

Encountering Teilhard

*The Living Legacy of
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

Edited by

JUAN V. FERNÁNDEZ DE LA GALA

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Introduction

It has sometimes been said that understanding Teilhard is complicated. Perhaps there is some reason in this, but only if we judge him by the audacity of his metaphors, by the transdisciplinary boldness of his reflections or by the mysterious sonority of the neologisms that punctuate his theological thought and sprout in his writings like strange lexical flowers: *christogenesis*, *noosphere*, *pleroma*, *diaphany*, *amortization*, *law of complexity-consciousness*, *third infinity*, *differentiated union*, *Omega Point*. . .

However, when I have been able to talk about Teilhard in some spiritual or academic forums, I have always been struck by a constant: the grateful testimony of many people who, since the time of the Second Vatican Council, were fascinated and completely seduced forever by his innovative thought, his prophetic visions, and his mysticism of a God incarnated in matter. I am not at all surprised that even John Paul II, who was a man of media crowds, or Benedict XVI, from a more intimate spiritual depth, were equally impressed by Teilhardian ideas and that, already in our days, Pope Francis wanted to recall them in *Laudato si'* and during his apostolic journey to Mongolia.

Whether in the gentle undulations of the Auvergne, in the saline verticality of the cliffs of Jersey, in the desolate plains of Mongolia, or in the Euclidean perpendicularity of the street layout of New York, Teilhard was always able to provide us with an axis of understanding of theology from the evolutionary paradigm and thus unify what scholasticism showed us in such an artificially dual and fragmentary way, cloistered in the domesticity of the Mediterranean and on the shores of an immovable Aristotelianism.

There is a rich existing corpus of analysis on the luminous and hopeful work of Teilhard, a corpus well outlined with the reasonableness and rigor of the academy. But we lack testimonies from the subjective and vital terrain of the lively intuitions that only he knew how to anticipate and arouse in many people of faith. These reflections, which we submit today to the kind judgment of our readers, want to be precisely that: an invitation to reread Teilhard's work according to the first-person account of readers who were seduced by his mystical perception of a God who becomes transparent to us in the matter of the universe and who is the Logos wherein the miracle of evolution unfolds. That evolution pertains to the cosmos, to life, and to culture. Perhaps it implies the evolution of the spirit, the greatest invitation to convergence that we can imagine.

Men and women, of different confessional traditions, lay and religious, theologians and scientists, speak here in the first person of their own astonished discovery of the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. We have collected here almost thirty testimonies, sent from eleven countries, expressed in five languages and coming from three continents. You will see that many of these testimonies bear the complicit aftertaste of a clandestine reading, at a time when Teilhard's thought was questioned by rigorist orthodoxy. Deliberately, we have sought a plurality of visions that, as you will see, converge toward similar intuitions, traveling in noospheric connection from diversity to unity. If this book shows us anything, it is precisely the convergence to which we are called and to which the attractive pole of Christ invites us. It is noticeable that Teilhard not only knew how to explain, but also to encourage, this final stretch of the evolutionary path that goes creatively from anthropogenesis to christogenesis and that unfolds in the human noosphere.

Our compilation gathers, above all, the reading experience of those who, in approaching Teilhard's work, felt between the lines the unforgettable sparkle of a prophetic and clarifying voice and, above all, the immanent closeness of God in matter, that transparent presence that Teilhard de Chardin liked to call

diaphany. It was enough for Teilhard to recover many of the concerns and intuitions already present in the foundational texts of John and Paul, of the patristic era, and of a scholasticism that knew how to be less Platonic. From there, Teilhard hopefully broadens our theological and liturgical perspective with intuitions that continue to seem novel to us today.

Here we leave you with this collective invitation to approach the work, at once mystical and scientific, of Teilhard de Chardin, to dialogue with him and to pray with him in the pilgrimage of these pages; to feel with him the close presence of God in the world, and, if we dare, to look at the reverse side of the cosmic tapestry, where we may be surprised to find, in small and unique stitches, the seams of our own life, interwoven in the fabric of the universe, entwined with those of other beings, and framed in the provident wickerwork of space-time.

For those who are familiar with Teilhardian terminology, it will not be necessary for me to dwell on the reasons for the Spanish title of this collective effort: *Convergences*. This term comes loaded with diverse denotative meanings and connotative symbolic adherences. For Teilhard, everything converges. Matter and spirit converge in the same evolutionary process; the thinking noosphere converges toward christogenesis; science and mysticism converge until they become indistinguishable activities; and above all, the whole creation converges toward God, in Christ, incarnated and resurrected, the attractive pole that will summon us to the Omega Point. Convergence can be synonymous with encounter, conciliation, articulation, and communion and always implies a dynamic and never forced process, fruit of the freedom of those who, being invited to convergence with others, can opt for divergence and set a course toward the east of Eden. In this book you will notice how the testimonies gathered here also converge, each one coming from a unique and unrepeatable personal history, but which the weight of Teilhard's prophetic visions has been able to bring together in a single sheaf of happy fruits.

Finally, you will find at the end of this collection, an unpublished letter from Father Pedro Arrupe, who vindicates the figure of Teilhard, praising his exemplary faith and obedience, and regretting the “abusive silence” to which he was subjected. Fortunately, with the era of Pope Francis, the “culture of suspicion” has already begun to be replaced by the “culture of encounter,” the more mature and dialogical faith that is built in the journey of time and cultures and is embodied in the paradigms and concerns of each era. The proposal made by Francis in his apostolic letter in the form of his *motu proprio Ad Theologiam Promovendam* (2023) is along these lines: Francis seeks to incarnate theological thought in every context, thus to be able to “penetrate, with originality and a spirit of imagination, into existential places” (ATP 9), while seeking to do so, moreover, in a genuinely Teilhardian style—that is, “in constant and transdisciplinary dialogue with other scientific, philosophical, humanistic and artistic human knowledge, with believers and non-believers and with men and women of different Christian confessions or different religions” (ATP 9).

Thus approached, theological research could recover, both in its content and in its method, that creativity of the incarnated Gospel that animated the nomadic preaching of Jesus of Nazareth and that, due to an excess of doctrinal rigor, we have at times suffocated, believing that we were honoring tradition. It is evident that theologians are not catechists. Nor should they be. To reduce theology to a mere strategic plan for proselytism, to satisfy the apologetic battle, or to defend supposed traditions constitutes a true waste of intelligence as a gift of God. With the extreme conciseness of an aphorism, Thomas More reminded us that “tradition is not the adoration of ashes, but the transmission of a flame.” That is to say, tradition is not the woody lethargy of the immovable, but the germinal greenness that encourages, every March, the living history of fresh shoots.

Far from the precautions of the past, the Church must be grateful for the good that Teilhard’s work has done and will continue

to do for many believers. These testimonies are intended to be a happy bouquet of the gratitude that we all owe to Teilhard. With this book we want to remember the Jesuit who was faithful to the Church, the geologist of the deserts of Mongolia, the mystic of the *Mass on the World*, and the theologian of evolution, and to express our gratitude for the way in which he contributed to broadening our ways of contemplating, adoring, and understanding God in the immensity of the cosmos. These ways are necessarily limited, astonished, and prayerful, in the face of a God who always surpasses and overflows us, a God who, as our Muslim brothers remind us, will be “always greater” than we can imagine.

J. V. FERNÁNDEZ DE LA GALA
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