

Renee-Marie Croose Parry (1922 – 2015) – Obituary

Renee-Marie Croose Parry, Co-Founder of The Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Association of Great Britain and Ireland in 1966, died on 11 May 2015 at the age of 93.

Renee-Marie was born in Bavaria to Margot and Wilhelm Hausenstein. For different reasons related to each parent, Hitler's coming to power in 1933 ended the comfortably secure life of that family: Wilhelm, a Protestant, was an art historian reviled by the Nazis for celebrating what they deemed "degenerate"; Margot, while not religious, was of Jewish ancestry. Renee-Marie was sent to a Catholic girls' school, judged to allow her to integrate best in her part of Germany. She was not aware of her Jewish ancestry until one day in 1936 when a classmate suddenly shouted at her, "*Du Judenweib!*" (You Jewish wench!) In a memoir she said it was years before she understood why her mother's family history "changed her whole existence".

In 1942, aged 20, she escaped from Nazi Germany to Rio de Janeiro as the pro-forma wife of a Brazilian citizen. Life there was not always easy for German-Jewish refugees. Soon after her arrival, she was held incommunicado in prison as a possible German spy. Later, after a change of government she was interrogated by the police about her friendship with another Jewish woman from Bavaria; an activist with communist sympathies. That challenged her linguistic skills, her Portuguese having been learned through the translated novels of Daphne du Maurier.

Renee-Marie left Brazil for the United States in 1946 and became a naturalised American citizen in 1952. She made her living teaching languages.

In 1962 she married an English economist and businessman, Kenneth Croose Parry, and for 23 years they lived in London where they co-founded not only The Teilhard Association but three other voluntary groups: the ad hoc committee of People for a Non-Nuclear World (1976-78); The Centre for the Advancement of Human Cooperation (1984-) and the Parliamentary Liaison Group for Alternative Energy Strategies/ later The Alternative Energy Group (1978-). In 1988, having returned to the United States, The Croose Parrys were sending out Round Robins for The Center for the Advancement of Human Cooperation and in 2007 Renee-Marie wrote a book with Kenneth, *The Political Name of Love*. She took her title from Frei Betto, a Dominican Friar and Liberation Theologian, who said, "Socialism is the Political Name of Love" and added that it is "A book about what is wrong with the world; how Cuba is trying to build a better society; and how the United States has set about to destroy it – while also jeopardising the future of history".

As a young woman, Renee-Marie felt her intellectual development had been "arrested": up to her 20th year she had concentrated solely on getting safely through another day "under observing, critical or even hostile eyes." Desire for acceptance had narrowed her attention to "the practicable, the immediate, the now." In Brazil, far from home and family, she longed to understand the world and her place in it. She "hungered for an englobing knowledge of history" that would help her transcend her feelings of impotence, and promote social transformation through "a religious spirit uncluttered by dogmas and judgemental thought."

In time, she came across the newly published writings of Teilhard de Chardin and found that englobing vision. By the summer of 1966 when the first Teilhard Review was published, the Association had been founded with Study Groups established in 11 English towns and cities plus 1 in Edinburgh. In London there were "many groups" with Renee-Marie as their Convenor. For nearly ten years, Renee-Marie played a strongly supportive role in the Association, with its Review and Conferences attracting outstanding contributors and speakers from the worlds of science, philosophy, theology and other fields.

In the mid-1970s Renee-Marie withdrew from participation in the Teilhard Centre for the Future of Man as it was then called over differences about how it should be managed. But her passion for his universal vision and her determination to dedicate her life to helping steer human evolution in the direction of Love remained strong throughout her life.

This is clear from a brief review of her 2007 book: “From socialism and Liberation Theology to the evolutionary vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, this book emphasises our human responsibility and makes the case for steady-state economics and human co-operation.”

It seems fitting to conclude this obituary with the quotation she included from Frei Betto OP, writing about Teilhard in 1992:

“He taught me to *see*. And to experience this marvellous journey without return aboard planet Earth, at a speed of nearly 30 kilometres per second... Intoxicated by his writings, I appreciate more deeply the stars, the bright splendour of the Sun, the evolution of the Universe, and the reluctant socialization of humanity.” *The Political Name of Love*, p.248.

However diverse our perspectives on Teilhard and the world, members of the British Teilhard Association will probably have shared this experience.

Bronwen Astor, who knew Renee-Marie and Kenneth well, adds her personal tribute:

We all owe a great debt to Renee-Marie. Her tremendous energy and unfailing sense of humour combined with intellectual and personal gifts of memory and rigour attracted many eminent scientists, philosophers and theologians and set the Teilhard Centre on a firm footing in its first twenty years. Yes indeed, Teilhard taught us all to *see*.

Alison Williams.