Louis M. Savary and Patricia H. Berne


*Teilhard de Chardin on Love* presents the theology of love of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, famed Jesuit scientist and theologian, and then tests that theological vision against largely anecdotal accounts of human relationships. The first half of the book offers a study of Teilhard’s theology, while the second ventures into the realm of practical theology by applying Teilhard’s theology of love to the sphere of human relations.

Having published widely on Teilhard, theologian Louis M. Savary co-authors *Teilhard de Chardin on Love* with his wife and psychologist Patricia H. Berne. The joy of reading Teilhard is arguably his poetic style, but this has often rendered him obscure to some. Savary and Berne skillfully illuminate Teilhard in simple, clear language without losing any of the challenging aspects of his theology. In Part One, Savory and Berne present Teilhard’s vision of God as love, and love as the essential energy of the evolving universe. They stress that Teilhard understood love not simply as a divine attribute or divine name, but as an energy that people experience in everyday life. Love is neither sentimental nor intangible, but energetic and capable of moving the entire universe toward its fulfillment. Moreover, the relationship that blooms from the love of partners or of a group is itself a type of being. In this respect, the authors present a relational ontology where the loving relationships produced by people can accomplish things that the individual members of the relationship cannot do on their own.

Part Two is where Savary and Berne make their contribution to practical theology by applying Teilhard’s theology of love to common human relationships: committed partners, masculine-feminine, parent–child, friendships, and relationships within a team. The book concludes with an argument for a theology focused on love rather than sin, followed by a meditation on loving and the *Pleroma*, or “Omega Love” (179–97).

The book is Ignatian in that it has regular spiritual exercises throughout the text. This approach indicates that one can experience Teilhard’s theology for oneself rather than simply giving or withholding intellectual assent to the arguments. For example, Savary and Berne help their reader to see love as energy when they ask: “Can you verify in your own life how love has propelled you or someone you know to perform an expression of human goodness that has made a difference in someone’s life?” (25).

Today, Teilhard’s theology of love is urgent and necessary when divisions run so deep that conversation and rational discourse fall into the fog of the
impossible and when the Earth seems to be fighting against humanity with the fierce storms of climate change. Love hopes all things (1 Cor 13:7). Teilhard provides an argument for that love that is not Pollyannaish, but rooted in eschatological certainty. Savary and Berne expertly craft a book that invites readers to turn from the powerlessness of despondency and cynicism towards the power of love. Moreover, they stress that extending this power of love to the world today is not restricted to the present, but stretches into the future. Perhaps because love is not primarily an exercise of the intellect, a practical theology is more appropriate than a historical or systematic treatment of Teilhard’s thought.

Although the text is intended for a broad audience within and beyond the academy, it should not be lightly dismissed by the scholarly community. Studies on Teilhard tend to be either historical—clarifying what Teilhard thought—or systematic—developing his ideas in a way that he could not freely do himself because of his censors. Thus, *Teilhard de Chardin on Love* will be of interest even to those familiar with Teilhard, for it makes an original, practical contribution to the existing literature. Students of Ignatian spirituality may find the spiritual exercises prescribed interesting applications of St. Ignatius’s approach to life with God. As a work of scholarship, the text contains generous footnotes citing a variety of Teilhard’s works. In these, Savary and Berne demonstrate their command of the Teilhard corpus. By accident or design, the works they cite are readily available in English, so readers can find Teilhard’s own words on love.

The chapter that may appear out of place is entitled “Invisible Partners” (99–116) because it presents the archetypes of Carl G. Jung more than an explicit presentation of Teilhard. However, the authors see a congruence of Teilhard with Jung and acknowledge the work of Franklin E. Vilas in this regard (100n6). Teilhard provides a metaphysical foundation for the psychological theories of Jung, a point that deserves greater exploration. Similarly in the area of comparative religions, perennial philosophy has largely been dismissed, but perhaps the same foundation of love and Teilhard’s insistence that “union differentiates” (53–70) gives reason to reconsider this once popular philosophy of religion.

Rather than turning to the related issue of non-Christian religions, Savary and Berne restrict the scope of the book to interpersonal love as it relates to cosmic evolution. When reflecting upon Teilhard and interpersonal love, those familiar with Teilhard’s life may expect some presentation of the deep love he shared with Lucile Swan. Swan does not appear in the book, and their correspondence is only mentioned in a footnote after other references to love and friendship (136n3). Instead, the authors explore the friendship between Pope
Saint John Paul II and Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka as an example of intimate, chaste, heterosexual love (89–90). Other examples of love and friendship abound throughout the book. The reader will meet a cast of characters from Dorothy Day to Maria Skłodowska-Curie. Among the cast are Savary and Berne themselves as they reflexively draw upon their own experiences as a married couple. In addition to the many references provided by Savary and Berne to well-known works by Teilhard, such as *Human Energy* (London: William Collins Sons & Co, 1969) and *Toward the Future* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), readers may wish to explore Teilhard’s vision of love between married couples in his wedding homilies, such as can be found in *On Love and Happiness* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

*Teilhard de Chardin on Love* will appeal to anyone interested in meeting the mind of Teilhard or in learning how to apply his theology to daily experiences. A lay audience will find the book quite accessible, and professional theologians will find a provocative theology of God. Savary and Berne provide a cogent argument for seeing God as love, attributing being to loving relationships, and observing God at work in people’s everyday lives.

*Bede Benjamin Bidlack*
Saint Anselm College
bbidlack@anselm.edu
DOI 10.1163/22141332-00502005-15