

ON THE WORKS OF TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

When dealing with questions on anthropology and evolution, one of our Lecturers in the Graduate School cautioned his students against the doctrines of Teilhard de Chardin as being contrary to the Church's doctrine. I later found Teilhard's works, on sale, in one of the leading bookstores in town. This bookstore has a reputation for offering only books which are reliable from the Catholic point of view. I wish to be clarified on the following points: (1) Are the works of Teilhard de Chardin banned by the Church? (2) If not, why should our Lecturer warn us against the doctrines of this author?

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Before answering these questions, an observation concerning the works banned by the Church, or the "Index" of prohibited books, may be in order.

According to a *Notification* of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated June 14, 1966,

"The Index retains its moral force, insofar as it instructs the conscience of the faithful, that they beware of those writings which may endanger faith and good morals; however, it no longer has the force of ecclesiastical law with its appended censures.

"Wherefore, the Church confides in the mature conscience of the faithful, especially of Catholic authors and publishers *and of those who are dedicated to the education of the youth.* She, nevertheless, rests her firmest hope in the watchful solicitude of every Ordinary and of the Conferences of Bishops, whose right and duty is to inspect and forestall pernicious books and, if the matter calls for it, to reprove and condemn

them." (Cfr. *Bol. Ec. de Filipinas, August, 1966, p. 475.* Trans by the Rev. Ralph Salazar of the UST Central Sem.)

With this criterion in mind, we may answer the queries of our interrogator, thus:

1. The works of Teilhard de Chardin have neither been formally banned by the Church, nor have they been included in the "Index." Yet, the following "Monitum," or *Warning*, has been issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office on July 30, 1962:

"There are in circulation certain works of Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, published even after his death, which obtain no mean attention. Intending no judgment on those which pertain to the positive sciences, it is manifest enough that in philosophical and theological matters, the aforesaid works abound with such ambiguities, nay, even grave errors, that they offend Catholic doctrine.

"Wherefore, the Most Eminent and Most Reverend Fathers of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office exhorts all Ordinaries and Superiors of Religious Institutes, Rectors of Seminaries and Presidents of Universities, to efficaciously safeguard the minds, of the youth especially, against the dangers of the works of Father Teilhard de Chardin and his followers." (Cfr. *AAS, 1962, p. 526.* Trans. by the Rev. Ralph Salazar.)

It may be worth noting that this *Warning* was issued shortly before the opening of Vatican II under the pontificate of good Pope John.

Even a perfunctory reading will indicate a clear distinction in this document with regard to the works of Teilhard, the positive sciences, such as anthropology or paleology, and his doctrines on philosophical and theological matters.

a. No judgment is passed (*praetermisso iudicio*) pro or con about Teilhard's teaching on the positive sciences. In this field, while some scholars claim a real validity to current views on the aforesaid matters, about anthropology and evolution in particular, other scientists, on the other hand, contend that such claims do not go beyond the limit of mere, so far, undemonstrated theories. The fact remains, however, that the natural sciences fall within the legitimate competence of the human mind, and beyond the jurisdiction of the Church when the field of Christian faith and life is not adversely affected by their investigations.

b. Conversely, in matters philosophical and theological, the teachings of Teilhard de Chardin are denounced by the Sacred Congregation as downright plagued with "such ambiguities, nay, even grave errors, that they offend Catholic doctrine." In the face of this serious pronouncement, Catholic scholars and professors who accept the divine authority of the Church to teach and to guide consciences, should accept the Church's admonition in the exercise of their teaching profession.

2. From the foregoing statements, our questioner may obtain the answer to the second part of his query. The warning given by the Lecturer in the Graduate School was not uncalled for. In calling the attention of his students against the dangers of Teilhard's works, he has shown himself a responsible Catholic and his lectures on this point are perfectly in line with the directives of the Church.

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