

THE TEILHARD NEWSLETTER

(published by the British Teilhard Association. www.teilhard.org.uk)



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Editorial

I have to sincerely apologise for the non-appearance of the Newsletter planned for September last year, and for the lateness of this one.

In the middle of August I was called out of retirement to assist a former engineer colleague on an extremely complex legal case. This commanded full time effort for a period of three months to the middle of November. I then departed to attend a conference in the USA on behalf of the Association. Immediately on my return the family was struck by serious illness. Only the most urgent personal matters have been dealt with until recently. I am pleased to report that things are now back on track.

The most important Association news is that we continue to welcome new members, both national and international, both via our website, and through attendance at our events. A full report of this and

other developments will be presented at our AGM on 6th May.

Interest in Teilhard continues to develop world wide. With two visits by myself to attend events in the USA last year and the attendance of Canon Alan Nugent, Chair of the Association at a meeting of European Teilhardian Associations in Italy, we are moving to develop further international participation.

Finally, you may recall the Chairman's note in the June 2005 Newsletter about the need for volunteers to come forward to help in the task of administering the Association. Please consider whether you are in a position to perhaps share that workload. In the meantime please bear with us - we are doing our best!

Bill C (Acting Editor)

The 2006 Annual Conference

This will take place at our normal venue, the Pastoral Centre at London Colney. It is a short taxi-ride from St Albans railway station, which in turn has a frequent service from London. Conference registration will take place from 3 pm onwards on Friday 5th May, with the conference proper beginning at 5 pm. The conference will end on Sunday 7th at 1 pm. The accommodation is modest (mostly in single bedrooms with wash-hand basin). The cost is similarly modest at £130.00.

For the 2005 conference we had well-known speakers from near and far. Our main speakers this year will be graduate students from the University of Kent, where there has been a strong interest in Teilhard for a number of years. The theme is 'Mysticism, Experience, and the Vision of Teilhard de Chardin.'

There will be ample provision for both group and plenary discussion – along with the usual opportunities for one-to-one interaction at coffee and meal breaks.

A leaflet is attached giving the key details and a registration form.

Glasgow One-Day Event

This took place as planned on Saturday 29th October 2005. Over thirty people attended, gathered in from an advertisement in the 'Tablet,' from a circulation of leaflets to all Catholic parishes in the Glasgow Diocese (over 100), and by personal invitation). While the majority of those attending were from Glasgow and West of Scotland, a number of delegates came a considerable distance.

The format of the meeting was successful with the three speakers going first and having the opportunity (provided they stuck to their time limit!) to take individual questions.

This was followed by a 'breakout' session where groups formulated questions. These questions were reduced to written form and collected up.

A selection of these questions were put to the speakers in the final session. This ensured both a reasonable

involvement for all three speakers, and a spread of issues for discussion.

It is intended to publish an account of the proceedings.

Efforts are under way to set up a Glasgow Teilhard discussion group.

Particular thanks are due to the Glasgow University Chaplaincy for the use of their premises, to Sister Pat Graham who assisted with the organisation, and to Executive Committee member David Lewin who looked after the registrations desk on the day.

Now that it is clear that regional events can attract a good number of participants, the Executive Committee will consider financing events at other locations. Please let us know if you would be willing to assist with organising an event in your area – suggesting a suitable venue and ideas for publicity. (We would assist in providing speakers and underwriting costs.)

Teilhard Conference, Chestnut College, Philadelphia (report by Acting Editor)

While at one stage (see editorial) it looked as though I might have to cancel attendance, in the end I was able to get away.

About half of the session time was taken up with keynote addresses. The remainder was for individual presentations, separated into four separate sessions. Thus only three out of 12 sessions could be attended.

The overall result was a mixed bag. The keynote addresses were on the whole excellent, particularly the informal remarks made by Professor Ursula King reminiscing about her time researching Teilhard in Paris the 1960s. (She recalled how her supervisor had spluttered about the wisdom of publishing 'all those Teilhard essays without any serious commentary.')

Father Tom King told us about his introduction to Teilhard. A colleague had been on to him for some time, saying 'You really need to read some Teilhard.' Eventually in exasperation his colleague got hold of a typewritten copy of 'The Divine Milieu' and handed it over. Father King put it to one side. Some weeks later it was still lying on his desk unread. Eventually, towards the end of a study session, he picked it up

with the intention of just glancing at it to see 'if it was worth reading.' After just a few pages he recognised the feeling that the author 'was talking directly to him.' He became completely absorbed, oblivious of his surroundings, and read on over several hours, right to the end. "Having finished it" he said, "I asked myself: 'What was that all about!'"

One paper in the individual sessions drew attention to parallels in Orthodox theology to Teilhard (see article in June 2005 Newsletter).

Quite a number of papers which scarcely mentioned Teilhard at all, which was rather surprising. In my view the average calibre of presentations at our last two conferences was well up to the standard of Chestnut College (though an element of prejudice may be present!)

Selected papers from this conference will be published in due course. If in the meantime any member would like to see a copy of the conference program, which contains 10-15 line abstracts of each paper, please contact me by letter, e-mail or telephone (see heading on page 1 for addresses)

Revelation and Evolution - Joint Event with Alister Hardy Society - September 2005

An account of this event, held at the University of Lampeter in Wales, is being prepared for the Alister Hardy Society, and details will be reported in the next Newsletter. In the meantime Canon Alan Nugent, Chairman of our Association has provided us with a summary of his talk, which was entitled 'Reflection,

Revelation and the Sense of Humanity, summarized below:

My paper focused on the concept of 'reflection' in Teilhard's thought, because through it he sought to understand revelation within an evolutionary context.

Teilhard's description of evolutionary development, in particular from anthropogenesis, (that is the emergence of humanity) to noogenesis (or the evolution of mind, of thought, of spirit) he attributes to reflection. Indeed the noosphere he would describe as the reflective life.

Intelligence, he attributes to the capacity to reflect, which is an endowment of the human being alone. It is this which distinguishes us from the animals and indeed from the earlier primates. Perhaps his most celebrated definition of reflection is that it is 'the power acquired by a consciousness of turning in on itself'... 'no longer only to know something, but to know *itself*, no longer only to know, but to know that it knows' (*The Human Phenomenon*, p.110).

Teilhard pursues this train of thought by suggesting that as this capacity for reflection becomes more developed, more profound, so humanity will become even more aware of and attuned to the 'whole', which surrounds it, of which it is part. This will indeed be 'revelation'. The whole, the unity, of which we are but a small part, in characteristic of Teilhard's thought and refers to that totality of life, that summation and completion of life, for which the word God is the only

adequate descriptor. This does not mean that Teilhard confines 'revelation' to human effort; indeed he insists that 'the whole reflects upon the monad' and it is only when this two-way process happens between the monad, the individual and the whole that revelation takes place.

The paper does not go on to suggest that sometime in the future, when human maturation through reflection has advanced that 'revelation' could become the reality of the next stage of human development. These are ideas I am playing with for a future article.

If anyone would like a copy of the paper then please contact me at the Subdeanery,

18 Minster Yard, Lincoln, LN2 1PX or by e-mail, subdean@lincolncathedral.com.

One final thought for you to ponder namely Teilhard's salutary statement in Sarah Appleton-Weber's new translation of 'The Human Phenomenon' p154.

"Reflecting in the consciousness of each one of us, evolution is becoming aware of itself."

Canon Alan Nugent

Availability of Teilhard's books – and a suggestion

A list is enclosed with this newsletter which gives details of both availability and price through internet booksellers. The prices of both paperback and/or second hand volumes are modest by today's standards.

The first draft of this newsletter before Christmas suggested that you might like to consider purchasing one or other of these volumes as a present. It's too late for that now, but there are always birthdays coming up.

But how about buying a present for yourself? Instead of dipping back into the Teilhard books you already have, why not buy another one and have a go!

Another list is in preparation, this time of books about Teilhard. Short reviews of any books of this kind that members have found particularly helpful would be appreciated for inclusion in this list.

The British Teilhard Association on the Internet – www.teilhard.org.uk - (Report by Editor)

Those of you who know about the Internet will already know about 'Google,' the most popular software for searching the internet. (You may have noticed its being mentioned in the media in connection its having agreed to restrictions requested by the Chinese government.)

A search is done by simply entering a word or words on the screen and clicking on the word 'Search.' In one twentieth of a second, the superfast computers at Google look at the enormous quantity of information they keep about individual websites world wide. A list is then sent back to your screen of the 'top 10' most

relevant websites. Also given is an estimate of the total number of website references world-wide.

Currently a search on the single word 'Teilhard' shows a total of 600,000 references come up. The British Teilhard Association's website comes up as the second most relevant. Three years ago there were less than 50,000 references, and we were placed around fiftieth.

This is a considerable achievement. But we cannot relax – we need to continuously update and improve. If you are a member with internet connection, then please do 'drop in' on the website and do some 'browsing.' Suggestions for improvement will be welcome.

Notes on other Teilhard Associations

The French Association is the largest, as one would expect, currently with over 800 members. The Dutch

and Italian Associations have about 100 members each. We have now over 110 members, 30 of whom

are new within the last three years (and we have a backlog of non-members who attended the three events reported above who still have to be approached and asked if they would like to join).

Our Chairman Alan Nugent attended a meeting of European Teilhard Associations in September last year. It was agreed that attendance at each other's events would be encouraged.

The French Association, as one would expect, is the most active. They organized a series of five international Conferences, starting with one in Hastings in 2001 (organized in part by our former Chairman and President Siôn Cowell), leading via China (2002), Cairo (2003), and Rome (2004) to the final very successful conference held in New York last April to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Teilhard's death. Like ourselves, they suffered a downturn in membership and interest in the 70s and 80s, but are now in recovery. Over the past few years the number

of local groups throughout France has for example increased from 10 to 40. In 2005 they increased the size and frequency of their journal entitled *'Teilhard Aujourd'hui'* (Teilhard Today), containing articles and reports of events, as well as a list of forthcoming events. In the December 2005 issue, plans for the future are outlined, with for instance proposals for study visits to India in 2007 to visit the archaeological sites that Teilhard visited in 1935, and in later years to similar sites in South Africa which he visited in the 1950s.

The American Teilhard Association has about 400 members. Their major activity is the publication of a series of Studies, two (and sometimes three) of which are produced every year. They ran out of stock of all of them at the celebrations held in New York last April, but all have now been reprinted. The full list can be seen on their new website www.teilharddechardin.org

Forthcoming Events

1. **Conference 2006** - See Page 1 for details – registration form attached to this Newsletter
2. **British Teilhard Association Annual General Meeting** - Saturday 6th May at London Colney, 2.00 pm
3. **Teilhard de Chardin Pilgrimages**

We have been asked by the 'Contemplative Fire' organization to pass on information about these pilgrimages (and we are pleased to do so). The following details have been taken from their leaflet.

'Hills, valleys, fields and woods provide the setting for a 3 mile walk of awareness. The beauty of the natural world is complemented by a garden labyrinth at our location in Hernes, a 400 acre estate near Henley on Thames. We will meet six times during the year on a learning journey, beginning and ending in a beautiful lodge with log fire (in autumn and winter). Each pilgrimage will give space and time in stillness to walk, to pause, and to enjoy the beauty of nature. It

will include some gentle input drawing on the wisdom and challenge of Teilhard de Chardin.

They are being run on the second Saturday of each month throughout 2006. The first has already taken place, on February 11. The remaining dates are Saturday 8th April, 10th June, 12th August, 14th October, 9th December. The starting time is 9.30 a.m, finishing time 2.00 pm.'

'Contemplative Fire' can be contacted on 01494 758878. Their website is www.contemplativefire.org

Waterproofs, boots, and packed lunch to be brought!

Directions and map showing location of Hernes are at: www.contemplativefire.org/images/hernesDirectionsLoRes.jpg

Annual Subscriptions

These are now due for 2006. They remain unchanged at £20 for ordinary members, £15 for those who are retired or are unwaged, and £10 for students. All members who can afford it are asked to consider making a donation over and above their subscription. You may wish to earmark such a donation for allocation either to the *Betty Lamb Fund* (for student bursaries) or to the *Publicity Fund* (for special efforts to bring the Association to the attention of a wider public). Please send cheques to the Treasurer, BTA, 3 Anthony Road, LARGS, Ayrshire, KA30 8EQ.

The Next Newsletter is planned for June 2006. **Deadline for receipt of copy, May 21st.**

Articles, letters, opinion pieces or poems, etc should be sent to Acting Editor (see page 1 for address)

Communications on Association matters should be addressed to the Secretary:

Peter Cox, 12 Falconer's Field, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 3ES

Phone: 01582 761955 Fax: 01582 621526 E-mail: peterjohncox@lineone.net

THE BRITISH TEILHARD ASSOCIATION
Twenty-Fifth International Teilhard Conference

‘Mysticism, Experience and the Vision of Teilhard de Chardin’

ALL SAINTS PASTORAL CENTRE
LONDON COLNEY, NR ST ALBANS

FRIDAY 5 – SUNDAY 7 MAY 2006

Led by a younger generation of Teilhardian Scholars

David Lewin, Brian Edwards and Duane Williams of Kent University, with contributions from colleagues who have been studying Teilhard for some time.

All are welcome

Further details from: Canon Alan Nugent, 18 Minster Yard, Lincoln, LN2 1PX Tel: 01522 521932 Email: subdean@lincolncathedral.com

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It is generally assumed that Teilhard de Chardin is something of a figure within modern mysticism. Is this because Teilhard was a mystic? Our conception of what mysticism is and what makes a ‘mystic’ affects how we might approach this question. For some the question means ‘Did Teilhard have extraordinary experiences of union with God?’ while for others the question can be broadened to ask whether Teilhard’s writings point to an ultimate unity of all things, an insight that is consonant with the mystical tradition. If we accept that Teilhard is a mystic in this latter sense, then what are we to do? Are we called to experience this unity in the moment of cosmic consciousness? Do the varied reports of mystical and religious consciousness provide empirical support for Teilhard’s vision? We must not only ask what Teilhard’s vision means, but we must also then consider what our relation to that vision can be. This is another way of asking not only what Teilhard is pointing to but also what demands this makes upon us. It is surely not enough that we enjoy reading Teilhard without full participation in Teilhard’s vision.

The aim of this conference is to consider the ways in which mysticism is conceived in the modern age, for that conception of mysticism is bound to affect the ways in which Teilhard is read and understood. While it is an open (perhaps misleading) question to ask whether Teilhard himself can be called a ‘mystic’, the recent tendency to associate mysticism with a variety of experiential practices, states of consciousness and new-age movements demands some critical attention. Ultimately, what is truly mystical in Teilhard – the truth of his vision – will provide the reference point for our reflections.

Some main questions for reflection:

- In what sense is Teilhard a ‘mystic’?
- How do we respond to the call of Teilhard’s vision?
- What does that vision have to do with religious experience?

ENROLMENT FORM

Please detach and send as soon as possible (with cheque in full or partial payment) to: Peter Cox, 12 Falconer's Field, Harpenden, Herts, AL5 4AU.

I enclose a cheque for £..... payable to "British Teilhard Association" (£130.00 per person residential or £65.00 non-residential but requiring meals, or £55.00 non-residential without breakfast. A minimum deposit of £60.00 is payable on enrolment - £30.00 for non-residential). Student rate £40.00 (some support with travel expenses will be available for students travelling to the conference over 250 miles one way).

Please make the following reservation (please print)

Name..... Title.....

First name(s).....

Address.....

.....

.....

..... Postcode.....

E-mail.....

Tel (day)..... (evening).....

Single or double room required.....

Special meal or other requirements.....

.....

If registering as a student please give details of the full/part time course on which you are enrolled.

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For office use only:

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