

TEILHARD PERSPECTIVE

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President's Corner

John Grim, May 2019

Teilhard de Chardin's Sense of Cosmogenesis in Relation to Wisdom Traditions

The concept of Cosmogenesis is an idea and an approach in the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that I have admired over the years. As an idea, he was influenced in this direction by the work of the Belgian cosmologist and priest, Georges Lemaître, who based his theory of universe expansion on the recession of nearby galaxies before Edwin Hubble's telescopic work proved this was the case.

As an approach, however, Teilhard brought cosmogenesis as an evolutionary question to every issue he thought about. His sense not only of a changing cosmos, but also of an expanding universe was a radical position on cosmology during the first forty years of the 20th century. The normative understanding was of a steady-state cosmos that allowed for dynamic change within

the universe, even as the whole of the universe was seen as unchanging.

For Teilhard, cosmogenesis described the unfolding universe from its initial flaring forth continuing into galaxies, our solar system, life on

Earth, and the emergence of the human. We did not live in a static cosmos but in a universe of dynamic movement. He writes, for example, that: "...the universe no longer appears to us as an established harmony but has definitely taken on the appearance of a system in movement. No longer an order but a process. No longer a cosmos but a cosmogenesis"

[*Reflections on the*

Scientific Probability and the Religious Consequences of an Ultra-human, 1951, VII, 272 E; 282 F).

The central manifestation of cosmogenesis for Teilhard was increasing complexity-consciousness in the universe. The universe shows movement from lesser to greater complexity, as well as from less to more consciousness. For



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Teilhard, consciousness is present throughout the universe from the initial flaring forth. Cosmogogenesis, then, became a multivalent, many-charged, idea, both as his overview term for the evolution of the universe, as well as a specific term for the first phase of cosmic evolution from the foundational emerging universe to our galaxy and solar system. Second, biogenesis occurred as life fluoresced on planet Earth. Finally, Teilhard's sequence settled on anthropogenesis, or human consciousness. Teilhard definitely sees human evolution as a seminal moment in the evolutionary process. Along with these distinctions, then, Teilhard used the term cosmogenesis as a holistic overview to summarize and indicate all three stages: cosmic, Earth, and human. Human action, according to Teilhard who gravitated towards the thought of the French philosopher, Maurice Blondel, regarding *action*, brought forward cosmic processes in ways that became increasingly significant for human self-understanding.

Teilhard's vision of cosmogenesis—in which matter and spirit mutually interpenetrate—brings him quite close to other wisdom traditions who also understood the cosmos as having inherent dynamic movement that deeply affected human action and behavior. Let me lay out two such visions that have multiple dispositions. First, there is the ancient wisdom in the Chinese text called the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*. Second, there is the concept of *cosmovision* as it is presented now in public conferences and gathering by Indigenous peoples, especially in the Americas.

Some years ago—when I was studying with Thomas Berry—I gave extended attention to the ancient Chinese *Book of Changes*, broadly dated to 3,000 years before the present. I was especially intrigued by hexagram #62, named *hsiao kuo*, or “the small get by.” Each hexagram has six lines that are arranged in broken and/or unbroken lines. In the configuration of *hsiao kuo*, the first two lines and last two lines are broken, and the inner two lines are solid. Firm attitudes predominate within, but, without, the broken lines suggest that relations with the world must be flexible. The wisdom inherent in this hexagram signifies a strong disposition, indicated by the inner solid lines, yet ready to accept change by yielding to resolute demands signaled by the outer

broken lines. This is such a thought-provoking technique in that the hexagram configurations draw on a metric-like system but reach towards a more profound knowing than simply quantified knowledge.

Interestingly, the firm inner lines advise holding firm in reverent resolve aligned with the core values one has been given. Thus, holding to the “small” is not proposed as small-mindedness, but rather an understanding that sometimes it is necessary to surrender authority and act with prudence in uncontrollable situations. It may also be that the authority given to a person by circumstances is more than one can handle at a moment of an all-encompassing challenge. We cannot surrender our leadership, or implement our plans, easily; yet, action is necessary. I find this remarkable advice for our times of turbulent politics, changing environmental configurations, and survival pressures on the interdependence of life around the planet.

This hexagram counsels acceptance of a vision of the cosmos well known by Indigenous traditions and included in their concept and approach, termed in English, *cosmovision*. We know that Teilhard had a stereotypical Western view of indigenous traditions as “static and exhausted” (Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 25). It is not helpful, nor is it recommended here, to substitute one stereotypical view for another, namely, a romanticized view of every indigenous person and their collective traditions as deep ecologists. However, the deep intimacies with local bioregions that are evident in their indigenous environmental knowledge are at the heart of *cosmovision*.

Contemporary Mayan elders of Central America say that: “Cosmovision and spirituality are a simultaneous experience, acting at the same time, [as with] myth and history, death and resurrection. It is a process that allows us to experience life and to be a part of the whole. Our connection to the world and the cosmos are the basis of our action, of our thoughts, and our sentiments in life and of life. These expressions of science and spirituality can be found in our astronomy, mathematics, architecture, agricultural systems, medicine, and understanding of the cycles of time, the life of nature and humans, and

the relationships between the movements of the stars, the sun, and the moon” [Mayan League statement: <http://www.mayanleague.org/maya-cosmovision>].

Thus, scientific contributions are understood in Indigenous cosmovisions as rooted in spiritual elements, and these ways of knowing are as deeply intuitive as they are observational, empirical, and rational. Spirituality is in *scientia*, or knowing, and science-as-knowing is in spirituality. It is remarkable that the diverse native traditions around the globe that are described as Indigenous can find shared understanding in the concept and practice of cosmovision. This accords with Thomas Berry’s view that the universe proceeds with three principles of differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. That is, Indigenous peoples have highly differentiated cultural traditions, yet, they share inherent alignment, or subjectivity, with the life of the bioregions that sustain them. This alignment, while unique in each Indigenous cultural expression, manifests a communion experience of cosmovision as fundamental to their ways of knowing themselves and their worlds.

Cosmovisions are typically embedded in ancient narratives believed to have been transmitted to the people by beings-in-the-world. These spiritual beings—plants, animals, places, sounds, seasons—tell their own stories, and in telling them manifest to humans what it means to live in a changing world. We can call these stories ethical narratives, because they counsel firm action in uncertain times. Often set in the primal time of beginnings, they do not simply advise actions to meet this or that particular need, but they tell of cosmic principles that guide action in respectful and sustaining relations with lands, animals and plants. Cosmovisions offer unique and diverse understandings of the ecological, interdependent relationships embedded in flourishing life. These perspectives give us a sense of the depth of practice and resilience embedded in Indigenous cosmovisions, especially as climate changes their worlds just as planetary heating brings rapid changes to the worlds of dominant societies.

Cosmovision, then, is a concept that points toward the different ways of knowing a world that

speaks to Indigenous peoples. Cosmovision provides an empathetic path for Indigenous peoples to relate to our changing world, as well as to voice their concerns about proper behavior going forward. These ideas and practices have been developed and used by Indigenous elders: first, in their articulation of meaningful and flourishing reality; and, second, in their struggles to achieve self-determination and sovereignty.

As the 21st century era of post-colonial control and oppression of small-scale societies comes into focus, this continuing global assault has also been recognized as a major fault line in the planetary environmental crises. That is, the marginalization of these local peoples in their homelands has resulted in the ironic recognition that Indigenous peoples are major conservers of plant and animal diversity. Some of the last remaining undeveloped sources of precious metals, water, and large-scale forests overlap with the regions that Indigenous peoples inhabit.

Cosmovision, then, opens ways of understanding how the concerns of social justice are integrally woven into concerns about ecological justice. That is, how concerns for equitable livelihood for all human societies is inextricably woven into concerns for the flourishing of the Earth community in which the human is one among many voices in that community. The United Nations document, *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP 2007), gives expression to this recognition as well as the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* (2010).

In the encyclical, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis wrote, “It is essential to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed.” I believe his rationale for naming Indigenous peoples as principle actors in environmental matters is because of their sense of humility, or *hsiao kuo*, “the small get by.” This is a sense of the voice of seemingly small realities, which, when viewed from the Western perspective of a hierarchical “great chain of being,” are lesser or inferior to the exceptional human. But from the

standpoint of many religions-in-the-world and from that of Indigenous wisdom perspectives these are small voices that are crucial to hear at the appointed time. Aligning with these seemingly small visionary voices coming from the heart of material creation has enabled life's resilience and survival.

Our contemporary challenges bring new questions, problems and opportunities to life on planet Earth. Such pressures make present values radiating from cosmic processes that shape human and non-human activities. I sense that this is what moved Teilhard so profoundly when he reflected on cosmogenesis. It was more than simply an idea for him. It was an encounter with the "Heart of Matter," as he used that phrase to title one of his essays. Yet, Teilhard himself was often unable to recognize that other wisdom traditions also saw into the heart of matter. For example, Teilhard could not grasp the range of wisdom in Confucian and Daoist traditions in China that both draw on the *I Ching, Book of Changes*. There are historical reasons for his limited realization, as the Chinese themselves turned from their wisdom traditions in the early 20th century to accommodate and to assimilate Western technologies and ideas. Moreover, Teilhard had his own Christian practices of humility, but the sense of *hsiao kuo* is different in that it connects to the world of living matter rather than individuated religious sensibilities in Christianity that focus exclusively on the human person.

Something quite significant emerges in the convergence of wisdom traditions that articulate cosmogenesis, cosmovision, and "the preponderance of the small," as one translator presents the Chinese characters, *hsiao kuo*. Embedded in each is a melding of the microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions so widespread in the religions-of-the-world in which the individual and the community locate themselves in larger sacred realities. Emerging in this contemporary convergence is a realization that the macrocosmic role of the human now is a setting aside, a "smalling-down," so that larger life might flourish. The "preponderance of the small" suggests a weighty turn in the realization of a wisdom that the role given the human in the age of the Anthropocene is not that of assertion, arrogance,

or unquestioned authority. An emerging cosmovision reveals a return of something ancient and true, an ecological insight that guides us in the midst of a changing cosmos. Cooperation, it teaches, is something seemingly small, yet vitally significant right now.

ATA Annual Meeting Report May 4, 2019

Tara C. Trapani, ATA Administrator



On May 4, 2019 the American Teilhard Association held its annual meeting in New York City, as it has done for more than five decades.

But this year was an exceptional one for many reasons. First, due to Union Theological Seminary's massive construction project, we needed to find a new venue for the meeting. Except for a brief period in the early 2000s, the ATA Annual Meeting has been held at Union every year since the 1960s, so we needed to find a home that would be as warm and welcoming for our members as Union has been these many years.

After quite a search, we were pleased to announce that this year's meeting would be held at the Synod House of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. This new setting seemed divinely ordained, indeed, as both of those who would be honored at this year's meeting had long-standing close ties to the Cathedral. Thomas Berry was a canon at the Cathedral for many years and worked

closely with the Cathedral's "Green Dean," Dean James Parks Morton. After Thomas' death in 2009, his memorial service was held at the Cathedral, and Paul Winter bade farewell to him with music, song, and the glorious sounds of nature. And Paul himself has graced many thousands in the Cathedral over the last several decades with his celebratory equinox and solstice concerts and his beautiful *Missa Gaia*.

The open, airy Synod House seemed buzzing with joy and celebration as the members and special guests poured in on this special day. The space was graced with fresh spring flowers from Jayne Ann McPartlin and her daughter, Siobhan DiZio, in the tradition of Fanny deBary. For many, this meeting was their first opportunity to see the new biography of Thomas that was just released from Columbia University Press, written by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal.

After socializing and joining together in a hearty meal, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim bade welcome to all, and Paul Winter joyously opened the meeting with an inspired selection from his repertoire. Tucker and Grim then spoke about Thomas and the challenging process of putting such a profoundly rich, diverse, and meaningful life into a single volume. Tucker read several quotes from the new biography, some in Thomas' own words, selections from his unpublished, unfinished memoir (titled *Goldenrod*). She closed with these words from Thomas:

Each of us is as old as the universe and experiences our greater self in the larger story of the universe. So we are as old as the universe and as big as the universe. This is our great self. We survive in our great self. Our particular manifestation is distinct from our universal presence to the total process. We exist eternally in our participation in the universe's existence.

(*Thomas Berry: A Biography*, 155; see also *Selected Writings on the Earth Community*, 188; originally from an interview with Thomas by Mary Judith Ress for *Conspirando*, 1994)

Immediately after their talk, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim welcomed Paul Winter to

the stage and presented him with the Thomas Berry Award for his contribution to the flourishing



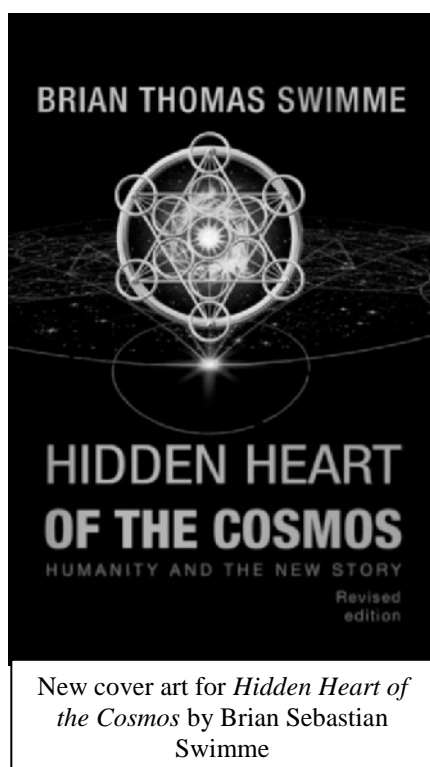
of the Earth Community through his profoundly moving music. Paul Winter accepted the award, named for one of his dearest friends and mentors, gave remarks about his own memories of Thomas and their time at the Cathedral together, and played for those assembled a moving recording of Pete Seeger singing "How Can I Keep from Singing." Paul closed the event by playing his own piece, "Wolf Eyes," followed by Bach's "Air on G String," receiving two enthusiastic standing ovations from the crowd.

The energy was high as the meeting broke and the members spread out across the city. Many said it was the most beautiful annual meeting they could remember in many a year and felt that the spirits of Thomas and Teilhard were indeed watching over the gathering with a smile.



Featured Excerpt from the new edition of *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*

*This October, Orbis Books will release a new, revised edition of Brian Thomas Swimme's classic *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story*. The ATA is pleased to offer an advance peek at the preface to the new edition.*



PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

By Brian Swimme

Twenty-five years have now passed since I wrote this slim book with its daring title, *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*. For this new edition I have gone through the text to update the science. The one major difference is that in the 1990s the best rough estimate of the universe's age was fifteen billion years. Now it's fourteen billion, rounded up from 13.799 billion.

My primary aim twenty-five years ago was to share the news that mathematical cosmologists had located the birthplace of the universe. But as I

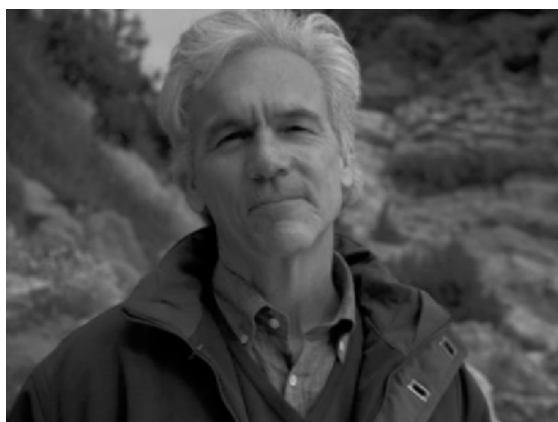
reviewed the text in 2019, I was surprised to find early on a diatribe against consumerism! Why had I gone so rapidly from extolling the stunning fact of science's discovery to a strong critique of the effects of advertisements on our children?

I realize now, decades later, that an ancient cosmological ritual had captured me. In traditional cultures all around the planet and back through time, when elders present the mysteries of the universe, they require participants to undergo a purification rite. Without my knowing what I was doing, I had constructed something similar. Before plunging into a celebration of the magnificence of the cosmos, I put my readers through a brief reflection on "consumerism," an element of modern consciousness that cried out for conversion. The change I would make today would be to add on others, especially militarism, racism, sexism. In my warnings to parents concerned with the effects of television on their offspring, I would include a critique that went beyond television. We will be such a conundrum for future historians. Deluging the tender souls of our children with the repulsive violence of our computer games, then expressing shock at the ensuing slaughter in the real world.

We are living through history's greatest transition in our understanding of the universe. Our knowledge dwarfs Copernicus' announcement that Earth spins around the Sun. Many hundreds of books and documentary films have been made about the this time-developmental universe and any more will be made. But simultaneous with our need to learn the nature of our evolving cosmos is the dire necessity to discover how to live in alignment with the Earth and universe. It took the genius of Thomas Berry to recognize the emergence of this qualitatively new cosmology as leading to a profound transformation of human civilization. In *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* I offer some practices for integrating the counterintuitive nature of science's discoveries, including our relationships to the birthplace of the universe, to the omniscient nature of the universe, and to the nonvisible, generative ground of our existence. These personal transformations of consciousness find their fulfillment in the reshaping of our cultures and societal institutions.

In 2011 Mary Evelyn Tucker and I released a multimedia project, the *Journey of the Universe* film, book, and conversations. Six years later Mary Evelyn and John Grim mounted Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) from Yale/Coursera titled “Journey of the Universe: A Story for Our Times” and available for free on the world wide web in every country. In one of the courses, “Journey of the Universe Conversations,” a comprehensive program of Earth renewal is suggested for moving from an industrial to an ecological society. Here scholars and designers discuss innovative plans for renewing our cities, our economies, our agriculture, our gender relations, our energy use, our educational systems, our racial relations, and our religious traditions.

In 2015, Pope Francis released *Laudato si'*, the most significant, single statement of the necessity to align our civilizations with the integral ecology of our Earth Community. Its penetrating analysis, together with its comprehensive vision of how we must change, can be considered one of the first moments the Earth Community as a whole reflects upon itself from the perspective of the evolutionary and ecological cosmology. *Laudato si'* is a planetary vision of a vibrant future; the “Journey of the Universe Conversations” is an action plan for realizing this vision. These initiatives and others coming forth from the hidden heart of the cosmos are manifestations of a planet in the midst of reinventing itself.



Excerpt from Kathleen Duffy’s *Teilhard’s Struggle*

The following excerpt is from Kathleen Duffy, SSJ. Teilhard’s Struggle: Embracing the Work of Evolution. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2019.



Preface On the Essay: “The Spiritual Power of Matter”

*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.*

In his essay, “The Spiritual Power of Matter,” Teilhard tells of a transformative experience that impacted him deeply at the time and affected him for the rest of his life. The incident is reminiscent of the gospel story of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-9; Lk 9:28-36) where, after climbing Mount Tabor, the apostles, Peter, James, and John, share an intimate moment with Jesus. As they look on, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus and speak with him. The apostles, overwhelmed at seeing Jesus transfigured, wish to remain forever with him in this place of delight. As rapidly as it came, the vision disappears and Jesus invites these apostles into the fullness of his mission with all of its delights and all of its hardships.

Teilhard's experience is similarly overwhelming and powerful. Possibly beginning as an Ignatian contemplation of the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor, a feast celebrated while he was on retreat in Jersey and one of his favorites (The feast of the Transfiguration is celebrated on August 6; Teilhard's essay is dated August 8), Teilhard uses a technique called "application of the senses" and loses himself to a scene that totally absorbs him. No longer simply observing the action, he becomes a major player in the drama and takes on the personae of these great Old Testament patriarchs who were drawn to follow the road of fire. In contrast to the otherworldly and celestial setting of Mount Tabor, the hot and barren desert in which Teilhard finds himself is familiar though the atmosphere is somewhat unsettling.

Like Elijah who was eventually carried away in a fiery chariot (2 Kgs 2:1-14), Teilhard finds himself traveling in the desert with a friend. Suddenly an ambiguous and somewhat murky force swoops down, expands around him, and encompasses him with its presence. The tempest of life engulfs him, the atmosphere quivers palpably about him, and an irresistible rapture takes possession of him. As the whirlwind penetrates to the depths of his soul and begins to demolish his ego, he falls prostrate. Like Moses who heard God speaking to him from the burning bush (Ex 3:1-22), Teilhard hears a Voice murmuring at the very center of his soul: "You called me: here I am," drawing you since your birth. Without knowing it, you have always desired me. You need me to grow and I have been waiting for you to be made holy" (Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter*, trans. René Hague. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, 72; hereinafter HM). When, like Moses, Teilhard asks the Voice for a name, the Voice, who describes itself as Matter, replies: I am the fire that consumes and the water that overthrows; I am the love that initiates and the truth that passes away. . . . I am the essence of all that is tangible . . . all that compels acceptance and all that brings renewal; all that breaks apart and all that binds together; power, experience, progress—matter all this I am. (HM, 69)

Just as Moses was asked to free the Hebrew people from Pharaoh's rule, Teilhard is being

asked to receive the Spirit of Earth so that he can help to redeem it, to make it holy. The Voice explains that only by receiving the Spirit of Earth into his own spirit, only by opening the eyes of all to the creative presence that fills the World, only by freeing his people from the bonds of outdated dogma, only by helping his people to see a universe in process of Christification will the World, beloved of God, be redeemed.

To accomplish this task, to participate in the evolutionary process, Teilhard realizes that, like Jacob who wrestled with an angel and like the billions of species before him who have struggled to survive and to develop the cosmos one small step at a time, he must learn to struggle against the forces that counter the forward movement of Evolution. Like the battles of World War I that Teilhard had recently lived through that, while devastating, were also so full of potential for effective change, this kind of struggle is holy. It is an act of reverence and respect for the work of Evolution that culminates in adoration.

Matter then challenges Teilhard to a duel: "Do battle boldly against me" (HM, 69). Extract from me the essence of all that is good, all that gives you energy, all that helps you to accomplish your task. Exhaling all the terror and anguish it had known throughout its evolutionary history—storms and earthquakes, hunger and drought, war and devastation—Matter prepares for battle. Filled now with the Spirit of Earth and in solidarity with all those creatures who have struggled to both survive and evolve, Teilhard leaps to his feet, and, with ruthless determination, responds in stages: at first, "not to be swept away"; then, for "the joy of feeling his own strength"; next, "to achieve mastery"; then, to discover the treasures hidden within; and finally, to plumb the depths of its mysteries (HM, 70-71). With ruthless determination, he struggles wholeheartedly against a grip that he eventually worships.

As their struggle continues, Teilhard notices that Matter is alive, young, and exuberant, evolving in response to their interaction. Matter is the container for Christ's body, the incarnate Presence of the Holy One. Teilhard is no longer dealing with abstract knowledge of the universe and of his God. Instead, he sees Matter, touches it, lives in its presence, and drinks of its vitality. And

in the process he finds that he is connecting intimately with his God. The experience comes as a premonition of the years ahead when he will struggle to articulate a new and glorious vision of Christ, a task that will test his faith and put him at odds with his Jesuit Order, his Roman Catholic Church, his family, and his friends.

Matter then suggests an approach to the task at hand: “Bathe yourself in the ocean of matter; plunge into it where it is deepest and most violent; struggle in the currents and drink of its waters. For it cradled you long ago in your preconscious existence; and it is that ocean that will raise you up to God” (HM, 72). Matter offers further advice, the key to the mystery of the World: “*Nothing is precious save what is yourself in others and others in yourself. In heaven, all is one*” (HM, 69). To open oneself to what is, no matter how difficult, to embrace it, and then to redeem it—this is the path to union with God. It is the only way to destroy the barriers that keep Humanity apart. Teilhard is ready to surrender. With all of his energy, he cries out: “Raise me up then, matter, to those heights, through struggle” (HM, 76).

Teilhard ends his essay with the “Hymn to Matter,” a prayer that must have seemed quite audacious. Each line of the prayer asks a blessing on one aspect of the World that he and all religious persons at the time were being encouraged to avoid: harsh Matter that he deals with as a geologist; perilous Matter that stirs up within him untamable passion; evolving Matter that is forever changing; immense and immeasurable Matter that reveals the dimensions of God; impenetrable Matter that keeps him trying to remove the veil that surrounds phenomena; mortal Matter that dissolves around him. He realizes that, rather than avoiding Matter, it is best to stay attentive and in conscious engagement with Matter’s inexhaustible potential in order to release its spiritual power.

Instead of leaving the World behind, which is what he had thought he was doing by entering the Jesuit Order, the exact opposite is being asked of him. Only by penetrating to the depth of Matter will he reach the divine milieu where the World becomes expressive and personal. Only by engaging in the struggle will he be captured by Christ. Only then will he feel the touch of Christ’s

hand and the warmth of Christ’s glance. Only then will he come to know the God of Evolution.

Teilhard understands the cost. He responds by vowing to plunge into the ocean of Matter, especially where it is deepest and most turbulent. Despite his greatest efforts, the price will be great—division, separation, death. He can never return to his former self and will become a stranger to his companions. However, the rewards outweigh any suffering that he will confront. In *The Divine Milieu*, he reflects on his experience of the Divine Presence alive in Matter:

By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers. *In eo vivimus*. [In him we live.] As Jacob said, awakening from his dream, the world, this palpable world, which we were wont to treat with the boredom and disrespect with which we habitually regard places with no sacred association for us, is in truth a holy place, and we did not know it. *Venite, adoremus*. [Come, let us adore.]

(Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life*, trans. Bernard Wall. New York: Harper & Row, 1960, 112.)

Having interacted with Matter at its deepest core, Teilhard knows what he must do, what he must say, who he must be. With a grateful heart, he casts off the heavy cloak of artificially contrived conventions that have been holding him back, and, like Elijah, soars off in a chariot that is making its way along the road of fire (HM, 76-77).



Notable Books & Publications

Kathleen Duffy, SSJ. *Teilhard's Struggle: Embracing the Work of Evolution*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2019

Review by Rasoul Sorkhabi, Ph.D.

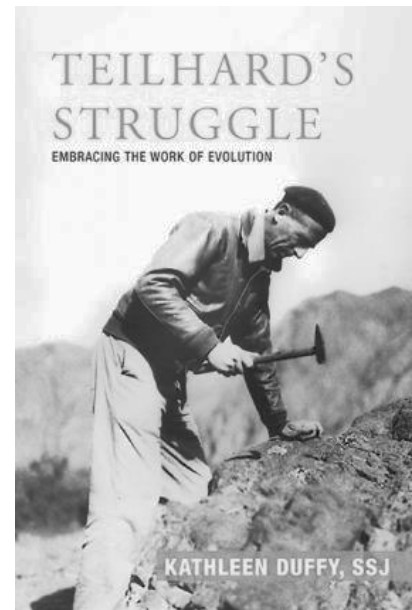
For most people, evolution simply means the biological development of life forms and the geological record of Earth's changes. This is what we study (if we are lucky) in biology and geology textbooks. Then, like many other topics we learn at school, we forget the details and keep the outline in the back of our minds. But for Teilhard de Chardin, as Kathleen Duffy shows in her new book, evolution was at the heart of his life, his thought, and his work. Teilhard was an ordained Jesuit priest who went on to obtain a doctorate in geology in 1922 with a thesis on the mammalian fossil record of Eocene strata in France. He then spent more than two decades doing geologic research in China, "Peking Man" fieldwork, and forays into India, Burma and Indonesia, aside from his earlier work in Egypt and his later work in South Africa. Evolutionary geology and physical anthropology consumed all of Teilhard's professional life. The cover page of Duffy's book depicts this: Teilhard the geologist with a hammer examining a rock outcrop (probably taken in 1931 in northern China).

As a young boy, Teilhard wondered if his love for rocks and nature was a distraction from his love for God and Christ. This was his first challenge, and he resolved it with his famous statement that there is a "communion with God through Earth." From Duffy's book we learn that this was only the beginning of Teilhard's life-long struggle, as evolution became a point of departure for his intellectual and mystical journey. He eventually extended evolution from the biosphere into the human sphere, into a mindscape that Teilhard calls noosphere, optimistically ending at the Christ-Omega Point. To accept evolution in the first place and then to extrapolate it to the social and religious realms required a quantum leap of faith for Teilhard, especially given his position as Jesuit and priest in the Catholic Church. It was not

easy, as Duffy in engaging language narrates. It came with huge sacrifices—personal, professional, psychological, financial—that few people would ever make. The Vatican officials did not permit Teilhard to publish his philosophical and mystical works (and then when they were published posthumously, they announced a *monitum*, or warning, on his writings). He was also not allowed to teach or to work in scientific positions in the Paris that he loved and was sent to live in exile, first in China and then in the United States where he died in New York City in 1955.

This is Duffy's third book related to Teilhard de Chardin. Her first book, *Rediscovering Teilhard's Fire* (St. Joseph University Press, 2010), is an edited volume consisting of essays contributed to various 2005 conferences held on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Teilhard's death. Her second book is *Teilhard's Mysticism: Seeing the Inner Face of Evolution* (Orbis Books, 2014), and this new book, *Teilhard's Struggle: Embracing the Work of Evolution*, is a sequel, if we consider Teilhard a combined Christian mystic/evolutionary scientist. There is also a stylistic pattern connecting the two works, as Professor Ursula King, a renowned expert on Teilhard, observes in the foreword to this book. She remarks that "Duffy is one of the few scholars who has truly appreciated the importance of Teilhard's early essays."

In *Teilhard's Mysticism*, Duffy uses Teilhard's 1917 essay, "The Mystical Milieu," as a basis to analyze how Teilhard's thinking developed to allow him to "see the inner face of evolution." In *Teilhard's Struggle*, she uses Teilhard's 1919 mystical narrative essay, "The Spiritual Power of Matter" (included in Teilhard's autobiographical work, *The Heart of Matter*,

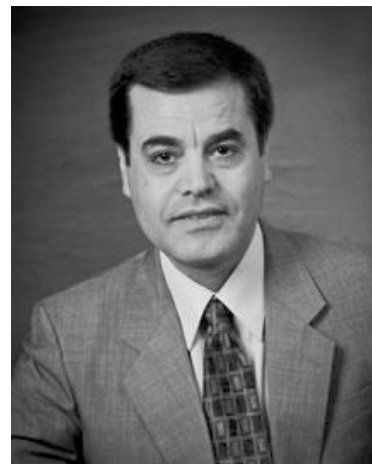


English translation, 1978), as a contemplative ground to integrate the various dimensions of Teilhard as a person, scientist, mystic, friend, believer, Jesuit, Church member, lover of the world, and struggler. Teilhard’s life involved all of these layers each of which is unraveled in the ten chapters of the book. Each chapter reads like an independent story; for this reason, some biographical information is repeated (and reinforced) here and there as necessary for the context of the chapter. Teilhard’s 1919 essay ends with a “Hymn to Matter.” Stanzas from that hymn decorate the openings of all chapters.

This book is published one hundred years after Teilhard wrote his essay, “The Spiritual Power of Matter.” That essay probably touches on the deepest layer of Teilhard’s thinking. We ordinarily think of matter as inanimate, unconscious entities moving around deterministically and interacting by chance. However, as Duffy discusses in the first chapter of the book, Teilhard has a holistic view of Matter/Spirit: Matter is the “without” of the Spirit “within,” he would say. In other words, Matter is alive, conscious, and ever evolving. That is why Teilhard often capitalizes words such as Matter, Spirit, and Evolution (which she does in this book). Duffy remarks: “Because the cosmos is not complete but is always moving toward greater union, greater novelty, and greater consciousness, struggle and suffering are inevitable.” In this view, Teilhard’s struggle (with its joy, suffering, and success) is actually part of the evolutionary process of humankind, at least in the Christian tradition.

Duffy is a scientist (professor emerita of physics at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia) and a Sister of St. Joseph (a Roman Catholic congregation)—two different backgrounds also shared by Teilhard himself. *Teilhard’s Struggle* is a small volume of 144 pages but a rich package of biographical information and analysis, with scholarly references to sources, as well as insights into the personal, intellectual, and professional life of a great man who, from his own experience, bridged Christianity and evolutionary science. Teilhard’s admirers as well as newcomers to the world of Teilhard will benefit from this book.

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Herman Greene, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim at the celebration of the 10th anniversary of Thomas Berry’s passing in North Carolina. June 1, 2019

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TEILHARD PERSPECTIVE is published by the American Teilhard Association, a non-profit organization whose goals are to explore philosophical, scientific, religious, social and environmental concerns in light of Teilhard's vision and to clarify the role of the human phenomenon in this emerging understanding of the cosmos.

We welcome suggestions of relevant ideas, books, news, events and contributions of articles for this newsletter. The editor is Tara Trapani. The *Teilhard Perspective* newsletter along with the biannual *Teilhard Studies* pamphlet and Annual Meeting notices are available through membership. Please contact us at: American Teilhard Association, c/o John Grim, 29 Spoke Drive, Woodbridge, CT 06525. Annual membership is \$35.

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American Teilhard Association, Thomas Berry, and Journey of the Universe Websites

At the ATA site www.teilharddechardin.org can be found a Biography, List of Writings, Pictures and Quotes, Life Timeline, ATA Events, Teilhard Studies with first page, recent full Teilhard Perspectives, Membership info, Links, and a Brian Thomas Swimme interview on Teilhard.

The Thomas Berry site www.thomasberry.org offers a Biography by Mary Evelyn Tucker, a John Grim essay: "Time, History, Historians in Thomas Berry's Vision," Writings by Thomas Berry, comments on his *The Great Work*, Films about or inspired by, and a List of Books.

A new site www.journeyoftheuniverse.org introduces this Emmy award-winning film, book, and educational series by Brian Thomas Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, to carry forward the inspiration of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry.