

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

Teilhard de Chardin was a French priest, geologist, paleontologist, who would come to the height of his powers with the lastingly important *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955). He was a quiet worker, who had slowly taken his own way, through a driven career. Who would have thought that this Teilhard de Chardin, a young man, from the French countryside, would prove to be one of a few modern thinkers to have addressed the fundamental question looming before modern thought.? That question, if we play all our cards in one hand, must be: is reality ultimately of material or spiritual nature? It was a keen query, of relevance to every man and woman living. Is each individual's destiny to be ashes and dust--'remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return--or is that destiny to be joy and ontological fullness?

The age in question, as we know, was one in which the discussion, carried on around the present question, brought into battle conservatives and liberals--ultimately, in the end, it ran headlong into the texture of French society, the Dreyfus case in the early twentieth century. French society as a whole was tied into such moments as the Dreyfus case--which showed how tightly French society as a whole was tied into the theological matters in question with Chardin's thought.

Chardin pursued the answer to his vast question through a lifetime of intense study. As a young man in the French Alps, he was keenly interested in the natural features of the land as well as, concurrently, the entire creation he attributed to God and His revelation. He was able to cast an analytic eye even on what awed him. With years of study and research behind him, he was able to win himself a Professorship at the Institut français de Géologie in Paris. From the work he did there, his extraordinary research capacities became evident, and there began that series of expeditions to and residences in Beijing which were to fill up much of the rest of his life. (Expeditions in the course of which for example, he was instrumental in the reconstruction of Peking Man, one the breakthroughs in the history of paleontology. The yield thus won, over a period of ten years, resulted in much education for the French people. Many were fascinated by Chardin's perspective, but many, ESPECIALLY IN HIS ORDER highly disapproved both of his premises and his conclusions.

Which brings us to some rudimentary comments on Chardin's master work, *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955). That vast work addresses the question whether the universe is matter, stuff, or whether it is intelligibility, down into the rock. It is Teilhard's contention--belief too--that matter is intelligible, and driven upward--that is refined--by the same process that drives evolution. The entire creation, by this account, is perfused by evolution and is by nature ascensional. From this perceptual standpoint Chardin unfolds his theory of the noosphere in which the ultimate dominance of the intelligible widens incrementally and ultimately, to assume--as Chardin sees it-- the spiritual dimensions of the god infused faith to which the god infused truth is equivalent.