

The Letters of Teilhard de Chardin and Lucile Swan

A Personal Interpretation

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The long awaited correspondence between Teilhard de Chardin and Lucile Swan has now appeared in print. The letters have been superbly edited and annotated by Thomas M. King S.J. and Lucile's cousin, Mary Wood-Gilbert. They are accompanied by photographs, explanatory essays, and a helpful chronology of the lives of the two correspondents.¹ It has long been known that a deep friendship existed between Teilhard and Lucile, yet few details were available before. We had to await the full text of this correspondence to discover the strong, loving bonds which existed between these two great souls.

Many volumes of Teilhard de Chardin's letters have appeared in print, made available by those who were their recipients, since Teilhard never kept any copies himself. Previously published letters give us many insights into Teilhard's personal life and manner of working, his travels around the world, and his friendships with people from different backgrounds. Teilhard was a beloved and precious friend to many. Several of his close friends were women, among them his cousin Margu rite Teillard-Chambon, the philosopher L ontine Zanta, Solange Lema tre, Ida Treat, Rhoda de Terra, and the American sculptress Malvina Hoffman. Some, but not all, of Teilhard's letters to these women have been published much earlier, whereas his letters to Lucile Swan have only now become available. They represent not simply another correspondence with one of his women friends, but they are a unique collection of very special letters which throw new light on Teilhard as a person and put his ideas, especially those about the nature and power of love, into a hitherto unknown perspective.

It is an unusual correspondence between two unusual people, the French scientist, priest and mystic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and the American sculptress, Lucile Swan. They spent many happy hours together during the years when both were working in Peking; they wrote to each other during their absences and travels, a correspondence that continued when both lived later in the USA and lasted until Teilhard's death in