

# NOTHING IS PROFANE

by Kevin Gallagher

*'...by virtue of the Creation and, still more, of the Incarnation, nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see.'*<sup>1</sup>

Teilhard invites us to be attentive. Everything in Creation is impregnated with the Divine. Even more than this, the incarnation invites us to allow our gaze to dwell on Christ the centre of this Milieu. 'God is as pervasive and perceptible as the atmosphere in which we are bathed,' he writes in the introduction to *The Divine Milieu*. Then he asks and answers an important and central question 'What prevents you from enfolding him in your arms? Only one thing: your inability to see him.'<sup>2</sup>



*Lyn Gallagher Autumn 2021*

This reflection explores some insights in the writing of Teilhard de Chardin in *The Divine Milieu*. Some of these insights connect with the work in our contemplative evolution network (CEN) such as daily contemplative practice and cooperating with evolution. Teilhard de Chardin was a mystic for this time. In the *Divine Milieu* he also acknowledges; 'it is impossible to love Christ without love for others and it is impossible to love others without moving nearer to Christ.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., *The Divine Milieu, An Essay On The Interior Life.*( London Collins 1957), 66

<sup>2</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., *The Divine Milieu*, 46

<sup>3</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., *The Divine Milieu*, 144

The English translation of the French Text; *Le Milieu Divin*, maintains the French word *Milieu* as *The Divine Milieu*. There is no accurate English equivalent so the translators have resigned to keep *Milieu* in the title and text of Teilhard's seminal work. *Milieu* means both *atmosphere and centre*, which quite aptly describes the underlying sense throughout. Also the subtitle; *An Essay on the Interior Life*, underlines the meaning of *Milieu* as encompassing for Teilhard, both outer environment and interior luminosity. His outer environment includes the sufferings of others.

While in Tianjin China in November 1926 Teilhard writes: 'I have finally decided to write my book on the Spiritual Life. I call it *Le Milieu Divin*. ... I have settled down to my little book. I want to write it slowly, quietly – living it and meditating on it like a prayer.'<sup>4</sup> In the same letter he expresses his wish to have it published so his ideas might open new frontiers for many minds and gain some sort of approval from the Church. As we know, publication was not achieved until 1957. Two years after Teilhard died.

In the text itself he writes that *The Divine Milieu* is '... a way of teaching how to see.'<sup>5</sup> The principle and foundation of the Spiritual life for Teilhard is; 'to see'. To see is synonymous with being attentive, noticing, awareness and forms of meditation. Mystics throughout history invite us to create conditions conducive to seeing. Methods of prayer and meditation are *space-making*, in order to *see*. Seeing is Contemplation for Teilhard. Seeing Christ in all things, in the heart of matter. 'One could say the whole of life lies in seeing'<sup>6</sup> he writes. 'It is essential to see--to see things as they are and to see them really and intensely'<sup>7</sup>

Teilhard's title in the introduction to *The Divine Milieu* is a latin phrase; '*In Eo Vivimus*' which translates, *In Him we Live*. It is a quote from Acts 17: 22-31. According to Savary this phrase is 'a core insight into Teilhard's Spirituality. ...unless you read each page of *The Divine Milieu* from this "*in eo vivimus*" you may miss its richness.'<sup>8</sup> Savary suggests. This richness for Teilhard, in light of the incarnation, translates: In Christ we Live. To read *The Divine Milieu* with this backdrop holds its centre, as Teilhard declares; '...our soul is wholly dedicated to Christ and centred upon him.'<sup>9</sup>

In 1950 toward the end of his life, Teilhard elaborates further on the Divine Milieu and his experience of what can be understood by him as '*seeing*' or '*seeing him*.'

Throughout my life, by means of my life, the world has little by little caught fire in my sight until, aflame all around me, it has become almost completely luminous from within... Such has been my experience in contact with the earth-the diaphany of the Divine at the heart

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<sup>4</sup> Letters from a Traveller 7 November 1926 91

<sup>5</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., *The Divine Milieu*, 46

<sup>6</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., Ed. Sarah Appleton-Weber: *The Human Phenomenon* (Toronto, SUSSEX 2015)3

<sup>7</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., *The Divine Milieu*, 53

<sup>8</sup> Savary Louis M., *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained* (NY; Paulist 2007) 16

<sup>9</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., *The Divine Milieu*, 58

of the universe on fire: Christ; his heart; a fire: capable of penetrating everywhere and, gradually, spreading everywhere.<sup>10</sup>

Teilhard's contemplative life of prayer and the heart of his *Essay on the Interior Life*, I suggest, can be described as: learning to see and live in union with Christ and Matter in an unfinished, evolving universe. 'Seeing and experiencing the diaphany of the Divine at the heart of the Universe on Fire: Christ.'<sup>11</sup> The text of *The Divine Milieu* offers a synthesis, a bringing together of Teilhard's scientific career and his religious commitment and life as a Jesuit priest. Another synthesis beckons further exploration; between his experience and education of the Spiritual Exercises and his experience and education in science and work as a Palaeontologist.



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Teilhard made the Spiritual Exercises a number of times during his life which united in him; love of God and love of earth and love of God through earth. I suggest here that our daily commitment in CEN to meditate or contemplate develops *seeing*, both inner and outer, inviting us to engage in a broken world. St Ignatius presents a framework in the Exercises to bring about unity in the exercitant, whom he refers to as *creature*, with *Creator* and *creation*. Kathy Duffy suggests that *The Divine Milieu* is patterned on the *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*. 'It is a unique reappropriation of the Exercises in the light of the theory of evolution.'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., *The Divine Milieu*, 46 (French Editors Footnote ref *The Heart of Matter*, 1950, 15

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> Duffy Kathleen., *The Spiritual Power of Matter: Teilhard and the Exercises*, (Review 2004) 198

In conclusion: The Divine Milieu presents a vision of Christ as all-in-everything. Nothing here is profane when we know how to see. Teilhard's way of teaching how to see has emerged from his experience of the Spiritual Exercises and invites us to include everything and everyone, he writes; 'See or perish. This is the situation imposed on every element of the Universe by the mysterious gift of existence. And thus to a higher degree, this is the human condition.'<sup>13</sup> For Teilhard; nothing is static, humanity is on the move, albeit slowly, evolving in an unfinished, broken universe. No-one goes to heaven until we all go to heaven. 'Seeing,' like an engine room, *spearheads* the human condition toward Christ awakening to interconnectedness and relatedness to everyone and all things.

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<sup>13</sup> Teilhard de Chardin., Ed. Sarah Appleton-Weber: The Human Phenomenon (Toronto, SUSSEX 2015)3