Ilia Delio, ed.

From Teilhard to Omega, Co-creating an Unfinished Universe. New York: Orbis Books, 2014. Pp. 263. Pb, \$30.00.

The ideas of the French Jesuit and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) have received an enthusiastic reception in the 1960s and '70s when most of his works were posthumously published. Since then, books on Teilhard have appeared regularly. This one is quite innovative, not being satisfied to explain his ideas, but more importantly to evaluate them with new trends in understanding the world and envisioning what is to come. Thirteen scholars (eight Americans, two British, one Australian, one French, and one Italian), all having extensively published on Teilhard, take up to the challenge of offering prospective views on the world, based on his ideas. The essays are distributed into five parts of unequal weight: five essays on theology, three on philosophy, four on spirituality, and only one on science.

In the first essay, John Haught laments that Teilhard's idea of evolution has failed to transform contemporary theology. Yet two scientific fields (evolutionary biology and cosmology) offer a large setting in which an immense drama of transformation is being played out, and with no clear certitude about its end and purpose. Based on Teilhard's idea, Haught sketches a metaphysics of the Future. God creates the world by drawing it from up ahead and thus can be seen as the ultimate Center of convergence for an unfinished universe. Only this dynamic vision of reality can foster love and hope, by making all of us conscious agents in this cosmic drama. Next, drawing from recent knowledge on the process of the formation of the cosmos and of the earth, Kathleen Duffy re-writes "The Eternal Feminine," a poem by Teilhard during the First World War. She calls to our attention the presence of Sophia in the natural world, which makes us more able to develop a sense of companionship with the other, especially to open our eyes to the presence of pain and suffering in the world. The two final essays of this section look at the deep and dynamic connection existing between God and the universe, with Denis Edwards analyzing some similarities between Teilhard's ideas and the evolutionary Christology of the German theologian Karl Rahner, and François Euvé arguing that Teilhard's anthropocentrism reveals in fact the structure at work in the entire natural world, in a dialectical form of centration, de-centration and super-centration. In this sense, Teilhard's ideas may help us to avoid the two extremes of prometheism and of obliterating the human specificity in the cosmos.

Patrick Byrne opens the section on philosophy, analyzing the rich symbolism in Teilhard, but stating also some limitations in communicating it. His

symbols fused scientific meanings in ways that caused confusion, especially among many scientists. Byrne shows how the method of the Catholic theologian Bernard Lonergan could solve the ambiguity of the symbols, since he does not postulate any special super-force like a radial energy, but explains how higher stages of intelligibilities emerge from within, in a non-systematic way, and yet with a determinate direction. Yet, Byrne recognizes their complementarity: although Lonergan's language is more precise, Teilhard's symbolic language is more accessible and powerful.

Another difficulty is the problematic status of metaphysics in Teilhard, and David Grumett explains the deep relation between metaphysics and morality and politics. Only by understanding Teilhard's metaphysics can his morality and politics make sense. Donald Wayne Viney returns to a review of the *Human Phenomenon*, written by the British biologist Peter Medawar who criticized Teilhard for being dishonest with others and with himself, and for doing bad science. In fact, the author shows that Medawar did not read carefully Teilhard who clearly affirmed his Hyperphysics going beyond the traditional boundary of science. This debunking is important because New Atheists often refer to Medawar's attack on Teilhard.

In the following section, dealing with spirituality and ethics, Edward Vacek presents Teilhardian spirituality as an invitation from God to collaborate with Him in building the world and ourselves. Traditional Christian ethics set up universal and eternal norms, but the morality of movement unveiled by Teilhard takes into account the dynamic situation of each individual, of the society and even of the human species. Even God is affected by evolution, because, by contributing to the world, we make a positive difference to God's life and being. Teilhard is sometimes considered as a guru of the New Spirituality or New Age movement, and William Dinges and Ilia Delio propose a useful clarification. Teilhard shifted away from a traditional other-worldly spirituality, and embraced fully the worldly realities, making sacred the secular. Unlike the so-called New Spirituality, his approach is clearly Christocentric. Ursula King offers a further elaboration of her paper on the important Teilhardian concept of "zest for life," which first appeared in *Teilhard and the Future of Humanity* (edited by Thierry Meynard, Fordham University Press, 2006). Against feelings of being powerless in our own individual lives and in the world, Teilhard teaches us a very proactive attitude, feeding the zest for life in our own lives and communicating it with others. As all the authors point out, Teilhard's approach is clearly Christocentric, but John Haughey indicates in his paper the failure of Teilhard in developing a more Trinitarian spirituality; however, Teilhard's conception of the deep unity between spirit and matter could precisely give a greater role in the role of the Holy Spirit.

The last paper, by Ludovico Galleni, is more technical. It deals with the reception of Teilhard's concept of geo-biology after his death. In order to maintain its equilibrium, the biosphere is now thought as a whole evolving object in which there is a movement towards complexity and consciousness. Yet, the author remarks that a complete theory of the biosphere has yet to be developed.

I personally found this volume very stimulating. The authors do not ignore the points of difficulties in Teilhard's thought, but engage them in a critical manner. We face indeed the paradox of the convergence. We are living in a world that is not very Teilhardian, characterized by the fragmentation of academic disciplines, by religious and nationalist conflicts, and by a growing gap between the poor and the wealthy. Lines of division and fractures appear easily to us, while the underlying forces of convergence play out at a deeper, slower, and often an elusive level. Teilhard's ideas have indeed failed to change radically the world, and yet his vision has sustained many in their engagement in the world, so it may become both more human and more divine.

The editor is also to be congratulated for the pedagogical approach, adding points to ponder and questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. Unfortunately, however, there is no specific chapter dealing with astrophysics. Also, the book is largely written from a Western perspective, ignoring that Teilhard developed most of his ideas while in China. Many of his ideas bear similarities with Asian thought, and there is today in Asia a growing interest in Teilhard. Because of the urgency and gravity of the questions dealt here, this book will surely find a broad audience.

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