

SILENCE

GILES HIBBERT, O.P.

IT is in the stillness of our hearts and in the stillness of our minds, in a perfect presence to ourselves, that we rise up—not of ourselves, but through him to whom alone we say, ‘Raise us, Lord, that we may see’. This rise of ours is ‘offering’, achieved in understanding and in loving; we do not rise in any simple way outside our normal selves, but remaining within and yet increasing, growing, rise up upon ourselves to know and see, as yet however darkly, God present in our souls, from whom we have our all; our being, life and understanding; our own true actuality.

If, then, we recognize the tumult of the shifting nature of our thoughts, the milling crowds of our conflicting fantasies, by calming and by ordering these which hold us down we may proceed and may attain to that pure silence of the spirit, where in the rise upon itself of understanding we will see and know and feel, though fleetingly, the presence of him alone who is. ‘Be still and know that I am God.’

This is that interior silence, achieving in transcendence pure spontaneity, the summit of human possibility, the opening out of spirit to beyond, the fulfilment of the soul in love, understanding and self-actuality. It is here that we regain that primal act from which depends, in one, our being and the being of the world itself. It is here we have the fulness of activity, which works and has itself been worked through silence into silence—of all activities the most perfect which leaves no trace behind it. No width, no length, no breadth, the locus of transcendence, the focus of the spirit into infinity and in perfect unity.

Here at the finest centre or the very touch-deep of our soul there is this point of focus, this point of contact—the point from which our soul turns out upon itself, the point to which and into which it also turns itself. This is the soul’s centre-point, and in this point lies ultimately its very person, its name, its ‘I’.

All else can change and become other; but not this point;

it can grow and shrink in the power of its life, its intensity, but it cannot be other than its very self. This is the point from which springs all true understanding; this is the point where all such understanding rests. This is a point of no length nor height, it is a point of no quantity nor quality, it is a point of pure silence; yet it is the very point of being, the source, the point of power of life.

This is the point of the soul in which it touches God; it is the point of grace, the source of life; it is the starting point of all activity. It is not doing, it is not thinking, it is a dwelling in itself, it is a dwelling in God, it is a dwelling in perfect silence—that very silence which is living, life-giving, more intense than mere activity, pure life itself—yet pure silence. Or so it should be.

Silence can be living and silence can be dead. Silence which is no more than just not-sound is dead; and silence which is dead is nothing. It is not merely not-sound, it is not-being, it is not-understanding, not-giving, evil, ignorance. It smothers, kills, denies. If the soul is not turning to its centre-point, not drawing from its centre-point, that is to say not striving to rise up, understanding upon understanding, love seizing love, memory making memory self, then, if not, that point will have the silence of death. It will not be any more self living, for it will be empty; it will be self dead.

Silence that is living is still however silence, because it does not *do*, it gives life; it does not understand, it gives understanding; it does not speak, but from out of it comes the word—both word of self and Word of God. If the soul dwells in this silence, all silence is living silence; all silence reveals, uncovers, lightens; all silence speaks.

Do we know this point? Can we understand this point? Can we penetrate it with our discursive mind? No. But slowly, and not easily, we can uncover it, get closer to it, dwell more nearly in it. It can only become more truly present to us by our actual dwelling in it—rising to it out of silence into silence—by our turning into it, drawing from it, realizing ourselves in and to and from its power. From it we understand, to it and through it we

love, in it we know ourselves; and it is in thus knowing that we can know that which gives self to what we are. It is from this silence that is uttered the word which is our knowledge of ourself. It is in this silence that rests our love. It is here at this centre-point of silence that we can both find ourself and find God.

By living towards this point, so that we can come to dwell in this point, this point—our very self—grows, not in quantity, not in quality even, but in intensity—the intensity of the power of life which flows from it giving life to all. This is the point of contact of the soul with God. This point of silence is itself the image of God, echoing silently back to him the supreme silence of God—the mystery of the blessed Trinity.

REVIEWS

LE MILIEU DIVIN. By Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. (Collins; 18s.)

In his preface Père Teilhard says that his book is addressed to '... the waverers, both inside and outside [the Church], that is to say for those who, instead of giving themselves wholly to the Church, either hesitate on its threshold or turn away in the hope of going beyond it'. The burden of what he has to say to the 'waverers' is summed up in a paragraph on page 20: 'Nothing is more certain, dogmatically, than that human action can be sanctified. "Whatever you do", St Paul says, "do it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." And the dearest of Christian traditions has always been to interpret those words to mean: in intimate union with our Lord Jesus Christ. St Paul himself, after calling upon us to "put on Christ", goes on to forge the famous series of words *collaborare, compati, commori, con-ressuscitare*, giving them the fullest possible meaning, a literal meaning even, and expressing the conviction that every human life must—in some way—become a life in common with the life of Christ. The actions of life, of which Paul is speaking here, should not, as everyone knows, be understood solely in the sense of religious and devotional "works" (prayers,