

Teilhard's Mass On The World:
100 Years and Moving Forward
New York 2023

By Jason Willits, ATA Member

This October, the American Teilhard Association, in collaboration with the *Neveux du Pere Teilhard de Chardin* (The Nephews of Teilhard de Chardin) and the *Amis de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (The Friends of Teilhard de Chardin), gathered to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *Mass on the World*, his prayerful consecration of the cosmos. The weeklong celebration happened at two major venues: Manhattan and Hyde Park, New York.

On Tuesday, October 17, Tracy Higgins, bilingual board member of the ATA, received our French visitors and acted as their tour guide through Manhattan in collaboration with a contracted travel company. Frank and Mary Frost, ATA board members, traveled with the group of French pilgrims along the southeast quadrant of Central Park. St. Vincent Ferrer was the first stop, an ornate Gothic style Dominican Church where Teilhard celebrated Mass while living at the Lotos Club and Hotel 14.

The group then took transport to St Ignatius Loyola Church, for a talk by Teilhard's grandniece Marie Bayon de la Tour about Teilhard as a Jesuit, followed by Mass, and lunch. Options for three New York landmarks were offered to the Teilhard pilgrims for the route back to their Marriott Hotel: St. Patrick's Cathedral, Carnegie Hall, and Rockefeller Center.

The next day, at the Marriott, Tracy Higgins spoke from her recent *Teilhard Studies* monograph "Teilhard in New York." Fr. Thierry Magnin presented a seminar titled "The Noosphere." Because Fr. Valerian Mendonca from India was unable to attend, he sent his lecture by video, "The Mass on the World and Cosmic Communion." Fr. Olivier Teilhard de Chardin's lecture was titled "The Christic." Fr. Lucio Florio of Argentina, also unable to attend, sent a video of his paper, "An Uncompleted Reception: The Contribution of Teilhard de Chardin's Thought to Academic Theology;" and Caroline Puig-Grenetier, a film "The Creative Unity of the World."

The second phase of the week's celebration began north of the city in Hyde Park, NY at Mariapolis Luminosa, a retreat center nestled among the hills and hardwoods of the Hudson River Valley whose changing leaves increased in vibrancy throughout the weekend.

Friday opened with Brother Reginald-Ferdiand Poswick, OSB, of Belgium, making a case for Teilhard having satisfied the Jesuit requirements of sainthood. Marie Bayon de la Tour presented a series of photos speaking about "Teilhard through the Eyes of his own Family." Many of these photos had never been seen by an American audience. Kathy Duffy, ATA President, read a paper by Fr. R.S. Almagno, OFM titled "Teilhard as Priest," and Teilhard's grandniece Marie elaborated his perspective on death. The American Teilhard Association sponsored bi-lingual translators through our digital media, so that members could tune in, digitally, and listen to seminars in either French or English. The weekend was emceed by Andrew Del Rossi, ATA

board member and host of the ATA Podcast. Tracy Higgins translated for the French speaking audience.

Joshua Canzona, Ph.D., Vice President of the ATA, spoke of the similarities between The Mass on the World and Islamic Mysticism before Sister Kathy reflected on the Mass itself. The Mass on the World has been publicly read for a century. One of the more notable celebrations of the para-liturgical service was written by Fr. Thomas King, SJ; which Kathy has adopted.

After dinner, filmmakers Frank and Mary Frost premiered their film, *The Evolution of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, which has been thirteen years in the making. The film was created for distribution via public television. By the end of the screening, the audience felt an urgency to premiere the film worldwide! It presents the beloved, devoted priest's life while capturing the conspiratorial aspects of Teilhard's censure and the development of his scientific work and vision. The film is visually stunning, with parts filmed on location throughout the United States, France and China.

Saturday morning was a time of preparation for the celebration of the Mass on the World. By lunchtime, the space was set. The weekend had been rainy and drab so far. Our prayers to Teilhard were answered when, upon exiting the dining room to make our way toward the room in which we would celebrate the Mass on the World, the clouds parted and rays of sunshine broke through the gray sky. The element of fire led the entire group into the seminar space, which had been converted into the parabolic seating appropriate for theater. More than a few eyes began to brim with tears at the offertory, while various ministers read Teilhard's words, accompanied by music and liturgical dance, in this powerful testament to Teilhard's spirituality.

After celebrating the Mass on the World, we caravanned from the retreat grounds to the Culinary Institute of America, where, on its campus, the old Jesuit cemetery, the site of Teilhard's burial is located. The gravesite visit was appropriately solemn, but without grief. The experience was informal and incredibly personal. Under the leadership of Fr. Olivier Teilhard de Chardin, we sang hymns and prayed together, including offering our intentions and asking for Teilhard's intercession.

One hundred years after having written his *Mass on the World* and 68 years after his repose, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., was finally granted a well-deserved funeral by those most deeply impacted by his works, his legacy, and his vision. Fr. Olivier Teilhard de Chardin, grandnephew of Teilhard, celebrated Mass Sunday, October 22nd, the day after visitation. Speaking at Teilhard's grave, grandniece Marie Bayon de La Tour expressed a sense of kinship between the Association of *Neveux du Pere Teilhard de Chardin*, Association of *Amis de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, and the American Teilhard Association.

Grandniece Marie also shared with us the details of Teilhard's final days and funeral of Teilhard the day after Bright Monday, April 12th, 1955. Fewer than a dozen were present; now, forty stood around. A wreath of flowers was the only decoration at that time; now, the flowers covering the grave were dwarfed by two large potted mums. A month before his funeral, Teilhard's diary states he wishes "to continue tenaciously to write with the idea that others will eventually see what I see..."

These forty pilgrims from across the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Belgium, and France have each, in some way, dedicated themselves to furthering Teilhard's vision. Our visit to the cemetery testifies to this promise. We are working on behalf of the emergence of Omega. Frank Frost's comments apply to us all: "This is not an ending of our work sharing Teilhard; rather, it is the beginning!"