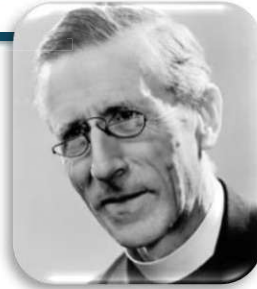


Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

France 1881-1955

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a famous French Jesuit who greatly influenced Catholic theology throughout much of the 20th century.



After his philosophical and theological formation, he pursued specialised studies in geology and archaeology. It was in these fields that he made great discoveries, which also inspired him to develop truly revolutionary theological and spiritual ideas (think of the theory of evolution).

It was this revolutionary aspect in particular that provoked his religious order, which sanctioned him with a ban on publishing and teaching. He retired to China, where he undertook archaeological and palaeontological research that led to the discovery of “Homo pekinensis”.

Most of his theological writings were published after his death and were very successful. *Le milieu divin* (The Divine Milieu, manuscript written in 1926-1927 in China) is one of them, and he shows himself not only as a man of science and a good theologian, but also as a highly spiritual and mystical man.



Prayer to God within me, before me, around me and above me

original in French

My God, when I approach the altar to receive Communion, grant that I may henceforth discern the infinite possibilities hidden beneath the smallness and proximity of the host in which you are concealed. I have already become accustomed to recognising, beneath the inertia of this piece of bread, a consuming power which, in the words of your greatest Doctors, assimilates me,

far from allowing itself to be assimilated by me. Help me to overcome the remaining illusion that would have me believe that your contact is limited and momentary.

I am beginning to understand under the sacramental species, it is first of all through the “accidents” of Matter, but it is also, by counteraction, through the entire Universe that you touch me, insofar as it flows back and influences me under your primary influence. In a true sense, the arms and heart that you open to me are nothing less than all the combined powers of the world which, penetrated to their very core by your will, your tastes, your temperament, fold back on my being to form it, nourish it, draw it to the central ardour of your fire. In the Host, it is *my life* that you offer me, Jesus.

What can I do to receive this enveloping embrace? To respond to this universal kiss? “*Quomodo comprehendam ut comprehensus sum?*”¹ To the total offering made to me, I can only respond with total acceptance. I *will* therefore *respond* to Eucharistic contact *with the entire effort of my life* – my life today and my life tomorrow – my individual life and my life united with all other lives. Within me, the Holy Species may periodically vanish. Each time, they will leave me a little more deeply immersed in the depths of your Omnipresence: living and dying, I will never cease to advance in you. The implicit precept of your Church that one must always and everywhere receive Communion is therefore justified with unprecedented vigour and rigour. The Eucharist must permeate my life. Thanks to the sacrament, my life must become an unlimited and endless contact with you, this life that appeared to me a few moments ago as a baptism with you in the waters of the world, and which now reveals itself to me as a communion with you through the world. The sacrament of life. *The sacrament of my life*, – of my life received, – of my life lived, – of my life surrendered.

¹ Trans.: How can I know that I have been understood?

Having ascended to heaven after descending into hell, you have so filled the universe in every direction, Jesus, that it is now blissfully impossible for us to escape from you. “*Quo ibo a spiritu tuo, et quo a facie tua fugiam?*”² I am sure of that now. Neither life, whose progress increases your hold on me; nor death, which throws me into your hands; nor the spiritual powers, good or evil, which are your living instruments; nor the energies of Matter, into which you have plunged yourself; nor the irreversible waves of time, whose rhythm and flow you ultimately control; nor the unfathomable depths of space, which measure your greatness; “*neque mors, neque vita, neque angeli, neque principatus, neque futura, neque fortitudo, neque altitudo, neque profundum, neque creatura alia (Rom 8:38)*”³ – none of these things can separate me from your substantial love, since they are all but veils, the “forms” in which you take me so that I may take you.

O Lord, once again, which of these two blessings is more precious: that all things be a contact with You? Or that You be so “universal” that I can experience and grasp You in every creature?

Sometimes we imagine that we can make you more attractive to me by exalting almost exclusively the charms and kindnesses of your former human form. Oh! truly, Lord, if I wanted only to cherish a man, would I not turn to those You have given me in the seduction of their present flowering? Mothers, brothers, friends, sisters, do we not have irresistibly lovable ones around us? What would we go to ask of Judea two thousand years ago? No, what I call, like every being, with the cry of my whole life, and even of all my earthly passion, is something quite different from a fellow human being to cherish: it is a God to worship.

² Trans.: Where could I go to escape your Spirit, and where could I flee from your presence?

³ Trans.: Neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither the present nor the future, neither power nor height, neither depth nor any other created thing.

Oh! To worship is to lose oneself in the unfathomable, to immerse oneself in the inexhaustible, to find peace in the incorruptible, to become absorbed in the defined immensity, to offer oneself to fire and transparency, to consciously and voluntarily annihilate oneself as one becomes more aware of oneself, to give oneself completely to that which is bottomless! Who can we worship?

The more Man becomes man, the more he will be pray to the need, and to an ever more explicit, refined and luxurious need, to worship.

O Jesus, tear open the clouds with your lightning! Show yourself to us as the Strong One, the Sparkling One, the Risen One! Be for us the Almighty who occupied, in the old basilicas, the complete solitude of the domes! Nothing less than this parousia is needed to balance and dominate in our hearts the glory of the world that is rising. So that we may conquer the world with you, appear to us enveloped in the Glory of the world.

selection and title by the editors, extract from:

Le milieu divin. Essai de vie intérieure. Paris, Ed. Du Seuil, 1957 ; p. 154-158.

Questions to aid reading and reflection

1. Try to formulate your spontaneous reaction, your general impression of this text.
2. What vision of the Eucharist do you find in it?
3. According to the author, what kind of communion does the Eucharist introduce us to?
4. Do you think you could pray with this text?