

Endmatter

BELIEVERS AND THEIR DISBELIEF

by Thomas M. King, S.J.

Abstract. Several recent Roman Catholics who were known for their devotion have left accounts of their troubled faith. I consider three of these: St. Therese of Lisieux, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Then I tell of the troubled atheism of Jean-Paul Sartre. Finally, I use texts of Sartre and Teilhard to understand the unsettled nature of belief.

Keywords: Dark Night of the Soul; destitution; faith and doubt; humanity; God; John of the Cross; Mother Teresa of Calcutta; prayer; Saint Thérèse of Lisieux; Jean-Paul Sartre; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Recently the private writings of several devout Catholics have come to public knowledge, and, amid their many statements of faith, these devout Catholics tell of fundamental difficulties with faith. Three such devout believers who had a troubled faith, all somewhat recent, are Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux. The atheist Jean-Paul Sartre also struggled—to believe there is no God. Both Teilhard and Sartre were philosophers of note, and I use their texts to understand why the ardent believer can still know difficulty or doubt.

TROUBLED CHRISTIANS

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a Jesuit priest and a noted scientist. He came from a devout family and readily accepted the traditional Catholicism in which he was raised. After his priestly ordination he began doctoral studies in geology, but these were interrupted by four years of military service in World War I. During this time he developed an

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original theology in a series of nineteen essays. After the war he finished his doctorate and went to Asia where he did an abundance of scientific work (his scientific writings are now published in ten volumes). Because of an essay on original sin written in 1923, church authorities put restrictions on what he could publish in philosophy or religion. No restrictions were ever placed on his scientific writings. He continued writing in philosophy and religion and circulated his work privately. After his death friends arranged their publication. They became immensely popular following the Second Vatican Council and are now collected in thirteen volumes. Many of them concern his understanding of how evolution and Christianity complement each other.

Teilhard's scientific writings centered on the geology of Asia and the early human fossils found there. He came to understand evolution as leading to a future world where Christ would be the unifying Soul of all things—the “universal Christ,” “Christ-Omega,” the “trans-Christ.” The theological part of this claim is based on his reading of the Pauline letters, especially Colossians and Ephesians.¹

Teilhard looked back to his time in the war as the “honeymoon” of his ideas, and these writings show great confidence. A fellow soldier tells of asking him how he stayed so calm and fearless in the midst of battle. He replied, “If I'm killed, I shall just change my state, that's all” (Corte 1960, 15). But as the years passed the honeymoon ended and his confidence lessened. In 1934 he wrote “How I Believe,” a long essay showing how Christianity satisfied his fundamental religious aspirations. The essay tells of personal satisfaction, so one is surprised to find a different tone in the Epilogue, “The Shadows of Faith”:

From what I have just said about my conviction that there is a divine personal term to universal evolution, it might be thought that, stretching ahead of my life, a bright and serene future can be distinguished. For my part, it is assumed, death appears simply as one of those periods of sleep after which we can count on seeing the dawn of a glorious new day. The reality is very different. (Teilhard 1971, 131)

This is not the bright confidence of “just change my state, that's all.” The Epilogue goes on to tell of “the agonies of doubt” and of his pressing on “*as though* Christ awaited me at the term of the universe” (emphasis added). He tells of having “no special assurance of Christ. . . . As much as anyone I walk in the shadows of faith. . . . Our doubts . . . are the price we have to pay for the fulfillment of the universe” (1971, 131–32). Surprising conclusions to a faith-filled essay!

Teilhard's best-known work is *The Phenomenon of Man*. It too makes a highly positive statement as he gives a detailed account of evolution that ends with an argument for Christianity. To reach his conclusion, however, he claims that one must make a *free choice*, a choice between “absolute optimism or absolute pessimism” (Teilhard [1959] 1965, 233). But many people find that to be the basic issue. If the final vision depends on a

choice, is it any wonder that he would sometimes doubt? Teilhard wrote *The Phenomenon of Man* in Peking under the Japanese occupation in the early days of World War II. While writing it he suffered from depression, but at this time he was able to encourage others by his ready smile and his optimism in assuring them of a bright future after the war.

Then, in an essay written shortly before his death in 1955, Teilhard again expressed ambiguity: "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? I often ask myself that question" (Teilhard 1978, 100). Much of his doubt centered on the fact that after he had "come down from the mountain" (his wartime years of vision) he could find no spiritual writer telling of a similar vision. So he "often" asked himself, "Am I, after all, simply the dupe of a mirage in my own mind?" Many believers ask themselves a similar question.

In such passages Teilhard's personal difficulties are suggested. But recently the notes he wrote to himself during his annual retreats have been published, and these contain many explicit statements of uncertainty. As a Jesuit Teilhard made an annual, eight-day retreat along the lines proposed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Teilhard left behind eighteen sets of retreat notes (others were lost, presumably in China) written in his personal shorthand. Like his published essays, they are dominated by vivid statements of personal faith, but one also finds in these notes some unsettling statements of doubt. For example, in his retreat notes for 1939 he tells of being troubled intellectually at "not seeing God as *real*" (Teilhard 2003, 129). In the following year he tried to find something positive in his doubts: "Dependence [on God] and Abandonment [to God] nourishing themselves on doubt itself (the sense of presence overcoming and absorbing the doubts of [God's] Existence)" (2003, 152). That is, his ability to acknowledge his dependency on God was nourished by his needy condition of having a weak faith. In 1941 he wrote, "My God, make yourself real for us! . . . The great Temptation for us is to have the impression that you are Nothing and there is Nothing" (2003, 192). In beginning his retreat in 1943: "The great question and initial hesitation: 'Is not the Divine Center imaginary?' 'Man does he not stand alone?'" (2003, 234). In 1944 he wrote, "What we need is the Sense of the Reality of God—it is complete Faith," and he added an exclamation in the margin, "If I were sure Christ-Omega exists!" (2003, 250) In his 1948 retreat he tells of being taken by "an attraction of the Trans-Christ" yet finds himself a victim of "the old growing fear that there would be Nothing on the other side (that which would ruin Everything on this side)" (2003, 295). That is, if there is Nothing after death, this would render the present life meaningless.

Shortly before his death he told a Jesuit friend, "I am always in the presence of God." His death came suddenly, as he was visiting friends.

His final words were “This time, I fear it’s terrible.” The words might tell of a fear of dying or only of the chest pains that accompany a heart attack.

Teilhard developed an original theology, and this contributed to his uncertainties, but similar difficulties have troubled saintly people who simply accepted the faith they were taught. I consider two of these, and again, the extent to which their faith was troubled has become known only after their death.

Mother Teresa has embodied for the modern world what it means to be a saint. Recently she was beatified. She was born in Kosovo of Albanian parents in 1910 and, hoping to work as a missionary in India, joined the Sisters of Loretta. While teaching in their school in Calcutta in September 1946 she had a vivid experience of Christ calling her to leave her congregation and work among the very poor. She soon founded the Missionaries of Charity, a new congregation of nuns that eventually included a congregation of priests and brothers.

As she made the transition out of her old congregation and in the early days of her new work, she had much consolation. But it was not to last; she found herself in desolation with a troubled faith. Her published writings, like those of Teilhard, give small indications of her struggles. Consider the advice she gave her sisters:

Jesus wanted to help by sharing our life, our loneliness, our agony, our death. Only by being one with us has he redeemed us. We are allowed to do the same; all the desolation of the poor people, not only their material poverty, but their spiritual destitution, must be redeemed, and we must share it, for only by being one with them can we redeem them, that is, by bringing God into their lives and bringing them to God. (Muggeridge 1971, 67–68)

The passage suggests that she knew the “spiritual destitution” of which she spoke. But only in the personal notes that she sent to her spiritual directors in the late 1950s does one see the extent of her destitution. After her death some of these notes have become available. In these Fr. Brian Kolodiejchuk, the postulator of her cause for canonization, tells of her disclosing “feelings of doubt, loneliness, and abandonment.”

In the darkness . . . Lord, my God, who am I that you should forsake me? The child of your love—and now become as the most hated one. The one—you have thrown away as unwanted—unloved. I call, I cling, I want, and there is no one to answer. . . . Where I try to raise my thoughts to heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul. Love—the word—it brings nothing, I am told God lives in me—and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. . . . my cheerfulness is the cloak by which I cover the emptiness and misery. In spite of all, this darkness and emptiness is not as painful as the longing for God. (Huart 2000, 656)²

Another passage reads: “just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not really existing” (Zaleski 2003, 25).

Formal prayer was dry and impossible, but she remained dedicated to her work:

I don't pray any longer. I utter words of community prayers. . . . This "aloneness" is hard. The only thing that remains is the deep and strong conviction that the work is His. . . . Every time I have wanted to tell the truth—"that I have no faith"—the words just do not come—my mouth remains closed—and yet I keep on smiling at God and all. (Huart 2000, 657)

Such passages seem to tell what she meant in saying her sisters must know "spiritual destitution."

Mother Teresa claimed as her patron and namesake Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897), whose journal, *Autobiography, The Story of a Soul*, published shortly after her death, made her immensely popular. Speaking of herself as a little flower in the garden of the Lord, she became known as "the Little Flower." Pius X called her "the greatest saint of modern times," and Pope John Paul II proclaimed her a "Doctor of the Church," a title usually reserved for saintly scholars. Recently two award-winning films have been made of her life.

Thérèse was born of devout parents who had nine children, only five of whom (all girls) survived to adulthood. Thérèse's two older sisters entered a Carmelite convent, and she obtained a dispensation from Rome to enter the same convent at age fifteen. In most senses of the term, she led a sheltered life; the nuns would never leave the convent and only rarely have contact with outsiders. She knew great consolation in her childhood faith and later, like Teilhard and Mother Teresa, her faith became highly troubled. Some of her difficulties were recorded in her *Autobiography*. On Easter Sunday 1896, she experienced a "Night of Nothingness" that would continue until her death the following year (Ahearn 1998, 53). Her *Autobiography* tells of the delight she had in thinking of heaven for eternity, but suddenly the joy was replaced by anguish:

For the voice of unbelievers came to mock me out of the darkness, "You dream of light, of a fragrant land, you dream that their Creator will be yours forever and you think that one day you will leave behind this fog in which you languish. Hope on! Hope on! And look forward to death! But it will give you, not what you hope for, but a still darker night, the night of annihilation. (Martin 1957, 118).

Notice, the unbelievers were speaking within her. She was not in daily touch with unbelievers, as Teilhard and Mother Teresa were, but she was well aware of the assaults on Christian faith that were particularly relentless in France at that time. Because of these inner voices she came to identify with the atheists of the world and started calling them her brothers (Ahearn 1998, 55). She explained that the veil of faith is no longer a veil "but instead a wall which towers to the sky and hides the stars." This was accompanied by an inner voice that kept saying "Keep trying! But there is nothing beyond, nothing at all" (Marie-Eugene 1995, 54). This continued until her death when she told her fellow sisters,

Do not be surprised, I have asked to die the death of Jesus on the cross, when he said, "Father, why have you abandoned me?" [Her biographer continues.] She suffered in this manner right up to the last moment, her final act of love would spring forth from that night, a night utterly filled with diabolical temptations, where it seemed as if all hell were gathered around her bed. (Marie-Eugene 1995, 56)

Her final words were, "My God, I love you."

DOUBT AND THE UNBELIEVER

Pope Benedict XVI has written of Saint Thérèse and her troubled faith, and his words suggest that he too was aware of what he wrote. "The believer can perfect one's faith only on an ocean of nihilism, temptation, and doubt . . . the believer does not live immune to doubt but is always threatened by the plunge into the void" (Ratzinger [1969] 2004, 44–45)—a text written thirty-some years before his papacy. The future pope continued, "Just as the believer knows himself to be constantly threatened by unbelief, which he must experience as a continual temptation, so for the unbeliever faith remains a temptation and a threat to his apparently permanently closed world" (p. 45). Thus he claims the unbeliever has a similar problem maintaining belief that there is no God.

The difficulty of an atheist doubting his or her atheism is evident in the texts of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), possibly the most articulate atheist of the twentieth century. Sartre proclaimed that there is no God. He made a belief claim; he was not agnostic. Sartre's father died when Jean-Paul was fifteen months old, and his mother brought him back to Alsace to live with her parents. His mother and grandmother were nominal Roman Catholics while his grandfather was a Protestant who lost no opportunity to ridicule the church (Sartre 1966b, 63). Jean-Paul was sent to weekly religion classes but soon protested, and that was the end of his religious training. He tells of being twelve years old and deciding to think of the Almighty. But suddenly the Almighty

tumbled into the blue and disappeared without giving explanation. "He doesn't exist," I said with polite surprise. And I thought the matter was settled. In a way, it was, as never have I had the slightest temptation to bring him back to life. But the Other One remained, the Invisible One, the Holy Ghost, the one who guaranteed my mandate and who ran my life with his great anonymous and sacred powers. I had all the more difficulty in getting rid of him in that he had installed himself at the back of my head. . . . (Sartre 1966b, 157)

The "Holy Ghost," being active in the back of his head, gave him his "mandate," his mission to write. He tells us that the idea of God contradicts many of his other ideas but says the idea of God kept coming up any time he thought about himself. He even felt he was writing his books for God to read (de Beauvoir 1981, 551). He tells of thinking of a divine hand preparing the way for him and giving him a destiny: "the Holy Ghost

had commissioned me to do a long and exacting job” (Sartre 1966b, 123). He explained, “Even if one does not believe in God, there are elements of the idea of God which remain in us and cause us to see the world with divine aspects” (de Beauvoir 1981, 551). His atheism was a struggle, so he called it “a cruel and long-term affair,” adding, “I think I’ve carried it through” (Sartre 1966b, 158).

His “cruel and long-term affair” could also describe the struggle of believers to maintain their faith. Sartre explained, “Faith, even when it is profound, is never entire. One must constantly prop it up” (1966b, 130). So Sartre had to prop up his disbelief. He left a vivid image that shows the character of his atheism: he tells of looking back on God with the easy amusement of an old beau speaking to a former belle: “Fifty years ago, had it not been for that misunderstanding, that mistake, the accident that separated us, there might have been something between us” (1966b, 65).

In a series of interviews that he gave shortly before his death he spoke of salvation coming from above (the meaning is not clear) and even suggested that the dead will come back to life (Sartre and Levy 1996, 106–7). Strange claims for an atheist! The question of whether the dead come back to life was central to the temptations against faith of both Teilhard and Saint Thérèse as presented above.

UNDERSTANDING THE DARKNESS AND DOUBT

In Christianity there is a long tradition concerning the “dark nights” known by the believer. Saint John of the Cross (1542–1591) spoke of two such nights. When one tries to live purely an ideal, one knows the Dark Night of Sense. Here one lives a dedicated life and ignores immediate comforts to embody a clear value. There is even some consolation in such living. But, after continuing this for some time, months or years, one finds that the ideal itself becomes unsteady and this begins the Dark Night of the Soul. Now one must travel by pure faith even though the ideal itself no longer seems to give support; one must continue through the darkness—to come to the Darkness which is Light. The Dark Nights were seen as times of purification in which we must be purified of all elements of self; they are burned out of us.

The individuals presented above, including Sartre, were aware of this tradition. So Teilhard could write of his ability to abandon himself to God being nourished by his troubling doubts—“nourished” as they reminded him of his weakness. Mother Teresa wrote to a priest troubled by feelings of emptiness: “God cannot fill what is full. He can only fill emptiness—deep poverty—and your yes is the beginning of being or becoming empty. It is not how much we really ‘have’ to give—but how empty we are so we can receive fully in our life and let him live his life in us” (Huart 2000, 654). By this emptying one would come to live purely by faith.

Such are the general lines along which the Dark Night of the Soul has been understood in the Christian tradition. But beyond the emptiness, weakness, and so forth, the writers considered above were afflicted by misgivings about their Christian faith. Each of them had known a time when belief in God (or belief in no God) was simple and direct. Each of them took this belief far more seriously than most others. Also, these individuals are all fairly recent. A noted scholar of the history of Christian spirituality, Dom John Chapman, OSB, writes of the Dark Night of the Soul being long a part of the Christian tradition. In earlier times devout persons understood their sense of the absence of God to be God punishing them for their sins, or God purifying them so they would no longer seek divine consolation but only God himself, or God emptying them so that he might fill them. Chapman continues:

This doesn't seem to happen nowadays. But the corresponding trial of our contemporaries seems to lie in the feeling of not having any faith; not temptations against any particular article (usually), but a mere feeling that religion is not true. It is an admirable purgative, as the 18th century one was; it takes all pleasure out of spiritual exercises, and strips the soul naked. (Chapman 1935, 47)

Passages of Teilhard, Mother Teresa, and Saint Thérèse seem part of this recent story. Chapman, writing early in the twentieth century, presents the phenomenon as contemporary.

Sartre and Teilhard also have presented an original philosophy that could offer a contemporary context to understand the doubts and temptations that afflict the dedicated believer or nonbeliever of today.

Sartre was familiar with John of the Cross and the Dark Night of the Soul and used them to understand French literary figures.³ As a young philosopher Sartre studied the Christian mystics, and they shaped the philosophical psychology he developed. Sartre came to sudden international fame with the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, an 800-page ramble, in 1943. The very title of the work recalls the phrase of John of the Cross: *Todo y Nada* (Everything and Nothing). For Sartre, the *Nothingness* of the title refers to consciousness. Considering consciousness as nothingness is not explicit in the Christian tradition, but such an understanding is consonant with many passages wherein Christian mystics refer to themselves as “nothing.” To understand Sartre’s claim, consider his account of “fascination,” a passage that could be equally telling of Christian “contemplation”:

In fascination there is nothing more than a gigantic object in a desert world. Yet the fascinated intuition is in no way a fusion with the object. In fact the condition necessary for the existence of fascination is that the object be raised on a background of emptiness; that is, I am precisely the negation of the object and nothing but that. (Sartre 1966a, 216)

Note that in this quotation the observer is simply the emptiness or nothingness wherein Being is revealed. To know one’s self as a nothingness is a

common theme in religious works. This identification is the basis of many parallels between Sartre and the teaching found in the Christian tradition.⁴

In the above text one's self has disappeared. In no way is one self-aware; one has become pure gaze. Likewise in the contemplative tradition one purifies one's self so God may be seen. This tradition often quotes the Bible: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8 RSV). Sartre proposed a similar purification, which he called "existential psychoanalysis," and it too would lead to letting go of all thought of self in order to see more clearly. But for Sartre humans are not content with being nothing (emptiness) and so invent opacities to give themselves an identity. This identity is largely a social construct, the result of others telling one who one is, but then one assumes this identity in order to *be something*. One is told one is a believer (a soldier, an intellectual, whatever), and by the term one sees one's self as an object—which one is not. Consciousness steps back from any object, so that in seeing one's self as an object, any object, consciousness is in "bad faith," for it knows better. In other terms, consciousness is endlessly other, so, in claiming to have any identity (the opposite of being "other"), consciousness is no longer consciousness. The objective truth about ourselves concerns only our past. "Existence [the present] precedes Essence." Essence tells only of what has been, and in the present we are free to change. "What *are we* then if we have the constant obligation to make ourselves what we are, if our mode of being is having the obligation to be what we are?" (Sartre 1966a, 71) That is, we feel obliged to maintain an identity only because we do not have one; lacking one we are endlessly other.

After writing of himself, Sartre adds: "What I have just written is false. . . . I have reported the facts as accurately as my memory permitted me. But to what extent did I believe in my delirium? That's the basic question and yet I can't tell" (1966b, 43). For Sartre, sincerity is a pose adopted in bad faith, for having objectified itself consciousness moves apart from all objects. So "faith, even when profound, is never entire. One must constantly prop it up" (1966b, 129). Because consciousness is a negation, it is constantly moving away from what it has been, and the identity one claims is only a pose.

These reflections could help explain the difficulty and doubts of one who claims to be a believer. For one must always work at maintaining this or any identity. So to have the being of either a "believer" or a "disbeliever" requires constant work.

Some texts of Teilhard also could be used to explain why the contemporary "Dark Night of the Soul" would take the form of doubt. He did not treat of doubt at length, but, as with Sartre, his texts could give some understanding of the phenomenon. According to the evolutionary perspective Teilhard developed, all humanity is coming together (the process

of evolution) to form an all-embracing unity under Christ the Lord. Today this unity is present but incomplete. As a present ideal many people today are motivated by their sense of a common human identity—that is, they want to act for the good of humanity. At one time our social identity was found in our nation, our class, our religion, or other restricted groups. In the last several centuries, however, people have become increasingly aware of having an all-inclusive human identity. What does this do to our faith? In reflecting on world religions, Teilhard concludes, “There cannot be any subject [of religious faith] other than the totality of thought on earth” (1971, 119).

Today we have a sense of totality—real and present but far from being complete. Accordingly, our own faith can be real and not complete. We can feel discomfort in knowing that there are millions of intelligent and good people who do not share our faith. Fyodor Dostoevsky would see this as a timeless phenomenon and have his Grand Inquisitor say, “The craving for community of worship is the chief misery of every man individually and of all humanity from the beginning of time. For the sake of common worship they’ve slain each other with the sword” (1950, 301).

Here Dostoevsky speaks of religious divisions as our chief misery from the beginning of time. But Teilhard would see this misery as contemporary, for only in the last two centuries have large numbers of people sensed “humanity” as a deeper “soul” they share in common. This was not always the case. At one time people had strong tribal, ethnic, religious, or national identities and often saw no problem in slaying those who did not belong. These restricted identities are less powerful today. Yes, Americans feel a particular obligation to help fellow Americans, and Roman Catholics feel a special obligation to help other Catholics, and so forth. But recently there has developed a general sense that we must look beyond these tribal identities. Appeals to “humanity” have changed the politics of the globe. Many became Communist in response to the call. Most nations will no longer claim to dominate another, or conquer another. Many charities have claimed to work for the good of all without regard to race or creed or color: Doctors without Borders, the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and so on. Teilhard claims that two centuries ago “mankind” was only a vague entity, but that has changed:

Mankind was the object of a faith that was often naive but whose magic, being stronger than all vicissitudes and criticisms, goes on working with persuasive force upon the present-day masses and on the “intelligentsia” alike. Whether one takes part in the cult or makes fun of it, even today no-one can escape being haunted or dominated by the idea of mankind. (Teilhard [1959] 1965, 245)

If we feel obligated to a common humanity this will affect our religious faith. Some people find a way out in claiming that religion is simply a very personal decision, and that is all there is to it. For Teilhard more is involved: “There cannot be any subject [of religious faith] other than the

totality of thought on earth." For, religion is "co-existent with, not the individual man, but the whole of mankind . . . my own effort to reach faith can succeed only when contained within a total human experience" (1971, 119). In another context he writes, "The organ made for seeing God is not . . . the individual human soul, it is the human soul united to all the other souls" (1971, 16). In a third context, "Our individual mystical effort awaits an essential completion in its union with the mystical efforts of all other men" (1957, 143). Thus, Teilhard is claiming that if our mystical efforts are individual or that of a restricted group, they are *essentially* incomplete.

Even apart from mysticism we can sometimes try to pray and, instead of praying, find we are drawn into an argument within, an argument with the nonbelievers who have become part of our identity. We are aware that some people consider prayer to be nonsense, and, if our sense of a common humanity is strong, such people are lodged within us. So, Saint Thérèse wrote of her anguish, "The voices of unbelievers came to mock me out of the darkness . . . [saying 'Death] will bring you, not what you hoped for, but a still darker night, the night of annihilation.'" She, like both Mother Teresa and Teilhard, had so identified with the "wretched unbelievers" (Martin 1957, 116) that they became a voice within her, and she claimed she could sit in table fellowship with atheists.

If one's social identity were limited to other believers or a section of believers, one would not know such a trial. But in identifying with humanity, one becomes painfully aware that one's own faith is not complete: "There cannot be any subject [of faith] other than the totality of thought on earth." We are to love God with all of our mind, heart and soul; but once we allow nonbelievers into our mind and heart, and even into our soul, how can we know such love?

Teilhard resolved the dilemma by saying that all humanity was longing for unity and only a common Soul could bring this about. This is what he saw Christ providing: a Soul to unite all humans; that is what all humans, believers and unbelievers, were seeking. But is this the case?

In meeting others who seemed to have no such interest, Teilhard found his own faith becoming "troubled." (Recall that he ascribed some doubt to the fact that he could find no spiritual writer who agreed with him.) In his first trip to China he had passed India, Sri Lanka, and Singapore and seen thousands of Asians. He wrote to a friend, "It is the immense mass of undisciplined human powers that overwhelms me" (Teilhard 1965, 70) On arriving in Tientsin he noted in his journal, "The incoherence of humanity = an agitated and broken sea." Soon he wrote to a fellow Jesuit, "How can we hope for the spiritual and heartfelt unification of these fragments of humanity, which are spread out in every degree from savage customs to forms of new civilization tolerably at odds with our Christian perspectives?" (1972, 104) The apparent disinterest in a common human

Soul threatened his understanding, and, shortly after arriving in China, he wrote of the “ocean of humanity whose slow, monotonous wave-flows trouble the hearts even of those whose faith is most firm” (1978, 120). Only in union with this great ocean of humanity could his own prayer be complete. In his first visit to Asia his prayer was troubled, for he was not able to see a mystical interest in the Chinese. Several months after first arriving to China, a long-time missionary to China made him aware of the mystical interest of the Chinese, and only with this assurance could Teilhard again pray in peace.

If today we sense ourselves to be one with humanity, even with those most destitute and most confused, we will find their destitute identities within ourselves. Three figures in recent Catholicism—Teilhard, Mother Teresa, and Saint Thérèse—identified themselves so intensely with a humanity that included the most abject, and in doing so they took on the anguish and doubt that is part of the complete human identity as it is today. Saint Thérèse tells of the inclusive character of her prayer: “I can only pray in my own name, and in the name of these brothers [contemporary atheists] of mine” (Ahearn 1998, 55; see Martin 1957, 117). The anguish and doubt are the price one pays for identifying deeply with nonbelievers. Teilhard likewise was able to pray only by a universal yearning shared by “believer and unbeliever alike: ‘Lord make us one’” (Teilhard 1978, 121). Only in speaking from that all-inclusive human base could his faith and prayer be complete. Only by sitting at table fellowship with atheists could Thérèse express the depths of her humanity. Only by knowing fully the extent of spiritual destitution could Mother Teresa present herself before God.

But, for Teilhard, at some future day we will all come together, and the faith of each can be complete. He writes in more poetic terms:

In reality, *the groan within us is the groan of something greater than us*. The voice we then hear is the voice of the single soul of the ages to come, weeping in us for its Multitude. And it is the breath, again, of this nascent Soul that passes into us, in the *fundamental*, obstinate, incurable *yearning for total union, the union which gives life* to all poetry, all pantheism, all holiness. (Teilhard 1968, 101)

Until then, for Teilhard: “Our doubts . . . are the price we have to pay for the fulfillment of the universe” (1971, 132).

NOTES

1. Many contemporary scholars see these two letters as written not by Paul but by one of his disciples. A treatment of Teilhard's use of the Pauline texts can be found in my book *Teilhard's Mass* (King 2005).

2. In November and December of 2002, ZENIT, a Roman Catholic Internet news agency, published “The Soul of Mother Teresa, Hidden Aspects of Her Interior Life” in four installments, by Fr. Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C., Postulator of Mother Teresa's cause for sanctity. Because of the way Fr. Kolodiejchuk found it being misunderstood and misquoted, he asked

ZENIT to take it down. He is now working on a study of her prayer. In the meantime an article in a journal in India published a number of her texts, including this (Huart 2000).

3. See his *Saint Genet* (Sartre 1971b), 194ff., and *l'Idiot de la famille* (Sartre 1971a), 2077ff., and his account of his own childhood (1966b). For the many similarities between themes in Sartre and the Roman Catholic tradition see my *Sartre and the Sacred* (King 1974).

4. This I have treated at some length in King 1974.

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