

THE TEILHARD NEWSLETTER



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Editorial

Following the short report in Newsletter 14, we include here summaries of contributions to the 2003 Conference as well as comments from three participants. As editor I am grateful to both the authors and commentators.** I would be happy to receive further comments which will be used in the next Newsletter (planned for December 2003).

An obituary of Vicomte Ilya Prigogine will appear in the next Newsletter. A distinguished scientist and Nobel Prizewinner, he worked on some of the problems that faced Teilhard, hence his work is of great interest to us.

From now on our Newsletters will be published simultaneously on our Website. For those of you who are on the Net, it is an easy matter to display a copy and print it

out for distribution to friends and others who may be interested. Please consider doing this.

Contributions for the next Newsletter will be very welcome. In particular notices and reviews of relevant books of interest to us are important.

Finally, I would remind you about our 2004 and 2005 conferences – see page 6 for brief details.

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** Summary No 1 and Conference Reflection 1 are based on complete versions supplied by the authors. Full copies can be requested from Bill Cranston at 3 Anthony Road, Largs, KA30 8EQ (bill@cran-ce0.demon.co.uk (Note 0 is a zero))

Conference Summary 1 – “Before your very eyes” - Rediscovering *The Divine Milieu* by Sion Cowell (President, BTA)

Teilhard was very conscious of what he had seen in his life's work and experience. He wanted others to see as he had. The choice is to see or to perish. His vision arose from the synthesis of his scientific work and his mystical experience. This seeing is much deeper than simply knowing, it is an experience of existence itself.

He wrote *The Divine Milieu* because he thought that the Christianity of his day was not touching the hopes and fears of modern humanity. And today, while a majority of people in the UK, according to surveys, still express some sort of spiritual thirst, the Christianity of today similarly often seems unable to satisfy that thirst.

There are many images of God being purveyed in modern society which largely represent the minds of those who purvey them. For Teilhard, God was, as for

Athanasius, "...the one who became man in order that man might become God."

In November 1926, while living in Tientsin (Tianjin), he started writing *The Divine Milieu*. He chose the word "milieu" because in the original French sense it expresses at one and the same time the idea of centre (with no fixed point) and a sphere (with no fixed circumference). Hence the divine milieu is "both the divine centre and the divine circle, the divine heart and the divine sphere."

As he described to his cousin and some friends, he wrote slowly, prayerfully and experiencing it as he wrote. He saw it very much as a tool for evangelisation.

It is important to understand that the Church Teilhard believed in was the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" which was centred in the Roman Catholic Church

and in which he never ceased to believe even though he endured many years of suffering for it. His faith in the Church was an extension of his faith in Christ, "... the central axis of universal convergence."

At the same time Teilhard was deeply committed to ecumenical dialogue in the fullest sense of the term, with other Christians and with non-Christians alike, though always coming from his own rootedness in the Catholic tradition. In the final analysis he was looking for "a general convergence of religions upon a Universal Christ who satisfies them all." He recognised the need for Christians to come together to give Christianity a cosmic dimension and for all men and women to develop a common human faith in the future - but a faith which would be incomplete without the fullness of Christ.

Teilhard was unfairly accused of Modernism, but his thought was to fulfil rather than diminish the person of Christ. Several of his fellow-Jesuits, and Dominicans too, were similarly accused.

Although he completed the manuscript in March 1927, approval to publish was withheld, perhaps because he was suspected of Modernism, arising from his parallel scientific work, from which he raised questions for theology.

The roots of *The Divine Milieu* are found both in the New Testament (especially St. John and St. Paul), and in

the Greek Fathers of the Church, especially Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Athanasius who encouraged his belief that Christ is the Milieu, "the presence who envelopes and penetrates to its very heart the cosmos in process of evolution, the centre and inexhaustible energy which animates the world and guides it to its completion in God."

Influenced by other Western mystics, nevertheless the chief influence was Ignatius Loyola and his Spiritual Exercises which Teilhard "fully followed in his annual retreat." (See summary 3 by Billy Hewett in this Newsletter – *Ed note.*)

The presence of Christ in the Eucharist extends not only to the bread and wine, but out to the whole earth and the whole cosmos. His great friend Pierre Leroy SJ, wrote:

"There can be no bread or wine without wheat or grape,
no wheat and no grape without a planet,
no planet without a star,
no planet without a galaxy,
no galaxy without a cosmos,
no cosmos without the Cosmic Christ."

Sion Cowell (but see note in Editorial above)

Conference Summary 2: **Teilhard Today – Thoughts on Evolutionary Psychology, and Girard** by **Christ Frost** (Member, BTA)

Chris started his talk with the well known quote from Galileo, "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect, intended us not to use them."

That was what attracted him to Teilhard, that he was brave in straddling the "gap" between Science and religious belief.

And of course in the past 50 years not only has Darwinism, to which Teilhard contributed, gained strength, its influence has also spread outwards from biology and anthropology.

So it is interesting to define some of these other areas, and what Teilhard might have to say about them if he were alive today.

One is *Evolutionary Psychology*, known initially as socio-biology, which compares human behaviour with that of animals. It is a contentious area, since people don't like being compared with animals, and they don't like having it suggested that in the same way as birds are born with patterns for nest-building in their beads, and baby beavers are born with the ability to build dams, so humans inherit a large number of behavioural predispositions. The teachers and sociologists hate this idea, but it seems to work usefully enough in many situations.

Conference Précis 3: **Ignatian Spirituality & Le Milieu Divin** by **Billy Hewett SJ** (Member BTA)

Teilhard de Chardin was educated at a Jesuit school where he would certainly have been influenced by the inevitably limited brand of Ignatian spirituality current at the end of

Then there is *Rene Girard* who has a beautiful overarching theory, which discusses the nature of competition, and how we always copy one-another, which is fine until we come into conflict. All too often the conflict is only resolved by choosing a scapegoat, so everyone can move on and coexist again.

Girardian theory is currently being applied by scholars to the Bible, Films, Politics, Shakespeare, economics, etc, and always yields new insights

Chris stressed that he was *not* asking people to believe in either Evolutionary Psychology or Girardism. But he suggested strongly that we need to understand them at least a little so we could think what Teilhard might have to say about them. Both subject areas are currently attracting a lot of academic debate. If Teilhard were alive he would probably be in the middle of that debate.

Chris Frost

* * *

(If you have read or are currently reading (or are now stimulated to read) in either of the areas mentioned by Chris you may care to take up his challenge to formulate a Teilhardian response and submit it for publication in the next Newsletter – *Ed note.*)

the nineteenth century—for better as well as for worse. That spirituality was clear, strong and greatly emphasised external discipline, dogma and competition. As a Jesuit he

underwent the full 30 days retreat twice in his life and every year of his 56 years as a Jesuit loyally and meticulously made the rather rigidly reduced 8 day version of the same Spiritual Exercises.

Not surprisingly it was the “staticism” both of form and content that he increasingly reacted against. This is nowhere more apparent than in the privacy of his (never intended for publication) retreat notes which make fascinating reading in this as in other respects. For him *the* sin behind all sins is that which he calls “immobilism.” He had very little desire in any sense to return to the Garden of Eden. He gives an amusingly Teilhardian interpretation of the traditional celebration of the “*Felix Culpa* (happy fault)”—it was happy precisely because it enabled our ancestors to evolve beyond the claustrophobic boredom of the fixed culture of Eden as portrayed in Genesis!

Teilhard was always more interested in Omega than in Alpha: the future rather than any kind of return to the past. His obsession with the Christ of the future, while it in no sense led him to deny the historical Jesus and his importance, did nonetheless take up all his energies. He shows no sign of any interest in the then current search for the historical Jesus because he never doubted him, nor needed in his spirituality to dwell much on the particularities of His life. Thus he speaks frequently (50 plus times) in his retreat notes of meditation, only three times of contemplation. And in the overcrowded, overcompressed version of the Exercises he made annually there was little time or space for authentic Ignatian contemplation - which involves an ever deepening, imaginative, affective and creative immersion by the unique form of Ignatian repetition in the specific scenes in the life of Jesus. Thus, despite his immense devotion to the implications of the Transfiguration, he never seems to have let the specific details as narrated in the synoptics undergo the specifically Ignatian contemplative treatment.

In this, as in all else, it is the Jesus Christ of the future, the emerging Omega, that overrides every other approach. Hardly surprising, therefore, that he should find the Principle and Foundation not only static but also too detached and remote to fulfil his passionate commitment to the Christ of the future. What is more surprising is that despite frequent reference to what he calls the “*ad amorem*,” his shorthand for the final exercise, the Contemplation for Attaining Divine Love, he still criticises it for its lack of immediacy and failure to do justice to Christ's identity with elemental evolution.

But despite his reservations and indeed criticisms both of the structure and the content of the Exercises, much of their dynamism did survive and influence both his life and his writings. Those familiar with both texts can see elements of this dynamic at work in *Le Milieu Divin* even if exact applications of the one to the other are from the nature of the case hard to pin down. Teilhard's sense of evolving beyond the text both in its content and in the way in which he annually experienced it, rigidly following nearly all the

set pieces with very little room for dynamic appropriation, naturally coloured his overall view.

However it is very significant that one of the very first notes he jotted down in his very last annual retreat was a project for “transposing” the Ignatian Exercises into a more viable and practical dynamic form in tune with his increasing experience of communion with the Christ of the future.

As it turned out, he was not given the time to attempt this project. But we should not regret this. Many other Jesuits, notably his French colleagues and successors, people like Fessard with his Hegelian “*Dialectique des Exercises*” and the great Christus (revue) team who in the late 50s and 60s as well as Karl Rahner himself brought their many and varied forms of expertise to the rediscovery of the Exercises. They were probably better qualified even than Teilhard for this task.

Besides which it probably needed the liberating and open to evolution implications of Vatican II to make this project practically viable. In this, as in so much else, Teilhard is like Moses looking over into the Promised Land he never himself quite reached though it was precisely his vision and his work that helped make the insights of Vatican II possible. It is also why, in a certain sense, much of his own anguished searching, persecuted life and sometimes tortuous expression and almost obsessive concern with the Christ of the future, is no longer required in the same way as it was required in his own much more fossilised times.

He does, however, in his life and in his works serve as a much needed model to inspire us always to be reaching beyond the limitations of one era as we face the in some ways even greater challenges of our own, while continuing to be loyal to the very real person of Christ as revealed in the gospels and to the continuing tradition of the always in need of reform Roman Catholic Church.

* * * *

The above summary of my paper was preceded by a Mass of the Transfiguration with quotations from *Le Milieu Divin* and the *Mass on the World*. It was followed, by popular demand, instead of the group discussion, by an Ignatian style contemplation of the Transfiguration such as Teilhard for reasons stated above probably never fully made - and certainly not as a group exercise. Participants were given space to simply share what they had experienced during the celebration, briefly and without fear of contradiction or further defence.

Perhaps this indicates a way ahead for Teilhardian relevance – developing a kind of *Teilhardian Process in Practice*, a way of appropriating both his insights and his life as a practical user-friendly group participative linguistically clarified spiritual tool for daily use very much along the lines of the “*ad amorem*” and the Ignatian daily “*examen of consciousness*.”

Billy Hewett

Sr. Frances O’Kelly IBVM – A further tribute

Sr. Frances was a generously practical Teilhardian right up to the very end of her life: I know this from my personal experience. The very day before she went into hospital I phoned her for help with the paper I was due to give at the London Colney Conference (see previous page – *Ed note*). It was some years since I had been in contact. Her response was immediate and generous. Not only did she know exactly what books I needed to consult, but she sent me her own personal copy of a particularly rare and valuable one

adding: “Keep it - I won't be needing it any longer.” After the operation I phoned to thank her: she was as clear and strong sounding as ever and seemed to be making a good recovery. She was so glad that we had offered Mass for her at the conference. A great Teilhardian, a great friend and a truly great daughter of that indomitably courageous foundress Mary Ward. May she both rest in peace - and continue to be with us in the Christ ahead.

Billy Hewett SJ

Conference Reflection No 1 – John Franklin

1. Global Spirituality

The conference brought home to me again the essential universality of Teilhard's thought and mystical insight, and yet of this being written within a frame of reference and language, not universal, but Catholic Christian. His approach has to be respected as has *The Divine Milieu* which was written as a devotional book of universal significance but in the language of Catholicism contemporary in his day.

There seems to be an essential difficulty in promoting Teilhard's spiritual vision in today's multi-faith, multi-cultural world. His style of writing is difficult for modern readers, and we are seeing growing acknowledgement of other religious traditions and the recognition of “spirituality” by many people who reject religion as such. There does seem to be a recognisable and growing “convergence” taking place as we become more of a global society, which while only “good in parts,” would nevertheless surely have gladdened Teilhard's heart.

He calls for us to carry on his work where he left off. The question is how we should do this? Should we continue to work within the framework of the Catholic Church and its language, or are there other ways? Might one way be to seek to translate or define Teilhard's use of the language of Christology in terms that don't weaken “Christian” but still be of relevance to other cultures?

The divine milieu of course is itself universal. Teilhard writes:

“God reveals himself everywhere, beneath our groping efforts, as a universal milieu, only because he is the ultimate point upon which all realities converge.”

It is experienced by mystics of all religions – and people of no religion at all, as the accounts of religious experience held in the archives of the Religious Experience Research Centre reveal, and Teilhard himself says, where, after describing a taste of the divine milieu as what anyone might say, even though outwardly a pagan.

This universality is found in different cultures. In the Hindu tradition the divine is described under a wide variety

of names. In the Upanishads it is generally as “Brahman”- the “unchanging Lord” of the Isha Upanishad. In the Islamic tradition, we find in the writings of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Araby (1165-1240), the famous Sufi mystic known as Al-Shaikh al Akbar, and later on the great mystic Jalal al-din Rumi (1207-1273) lines such as:

“Everything arises from Him, and ends in Him.”

which exactly parallels Teilhard's quote above. Similar expressions are to be found in ancient Buddhist writings. There are many other examples.

So can it possibly be right that we should continue to restrict Teilhard's vision of the universal of the divine milieu to the language and province of the Catholic Church, a language and interpretation which tends to separate people of other different persuasions rather than unite us in the ultimate, in the UNIVERSAL DIVINE LOVE? Should we not try and develop the spiritual “core” of our respective religions and beliefs with Love the foundation stone, recognising the “Golden Rule” as being common to all, and share in the movement towards a common “global ethic.” Hans Kung has written:

“No peace among nations without peace among religions. No peace among religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions.”

Shouldn't we, inheritors of Teilhard's mantle, seek to play our part here, in seeking perhaps to relate Teilhard's vision to the “foundations of all the religions?”

Whether you agree with me or not I would like this to start a debate . . .

John Franklin (but see note in Editorial)

(As with the contribution from *Chris Frost*, you are invited to comment on John's paper. A full (4 pages of A4) version of John's paper is available on request – see note to Editorial on p.1)

Conference Reflections 2 and 3 – Georgina Clarkson, Roy Bass

2. Questions and Impressions

No doubt, most “Teilhardians” came to the Conference with their own expectations. I came with questions. How can we articulate a Christology which is in keeping with what we know today about the origins of the universe and its infinite dimensions in space and time? What do we mean by “The Cosmic Christ?” And how do we express the essence of our faith in Christ in a language that makes sense to the world of the internet, the computer and space travel?

In the course of the weekend what I enjoyed most was meeting so many wonderful people, some of whom have been studying Teilhard continuously since the 60's, personally or in groups. Some are in the process of doing their doctorate on aspects of Teilhard's ideas, (e.g. on the interesting question: how far has humanity evolved along the lines that Teilhard foresaw). Others are developing an interest in his views in relation to the problems posed by today's research on genetic engineering, cloning etc . . .

There were no quick and easy answers. In fact, many more questions were raised over the weekend. How do I communicate with members of my own Church? How can Teilhard's vision be shared with Jews, Moslems, Buddhists or people of other faiths? How do Teilhard's views relate to other disciplines e.g. to Rene Girard's study of human conflict? How impatient was Teilhard with Ignatian spirituality? Was Teilhard an optimist? How does his view of humanity compare with that of Jung? We spoke about the Iraq war and about globalisation and multinationals and so on and wondered what Teilhard would have to say about such things. How would he express himself in today's language? We all agreed, at least, that even in his own time, Teilhard's theories were hard to put into words. We

agreed, also, that he was a mystic and that it is well nigh impossible to put into words what one “sees.” Still, we were invited to try and develop our “inner see-ing” and see “what is before our very eyes.” Teilhard himself claimed that it was “given me to see” how Jesus of Nazareth is linked irrevocably to the whole cosmos.

During the weekend a considerable amount of time was given to meditation and silence. I found this invaluable. I found it helpful that we returned on several occasions to the Mystery of the Transfiguration which held a special attraction for Teilhard and may hold a way forward for us. We dwelt for a long time on the importance of love as the hallmark of the Christian and Teilhard's honest confession that it may be easier to love the world of matter and the world of angels than the person that we share our daily lives with. Love may be the only universal language that will help us to understand and communicate across all the barriers we have put up between cultures and faiths.

My sincere thanks to all involved in preparing and running this conference as well as to all those who shared so much with me in groups and in casual conversations. Till we meet again, may it be “given to us to see.”

Georgina Clarkson

3. An Assessment and a Thankyou – Roy Bass

In the first conference Alan has chaired, and for the second year running, Oliver Knowles concluded that it was the best he had ever attended. Perhaps it would not be too fanciful to hope that this is a mark of growing in radial energy. Many thanks to Alan for the large part he played in generating a very stimulating experience.

Roy Bass

Teilhard on the Internet – continued – Bill Cranston

In the last newsletter, I tried to explain what the Internet was, and showed (I hope!) that there is a lot about Teilhard out there. I've continued looking and have been heartened by the discovery of many more people who are currently both studying Teilhard and promoting his ideas.

Here are some items from my current searching:

1. 'Catching Dreams on the Web' – Essay by Doris Schoenhoff

www.unesco.org/education/educprog/lwf/doc/portfolio/opinion10.htm

This was written in 1996. Doris Schoenhoff starts by recalling a previous essay written by her in 1980 entitled “The Electronic Noosphere,” crediting Teilhard with having coined the word noosphere to describe ‘a thinking layer of the earth.’ She goes on to describe the beginnings of the World Wide Web, giving the annual cost of running a commercial Web-site at the time as \$100,000 per annum, and worrying that ‘big business’ might dominate. (This has not happened, many millions of individuals run their

own websites at a cost of less than \$100 per annum, and our costs should be less than \$1000 per annum.)

2. 'Approaching the Whole: an Enquiry into Man and the Environment' – Essay by Joseph Milne

www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~alfar2/Approaching%20the%20Whole.htm

While Teilhard is not mentioned by name in this essay, his influence is clear, and can be inferred from the extensive bibliography also on Joseph Milne's website. As a civil engineer, I find have considerable sympathy with his critique of “*the manner* in which environmentalists are addressing the problem and the way in which ecology conceives the world.” It is not surprising that the essay has drawn fierce criticism from ecologists. More surprising perhaps is his conclusion that ‘the Christian argument for stewardship as an ecological model has no force.’ It could be interesting for us in the British Teilhard Association to hear him draw out just how Teilhard's thinking influenced the essay. The discussion would be lively!

3. The Sentient Universe: by Guillermo A Murguia and Juan S Agudelo.

www.humanevol.com/doc/doc200302100401.html

A translation of a book published in Spain in 2001 by the Human Evolution Research Institute. This Institute is organised by five Spanish professionals from Spain, Mexico and the USA (two engineers, two humanities professors, and an educationist). The book "intends to demonstrate that Teilhard's ideas are more valid and current now than they were half a century ago." In the course of the book they identify the weaknesses in the positions of writers such as Richard Dawkins and Stephen Jay Gould. The book ought to be properly published in English - I have written to the authors to suggest this.

4. Lecture on Technological Optimists: Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin – David Black

www.wlu.ca/~wwwblack/cs400/fall02/October3.htm

Here you find notes issued to senior (final year) students in a Canadian course discussing technology. Outlines Teilhard's career, analyses his attitude to technology, quotes Erik Davis' book *Technognosis* as saying that "Teilhard saw the Net coming more than half a century before it arrived." Encourages the students to give the concluding pages of *The Phenomenon of Man* a try!

5. Brief details of three others

a) Sermons by Universalist Unitarian Ministers. b) A University of Chicago Doctoral Thesis on Teilhard, Merton and Lonergan. c) A Teilhard Scholarship Essay Competition, Sophia University, Japan.

6. Negative opinions about Teilhard

There are some sites where some quite vicious things are said. While this is hurtful, I believe that positive good will come of it, since most of the people involved are clearly fanatical in the messages they are trying to put over.

www.teilhard.org.uk

The text above, simply typed into your computer, takes you to our website. It was set up over a year ago, the principal content being an excellent biographical paper by our President Siôn Cowell. As the then Chairman, he felt the priority was to have a full and authoritative account of Teilhard's life available for those seeking information. The site has now been considerably expanded to include sections about the Association itself, giving information about our workings, how to contact us, events and publications etc. It also includes a 'discussion' page to allow interested people opportunity to communicate and express their thoughts and queries about Teilhard: a facility that also might be used to question and discuss how, perhaps, we might promote and further his thoughts today.

We hope that you will visit the site, and that you will like what you find there. Please feel free to express any views you may have, either to the Secretary, Peter Cox, through the Newsletter by writing to the Editor, Michelle le Morvan, or even, perhaps, by leaving a message on the 'discussion' page of the website. What we would very much like, and would greatly appreciate, would be for you to pass on the message about Teilhard, the Teilhard Association and our web site to others.

The British Teilhard Association exists to promote the study and development of Teilhard's vision of a universe in evolution towards ultimate convergence or completion in a 'universal cosmic centre' or 'centre of centres', which he identified, in the Christian tradition, with the Cosmic Christ of St. John and St. Paul and the Church Fathers.

British Teilhard Association Conferences 2004 and 2005

2004 26 - 28 March Venue: London Colney

2005 29 April - 1 May Venue: London Colney

We are inviting speakers from other faiths to address the conference in 2004. Please consider inviting your friends from other faiths to attend. The 2005 conference will be a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Teilhard's death – we aim to have significant contributions from the scientific community for that event.

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