I have not yet reached perfection, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Jesus Christ. (Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 3:12).

Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the Feminine

Marie Bayon de La Tour

Introduction

If there is one delicate subject, it is indeed that of the relations of a clergyman, of a priest of the Catholic Church, with women. However, it is only with deep respect that it is possible to approach the emotional and spiritual life of a man. A fortiori when his vows call for consecrated celibacy.

The life of Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a man full of charm and with an apparently free existence, did not escape beautiful and great female friendships, but we must not forget that he also had many male friends. Friends who were pillars for him: Fathers Pierre Charles, Auguste Valensin, Henri de Lubac, Bruno de Solages and Pierre Leroy, to name but a few members of the clergy, without omitting lay friends, scientists or not.

The existence, work and thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin are extremely coherent. In an audio testimony recorded in 1958, Marguerite Teillard-Chambon does not hesitate to speak of the "interpenetration" of these elements.

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1 This conference takes up (and develops) a lecture given on 19 March 2017 at the symposium entitled: "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin face à ses contradicteurs" (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin facing his opponents), a symposium that took place on 18 and 19 March 2017 at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris. It was organised by the Académie Catholique de France in partnership with the Teilhard de Chardin Chair at Centre Sèvres, the Teilhard de Chardin Foundation, the Friends of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the Friends of Maurice Blondel, under the high patronage of Cardinal Poupard.

2 A granddaughter of her brother Joseph, having grown up close to him and in the Teilhard homes. Joseph died in 1978. The General Secretary of the association of the nephews of Father Teilhard de Chardin, a vice-president of the Association of the Friends of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, an observer at the Teilhard Foundation. She actively participates in the re-publication of the works of Fr Teilhard. Family testimonies are numerous. bayonelayachtour@hotmail.com.

3 Especially in these difficult times for the Church.


5 Decade of Cerisy from July 25 to August 3, 1958. Archives Teilhard de Chardin Foundation.
A son of Saint Ignatius, Pierre Teilhard lived in the world and in a way "faced" it in all its dimensions. The "Feminine" is a fundamental dimension of it, he did not avoid it, did not hide it. But didn't he take too many risks?

Courageously, however, he sought how to integrate all the dimensions of women in the Church and in his vision of the universal Christ. It should not be forgotten that the usual "disposition" of a clergymen towards the feminine, a hundred years ago, was certainly not similar to that of today. We can follow this quest in all his work, but it constitutes the main theme of three of his texts: "The Eternal Feminine (1918)"7, "The Evolution of Chastity (1934)"8 and the end of "The Heart of Matter" entitled "The Feminine or the Unitive"9 written in 1950, five years before his death.

We have found it interesting to compare his life's main female encounters (broadly defined) with what he said or expressed in his correspondence, his writings or his diary.

Some of these texts, and this is important, are called by Pierre Teilhard himself "essays" or "sketches", they are not intended for publication but they constitute stages in his research. For "the Feminine", as for the other themes he dealt with in his life, Father Teilhard never ceased questioning his vision and making it deeper.

We will study this parallel between his life and his work in three stages: first of all the women surrounding him when a child, then his cousin Marguerite building "the bridge", and then his encounters with women in Paris and around the world. Finally, we will conclude with a brief study of the relationship between Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and women.

1. The women surrounding him when a child

In his autobiographical essay "The Heart of Matter"10 written in 1950, five years before his death, Pierre Teilhard himself acknowledges what his mother passed on to him and speaks of her "radiance"11. He said of her: "Attentive, her beautiful and grave face seemed to be illuminated from within", a face in which a little of God's love is revealed to him.12 His brother Joseph wrote: "My mother knew how to meditate: apart from Peter, Marguerite-Marie and Gabriel, her children were not so capable, far from it" and further on he added: "from time to time, she would bring preachers of her choice to the old churches of Orcines or Luzillat. I especially remember Father Matheo, a zealous devotee of the Sacred Heart..." We know how

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6 Father Teilhard often writes the Feminine with a capital letter, it shows the status he gives it, we will come back to this.
7 "Écrits du temps de la guerre" Tome XII, p 279-291, Seuil. 1965. [The works of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (PTC) were published by Seuil in thirteen volumes noted from I to XIII].
13 We will find this notion again with the term "diaphania" used by Fr Teilhard, as he explains in "Le Cœur de la Matière". For him, "the World gradually caught fire for me, burst into flames; how this happened all during my life, and as a result of my whole life, until it formed a great luminous mass, lit from within, that surrounded me." T XIII "Le Cœur de la Matière" p 21, Seuil 1976.
much Father Teilhard saw in the Sacred Heart the place where the conjunction of the Divine and the Cosmic is realized. About his mother, Father Teilhard specifies what follows in the same text from "The Heart of Matter": "It called for a spark to fall upon me if the glow was to burst into flame. That spark, through which "my Universe", as yet but half personalized, was to attain centricity by being amorized, undoubtedly came through my mother: it was through her that it reached me from the current of Christian mysticism and both illuminated and inflamed my childish soul." Thus, as Father Teilhard looks back on his existence, he does not forget the spiritual heritage transmitted by a mother who not only had a very vivid faith and a profound devotion to the Sacred Heart, but also a permanent concern for others and their spiritual awakening.

Two of Pierre's sisters will die young and if the first one dies before he is born, Louise's death at 13 years of age affects him; he was confronted with death at a very early age. But his two other sisters, Françoise and Marguerite-Marie Teilhard de Chardin, cannot be ignored. "I am convinced," said his cousin Marguerite Teillard-Chambon, "that his two sisters, after their mother, made the most penetrating first impressions on Pierre Teilhard.

His sister Françoise (1879-1911), who entered the Little Sisters of the Poor in 1903, was very close to Pierre. This entry was a real spiritual battle, a battle that she led with the help of her brother Pierre. It was to Françoise that Pierre said one day (around 1900-1901): "You look at your crucifix the wrong way around, it is not only the cross that you must see, it is Jesus Christ who is on it" and she used to say: "You must give yourself to God in three suitable ways: generously, simply and cheerfully." His other sister was Marguerite-Marie (1883-1936). Seriously ill, yet active beyond her weak strength, she was also very close to Pierre. She was the president of the Catholic Union of the Sick, a network of prayer and mutual support. Marguerite Teillard-Chambon testified: Between her and Pierre: "fraternal friendship had become an intimacy...they wrote to each other regularly and they knew from each other everything that really mattered in their lives, their trust was mutual." Monique Givelet wrote a book about Marguerite-Marie, a book the preface of which was written by Pierre. It ends as follows:

"O Marguerite, my sister, while, dedicated to the positive forces of the Universe, I was running the continents and the seas, passionately busy watching all the hues of the Earth rise, you, motionless, lying, were silently metamorphosing into light, deep within yourself, the worst shadows of the World. In the eyes of the Creator, tell me, which one of us will have had the better part?"

Therefore, Pierre Teilhard was born and grew up in a profoundly Christian environment, surrounded by women animated by a radiant faith with whom he shared simple and trusting relationships. He would later maintain this trust in others, sometimes verging on candor.

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14 In the quotations, the passages are underlined by Father Teilhard de Chardin himself.
16 Marielle in 1881 at 4 years of age and Louise at 13 years of age in 1904. Albéric his elder brother in 1902. Two Teilhard brothers were killed in war 14-18 and three wounded. Only Pierre escaped unharmed.
2. His encounters in Paris and around the world

Born in 1881, he joined the Society of Jesus in 1899. When we talk about Father. Teilhard, we must never forget how much he is inhabited by Ignatian spirituality. He is also inspired by St. Paul and St. John as well as by the Fathers of the Church.

Pursuing studies in geology and paleontology, in the wake of Bergson and Newman, Father Teilhard wondered about the place of man and the meaning of Christ in the Evolving Universe. He was ordained a priest in 1911 and arrived in Paris in 1912. He entered the Museum of Natural History. There he met Ida Treat in 1924. An American, a journalist, with a passion for paleontology. Full of life and exuberance. Coming from a world very different from his own, she did not share his faith, she was an atheist and a Marxist. She had just married (1923) Paul Vaillant-Couturier. She was, as we shall see, like so many others, certainly moved by the charm of Pierre. But, very intelligent, she knew how to transform this attraction into a beautiful friendship and they corresponded all their lives.19 "I have never met anyone so capable of "reverberating" to the suffering of others" Pierre Teilhard wrote to Lucile Swan.20

Father Teilhard was faithful in friendship. His correspondence attests to the many exchanges he had with people from all walks of life during his entire life. It is important to say that all his friends, men and women, forged ties with each other, supporting each other, and forming a kind of second family around him.

In Paris, he got back to Marguerite Teillard-Chambon (in literature Claude Aragonnès 1880-1959), his cousin from the first generation.

They had met as children in Clermont-Ferrand, but, at that time, Marguerite was especially close to his sisters Françoise and Marguerite-Marie. Adolescence had separated them. She was one of the first agrégé women in France (Lettres) at the age of 23 in 1904. She was a beautiful woman, sensitive and cultured. In addition to their Auvergne roots and common holidays, they discovered that they were both animated by a deep spirituality. She devoted herself to teaching young girls. She introduced him to the intellectual Paris she was already familiar with. The letters written by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to Marguerite Teillard-Chambon during the war, published under the title "The Making of a Mind"21 show how much Pierre needed her viewpoint. "My thought is still trying to find itself and once again I am seeking to clarify it by talking with you...you will tell me what you think".22

This need is already emerging for Pierre Teilhard23 to submit his ideas, to debate them. And if he did so with men, it is certain that feminine finesse and sensitivity were for him a necessity: ".../...nothing has developed in me except under the gaze and influence of a woman" he writes in "The Heart of Matter"24. Is it his cousin that he is alluding to in the same essay when he writes: "Having set out, from childhood, to discover the Heart of Matter, it was inevitable that one day I would find myself face to face with the Feminine. The curious thing is only that in this

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19 Excerpts from the letters written by Pierre Teilhard (1926-1952) to Ida Treat were published under the title "Accomplir l'homme" (the other correspondent of the book being Rhoda De Terra) by Grasset. 1968.
22 In addition to "Genèse d'une pensée", excerpts from letters dated 1923 to 1955 have been published under the title "Lettres de voyage", Grasset 1956. The complete version remains to be published.
23 Pierre Teilhard, as he himself said, proceeds by trial and error.
24 "Écrits du temps de la guerre". Tome XII p 70 Seuil. 1965.
case, the encounter waited until I was thirty years old before it happened."25 It is very likely that Pierre Teilhard owes her a lot and she played an essential role with him throughout his life. Pierre Teilhard notes in his diary on February 14, 1917: "Who knows me except Marg?"

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1914, the war is there, he enlists as a stretcher-bearer and despite - and stimulated too! - by an extremely difficult existence, he writes essays that he keeps safe with his family. What he called "one more sense"26 developed in him, that is to say "to perceive, without seeing them, the reality and organicity of collective greatness"27. In these wartime essays, reflections on the feminine appear regularly; we can follow the evolution of his thinking.

On September 2, 1915, he was in the middle of the battle, and he noted in his diary, in light of the meetings that took place in the middle of the war28: "Never before had I discerned so much how much Christian morality is a conquered summit, which very few, in short, manage to hold, and whose possession by humanity demands a continual struggle". A thought, on his part, well anchored in reality29. Then he goes further in his analysis and notes: "The authentic and pure feminine is par excellence a luminous and chaste energy, bearer of courage, of ideals, of goodness = the Blessed Virgin Mary. WOMAN is, de jure, the GREAT SOURCE radiating purity, this is the fact, not noticed enough, apparently contradictory, which appeared with Christian virginity. Purity is above all a feminine virtue, because it shines eminently in woman; it is preferably communicated through her and has the effect of feminizing, in a way (in a very beautiful and mysterious sense of the word)".30

In his essay "The painting" written during the battles of Verdun32, Pierre Teilhard describes the look of Christ. And among the many variations of it, he describes "those eyes, for example, so sweet and tender at first that I thought my mother was standing before me, became, the next moment, passionate and subjugating like those of a woman - so imperiously pure, at the same time as, under their domination, the feeling would have been physically incapable of going astray". It is obvious that here he is describing looks that come out of his memory because they impressed him.

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29 On August 22, 1915, he wrote to Marguerite: "Little by little, Our Lord is conquering you and taking you for Him. Without doubt, peace of heart, its dilation in the midst of warm and grateful affections, is more harmonious, more normal, more suitable for easy action, than isolation and breakdowns. (So is health in relation to illness...). This is why we must strive, through our personal efforts, to secure support in good and solid friendships, to guard ourselves from infirmities of body and soul...but if God intervenes to wean our hearts, to turn by force, on Him alone, the appetite for happiness and reciprocal love which He has aroused in us during happy years of youth, then we must not complain about it. Don't be angry with Our Lord if He wants to make you more than what you call "a simple Christian". Because your action must be far-reaching, it must emanate from a heart that has suffered: this law is gentle, in fact...". "Genèse d'une pensée", p 82 Grasset 1961.
30 Both these words are written with capital letters in the text.
In 1917, in a spiritual essay entitled "The Mystical Milieu"\footnote{"Écrits du temps de la guerre". Tome XII, p153-192, Seuil. 1965.}, he wrote: "The true union is the union that simplifies, and to simplify is to spiritualize". Here we find the concept of "creative union" which is his way of describing Evolution as the ascent from the Multiple to the One.

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In 1917-18 he was 36 years old; he had been a priest since 1911. He took his vows as a Jesuit in 1918 and he wrote his famous essay "The Eternal Feminine". It took him several months of trial and error to write this true poem (in prose). He notes in his diary: "To write in the form of a (very broad) paraphrase of Wisdom"\footnote{PTC "Journal" 15 mars 1917, p 296, Fayard 1975.} then, still in his diary: "Not to seek the woman but the Feminine in all women".\footnote{PTC "Journal" 20 septembre 1919. Unpublished.} We find this attitude in the text of the Eternal Feminine. In a way that is new for a clergyman, Pierre Teilhard starts from his own experience to write this fresco, but he sees further: "Whoever hears the call of Jesus does not have to reject love out of his heart. On the contrary, he must remain essentially human. He therefore needs me (the Eternal feminine is speaking) to sensitize his powers and awaken his soul to the passion of the divine."\footnote{"Écrits du temps de la guerre" ; Tome XII, p 287, Seuil. 1965.}

This text is an ode to love and at the same time a true digest of his questions and visions of human love, human love being a sign and vector of divine love. Father Martelet\footnote{Fr Gustave Martelet sj : "PTC, Prophète d’un Christ toujours plus grand", p 104, Lessius 2005.}, now deceased, a Jesuit and a fine connoisseur of the thought of Father Teilhard, wrote: "There is a real coherence between Teilhard’s spontaneous inclination and even his impulse towards the feminine as well as towards Woman, and his passion for Christ". And the Eternal Feminine to tell us: "In me, it is God who is awaiting you".\footnote{"Écrits du temps de la guerre » ; Tome XII, p 289, Seuil. 1965.} Henri de Lubac will point out in his study of "The Eternal Feminine"\footnote{Henri de Lubac "L’Éternel Féminin" Aubier. 1983.} that Father Teilhard wrote in his notebook on April 29, 1916: "Virginity: the certain intrusion of the Revealed One into the cosmos".\footnote{Henri de Lubac "L’Éternel Féminin", p23, Aubier. 1983.}

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When Father Teilhard took his vows as a Jesuit on May 26, 1918, at the end of the war, he said with sagacity: "I will take a vow of poverty: never have I understood better how money can be a powerful means for the service and glorification of God - I will take a vow of chastity: never have I understood better how man and woman can complement each other to raise themselves up to God. - I am going to make a vow of obedience: I have never understood better how much God gives freedom in his service."\footnote{"Biographie Pierre Teilhard de Chardin" Claude Cuénot, p 43, Plon. 1958.}

He resumes his teaching and his research activities and, of course, he meets women...

For one of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s characteristics is having travelled the world. He has crossed paths with women from different horizons, women who are not always conventional. The status of women must be placed in the context of the early 20th century. In western
societies, girls were raised in anticipation of marriage. No one thought of developing in them anything other than the qualities of a housewife and artistic talents.

Most of the women met by Fr Teilhard were outside this traditional pattern. Freer, sometimes paying dearly for this independence, they were also more available for exchanges. They are often women with rich personalities. We have seen the commitment of Marguerite Teillard-Chambon who, like Madeleine Daniélou, having a solid intellectual background, wanted to develop the teaching of girls. They were often women who were out of the usual norm at the time.

Was he as naive about his female relationships as people tend to say? In 1922, he wrote in his retreat notebook: "Being absolutely transparent between God and them, the joy of overcoming" and in the same notebook on the following day: "Spiritual friendships = spiritualized. One cannot eliminate what divides one's heart: one must assimilate it, go through it." Here we find what Edith de la Héronnière, in her biography of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, called: "The mysticism of the crossing". An attitude so characteristic of his life, his thought and his faith. An attitude in which difficulty is neither concealed nor minimized, but in which man's freedom, and therefore his dignity, is at stake in the will to overcome this difficulty from above.

On January 29, 1922, he wrote to Marguerite Teillard-Chambon: "I think a man would have to be exiled to Mars, or to another Universe, to suspect the incredible tenderness that unconsciously links him to the body of all human beings. How then will this immense affection, of which family affections are probably only a pale reflection, be awakened? - It is good, meanwhile, that we brush an inkling of it, as is happening to you ".

Throughout an eventful life where he suffered intensely from not being able to express his deepest convictions, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin needed these affections that he could describe so well.

In 1923, introduced by Marguerite Teillard-Chambon, he met Léontine Zanta. A woman as elegant and distinguished as she was intelligent. She was the first woman doctor of philosophy, a disciple of Bergson, and she played a leading role in French feminism. It was a Christian feminism in order, in Léontine Zanta's own words: "to reach a broad and full life". In 1930 he wrote to her: "Try and make it clear in your lectures that there is a place for a new woman, between the servant girl and the "virago"; the place of someone who inspires, not only because she is beautiful, but because she understands". Léontine held a salon where she received the intellectual elite of her time. She will be a privileged witness to the evolution of Pierre Teilhard's thought. He will be her spiritual adviser and, fearing that her intelligence may supersede her mystical sense, he wrote to her: "Your true strength will always be in the spiritual tension that you will manage to maintain within you, through thought and contact with God." They will correspond throughout their entire lives.

At that time, he also met Simone Bégouën who had just married his dear friend Max Bégouën. It was a sweet and fraternal affection: "Simone, dear .../...how are you, 'little sister'"

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47 15 december 1922.
he wrote to her. In the early 1930s, Simone offered to mimeograph the works of Father Teilhard. She will devote herself to their propagation, which Jeanne Mortier will continue afterwards.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin left for China in 1923. About China, he said: "By its immensity, by the enormity of its dimensions, it has contributed to broaden my thinking, to elevate it to a planetary scale." In 1927, he resided in TienTsin and completed "The Divine Milieu", a major work that he dedicates "For those who love the world". This "Essay on the Interior Life" as he called it, was written for the attention of "the wavering, both inside and outside" the Church in order "to show that Christ, ever the same and ever new, has not ceased to be the first within mankind."

In China, of course, he met many people. In 1929 in Beijing, he met Lucile Swan, an American sculptor and painter. She was the one that Dr. Weidenreich entrusted with the task of sculpting the head of the Sinanthropus (Nelly) from the remains discovered at Chou-Kou-Tien. Lucile was divorced, born into a family of artists of Episcopalian tradition. Like Ida Treat, Lucile was far removed from the world where Father Teilhard came from. Pierre Leroy writes about Lucile "A striking face, a quiet look, a bearing that is both simple and dignified". Their meeting was a shock, and a source of joy and sorrow. Their correspondence, which our family wished to publish in connection with Lucile's niece, Mary Wood Gilbert (now deceased) may be confusing, but it is moving and allows us to follow, in a way, "from within", Pierre Teilhard's openness and vision of the feminine. Lucile suffered and had difficulty in understanding (she may have understood him at the end of her life?) what held him back in his fidelity to his vows. Like all the important events of his life, this meeting gave him food for thought. It deepened the meaning of his vow of chastity.

Shortly afterwards, he wrote in his essay "The Spirit of the Earth" in 1931: "Love is the most universal, the most formidable, and the most mysterious of cosmic energies."

Three years later, in 1934, he wrote an essay entitled: "The Evolution of Chastity", a text that he himself called "a draft" and judged to be in danger of being misunderstood. This is what he wrote to Léontine Zanta on June 24, 1934: "This winter, I have been able to resume writing a little .../...a draft, less to the point, on the Evolution of Chastity.../...the work is still in my drawers - because it is in danger of being misunderstood. However, it is an absolutely loyal and selfless effort to try and get to the bottom of a question that seems to me terribly vital and terribly obscure. I have put together here all that I could find in the depths of my evidence in the face of questions and challenges that are not abstract at all, in order to form "the defense"

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48 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin "Le Rayonnement d’une amitié". Letters to the Bégouën family, p 146, 14 avril 1939, Lessius 2011.
49 The trace of it is proven from 1933 onwards.
50 "En Chine avec Teilhard" (in the 40's), Claude Rivière, p 113, Seuil.1968.
51 "Le Milieu divin". Tome IV, front page, Seuil 1957.
52 "Le Milieu divin". Tome IV, p17, Seuil 1957.
53 "Le Milieu divin". Tome IV, p18, Seuil 1957.
and specially to define the value or essence of "chastity". We will have to discuss about that. Basically, it is simply, but in all its acuity! the problem of Matter."

He then wrote to Father Valensin: "What I have written here is the best of what I have found to answer (myself and others) when, on three or four occasions, I have been put, for long periods of time, "at the foot of the wall". You may find it a weak triumph. But the fact is that, really, I can't see anything more." He then notes in this essay the extent to which a woman can enrich a man, and then he goes further: "Virginity is placed on chastity like thought on life: through a reversal, or a singular point." The madness of a clergyman passionately given to the "ever greater Christ", reminding us that the Church is a mystery of love first of all.

In his letters to Lucile Swan, we find this proposal of an encounter on a higher level, an attitude that is very difficult for her to live, but which is very revealing in Pierre Teilhard of a mystic who lives the union with the Universal Christ with intensity. On May 15, 1936, he wrote to her: "You are seeking a balance "for two", and for me, the only question is a balance "for three."

A notion that we find in his text "Sketch of a Personalistic Universe" written at that time (it is dated May 4, 1936): "Love is a three term function: man, woman and God. Its whole perfection and success are bound up with the harmonious balance of these three elements."

Lucile wrote in her diary on July 23, 1934: "I would like to love God as P. T. does - Perhaps it will come in time".

No testimony allows us to doubt that Pierre Teilhard did not remain faithful to his vows. This is particularly clear in the correspondence which Lucile Swan herself entrusted to her niece Mary Wood Gilbert, asking her to make her point of view known. In the preface to this correspondence Mary Wood Gilbert tells us: "I once asked Lucile if there had ever been anything physical between them. She replied, "Never."

In China, he also met Claude Rivière, a French journalist for Shanghai radio. If the meeting was also an emotion for her, she immediately understood the vocation of her Jesuit friend and what came out of it. Her analysis, very human, deserves to be quoted: "With women, he wore triple pink glasses. Allergic to duplicity, to lies, this great man of such vast intelligence often lacked a critical spirit when it came to judging men, let alone women. Let's not forget that he had known in his milieu only exceptional women, his mother, his sisters, his cousins, Simone Bégouën, and so on. And that he had a real cult for femininity and the role it plays in evolution."

His thinking continued evolving and searching, the notion of the emergence of the Person and of the Personal had been on his mind for a long time, but he was making it deeper. We have mentioned his "Sketch of a Personalistic Universe" written in 1936. Monsignor Bruno de Solages told Maurice Blondel in 1948 ".../...it was in China, around 1934, that he (Fr. Teilhard)
made what he called "the discovery of the Personal". In this "Sketch", Pierre Teilhard writes "the first of these rules is that love serves for the spiritual differentiation of the two beings it brings together." He notes a little later (in 1947): [It is] "by associating oneself suitably with all the others that the individual can hope to reach the fullness of his or her person". He does not hesitate to fear "a more subtle alteration of love: I mean egoism as a couple." There is no doubt that these contacts with women participated in the construction of this vision.

Between 1938 and 1940, Father Teilhard wrote a work that he had been meditating on for a long time, a work that he called in its early days "Man" and which became "The Human Phenomenon". It describes the cosmic event of the emergence of Man (with a capital M). For him, the evolution of the world is a reality, it is the modality of creation. Evolution goes from the simplest to the more complex, from the most inert to the more conscious. Man being the most conscious being, it is therefore from him that the history of the World must be understood. In 1940, Father Teilhard de Chardin wrote in The Human Phenomenon: "Man, not the static center of the World, as he thought he was for a long time; but the axis and arrow of Evolution, which is much more beautiful."

In this book, he states that "universal love ... is the only complete way to love." Then, having established this, we must resolve to admit "that for us the Universe... takes on, forward, a face and a heart, that it gets personified ..... From then on, he adds: "For failure to be transformed into success,... it is necessary and sufficient that, extending our science to its last limits, we recognize and accept as necessary in order to close and balance Space-Time... the already present reality and radiance of this mysterious Center of our centers that I have named Omega."

Back in Paris in 1946, Pierre Teilhard met Jeanne Mortier again, whom he had been acquainted with in 1939. In 1951, he appointed her as the legatee of his works. It is thus to a
woman that he entrusted the preservation and distribution of his works. He knew that he could rely on her dedication, her efficiency and fidelity to his thinking. Jeanne Mortier was convinced of the value of Father Teilhard's message, she knew that he was "an expected word" by many believers and non-believers alike. She devoted to the task all her intelligence and energy until her death in 1982. Finally, in New York in 1951, he saw Rhoda De Terra again, he had already met her in China. She was the wife of Helmut De Terra whom she had divorced. De Terra was a geologist and anthropologist, a friend of Father Teilhard. A faithful and reassuring friend, Rhoda watched over him during his trip to South Africa in 1951. It was at her home that he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage while having tea. He died a few hours later on April 10, 1955. One Easter Sunday as he had wished.

So many other women should be mentioned, who were most often listened to, supported and guided. Adrienne Croissant, Mrs. Haardt (the widow of Georges-Marie Haardt, the head of the Yellow Cruise), Marthe Vaufrey, Dominique de Wesp... The mission of a pastor whose traces we can find in his letters, so personal and profound that they were generally kept by their correspondents.

3. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and feminine relationship

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a man with a great sensitivity. A basic sensitivity, and a sensitivity probably exacerbated by successive mournings, sometimes experienced at a very young age, and by the ordeal of silence and exile which were imposed on him because of the content of his spiritual writings. The few friends whose memory we have evoked, exceptional women for their generation - some of them are writers and agrégées of letters, others scientists, artists or theologians - will contribute, in a way, to the elaboration of his essays, which were often submitted to their benevolent criticism. Father d'Ouince, the Jesuit superior of Maison des Études, testifies: "Teilhard thought that feminine intuition and sensitivity brought to the judgement, too exclusively rational, of man a precious and, for him at least, indispensable complement. He therefore expected from his correspondents light and help in choosing his path.

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76 On this subject of the feminine, she writes in a commentary on "L'Éternel Féminin": "What are earthly unions compared to the one in which the Eternal finds his infinite bliss! The Son of God who, in the Eucharist, gives us his divinity, is in the absolute sense, the bread in which all delights are found". Just before her death in 1982, she published the "Lettres à Jeanne Mortier". Seuil. 1982.

77 This is the title of one of Teilhard's essays.

78 According to a letter from Fr Leroy dated 13 April 1955. Family archives.

79 Excerpts from the letters written by Pierre Teilhard (1926-1952) to Rhoda De Terra were published under the title "Accomplir l'homme" (the other correspondent of the book is Ida Treat) by Grasset in 1968. In the preface to this work, Father d'Ouince (the superior of the Jesuit house in Rue Monsieur until 1952) wrote: "The two correspondents of the Father, equally open to the things of the spirit, equally sensitive to the originality of the thinker and the value of the religious man, do not share his Christian faith. Teilhard suffered too much from the narrowness and prejudices of certain Catholic circles not to feel a kind of relief at being able to meet interlocutors who were alien to the conformism of well-meaning Christians...". (p18)

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more precisely. At the same time, he was too keenly aware of the benefits of faith not to wish, as far as possible, to share it.”

This is why we find in "The Heart of Matter" written in 1950 (5 years before his death): "the general homage, quasi-adoring, rising from the depths of my being, to those whose warmth and charm passed, drop by drop, into the blood of my dearest ideas...". Some of them, as we have mentioned, will undoubtedly be the source of his texts on "the Feminine". Others will participate, through their material help, in the distribution of his writings.

He was a man about whom much has been written, especially on this subject. Would not some authors be tempted, as on other points of his thought and his life, to project their own existence, their own questions and their own visions?

Pierre Teilhard lived a large part of his life abroad, a life that was always rich in discoveries and human encounters. Thanks to a very abundant correspondence (the publication of which is not yet complete), we discover that it is with his many friends that he found the freedom to express his most intimate feelings and convictions: "I note that the sharpness of my thought is more and more willingly expressed outside arranged Essays, at random and under the excitement of letters to write to such and such of my correspondents" he wrote to one of his friends. So his correspondence does not only testify to the major place of friendship in his life, but also to the evolution of his thinking. It is reasonable to believe that the trust of women, their affection and the transparency of the ties that united them to him were a providential support in Pierre Teilhard's life. We also know from their testimonies that these friends, in turn, were sensitive to the simplicity of heart and the radiant personality of their friend.

In all his letters to the ones near to him, men (he sometimes ends his mail to Pierre Leroy with: "Very affectionately"), or women, we find these expressions full of tenderness. I will quote some of them:

To Ida Treat: "Very dear friend.../... you know how I remain profoundly yours (February 1922). Let me be for you half of what you are for me (30 June 1934). ... more affectionately than ever" (May 1937).

To Claude Rivière: "Dear little Claude.../... Profoundly yours, and tenderly" (20 October 1943).

To Lucile Swan: "Dearest .../... Yours, so much."

To Marguerite Teilhard-Chambon: "Dear great friend .../... You know I love you, yours, Pierre (September 1929) ... and believe in what my heart keeps for you (6 March 1934), ... very affectionately, as ever (6 March 1936)."

We also find as common expressions in his correspondence: "I am looking towards the west" (i.e. towards his correspondent), "Your letters are a great joy to me", "our precious meeting" or "I imagine you in... (such and such a place)").

These terms should also be seen in the context of the time. Correspondence was a common means of communication and was expressed with great freedom. Thus Father Charles de Foucauld wrote to his cousin Marie de Bondy "Where was I yesterday at this hour? I was still with you, saying goodbye, it was hard, but still it was sweet, since I was seeing you.... "

The uninformed reader could sometimes be misled by the misinterpretation of the expressions of affection we have just quoted. Haven't I been tempted yself, when reading "The

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81 "Accomplir l'homme" p19, Grasset 1968.
Making of a Mind", to put myself in the place of Marguerite Teillard-Chambon and to ask myself what my reaction would have been to such marks of confidence, and even tenderness, from one of my cousins!

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin knew the sensitivity of his readers, he knew how to adapt to them and it was always with great humanity and judgement that he wrote his correspondence. It is necessary to keep in mind the spiritual training of Pierre Teilhard in the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius, especially in the manner of making a good and holy election. "Let each one, in fact, convince himself that he will progress in his spiritual efforts in proportion to what he will be stripped of: the love of himself and the attachment to his personal advantage." His own sensitivity enabled him to reach one where he or she was in his or her spiritual evolution. He knew on what mode of expression, adapted to his time, he could situate himself with the person. There are many testimonies that attest to the attention he paid to every person. His benevolence has remained proverbial. His friend Father Pierre Leroy said: "He had a rare quality among men of his worth: he knew how to listen to others and seemed to be interested in what they had to say; when they were too fanciful, he was content to smile".

He always loved family, friends, work relationships. His cousin Marguerite Teillard-Chambon writes: "There was an extraordinary welcoming faculty in him." Because he loved men, he sought the best path for them. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin has always lived with one certainty: "We only convert what we love". Thus, for him, it is necessary to "Immerse oneself in order to emerge and lift up".

He also knew how incomprehensible his own path was sometimes to those around him. He wrote in "The Heart of Matter", speaking of himself of course: "Even for those he loved most, his affection would be a burden, for they would feel him invincibly searching for something behind them".

It is with all his humanity inhabited by his vision of Christ, with his fervent prayer and all his affectivity that he will embark on the path of friendship.

Because the male-female relationship is the most natural relationship in human beings, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin saw other dimensions in women. They inspired him and helped him.

85 "Exercices spirituels de saint Ignace de Loyola" 189 p. 104 ; Seuil 1982.  
86 Fr Leroy "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin tel que je l'ai connu" p 33, Plon 1958. Two testimonies must be added here. The one from Fr Leroy, this great friend of Father Teilhard who lived with him for many years in China, before seeing him again in the United States. He always specified that he never saw Father Teilhard make a gesture towards a woman (or a man), or even touch her, whatever she might be. And the one reported by paleontologist Marc Godinot who met a colleague, Peter Robinson, (University of Colorado): "Peter Robinson was Simpson's 'field assistant' and he was Teilhard's driver when he came to visit Simpson in Arizona. It is true that in his correspondence Pierre Teilhard does not say that during this visit he was accompanied by Rhoda de Terra, but this colleague, who was a young student at the time, writes to me that Teilhard and Rhoda de Terra slept in two separate tents. This testimony might be important."(February 17, 2017)  
87 One could add: "And was loved by those he met. There are many testimonials to his influence, including during the 1914-1918 war and the Yellow Cruise.  
88 "Lettres de voyage" p10, Grasset 1956.  
90 "Quelques réflexions sur la conversion du monde" 1936. p166, Seuil. 1965.  
91 "Le Cœur de la Matière"1950. A little before, he writes in this text: "...In a flash he discovered, everywhere present around him, the one thing necessary ..../... He would henceforth be for ever a stranger.". Tome XIII, p 87- 88, Seuil 1976.
to make his vision wider. The Feminine must help man to tear himself away from himself in order to better go to God. On October 4, 1944, he noted in his diary: "The problem that is sought under Chastity: the maximum spiritualization in its relationship with the Feminine. We now see that it is no longer a matter of separation, but of synthesis. Essentially the Feminine is not a ballast (weight), but an upward force."

For him then, this uprooting from himself must be a growth. A growth that participates in the construction of the World. Thus, at about the same time, he wrote to Claude Rivière: "The deep contact of two beings, center to center, I tell you (independently from all that they can communicate explicitly from expressed thoughts), is it not the most creative operation in the Universe surrounding us?" For Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, this energy must not be wasted, it is intimately linked to creation.

Pierre Teilhard did not dodge the difficulty of the excessively dehumanizing attitude of many of his peers towards women. At the end of his life (1950), he wrote: "No more than light, oxygen and vitamins, man, no man, can (more and more obviously every day) do without the Feminine."

Words that were certainly not very conventional at the time, and yet he invites us to an innovative anthropological vision of the contribution of the feminine. This, however, can only resonate for us with what Pope Francis stressed on 22 April 2015: "Without woman, man lacks communion, fullness: there is no inferiority or subordination in their relationship, because man and woman are of the same substance and are complementary."

Whatever his encounters, his commitment to the Society of Jesus and to the priestly way will remain an interior evidence for him. He was a disciple of St. Ignatius, practicing his Spiritual Exercises which aim to "overcome oneself and order one's life without being decided by any disorderly attachment."

The attentive support he gave to each one, his friendly and spiritual accompaniment, his passion for Christ were often edifying for his believing and non-believing friends. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin will always remain for them a luminous witness of the love of Christ which motivated him. We know that some will discover or rediscover Faith through his contact.

As a seeker of God and a mystic, the testimony of Pierre Teilhard brings a teaching for the Church. He knows that human love is inscribed in another Love which is much greater and which is its source. Divine Love which expands one's capacity to love and to give oneself to others. In 1948, he wrote at the end of his writing "The Human Phenomenon": "Christian love.../...Is it not a positive fact that, for twenty centuries, thousands of mystics have drawn from its flame such passionate ardours that they have left far behind them, in radiance and purity, the impulses and devotions of any human love?"

In 1950, Father Teilhard de Chardin confided to us in his diary: "Without an Omega of love, the Earth would be uninhabitable."
"Without an Omega of love, the Earth would be uninhabitable"... This is what is at stake in life and in the spiritual life of society. Like many clergymen (not only Christian ones), by respecting his vows, Pierre sends back to the world an image of the One to whom he has given himself.

In spite of misunderstandings and suffering, he is attached to the Church and will always remain faithful to her. It is an interior fidelity because his life is based on his spiritual experience and mystical dimension; Christ does not belong to him and is indeed the One of the Church. He himself tells us this in July 1918, shortly before pronouncing his vows as a Jesuit, in a magnificent writing entitled "The Priest" (he was ordained in 1911): "...I have taken on my vows, my priesthood, (and it is this that gives me my strength and my happiness) in a determination to accept and divinize the powers of the Earth..."97

Ever searching, he confided in a 1929 letter to his friend Father Gaufroy: "It seemed to me that in the Church today there are three perishable stones dangerously embedded in its foundations: the first is a government that excludes democracy; the second is a priesthood that excludes and minimizes women; the third is a revelation that excludes, for the future, Prophecy."98

In this area of the feminine, as in so many others, it turns out that he is much more rooted in tradition than one might think. However, in the present context, this commitment is challenging. Questions emerge: Is every being capable of living chastity at such a level? Is the latter an audible virtue today? What place for women in the Church and in society? What types of relationships between men and women contribute to a better development of human dignity, precisely to a better "Omega of love"?

Thus, for the Roman Catholic priest that Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was, the source of his commitments is the coming of Christ. "By virtue of Creation, and even more so of the Incarnation, nothing is profane99 here on earth for those who can see."100 This is what he wrote in his book "The Divine Milieu".

This is expressed by another Jesuit, Father Martelet, with whom we conclude: "The humanity of a priest and a clergyman is never exempt from an affectivity capable of being grasped humanly in the depths of oneself by the other. The example in this case is not primarily Fr. Teilhard, but Christ himself in the historicity of his relationship with the women of his time. Whether it be the actions of the Galilean woman in the house of Simon the Leper, of the Syro-Phoenician woman at the limits of Jewishness, of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well or of Mary Magdalene in the garden of the Resurrection, Jesus allowed himself to be imbued by women with a human tenderness inseparable for him from his messianicity".101

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97 "Le Prêtre" Tome XII, p332, 8 July 1918, Seuil 1965.
99 Here again, underlined by Fr Teilhard de Chardin himself.