

Teilhard's Unity of Knowledge

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Two years ago - together with another Jesuit (James Salmon) - I directed a Symposium at Georgetown University titled "Teilhard and the Unity of Knowledge." We chose the title and the theme because they best told of our appreciation of Teilhard. That is, Teilhard had given us the context in which our knowledge of science, our sensitivity to human relationships, and our sense for God could become mutually coherent. He had provided a unity for the things we knew. We were also aware that a number of scholars in different fields had found in Teilhard a significant context in which they could situate their own work. We invited a number of these to speak.' But though I organized the Symposium, I have not previously had the occasion to address the issue.

I. Evolution as a Context for all Knowledge

(a) Evolution as Organic

Any effort at unifying knowledge probably requires a unifying theme. For Teilhard this unifying theme was evolution. He writes that the idea of evolution germinated within him when he was about thirty years old. It began haunting his thoughts like a tune. He experienced evolution like "an unsatisfied hunger, like a promise held out to me, like a summons to be answered" (HM, 25). Soon he began full-time studies in geology and what is now known as paleo-biology; for such studies evolution easily served as a unifying theme. But eventually Teilhard would extend evolution beyond science to identify it as a "general condition of all knowledge" (AM, 211). He would claim "All the fields of knowledge" have been transformed by evolution. It is not just a theory or a hypothesis,

It is a general condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must bow and which they must henceforward satisfy if they are to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow (P, 219) evolution has finally invaded everything ... all nuclear physics, all astral physics, all chemistry are in their manner `evolutionary.' And the whole history of civilization and ideas is at least as much so (V, 246).