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Biography of Teilhard de Chardin

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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. Yet 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 experience of the divine and his insight into the role of the human in the evolutionary process emerges as his dominant concerns. In briefly presenting the biography of Teilhard three periods will be distinguished: 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 Francois-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. The long extinct volcanic peaks of Auvergne and the forested preserves of this southern province left an indelible mark on Teilhard. He remarks in his spiritual autobiography, *The Heart of Matter*, that:

Auvergne moulded me Auvergne served me both as museum of natural history and as wildlife preserve. Sarcenat in Auvergne gave me my first taste of the joys of discovery to Auvergne I owe my most precious possessions: a collection of pebbles and rocks still to be found there,

where I lived. (translated in Claude Cuenot, *Teilhard de Chardin*, Baltimore, 1938, p. 3.)

Drawn to the natural world, Teilhard developed his unusual powers of observation. This youthful skill was especially fostered by his father who maintained an avid interest in natural science. Yet Teilhard's earliest memory of childhood was not of the flora and fauna of Auvergne or the seasonal family houses but a striking realization of life's frailty and the difficulty of finding any abiding reality. He recollects:

A memory? My very first! I was five or six. My mother had snipped a few of my curls. I picked one up and held it close to the fire. The hair was burnt up in a fraction of a second. A terrible grief assailed me; I had learnt that I was perishable... What used to grieve me when I was a child? This insecurity of things. And what used I to love? My genie of iron! With a plow hitch I believed myself, at seven years, rich with a treasure incorruptible, everlasting. And then it turned out that what I possessed was just a bit of iron that rusted. At this discovery I threw myself on the lawn and shed the bitterest tears of my existence! (from *The Heart of Matter*, in Cuenot, p. 3.)

It was but a short step for Teilhard to move from his "gods of iron" to those of stone. Auvergne gave forth a surprising variety of stones amethyst, citrine, and chalcedony just to name a few with which to augment his youthful search for a permanent reality. Undoubtedly his sensitive nature was also nurtured by his mother's steadfast piety. Teilhard's reflections on his mother's influence is striking, he writes:

A spark had to fall upon me, to make the fire blaze out. And, without a doubt, it was through my mother that it came to me, sprung from the stream of Christian mysticism, to light up and kindle my childish soul. It was through that spark that 'My universe,' still but half-personalized, was to become amorised, and so achieve its full centration. (*The Heart of Matter*, in Cuenot, p. 4.)

This early piety was well established, so that when he entered Notre Dame de Mongre near Villefranche-sur-Saone, thirty miles north of Lyons, at

twelve years of age, his quiet, diligent nature was already well-formed. During his five years at this boarding school Teilhard exchanged his security in stones for a Christian piety largely influenced by Thomas a Kempis's Imitation of Christ. Near the time of his graduation he wrote his parents indicating that he wanted to become a Jesuit.

Teilhard's training as a Jesuit provided him with the thoughtful stimulation to continue his devotion both to scientific investigation of the earth and to cultivation of a life of prayer. He entered the Jesuit novitiate at Aix-Provence in 1899. Here he further developed the ascetic piety that he had learned in his reading at Mongre. It was also at Aix-en-Provence that he began his friendship with Auguste Valensin who had already studied philosophy with Maurice Blondel. In 1901, due to an anti-clerical movement in the French Republic, the Jesuits and other religious orders were expelled from France. The Aix-en-Provence novitiate that had moved in 1900 to Paris was transferred in 1902 to the English island of Jersey. Prior to the move to Jersey, however, on March 26, 1902 Pierre took his first vows in the Society of Jesus. At this time the security of Teilhard's religious life, apart from the political situation in France, was painfully disturbed by the gradual sickness that incapacitated his younger sister, Marguerite-Marie, and by the sudden illness of his oldest brother, Alberic.

Alberic's death in September, 1902, came as Pierre and his fellow Jesuits were quietly leaving Paris for Jersey. The death of this formerly successful, buoyant brother, followed in 1904 by the death of Louise, his youngest sister, caused Teilhard momentarily to turn away from concern for things of this world. Indeed, he indicates that but for Paul Trossard, his former novice master who encouraged him to follow science as a legitimate way to God, he would have discontinued those studies in favor of theology.

From Jersey Pierre was sent in 1905 to do his teaching internship at the Jesuit college of St. Francis in Cairo, Egypt. For the next three years Teilhard's naturalist inclinations were developed through prolonged forays into the countryside near Cairo studying the existing flora and fauna and also the fossils of Egypt's past. While Teilhard carried on his teaching assignments assiduously he also made time for extensive collecting of fossils and for correspondence with naturalists in Egypt and France. His collected Letters from Egypt reveal a person with keen observational powers. In 1907 Teilhard published his first article, "A Week in Fayoum." He also learned in 1907 that due to his finds of shark teeth in Fayoum and

in the quarries around Cairo a new species named Teilhardia and three new varieties of shark had been presented to the Geological Society of France by his French correspondent, Monsieur Prieur. From Cairo Pierre returned to England to complete his theological studies at Ore Place in Hastings. During the years 1908 to 1912 Teilhard lived the rigorously disciplined life of a Jesuit scholastic. Yet the close relation he maintained with his family is evident in the depth of feeling expressed at the death in 1911 of his elder sister, Françoise, in China. This sister, who was the only other family member in religious life, had become a Little Sister of the Poor and worked among the impoverished of Shanghai. For Teilhard her death was particularly poignant because of the selfless dedication of her life.

His letters during this period at Hastings indicate that the demands of his theological studies left little time for geological explorations of the chalk cliffs of Hastings or the clay of nearby Weald. Yet his letters also reveal his enthusiasm for both of these types of study. In summary, three different but interrelated developments occurred during this period which significantly affected the future course of Teilhard's life. These are the reading of Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, the anti-Modernist attack by Pope Pius X, and his discovery of a fossil tooth in the region of Hastings.

In reading Henri Bergson's newly published *Creative Evolution* Teilhard encountered a thinker who dissolved the Aristotelian dualism of matter and spirit in favor of a movement through time of an evolving universe. Teilhard also found the word evolution in Bergson. He connected the very sound of the word, as he says, "with the extraordinary density and intensity with which the English landscape then appeared to me - especially at sunset - when the Sussex woods seemed to be laden with all the fossil life that I was exploring, from one quarry to another, in the soil of the Weald" (from *The Heart of Matter*, in Robert Speaight, *The Life of Teilhard de Chardin*, New York, 1967, p. 45). From Bergson, then, Teilhard received the vision of on-going evolution. For Bergson, evolution was continually expanding, a "Tide of Life" undirected by an ultimate purpose. Teilhard would eventually disagree with Bergson with respect to the direction of the universe. Later he put forward his own interpretation of the evolutionary process based on the intervening years of field work.

In 1903 while Pierre was in Egypt, Pius X succeeded Leo XIII as Pope. The forward-looking momentum of Leo was abandoned by the conservative Italian Curia in favor of retrenchment and attacks on a spectrum of ideas labelled “modernism” in the encyclical *Pascendi* (1907) and the decrees of *Lamentabili* (1907). Among the many new works eventually placed on the *Index of Forbidden Works* was Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, although it was not yet suspect when Teilhard read it at Hastings. It is in this ecclesiastical milieu that Teilhard endeavored to articulate his emerging vision of the spiritual quality of the universe.

It was also during his years at Hastings that Teilhard and other Jesuits met Charles Dawson, an amateur paleontologist. Because of Pierre’s years of collecting in Cairo he had acquired a growing interest in fossils and prehistoric life, but he was not an accomplished paleontologist, nor did his studies allow him the time to develop the skills needed to accurately date or determine pre-historic fossils. In his very limited association with Dawson, Teilhard discovered the fossil tooth in one of the diggings that caused his name to become known to the scientific community. Moreover, Teilhard’s enthusiasm for the scientific study of prehistoric human life now crystallized as a possible direction after his ordination in August 1911.

Between 1912 and 1915 Teilhard continued his studies in paleontology. But because of his initiative in meeting Marcellin Boule at the Museum of Natural History and in taking courses at this Paris museum and at the Institute Catholique with Georges Boussac, Teilhard now began to develop that expertise in the geology of the Eocene Period that earned him a doctorate in 1922. In addition, Pierre also joined such accomplished paleontologists as the Abbe Henri Breuil, Father Hugo Obermaier, Jean Boussac and others in their excavations in the Aurignacian period caves of southern France, in the phosphorite fossil fields of Belgium and in the fossil rich sands of the French Alps. While Teilhard was developing a promising scientific career he also renewed his acquaintance in Paris with his cousin Marguerite Teilhard Chombon. Through Marguerite, Teilhard entered into a social milieu in which he could exchange ideas and receive critical comment from several perspectives. In these surroundings Teilhard developed his thought until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

When the war came in August, Teilhard returned to Paris to help Boule store museum pieces, to assist Marguerite turn the girl’s school she headed into a hospital, and to prepare for his own eventual induction. August was

a disastrous month for the French army; the German forces executed the Schlieffen Plan so successfully that by the end of the month they were about thirty miles from Paris. In September the French rallied at the Marne and Parisians breathed easier. Because Teilhard's induction was delayed, Teilhard's Jesuit Superiors decided to send him back to Hastings for his tertianship, the year before final vows. Two months later word came that his younger brother Gonzague had been killed in battle near Soissons. Shortly after this Teilhard received orders to report for duty in a newly forming regiment from Auvergne. After visiting his parents and his invalid sister Guiguite at Sarcenat, he began his assignment as a stretcher bearer with the North African Zouaves in January 1915.

The powerful impact of the war on Teilhard is recorded in his letters to his cousin, Marguerite, now collected in *The Making of a Mind*. They give us an intimate picture of Teilhard's initial enthusiasm as a "soldier-priest," his humility in bearing a stretcher while others bore arms, his exhaustion after the brutal battles at Ypres and Verdun, his heroism in rescuing his comrades of the Fourth Mixed Regiment, and his unfolding mystical vision centered on seeing the world evolve even in the midst of war. In these letters are many of the seminal ideas that Teilhard would develop in his later years. For example during a break in the fierce fighting at the battle of Verdun in 1916 Teilhard wrote the following to his cousin, Marguerite:

I don't know what sort of monument the country will later put up on Froideterre hill to commemorate the great battle. There's only one that would be appropriate: a great figure of Christ. Only the image of the crucified can sum up, express and relieve all the horror, and beauty, all the hope and deep mystery in such an avalanche of conflict and sorrows. As I looked at this scene of bitter toil, I felt completely overcome by the thought that I had the honour of standing at one of the two or three spots on which, at this very moment, the whole life of the universe surges and ebbs places of pain but it is there that a great future (this I believe more and more) is taking shape." (*The Making of a Mind*, New York, 1965, pp. 119/20.)

Through these nearly four years of bloody trench fighting Teilhard's regiment fought in some of the most brutal battles at the Marne and Epres in 1915, Nieuport in 1916, Verdun in 1917 and Chateau Thierry in 1918. Teilhard himself was active in every engagement of the regiment for which

he was awarded the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur in 1921. Throughout his correspondence he wrote that despite this turmoil he felt there was a purpose and a direction to life more hidden and mysterious than history generally reveals to us. This larger meaning, Teilhard discovered, was often revealed in the heat of battle. In one of several articles written during the war, Pierre expressed the paradoxical wish experienced by soldiers-on-leave for the tension of the front lines. He indicated this article in one of his letters saying:

I'm still in the same quiet billets. Our future continues to be pretty vague, both as to when and what it will be. What the future imposes on our present existence is not exactly a feeling of depression; it's rather a sort of seriousness, of detachment, of a broadening, too, of outlook. This feeling, of course, borders on a sort of sadness (the sadness that accompanies every fundamental change); but it leads also to a sort of higher joy . . . I'd call it 'Nostalgia for the Front'. The reasons, I believe, come down to this; the front cannot but attract us because it is, in one way, the extreme boundary between what one is already aware of, and what is still in process of formation. Not only does one see there things that you experience nowhere else, but one also sees emerge from within one an underlying stream of clarity, energy, and freedom that is to be found hardly anywhere else in ordinary life – and the new form that the soul then takes on is that of the individual living the quasi-collective life of all men, fulfilling a function far higher than that of the individual, and becoming fully conscious of this new state. It goes without saying that at the front you no longer look on things in the same way as you do in the rear; if you did, the sights you see and the life you lead would be more than you could bear. This exaltation is accompanied by a certain pain. Nevertheless it is indeed an exaltation. And that's why one likes the front in spite of everything, and misses it." (*The Making of a Mind*, p. 205.)

Teilhard's powers of articulation are evident in these lines. Moreover, his efforts to express his growing vision of life during the occasional furloughs also brought him a foretaste of the later ecclesiastical reception of his work. For although Teilhard was given permission to take final vows in the Society of Jesus in May 1918, his writings from the battlefield puzzled his Jesuit Superiors especially his rethinking of such topics as evolution and

original sin. Gradually Teilhard realized that the great need of the church was, as he says, “. . . to present dogma in a more real, more universal, way -a more ‘cosmogonic’ way” (*The Making of a Mind*, pp. 267/8). These realizations often gave Teilhard the sense of “being reckoned with the orthodox and yet feeling for the heterodox” (*The Making of a Mind*, p. 277). He was convinced that if he had indeed seen something, as he felt he had, then that seeing would shine forth despite obstacles. As he says in a letter of 1919, “What makes me easier in my mind at this juncture, is that the rather hazardous schematic points in my teaching are in fact of only secondary importance to me. It’s not nearly so much ideas that I want to propagate as a spirit: and a spirit can animate all external presentations” (*The Making of a Mind*, p. 281).

After his demobilization on March 10, 1919, Teilhard returned to Jersey for a recuperative period and preparatory studies for concluding his doctoral degree in geology at the Sorbonne, for the Jesuit provincial of Lyon had given his permission for Teilhard to continue his studies in natural science. During this period at Jersey Teilhard wrote his profoundly prayerful piece on “*The Spiritual Power of Matter*.”

After returning to Paris, Teilhard continued his studies with Marcellin Boule in the phosphorite fossils of the Lower Eocene period in France. Extensive field trips took him to Belgium where he also began to address student clubs on the significance of evolution in relation to current French theology. By the fall of 1920, Teilhard had secured a post in geology at the Institute Catholique and was lecturing to student audiences who knew him as an active promoter of evolutionary thought.

The conservative reaction in the Catholic Church initiated by the Curia of Pius X had abated at his death in 1914. But the new Pope, Benedict XV renewed the attack on evolution, on “new theology,” and on a broad spectrum of perceived errors considered threatening by the Vatican Curia. The climate in ecclesiastical circles towards the type of work that Teilhard was doing gradually convinced him that work in the field would not only help his career but would also quiet the controversy in which he and other French thinkers were involved. The opportunity for field work in China had been open to Teilhard as early as 1919 by an invitation from the Jesuit scientist Emile Licent who had undertaken paleontological work in the environs of Peking. On April 1, 1923, Teilhard set sail from Marseille

bound for China. Little did he know that this “short trip” would initiate the many years of travel to follow.

THE YEARS OF TRAVEL

Teilhard’s first period in China was spent in Tientsin, a coastal city some eighty miles from Peking where Emile Licent had built his museum and housed the fossils he had collected in China since his arrival in 1914. The two French Jesuits were a contrast in types. Licent, a northerner, was unconventional in dress, taciturn and very independent in his work. He was primarily interested in collecting fossils rather than interpreting their significance. Teilhard, on the other hand, was more urbane; he enjoyed conversational society in which he could relate his geological knowledge to a wider scientific and interpretive sphere. Almost immediately after his arrival Teilhard made himself familiar with Licent’s collection and, at the latter’s urging, gave a report to the Geological Society of China. In June 1923 Teilhard and Licent undertook an expedition into the Ordos desert west of Peking near the border with Inner Mongolia. This expedition, and successive ones during the 1920s with Emile Licent, gave Teilhard invaluable information on Paleolithic remains in China. Teilhard’s correspondence during this period gives penetrating observations on Mongolian peoples, landscapes, vegetation, and animals of the region.

Teilhard’s major interest during these years of travel was primarily in the natural terrain. Although he interacted with innumerable ethnic groups he rarely entered into their cultures more than was necessary for expediting his business or satisfying a general interest. One of the ironies of his career is that the Confucian tradition and its concern for realization of the cosmic identity of heaven, earth and man remained outside of Teilhard’s concerns. Similarly tribal peoples and their earth-centered spirituality were regarded by Teilhard as simply an earlier stage in the evolutionary development of the Christian revelation. Teilhard returned to Paris in September 1924 and resumed teaching at the Institute Catholique. But the intellectual climate in European Catholicism had not changed significantly. Pius XI, the new Pope since 1922, had allowed free reign to the conservative factions. It was in this hostile climate that a copy of a paper that Teilhard had delivered in Belgium made its way to Rome. A month after he returned from China Teilhard was ordered to appear

before his provincial Superior to sign a statement repudiating his ideas on original sin. Teilhard's old friend Auguste Valensin was teaching theology in Lyon, and Teilhard sought his counsel regarding the statement of repudiation. In a meeting of the three Jesuits, the Superior agreed to send to Rome a revised version of Teilhard's earlier paper and his response to the statement of repudiation.

In the interim before receiving Rome's reply to his revisions, Teilhard continued his classes at the Institute. Those students who recalled the classes remembered the dynamic quality with which the young professor delivered his penetrating analysis of homo faber. According to Teilhard the human as tool-maker and user of fire represents a significant moment in the development of human consciousness or hominization of the species. It is in this period that Teilhard began to use the term of Edward Suess, "biosphere," or earth-layer of living things, in his geological schema. Teilhard then expanded the concept to include the earth-layer of thinking beings which he called the "noosphere" from the Greek word nous meaning "mind." While his lectures were filled to capacity, his influence had so disturbed a bloc of conservative French bishops that they reported him to Vatican officials who in turn put pressure on the Jesuits to silence him.

The Jesuit Superior General of this period was Vladimir Ledochowski, a former Austrian military officer who sided openly with the conservative faction in the Vatican. Thus in 1925 Teilhard was again ordered to sign a statement repudiating his controversial theories and to remove himself from France after the semester's courses.

Teilhard's associates at the museum, Marcellin Boule and Abbe Breuil, recommended that he leave the Jesuits and become a diocesan priest. His friend, Auguste Valensin, and others recommended signing the statement and interpreting that act as a gesture of fidelity to the Jesuit Order rather than one of intellectual assent to the Curia's demands. Valensin argued that the correctness of Teilhard's spirit was ultimately Heaven's business. After a week's retreat and reflection on the Ignatian Exercises, Teilhard signed the document in July 1925. It was the same week as the Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Tennessee which contested the validity of evolution.

In the spring of the following year Teilhard boarded a steamship bound for the Far East. The second period in Tientsin with Licent is marked by a

number of significant developments. First, the visits of the Crown Prince and Princess of Sweden and later that of Alfred Lacroix from the Paris Museum of Natural History, gave Teilhard new status in Peking and marked his gradual movement from Tientsin into the more sophisticated scientific circles of Peking. Here American, Swedish, and British teams had begun work at a rich site called Chou-kou-tien. Teilhard joined their work contributing his knowledge of Chinese geological formations and tool-making activities among prehistoric humans in China. With Licent Teilhard also undertook a significant expedition north of Peking to DalaiNor. Finally, in an effort to state his views in a manner acceptable to his superiors Teilhard wrote *The Divine Milieu*. This mystical treatise was dedicated to those who love the world; it articulated his vision of the human as “matter at its most incendiary stage.”

Meanwhile Teilhard had been in correspondence with his superiors who finally allowed him to return to France in August 1927. But even before Teilhard reached Marseille a new attack was made on his thought due to a series of his lectures which were published in a Paris journal. While Teilhard edited and rewrote *The Divine Milieu* in Paris, he was impatient for a direct confrontation with his critics. Finally in June 1928 the assistant to the Jesuit Superior General arrived in Paris to tell Teilhard that all his theological work must end and that he was to confine himself to scientific work. In this oppressive atmosphere Teilhard was forced to return to China in November 1928.

For the next eleven years Teilhard continued this self-imposed exile in China, returning to France only for five brief visits. These visits were to see his family and friends who distributed copies of his articles and to give occasional talks to those student clubs in Belgium and Paris who continued to provide a forum for his ideas. These years were also very rich in geological expeditions for Teilhard. In 1929, Teilhard traveled in Somaliland and Ethiopia before returning to China. He played a major role in the find and interpretation of “Peking Man” at Chou-kou-tien in 1929-1930. In 1930 he joined Ray Chapman Andrew’s Central Mongolian Expedition at the invitation of the American Museum of Natural History. The following year he made a trip across America which inspired him to write *The Spirit of the Earth*. From May 1931 to February 1932 he traveled into Central Asia with the famous Yellow Expedition sponsored by the Citroen automobile company. In 1934, with George Barbour he traveled up the Yangtze River and into the mountainous regions of Szechuan. A year

later he joined the Yale-Cambridge expedition under Helmut de Terra in India and afterwards von Koenigswald's expedition in Java. In 1937 he was awarded the Gregor Mendel medal at a Philadelphia Conference for his scientific accomplishments. That same year he went with the Harvard-Carnegie Expedition to Burma and then to Java with Helmut de Terra. As a result of this extensive field work Teilhard became recognized as one of the foremost geologists of the earth's terrain. This notoriety, in addition to his original theories on human evolution, made him a valuable presence for the French government in intellectual circles east and west. His professional accomplishments are even more noteworthy when one recalls the profound tragedies that he experienced in the years between 1932 and 1936 when his father, mother, younger brother, Victor, and his beloved sister, Guiguite, all died during his absence.

The final years of exile in China, 1939 to 1946, roughly correspond to the years of World War II and the disintegration of central control in Chinese Republican politics. During this period, Teilhard and a fellow Jesuit and friend, Pierre Leroy, set up the Institute of Geobiology in Peking to protect the collection of Emile Licent and to provide a laboratory for their on-going classification and interpretation of fossils. The most significant accomplishment of this period, however, was the completion of *The Phenomenon of Man* in May of 1940. An important contribution of this work is the creative manner in which it situates the emergence of the human as the unifying theme of the evolutionary process. *The Phenomenon of Man* in its presentation of the fourfold sequence of the evolutionary process (the galactic evolution, earth evolution, life evolution and consciousness evolution) establishes what might almost be considered a new literary genre.

With the war's end Teilhard received permission to return to France where he engaged in a variety of activities. He published numerous articles in the Jesuit journal, *Etudes*. He reworked *The Phenomenon of Man* and sent a copy of it to Rome requesting permission for publication, a permission never granted in his lifetime. He was also asked to stand as a candidate for the prehistory chair at the Sorbonne's College de France soon to be vacated by his long-time friend, the Abbe Henri Breuil. By May of 1947 Teilhard had exhausted himself in the attempt to restate his position and to deal with the expectations of his sympathetic readers. His exhaustion caused a heart attack on June 1st, 1947. For Teilhard this illness meant a postponement in joining a University of California expedition to Africa

sponsored by the Viking Fund of the Wenner-Gren Foundation in New York. Teilhard had looked forward to the trip as an interlude before the confrontation with Rome over *The Phenomenon of Man* and the teaching position at the Sorbonne. While recovering from this illness, Teilhard was honored by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs for his scientific and intellectual achievements and was promoted to the rank of officer in the Legion of Honor.

In October 1948, Teilhard traveled to the United States. At this time he was invited to give a series of lectures at Columbia University. Permission was refused by the local Jesuit Superior. Suddenly, in July 1948, Teilhard received an invitation to come to Rome to discuss the controversies surrounding his thought. Gradually Teilhard realized that the future of his work depended on this encounter and he prepared himself as he said, “to stroke the tiger’s whiskers.”

Rome in 1948 was a city just beginning its recovery from the war’s devastation. The Vatican Curia was also beginning its reorganization, for Pius XII who had assumed the Pontificate in March 1939 had been in relative isolation during the war years. In the late 1940s he developed his plans for the holy year of 1950. As a former Vatican diplomat, Pius XII continued the Curia’s conservative stance with a more sophisticated and more intellectual effort.

When Teilhard came to Rome he stayed at the Jesuit residence in Vatican City. After several meetings with the Jesuit general, Fr. Janssens, Teilhard realized that he would never be allowed to publish his work during his lifetime; furthermore, that he would not be granted permission to accept the position at the College de France. Those who spoke with Teilhard when he returned to Paris could sense the frustration that enveloped him as he groped to understand the forces against which he was so powerless. During the next two years Teilhard traveled extensively in England, Africa and the United States trying to determine an appropriate place to live now that China was no longer open. In December of 1951 he accepted a research position with the Wenner-Gren foundation in New York.

THE FINAL YEARS IN NEW YORK

Teilhard's decision to live in New York was approved by his Jesuit Superiors and this resolved his uncertainty with regard to a place of residence. He lived in the following years with the Jesuit fathers at St. Ignatius Church on Park Avenue and walked both to his office at the Wenner-Gren Foundation and to the apartment of his self-appointed secretary and friend, Rhoda de Terra. Teilhard's correspondence with Father Pierre Leroy during these final years, recently published in English as *Letters From My Friend*, are remarkable in their lack of bitterness and for their single-minded scientific focus.

In 1954 Teilhard visited France for the last time. He and his friend Leroy drove south together to the caves at Lascaux. Prior to visiting Lascaux they stopped at Sarcenat together with Mrs. de Terra who had joined them. Wordlessly they walked through the rooms until they came to his mother's room and her chair. Only then did Teilhard speak, saying half to himself, "This is the room where I was born." Hoping to spend his final years in his native country, Teilhard applied once more to his superiors for permission to return to France permanently. He was politely refused and encouraged to return to America.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin died on Easter Sunday, April 10, 1955 at six o'clock in the evening. His funeral on Easter Monday was attended by a few friends. Father Leroy and the ministering priest from St. Ignatius accompanied his body some sixty miles upstate from New York City where he was buried at St. Andrews-on-Hudson, then the Jesuit novitiate.

Teilhard's life with its simple, quiet ending unfolds like the tree of life in his own description, slowly, seemingly half opened at points yet bearing within it an enduring dignity. As he wrote of the tree of life:

Before attempting to probe the secret of its life, let us take a good look at it. For from a merely external contemplation of it, there is a lesson and a force to be drawn from it: the sense of its testimony. (*The Phenomenon of Man*, New York, 1965, p. 137)

REFLECTIONS ON HAPPINESS

IN the world of mechanized matter, all bodies obey the laws of a universal gravitation; similarly, in the world of vitalized matter, all organized beings, even the very lowest, steer themselves and progress towards that quarter in which the greatest measure of well-being is to be found.

One might well imagine, then, that a speaker could hardly choose an easier subject than happiness. He is a living being addressing other living beings, and he might well be pardoned for believing that his audience contains none but such as are already in agreement with him and are familiar with his ideas.

In practice, however, the task I have set myself today turns out to be much nicer and more complex.

Like all other animate beings, man, it is true, has an essential craving for happiness. In man, however, this fundamental demand assumes a new and complicated form: for he is not simply a living being with greater sensibility and greater vibratory power than other living beings. By virtue of his 'hominization' he has become a reflective and critical living being; and his gift of reflection brings with it two other formidable properties, the power to perceive what may be possible, and the power to foresee the future. The emergence of this dual power is sufficient to disturb and confuse the hitherto serene and consistent ascent of life. Perception of the possible, and awareness of the future – when these two combine, they not only open up for us an inexhaustible store of hopes and

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fears, but they also allow those hopes and fears to range far afield in every direction. Where the animal seems to find no difficulties to obstruct its infallible progress towards what will bring it satisfaction, man, on the other hand, cannot take a single step in any direction without meeting a problem for which, ever since he became man, he has constantly and unsuccessfully been trying to find a final and universal solution.

'De vita beata', in the ancient phrase – on the happy life: what, in fact, is happiness?

For centuries this has been the subject of endless books, investigations, individual and collective experiments, one after another; and, sad to relate, there has been complete failure to reach unanimity. For many of us, in the end, the only practical conclusion to be drawn from the whole discussion is that it is useless to continue the search. Either the problem is insoluble – there is no true happiness in this world – or there can be only an infinite number of particular solutions – the problem itself defies solution. Being happy is a matter of personal taste. You, for your part, like wine and good living. I prefer cars, poetry, or helping others. 'Liking is as unaccountable as luck.' You must often, I am sure, have heard that sort of remark, and it may well be that you are a little inclined to agree.

What I want to do this evening is to confront fairly and squarely this relativist (and basically pessimist) scepticism shared by so many of our contemporaries, by showing you that, even for man, the general direction in which happiness lies is by no means so ill-defined as it is taken to be: provided always that we confine our enquiry to the search for those joys which are essential and, in so doing, take as our basis what we are taught by science and biology.

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I cannot, unfortunately, give you happiness: but I do hope that I may be able at least to help you find it.

What I have to say falls into two parts. In the first, which will be primarily theoretical, we shall try together to define the best route leading to human happiness.

In the second part, which will serve as a conclusion, we shall consider how we must adapt our individual lives to these general axes which run towards happiness.

I. The Theoretical Axes of Happiness

A. THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM: THREE DIFFERENT ATTITUDES TO LIFE

If we are to understand more clearly how the problem of happiness presents itself to us, and why we find ourselves at a loss when we meet it, it is essential to start by taking a comprehensive view of the whole position. By this I mean that we must distinguish three fundamental initial attitudes to life adopted by men as a matter *of fact*.

Here an analogy may well be a useful guide.

Let us imagine a party of tourists who have set out to climb a difficult peak, and let us take a look at them some hours after they have started. By this time we may suppose the party to be divided into three sorts of elements.

Some are regretting having left the inn. The fatigue and risks involved seem out of all proportion to the value of a successful climb. They decide to turn back.

Others are not sorry that they set out. The sun is shining, and there is a beautiful view. But what is the point of climbing any higher? Surely it is better to enjoy the mountain from here, in the open meadow or deep in the wood. And so they

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stretch out on the grass, or explore the neighbourhood until it is time for a picnic meal.

And lastly there are the others, the real mountaineers, who keep their eyes fixed on the peaks they have sworn to climb. So they set out again.

The tired – the hedonists – the enthusiasts.

Three types of men: and, deep within our own selves, we hold the germ of all three. And, what is more, it is into these three types that the mankind in which we live and move has always been divided.

I. *First, the tired (or the pessimists)*

For this first category of men, existence is a mistake or a failure. We do not fit in – and so the best thing we can do is, as gracefully as possible, to retire from the game. If this attitude is carried to its extreme, and expressed in terms of a learned doctrinal system, it leads in the end to the wisdom of the Hindus, according to which the universe is an illusion and a prison – or to a pessimism such as Schopenhauer's. But, in a milder and commoner form, the same attitude emerges and can be recognized in any number of practical decisions that are only too familiar to you. 'What is the good of trying to find the answer? . . . Why not leave the savages to their savagery and the ignorant to their ignorance? What is the point of science? What is the point of the machine? Is it not better to lie down than to stand up? better to be dead than asleep in bed?' And all this amounts to saying, at least by implication, that it is better to be less than to be more – and that best of all would be not to be at all.

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2. *Secondly, the hedonists (or pleasure-seekers)*

For men of this second type, to be is certainly better than not to be. But we must be careful to note that in this case 'to be' has a special meaning. For the followers of this school, to be, or to live, does not mean to act, but simply to take your fill of this present moment. To enjoy each moment and each thing, husbanding it jealously so that nothing of it be allowed to be lost – and above all with no thought of shifting one's ground – that is what they mean by wisdom. When we have had enough, then we can lie back on the grass, or stretch our legs, or look at the view from another spot. And meanwhile, what is more, we shall not rule out the possibility of turning back downhill. We refuse, however, to risk anything for the sake of or on the chance of the future – unless, in an over-refinement of sensibility, danger incurred for its own sake goes to our heads, whether it be in order to enjoy the thrill of taking a chance or to feel the shuddering grip of fear.

This is our own version, in an oversimplified form, of the old pagan hedonism found in the school of Epicurus. In literary circles such has recently been the tendency, at any rate, of a Paul Morand or a Montherlant – or (and here it is far more subtle) of a Gide (the Gide of *Fruits of the Earth*), whose ideal of life is to drink without ever quenching (rather, indeed, in such a way as to increase) one's thirst – and this with no idea of restoring one's vigour, but simply from a desire to drain, ever more avidly, each new source.

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3. *Finally, the enthusiasts*

By these I mean those for whom living is an ascent and a discovery. To men in this third category, not only is it better to be than not to be, but they are convinced that it is always possible – and the possibility has a unique value – to attain a fuller measure of being. For these conquerors, enamoured of the adventurous, being is inexhaustible – not in Gide's way, like a precious stone with innumerable facets which one can never tire of turning round and round – but like a focus of warmth and light to which one can always draw closer. We may laugh at such men and say that they are ingenuous, or we may find them tiresome; but at the same time it is they who have made us what we are, and it is from them that tomorrow's earth is going to emerge.

Pessimism and return to the past; enjoyment of the present moment; drive towards the future. There, as I was saying, we have three fundamental attitudes to life. Inevitably, therefore, we find ourselves back at the very heart of our subject: a confrontation between three contrasting forms of happiness.

1. *First, the happiness of tranquillity*

No worry, no risk, no effort. Let us cut down our contacts, let us restrict our needs, let us dim our lights, toughen our protective skin, withdraw into our shell. – The happy man is the man who attains a minimum of thought, feeling and desire.

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2. *Secondly, the happiness of pleasure*

Static pleasure or, better still, pleasure that is constantly renewed. The goal of life is not to act and create, but to make use of opportunities. And this again means less effort, or no more effort than is needed to reach out for a clean glass or a fresh drink. Lie back and relax as much as possible, like a leaf drinking in the rays of the sun – shift your position constantly so that you may feel more fully: that is the recipe for happiness. – The happy man is the man who can savour to the highest degree the moment he holds in his hands.

3. *Finally, the happiness of growth*

From this third point of view, happiness has no existence nor value in itself as an object which we can pursue and attain as such. It is no more than the sign, the effect, the reward (we might say) of appropriately directed action: a by-product, as Aldous Huxley says somewhere, of effort. Modern hedonism is wrong, accordingly, in suggesting that some sort of renewal of ourselves, no matter what form it takes, is all that is needed for happiness. Something more is required, for no change brings happiness unless the way in which it is effected involves an *ascent*. – The happy man is therefore the man who, without any direct search for happiness, inevitably finds joy as an added bonus in the act of forging ahead and attaining the fullness and finality of his own self.

Happiness of tranquillity, happiness of pleasure, and happiness of development: we have only to look around us to see that at the level of man it is between these three lines of progress that life hesitates and its current is divided.

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Is it true, as we are so often told, that our choice is determined only by the dictates of individual taste and temperament?

Or is the contrary true? that somewhere we can find a reason, indisputable because objective, for deciding that one of these three roads is absolutely the best, and is therefore the only road which can lead us to real happiness?

B. THE ANSWER GIVEN BY THE FACTS

I. *General solution: fuller consciousness as the goal*

For my part, I am absolutely convinced that such a criterion, indisputable and objective, does exist – and that it is not mysterious and hidden away but lies open for all to see. I hold, too, that in order to see it all we have to do is to look around and examine nature in the light of the most recent achievements of physics and biology – in the light, that is, of our new ideas about the great phenomenon of evolution.

The time has come, as you must know, when nobody any longer retains any serious doubts about this: the universe is not ‘ontologically’ fixed – in the very depths of its entire mass it has from the beginning of time been moving in two great opposing currents. One of these carries matter towards states of extreme disintegration; the other leads to the building up of organic units, the higher types of which are of astronomical complexity and form what we call the ‘living world’.

That being so, let us consider the second of these two currents, the current of life, to which we belong. For a century or more, scientists, while admitting the reality of a biological evolution, have been debating whether the movement in which we are caught up is no more than a sort of vortex,

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revolving in a closed circle; or whether it corresponds to a clearly defined drift, which carries the animate portion of the world towards some specific higher state. There is today almost unanimous agreement that it is the second of these hypotheses which would appear undoubtedly to correspond to reality. Life does not develop complexity without laws, simply by chance. Whether we consider it as a whole or in detail, by examining organic beings, it progresses methodically and irreversibly towards ever higher states of consciousness. Thus the final, and quite recent, appearance of man on the earth is only the logical and consistent result of a process whose first stages were already initiated at the very origins of our planet.

Historically, life (which means in fact the universe itself, considered in its most active portion) is a rise of consciousness. How this proposition directly affects our interior attitudes and ways of behaviour must, I suggest, be immediately apparent.

We talk endlessly, as I was saying a moment ago, about what is the best attitude to adopt when we are confronted by our own lives. Yet, when we talk in this way, are we not like a passenger in the Paris to Marseilles express who is still wondering whether he ought to be travelling north or south? We go on debating the point: but to what purpose, since the decision has already been taken without reference to ourselves, and here we are on board the train? For more than four hundred million years, on this earth of ours (or it would be more correct to say, since the beginning of time, in the universe), the vast mass of beings of which we form a part has been tenaciously and tirelessly climbing towards a fuller measure of freedom, of sensibility, of inner vision. And are we still wondering whither we should be bound?

The truth is that the shadow of the false problems vanishes

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in the light of the great cosmic laws. Unless we are to be guilty of a physical contradiction (unless, that is, we deny everything that we are and everything that has made us what we are) we are all obliged, each of us on his own account, to accept the primordial choice which is built into the world of which we are the reflective elements. If we withdraw in order to diminish our being, and if we stand still to enjoy what we have, in each case we find that the attempt to run counter to the universal stream is illogical and impossible.

The road to the left, then, and the road to the right are both closed: the only way out is straight ahead.

Scientifically and objectively, only one answer can be made to the demands of life: the advance of progress.

In consequence, and again scientifically and objectively, the only true happiness is the happiness we have described as the happiness of growth and movement.

Do we want to be happy, as the world is happy, and with the world? Then we must let the tired and the pessimists lag behind. We must let the hedonists take their homely ease, lounging on the grassy slope, while we ourselves boldly join the group of those who are ready to dare the climb to the topmost peak. Press on!

Even so, to have chosen the climb is not enough. We have still to make sure of the right path. To get up on our feet ready for the start is well enough. But, if we are to have a successful and enjoyable climb, which is the best route?

2. Detailed solution: the three phases of personalization

As I said earlier, life in the world continually rises towards greater consciousness, proportionate to greater complexity –

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as though the increasing complexity of organisms had the effect of deepening the centre of their being.

Let us consider, then, how this advance towards the highest unity actually works out in detail; and, for the sake of clarity and simplicity, let us confine ourselves to the case of man – man, who is psychically the highest of all living beings and the one best known to us.

When we examine the process of our inner unification, that is to say of our personalization, we can distinguish three allied and successive stages, or steps, or movements. If man is to be fully himself and fully living, he must, (1) be centred upon himself; (2) be ‘de-centred’ upon ‘the other’; (3) be super-centred upon a being greater than himself.

We must define and explain in turn these three forward movements, with which (since happiness, we have decided, is an effect of growth) three forms of attaining happiness must correspond.

1. First, *centration*. Not only physically, but intellectually and morally too, man is man only if he cultivates himself – and that does not mean simply up to the age of twenty . . . If we are to be fully ourselves we must therefore work all our lives at our organic development: by which I mean that we must constantly introduce more order and more unity into our ideas, our feelings and our behaviour. In this lies the whole programme of action, and the whole value and meaning (all the hard work, too!) of our interior life, with its inevitable drive towards things that are ever-increasingly spiritual and elevated. During this first phase each one of us has to take up again and repeat, working on his own account, the general labour of life. Being is in the first place making and finding one’s own self.

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2. Secondly, *decentration*. An elementary temptation or illusion lies in wait for the reflective centre which each one of us nurses deep inside him. It is present from the very birth of that centre; and it consists in fancying that in order to grow greater each of us should withdraw into the isolation of his own self, and egoistically pursue in himself alone the work, peculiar to him, of his own fulfilment: that we must cut ourselves off from others, or translate everything into terms of ourselves. However, there is not just one single man on the earth. That there are, on the contrary, and necessarily must be, myriads and myriads at the same time is only too obvious. And yet, when we look at that fact in the general context of physics, it takes on a cardinal importance – for it means, quite simply, this: that, however individualized by nature thinking beings may be, each man still represents no more than an atom, or (if you prefer the phrase) a very large molecule; in common with all the other similar molecules, he forms a definite corpuscular system from which he cannot escape. Physically and biologically man, like everything else that exists in nature, is essentially plural. He is correctly described as a ‘mass-phenomenon’. This means that, broadly speaking, we cannot reach our own ultimate without emerging from ourselves by uniting ourselves with others, in such a way as to develop through this union an added measure of consciousness – a process which conforms to the great law of complexity. Hence the insistence, the deep surge, of love, which, in all its forms, drives us to associate our individual centre with other chosen and specially favoured centres: love, whose essential function and charm are that it completes us.

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3. Finally, *super-centration*. Although this is less obvious, it is absolutely necessary to understand it.

If we are to be fully ourselves, as I was saying, we find that we are obliged to enlarge the base on which our being rests; in other words, we have to add to ourselves something of 'the Other'. Once a small number of centres of affection have been initiated (some special circumstances determining their choice), this expansive movement knows no check. Imperceptibly, and by degrees, it draws us into circles of ever-increasing radius. This is particularly noticeable in the world of today. From the very beginning, no doubt, man has been conscious of belonging to one single great mankind. It is only, however, for our modern generations that this indistinct social sense is beginning to take on its full and real meaning. Throughout the last ten millennia (which is the period which has brought the sudden speeding-up of civilization) men have surrendered themselves, with but little reflection, to the multiple forces (more profound than any war) which were gradually bringing them into closer contact with one another; but now our eyes are opening, and we are beginning to see two things. The first is that the closed surface of the earth is a constricting and inelastic mould, within which, under the pressure of an ever-increasing population and the tightening of economic links, we human beings are already forming but one single body. And the second thing is that through the gradual building-up within that body of a uniform and universal system of industry and science our thoughts are tending more and more to function like the cells of one and the same brain. This must inevitably mean that as the transformation follows its natural line of progress we can foresee the time when men will understand what it is, animated by one single heart,

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to be united together in wanting, hoping for, and loving the same things at the same time.

The mankind of tomorrow is emerging from the mists of the future, and we can actually see it taking shape: a 'super-mankind', much more conscious, much more powerful, and much more unanimous than our own. And at the same time (a point to which I shall return) we can detect an underlying but deeply rooted feeling that if we are to reach the ultimate of our own selves, we must do more than link our own being with a handful of other beings selected from the thousands that surround us: we must form one whole with all simultaneously.

We can draw but one conclusion from this twofold phenomenon which operates both outside ourselves and inside ourselves: that what life ultimately calls upon us to do in order that we may be, is to incorporate ourselves into, and to subordinate ourselves to, an organic totality of which, cosmically speaking, we are no more than conscious particles. Awaiting us is a centre of a higher order – and already we can distinguish it – not simply beside us, but *beyond* and *above* us.

We must, then, do more than develop our own selves – more than give ourselves to another who is our equal – we must surrender and attach our lives to one who is greater than ourselves.

In other words: first, be. Secondly, love. Finally, worship. Such are the natural phases of our personalization.

These, you must understand, are three linked steps in life's upward progress; and they are in consequence three superimposed stages of happiness – if, as we have agreed, happiness is indissolubly associated with the deliberate act of climbing.

The happiness of growing greater – of loving – of worshipping.

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Taking as our starting-point the laws of life, this, to put it in a nutshell, is the triple beatitude which is theoretically foreseeable.

Now what is the verdict of experience on this point? Let us for a moment go directly to the facts, and use them to check the accuracy of our deductions.

First, there is the happiness of that deep-seated growth in one's own self – growth in capabilities, in sensibility, in self-possession. Then, too, there is the happiness of union with one another, effected between bodies and souls that are made to complete one another and come together as one.

I have little need to emphasize the purity and intensity of these two first forms of joy. Everybody is in basic agreement on that point.

But what shall we say about the happiness of sinking and losing self in the future, in one greater than ourselves? . . . Is not this pure theorizing or dreaming? To find joy in what is out of scale with us, in what we can as yet neither touch nor see. Apart from a few visionaries, is there anyone in the positivist and materialist world we are forced to live in who can concern himself with such an idea?

Who, indeed?

And yet, consider for a moment what is happening around us.

Some months ago, at a similar meeting, I was telling you about the two Curies – the husband and wife who found happiness in embarking on a venture, the discovery of radium, in which they realized that to lose their life was to gain it. Just think, then: how many other men (in a more modest way, maybe, and in different forms and circumstances), yesterday

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and today, have been possessed, or are still possessed, even to the point of death, by the demon of research? Try to count them.

In the Arctic and Antarctic: Nansen, Andrée, Shackleton, Charcot, and any number of others.

The men of the great peaks: the climbers of Everest.

The laboratory workers who ran such risks: killed by rays or by the substances they handled – victims of a self-injected disease.

Add to these the legion of aviators who conquered the air. And those, too, who shared man's conquest of man: all who risked, or indeed gave, their lives for an idea.¹

Make a rough count; and when you have done so, take the writings and letters left by these men (such of them as left any), from the most noteworthy of them (the everyday names) to the most humble (those whose names are not even known) – the airmail pilots who twenty-five years ago were pioneering the air-route across America for human thoughts and loves, and paid for it, one after another, with their lives. What do you find when you read what they confided to paper? You find joy, a joy that is both higher and deeper – a joy full of power: the explosive joy of a life that has at last found a *boundless* area in which to expand.

Joy, I repeat, in that which knows no bounds.

What generally saps and poisons our happiness is that we feel that we shall so soon exhaust and reach the end of whatever it is that attracts us: we know the pain of separation, of loss by attrition – the agony of seeing time fly past, the terror of knowing how fragile are the good things we hold, the dis-

¹You know that my life is an oblation, joyfully and conscientiously offered, with no selfish hope of reward, to the Power which is higher than life' (Rathenau).

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appointment of coming so soon to the end of what we are and of what we love.

But when a man has found, in an ideal or a cause, the secret of collaboration and self-identification (whether it be close or distant) with the universe as it advances, then all those dark shadows disappear. The joy of worshipping so spreads over the joy of being and the joy of loving as to allow them to expand and grow firmer (Curie, for example, and Termier were admirable friends, fathers and husbands): it does not lessen or destroy the earlier joys, and it holds and brings with it, in its fullness, a wonderful peace. Its source of nourishment is inexhaustible, because it gradually becomes one with the very consummation of the world in which we move; by the same token, moreover, it is safe from every threat of death and decay. Finally, it is, in one way or another, constantly within our reach, since the best way we have of reaching it is simply, each one of us in his own place, to do what we are able to do as well as we can.

The joy of the element which has become conscious of the whole which it serves and in which it finds fulfilment – the joy which the reflective atom draws from awareness of its function and completion within the universe which contains it – this, both logically and factually, is the highest and most progressive form of happiness I can put before you and hope that you may attain.

2. The Fundamental Rules of Happiness

So much for pure theory. We may now consider in what ways it can be applied to our individual lives.

We have just made it clear that true happiness is a happiness

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of growth – and, as such, it awaits us in a quarter characterized by:

1. unification of self within our own selves;
2. union of our own being with other beings who are our equals;
3. subordination of our own life to a life which is greater than ours.

What consequences do these definitions entail for our day-to-day conduct? And what practical action should we take in order to be happy?

I can, of course, satisfy your curiosity and assist your good will by only the most general indications; for it is here that, quite rightly, we come up against any number of problems of taste, accident and temperament. Life becomes established and progresses in nature and structure only by reason of the very great variety of its elements. Each one of us sees the world and makes his approach to it from a particular angle, backed by a reserve of vital energy, with its own peculiarities, which cannot be shared by others. (We may note, incidentally, that it is this complementary diversity which underlies the biological value of 'personality'.) Each one of us, therefore, is the only person who can ultimately discover for himself the attitude, the approach (which nobody else can imitate), which will make him cohere to the utmost possible degree with the surrounding universe as it continues its progress; that cohesion being, in fact, a state of peace which brings happiness.

Bearing these reservations in mind, we can, following our earlier lines of thought, draw up the following three rules of happiness.

1. If we are to be happy, we must first react against our tendency

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to follow the line of least resistance, which causes us either to remain as we are, or to look primarily to activities external to ourselves for what will provide new impetus to our lives. We must, it is true, sink our roots deep into the rich, tangible, material realities which surround us; but in the end it is by working to achieve our own inner perfection – intellectual, artistic, moral – that we shall find happiness. The most important thing in life, Nansen used to say, is to find oneself. Through and beyond matter, spirit is hard at work, building. – *Centration.*

2. If we are to be happy we must, secondly, react against the selfishness which causes us either to close in on ourselves, or to force our domination upon others. There is a way of loving – a bad and sterile way – by which we try to possess rather than to give ourselves. Here again, in the case of the couple or the group, we meet that same law of maximum effort which governed the progress of our interior development. The only love which brings true happiness is that which is expressed in a spiritual progress effected in common. – *Decentration.*

3. And if we are to be happy – completely happy – we must, thirdly, in one way or another, directly or through some medium which gradually reaches out further afield (a line of research, a venture, an idea, perhaps, or a cause), transfer the ultimate interest of our lives to the advancement and success of the world we live in. If we are to reach the zone where the great permanent sources of joy are to be found, we must be like the Curies, like Termier and Nansen, like the first aviators and all the pioneers I spoke of earlier: we must re-polarize our lives upon one greater than ourselves. Do not be afraid that this

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means that if we are to be happy we must perform some remarkable feat or do something quite out of the ordinary; we have only to do what any one of us is capable of: become conscious of our living solidarity with one great Thing, and then do the smallest thing in a great way. We must add one stitch, no matter how small it be, to the magnificent tapestry of life; we must discern the Immense which is building up and whose magnetic pull is exerted at the very heart of our own humblest activities and at their term; we must discern it and cling to it – when all is said and done, that is the great secret of happiness. As one of the most acute, and most materialist, thinkers of modern England, Bertrand Russell, has put it: it is in a deep and instinctive union with the whole current of life that the greatest of all joys is to be found. – *Super-centration*.

There you have the real core of what I have to say to you; but, having reached that point, there is one more thing which I owe it to you and to myself to say, if I am to be absolutely truthful.

I was recently reading a curious book,² in which the English novelist and thinker H. G. Wells writes about the original views recorded earlier by an American biologist and businessman, William Burrough Steele, which bear precisely on the point we are now considering, human happiness. Steele tries, with much good sense and cogency, to show (just as I have been doing) that since happiness cannot be dissociated from some notion of immortality, man cannot hope to be fully happy unless he sinks his own interests and hopes in those of the world, and more particularly in those of mankind. He adds, however, that, put in those terms, the solution is still incom-

²H. G. Wells, *The Anatomy of Frustration*.

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plete; for if we are to be able to make a complete gift of self we must be able to love. And how can one love a collective, impersonal reality – a reality that in some respects must seem monstrous – such as the world, or even mankind?

The objection which Steele found when he looked deeper, and to which he gave no answer, is terribly and cruelly to the point. My treatment of the subject would, therefore, be both incomplete and disingenuous if I did not point out to you that the undeniable movement which, as we can see, is leading the mass of mankind to place itself at the service of progress is not 'self-sufficient': If this terrestrial drive which I am asking you to share is to be sustained, it must be harmonized and synthesized with the Christian drive.

We can look around and note how the mysticism of research and the social mysticisms are advancing, with admirable faith, towards the conquest of the future. Yet no clearly defined summit, and, what is more serious, no *lovable* object is there for them to worship. That is the basic reason why the enthusiasm and the devotion they arouse are hard, arid, cold, and sad: to an observer they can only be a cause for anxiety, and to those who aspire to them they can bring only an incomplete happiness.

At the same time, parallel with these human mysticisms, and until now only marginal to them, there is Christian mysticism; and for the last two thousand years this has constantly been developing more profoundly (though few realize this) its view of a personal God: a God who not only creates but animates and gives totality to a universe which he gathers to himself by means of all those forces which we group together under the name of evolution. Under the persistent pressure of Christian thought, the infinitely distressing vastness of the world is

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gradually converging upwards, to the point where it is transfigured into a focus of loving energy.

Surely, then, we cannot fail to see that these two powerful currents between which the force of man's religious energies is divided – the current of human progress, and the current of all-embracing charity – need but one thing, to run together, and complete one another?

Suppose, first, that the youthful surge of human aspirations, fantastically reinforced by our new concepts of time and space, of matter and life, should make its way into the life-stream of Christianity, enriching and invigorating it; and suppose at the same time, too, that the wholly modern figure of a universal Christ, such as is even now being developed by Christian consciousness, should stand, should burst into sight, should spread its radiance, at the peak of our dreams of progress, and so give them precision, humanize and personalize them. Would not this be an answer, or rather *the* complete answer, to the difficulties before which our action hesitates?

Unless it receives a new blood transfusion from matter, Christian spirituality may well lose its vigour and become lost in the clouds. And, even more certainly, unless man's sense of progress receives an infusion from some principle of universal love, it may well turn away with horror from the terrifying cosmic machine in which it finds itself involved.

If we join the head to the body – the base to the peak – then, suddenly, there comes a surge of plenitude.

To tell you the truth, I see the complete solution to the problem of happiness in the direction of a Christian humanism: or, if you prefer the phrase, in the direction of a super-human Christianity within which every man will one day understand that, at all times and in all circumstances, it is possible for him

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not only to serve (for serving is not enough) but to cherish in all things (the most forbidding and tedious, no less than the loveliest and most attractive) a universe which, in its evolution, is charged with love.³

Lecture given by Père Teilhard de Chardin in Peking,
28 December 1943

³Père Teilhard had added the following quotation at the end of his original typescript: 'From the religious standpoint happiness and contentment are not things which result from welfare in any mere material or biological sense. Were human society freed from all disease or accident, poverty, and overt crime, it might still be very miserable and intolerably dull. The only thing that brings content is the service of God; and that service can be equally real under the most variable conditions and in any station in life; for the kingdom of God is within us. God's kingdom is one of loyal service, whatever form the service may take. The religious perception that in that service, apart from its mere outward results, we are one with God, brings inspiration, strength, and inward contentment' (J. B. S. Haldane, *Materialism*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1932, p. 156).

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TODAY, in the middle of the global crisis through which the world is passing, there is not a single man, believer or unbeliever, who is not longing with his whole soul for light – a light to show him that there is some sense of direction behind, some outcome to, the confusion that prevails on earth. Never, perhaps, since the first year of the Christian era, has mankind found itself so cut off from its past structures, more anxious about its future – more ready to welcome a saviour.

We who are Christians know that the saviour has already been born; but we now have a completely new phase of mankind, and should not the saviour be *re-born* in a form commensurate with our present needs? People are looking today (this I know from so often having heard it admitted) to Rome. Will the Church be able, at the decisive hour, to take to herself a world which offers itself to her in the very throes of its transformation? Will she find at the critical moment the word which will explain what is happening, and so give back to us clarity of vision and joy in action – the word for which we are waiting?

I myself, a mere unit in the great Christian body, can, you may be sure, make no claim to show our leaders the road to follow. For various accidental reasons, however, and by temperament, I have found myself living more closely than others to the heart of the earth; and in consequence I feel the need to emphasize here, with all sincerity and frankness, the remodelled form of worship I believe to be required by that heart.

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I. A POSSIBLE DIAGNOSIS OF THE SITUATION: A CRISIS OF GROWTH

Some are so distressed by the intellectual and moral disorders that are today confusing the human mass that they are inclined to believe that what we are doing is simply to drop back and disintegrate. Feeling as they do, what they would suggest to save our threatened civilization would be to force emancipated minds back into the framework of the old way of looking at things.

To my mind, the nature of the disease is completely different – and in consequence calls for a completely different remedy. The more I question myself, and the people I meet, the more convinced I am of this: disregard of traditional rules certainly plays a large part in the troubles from which we are suffering, but that disregard itself is not so much lack of principle as dissatisfaction. There is something too narrow and something missing in the gospel as presented to us. In spite of appearances, our age is more religious than ever: it is only that it needs stronger meat. A crisis not of spiritual weakness and frigidity, but one of transformation and growth – that is the sort of ordeal we are experiencing.

That being so, it is useless or even dangerous to recommend a mere return to the past. It is because man needs and hopes for something other than he is now rising up in protest and kicking over the traces. Wider horizons, and not a tighter rein – that, if I am not mistaken, is the only remedy that can effectively bring our generation back to the ways of truth.

But – and this is the point – where are those horizons to be found? Fundamentally, what is it that human beings are

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looking for today? In other words, what lies at the root of their confusion?

II. THE DEEP ROOTS OF THE CRISIS: THE RISE OF A NEW SUN

At the original source of the intellectual and social troubles which characterize the present crisis, there lies, to my mind, an important change; during the last two centuries this change has taken place surreptitiously in the deepest layers of that religious consciousness of man which has, with reason, been called the 'naturally Christian soul'.

Until the dawn of modern times, the problem of salvation could be expressed for man in no more than two terms: the existence on earth of each man, and his ultimate end; the brief years of life, and eternity; the human individual, and God. And between the two – nothing.

What, then, has happened in the course of barely two hundred years? As a result of a complex combination of external discoveries and internal insights, man has become conscious simultaneously both of the incredible resources accumulated in the human mass, *and* of the possibilities open to this energy for the building up of a tangible work, *anticipated* by nature. God is no longer seen as standing immediately above man: there is an intermediate magnitude, with its accompanying train of promises and duties. Thus, without leaving the world, man is now discovering above himself some sort of 'object of worship', something greater than himself: and it is the appearance of the earth of tomorrow – of this new star, which is channelling into itself the religious forces of the world – that is associated, I believe, with the origin of our

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present perplexities. It is this, in any case, that accounts for the irresistible emergence of the great myths (the communist, the nationalist myths), whose appearance and whose impact are shaking the old civilization. It is no longer a matter of mere heresies within Christianity, but of Christianity's being confronted by what seems to be an entirely new religion, which threatens to make a clean sweep of everything. You may call it the Temptation on the Mountain, if you wish; but there is an infinite subtlety in it, since, in this context, it is not a question of self-gratification in worship, but of disinterested conquest, productive, without any doubt, of lofty spiritual forces. It is the replacement, in human consciousness, of charity by the 'sense of the earth'.

What is the duty of us Christians at this juncture?

III. GENERAL SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM: CONJUNCTION OF THE TWO STARS IN MANKIND'S HEAVEN

It is impossible, I was saying, to return man to the right path by forcing him back towards some long out-dated condition. And it would be equally useless to try to convert him by removing from his horizon the pseudo-divine object which has just invaded it under the symbols of mankind, of race, or of progress. Whether we like it or not, not one of us can exist without thereby experiencing the deeply penetrating influence of this new star. Each one of us (those of us whose faith is strongest) is faced by the spiritual problem of balancing not two but *three* co-existing realities: our own soul, God, *and also* the earthly future of the world lying ahead of us. To deny the existence of this last object would be to falsify ourselves, to lie to ourselves and, in consequence, to our faith.

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If that, however, is so, then the general solution of the problem becomes clear. It emerges automatically. There is only one way of escaping from the threatening, absorbing, thing which we cannot remove from our sky, and must not try to remove, simply because it *exists*: and that way is to overcome it by a Force greater than it. Would it not be possible to assimilate it, to baptize it, to Christianize it, to *Christify* it?

'Thy kingdom come.' We used, perhaps, to imagine that God's triumph is confined to a purely interior and 'supernatural' dominion over souls. Is that true? Or does it not, on the contrary, presuppose not only the tangible reality of our own individual bodies, but also the fulfilment of the collective human organism throughout the ages?

'Love one another.' Is that essentially Christian disposition limited to easing, individually, the sufferings of our fellow-men? Or does it not, rather, need to be developed in active sympathy with the great human body, in such a way as not merely to bind up its wounds but to embrace its anxieties, its hopes, all the structural growth that creation still looks for in it?

To incorporate the progress of the world in our picture of the kingdom of God: to incorporate the sense of the earth, the sense of man, in charity – with the world no longer eclipsing God nor carrying us away at a tangent – with the two stars entering into an harmonious conjunction – with the two influences added together in an hierarchical whole, so to uplift us in one and the same direction – '*Deus amictus mundo*', 'God clothed in the world': were such an operation possible, we may be sure that it would immediately and radically put an end to the internal conflict from which we are suffering.

And so little is needed, so little would be enough, for this

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liberating transformation to be effected: simply – and this is the point I want to make – that we should follow our creed to its fullest implications, along the logical and historical line of its development.

IV. THE GREAT REMEDY: THE MANIFESTATION OF THE 'UNIVERSAL CHRIST'

'*Nova et vetera*' – 'New things and old.' It is part of the normal economy of the Christian life that certain elements, long dormant in revealed truth, suddenly develop into powerful branches; and this happens commensurately with new times and needs, and in answer to their demands.

In our own day, this, it seems to me, is the part reserved for the grand and essentially dogmatic idea of the Christian *pleroma*: the mysterious synthesis of the uncreated and the created – the grand completion (at once quantitative and qualitative) of the universe in God. It is impossible to read St Paul without being astounded by three things simultaneously: first, the fundamental importance attached by the apostle to this idea, interpreted with the utmost realism; secondly, the relative obscurity to which it has hitherto been relegated by preachers and theologians; and thirdly, its astonishing appropriateness to the religious needs of the present day. Here we have the concept of God gathering to himself not merely a diffuse multiplicity of souls, but the solid, organic, reality of a universe, taken from top to bottom in the complete extent and unity of its energies – and do we not find in that precisely what we were feeling our way towards?

It would, indeed, seem that under the guidance of a divine instinct, and parallel with the rise of modern humanist aspira-

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tions, the sap of Christianity is even now flowing into the bud that has been dormant so long, and will soon make it burst into flower. We can now clearly distinguish a fundamental movement in the Church, which also started just two hundred years ago, in the cult based on devotion to the heart of Jesus, and which is now clearly directed towards worship of Christ – of Christ considered in the ways in which he influences the whole mystical body, and in consequence, the whole human social organism; the love of Christ being seen as the energy in which all the chosen elements of creation are fused together without thereby being confused. Rome has recently made a gesture which marks a decisive stage in the development of dogma, expressing and sanctioning in the figure of Christ the King this irresistible advance of Christian consciousness towards a more universalist and more realist appreciation of the Incarnation.

What I have in mind, and what I dream about, is that the Church should follow up the logical extension of this movement, and so make plain and actual to the world, as St Paul did to his converts, the great figure of him in whom the *pleroma* finds its physical principle, its expression, and its consistence: Christ-Omega, the Universal-Christ. ‘*Descendit, ascendit, ut repleret omnia*’ – ‘He descended, and he ascended, that he might fill all things.’¹ St Paul’s imagery made rather a vague impression, no doubt, on the Romans, the Corinthians, the Ephesians, or the Colossians, because in those days the ‘world’, the ‘whole’ (with all that those words now imply for us of the organically defined), had not yet come to exist in man’s consciousness; but for us, fascinated by the newly discovered magnitude of the universe, it expresses exactly that aspect of

¹Ephesians 4: 9–10.

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God which is needed to satisfy our capacity for worship. Between Christ the King and the Universal Christ, there is perhaps no more than a slight difference of emphasis, but it is nevertheless all-important. It is the whole difference between an external power, which can only be juridical and static, and an internal domination which, inchoate in matter and culminating in grace, operates upon us by and through all the organic linkages of the progressing world.

This figure of the Universal Christ, the prime mover, the saviour, the master and the term of what our age calls evolution, entails no risk, we should note, of the disappearance of the man-Christ, or of a deviation of mysticism into some pantheistic and impersonal form of worship.

The Universal Christ, born from an expansion of the heart of Jesus, requires the historical reality of his human nature if he is not to disappear; and at the same time, as a function of the mechanism specific to love, he does not absorb but completes the personality of the elements which he gathers together at the term of union. Nor, again, is there any danger that the faithful who are drawn to the Universal Christ will forget heaven and allow themselves to succumb to a pagan naturalism and be drawn into a materialist conquest of the earth: for does not the Universal Christ, in his full glory, always emerge from the Cross?

So, there is no danger: on the other hand, what advantages are to be reaped, and how alluring the prospect!

This (and I speak from experience) is something of which I am deeply convinced. The religious consciousness of today, now finally won over to the idea of some 'super-mankind' to be born from our efforts, but unable to find any concrete image or rule of action that will answer its aspirations – this

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modern consciousness *could never resist* a Christianity which presented itself as the saviour of the earth's most real and living hopes. This would mean a complete and radical conversion of neo-paganism; and it would mean also a new infusion of the lifeblood of mankind into the heart, too often starved of that human energy, of those who believe.

It is only the Christian (and he *only in so far as* he absorbs into himself the human-divine properties of the Universal Christ) who is in a position today to answer the complex demands of nature and grace by an incredibly rich and simple act, by *a completely synthetic act*, in which the spirit of detachment and the spirit of conquest combine, correct and elevate one another – the spirit of tradition and the spirit of adventurous enquiry, the spirit of the earth and the spirit of God.

May we not say that if the Church wishes to guide the convulsions of the modern world to a fruitful issue, all she needs to do is to summon us to the discovery and the exercise of this completely modern form of charity?

After two thousand years, the affirmation of a Christian optimism in the nativity of the Universal Christ: is not that the message and the rallying cry we need?

Peking, 31 October 1940

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