

Teilhard in New York¹

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Introduction

“Overall, I have never felt more devoted to the single effort of discovering and revealing the reality and immensity of a Christ whose heart aims to manifest itself as the very heart of a converging universe—pray that I am faithful to the very end.”²

In this excerpt from a letter to Jeanne Mortier, written soon after he arrived in New York City in 1951, Teilhard echoes his lifelong commitment, ever mindful of his approaching end. The following account, based largely on his letters, describes events that precipitated his exile and shows how he lived out this commitment during his final days in New York City. It recreates a picture of his daily life in the city, his acquaintances, his last essays, and some general impressions about American life and the events of the times. But, most touching, this summary also provides a reminder of Teilhard’s characteristic response to suffering in service to his commitment.

When Teilhard landed in New York during the denouement of his remarkable life, he was energized by the fieldwork he had just left in South Africa and committed to devoting his waning strength to the continued development and discreet dissemination of his vision. His commitment to the “religion of tomorrow”³ remained stronger than ever. He was “thinking of rewriting ‘Mass on the World’ in the same line but in a new way, at the end of life—not at the beginning.”⁴ He felt a sense of urgency to clarify and share his ideas through encounters with thinkers of all backgrounds.

¹ The following was prepared in anticipation of a pilgrimage by visitors in association with an international conference in New York celebrating the 100th anniversary of Teilhard’s “Mass on the World.”

² Teilhard to Jeanne Mortier, November 30, 1951, in *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier*, trans. by author (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1984), 84.

³ *Ibid.*, March 8, 1955, 178.

⁴ *Ibid.*, November 22, 1952, 119.