

In Good Company: The Body and Divinization in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ and Daoist Xiao Yingsou. By Bede Benjamin Bidlack. East Asian Comparative Literature and Culture. Boston: Brill, 2015. Pp. xviii + 236. \$135.

Unlike many of his contemporaries who viewed the human body as an obstacle to holiness, Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin sees the body not only as a non-dualistic conductor of religious experience but also as a vital fragment of a vividly interconnected cosmos. Yet, he is silent about the fate of the human body after death. This is not surprising since the word body usually connotes the material body which clearly suffers decay. Although Teilhard envisions individual bodies in the process of forming the Body of the Cosmic Christ, he is unable to communicate his sense of the nature of the resurrected body.

In this volume Bidlack attempts to make explicit what is implicit in Teilhard, to offer him language and concepts that are consistent with his thinking. He engages Teilhard in a dialogue with thirteenth-century Daoist Xiao Yingsou, attempting to expand and enhance Teilhard's concept of the divinized body, particularly the body that persists beyond death.

Sensitive to their extreme differences in culture, cosmology, language, and spiritual sensibilities, B. prepares the stage by providing considerable philosophical and theological context for each conversation partner. For Xiao, he reviews the history of Daoism with particular emphasis on the practice of external and internal alchemy; for Teilhard, he reviews the thought of theologians and philosophers who have influenced him, beginning with scriptural references from John and Paul and ending with works of Henri Bergson and Maurice Blondel. Only after distinguishing the vast differences between these theologians is a constructive and creative dialogue possible.

The key to the success of B.'s dialogue lies in two components of Xiao's work: his three descriptors for the human body and his beautifully rendered image, *Mountain Diagram*, which lends visual insight to the practice of internal alchemy. The image provides a graphic description of the pathways of *qi* (energy) through the body of the Daoist practitioner and allows one to sense not only the differences among the three terms for the body: *dong*—the material body (the scaffolding), *ti*—the cosmic body (the borderless body that is continuous with the entire universe), and *shen*—the experiencing body (the psychological body) but also their interconnection within the person (147).

Although separated by more than six centuries and very different cosmologies, Xiao and Teilhard share interesting insights about the cosmic body. In particular, Xiao advises the Daoist practitioner to form within his or her body a community among its organs, to enhance the circulation of *qi* throughout the body, and in this way to connect to the cosmos of which the body is a microcosm; Teilhard instead plunges into the cosmic evolutionary history of his body and, as a result, knows himself as interconnected with all of creation. Yet Teilhard fails to articulate the nature of the human body after death.

B. is to be congratulated for noticing the consonance between Xiao and Teilhard and for suggesting that Teilhard could have found richer language for the body. For

instance, Xiao's use of *shen*, the experiencing body, offers a way of thinking about the body after death that not only avoids dualism but also preserves the body's individuality and intersubjectivity. Reading the stories of the resurrection of Jesus and Teilhard's portrayal of the Cosmic Christ side by side with Xiao's *Mountain Diagram* as well as his depiction of the tripartite body definitely stimulates new ways of thinking about resurrection and Teilhard's Cosmic Christ. Possibly Teilhard saw this too but was unable to articulate it because of the paucity of language to convey this concept.

For those unfamiliar with the complexities of Chinese thought, B.'s book is challenging, especially chapters 3 and 4, where he presents Daoist concepts of the body in elaborate detail. On the other hand, for anyone interested in delving more deeply into Xiao's thought, B. makes available several resources: a translation of Xiao's commentary on internal alchemical practice, *Inner Meaning of the Scripture of Salvation*, a comprehensive analysis of each element of the *Mountain Diagram*, a glossary of Chinese terms, and a 15-page bibliography. Fifteen illustrations as well as Chinese characters for titles and key expressions create an appropriate atmosphere for the dialogue.

This book definitely contributes to Teilhard scholarship. The connections B. makes between the Daoist body and the Teilhardian body are brilliantly mined giving a depth and richness to Teilhard's Cosmic Christ. This work encourages further activity in comparative theology and illustrates the power of constructive interfaith dialogue to broaden our theological categories.

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Zen and the Unspeakable God. By Jason N. Blum. Comparative Interpretations of Mystical Experience. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University, 2015. Pp. x + 190. \$74.95.

In this volume Blum challenges scholars to reevaluate how they think about mystical experience, encouraging them to forsake hermeneutical strategies that privilege methodology over content, and proposing an alternative account that foregrounds the mystical experience of the individual. The title may lead potential readers to believe that this is one more contribution to the thriving field of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, perhaps exploring Zen's notion of *satori* and the limits of Christian discourse about the divine. What B. sets out to accomplish, however, is even more ambitious: he highlights the limitations of the contextualist approach to the study of mysticism and calls us to pay closer attention to the mystic's own claim about mystical experience. The actual thrust of the book's argument might have been illustrated better by a different title, such as *Beyond Contextualism: Towards a New Hermeneutic of Mystical Phenomena*.

B. starts chapter 1 by outlining the contested role that context plays in contemporary debates about mystical experience (13–15) and focuses on the work of Steven Katz, whose writings on mystical phenomena “largely initiated the epistemological