albéric, who spent two years in the Far East at the turn of the century, and by his sister Françoise, who went as a missionary to China and died there of smallpox in 1911. For details about other early influences, see King (1980, 37–53).

5. See the description of her work for the Musée Guimet and the Union des Croyants, and of her publications on Eastern religions, in Leroy (1992, 152–55). I have discussed Teilhard's activities in Paris (King 1980, 89–97).

6. His work in association with the Union des Croyants is examined in detail in my article "Teilhard's Association with the World Congress of Faiths" (King 1989, 135–46).

7. See King (1980, 236) for a "Table of Early Writings" which contains such discussions.

8. A "Table of Later Writings," which includes comparative references to Eastern religions, is found in King (1980, 237). A detailed analysis of all of these texts is found in chapters 5, 6 and 7 (King 1980).

9. In *Letters from a Traveller* (LFT), the letter of 25 May 1923 to Abbé Breuil is only given in abbreviated form and does not contain the reference to the spiritual unity of humanity.

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