

The Influence of Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

—Richard Rohr, OFM

Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.

—Albert Einstein

When I was at Duns Scotus College in Michigan in the early 1960s, I was fascinated by the poetic-scientific-mystical-cosmic language of the recently deceased Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). Vatican II was still in process, so we were not sure if we could even read this edgy theologian. We were told that Rome had issued “warnings” against him. But since there were no explicit “condemnations,” some of us twenty-year-olds read him in the safety of our private rooms. Teilhard was like spiritual porn!

Now I look back and realize that, in those early years, I often shared the same joy and excitement of the English poet William Wordsworth, who, when reflecting on the era of the French Revolution, said: “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very heaven!” How true that was for my generation. Most priests in seminaries—under the next few popes—never enjoyed the freedom, enthusiasm, and open-horizoned intellectual life that we embraced in that heady and hearty time.

Even now, fifty years later, I get stirred and energized when I read Teilhard, even though I am unsure that I fully understand him. So many of his words are vague, self-created, and self-defined, yet I still love *The Divine Milieu* and *The Phenomenon of Man* and, at some intuitive level, still trust what I read. It might not all stand the test of time, but I am convinced that enough of it will endure—to change the *foundational evolution of history and spirituality*.

Teilhard still has something to say that history deeply needs and deeply wants to hear, even though I am quite sure

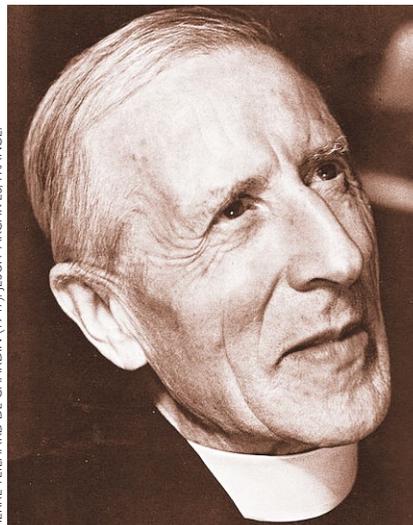
he would say it in a little less Catholic way if he had the advantage of the scientific discoveries, Scriptural exegesis, and Christian ecumenism that have evolved since his death.

Teilhard gives a beautiful coherence to the universe and unites the disparate strands of knowledge into one unified whole, which is exactly what our deepest soul invariably insists *must* be true. Whether you agree with his precise interpretation or not, you cannot help but breathe fresh air when you absorb even a bit of his optimism, faith, and intelligence—in what, for him, was a certain and positive future, which he called the Omega Point, the Cosmic Christ.

The final burst of truth that he offers his students is that the evolution of the universe is all about love—but with the most solid and unsentimental of definitions. For him, love is the very physical structure of the universe, driving all things toward union, attraction, and cosmic sympathy, despite the equally recognized pushback of obvious sin and evil—which Christians call the “scandal of the cross.” For Teilhard, it is a pan-erotic universe.

How this enthusiasm was cast down in the following decades, when the language of Armageddon (see Revelation 16:16), *Apocalypse Now*, and *The Late Great Planet Earth* took over the American and Christian conversation. It was a fall into historical hopelessness, an abyss from which we cannot seem to escape, to this day. There is no meaningful goal, no unified anything, no positive purpose or meaning to this planet. By 1968, we had slowly slipped into what we now call postmodernism, where each one of us is on our own, and the whole human and divine project

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PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN (1947). JESUIT ARCHIVES, FRANCE.

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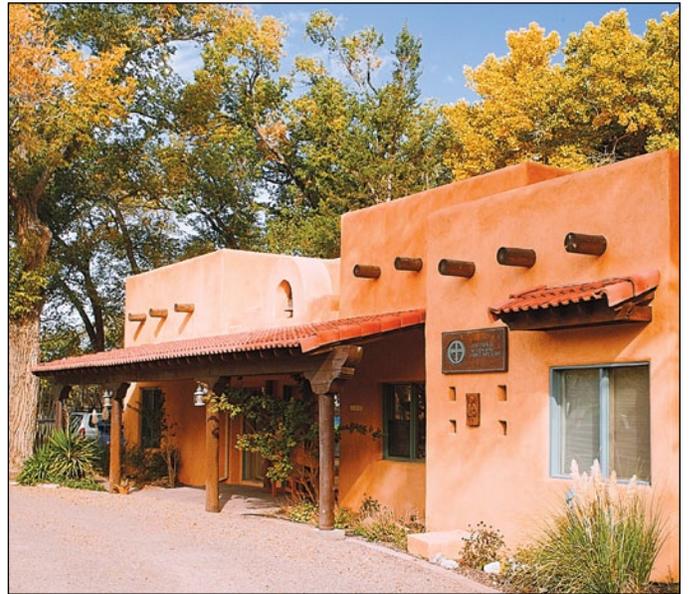
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The question for us is always "How can we turn information into transformation?" How can we use the sacred texts, tradition, and experience to lead people into new places with God, with life, with themselves? — Richard Rohr, OFM

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Ripples in the World: A Walking Reflection

I'm curious about the color of the sky and the brush of the wind. It pleads for me to get away from my walls and to move with it. I put on my shoes, grab an extra layer, and begin to walk. I'm not sure where I'll go today. That's okay. The stir of nature gives me permission to slow it all down and listen to her leaves, her bark, and her buzzing family. People are out here. There's a man working on the telephone pole and a family that's about to walk by. There's also a woman with a cane waiting for the bus up ahead. I feel their spirits floating through and beneath their skin. They speak to mine through passing smiles, friendly gazes, and gentle nods. When I'm unhurried, I am reminded how grounded and connected they make me feel.

I'm moving. I'm several blocks from where I started. I passed a busy commercial street. There was no crosswalk nearby, so I waited for cars to zoom by and then crossed. I'm now on a quiet road under the shade and arms of trees who I imagine to have been here for a hundred years. I can vaguely hear horses pulling carriages as a means of getting somewhere faster in a time when walking was all we really had. The difference between a sea of cars on concrete and slow steps under trees is striking. That's okay. If I'm centered enough, I can still see floating spirits, stories, and hope within each of the drivers. *We are all trying . . . aren't we?*



I continue walking. I've been gone for only thirty minutes. It's a simple pace. I couldn't be more than a mile away from my home. I have exchanged smiles with twenty people, seen many blossoming flowers and trees, mingled with bees and butterflies, and have even found my way into the café for a guilty treat. Life is moving. When I walk, I can more easily peel the masks away. We are good. I am good. Beyond good. So purely good, words can only touch the surface in describing it. I return home after my one-hour walk. My heart and my mind are opened and calm. Gratitude everywhere.

Moving at a one- to three-mph pace (while walking, strolling, or rolling) is a gift from above, behind, below, and within. I find that it's one of the most available teachers in our midst to bring our contemplative spirits into action . . . *a divine participation*. It is a dance that awaits, constantly awaits, our trusting and merciful hand.

Jonathon Stalls, a student of the Living School for Action and Contemplation, is a passionate social entrepreneur and devoted long-distance walker based in Denver, Colorado. He is the founder of Walk2Connect, a walking cooperative focused on connection-based walking programs with whole-health outcomes. He completed a 3,030-mile, eight-and-a-half-month walk across the USA in 2010 and the Camino de Santiago with his father in 2012. Connect with Jonathon and share your walking stories and photos on Twitter: @jonathonstalls @walk2connect #lifeat3mph.

Staff Picks from CAC's Bookstore

“In *Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation*, Fr. Richard Rohr suggests developing a relationship with Silence. He writes, “Silence is that ever-faithful companion, a portal to constantly deeper connection with whatever is in front of you.” This concept of relationship awakened in me a profound “Yes!” A yes that has had a remarkable impact on my contemplative practice, outlook on life, and engagement with others.”

—Dan O'Connor,
Senior Accountant

“Exhausted by the divisiveness that distorts political discourse these days? In *Authentic Transformation*, a webcast with Fr. Richard Rohr, we are urged to “be present to people not just like us,” and reminded that transformed people transform politics, not the other way around.”

—Mary Anne Reilly,
Customer Service Coordinator



“In *Jesus and Buddha*, Fr. Richard Rohr and James Finley explore the essential teachings of the two great world teachers, and traditions, with respect, love, and humor. The central place of contemplation is introduced and explored, based on their assertion that both teachers were trying to help people develop a higher consciousness to live in a world where pain and suffering are realities. This deeply informative series inspires a fresh consideration for the gifts of different traditions and cultures.”

—Clifford Berrien,
Customer Service Representative

From a Desert Retreat in New Mexico

I sat in a simple room listening to wisdom
 Filtered through a jolly Franciscan
 Down from desert fathers
 And into my soul like sunlight
 Slanting in through a window in the roof.
 Is the glare too much, he asked,
 Would you like to move, but
 I would not imagine hiding
 From that warm and piercing glow.

There were no fancy refreshments or teas
 To distract my friends and me. I took
 Only water, slightly, and it was enough,
 Like baptism in a font,
 To bathe me completely.

And through the morning,
 The rough and working neighborhood,
 Ramshackle and gray,
 Was transformed again by the steady witness
 Of this man's community.

At noon, I walked into the courtyard
 To admire the wise cottonwood tree,

Massive with rigid limbs sprawling
 Like an octopus into a blue ocean sky,
 A sign of water in the valley of the Rio Grande.
 With three trunks now, in its old age,
 They've named it the Trinity Tree.

From somewhere
 Above the walls, I heard
 A familiar chortling, a faint chorus
 Of raspy voices gargling the very breath
 That held them aloft and sent their sounds
 To me below.

So I scanned the empty sky, searching for my place
 In this procession of desert witnesses in a river,
 Until I saw the hundreds of Sandhill cranes,
 Circling my head, and our heads, and the city,
 And the world,
 Like a halo.

—Sam Candler

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler is the Dean of The Cathedral of St. Philip in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, Georgia: www.stphilipscathedral.org/

Living School for Action and Contemplation Fall Symposium

The faculty and staff of the Living School for Action and Contemplation are excited to give you a sneak peek into our fourth Living School Symposium. This August we will welcome our newest cohort and send forth our second class, the 2016 Cohort. Our three core teachers, Fr. Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault, and James Finley, will be joined by two guest presenters: Mary Evelyn Tucker and Jack Jezreel.

Mary Evelyn Tucker is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale University, where she has appointments in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies. Holding particular interest in Asian religions and ecology, she has collaborated with others to address the spirituality of the planet as it interfaces with human values and has worked with evolutionary philosopher Brian Swimme to create a multi-media project called *Journey of the Universe*.

Jack Jezreel is a pioneer in intentional Christian community, serving homeless people and teaching churches to be on fire with mission for outreach and social change. He is the founder of *JustFaith* which has partnered with six nationally recognized organizations to work with over 25,000 people

and 1,000 churches to engage in social ministry. He understands the power of transformative education in the world and embodies the underlying mission of the Living School.

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Teilhard de Chardin: A Reflection by Living School Graduate Gabrielle Stoner

"The whole of life lies in the verb seeing." —Teilhard de Chardin

Any vista is dependent on the eyes of the viewer: *how* we see impacts *what* we see. When I discovered the work of French Jesuit priest and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin, my heart was blown wide open, and I began seeing things in a whole new way.

Teilhard describes the convergence of matter and spirit through the lens of evolution. As a scientist and theologian, he paints the picture of a universe that is still in the process of becoming, and a God active within matter, incarnate *as our very lives*, participating with us in the becoming of all things.

I began to comprehend evolution as the ecstasy of the Trinity—geared toward more life, *more* creation, *more* interconnectivity, and *more* love. God isn't "out there," remote from us, but rather "at the tip of my pen, my shovel, my paint brush, my sewing needle . . . my heart and thoughts,"¹ as Teilhard says.

In my own life, Teilhard has helped shape a radical



evolutionary acceptance of my humanity, life circumstances, and whatever form the divine generativity decides to take through me. Now, I welcome the messiness of being human: understanding anguish, frustration, and desire as belonging to the energy of love that gives birth to new stars. Gone are the false categories of sacred or secular and the notion of the "separate" individual; there is only the breathtaking whole of our joint becoming in God . . . and the view from there is staggeringly beautiful.

Musician "Brie" Stoner currently works as a research assistant to Cynthia Bourgeault and as the Project Manager for Ilia Delio's online learning platform, The Omega Center. She has contributed a chapter to Ilia

Delio's new book Personal Transformation and a New Creation: The Spiritual Revolution of Beatrice Bruteau (Orbis, 2016). Brie is the mother of two young boys and lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan. To read more of Brie's work, visit www.becomingultrabuman.com

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 84.

The Influence of Teilhard de Chardin

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is heading toward a whimper and a dull thud. The very optimistic and hopeful end promised by the Resurrection of Christ was taken away from us—and now it is very hard to heal or give hope to individuals inside of a world that is imaged as "going to hell in a handbag."

Teilhard de Chardin believed, as many Fathers of the Church had asserted in the early centuries, that God's choice for Incarnation was taking on not just one human body in Jesus but, in fact, God's total embrace of the physical

universe and human *nature* in its entirety—from the Alpha Blueprint taught by Duns Scotus to the Omega Victory revealed by Teilhard.

To put it directly and succinctly, everything you can see with your eyes, and the eyes by which you see them, are all the Body of God, and are all headed toward Resurrection.

fr. Richard Rohr, O.F.M.



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"The physical structure of the universe is love."

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

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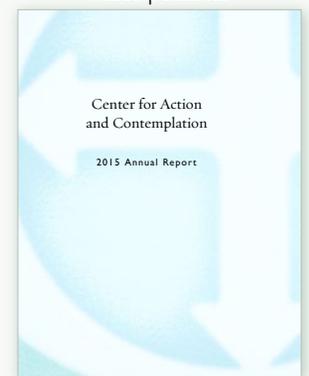
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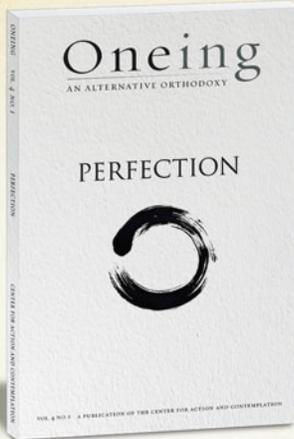




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Spare me perfection. Give me
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from embracing the full reality of
who I am, just as I am.

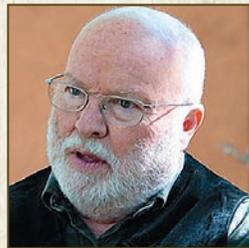
—David Benner

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Registration for the webcast includes access to the replay, which will be made available through Sunday, August 14, 2016, starting shortly after the live broadcast. Register no later than 4:00 p.m. US MDT on July 12, 2016, to participate in the live webcast and/or to view the replay. You must register online prior to the webcast to gain access to the replay. CAC is unable to accept phone registrations for webcasts.

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