

The 'Satan' Hypothesis

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The Church's imaginary field of Satanic energy, the Teilhardian idea of consciousness as a general phenomenon in nature, and the necessity to go beyond childish things and accept the responsibilities of adulthood

The Divine Milieu palaeontology

In his spiritual testament written one month before his death, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, speaks of energy being transformed into *presence*. But alas, he tells us, he is one of the few people to have witnessed such a transformation - the wonderful "Diaphany" that has transfigured everything for him seems to be a closed book for others. He is however no better a person for having had a glorious vision of "energy undergoing fundamental change"; he is still not at peace and cannot properly communicate the "wonderful unity" encompassing him.

The words chosen by de Chardin to describe his experience of a transfigured world are interesting: "diaphany", "glorious vision", "wonderful unity". Then a disturbed and disturbing question from this remarkable man: "Is there in fact a Universal Christ, is there a Divine Milieu? Or am I, after all, simply the dupe of a mirage in my own mind?" There again, each time he thinks like this, each time he questions the authenticity of his "Christic" (his vision of the cosmic Christ), three successive waves of evidence arise from deep within to sweep away any such a fear: (1) *coherence* of mind and heart; (2) a *contagious power* that allows love of God to erupt; and (3) the obvious *superiority* of such a vision over religious dogma. Startling stuff; particularly the last point. But as nothing compared with a later statement suggesting that this "superiority of vision" might spontaneously and explosively spread to others as in a chain-reaction. For is it not the case, asks de Chardin, "that the truth has to appear only once, in one single mind, for it to be impossible for anything ever to

prevent it from spreading universally and setting everything ablaze."¹

Fellow Jesuit Malachi Martin is scathing of de Chardin's writings on the spiritual evolution of the human race, he in fact singles de Chardin out for punishment in his book *The Jesuits*, stating that it is not possible to understand the change brought about in the Society of Jesus without a knowledge of de Chardin's thinking - a form of thinking described as "the almost perfected mode of recalcitrance to all and any papal wish". Warming to his subject, we learn that de Chardin is tall and aristocratic in bearing, distinguished and quick-witted, messianic in intensity and not unlike de Gaulle in some aspects of character and verbal delivery. We also learn that he consciously identifies with the sixteenth-century astronomer, Galileo Galilei, that he possesses an arrogance of attitude that does not repel, and that he injects a new philosophy and a new excitement into an age already revolutionised by genetics and other scientific discoveries. The problem for Martin is that this new philosophy utterly contradicts Catholic teaching on creation; the Bible did not say anything about Adam and Eve "evolving" from higher animals - the Scriptures stated clearly that Homo sapiens were a separate creation: the human soul had been breathed into Adam as a direct gift from his creator.

The attempt by some Catholic scholars to reconcile evolution with official doctrine had, Martin claims, spawned a nightmare scenario, a hybrid theory of creation in which God had intervened in the evolutionary process and infused a soul into an already evolved animal. Orthodox Catholic teachings rejected this view, de Chardin's notion of consciousness having existed, in some incomprehensible form, in matter from the very beginning sheer foolishness. And to think, as de Chardin did, that this process of development was heading for some future historical Omega Point, and that Christ, but *not* Jesus, was this Omega Point, defied reason on any level of expression. Martin then offers a judgment:

such a theory imposes either the abandonment or the complete transformation of all the basic doctrines of

Roman Catholicism. Creation, Original Sin, the divinity of Jesus, redemption by Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary, the Church, the forgiveness of sins, the Sacrifice of the Mass, priesthood, papal infallibility, Hell, Heaven, supernatural grace - even the existence of the freedom of God - all must be reformulated, and perhaps abandoned in large part.²

A damning appraisal of Teilhard de Chardin's mind-set and character follows, an appraisal that searches for its target through personal attack: de Chardin is against the cloistered life; de Chardin does not like Christmas; de Chardin is feckless, lacks gentleness, compassion, fair-mindedness and sensitive perception and, de Chardin is disillusioned with the Roman Catholic Church. We have, finally, reached the root of Martin's dissatisfaction with this famous Jesuit palaeontologist: Teilhard de Chardin wanted to get to the heart of what it meant to be a human being beyond the strictures of the Catholic faith. The quality of Malachi Martin's invective against de Chardin should be noted: he strips this priest of *all* human dignity on the basis of his having turned his back on Catholicism's supernatural claims. In other writings Martin manages to accommodate the ultra-cool persona of Ignatius Loyola, with de Chardin it is different; his arrogance and coolness is viewed through a satanic lens. Martin admits that de Chardin's arrogance and coolness did not repel others - there was something deeply attractive about this man in spite of odd personality traits - but that attractiveness was a trick of the darkness that resided in de Chardin's soul. When de Chardin talked of "presence" and "energy" he was not describing a spiritually wholesome experience; he was admitting to having been psychically invaded.

I can, to an extent, sympathise with Malachi Martin's exasperation; Teilhard de Chardin's use of religious language in this curiously out-of-kilter fashion reveals a mind caught between warring emotions, his choice of questions - Is there a Universal Christ, is there a Divine Milieu? Am I simply the dupe of a mirage in my own mind? - indicative of a struggle between "opposites"

going on in the depths of his psyche. He is trying to describe *energy undergoing fundamental change*, but it is beyond his ability to explain what that means. He admits to be no better a person for having had this experienced, the wonderful unity and peace encompassing him a recognised contradiction in terms.

The Fatal Thread of Materialism

In *Hostage to the Devil* Malachi Martin hits stride and carries us down into what he terms the "Teilhardian mystery". We are shown how the "fabric of faith" is stripped from a fellow priest's life through too strong a fascination with de Chardin's ideas. Falling into the trap of thinking that his concept of Jesus is too small, this priest's "complaints of reason" form a fatal thread born out of his acceptance of de Chardin's theories. In evolutionary terms, materiality and divinity are one; Jesus was not God come down to earth from Heaven - he was an off-shoot of creation's travail towards perfection. This was the meaning of Jesus double nature; he had brought the divine element of consciousness in matter to its point of fullest expression.

As seen through Malachi Martin's eyes this is a horrendous deceit; it is a satanic reinterpretation of a stupendous Gospel truth. It does not matter that Catholic doctrine flies in the face of science's descriptions. It does not matter that the evidence of palaeontology points to there having been many crude precursors of the human. It does not matter that cyclotrons reveal an amazing complex subatomic world and that other scientific disciplines uphold these findings. All that matters is that one continues to believe in a Catholic interpretation of spiritual truth. Catholic methodology is more than a "method"; it is a *route* into the mind of God. Teilhard de Chardin was not merely wrong or mistaken in his assertions; he was possessed by diabolical forces intent on skewing his thinking away from revealed truth. *That* was the bottom line - he had failed to identify the "presence" in his life as *intelligent* evil, an evil that had subsequently infected the whole Jesuit Order with rebellion and disobedience.

Torn between Realities

Malachi Martin refers to de Chardin's ideas in *Hostage to the Devil* and in *The Jesuits*, and on each occasion we gain access to his thinking processes and witness the phenomenon of an educated mind in the service of dogma. His tone is fascinating, his passion sincere, his unquestioning devotion to doctrine inescapable. He can analytically list cogent reasons for *not* believing in some particular doctrine, and in the next declare belief in that very doctrine by way of faith alone. Whatever the facts, he can produce an escape route for his "faith". Which is to say that he believes in a universe where the laws of physics are no more than decoration, and that such laws can, if God so wishes, be suspended. And why not, he argues. What is the point of being God if you can't have your own way.

Malachi Martin describes de Chardin as an intellectual, an ascetic, a teacher, a mystic, a pioneer excavator and a discoverer of Peking Man (*Sinanthropus pekinesis*), and as a philosopher who thought even primitive matter was transfused with consciousness. Dedicated to the philosophy of Descartes, de Chardin's ability to "answer inquisitorial questions with a flow of professional and technical detail"³ is recorded, his refusal to "kowtow intellectually" to Church authority described as having frightened the ecclesiastical mind. Quite a grocery list of positive attributes, but immediately invalidated by the observation that this man was the "custom-built answer, the ready-made darling for the bankrupt Catholic intellectuals of his century" *because* he helped others shake off the traditional shackles of Christian dogma. Shackles? Condemned for his "refusal to revolt when silenced by chicanery", de Chardin is likened to Joan of Arc, Francis Xavier and Simone Weil. His refusal to do what? Do those words mean what they seem to mean? Is Martin further condemning de Chardin for having had the intelligence to keep his mouth shut when faced with trickery and fallacious methods of reasoning? If so, what is his game plan in making such an extraordinary statement? And why, one has to ask, is his work peppered with sentences like this? Is

some other part of his mind trying to inform him that his faith-based evaluation of Catholic Christianity is questionable?

Malachi Martin's principle gripe is that Teilhard de Chardin allowed scientific theory to get in the way of revealed truth. In allowing the beliefs and assumptions of science to stand as undeniable facts, the Church's teaching on creation, the human condition and the coming of Jesus as saviour became superfluous. Describing the gulf between these approaches as an "impassable" and "impossible" *gap*, Martin describes those who think this way as being in the clutches of a fatal flaw. God is no longer divine, Jesus no longer a saviour figure, the mystery of life no more than an evolutionary accident and human consciousness merely the "culminating flower" of a process born among the gases and acids of outer space.

Father David Bones

Referring to a meeting between Teilhard de Chardin and Father David Bones in 1955 (the "priest" mentioned earlier), Martin describes de Chardin as exhibiting a strange simplicity, a child-like aura that quickly takes on a sinister and vacuous edge. Something difficult to pin down is going on within or behind Martin's words. Then there is the inscription written by de Chardin in *Le Milieu Divin*, the book David brings to be autographed, an inscription innocent in itself but later made into a reason for David to question this old Jesuit's state of mind. The words are innocuous, but deadly in their impact when the pieces are assembled, for this soon to be dead Jesuit had written: "They said I opened Pandora's box with this book. But, they did not notice, Hope was still hiding in one of its corners."⁴ A description of de Chardin during this interaction leaves one wondering if Martin was hiding in a cupboard complete with spy-hole, for it states that de Chardin was "completely with David, totally present to him, taking in David's glance with a personable expression and a direct simplicity that almost embarrassed the younger man."⁵ Martin the novelist is again at work, the impressions built page by page a damning

broadside that changes the old anthropologist into an agent of the Devil. This is not said directly, but it is undeniably what Martin is driving at when he later describes Father Bones' mental state as "possession" and blames a nervous breakdown on having imbibed the theories of Teilhard de Chardin.

Teilhard de Chardin's metaphysic of evolution upset the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Centred on "Christ" it may have been, but it was in the end a synthesis of ideas that bred suspicion, incomprehension, and finally anger among his peers. Perceiving evolution as a process converging towards a final unity, de Chardin revitalise the ideas of Irenaeus and Don Scotus without losing sight of Augustine's concern with sin. Censored, silenced, exiled and forbidden to publish or lecture, he remained a Catholic priest, his ideas "run[ning] through the intellectual milieu of Europe and America like mercury",⁶ ideas that would continue to influence thinkers dissatisfied with Catholic theology. Placed alongside pioneers such as Pico della Mirandola, Ramon Llull and even Origen, de Chardin's originality of thought earned him both applause and condemnation because he believed that materiality and divinity were one and the same thing. The Church's grand divide between the material and the divine was under threat, science and theology made to coalesce, God and world stitched together again to form a new paganism. Gnosticism's emphasis on consciousness "emerging from sheer materiality as automatically as a hen from an egg"⁷ was back in circulation, Christ's redemptive death on the cross annulled.

Teilhard de Chardin's philosophical-cum-theological interpretation of evolutionary facts singled him out in *The Jesuits* for special obloquy, particularly over the state of the Catholic Church in India. Focusing on a special meeting between John Paul 11 and some high-ranking clerics, Martin releases information on Vatican tensions while concentrating on a report that summarises Jesuit influence in India as an adulteration of Christian belief. Accused of having deformed the meaning of priesthood, baptism, the value of prayer, mortification and penance, the Society of Jesus is held responsible for undermining the value of the Eucharist, of

discrediting belief in immortality, of diluting belief in Heaven and Hell, and of eroding the primacy of the Holy Father.⁸ All in all, a damaging catalogue of misdemeanors, and aimed directly at de Chardin's influence on the Jesuit Order. So it is not at all surprising that a traditionalist like Malachi Martin reacts when de Chardin's name is mentioned; as far as he was concerned de Chardin was an unwitting henchman of the Devil.

Matter & Consciousness

The candy puff spirituality of the New Age is dismissed by the Christian churches as a spirituality that cannot in the end satisfy our deepest needs. Our cravings perhaps, but not our needs. Attaching the label "Neo-Gnosticism" on the fandango of cultic groups that have appeared since the early 1960s, Christians glare disapprovingly from an Olympian perch of doctrines that have caused a veritable exodus from the churches. Confronted by science's marvels, and by her methodology, most people have eaten of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and declared that it is good. So what of Teilhard de Chardin? Should we attempt to create a synthesis between science and religion as he tried to do? Is it enough to place his "Christic" veneer on science and speak of super-organisms "woven of the threads of individual men";⁹ or should we bite the reality bullet and accept that we are alone in an alien universe? Teilhard de Chardin understood this dilemma only too well, hence his probing question on whether there is in fact a Universal Christ or a Divine Milieu. But he, unlike most, had experienced "Energy becoming transformed into Presence" and was able to hope otherwise.

The basic hypothesis in de Chardin's writings is that matter and consciousness are bound together, that in spite of not being measurable, consciousness is nevertheless "organically and physically rooted in the same cosmic process with which physics is concerned."¹⁰ Consciousness is not a chance eruption in nature; it is not a fortuitous event. It is a *general* phenomenon allied to the

existence of matter. Without consciousness there would be no universe, and without universe there would be no consciousness, a fact that belied its profundity if thought to indicate that consciousness was a secondary, and not a primary, force. For de Chardin, consciousness was not merely that through which we viewed the universe, it was, in some extraordinary sense, the universe comprehending itself. Small and insignificant we human beings appeared to be, but we were in fact a general thrust in nature towards ever greater expressions of awareness. Consciousness was imperceptible in relation to low levels of complexity, but perceptibly dominant at high levels of complexity.¹¹ There was no such thing as inert, brute matter: life and matter were not opposed, they were complementary.

It is not enough for Martin to disagree with de Chardin; he feels compelled to link consciousness and matter to an imagined field of Satanic energy as he introduces another priest - Father Jonathan - and tells us that this priest sells out to de Chardin's ideas due to having studied palaeontology under Father David Bones. Intelligent and dedicated, Jonathan formulates an approach to Church doctrine at odds with orthodox sensibility, the sacraments being described by him as "expressions of man's natural unity with the world around him".¹² Perturbed by the news, David blames himself for not having guided Jonathan through de Chardin's notions, the "thin and fragile line between Teilhard's view and a total denial of the divinity of Jesus"¹³ having been crossed. He had not noticed this transition, the reason being that he too had begun to think along similar lines.

Malachi Martin's writing is masterly as he assembles this jigsaw of possession and infection. Visited by a "force" that instructs him, Jonathan progressively surrenders his will until he has no more will to surrender. He becomes a priest, but his mind is by then in the service of "serpentine thoughts", his will intertwined with "fine tendrils" that cannot be shaken off, a "coiled presence weaving slowly, possessively, with ease, lazily enjoying an acquired resting place in the shaded corners of his being".¹⁴ An ancient voice is asking him to "let go", inviting him to be at peace within

himself. Then, finally, the moment of surrender as this invading force lays claim to his life during Mass. A seizure as he stretches his hands out over the chalice. Tears and groans and urine easing from him as he stands there, rooted to the spot, his hands clamped down on chalice and wafer. Then suddenly flung backwards onto the marble floor and rendered unconscious before an astonished pastor and his two assistants. Epilepsy on his mother's side is blamed for the incident, but there is no truth in this claim: Father Jonathan's mother had not been an epileptic.

This is a far cry from de Chardin's experience of energy transformed into "presence", yet perhaps not all that different. It is perhaps only a matter of the way in which the mind has been trained to perceive reality. Teilhard de Chardin and Father Jonathan were after all Catholic priests, their mental paradigm Christ-centered, their inclination towards a religiously-oriented overview underscored by science and the arts. Jonathan was a gifted painter, poet and writer enamoured of the poet Shelley's ideas about God from an early age. Pioneering a similar break with Catholic orthodoxy during the 1960's, Jonathan's contribution would be curiously New Age in feel and quality, a candy puff spirituality with de Chardin's Omega Point planted on top like the fairy on a Christmas tree. This was not at all the diaphanous transformation of the world as experienced by de Chardin, more a bedazzlement of the mind. Yet not dissimilar when the visions of these men are placed side by side. Grandiose ideas course through both, a new humankind for de Chardin, a new priesthood and a new church for Jonathan.

An old dread seeps into the mind as one reads Malachi Martin's skilful prose - the dread of things that go bump in the night. As the story of Father Jonathan is pushed towards its climax, the question of what is happening to this man catapults into the realm of paranoia - Martin's own. An invitation to spend three weeks with a party of friends in the Canadian wilderness is accepted by Jonathan and a train of events is set in motion than ends in his being exorcised by none other than Father David Bones. Spending more and more time alone, Jonathan wanders into the wilderness, "looking for something or some place."¹⁵ It is

not long before he finds what he's looking for: an s-shaped section of river bank where he experiences an electrifying sense of discovery. It is a beautiful place, the water shallow, the sand of the riverbed soft, the surrounding boulders and rocks almost like black-cowled monks arranged in rows. Here then is his place of revelation and transformation, his "*opening* in nature". Face down on the sand he starts to dig with his fingers, shouting all the while *Sacerdos! Sacerdos! Sacerdos!* He wants to become a new priest for the New Time, and as he lies there the process of transformation begins, first as an emptying, then as a flushing away of the man he had become.

Under some kind of compulsion he walks into the water, and in midstream bends over to feel at the base of a rock for the "veined heart of our world ... where Jesus, the Omega Point, was evolving."¹⁶ Chanting the name of Jesus softly, he relaxes into the experience until all anticipation, forward-looking thought and emotion is "wrapped up and contained in the now, the here-present."¹⁷ Then psychological disaster strikes. Withdrawing his now bleeding hands from the water, he looks at them lovingly, turns, wades back to the beach and heads at a zigzagging trot through tall pine trees. Propelled by an inner force, he struggles up to a ridge where he rests under a small tree with low branches, but on looking at this tree properly is horrified to see that unlike the pines, it is a dead, barkless, lightning-blasted trunk with two stubby arms. It is a cross, and there is blood on it. Seized by an uncontrollable rage, he curses the tree and everything it stands for, breaks off one of the stubby arms and tumbles down the slope and is rendered unconscious.

To say that Malachi Martin makes an emotional meal of this incident would be an understatement. Jonathan has problems, that is obvious, but his main problem is not demon possession; it is, when everything else is considered, the kind of Catholicism he has dined on since childhood. David, too, is undergoing the same troubling process, the process of his will bending towards an accommodation of doctrines that contradict reality. He does not experience seizures, but his mind will eventually seize up and

threaten him with what he expects - possession by evil. As a practicing diocesan exorcist, David is torn between the realities of palaeontology, anthropology and the literalist demands of his faith. Aware that palaeontology and the doctrines of the Church are at odds with one another, he nevertheless manages to continue with his priestly life and ignore the obvious, at least he does so for a while. When faced with an exorcism, however, this alliance of incompatibles becomes too difficult for him to handle, and when confronted by his bishop and asked if evolution is as much a fact as the salvation of Jesus, this alliance breaks down. Jesus may have become the culmination of the evolutionary process for Teilhard de Chardin, but for Father David Bones such an arrangement is no longer sustainable. Nor is it sustainable for Father Jonathan; he too will crack open as the pressure for doctrinally conformity is applied.

We are, in the end, left with Jonathan's mysterious seizures and the fact that he lied about his mother being an epileptic to bedevil our imaginations. His mother may not have been an epileptic, but as David finds out later, she was prone to seizures. Martin makes nothing of this except to record that David was relieved to know that something of the kind ran in the family. But the word "seizure" is left to reverberate on the page, for if not epilepsy, then what, exactly? Left to conclude that the mother too was possessed by evil, Jonathan's seizures collapse, by inference, into her seizures, and the puzzle effortlessly completes itself. Martin offers no evidence for this veiled conclusion, but it is there by inference, Jonathan's outbursts of uncontrollable temper when a boy perceived in terms of possession rather than psychological disturbance.

Virtue 'Beyond' Intent

It is necessary to adjust one's perception of de Chardin and his work after this onslaught, for beneath all the obscure language lies a truth capable of carrying us not only to the heart of matter, but to the heart of what matters in the deepest sense of presence, or identity. Teilhard de Chardin offers us a clue when he speaks of "a

precise and overwhelming sense of the general convergence of the universe upon itself". This is not, as Martin seems to think, a reference to "nature" usurping consciousness to the detriment of the divine; it is our perceptual capacity to detect the underlying unity of creation in a manner not yet properly appreciated by our religious institutions. Such a capacity need not be embedded in de Chardin's "Christic", but it should be recognised as signifying our embeddedness in a reality capable of communicating something of itself to itself through *presence*. Presence is energy "undergoing fundamental change", and we are that energy in terms of self-presence. A humble worshipper's unsophisticated faith in the catechism can produce more real charity and calm trust than de Chardin can muster, but that is not enough in itself to force his return to that catechism. The belief that "belief" is sufficient in itself is, for de Chardin, an inadequate premise because it short-changes the believer and makes a nonsense of reality's fundamental challenge. This challenge is not to be found in religion's "goodness for the sake of goodness" demand; it is to be found in the realisation that "presence" *is* "identity", and that identity, when properly focused, constitutes "virtue" *beyond* intent.

References and Notes:

- 1 Chardin, Teilhard de, *Let me Explain*, Collins/Fontana Books, London 1974, p. 159.
- 2 Martin, Malachi, *The Jesuits* (1988), p. 288.
- 3 Martin, Malachi, *Hostage to the Devil*, Arrow Books, London 1988, (1988), p. 93.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- 8 Martin, Malachi, *The Jesuits* (as above), p. 88.
- 9 Chardin, Teilhard de, *Let me Explain*(as above), p. 51.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 12 Martin, Malachi, *Hostage to the Devil* (as above), p. 107.

- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 114,
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 131.