

Mysticism and Contemporary Society

Some Teilhardian Reflections

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We are pleased to reprint from Contemporary Spiritualities, C. & J. Erricker, eds. (New York: Continuum, 2001) with permission this paper by University of Bristol theologian and Teilhardian scholar Ursula King. In an introduction to the book, Ewert Cousins, Fordham theologian and former ATA president, said Prof. King's essay was the best he had seen on the subject.

Introduction

As a fervent Christian mystic and prolific religious writer, the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin had much to say about spirituality in the contemporary world. When alive, he was best known as a distinguished scientist of human origins, but since his death in 1955 it is above all the large body of his posthumously published religious writings which have attracted worldwide attention. Teilhard de Chardin not only reflected with audacious courage on the contemporary meaning of the Christian gospel, but also on the significance of religious pluralism and interfaith encounter in a world shaped by modern science and technology. His works convey a vibrant spirituality linking the insights of science, religion and mysticism.

Religion as the deepest source of human energy and meaning is one of the central themes of his thought. According to him, religion has held a central place in human evolution and will hold such a place in the future development of the human community, for he sees the entire world involved in a process of spiritual transformation linked to the rise of consciousness and the spirit. What he calls the "mystical sense" of human beings—a fundamental quest for oneness and unification—is now assuming global and planetary dimensions because the "mystical temperature" is rising to the same extent that human consciousness and self-reflection are growing. Teilhard de Chardin has rightly been called a "global prophet" whose ideas are widely referred to all over the world, not only in books and discussions but today also on the internet.

Already in 1937 he had written an important essay on "The