

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Bernard Lonergan: The Great Work of Our Time

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Introductionⁱ

Three great religious scholars of the twentieth century, Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry and Bernard Lonergan, have profoundly affected my academic career. As an undergraduate student in biology and mathematics, I was fascinated by the workings of the natural world and by the sheer power of mathematics to describe its elegance. Sometime in the early 1970s while still engrossed in science, I read (as did many spiritually-inclined young people of that decade) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* (sic).ⁱⁱ I was enchanted. Of course our incredibly complex and beautiful universe has a spiritual core. How could it not? I could not get enough of Teilhard.

As I completed my science degree, I had just begun to take seriously the ecological disasters that had come to light in the recent environmental movements. On an otherwise uneventful day in the summer of 1980, I came across a bound set of Thomas Berry's papers at Holy Cross Retreat Centre in Port Burwell, Ontario. Reading "The New Story," among a number of his other essays, would determine my academic future. Here was something worth studying. For Berry, the ecological crisis was also a religious crisis requiring a whole new spiritual understanding of the world. This from someone who appreciated science, the physical world, and Teilhard! I went on to study with Thomas Berry at Fordham University and to write my dissertation on his work at The Catholic University of America.

ⁱ I am indebted to Patrick Byrne for generously sharing his paper, "The Unity of Science, the Universe, and Humanity for Teilhard and Lonergan," *Lonergan Workshop* 26 (2015), 21-70, before its publication, Stephen Dunn for comments and suggestions on an earlier draft, John Haught and members of the Thomas More Institute for kind direction as I began to write this paper.

ⁱⁱ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Row, 1959) is the original edition/translation. Although we usually prefer to refer to the latest edition/translation of this work, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, trans. Sarah Appleton-Weber (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), this paper is citing the original translation, *The Phenomenon of Man*.