

EDITORIAL

WHATEVER may be the ultimate judgment about the work of Père Teilhard de Chardin, there can be no question of the great interest aroused by the English translation of *The Phenomenon of Man*. The enthusiastic reviews, the correspondence in journals, the crowded meetings when his ideas have been under discussion; all bear witness to it. This in itself would require us to see what he has succeeded in doing, to examine the 'phenomenon' of his impact on such a variety of people and opinions—if his own method and terminology may be borrowed.

What is it about Père Teilhard's work that has this effect? Of course he has a great theme: the whole sweep of human evolution and its continuance here and now in 'the Christian phenomenon'. But how has he managed to make this acceptable to Sir Julian Huxley and Mr Philip Toynbee as well as to Catholics such as Dr Bernard Towers, whose article is printed in this issue of *BLACKFRIARS*? It is difficult to avoid the impression that there is a fundamental ambiguity in his thought—the ambiguity inherent in prophecy at all times—which makes it possible for him to be understood in different and perhaps incompatible ways.

If the Teilhard of Dr Towers is not that of Sir Julian Huxley, we have to ask which is likely to be the real Teilhard. Dr Towers writes from the standpoint of revealed Christian theology. He sees in Teilhard's thought a means of integrating the ideas with which a scientist works and those by which a Christian lives; but he makes the necessary distinction between faith and reason, between what we ourselves can attain and what we can only be further given by God in Christ. Sir Julian, on the other hand, speaking of Teilhard's 'gallant attempt to reconcile the supernatural elements in Christianity with the facts and implications of evolution', sees in this 'his naturalistic general approach'. Is Père Teilhard's own approach in fact naturalistic or Christian? From his private papers and correspondence, from what we know of the whole character of his life, we cannot doubt his intention that it should be Christian.

Unfortunately, Christianity cannot be presented as a phenomenon to be observed without a measure of compromise. At the end of the book a single footnote tells us to substitute something 'still more elevated' for the final point of evolution (the Omega point) hitherto seen from a naturalistic viewpoint, 'in deference to the theological concept of the supernatural'. But if Christianity can only be fully

understood at all in faith, then a neutral view of it will be false, and no footnote can restore what should never have been removed. Clearly no final decision about the orthodoxy of Père Teilhard's thought can be attempted here. That must be a matter for ecclesiastical authority. In the meantime it can and must be freely discussed, for even if this first attempt to draw evolution into the understanding of Christian faith has not entirely succeeded, the work is of the highest importance and must go on.

THE World Refugee Year has presented, in a dramatic way, the tragic situation of our time, when years after a war its innocent victims are still deprived of the rudimentary supports that make human life tolerable. The generous response to the national appeal (which we take this opportunity of commending) is in its measure a protest against a larger iniquity than homelessness and poverty. The name of Danilo Dolci evokes the same sort of sympathy for those whom a world immeasurably rich in its material resources seems to prefer to forget. It is this lack of sensitivity to the fate of the weak and the exploited that is so hateful at a time when astronomical sums can be devoted to destruction or for that matter to mere pleasure. The problem is indeed too large for the agencies of private charity, fitful and temporary as they must inevitably be. Immediate needs must be met, but the greater need remains: to inform the consciences of men and women everywhere, so that they may realize that being one's brother's keeper is no longer a counsel of perfection but a law of life in a world that is increasingly learning that frontiers have ceased to have much meaning. The prophets of nuclear destruction are right to insist on the prospect of total destruction that any future world war would bring. And the prophets of peace must be equally insistent in saying that Chicago or Cheltenham can no longer let India or Sicily starve. A Christian doctrine has in fact become the self-interest that survival demands.