

Guest Editor's Introduction

Over twenty-five years ago, Lippincott published *The Promise of Teilhard*, a book which was reviewed widely and positively at the time. Since the author was Philip Hefner, it is not inappropriate for *Zygon* to revisit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin forty years after his death in 1955. Today wide acclaim for Teilhard so evident twenty-five years ago has subsided. Professor Hefner requested of me that this issue be an authoritative and somewhat comprehensive survey and interpretation of critical work of the last quarter century "and an assessment of just what status Teilhard holds for us today, particularly (but not exclusively) for persons whose concern is the inter-relationship of religious faith/theology and the sciences." In attempting to fulfill this request the issue also endeavors to respond to *Zygon's* hypothesis that religious insight, when yoked with updated scientific discoveries about the world and human nature, can provide valid and effective guidance for enhancing human living. Teilhard's life and work, addressed in this volume, manifest the wisdom of this sentiment.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born on 1 May 1881 in the province of Auvergne in France, the fourth of eleven children. His roots were aristocratic. The serious interest of his father in the study of nature and his mother's simple and unaffected religious piety had a lasting effect on their son. He entered the Jesuit order in 1899. From 1905 to 1908 he was Reader in Chemistry and Physics at the Jesuit high school in Cairo, Egypt. This position offered him the opportunity to investigate fossil deposits and publish a note, "The Eocene of Upper Egypt," in the *Bulletin scientifique du Caire*. He was ordained a priest in 1911 and began formal studies in paleontology at the Paris Museum in 1912. In 1914 he was summoned by the army and posted as a medical orderly. At his own request he was sent to the front as a stretcher bearer. In this position he spent four years, refusing all promotions, and was decorated for gallantry in the field with the highest honors of the Republic. These four years of regular contact with death were a period of exceptional intellectual and spiritual activity and insight. In 1919 he began preparing his doctoral thesis for the Sorbonne and was selected to teach geology at the Institut Catholique de Paris. By this time he had already attracted attention because of several significant scientific publications.

After defense of his thesis in 1922, Teilhard was elected president of the Société Géologique de France. In February 1923 he was selected as paleontologist to set up the French Paleontological Mission in China, and there he generated several scientific notes on Chinese geology and paleontology, previously unknown to the world of scholarship. It was at this time that he also drafted what was to become his *Mass on the World*.

Teilhard arrived back in France in October 1924. During a conference in 1922 about the origins of humans, he had been asked to give his opinion about the problem of Original Sin. A draft written only for some of his friends who were theologians somehow disappeared from his desk while

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he was in China. It reached Rome. In 1925 he was forced to give up his position at Paris. As Mathias Trennert-Hellweg relates in his present article "The Church as the Axis of Convergence in Teilhard's Theology and Life," this was the first of many rebuffs of Teilhard's ideas from within his own Jesuit Order and the official Roman Catholic Church. In view of this great disappointment, Teilhard agreed with Jesuit superiors to return to work in China, and so he left France in the spring of 1926. Until 1946 Teilhard was based in China, although up to 1939 he participated in some of the most significant geological expeditions of that time outside China. One sees the breadth of his contribution to scientific knowledge if one looks through the ten volumes of his scientific works edited by Karl and Nicole Schmitz-Moormann. It was also during this period that he wrote *The Divine Milieu* and many of his other nonscientific works.

As a French citizen Teilhard was confined to the Peking region during the Japanese occupation of World War II. Here he and his Jesuit colleague Pierre Leroy set up the Institute of Geobiology described in Lodovico Galleni's contribution to this volume. There was also time to complete the draft of *The Phenomenon of Man* and other manuscripts which could not be published until after his death.

Upon his return to Paris in May 1946, Teilhard was immediately lionized, since some of his unpublished writings had been mimeographed and distributed by friends and colleagues. He was invited to lecture widely but suffered a heart attack in the spring of 1947. After his recovery, realizing a return to now Communist China was impossible, he visited the United States in 1948 in order to give some academic lectures and visit former colleagues from the China days. A visit to Rome in October 1948 convinced Teilhard that as a Jesuit he would not be allowed to publish *The Phenomenon of Man* nor be granted permission to accept a chair that the College de France had offered him. Between 1948 and 1951 he continued his lecturing activities and writing, primarily in France, until he accepted a staff position with the Wenner Gren Foundation headquartered in New York City. There he collaborated in organizing research on human origins throughout the world. In 1951 and 1953 he made extended visits to Africa, where he participated in establishing a network of research into human origins covering all of Africa south of the Sahara. The staff position allowed him to continue his private investigations and writing concerned with human origins and religious thought. He died suddenly in New York City on Easter Day 1955 and is buried in a Jesuit cemetery near Poughkeepsie, N. Y. The caretaker of the cemetery says that he opens the gate for visitors to Teilhard's grave on the average of one to two times a day throughout the year.

To support the yoking hypothesis of *Zygon* and to focus a critical assessment of the status of Teilhard today, authors were selected who have recorded familiarity with principal elements in Teilhard's life. This approach also offers a contemporary holistic vision of Teilhard's status:

Like the meridians as they approach the poles, science, philosophy, and religion are bound to converge as they draw near to the whole. I say "converge" advisedly, but without merging, and without ceasing, to the very end, to assail the real from different angles and different planes. (*The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall, New York: Harper & Row 1959, p. 30)

With generous support from the John Templeton Foundation and Loyola College in Maryland we were able to bring together the authors for the

annual Cosmos and Creation Conference at Loyola, 27–29 May 1994. We hoped the interchange—after presentation of drafts of manuscripts by the authors to each other and 250 attendees—would help to finally produce a volume worthy of *Zygon* and Teilhard.

Lodovico Galleni analyzes Teilhard's scientific publications in order to evaluate his connections with the current theories of biological evolution and human origins. In the process, Galleni describes Teilhard's seminal proposals regarding canalization phenomena and what is known now as the science of geobiology. Moving to the world of physics, Michael Heller revisits Teilhard's vision of the world and its cosmology after almost a half century of intense experimental and theoretical investigation. Heller concludes that, as a serious scientist, Teilhard today would be forced to revise some of his fundamental views. Thomas King describes the transition from Teilhard the scientist to Teilhard the philosopher by describing his epistemology. King concludes that Teilhard's use of hypothesis permitted reconciliation of the two great attractions in his life, science and revelation.

Commentators have often described Teilhard as a mystic. In view of his living and travelling in Asia for many years, Ursula King details his familiarity with and attitude towards Eastern religions. Using texts from Teilhard, King concludes that he remained a Eurocentric scientist-poet who had looked to Eastern religions for answers to specific questions about the development and destiny of humankind. Although he did not find the answers there, he appreciated the importance of such issues in the quest for a spiritual unity for humanity. Anyone familiar with Teilhard's life is aware of his order's official rejection of his nonscientific writings. Mathias Trennert-Helweg tells the story of this rejection and Teilhard's continued loyalty to his religious commitment. For many years Karl Schmitz-Moormann has written and spoken of the failure of theologians to deal with the world that scientists like Teilhard experience, an evolving cosmos with an indefinite destiny. Although making no predictions, Schmitz-Moormann the theologian offers insight into developments and trends that could take place within a Teilhardian presentation of Christian faith. The essay is not so much about Teilhard as it is a vision of some potential fields of theology that could be enriched and vitalized by a valid Teilhardian perspective.

Professor Hefner and I agreed early on that the volume should include an update on the status of publication of Teilhard's own writings. Because of censorship, his nonscientific writings were not available to the public until after his death. The story of his works and their eventual publication is detailed by Nicole Schmitz-Moormann.

Also included are reviews of two important, recently published books concerned with Teilhard; the reviewers are Winifred McCulloch, of the American Teilhard Association, and Philip Hefner. Thomas King and I have gathered an annotated bibliography of works by and about Teilhard that have been published since 1980. We hope that this bibliography might serve as a supplement to references in the volume and as an instrument for teachers who wish to be updated on Teilhard scholarship.

I appreciate the opportunity to bring this collection of essays to the public as a further testimony to the significance and promise of Teilhard's thought. I am especially grateful to Nicole and Karl Schmitz-Moormann for their advice and technical support. Without them this project would not have been such a delight.

—James F. Salmon, Maryland Province, The Society of Jesus



Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 1931

On Yellow Expedition in Western China
Photo courtesy of Mary Wood Gilbert