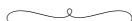


# *Teilhard de Chardin*



## *A Book of Hours*

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# *Introduction*

A Book of Hours  
for Those Who Love the World

*Kathleen Deignan*

What you hold in your hands is a devotional companion for postmodern contemplatives created from the inspired cosmopoetics of one of the great visionaries of our planet, the Jesuit priest-scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). At once an exacting geologist and an inspired religious visionary, Teilhard’s life and ministry were dedicated to “those who love the world” (DM, 11), to whom he offered a way to bridge the difficult divide between the still emergent science of evolution and Christian faith. Born in the ecologically rich and formative Auvergne region of France, Teilhard’s early scientific interests were fostered by his naturalist father, while his profound faith and spirituality were nurtured by his devout Catholic mother, whose inspiration led him to enter the Society of Jesus at age

eighteen to begin intensive theological and later scientific training.

Teilhard's studies were interrupted by World War I, during which he volunteered to be a stretcher bearer, an experience that would change and guide the course of his life. It was from the blood-soaked battlefields of the European Front that Teilhard began to draft seminal notes that would later develop into his most celebrated essays and books. It was from the battlefield also that his own visionary sense of humankind's role in God's evolutionary design for the cosmos took shape.

Resuming his science studies after the war, Teilhard earned a degree in geology and soon became an avid paleoanthropologist, researching human beginnings. A prolific contributor to his field, he participated in the discovery of the early hominid Peking Man, a subspecies of *Homo erectus* (LT, 160), and uncovered several new fossil species while in Egypt, one of which was later named for him: "Teilhardi" (LE, 207). But Teilhard soon came to sense that his quest to understand the meaning of the human enterprise was not to be discovered in the archaic past, but by turning his exploration toward the emerging future.

The early twentieth century was a revolutionary moment for scientific research and discovery as the new paradigm of evolution began to impact all aspects of human understanding and experience, especially religion. Heir to Darwinian evolutionism, Teilhard was also a contemporary of George Le Maître—the Belgian priest who first proposed the "primeval atom" theory of cosmic beginnings later described as the "big bang." Teilhard was born two years after and died a week before the legendary Einstein, and shared his moment with other eminent scientists

probing the mysteries of the cosmos. Teilhard was particularly sensitive to how their work would affect not simply questions of human origins but more so their impact on questions of human destiny, the nature of the universe, and divinity itself. Drawn into these controversies as both a scientist and mystic, Teilhard fashioned the question to which he would direct his life: “Who will give evolution its God?”

Wrestling with this *koan*, Teilhard began to lecture and write toward new horizons of understanding to offer a way for people of faith to comprehend and integrate the new science into a sacred worldview. However, such publicity brought him into conflict with his traditionalist Jesuit and Vatican superiors who found his theological proposals beyond the boundaries of his science and religiously unsettling. In 1923, while teaching in Paris at the Institut Catholique and in response to requests from students, Teilhard wrote a short essay titled “Note on Some Possible Historical Representations of Original Sin,” attempting to help reconcile the biblical presentation of human origins with the new Darwinian understandings of evolution by proposing a more contemporary and scientifically relevant reading of the creation narratives of Genesis (CE, 46). When his private note for a few students and friends was reported to his Jesuit superiors, Teilhard found himself under interdict and summarily exiled to a Jesuit-sponsored science museum in China to focus exclusively on paleontology. Ironically, it was during his Asian exile that Teilhard helped to find fossil evidence for the theory of evolution.

Banishment did not silence Teilhard, however, but gave greater urgency to his commitment to write for the sake of

“those who love the world” (DM, 11). Regrettably, the fruit of his most intense labor, his books *Le Milieu Divin* and *Le Phénomène Humain*, were not published during his lifetime, despite multiple requests to his order and many revisions. Yet he found a way to remain obedient both to superiors and his personal mission by bequeathing his writings to his secretary Jeanne Mortier, who saw to it that they were published after his death. When they were, the Holy Office still issued an official warning on June 30, 1962, regarding the ambiguities and errors against doctrine in Teilhard’s writings. Even so, from the first publication of his extraordinary trove his message began to be broadly accepted and embraced across the religious and secular worlds, as decades later countless books, institutes, scholarly associations, conferences, curricula, courses, and retreats were dedicated to unfolding his rich legacy. Even popes have saluted him as a Christian seer for our time, most notably Pope Francis, who cites him in paragraph #83 of his papal encyclical, *Laudato si’*.

Vivid and reflective reports of Teilhard’s travels around the globe can be found in his letters and essays from South Africa to Mongolia, Egypt to Paris, the badlands of Arizona, and lastly from his final years in New York. Pere Teilhard died in Manhattan on Easter Sunday, April 10, 1955, at the age of seventh-three and is buried in the cemetery of Saint Andrew’s on the Hudson, a former Jesuit novitiate, now the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. In all, Teilhard leaves a unique legacy of inspired religious writings, no fewer than 196 spiritual essays and books about his experience of finding God through the Earth and the cosmos and offering a vision-

ary framework for our deepest human self-understanding. It is from this stunning library of luminous texts that the book you are holding was composed.

Offered in the form of a Book of Hours, this Teilhardian breviary promises to ignite one's innate sense of the universe as the revelatory and evolving body of divinity. This is a work of love, joyfully created with my Congregation of Notre Dame sister, Libby Osgood. She, a young engineer, and I, an elder theologian, have spent two years intensively combing through and dialoguing about Teilhard's literary corpus to capture the illuminating power of "found" prayers, poems, and hymns shining throughout his written legacy. Here, in this resource for daily prayer, we present them in an elegantly unified format to awaken in those who pray with them what was so palpably alive in Teilhard: the cosmic sense of the sacred.

However, this is not a book *about* the renowned priest-scientist who brought his challenge and genius to the divide between an ever more expansive scientific picture of the universe and uncomprehending static religious worldviews. Nor is it an investigation into Teilhard's original and challenging cosmic system to be unraveled intellectually. Such work continues to be ably done by an exceptional community of theologians, scientists, religious historians, biographers, and artistic interpreters. Comprising a growing Teilhardian School of thought, these scholars have worked to present his radical recasting of traditional worldviews in the light of evolutionary science illuminated by religious faith. His and their work have been dispersed broadly to significantly influence culture, education, religion, the arts, and new formularies of contem-

porary thought. Rather, the offering being made here is not the remarkable system of Teilhard the cosmological scientist, but the spirituality of Teilhard the cosmic mystic.

If you are new to the gift of Teilhard, we invite you to explore the website of the American Teilhard Association at [www.teilharddechardin.org](http://www.teilharddechardin.org)—a vibrant network that holds and unfolds his living legacy, founded by two of his earliest disciples and distinguished teachers in their own right, Father Thomas Berry and Dr. Ewert Cousins. There you will find an introduction and comprehensive résumé of Teilhard's life and work by eminent Teilhardians Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim.

Though students and teachers within this virtual school, my colleague and I depart from earlier waves of scholarship that have adopted explanatory or exploratory approaches to his work. We have chosen to be expository, using a singular lens to recognize and present the most incandescent cosmopoetic writings from Teilhard's rich literary corpus that invite contemplatives into a new mind and heart to participate in the divine work of cosmogenesis. In the simple curation of this cache of literary gems, a singular timbre of Teilhard's voice is heard sounding as priest of the cosmos, visionary of a new religious conception, personal mentor, and guide for a critical and protracted era of global spiritual emergence.

Because it was Teilhard's explicit desire to offer succeeding generations an expansive spiritual horizon and the energy to reach it in the practice of integral, multifaceted worship, we sought motifs that serve his missionary purpose: to intensify humanity's capacity for adoration. Months of gleaning through his written collection were rewarded with a harvest of full-

bodied language with which to understand, speak of, and most importantly to worship “evolution’s God.”

I want these pages to be instinct with my love of matter and life and to reconcile it if possible with the unique adoration of and only absolute and definitive godhead.  
(WTW, 14)

So, as we labored to distill, harmonize, and augment Teilhard’s stunning idiom of prayer, this unique breviary was born in a new voice of praise. It opens the contemplative to a sacred space for encountering Teilhard the Spiritual Master and companion for citizens of the universe who desire to awaken into the *divine milieu*.

“For those who love the world” comes from the dedication page of Teilhard’s own singular spiritual masterpiece, *The Divine Milieu*, published in 1927. Written for the wayfarers of his time lost upon the shifting tides of a tumultuous century, Teilhard wished to offer his contemporaries and those to follow trustworthy orientation through the inevitable human challenges that marked the crisis of modernity and now its aftermath. On the whole, religions were failing to speak to the people of a dramatically new age entrenched in static worldviews and ideologies, political polarizations, planetary warfare, and world-shaking scientific discovery. In the absence of a common language of meaning, bifurcation continued to widen the divide between persons of religious instinct and a new breed of atheists who found faith within the world alone. But for Teilhard there was no such divergence. He believed we had come at last to



a moment when humankind together might witness and realize greater convergence in all dimensions of human existence under the suasion of a new scientific/religious cosmology, a unitive insight that celebrated a way to love the world in God and God in the world.

But Teilhard's spiritual classic neither fulfilled nor exhausted his ministry to guide the "wayfarers" of the world toward their true nature as planetary citizens. Instead, it served as a kind of preamble to his mystical teachings redolent throughout the broad and complex literary corpus found among his books, essays, and particularly in his rich personal correspondence. In that spirit, this *Book of Hours* means to serve Teilhard's perennial desire to be spiritual mentor and guide to those who love the world by inviting us to pray and worship with him in a "cosmogonic" key as a way to activate a capacity to perceive and abide in the *divine milieu* as our true home ground.

The design of this breviary offers today's contemplatives a fresh way to pray, in Teilhard's own words, a centuries-old devotional practice organic in nature and one that finds its likeness in nearly every religious tradition. Honoring Earth's axial rotation and terrestrial rhythms, global cultures have designed patterns for consecrating time, for awakening spiritual senses, for entering into a thin space, a harbor of grace to keep us in peace and presence. In the Christian form such regular prayer patterns have a long and varied pedigree originally rooted in Judaic practice and flowering in the many patterns for Christian communal or solitary daily prayer. Sometimes called "The Liturgy of the Hours" or "The Divine Office," these

devotional sequences serve to entrain a person to the spiritual opportunities offered in the shifting moods of an Earth day at once concealing and revealing the palpable presence of divinity in those intervals when our galactic mother star shines then veils her face: *dawn* turning to *day*, turning to *dusk*, turning to *dark*. As hours beget days, so this breviary ushers us into a week of deep reflection on the sacred mysteries illuminated by Teilhard's insight.

To give depth to this format of prayer we have invoked the creative tropes of "hexameron literature" popular in the medieval Christian period, a genre that presented theological and cosmological commentaries on the six days of biblical creation accounts interpreted in richly mystical and moral terms. Though largely faded from use, this literary formula affords a way to let Teilhard's creation days unfold—with one alteration. Instead of a six-day or seven-day imaginary, we offer an octamer formula of eight days: *Unfolding Cosmos*, *Evolving Christ*, *Living Earth*, *Becoming Human*, *Building the World*, *Creative Suffering*, *Transforming Spirit*, and an eighth day anticipating the cosmic climax *Toward Omega*.

This innovation imitates in a metaphorical way Teilhard's vision of ongoing creation in its full expanse from the genesis of the universe in its primordial first day, incrementally moving through deep time toward its future frontier, as yet unknown and unimaginable. In this all-embracing style the fullness of a divinely generative cosmos progressively unfurls through the week, day by day, hour by hour, to magnetize and mesmerize us, and activate our own desire to participate in the journey.

There's no doubt that there is a powerful educative force lodged in the world, which continually calls us to journey further into the deep layers of being: what attracts us in things is always withdrawing further from us, beyond every individual tangible reality, and finally beyond death. (MM, 296)

This life-changing journey motif is another archetypal trope that finds resonance in Teilhardian thought as a medium for the transformation of human nature. An eight-day spiritual itinerary for humans navigating the mysterious pathways of evolution harkens back to a variety of similar formulas in the Christian tradition. In the thirteenth century the Franciscan Master Bonaventure offered a guiding map for Christians wayfaring toward divinity in *The Mind's Journey into God*. Orientation patterns such as these work alongside other proposals for spiritual maturing exemplified most lastingly in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, developed to inform a disciple's process of realizing spiritual maturity and liberty. In this lineage, Teilhard offers guidance for fostering mystical ambition, though less systematically. Similarly, he proposes ascetical exercises to activate human transformation, though more suggestively.

Yet when we tune in to his “found” hymns of adoration and praise, his “found” epistles and exhortations, canticles and blessings, and when they become the focus of our *lectio divina*, we hear the voice of a master of souls who desires Christic transformation—the voice of a pastor, psalmist, mentor, and sage. Teilhard's voice is here for those who seek an inspired teacher with whom to learn to see as he did and as we may.

Seeing. One could say that the whole of life lies in seeing—if not ultimately, at least essentially. To be more is to be more united—and this sums up and is the very conclusion of the work to follow. But unity grows . . . only if it is supported by an increase of consciousness, of vision. That is probably why the history of the living world can be reduced to the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes at the heart of a cosmos where it is always possible to discern more. Are not the perfection of an animal and the supremacy of the thinking being measured by the penetration and power of synthesis of their glance? To try to see more and to see better is not, therefore, just a fantasy, curiosity, or a luxury. See or perish. This is the situation imposed on every element of the universe by the mysterious gift of existence. And thus, to a higher degree, this is the human condition. (HP, 31)

Simultaneous with Teilhard's existential insight came an understanding that he himself was someone with penetrating eyes able to sense beneath the incoherence and confusions of surface existence, a deep, living unity. With this self-recognition he accepted a mandate that became his sacred mission: to generate a chain reaction of similar insight to spread explosively around the world.

I do believe that I can see something, and I would like that something to be seen. You can't imagine what intensity of desire I sometimes feel in this connection, and what impotence! (MM, 269)

And so he prays to be “the apostle, the evangelist” of his scientifically religious intuition concerning the multidimensionality of the living cosmos.

In particular, he desired to be the apostle of a life-transforming gospel announcing a vision of divinity laboring to self-manifest as the incarnate body of the world, perceived through his Christian eyes as the living Christ-force at play in the universe. The paleontologist turned from his professional quest to scientifically understand the human phenomenon by exploring its fossil past to something far more profound: his sense that the human species is an evolutionary force who brings into the universe something completely new. Feeling the inner pressure of such a cosmic “gospel” arising in him, he prayed to know how to awaken it in others. He perceived that this radical sense of human significance could be a catalyst for understanding the entire cosmic enterprise, even a new understanding of divinity. It would be “the dawn of a new epiphany” (TF, 38).

Teilhard could see from his deep-time perspective on an ever ancient—ever new cosmos that the human journey and our work on its behalf may be just beginning in earnest. To aid us on our tentative itinerary toward unitive convergence, he persuades us to accept our vocation to be the orienteers and “the arrow” of such consciousness evolution. He understood that a cosmic expedition required divestment of all distorting identities and prejudices of which he was aware—political, national, tribal, and religious. Only thus could he be liberated from ideological conditioning and psychological obscuration so that his true terrestrial identity could be sensed and lived. How often Teilhard repeated his creed, the simple utterance

of a pure heart! “I am less a child of heaven than I am a child of earth” (HU, 13).

In service of “earth’s task” Teilhard asks for an augmentation of the traditional Christian gospels that strive to engender personal, interpersonal, and social morality. Teilhard’s new testament calls for conversions toward ecological morality and mysticism arising from a more penetrating sense of the continuing incarnational process. For Teilhard to “work at earth’s task” means asking disruptive questions, moving beyond obstructive answers, and generating creative alternatives.

He also indicates the course correction that could reorient us through the impasse to which our momentous wrong turn into materialist/technological captivity has brought us. Returning to the wisdom of cosmic realism he exhorts us to comprehend and generate the only actual energy that will power our long journey through the universe.

This is the very moment, paradoxically, for Man to discover the biological value . . . of the only energy which can group and achieve . . . Man, without turning him into a gadget or a slave: a mutual form of love, based on the consciousness of a common Something (or rather Somebody) into which all together we converge. (LTF, 145)

With this we come to the heart of Teilhard’s gospel and its upending of all spiritual dualisms, its healing of mystical double vision: “the essence of my ‘gospel’ can be summarized by these simple words: not only ‘God is love’ but ‘the World is love’”

(LLS, 218). In its reception we are empowered to experience these mysteries as one and the same modalities of communion. Such unitive intimacy awakens the “cosmic sense” as love moves toward more vast horizons, beyond the human or even the terrestrial, reaching to the dynamic cosmos. With Teilhard we learn to love the universe in its totality, “its energies, its secrets, and its hopes because I am dedicated to God the only origin, the only issue, the only term” (WTW, 14).

Teilhard wished to activate in planetary amateurs the soul of a magnanimous lover fully alive with resonant attraction to all that is beautiful, mysterious, and suffering in the world. His understanding of loving goes beyond romantic, familial, or tribal bonding, because love neither originates nor culminates in the human. It is a cosmic power, a centrating magnetism like gravity itself that makes the ever expanding universe cohere. Love is a constructive, creative, unitive force born of the cosmos’ own genius drawing all elements into convergence by all that is most intimate and ultimate in them. In the human, the conscious activation and guidance of this process becomes our species’ highest vocation, our most arduous task, our evolutionary destiny.

Teilhard tells his spiritual novices that we shall be astonished at what depths of affection our conscious relationship to the universe will awake as we intentionally enter into the work and spirit of “amorization” (HM, 50). Guiding his disciples to understand more profoundly that it is divinity’s own self that allures us in the face and form of the cosmos, he suggests that “there are infinite degrees in the loving initiation of one person into another unfathomable Person” (WTW, 147). To support

such evolutionary transformation, the spiritual master invites our readiness to make a cosmic vow, indeed a Christic vow, in imitation of divine, self-emptying love: “the reckless vow of all love” through which we lose ourselves in all that we love ever more intimately and expansively (DM, 132).

“The reckless vow of all love” reveals to those who love the world another hidden power of the universe. In Teilhard’s experience, nothing exhilarates human creatures more than the joy of finding and surrendering to a beauty greater than ourselves discovered in the cosmic *process* that reveals a cosmic *presence* seen as a divine *person*. As mystery reveals itself to us universally, we feel surrounded by it, become transfixed by it “so that there is no room left to fall down and adore it, even within ourselves” (DM, 112).

Finding the world in our souls is the ground of our hope in an evolutionary, unfinished, suffering universe still laboring for liberation from the limitations and determinisms of being such. Yet it means we are congenitally, courageously oriented toward an unimaginable future, an unimaginable God of the future, an unimaginable human transfiguration in the future. Teilhard says we need a new face of God to worship, to astonish, to allure, and to inspire our adoration forward as we continue our perilous journey. Perhaps now we begin “to see” such an image dawning as we gradually realize our own mystical capacities empowered by a great faith in the God of tomorrow and in ourselves as embryonic agents of the future (AE, 238). Indeed, the new face of emerging divinity may yet be perceived as humankind converges in the sacred sphere of adoration to intone together God’s newly whispered names.



As we chant our deepest desires in songs at dawn and in nightly hymns, we ourselves become enchanted as we attune to galactic choirs silently or plainly sounding throughout the *divine milieu*. With them we play into harmonies as yet unheard, augmenting the hymn of the universe being sung through everything calling us to offer the soaring descant and contrabass of our human voice. This Book of Hours offers those who love the world Teilhard's libretto. May it be a grace for you and for our living Earth through which such healing praise shall quietly resound.

*Lex orandi, lex vivendi:* As we pray, so we live.