

*The Life of Teilhard de Chardin*, Robert Speaight (Harper & Row: 1967).

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest and scientist who lived from 1881 to 1955. As a geologist and paleontologist, he was an integral part of the team which discovered *Sinanthropus* (the Peking man) in China in 1926.

Throughout his life, Teilhard sought to find a balance between the areas of science and religion, both of which were extremely important in determining who he was. He was ordained a priest in 1911 and spent the better part of two decades in China beginning in 1923.

Much of what we know of Teilhard, and the primary source for this biography, comes from the correspondence he had with a number of persons. One of these was his close friend and counselor Auguste Valensin (another Jesuit priest). His formal writings, especially his book *The Phenomenon of Man* were not published during his lifetime. Unofficial copies were widely reproduced, read and discussed, especially by Jesuit scholars. The Jesuits, under much pressure from the church hierarchy had refused to give him permission to publish.

Seven years after his death, in 1962, although his writings had become fairly well accepted, the church formally condemned those writings, stating, "The above-mentioned works abound in such ambiguities and indeed even serious errors, as to offend Catholic doctrine... For this reason, the most eminent and most revered Fathers of the Holy Office exhort all Ordinaries as well as the superiors of Religious institutes, rectors of seminaries and presidents of universities, effectively to protect the minds, particularly of the youth, against the dangers presented by the works of Fr. Teilhard de Chardin and of his followers." This is still the official policy.

The Jesuit Order accepted Teilhard a devout believer and helped protect him by having him work both at museums and doing fieldwork in China. At the end of his life, he was stationed in New York City, where his views were much more acceptable than in Italy.

In a 1923 letter to Valensin, Teilhard had written "I don't know a single scientist who is not an evolutionist." Perhaps the best explanation of Teilhard's reasoning that I have read can be found in a [Wikipedia article](#).

In "The Phenomenon of Man, Teilhard writes of the unfolding of the material cosmos, from primordial particles to the development of life, human beings and the noosphere, and finally to his vision of the Omega Point in the future, which is "pulling" all creation towards it. He was a leading proponent of orthogenesis, the idea that evolution occurs in a directional, goal driven way, argued in terms that today go under the banner of convergent evolution. Teilhard argued in Darwinian terms with respect to biology."

Culture is developed through education. Teilhard makes sense of the universe by its evolutionary process. He describes a sequence of evolution of matter into a geosphere, a biosphere, consciousness in man, and finally to supreme consciousness, which he calls the Omega Point. He calls this consciousness the "noosphere," which has been compared with C.G. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious.

Teilhard is commemorated on April 10th in the Episcopal church's *Calendar of the Church Year*. The article in that publication concludes with, "Shortly before he died, he prayed: 'O God, if in my life I have not been wrong, allow me to die on Easter Sunday.' He died on April 10, 1955: Easter Sunday."