

# Teilhard de Chardin: A Short Biography

John Grim & Mary Evelyn Tucker

*There is a communion with God, and a communion with the Earth,  
and a communion with God through the Earth.*

*Writings in Time of War, New York, 1968, p. 14*

These lines that conclude Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's essay, "The Cosmic Life," provide an appropriate starting point for a consideration of his life. They are of special interest because Teilhard wrote them in 1916 during his initial duty as a stretcher-bearer in World War I. In many ways they are an early indication of his later work and a reminder that much of the richness of Teilhard's thought was framed during these seminal war years. These lines also suggest one of Teilhard's lasting contributions, namely, a sense of one's personal life as manifesting, and manifested in, the larger story of the universe. The communion experiences emphasized here take us back to his early childhood in the south of France and ahead to his years of travel and scientific research. Throughout Teilhard's seventy-four years, then, his communion experience with the divine and his insight into the role of the human in the evolutionary process emerge as his dominant concerns. In briefly presenting the biography of Teilhard three periods are distinguished here: the formative years, the years of travel, and the final years in New York.

## The Formative Years

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born on May 1st, 1881, to Emmanuel and Berthe-Adele Teilhard de Chardin. While both of his parental lineages were distinguished, it is noteworthy that his mother was the great grandniece of François-Marie Arouet, more popularly known as Voltaire. He was the fourth of the couple's eleven children and was born at the family estate of Sarcenat near the twin cities of Clermont-Ferrand in the ancient province of Auvergne in south, central France. The long extinct volcanic peaks of Auvergne and the forested preserves of this province left an indelible mark on Teilhard. He remarks in his spiritual autobiography, *The Heart of Matter*, that:

Auvergne molded me... Auvergne served me both as museum of natural