

# The Theology of Teilhard de Chardin

J. STAFFORD WRIGHT

---

THE PUBLICATION in 1959 of *The Phenomenon of Man* was the start of the phenomenon of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Nothing comparable has happened in the world of theology since theology first began, and one cannot think of anything similar in literature as a whole. Here was a Jesuit priest who died in 1955, virtually unknown except in the restricted circles of palaeontology. In his lifetime he had spoken of his ideas, which were regarded by his superiors in the Jesuit Order as rather too risky to be published in book form. The manuscripts were there, some ready for publication, but Teilhard loyally observed the ban.

At his death the dam burst, and first *Le Phénomène Humain* appeared, written during the War, and then, after two mostly scientific books, *Le Milieu Divin*, actually written as early as 1926-1927. The publication of these two books in English in 1959 and 1960 kindled a fire of interest in Teilhard and his approach to the Christian faith. Within a year or two a society was formed for the study of his ideas, and every barrel was scraped to produce all his major and minor writings in printed form. At the time of writing there are some twenty books available, all published in Britain by Collins, with the single exception of a few of his essays, in a different translation from those in the Collins editions, in a rather unusual collection of writers in *The Wind and the Rain*, edited by Neville Braybrooke as an Easter Book for 1962, and published by Secker and Warburg. In addition paperbacks and hardbacks by Christian enthusiasts took pains to explain the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, and to suggest or remove problems created by his basic ideas, Teilhard being no longer alive to answer objectors himself. The nearest approach to his own answers is in the selection from his writings entitled *Let Me Explain*, arranged by Jean-Pierre Demoulin (1966 and 1970).

The inevitable happened, as always. The professionals came in on both sides. On the one side were those who expounded Teilhard as a

good Christian thinker. On the other side were those who found him in error, or at the best a danger to the unwary. Generally it was necessary to play the old game of quoting or summarising what an author says, and then continuing the argument by 'if he says *this*, he must mean *that*', even though the author has indicated that he does not hold *that*. Teilhard was particularly vulnerable to this type of treatment, for, as he wrote in *How I Believe* in 1934, 'The originality of my belief lies in its being rooted in two domains of life which are commonly regarded as antagonistic. By upbringing and intellectual training, I belong to the "children of heaven"; but by temperament, and by my professional studies, I am a "child of the earth" . . . I have allowed two apparently conflicting influences full freedom to react upon one another deep within me'.

### *Teilhard's life*

IN order to understand this statement, one must look briefly at Teilhard's life. His upbringing, which made him a child of heaven, can be stated simply. He was born in 1881, the fourth of eleven children, with a good family background. After passing through a Jesuit college near Lyons, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1899, although he was not ordained until 1911, surprisingly enough in Hastings. There cannot be many ordinands who have gone forward to ordination with the resolution to devote themselves to the study of fossils, but Teilhard had already immersed himself in the study of rocks in the Channel Islands and in Sussex.

Further studies in Paris were interrupted by World War I, and Teilhard enlisted as a corporal in the medical corps. He distinguished himself in the front line, and was awarded the Legion of Honour. After the war he held the post of Professor of Geology at the Catholic Institute in Paris, but, falling under suspicion through certain of his views, he was pressed to join a fellow Jesuit in an expedition to eastern Mongolia, and from 1923 until 1946 he was engaged for most of the time in field work in various parts of the world. In China a team of Chinese students, whom he had trained, discovered the skull of 'Pekin Man'. He also worked in India, Java, and Africa. First hand accounts of these years may be read in Teilhard's *Letters from a Traveller, 1923-1955* and George Barbour's *In the Field with Teilhard de Chardin* (Herder 1965). During the Second World War he was interned in Peking, and during this time he wrote *The Phenomenon of Man*.

So we have Teilhard the very earthy expert, lecturer and writer in palaeontology, a man of worldwide fame in his subject. Less well known was Teilhard the Christian thinker, whose thoughts in manuscript were privately circulated among priests and students. It is with

Teilhard the Christian thinker that this article is concerned.

One interesting thing is that Teilhard rarely goes out of his way to mention other thinkers, although his Jesuit training must have included a study of the leading philosophies of the past and present. In a sense he was an original thinker, and he regarded himself as this. His friendship with Sir Julian Huxley showed that both had arrived at very similar conclusions through their study of life, but Teilhard had the advantage, or should one say the problem, of revelation, which inevitably guided his interpretation of the facts. Nonetheless it was Huxley author of the striking *Religion without Revelation*, who wrote the long and appreciative introduction to the English edition of *The Phenomenon of Man*.

At this point we must realise that there were three Teilhards. We have looked briefly at Teilhard the Scientist. The second Teilhard was a Scientist-Theologian, who wrote *The Phenomenon of Man*, *The Future of Man*, and *Science and Christ*. The third Teilhard gave us the remarkable mystical books, *Le Milieu Divin* and *Hymn of the Universe*. Although one knows of Christians who have had their faith restored by the second Teilhard, there are others, including the writer of this article, who came to Teilhard the third without being much concerned with the other two. Clearly, however, in his own mind and experience Teilhard was one, and not three.

### *Scientist-Theologian*

WE must describe Teilhard in this order, not as Theologian-Scientist. Certainly, as a fully trained and loyal Jesuit, so loyal that he faced the ban on the publication of his ideas without rebellion, he never wavered in his allegiance to the Christian faith. Yet it was evolution that fired his personal faith, and those who have found their own faith restored or strengthened by *The Phenomenon of Man* were probably those who had felt that the ideas of Darwin had removed God from the universe.

It is not easy to set out Teilhard's approach in simple terms. He himself wrestled to find suitable expressions, and had no hesitation in coining illustrative words. A theological scheme that cannot be expounded in simple terms is of little value except to a limited circle of scholars. Hence we shall do our best to pick out the essentials and reduce them to an outline that would represent Teilhard's position.

The scientist observes phenomena, and is concerned with material things as they are now and how they came to be as they are. This was Teilhard's quest. Man is the most advanced phenomenon in existence, in the sense that he has a capacity for reason and ideals that no other animal possesses. If, like Teilhard, we trace man back through the millennia of evolutionary process, we dive through the animal world,

through the beginnings of rudimentary forms of livingness, to the world of 'mineral'. The evolutionist believes that the chain is unbroken, even if many links are still hypotheses. This, at least, is what Teilhard held.

In following up his ideas, we realise that he worked on a broad canvas. He is not dealing with Mr. Jones, or an individual dinosaur, or single atoms, but with various successive group states. We need not quarrel with him over this, since most of us do the same when we look at God's hand in history. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is perfectly correct in declaring that God rewards the righteous and punishes the ungodly in this life, but we see this, not by looking at Job or Manasseh, but by observing how cruel, overambitious and immoral nations and their rulers sow the seed of their own destruction, while a nation that wants to have general internal stability must observe the basic laws of God.

Working on a similar broad canvas, Teilhard detected a movement in the created order, leading to fresh irreversible manifestations which enhanced the efficiency of the whole. The original period of existence was wholly inorganic. One may refer to it as the *geosphere*. Out of this emerged plant and animal life, adding what Teilhard called the *biosphere* to total existence. The appearance of man added the new dimension of mind, the *noosphere*.

These ideas are obvious to all evolutionists. To some they exclude the concept of God, since all can be built up through natural cause and effect, and through response to the environment. However, a believer in God may conclude that the purposeful world-as-it-is shows the existence of a purposeful Mind, who chose to create by the slow process of evolution rather than through the direct formation of the world and all that is in it. Paley's deduction of the existence of a watchmaker from the apparent purposefulness of a watch may still hold good, even though the watch came together in stages. Others see the universe as the unfolding of 'God', who attains personality only in personal beings, thus giving us the various expressions of Pantheism.

What, then, does Teilhard believe? As an observer of phenomena he sees that the created order has gradually produced a highly acute consciousness in mankind. May we not conclude then that there was incipient consciousness in the basic creation, following the new realisation that there is no such thing as inert blocks of matter? Incipient consciousness moved to groupings of ever greater complexity in order to find fuller expression. It is hard to believe that this movement could be entirely a hit-or-miss groping. But, if the movement comes from a Creator, how does this Creator God operate? Teilhard sees no evidence for repeated acts of creation that would break in on the steady unfolding of the original. But he does not accept the Deist idea of a God who has made such an effective machine that he can let it run on without disturbing Himself. To Teilhard God is not iden-

tifiable with the energy in the atom, but He is of His own will involved in the world of matter. In other words, Teilhard holds a belief in the immanence of God in a way that he distinguishes from pantheism. Pantheism is a total identification of God with the universe, so that, if the universe were to be blotted out, there would be no God left. Immanence means that God is involved in all that He has created, but exists in His own right, so that He is in no sense dependent on the universe for His existence.

This involvement of God is expressed in three New Testament texts, which illuminated Teilhard's attempts to bring together scientific observation and the Christian faith. 'In Him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28); 'In Him (Christ) all things hold together' (Col. 1:17); 'Upholding the universe by His (Christ's) word of power' (Heb. 1:3). At the very least a Christian must say that matter continues to be the expression of God in Christ, inasmuch as He is the continuing source of its existence. This is a sound Christian doctrine, which becomes a distortion only if it is detached from the further revelation of God as transcendent and personal. Teilhard's mystical writings and his prayers show that he did not pray to a life force of God upholding matter but to God who is personal in Himself.

We look back with Teilhard on the unfolding purpose of the past, but what of the future? Scientific observation suggests that the developed consciousness in mankind is now capable of actually planning and directing the next step in evolution. This is the bringing together of the diverse races and cultures into harmonious relationship. It would seem to observation that evolution could go no higher, and that this state is a kind of magnet that has drawn from the beginning. It is the final destiny of the created order, the point Teilhard calls Point Omega.

The Christian has knowledge that goes beyond observation. To him Point Omega is the state in which God has become all in all, and this state is identified with the full maturity of the living body of Christ. In his essay in chapter 10 of *Science and Christ* Teilhard writes, 'Christ occupies for us, here and now, so far as his position and *function* are concerned, the place of the point Omega'. Obviously one asks about the Parousia, or Second Coming. Teilhard's mind is open about this, but in an essay, *Trois choses que je vois*, he gives what clearly he believes, namely that Christ may defer his return 'until the human community has realised to the full its *natural* potentialities, and thereby becomes qualified to receive through him its supernatural consummation. Indeed, if the historical development of spirit is bound by definite physical rules, must not this be equally the case—a *fortiori*, even—where its further unfolding and completion are concerned?' (Quoted by Wildiers in *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, p. 141).

Teilhard must now avoid the trap into which others have fallen when they have accepted the concept of the Cosmic Christ. Why, in

fact, do we need the incarnation at all, since the Christ Spirit is already at work in the world, and is specially at work in the great founders of world religions? There seems to be no answer from the realm of science, but Teilhard accepts God's revelation, and embraces the once-for-all unique incarnation of God the Son. Indeed he sees the necessity of it, whether or not man had sinned—a crux of division in medieval thinking—since God must become completely involved in the material order which is working out the purpose for which He created it.

In fact we must add another level to the natural development. The coming of man introduced the level of anthropogenesis; the coming of Christ introduced Christogenesis. Already He was the centre of the universe as the upholder of its existence. Now He has involved Himself in an evolved material body, which includes much more than we commonly think of as body. He founded His church at a definite point of historical time, and has continued to be the centre of life for this church in a fuller way than as the upholder of the universe. Non-Christians will continue to evolve towards a unity of love, but an act of faith declares that they will attain their Point Omega only by coming into the Body of Christ. This may be an over-simplification, but it probably represents the kernel of Teilhard's many pages of writing.

### *Some objections*

Teilhard's scheme makes good sense, but he is open to certain objections.

1. His wholesale acceptance of evolution. As a personal opinion, which many other conservatives do not share, I would accept that the opening chapters of Genesis could be interpreted in a Teilhardian sense. God causes one thing to emerge out of another, making water and earth creative. In Genesis 1 man is not originated from earth and water, but the more detailed description in chapter 2 shows his origin from clay, which is earth and water. It would seem that Teilhard was not greatly concerned with linking his theories to the Genesis record, and the verdict of Joseph Kopp covers what little he actually wrote; 'The question of "our first parents" is, according to Teilhard, an idle one from the scientific point of view' (*Teilhard de Chardin Explained*, p. 44).

Suppose, now, that scientists become dissatisfied with what we might call total evolution. At the moment there is some movement in this direction. To the average person, who sees the marvellous nature films on TV, total evolution becomes harder and harder to accept, and a more literal interpretation of Genesis seems more likely. This would involve several creative acts of God, which in each case produced a large number of 'basic' kinds, each of which had the capacity to

develop in response to its environment. If one accepts an initial creation of matter, further creations of fresh orders of being would come as each previous stage was sufficiently prepared to receive them. Thus, instead of a single primal insect or bird, God would have created a wide range of insects and all types of birds, ranging from hawks to humming birds, each capable of development within its family. This would certainly fit the actual, as opposed to the hypothetical, fossil evidence. One must not forget that total evolution has to assume that a male and female fresh type emerged at the same time and the same place in order for the new order to be perpetuated, and it is doubtful whether the time scale permits the development of the world-as-it-is by hit-or-miss experiments.

The common opinion is that this would overthrow Teilhard's philosophy completely, for Teilhard regarded it as essential that God should not intervene anywhere in His own work of creation. Yet surely the incarnation was one such intervention, since evolving matter did not produce the God-Man. One imagines also that Teilhard believed in miracles on the authority of the Bible, and, although some of these, like the damming of the Jordan, are no more than miracles of synchronisation and capable of scientific explanation, others, such as raising from the dead, certainly seem to involve direct divine intervention. What we are trying to do is to see whether the Teilhardian concepts can be salvaged if total evolution proved not to be a fact. One could say that the material universe is carried on to full development through the upholding immanence of God, but that each level can only go so far without a graft of a different order. In other words there is a Point Omega for the non-living, a Point Omega for the plant world, and a Point Omega for the animals. Each new step starts with grafts of forms of existence which share the 'life' of already existing matter, but which carry it on in a whole variety of ways. One can, I believe, see this as conserving what Teilhard wished to find in matter as the manifestation of the living God.

2. The problem of evil. Every writer on Teilhard recognises a great weakness here. Teilhard not only suffered from the human desire to produce a solid theory, even if it meant overlooking some points which others regard as important, but he suffered from sheer goodness of heart. The latter enabled him to get on with all sorts and conditions, including atheists and agnostics, and to believe that the human race would henceforward direct its course towards social and inter-racial harmony. One's impression is that he would like to have overlooked evil, and the idea of the Fall was a difficult hurdle. As a scientific thinker he held that the quests and struggles of an evolving universe inevitably involve the evils of pain, suffering, death, and disaster. Man, when he emerges, not only becomes involved in these physical evils, but finds that his advance involves deliberate choices of Yes and No, which become for him the source of moral evil.

One can introduce the idea of the Fall only by declaring that man, under God, had the possibility of always saying Yes to the right choice from the beginning.

There is no doubt that Teilhard held fast to the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ on the cross, and his mystical writings show this. But he was continually drawn to redemption on a cosmic scale, whereby the disorders of the whole structure of things are reduced to order in Christ. There is no doubt that he is here reflecting the magnificent statements in Ephesians and Colossians of the universal scope of the atonement (Eph. 1:9,10; Col. 1:20), even though his concept of the universe was somewhat different from Paul's.

3. The knowledge of God. Teilhard denies that his belief is pantheism, but, as we shall see when we look at his mystical writings, he found God in and through the material order. This, of course, was not limited to his times of personal devotion, but meant the contact with Christ in the common things of life, after the pattern of what appears in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats; 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Matt. 25:40). Also he naturally found God in his work in the field. There are two dangers here into which Teilhard might have fallen. One is to regard it as sufficient to be outgoing to all one's neighbours in the manner of the good humanist. Teilhard's charity and love, with all its natural elements, centred in Christ. The other danger is the sole belief in God as the ground of one's being. Teilhard as much as anyone believed in God as the ground of the being of every single thing, but he equally believed in the revelation of our personal Father in heaven. Teilhard certainly found strength and comfort in the orthodox revelation of the Christian faith, and even though a few points of what the Bible says did not fit easily into his scheme, he firmly adhered to the revealed doctrine of the Triune God.

4. Roman Catholicism. In reading his writings it is easy to forget that Teilhard was a Roman Catholic, and there were evidently times when he forgot it too. Thus Robert Speaight's *Biography of Teilhard de Chardin* quotes Teilhard as saying about apparent enemies of the faith whom he encountered, 'Labelled as enemies, we at once recognised that we were brothers. And why? Simply because all we were trying to do, on either side, was to magnify and unify the earth' (p. 265). Obviously he sometimes speaks as a Roman, but it is not too difficult to distil out what belongs to all Christians. Since his works have circulated widely among Christians of all denominations, it is obvious that their distinctively Roman expression is at a minimum. Indeed it has been said that he is more widely read by Protestants than by Roman Catholics.



*The Mystic*

IF we did not have the mystical and devotional writings of Teilhard, we might have treated him as a theologian of the head. We might indeed have wondered exactly how he worked out his theories in practice. With these other writings before us, we can see the consistency of head and heart. At the same time it is not necessary to have read *The Phenomenon of Man*, nor to be a total evolutionist, in order to find real help from *Le Milieu Divin* and *Hymn of the Universe*. What is important is that one should be drawn to the Teilhardian type of mysticism.

There are several types of experience that shelter under the umbrella of mysticism. A modern craze is for what might be termed Psychic Mysticism. This can be cultivated through certain drugs or through exercises of the yoga type or through such things as Transcendental Meditation. This mysticism is a flight from the senses, but remains in the opened inner world of the one who experiences. It is sub-Christian, since it does not break through to the personal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The experience is not concerned with God in any real sense, but it produces a sense of oneness with the universe. A small proportion of ordinary people, Christian and non-Christian, including the present writer, have had a momentary flash of what has been called Cosmic Consciousness, which has come spontaneously, and which for a few seconds gives one the *knowledge*, not simply the theory, of the universal oneness. The already convinced Christian sees that the all cannot be separated from God, but for the agnostic, like Richard Jefferies, who has described his experience in *The Story of My Heart*, there is no breakthrough from nature to God. The discussion of this psychic mysticism does not belong to this article.

If we define mysticism as the way to the personal apprehension (not comprehension) of God and of realised union with Him, we must not play down the experience of the simplest Christian, especially one who has had a sudden conversion. When he says that God has become real to him, he is speaking the truth. Devout Christians have often treated the experience as wholly spiritual, but equally psychologists have tended to explain everything in psychological terms. If the God of the Bible is real, then it is to be expected that a converted person can know Him, and many converts have an acute awareness of Him. The purpose of prayer and Bible reading is to deepen the awareness as well as to obtain practical help for life and thought.

Normally mysticism is treated as something deeper, and there are two differing approaches to it. The more usual, among Catholics and Protestants, is to shed the world in the interest of the spirit. This has been the standard Evangelical approach, and it makes good sense. The other approach is via the body and the senses, embracing life wholeheartedly. This second approach has probably never been

presented to Christians more deeply than it has been in Teilhard's writings.

It is even harder to write simply of Teilhard's mysticism than it has been to write of his scientific theology. He addresses God as transcendent and above, but his conversation and meditation concerns the communion with God who is '*diaphanous*' in the created order, and who may be experienced as diaphanous, or shining through. This is all very well when everything comes our way, when, like Robert Browning's Pippa, we can sing, 'God's in his heaven, All's right with the world'. Teilhard moves in this climate in the first part of *Le Milieu*, which he calls, 'The Divinisation of our Activities'. He states and works out a syllogism: At the heart of our universe, each soul exists for God, in Our Lord. But all reality, even material reality, around each one of us, exists for our souls. Hence, all sensible reality, around each one of us, exists, through our souls, for God in Our Lord.

Teilhard does not find any barrier between natural and supernatural. 'Any increase that I can bring upon myself or upon things is translated into some increase in my power to love and some progress in Christ's blessed hold upon the universe' (p. 35). Teilhard is saying the same as George Herbert in 'Teach me, my God and King, In all things Thee to see', but he works out the concept at greater depth. In using the world and its day by day life the Christian enjoys attachment, but there is also detachment if he is to advance. Teilhard uses the analogy of the craftsman, who 'must learn continually to jettison the form which his labour or art or thought first took, and go in search of new forms' (p. 45).

But what happens when we cannot take the initiative, but find that things are done to us? In the second part of the book Teilhard writes of 'The Divinisation of our Passivities', or of what he calls our *diminishments*, the darkness that so often blocks our way. Insofar as this comes as a result of our own sin, we must repent. Insofar as the evil can be resisted, evolution under God moves both Christians and non-Christians to resist and expel it. What remains may, as many people find, be accepted with resignation. For Teilhard it must be embraced with more than resignation, namely wholeheartedly as a fresh occasion for finding God.

In the next chapter, 'On Christian Asceticism', the use of matter in a positive way leads to two interesting sentences on p. 91. 'Of its nature, and as a result of original sin, it is true that it (i.e. matter) represents a perpetual impulse towards failure. But by nature too, and as a result of the Incarnation, it contains the spur or the allurements to be our accomplice towards heightened being, and this counterbalances and even dominates the *fomes peccati* (i.e. root tendency to sin).'

The final two chapters, 'The Divine Milieu' and 'In Expectation of the Parousia' work out the themes of the individual Christian, and of the corporate body of the Church and the world, with charity-love as

the bond of advance. In a section 'The outer darkness and the lost souls' Teilhard's evolutionary optimism has to face the Scriptural revelation. 'In the course of the spiritual evolution of the world, certain conscious elements in it, certain monads, deliberately detached themselves from the mass that is stimulated by Your attraction. Evil has become incarnate in them, has been "substantialised" in them. . . . That separated whole constitutes a definitive loss, an immortal wastage from the genesis of the world.' Teilhard refuses to consider who will be damned. He says to God, 'I shall accept the existence of hell on Your word, as a structural element in the universe, and I shall pray and meditate until that awe-inspiring thing appears to me as a strengthening and even blessed complement to the vision of Your omnipresence which you have opened out to me' (p. 141). How typically Teilhardian!

Before considering the other book, we may comment on *Le Milieu*. Teilhard was a man of complete devotion, and what he writes is applicable to Christians of similar dedication. For others his words could be dangerous, especially for those who are in easy circumstances. We go into the country and let nature speak to us of God. In daily life it is all too easy to persuade ourselves that we are doing things for Christ's sake, although in fact we are acting simply in the spirit of the good humanist. Teilhard wrote of finding God and enjoying Him in every situation. This is no substitute for prayer and the Bible. Indeed prayer and the Bible are the foundations on which the Teilhardian emphasis must rest. But prayer and the Bible are not concerned only with the spiritual. They have at their centre and apex the Cosmic Christ, who is upholding all things and all people in existence.

Teilhard's *Hymn of the Universe* contains a supplement to all of his thinking in the various *Pensées*, which have been selected from his published and unpublished writings. Probably they do not add anything essentially new to the admittedly inadequate summary in this article. But in the first part of the book we have Teilhard's enjoyment of the Mass in the sort of setting with which we have become familiar. Even if we do not accept his belief in transubstantiation, we can, if we wish, find some link with Series 2 and 3, in which the death on the cross is opened out to include the creation and the cosmic activity of Christ. Teilhard's joyful meditation flows from the entry of Christ into the host and the chalice, to be received by Teilhard, the priest as Spirit-matter. In 'vision' he sees the host expanding to fill the world, giving life and purification everywhere. Evangelicals also value the sacraments as making material substances the vehicles of divine truth, although admittedly some have not wanted to exchange what they have experienced as direct spiritual contact for experience through material symbols. In fact it is not so much an exchange as a supplement, recognising that God would not have given us the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, unless material substance

and material acts could help towards an appreciation of greater realities. One must, however, admit the other possibility, which for some Christians is the reality, that the total experience comes by itself, and the sacrament of the bread and wine is a simple declaration that the experience has happened.

The other chapter in the book is 'The Spiritual Power of Matter'. This was written in 1919, but the remarkable thing about Teilhard is that he arrived at the maturity of his understanding of the universe at an early stage, and admitted at the end of his life that he still held to the same conclusions. This essay is based in a rather obscure way on the catching up of Elijah to heaven, but it is one of the strongest pieces of Teilhardian devotional theology that one meets anywhere. The chapter concludes with a Hymn to Matter. 'Without you, without your onslaughts, without your uprootings of us, we should remain all our lives inert, stagnant, puerile, ignorant both of ourselves and of God. You who batter us and then dress our wounds, you who resist us and yield to us, you who wreck and build, you who shackle and liberate, the sap of our souls, the hand of God, the flesh of Christ: it is you, matter, that I bless' (p. 69).

### *An assessment*

RECOGNISING that some are drawn towards transcendence and others towards immanence, we accept Teilhard as an example of the second. It is only too easy to search for God in the book of nature without also reading the book of the Bible. Many immanentists have thereby lost their way in a world soul. Teilhard had two ways of escaping this trap. Scripture taught him the transcendence of God, and his attitude to matter kept him from the lure of eastern religions with their attainment of perfection through withdrawal from the things of the senses. Although the Bible lays more stress on transcendence than on immanence, it says sufficient about immanence for Teilhard to make it his theme. The result is that he sets out a way of thought and experience that appeals to some types of Christian mind, although it is doubtful whether he could ever have swayed an evangelistic meeting.

We have already noted how hard he found it to fit the Fall into his theology, even though he did not reject it as an article of belief, but left it as an unresolved problem. One further criticism is his failure to make explicit, though it is there implicitly, the difference between the immanence of God in all creation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian and the Christian church. Immanentists have bedevilled the issue by quoting what is said uniquely of the Holy Spirit coming into and indwelling the Christian as though it applied to everyone.

We note one or two recent developments that would have pleased

Teilhard. Everywhere there is increasing concern for the well-being of all the peoples of the world. This is far from being confined to Christians, and Teilhard would have hailed it as the guided evolution towards Point Omega. On the other hand one still dreads the seething mass of self-centred concern that keeps breaking out to crack the veneer of civilisation. The other development is the increasing emphasis on the body as the vehicle of the spiritual. Thus we have the kiss of peace or its equivalent in the communion service. Bodily postures become significant, so that in prayer it is normal now to find Christians lifting up their hands or spreading them out to receive God's answer. At a recent conference of young people at Taizé a reporter spoke of love-making in the church, though, such is our TV-moulded outlook, her readers thought she was referring to what is commonly known as 'sex'. Here again the Bible saves the Christian from the misuse of physical relationships in the form of sex acts that formed the heart of Canaanite religious worship and that today are often integrated into the love-ins of those who are looking for real experience outside the formalities of society.

### *Teilhard and Anglicanism*

IT would be easier to relate Teilhard to Quakerism than to Anglicanism, since Quakers take more readily to God as immanent. In this article we have indicated a few points of contact and divergence. First, there are a limited number of Anglicans who find more help in immanence than in transcendence, say, after the manner of Wordsworth. Teilhard's approach naturally appeals to them. Yet Teilhard was able to move more easily to transcendence than some theologians who emphasise God as the ground of our being. This balance is hard to achieve.

Anglican services, and indeed all forms of public worship, are based on transcendence, and it would be difficult to devise a Church service centring round immanence. Yet there is room for hymns which open up the concept of God's inner presence, apart from the new work of the Holy Spirit. Such hymns include 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind', 'Immortal love, for ever full', both by Whittier, and the hymn which people love or dislike, 'Immortal, invisible'. Such hymns draw us into the mystery and feeling of God's total presence and work.

Secondly, we noticed the place that Series 2 and 3 give to the centrality of Christ in creation. Teilhard would find this, and approve of it, in the Roman canon of the mass. It undoubtedly opens up an aspect that is missing in Cranmer's service. It may be argued that the Lord's Supper should centre entirely upon the atoning death on the cross, but those who use the new Series without too much prejudice may find their thoughts and their worship stimulated by deliberately travelling with the Cosmic Christ through creation to His incarnation, death, resurrec-

tion, and second coming.

Thirdly, we saw that Teilhard accepted the incoming of the Holy Spirit implicitly, but did not incorporate it clearly in his thinking. One doubts whether he would have been impressed by the Charismatic Movement, and indeed he might have seen it as an attempt to get quick experiences rather than finding God and charity-love in the things of daily life. Whether such a distinction is true or false, one must make a distinction between the manner in which God upholds all creation and the manner in which by His Holy Spirit He fills His church.

Fourthly, we have seen how Teilhard would have welcomed all movements towards church union, although one suspects that he would have been impatient with conferences and synods to 'fix the rules', and would have had more sympathy with the realisation of 'all one in Christ Jesus' already. He might well have gone further, since his thoughts about Point Omega seem to blend together the natural movement of guided evolution and the total maturity of the Christian church.

We may conclude that Teilhard belongs more to the sphere of private devotion than to public worship. Yet anyone who leads a time of meditation might himself absorb much of Teilhard, and frame the devotions of the group accordingly.

In conclusion, with whom can one compare Teilhard? One name springs immediately to mind, Brother Lawrence with his *Practice of the Presence of God*. Although he would have understood little of Teilhard's scientific theology, he would have been completely at home with him in the world of matter. Like Teilhard, although a Roman Catholic, his book has been enjoyed in Protestant circles. Indeed he has outstripped Teilhard in one respect, which should earn him a place in the *Guinness Book of Records*. He is, I believe, the only Roman Catholic whose book has been reprinted by a Brethren publisher.

### Bibliography

CHIEFLY SCIENTIFIC: *The Phenomenon of Man, The Appearance of Man, Man's Place in Nature, The Vision of the Past, The Future of Man.*

CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION: *Science and Christ, Human Energy. The Activation of Energy, How I Believe, My View of the World.*

DEVOTIONAL AND MYSTICAL: *Le Milieu Divin, Hymn of the Universe.*

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL: *Letters from Egypt (1905-1908), Letters from Hastings and Paris (1908-1914), The Making of a Mind (Letters from a soldier-priest (1914-1918)), Letters from a Traveller (1923-1955), Letters to Léontine Zanta (1923-1939), The Heart of Matter (autobiographical papers).*

There are between 20 and 30 books on Teilhard's life and thinking.

The address of the Teilhard Association is St. Mark's Chambers, Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4PW.