

TEILHARD DE CHARDIN. A biography, by Robert Speaight. *Collins, London, 1967.* 323 pp. 45s.

A twentieth-century Frenchman, living and working in China, visiting for professional purposes such countries as India, South Africa and Japan, cannot fail to arouse a certain interest. Add to this the professional pursuit of palaeontology and his close connections with the Piltdown Man and Sinanthropos. However, the intention and achievement of the biographer is to present the man, more interesting and more significant than any of these things. For many readers the essential interest will be that Teilhard was at once a 'Man of Faith' and a 'Man of Science'. The roots of both these attitudes lay in boyhood days. The full development of each, the inter-relationships between them, the synthesis reached on a personal level and increasingly interpreted for others, occupied a lifetime. Here lay the means and the provision for that 'Apostolate to the Gentiles', those outside the Churches, which was at once the chief purpose of his life and the essential cause of his suffering.

The young Jesuit had already encountered Bergson's thought and the theory of evolution some time before he began his service as a stretcher bearer in the First World War. During these years he found not only opportunities for heroic service, but a widening and deepening of his religious experience; while his priesthood expanded into apostolate he was deeply involved in his 'intellectual honeymoon'. He realized a sense of humanity, of manhood's actual and potential unity, and glimpsed his vision of a world in living in, by and for God. He saw that, though religionless, men were hungry for religion. Yet at the same time they were deprived of it by the Churches. These did not realize that, to be recognized and worshipped by men today, God would have to be seen as including and surpassing 'the grandeur, intimacy and unity reflected in the world', and Christ be understood as greater, not smaller, than reality. In refusing to face the world disclosed by science, Christian theologians failed in their essential task. Teilhard thought, read, wrote, consulted, developed and clarified his ideas and their formulation. The immediate post-war years, spent chiefly in Paris, were occupied with study, research, teaching, and friendships old and new. A time of such satisfying activity and preparation was brought to an abrupt end in 1924, by Cardinal Merry del Val's objection to an old essay by Teilhard on Original Sin. The current was flowing fast against anything conceivably

Modernist, while Thomism was resurgent. Therefore, work was arranged in China for Teilhard, and so began what was virtually a life-long exile from his beloved Paris and France. While this helped towards, rather than hindered, the attainment of professional success, his real vocation, to reformulate and teach the Christian faith in the light of the new scientific understanding of man and the universe, was to be denied, hindered and nullified, as far as official action could determine, and as far as his own religious obedience required. This time was the first, but not the last or greatest, crisis of obedience, for though clear-sighted he loved and believed in the Church and willed to remain a Jesuit. Both of these loyalties proved exceedingly costly, and so his greatest works *Le Milieu Divin*, *La Messe sur la Terre*, *Le Phénomène Humain*, remained unpublished in his lifetime, though his mission and his message burned clearer and brighter.

While his theological thinking had its biblical foundations, in the Cosmic Christ of St John and St Paul, the theory of evolution, which he had welcomed and applied, enriched his thought and largely determined its formulations. Because of this the basic doctrines of creation, original sin, the incarnation, the consummation of all things were radically affected. A gospel of human effort emerged, for man's activity was the primary way of achieving God's will; nor would man's efforts be confounded at the last by divine catastrophic action, rather they would be fulfilled, though surpassed. Yet unless Teilhard himself was known, the purpose of his teaching would be readily misconceived. That all proceeded from faith, and love was an essential prerequisite to understanding. His life was 'a love affair', his research adoration and apostolate.

As age and health restricted his field work, Teilhard devoted himself increasingly to the consideration of mankind's future. His own immediate future concerned him in so far as he wished 'to finish well', to die *en marche*. These objectives he achieved, dying suddenly at the house of a friend on Easter Day 1955. Robert Speaight's biography gives us an excellent introduction to Teilhard and his world. For those who have had other introductions there are still treasures to be gleaned here, and for those who come to it first it will provide an incomparable beginning.

MARJORIE EDWARDS