

Geology and Grace: Teilhard's Life and Achievements

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Introduction

The life and achievements of Teilhard de Chardin have been celebrated internationally in 2005, the fiftieth anniversary of his death in New York City on Easter Sunday, April 10, 1955. While his full name is actually Marie Joseph Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, he is best known today by his family name, Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard was born May 1, 1881 in Auvergne, a central province of France, distinguished by the presence of numerous young volcanoes. The family château, Sarcenat, is located a few miles from the provincial capital, Clermont-Ferrand.

Prior to 1955, Teilhard was known in limited academic circles in France, China and the United States for his geological and paleontological expertise, and in even more limited religious circles for ideas that were labeled controversial and even suspect until they were published after his death. In the past half-century, however, the writings of this Jesuit priest-geologist and mystic have become progressively more widely known and are no longer under an ecclesiastical cloud of disapproval. In fact, as Teilhard's works became more widely studied, they met with approval by Cardinal De Lubac (1967) and Cardinal Agostino Casaroli writing in the name of Pope John Paul II (Skehan, 2001, 64). Since their appearance in 1955 in French and 1959 in English, Teilhard's writings have reached an ever-widening audience, serving as a source of authentic inspiration founded on a modern scientific vision.

Seeds of Teilhard's Influence

My paper has a two-fold focus on Teilhard as a professional geoscientist and on his "new mysticism" of action. I will first explore his early life and activities in the hopes of uncovering those influential "seeds" that were to flower in his later life. His mother, Berthe-Adèle de Dompierre d'Hornoy, was a devout Catholic who read the classical writings of the Christian mystics and transmitted her love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to her son by word and example. As Teilhard wrote in *The Heart of Matter*: "At the age