

The Teilhardian Synthesis, Lamarckism, and Orthogenesis

Edward O. Dodson

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born in 1881, the scion of a distinguished French family, including on his mother's side no less a personality than Voltaire. He had a vocation to the priesthood and joined the Jesuit order. Taking advantage of his interests, the Jesuits encouraged him to train as a paleontologist. He did his doctoral studies under Marcellin Boule, the leading French paleontologist of the time. As a scientist, Teilhard did important work on the fossil mammals of France and especially of China (Teilhard et Leroy, 1942), where he worked for many years. In 1940, he completed his major book, *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), in which he presented his holistic vision of an oriented and purposeful evolution. Although he thought that he had written a purely scientific work, it was in fact a complex blend of science, philosophy, and theology, all presented in a unique poetic fashion. His Jesuit superiors did not understand it, and he was forbidden to publish the book. It remained unpublished until after his death on Easter Sunday, 1955. It was then published within the year in French (*Le Phenomene humain*) and four years later in English.

The Phenomenon Of Man is Teilhard's effort to formulate a unified outlook upon all of reality, encompassing at once his experience as an evolutionary scientist and his vocation as a priest. He believed that humanity in its totality, including not only physical but also mental and spiritual attributes, is a phenomenon that is subject to study, like any other natural phenomenon. Such a study, however, can be made only from an evolutionary point of view, for everything is a process of development. There are three great phases: first, a physicochemical phase, including the great array of chemical elements and compounds, stars, planets, and galaxies; second, a phase of biological evolution, which started in the most complex products of physicochemical evolution and resulted in the origin of life and its diversification into the several kingdoms of organisms, on the order of 40 to 50 phyla (the broadest subdivisions of the kingdoms of life), and

This publication may be ordered from the American Teilhard Association, c/o Prof. John Grim, Department of Religion, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837. (570) 577-1205 grim@bucknell.edu