

Teilhard's Vision of Evolution¹

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Abstract. With Teilhard de Chardin's emphasis on "seeing" as a guide, this Study explores his evolutionary vision as a dynamic process in which the psychic character of physical matter ascends into ever-greater complexity and consciousness. Teilhard proposed that this axial rise of complexity-consciousness is especially evident in the appearance of humans. His special insight was to perceive the significance of complexity-consciousness as an emergent property of a matter-spirit process. What results is a unique phenomenology of an involution of matter, a metaphysics of union with spirit, and a mysticism of concentration of person. Finally, there are considerations of the vitality and limits of Teilhard's thought in light of contemporary issues

The deeper relationships of organic matter and human consciousness continue to challenge human understanding as exclusively mechanistic models of physical matter lose their explanatory power. One vision that still reflects one of the most inspired examinations of these evolutionary questions is that of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), French Jesuit and paleontologist. Teilhard grappled with novel questions for his day, namely, the meaning and significance of traditional religions and their cosmologies in light of the scientific story of an evolving universe. Moreover, as his personal life story brought him into encounters with Asian cultures he had to assess the relationships, if any, of Western-based science to the religions of the world. Certainly, there were limits to his awareness of Asian religions and cultures, as well as historical constraints on his scientific knowledge, but the ongoing significance of Teilhard's thought is that it extends into current discussions regarding the relationship of religion and science, religion and evolution, and spirit and matter.

During the 20th century many thinkers pondered the relationship of human consciousness to material reality. From the standpoint of the empirical sciences, consciousness appears as an emergent phenomenon having come from nothing but inert, non-conscious matter that composes the known universe. Religious-oriented thinkers have often framed their inquiry in terms of divine and human interactions — that is, religious revelations in which a divine mediation is seen as having broken into the

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