

## Review

*The Human Phenomenon.* By Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. A New Edition and Translation of *Le phénomène humain* by SARAH APPLETON-WEBER. Foreword by Brian Swimme. Portland, Ore.: Sussex Academic Press, 1999. xxxi + 281 pages. \$69.95.

Sarah Appleton-Weber, poet and scholar, has gifted English-speaking admirers of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and his thought with a superb new translation of the book known in English since 1959 as *The Phenomenon of Man*. They will find this new translation worth a fresh reading. Sarah Appleton-Weber first heard of Teilhard in 1952 through her professor at Vassar College, Ida Treat, longtime friend of Teilhard until his death in 1955.

Although Appleton-Weber read the English translation by Bernard Wall when it was published in 1959, she happened to be rereading the original French edition in 1974 while writing a long sequence of poems that eventually were published by Doubleday in 1977, *Ladder of the World's Joy*. She claims in her introduction to the translation that Teilhard's vision was a source of joy and inspiration to her own creativity, and to fifteen years of research in preparation for this new translation. The study included careful reading of the Teilhard corpus of letters, edited and unedited manuscripts, private journals, and retreat notes, many of which were not known at the time of the Wall translation. Her conversations in Europe and America with those who knew Teilhard well and with whom he shared his vision support her interpretation. The volume is truly a scholarly labor of love.

On 2 January 1925, Teilhard made the first entry in his private journals, "to write an essay that looks objectively at the whole human phenomenon." In June 1937 he wrote to Henri De Lubac, "The book of my life, if I succeed in doing it, will be simply titled *L'Homme*." In 1940 he changed the title of the completed manuscript to *Le phénomène humain*. Insistence by church censors caused constant revisions. In 1947 Teilhard wrote to Lucile Swan, "I have started readjusting the notorious book for a new examination." Although he did not give up hope that the book would be published, revisions were rejected in Rome with the critique that it was not scientific enough. So Teilhard continued his prolific scientific research program and wrote short essays that were distributed to friends and to those who requested copies of his writings and public talks.

Before leaving Paris to take up his research appointment with the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research in New York City, Teilhard was encouraged by his French Jesuit superior to leave his manuscripts to a layperson

so that they could be easily published after his death. Therefore he left them to Jeanne Mortier, his part-time secretary in Paris. When Teilhard died in 1955, three versions of the manuscript of *Le phénomène humain* were collected and edited under the direction of Mortier and published later in 1955 by Éditions du Seuil. Mortier is known to have had her own interpretation of Teilhard and his vision that characterized him as more a mystic than a scientist. The 1959 translation in English, published by Collins in England and by Harper in the United States, and translations into twenty other languages are based on the Mortier-directed French edition.

This new translation has used the same manuscripts and materials as Mortier used and has the advantage of Appleton-Weber's consultation with many of the same persons who advised Mortier during her final editing of the French manuscript before its publication. This new translation has also been officially approved by the Teilhard Foundation in Paris. Wall's acknowledgment recognizes only British scholars, who are not known to have been particularly insightful into Teilhard and his scientific background. Moreover, in a translator's note Wall admits to having "dispensed" with many identifications like italics and quotations that Teilhard considered significant.

There are other misunderstandings that are cleared up in the new English translation. For example, Appleton-Weber correctly differentiates between Teilhard's two terms "homme" and "humain." The change in title of the translation manifests an entirely different interpretation of *Homo sapiens*. Teilhard was not interested in humans as one species among many but in the emergence and amazing dynamism in human evolution. Human speciation remained virtual for Teilhard. The "expansive convergence" of biological evolution had created step one for human "compressive convergence."

Author Tom Wolfe captures Teilhard's vision when he writes in a special issue of *Forbes* magazine (4 October 1999) titled "Big Issue IV: Forty-Five Minds Come Together on the Great Convergence." Wolfe devotes his contribution to showing how Teilhard was the first to use *convergence* in order to capture this dynamic character in human evolution. He quotes Teilhard: "With the evolution of Man a new law has come into force—that of convergence." Wolfe goes on to show how Teilhard saw humanity as "a living membrane," a developing "thinking skin," and he discusses Teilhard's specific reference to radio, television, and "those astonishing electronic computers, pulsating with signals at the rate of hundreds of thousands a second." Referring to globalization, Wolfe notes, "no one can deny his stunning prescience." To us this dynamism in evolution is much clearer in *The Human Phenomenon* than in *The Phenomenon of Man*.

In his insightful article "Five Ways of Reading Teilhard," Ian Barbour correctly classifies Teilhard as a process thinker. He writes that Teilhard uses both metaphors and analogy. Some scientists who have read the 1959 translation have been left with the impression that Teilhard was essentially a poet who used vivid and sometimes vague metaphors to communicate his personal vision. In our opinion, a careful reading of the new translation negates this impression. Teilhard emphasizes throughout the essay that his thinking is based on analogy. And what is more common in creative science than the use of analogy by the imaginative scientist? Whether Teilhard's analogies stand is a fair question. What is often forgotten by commentators about him is that in his self-understanding he was

first and foremost a scientist. The ten published volumes of his science publications attest to this fact. In her introduction, Appleton-Weber explicitly notes that Teilhard does not use metaphor but analogy founded in nature, that his apparently metaphorical comparisons are the expression of physical and biological structural realities that “hominized” for Teilhard. We leave a conclusion to the reader.

Later in his life Teilhard wrote that his four years in the trenches during World War I were the occasion for some of the most vivid experiences of his life. He claimed that his “Nostalgia for the Front” (in *The Heart of Matter*, trans. René Hague [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978]) supplied him with an insight into the full reality of the human phenomenon. Many commentators claim that these experiences were fundamental to his so-called vision of evolution. His thoughts about these insights were first shared during this period in his letters to his cousin, Marguerite Teilhard-Chambon. The letters manifest Teilhard’s trust and respect not only for her intellect but also for her as a wise confidant and advisor. Marguerite remained in that capacity throughout their lives. Recent publication of correspondence of Teilhard with Lucile Swan gives another example of his affection and deep respect for the women with whom he shared his thoughts.

Perhaps forty-five years after his death, and after the publication of his essays and some correspondence, it is easier than it was in 1959 to understand the significance for him of the feminine. By examining carefully and following the original manuscripts closely, Appleton-Weber does not take liberties in her translation that were taken by Wall. An example of these oversights that includes the significance of the feminine for Teilhard is in the table of contents. The Mortier French edition lists Chapter 3 in Part 2 as “CHAPITRE III. La Terre-Mère (Démêtêr).” The 1959 Wall translation is “CHAPTER III. Demeter,” whereas the Appleton-Weber translation is “Chapter III. Mother Earth (Demeter).” The Mortier French edition begins the chapter with: “Démêtêr! Terre-Mère! Un fruit? Quel Fruit? . . . Cherche-t-il à naître sur l’Arbre de la Vie?” The 1959 translation eliminates this introduction to the chapter completely, while the Appleton-Weber version captures the significance of the transition in Teilhard’s description of the transition from Part 2 on “Life” to Part 3 on “Thought”: “Demeter! Mother Earth! What kind of fruit? Is it seeking to be born on the tree of life?” The dramatic introduction of the feminine and fertility at this juncture in creation is not unusual in view of the role of women in his own life and of both Eve and Mary of Nazareth in biblical tradition.

A comparison of this new translation with the 1959 translation would not be complete, at least for some scientists, without reference to the meaning of the French words in the title of Part 1, Chapter 2: “Le Dedans des Choses.” The 1959 translation calls it the “Within of Things,” and Appleton-Weber’s version reads “The Inside of Things.” Another possibility is the “Interior of Things.” The important factor is that the chapter does not portray location but is a description of what Teilhard claims is present in every being, an inside and an outside. In the dictionary *Lexique Teilhard de Chardin*, Claude Cuénot, the Teilhard scholar, defines *Dedans* as “Aspect or psychic [sheet] of the Stuff of the world. Depending on the hierarchy of levels of the real, this can be infinitely diluted to strongly concentrated.” Cuénot defines Teilhard’s meaning of the Outside of Things” as “Aspect or material [sheet] of the Stuff of the world. According to the

growing of the inside of things, it is more and more subtle and differentiated. The inside and the outside are functions of one another, and on the phenomenal level they constitute both aspects of one and same reality.”

Appleton-Weber's introduction to the work opens to readers, including Teilhard scholars, the meaning and relevance not only of Teilhard's vision but also of phrases and words that he used to help bring his vision into focus. She includes copious notes that explain particular words and phrases used by Teilhard and that up to now have confused many English-speaking readers unless they were familiar with the whole Teilhard corpus. Appleton-Weber refers in these notes to locations in the *Oeuvres* where Teilhard defines or clarifies the meaning of these words and phrases. Her introduction of fifteen pages and copies of key diagrams used by Teilhard are of great value to anyone interested in his thought. For these reasons and because of its quality we call the new translation critical. Indeed, Teilhard scholars may safely compare it to the original French edition. In view of the substantial value of this new translation for communicating the vision of Teilhard, we hope that a paperback edition will be in print soon, so that it can be read by more persons interested in his thought.

JAMES F. SALMON, S.J.  
Chemistry Department  
Loyola College in Maryland  
4501 N. Charles St.  
Baltimore, MD 21210

NICOLE SCHMITZ-MOORMANN  
Woodstock Theological Center  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC 20057-1137