

## Prayer of the Month • April 2011

Lord, enfold me in the depths of your heart; and there hold me, refine, purge, and set me on fire, raise me aloft, until my own self knows utter annihilation.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, 1881–1955

This is a prayer that knows we have to change, and recognises the best place for such radical change to happen in the depths of God's own heart. The transformation through refinement and purification is not something we can carry out ourselves, but must be done by God. He can only do it if we let him. He needs to hold us, not as a victim, but in a loving embrace as he draws us closer to his own heart. What can the self know in utter annihilation? Is there still a sense of personal identity and uniqueness? Or is that very sense of identity part of the selfish self? Perhaps we will simply be absorbed into a greater whole. Whatever the result, Teilhard has this strong desire to 'let go into God'. We can do the same if we have sufficient self-awareness and sufficient trust in God and his good purposes for us.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born near Clermont in central France, on 1 May 1881. He entered the Jesuit noviciate at Aix-en-Provence in 1899 and was ordained priest in 1911. During his training, as well as studying theology he was attracted by the natural sciences, especially geology and palaeontology, and worked for some years as a palaeontologist in China, being involved in the discovery of Peking Man. His theological ideas were controversial and he had not obtained permission to publish them by the time of his death on 10 April 1955. They were only subsequently published, the first and most influential being *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955; English translation 1959). In this, he regards the universe as an evolutionary process developing in greater complexity towards higher levels of consciousness. At times in this process there are thresholds. The development of self-consciousness has led to freedom from the laws of nature so that mankind can be involved in directing it as it moves towards a state of convergence in the Omega Point. For Teilhard, the whole universe has a sacramental nature and is in the process of 'Christification' due to the incarnation.

Colin Lunt