

SEARCHING FOR SOUL: TEILHARD, DE LUBAC, RAHNER, and the EVOLUTIONARY QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY

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What an absurd thing life is, looked at superficially: so absurd that you feel forced back on a stubborn, desperate faith in the reality and survival of the spirit.

Otherwise—were there no such thing as spirit, I mean—we should have to be idiots not to call off the whole human effort.¹

The above remarks are found in a letter written by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to his old mentor Henri Breuil. They express not only his grief at the sudden death of his Canadian colleague, Davison Black, in the laboratory in Peking where they worked together analyzing the fossilized remains of *homo pekinensis*. They also express what might be thought of as Teilhard's lifelong passion and the major goal of his thought.

It seems doubly ironic that this faith in the survival of the spirit, (because it appears to have involved his questioning of the special or direct creation of the human soul by God), has been singled out as one of the weakest links in Teilhard's attempt to synthesize Christianity and evolution. In fact, as we shall soon see, this was—along with the problem of original sin—one of the two major concerns expressed by Pope Pius XII in the 1950 encyclical *Humani generis*, even though neither Teilhard nor Henri de Lubac, whose work had also been under suspicion, were named explicitly in the document. And while de Lubac's *Surnaturel* was eventually cleared by the Church's censors for publication after extensive revision, Teilhard's own masterwork, *Le Phénomène Humain*, was never officially approved despite repeated revisions. And today, even after several later papal commendations of his visionary efforts to reconcile religion and science, the situation apparently remains the same.

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Letters from a Traveller* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 202.