

# **CHRIST IN THE WORLD OF MATTER: TEILHARD DE CHARDIN'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND VISION**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Through the wide diffusion and translation of his posthumous works, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) has made a greater impact on postwar religious consciousness than probably any other theologian. Nevertheless, his identity, whether as theologian, scientist, mystic, or philosopher remains contested. He is sometimes presented as the prophet of a new spiritual age, yet Teilhard remained faithful and obedient to the Roman Catholic Church throughout his life. His work abounds with rational concepts and neologisms, yet he retained a deep sense that there is more to reality than the cognizable.

It is noteworthy that Teilhard not only had religious experiences but also possessed the theological competence and imagination needed to interpret them. In this contribution I highlight the importance of the specifically Christian context of Teilhard's religious experience in forming and unifying his vision of the world. I begin by looking at three short accounts of specific religious experiences that he compiled during October 1916, whilst serving as a stretcher-bearer with the French army in the Verdun region of northeastern France, accounts that are included in a collection of his early writings, *Hymn of the Universe*. I then consider the implications of these experiences for Teilhard's wider Christian vision.