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**America's Teilhard: Christ and Hope in the 1960s**, Susan Kassman Sack, Catholic University of America Press, 2019 (ISBN 978-0-8132-3165-5), 334 pp., pb \$34.95

The Jesuit thinker Pierre Teilhard de Chardin produced much of his work during the interwar period, yet because the Roman Catholic Church censored him this was only widely disseminated following his death in 1955. Publication began quickly in France and spread to other countries including the United States. In this book, the independent scholar and pastoral educator Susan Kassman Sack charts Teilhard's American reception through the publication of his key texts, influential studies of them, archival materials including scholarly and administrative correspondence, and journalistic comment. The result is an important work that, by appraising the social, cultural, political and economic contexts of Teilhard's reception, develops an account of why his writings and ideas exerted a magnetic pull on Americans. The study also explains why, despite high book sales and packed public conferences, this audience was, by the late 1960s, losing interest in him.

Theologically, Teilhard was rooted in the French Roman Catholicism of the first half of the twentieth century, combining metaphysics, doctrine, Christian mysticism and evolutionary theory. However, during the 1960s he discovered a huge and enthusiastic American following. Sack convincingly argues that his thought, which celebrated progress, energy and hope, was peculiarly translatable into this sharply contrasting context, even if, in transposition, it was frequently subjected to a hermeneutic that evacuated it of Christian content.

The study is split into four chronological sections. The first, covering the period 1955–60, delineates the contours of contemporary modernity, especially the belief in progress through economic growth, scientific research and the expansion of education. These values, pursued and enjoyed by many, were viewed as entirely compatible with Christianity: in the later 1950s, 47 percent of Americans attended church weekly and 99 percent said they believed in God (p. 36). Internationally this was the era of the United Nations, which had been established in the wake of the Second World War, with headquarters in New York, to promote and secure a peaceful and unified global order.

The second section examines the years 1961–4, when Teilhard's thought began to be disseminated in the United States. The French committee formed to publish his works hadn't included clergy, for fear that any participating would risk ecclesiastical censure. The efforts of Thomas Merton and several American Jesuits to situate Teilhard in his Christian theological and spiritual contexts were therefore important. The June 1962 *monitum* issued by the Vatican, which cautioned against ambiguities in Teilhard's thought and precipitated the removal of his works from the libraries of seminaries and other Roman Catholic educational institutions, had the effect of

fuelling public interest in the man and his ideas. Moreover, as the Second Vatican Council progressed, early concerns that Teilhard's vision was incompatible with Catholic orthodoxy declined. Sack argues that, at this time, his love of materiality, his high valuation of the secular realm, and his belief in global spiritual development, deeply resonated with American values. When the social and economic standing of American Catholics was rising, this displayed their distinctive contribution to their nation and thereby to the world. John F. Kennedy, as the first Catholic President, exemplified this similarly to how Barack Obama would do four decades later for people of colour. Key members of his 'Camelot' team, including secretary of defense Robert McNamara and Peace Corps director Sargent Shriver, read Teilhard, and Kennedy himself became, through his assassination, a martyr for progressive political Catholicism. The appropriation of Teilhard by an author of the stature of Flannery O'Connor is just one instance of how his thought permeated American culture.

The book's third section, titled the 'years of hope', presents the contribution of Teilhard's vision in 1965–7 to social and political movements. Yet given their conflictual character, it should be acknowledged that these also called into question his conviction that progress was peaceable, convergent and assured. Notwithstanding its achievements, the civil rights movement disintegrated into rioting, then the Vietnam War and domestic resistance to it refuted the assumption that peace could be easily spread abroad by benevolent American intervention. The countercultural movements that flourished during these years may sometimes have invoked aspects of Teilhard's thought, such as his mysticism, but the social fragmentation to which they contributed were antithetical to what had been taken to be his hyper-modern vision of harmonious convergence. The American Teilhard Association, which was founded in 1965, presented Teilhard's vision as secular.

The fourth and final section, encompassing 1968–70, is titled the 'bitter years'. Post-war idealism finally unravelled with the killing of Martin Luther King and civil unrest in reaction to the Vietnam War, which was viewable by millions of citizens on their home television screens. Some of the most reflective theological treatments of Teilhard date from this period, including those by Christopher Mooney and Ian Barbour. Contrastingly, studies such as that by Philip Hefner present his humanism and spirituality without reference to the christology that formed the heart of his thought. The interdisciplinary research projects and institutes that these spurred were similarly predicated.

Sack notes that, prior to its export to the United States, Teilhard's thought had become hugely popular across his native France. These national contexts could be usefully compared. In each, formal state secularism was underlain with a deep social Christianity. Also in each, theories of creation existed that were amenable to a theistic interpretation: in France, Lamarckian orthogenesis, and, in the United States, creationism. However, it was perhaps inevitable that, in the United States,

Teilhard's thought would be appropriated by New Age elements as well as enmeshed in optimistic secular teleology.

Sack displays a strong grasp of Teilhard's thought and of how and why particular interpretations of it arose, even if, during excursions on episodes in recent United States history, Teilhard fades into the background. At other points the text reads like a literature review, but this is arguably justified by the methodology in use. In contrast, the study is intentionally light on theological analysis, which leaves open some interpretive questions. For example, Teilhard's immanentism is associated with the doctrine of the incarnation, which is seen as an outworking of kenoticism (pp. 19–22). However, theories of the incarnation vary, and Teilhard's presentation of Christ as Omega suggests a view of Christ as the Pantocrator ruling over creation. In a couple of cases it is unclear why non-American authors are discussed. Donald Gray (pp. 281–2) was a Church of England priest who became a canon of Westminster Abbey and didn't work in America at any point in his life. Henri de Lubac was a dominating figure in Teilhard interpretation, but also never lived in the United States and his works on Teilhard were translations from French.

Some readers may wish to probe more deeply the validity of using Teilhard to celebrate modernity and progress. Teilhard himself explicitly disowned a facile optimism, promoting unity, complexity, convergence and equality above brute prosperity or technological achievement. In places he reflects on suffering and evil with metaphysical nuance and pastoral sensitivity, and when referring to these Sack acknowledges that most interpreters were disinterested in them. Teilhard didn't defend a naïve realized eschatology but recognised that anything that might be called progress would depend on human collaboration, through grace, with the work of Christ.

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