

Christogenesis: The Development of Teilhard's Cosmic Christology

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Abstract: As part of his evolutionary cosmological vision, Teilhard devised an original Christology whose development can be followed in his writings. His main purpose was to establish the person of Christ as the convergent focus of cosmic evolution. Already, in his earliest essays, he spoke of the universal Christ and about the cosmos being centered in him. Once his conception of evolution converging in an Omega Point was established, he identified the Omega Point with Christ, so that the whole process of cosmogenesis becomes a true Christogenesis. A Christic sense of the world, the consequence of Christ's presence as the enlivener of the evolutionary process, corresponds to a cosmic vision, the consequence of the evolution. Teilhard's vision was for him not a mere theory, but the motor of his interior life and mission, which, he proclaimed, was to universalize Christ and thus to Christify the universe.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout his life as geologist and paleontologist, Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was in constant contact with the fossil record of biological and human evolution. One of the highlights of his scientific career was his involvement in the early discoveries of primitive human fossils in China. Evolution was for him no mere scientific hypothesis, but the revelation of the deepest essence of the world, the universal rule that explains all reality. His main concern was to find a way to integrate Christian thought into the new cosmological vision of the evolving universe. Already present in his early writings, this concern continued to occupy him until he wrote his last pages only a few days before his death. He realized that in contrast to the prevailing static worldview, an evolutionary vision of the universe and of life would necessarily deeply affect our conception of the relation between God and the world which would have to be adapted to a dynamic evolutionary framework. This implied, among other things, a reformulation of the idea of creation, the problem of evil, the mystery of Christ, and its relation to the world. In the process, Teilhard discovered the presence of the cosmic Christ at the very heart of the material universe. In fact, the very foundation of his Christian vision of evolution and the core of his mysticism is the conception of the role of the person of Christ in the evolution of the world.¹ His writings on these subjects were precisely those which raised problems for the ecclesiastical authorities of the Catholic Church who did not allow their publication during his lifetime.

THE EVOLUTIVE COSMOVISION

The best way to describe Teilhard's thought is with the term "vision." Teilhard himself used this term in the first lines of the prologue to his fundamental work, *The Human Phenomenon*:

These pages represent an effort to *see* and to make others *see* . . . To seek to see more and better is not a fantasy, a curiosity or a luxury. To see or to perish, this is the situation imposed on everyone who forms an element of the universe by the mysterious gift of existence."²

For this reason, when, in 1948 he summarizes his thought, he titles it “My Fundamental Vision.”³ At the beginning of this essay he writes: “It seems to me that the efforts of my whole life would not be in vain if I could only, in one moment, show what I see.”⁴

Teilhard’s vision is not purely scientific, nor is it simply a philosophical consideration; instead, it always includes what he calls “the Christian phenomenon.”⁵ In the introduction to “My Fundamental Vision,” Teilhard says that his vision includes physics or phenomenology, metaphysics, and mysticism, and he divides the essay accordingly. Continuity exists for him among the three, both between the physical and the mystical, and between his cosmic vision and his Christian faith. In the latter part of this essay where he deals with the mystical, he presents the figure of Christ-Omega as the end of the evolutionary process. This is done by means of a new metaphysics, one of union rather than of being. For this reason, in 1934 when he wrote an essay about his religious and Christian position he titled it “How I Believe.”⁶ To see and to believe were the two inseparable motors of his thought. In the beginning of this essay he states the four pillars of his faith: “I believe that the Universe is an Evolution. I believe that Evolution proceeds towards Spirit. I believe that the Spirit is fully realized in a form of Personality. I believe that the supremely Personal is the Universal Christ.”⁷ Hence, Teilhard’s vision and faith comprehend an evolutionary conception of the universe whose summit is Christ.

When Teilhard wrote these essays the geological evolution of the earth and the biological evolution of living beings were already well known and accepted by the scientific community. The expansion and evolution of the universe, as it is described today in the Big Bang model, was still a subject of debate and, within Catholic ecclesiastical circles, evolution was still looked upon with a certain suspicion. Teilhard certainly knew, though he never quoted them, about the models of the expanding universe proposed between 1919 and 1935 resulting from the application of Einstein’s theory of general relativity and about the first proposals regarding the origin of the universe from the explosion of a primeval fireball that contained all the mass-energy of the universe.⁸ For him it was enough to know that in the beginning the universe was made up of an aggregate of elementary particles which eventually combined to form the first atoms and then more and more complex molecules. This, he knew, was followed by biological evolution on earth from the first unicellular beings to the human species. Thus, cosmic evolution had, for him, a clear dynamic that proceeds from the simple to the more complex. Complexity and not size or number constitutes for him the true axis of evolution. To the very small (the subatomic) and the very large (intergalactic space), Teilhard found it is necessary to add a third dimension, that of the very complex (the human brain).⁹ He saw that it is along the dimension of complexity that evolution progresses from elementary particles to living things and finally to the human. Within the “biosphere,” the sum total of living beings on Earth, living things complexify from the most primitive unicellular to more and more complex plants and animals. Evolutionary progress continues as mammals complexify to the primates and finally humans at which time self-reflective consciousness appears. The complexity found with the coming of self-reflective consciousness comprises another new level which Teilhard calls the “noosphere.” In Teilhard’s terminology, the universe has progressed through a “cosmogogenesis,” during the billions of years of cosmic history before the appearance of life, to a “biogenesis,” during the advent of life and its development, and finally through an “anthropogenesis,” during the advent and development of thought, following always a line of greater complexity. This complexification cannot be explained merely as a sum of simple elements, but as the result of a process in which new entities with new qualities emerge as material beings become more complex.

Teilhard does not finish his analysis of evolution with the appearance of the human, however; instead, he projects the process into the future noting that evolution must continue to progress at the human level.¹⁰ He describes the noosphere as a thinking and personalized membrane that covers the surface of Earth. He felt that as humanity grows in number and becomes more sophisticated in culture, an increasing level of socialization must be achieved which must finally lead to some kind of unity. Teilhard calls this new stage of humanity, “superconsciousness.” To make sense, he claims, evolution must converge. This is an important point in his thought; a divergent evolution would devalue the whole process which has progressed from inert matter to consciousness. Thus, in this last stage, evolution must tend toward a final point of convergence, which must be at the level of consciousness and person and must itself be “superconscious” and “superpersonal.”

In this final point of convergence of the whole evolutionary process, which Teilhard calls the Omega Point, the ultimate union of all conscious beings takes place and the whole universe finds its fulfillment. The energy that enables the world to converge he calls radial energy, the energy needed to drive the elements to higher levels of organization. At the human level, this energy takes the form of love.¹¹ Teilhard gives the word love a very general meaning and defines it as “a mutual internal affinity.”¹² Conscious beings (humans) converge towards the Omega Point through a process which implies a union that conserves their own identity, a process possible only through love. Love then energizes human evolution and draws it towards convergence. The Omega Point is not simply the point of convergence but also the creative force that empowers the evolutionary movement.¹³ When Teilhard analyzes the qualities that must characterize the Omega Point, he finds that, as the universal center of unification of the universe, the Omega Point must be personal, preexistent, and transcendent, and finally identifies the Omega Point with God. In this way God is not only the creator but also the final end of creation. This ultimate function is realized through the union, at the spiritual level, of all human consciousness in God.

Teilhard takes a further step, considering what he calls the “Christian phenomenon.”¹⁴ By this term he means the existence in humanity of a religious current with properties that agree with those found in the study of the human phenomenon. This phenomenon constitutes for him a true evolutionary human “phylum” which progresses in the same direction as the arrow defined by biogenesis and anthropogenesis, because of its orientation toward a synthesis based on love. It is connected with the slow and complicated rise of humanity from its very origin encouraged by an innate need for adoration.¹⁵ Teilhard identifies the spirit which guides and sustains human evolution toward union in the Omega Point with Christ, in whom God is made present already at the heart of the world. The evolutionary process, which has moved through the stages of cosmogenesis, biogenesis, and anthropogenesis, becomes for him finally a “Christogenesis;” that is, a process in which the whole universe becomes the cosmic body of Christ. It took Teilhard his whole life to realize the full import of this insight and to work out its consequences.

EARLY WRITINGS: THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST

After his study of theology in Hastings, England (1908-1912) and his study of geology in Paris between (1913-1915), Teilhard began to seek ways to integrate the figure of Christ into the vision of a world in evolution. He first wrote on this subject during World War I where he served as stretcher bearer from 1915 to 1919. The experience of war was for Teilhard a very deep, almost mystical one, a “baptism in the real,” an immersion in the struggle and agony of

human existence. He says, “For me, without the war there would have been a whole world of sentiments that I never would have known nor experienced.”¹⁶ During the war, Teilhard wrote twenty essays, almost all of them of a deep religious sentiment, in which he tried to integrate his Christian faith with his scientific vision. Although he was already thirty-four years old, these writings are filled with youthful enthusiasm and the seeds of his emerging thought. His first essay, entitled “Cosmic Life” (1916), is dedicated “To *Terra Mater* and through her in first place to Jesus Christ.” In this essay we find the first indication that the mystical body of Christ must be understood as a physical and organic reality and not merely as a moral or juridical entity.¹⁷ Here for the first time Teilhard assigned to Christ the adjective “cosmic.” He considers Christ as the center of all human effort and affirms that “Christ has a cosmic body shared through the whole universe.” In Section IV of this essay, entitled “Communion with God through Earth,” he joins union with God to human effort. He notes that in order to take part in the body of Christ we need not reject the world, reconciling “faith in the world and faith in God.” Teilhard affirms already, although not yet in an elaborate form, that the cosmos is centered in Jesus and calls evolution “holy.” The whole point of cosmic evolution is the incorporation, understood by him in a physical sense, of humanity in Christ. He also enters into a consideration of the sorrows and suffering of the world and relates them with the cross of Christ. He begins to explore the great mystery of how the life blood of Christ mixes with the blood of evolution. Teilhard ends the essay with a prayer to Christ who is “as gentle as the human heart, as fiery as the forces of nature, as intimate as life itself,” saying, “I love you as a world that has seduced me.”¹⁸ This first essay contains many ideas about the role of Christ in the universe that are not yet fully elaborated and still somewhat confused, ideas that have been maturing in Teilhard while on the front, during his experience of long periods of loneliness, of union with his fellow soldiers, and of the proximity of death. The central themes are how to unite with God through the world, the conciliation of his faith in God with his faith in the world, and the consideration of the world as the cosmic body of Christ. These still very incipient insights will develop and will be made more precise and clear as Teilhard lives his life.

The same ideas are presented in more poetic form in “Christ in Matter,” written that same year.¹⁹ This essay contains three short stories written in the style of English author Robert Hugh Benson. They set forth in poetic language the extension of the body of Christ through the whole material universe which Teilhard conceived as the body of Christ. The first narrative describes a vision in which a picture of Christ continuously extends itself until finally it occupies the whole universe; while the third story describes a vision of the consecrated Host extending itself until it encompasses the whole world. This cosmic sense of the Eucharist becomes one of the fundamental elements of Teilhard’s Christology.

A year later the same ideas are repeated in “The Mystical Milieu” (1917) where he affirms that all elements of the universe are grouped together according to a new order into one point, one person, Jesus, identifying Christ’s Mystical Body with his Cosmic Body.²⁰ Here Teilhard uses for the first time the word “*milieu*.” What he here calls the “mystical milieu” will later become the “divine milieu,” a key term in understanding his mystical vision of the world. In this essay, the mystical milieu is organized as a series of concentric circles. Teilhard passes from the outermost circle, which he calls the circle of presence, to those of consistency, energy, and spirit, to end finally at the center, in the circle of person. In this process, the mystical milieu acquires a divine-human form which has a name and a face, namely, that of Jesus. Referencing the Eucharist, Teilhard affirms that, through the consecration, not only the bread on the altar but also the whole universe becomes part of Christ and is therefore divine. When describing the circle of the spirit, Teilhard uses for the

first time the image of “fire” which will also have a long trajectory in his writings. He is talking here about the divine fire that descends as in a holocaust upon the universe and transforms it, revealing at its center the radiant presence of God. The essay ends in a prayer to Christ, whose face irradiates all reality and virtue, thus revealing the mystery of his mystical and cosmic body.

The essay “The Priest” (1918), a meditation on the priesthood, develops with greater amplitude the idea of the universal extension of the Eucharistic consecration and includes already some contents of the “Mass on the World.” “The Priest” is divided into four parts, namely, consecration, adoration, communion, and apostolate, extending the Eucharistic consecration to the whole universe. In a prayer which Teilhard addresses to Christ he asks: “Is not the infinite circle of things the definitive Host which you want to transform?”²¹ He considers that the words of the consecration (This is my Body; this is my Blood) are actually addressed to the whole creation. Thus he ends saying: “I kneel, Lord, before the universe that has imperceptibly, under the influence of the Host, become your adorable Body and your divine Blood.”²²

In “Forma Christi” (1918), Teilhard presents the Christian interior life as a synthesis of the love of God and the love of the world.²³ He begins saying that, on the cosmic time scale, the universe tends towards deeper union by way of a gradual evolution. Because of the attraction that Christ exercises on humanity and, through the human, on the entire universe, he sees Christ as the cosmic center of this universe, a unique center that is at the same time natural and supernatural, personal and cosmic. In this essay he returns to the problem of human effort. Humanity must first become immersed in material things and afterward emerge from them. Both movements are made in and through Christ. Teilhard considers human effort as an immersion into the universe in order to bring it under the influence of Christ. In order to do this the movement of immersion in the world must be followed by one of emergence and detachment from it. In this process the body (actually the flesh) of Christ plays an essential role. In Teilhard’s words, “In order to be the soul of our souls it is necessary that he (Christ) become first the flesh of our flesh.”²⁴ He ends his essay saying that Christ appears like a “form” that informs the “matter” of those who unite with him.

The cycle of essays which began with “Cosmic Life” ends with “The Universal Element” (1919), the last of Teilhard’s wartime writings.²⁵ Here Teilhard adds that the “universal element” of our world is Christ and ends by saying that “the first privilege of the Incarnate Word—and the most powerful appeal he makes to our generation—is that he is the Principle in whom the universe develops.”²⁶ It is of interest to find here formulated in an explicit way for the first time the difference between the pantheistic solution and the Christian one. While in pantheism the individual is dissolved and loses his personality in his integration into the whole, in the union in the Mystical Body of Christ the individual keeps his own individuality and personality because this union is made through love.²⁷ Teilhard had felt the attraction of the Orient, and maybe even a certain temptation to pantheism, during his years in Egypt as a science teacher at the Jesuit college of Cairo between 1905 and 1908. This temptation accompanied him all his life.

In this first stage of his writings, Teilhard tried to integrate the person of Christ within the context of the evolutionary world. To do this he used the union of humanity in the mystery of Christ’s Mystical Body, understood by him as physically and organically extended to the whole universe, to form the cosmic body of Christ. He avoided the dangers of pantheism, establishing that union with Christ is achieved through love, so that a person’s individuality

and personality are preserved. He also applied this conception to the Eucharistic mystery which he extended to consecration of the whole universe. It was already clear for him that the way to Christ must pass through human effort and that a religious attitude must incorporate the consideration of the universe. Faith in the world and faith in God are not opposed; rather, the first is a path to the second.

FROM COSMOGENESIS TO CHRISTOGENESIS

The second stage of Teilhard's writings covers the period from 1920 to 1935. Teilhard is now no longer on the front, but rather immersed in the environment of scientific research in the fields of geology and paleontology in either Paris or China, interchanging ideas with his colleagues. This gives his writings a different character. In a short note, "A Note on the Universal Christ" (1920), he stresses again the organic character of Christ as the center of the universe and traces this idea to the writings of Sts. Paul and John.²⁸ He wonders whether it is the universe or Christ that is greater and more adorable and opts for the universal Christ. This choice is not the result of his seeking to present today a more attractive figure of Christ, but the consequence of the need to reformulate Christian theology. This reformulation requires a new interpretation of original sin and redemption, the recognition of the world as a great whole, the extension of the Kingdom of God to the material universe, and the acceptance of the value of the world conceived as centered in Christ. The logical, moral, and juridical categories which theologians have used to explain the relationship between Christ and the universe must now be replaced by the physical and organic. He ends the essay by asking whether a new cycle of growth is opening in the Church, the cycle of the worship of Christ through the universe. This is one of the first times in which Teilhard explicitly propounds the need for a new way of doing theology in which the results and points of view of science are taken seriously. His own attempts along this line, which he always considered as experiments, were what most concerned ecclesiastical authorities.

In "My Universe" (1924), Teilhard presents, for the first time, an explicit identification between Christ and the "omega" (still in lower case letters) of evolution.²⁹ He summarizes his exposition in three points: "A) The Christ of revelation is nothing other than the omega. B) As omega, Christ presents himself as reachable and inevitable in all things. C) In order to become omega, Christ through his incarnation had to pervade and animate the Universe."³⁰ He supports his position with a long list of quotations from St. Paul.³¹ Three in particular, from the letter to the Colossians, which he quotes in Latin (Col 1, 17; 2, 10; 3, 11), drive him to exclaim: "But this is the very definition of omega!" and he adds "as a physicalist it is impossible for me to read St. Paul without seeing in a stunning way the universal and cosmic domination of the Incarnate Word."³² In this context, Teilhard writes not about evolution and its convergence, but about "Creative Union." By this term he means that the universe is formed from the "multiple" by successive stages of unification under God's creative influence. Creation is, for him, a process of unification which begins with absolute multiplicity and ends at the opposite pole where the unifying process of evolution eventually accomplishes the final unification in the Omega Point, the ultimate cosmic term. The multiple has a negative meaning of the resistance that must be overcome by Creative Union.

Teilhard uses the concept of Creative Union to explain the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ and the mystery of his Eucharistic presence. The incarnation must be understood as coexisting with the length of the universe and the resurrection as the moment when Christ assumes effectively his role as universal Center. In regard to the Eucharist, the matter of the sacrament is not only the bread on the altar, but the whole world, where the

universal Christ becomes ever more deeply present. Though he admits that the “primary body” of Christ is limited to the species of bread and wine, he claims that the Eucharistic presence is not limited to the bread and wine. Since Christ is omega, that is, the “universal form” of the world, his presence must extend from the “burning focus” of the consecrated host to the whole universe. Thus, in a certain manner we can say that the matter of the sacrament is the universe itself filled by the superhuman presence of the universal Christ.³³ His mystical vision does not fail to discover this universal and sacramental consecration of the world. Thus, it is difficult for him to decide which grace is more precious—to find Christ animating Matter or to find Matter making Christ tangible and universal.³⁴ The basic ideas of Teilhard’s fundamental conception of Christ’s role in the universe are already present in this essay, but they will be made more explicit in later writings.

The problem of pantheism is addressed in “Pantheism and Christianity” (1923). Teilhard considers that the difficulties of oriental pantheism with its denial of the individual person must be overcome by an evolutionary “Christian pantheism” which is realized through the unification of the world in Christ.³⁵ For him “pantheism is only the defective form in which is expressed a well-justified tendency in the human soul which can be satisfied only in Christianity,”³⁶ in the unifying role of Christ in the universe. Teilhard begins to recognize that under the various forms of pantheism there is an underlying human desire for the experience of the Whole and for union with the whole which leads to a true worship of the world. This is a natural concern and Teilhard wants to find a Christian answer to it. Rather than suppressing these tendencies as incompatible with the Christian spirit, a way must be found for their realization in the mystery of Incarnation understood in all its realism. Everything positive found in pantheism is present in the union of humanity with the rest of the universe in the mystical body of Christ. Teilhard describes this union with the term “Pleroma,” which in Greek means a plenitude that embraces everything. This term was used by St. Paul to describe the union of everything in Christ.³⁷ The term union as it is used here must be understood in an organic and physical sense and not merely in a juridical sense. It saves the individuality of the human person which in oriental pantheism is lost and disappears in the Whole. Thus, Teilhard writes that union in Christ “satisfies all the legitimate pantheistic needs of our spirit.”³⁸ He insists that his thought is in line with the doctrine of St. Paul and quotes the text, “God will be all in all,”³⁹ a text he considers to be the clearest statement of Christian “pantheism.”⁴⁰

Between 1926 and 1932 Teilhard wrote his most complete and extended work of religious character, *The Divine Milieu*,⁴¹ where he presents the master lines of his spirituality. He begins with the problem of the sanctification of human effort and human passivity. By passivity, he means all in human life that we consider negative, such as, suffering, weakness, sickness, and finally death. On the positive side, all human effort is actually directed to accomplish the union of the universe in Christ. He takes as a starting point, as we have seen in other writings, the physical reality of the Mystical Body of Christ. As a consequence of the presence of the universal Christ in the world through his incarnation, all in the world is sacred; nothing is profane. Then all human effort or activity as well as all passivity can be seen as divinized by the union of the world with Christ.

Besides the phrase, divine milieu, Teilhard uses two other terms, “diaphany,” from the Greek meaning translucent, and “incandescence,” to designate the transparency and luminous presence of God in the world. The divine milieu manifests itself as an incandescence of the interior layers of being which makes possible God’s diaphany, an appearance that cannot be prevented by all the powers of the world.⁴²

In this work, Teilhard answers the objection that his image of Christ is far removed from the Jesus of the Gospels. He affirms with force that the Christ he is talking about is “an extension of the Christ who was born of Mary and who died on the cross.”⁴³ For him the figure of Christ remains always “attached to the tangible truth of the events of the Gospels.”⁴⁴ He also incorporates, for the first time, Christian love or charity into his vision of the union of the world in Christ. It is precisely through love that the unification of humanity is achieved.⁴⁵ For a Christian, it is impossible to love Christ without loving others and to love others without loving Christ. Again he considers the Eucharist as the consecration of the world. In conclusion, he develops practical consequences for the Christian life of his considerations regarding the universal Christ, God’s diaphany and milieu in the universe, and lays the foundations for a Christian spirituality which incorporates human effort in the world.

Teilhard provides the most decisive elaboration of his thought in *The Phenomenon of Man* written first between 1938 and 1940 and revised many times later, especially between 1947 and 1948. In this work, he emphasizes the convergent nature of evolution and presents the Omega Point (from now on always written with capital letters) as the ultimate pole of the world.⁴⁶ Christ’s role in the universe is described in the epilogue which bears the title, “The Christian Phenomenon.”⁴⁷ Here Teilhard again insists that the redemptive incarnation of Christian doctrine must be considered as a “prodigious biological operation” with Christ as its Omega Center. If the world evolution is convergent and Christ is its center, then cosmogenesis becomes a “Christogenesis” meaning a process that forms the Total Christ. Teilhard tries to keep this work as a scientific reflection—claiming to address “only the phenomenon, but the entire phenomenon,”⁴⁸ without entering philosophical or theological speculations. For this reason, he insists that what he wants to show is the coherence between the convergence of world evolution suggested at the phenomenological level by the results of science and the role assigned to Christ in Christian revelation. He considers this as the completion of the path he has followed, guided by science, through the stages of evolution from biogenesis to anthropogenesis to arrive at the need for a convergence into an Omega Point. Since his Christian faith indicates that an Omega Point has already been made present in the world through Christ’s incarnation, Christ becomes for him not only the end of evolution but also its middle as the impulsive force that makes evolution possible. Christ’s role in the universe is, therefore, totally integrated into the dynamics of evolution as the Omega Point toward which everything converges. Christ then is able to satisfy all the human desires and expectations that have arisen through the evolutionary nature of the universe. Teilhard asks “Is not the Christian phenomenon, which rises upwards at the heart of the social phenomenon precisely the palpable influence on our world of *an other* and supreme Someone?” In other words, are not the Universal Christ and the Omega Point one and the same? He concludes: “in view of such a coincidence, even if I were not a Christian, but only a man of science, I think that I would have to raise the question.”⁴⁹

A NEW CHRISTOLOGY

From 1930 to the end of his life Teilhard made more explicit the need to find a new vision of Christ in the context of an evolutionary universe. Thus, the ideas we have already seen in his writings open themselves now to a more formal elaboration within a new Christology. This process begins in “Christology and Evolution” (1933) where he asks: “What form must our Christology take if it is to remain itself in a new world?”⁵⁰ Teilhard points out that the Christology of his day has been expressed in terms of a static worldview. Today, science tells us that the universe has evolved throughout billions of years from elementary particles, to

form stars and planets, life on earth, and finally the human. This is a dynamic worldview. Because of this new understanding, Teilhard insists on the need to develop a new Christology, which must take into account the fact of evolution. He realized that this would entail the revision of some very fundamental concepts such as the meaning of redemption, incarnation, and evangelization, so that they satisfy the nature of an evolutionary world. Redemption had been traditionally seen in terms of reparation and expiation and as a way to overcome original sin. Teilhard makes it clear that the literal interpretation of the sin of Adam and Eve cannot be held today when we know more about what was involved in the process of human evolution. Moreover, the very idea of evil and sin must be changed since physical and moral evil necessarily emerge in the process of evolution. It is not surprising that these ideas created serious concerns for ecclesiastic authorities who continued to look with suspicion on the theory of evolution. Teilhard understood that the real sense of redemption is not simply the expiation of sin, but complete victory over the mystery of evil, which he saw as the shadow that inevitably accompanies the process of evolution. This victory can be accomplished only in the light of the Cross. Incarnation must now be seen primarily as the presence in the world of the very Pole of its convergence that attracts everything to itself, so that Christ can truly be said to be the savior of evolution. Thus, evolution cannot fail since it is animated by Christ. Teilhard finishes this essay calling the Universal Christ the Christ of evolution.

The same ideas are repeated at the end of “How I Believe” (1934), where the Universal Christ appears as the term of evolution and the only object of Teilhard’s faith.⁵¹ In this essay Teilhard summarizes the fundamental lines of his faith. He begins defining what he understands by belief and describes the four stages of his faith—in the world, in the Spirit, in immortality, and in the convergence of evolution in a personal center. Considering the religious phenomenon, he concludes that only Christianity is coherent with these stages. He finds that his faith in the world is assumed by his faith in the universal Christ, who is a synthesis of Christ and the world. This Christ revealed by the Gospels is also the final term of evolution. Only faith in the universal Christ can make possible the convergence of all religions in order to form what he sees as the religion of the future.

Teilhard returned to this subject a few years later in a monograph entitled “Christ the Evolver” (1942). He begins with a warning that this essay is not for the general public who may have in the past misunderstood some of his ideas, but for his colleagues, philosophers, and theologians.⁵² The essay arises from his need to readjust the fundamental lines of traditional Christology to make them coherent with the vision of an evolving universe. Teilhard wanted to pass from the Christian notion of Christ-Redeemer to Christ-Évoluteur without deforming the idea of redemption. Teilhard sees a new vision rising on the horizon of Christ’s role not only as redeemer but also as the engine of evolution leading it towards its very consummation in Christ.

These ideas are further explained in his essay, “Super-humanity, Super-Christ, Super-charity” (1943). Here, Teilhard took as a starting point what he considered the three super-realities which are closely related: Super-humanity with an earth dimension, Super-Christ corresponding to this Super-humanity and Super-charity with the same dimensions as the other two.⁵³ He insists that by a Super-Christ he means not a new Christ, but Christ in whom we discover renewed and larger dimensions since Christ is the enlivener of all the biological and spiritual energies of the universe. In this essay Teilhard used for the first time the term Christ-Omega, meaning Christ as the engine of evolution and the one under whose influence

our charity becomes universal and dynamic. This new form of charity, animated by the presence of Christ-Omega, is what Teilhard means by the term Super-charity.

Teilhard's Christology becomes more precise in "Christianity and Evolution" (1945) which has as a subtitle "Suggestions for a New Theology."⁵⁴ Here he points out that, over the past twenty years, his ideas have matured, contributing new elements toward an elaboration of a "Christian evolution." He reminds us that the present religious situation can be characterized by an apparent opposition between faith in the world and faith in God and by the need for finding a synthesis between the two. In order to find this synthesis, the new humanism, which is full of life but "acephalous," that is, without a head to give it consistency and unity, must find through Christian faith the head that it needs. During the first centuries of the Church, the first concern was to come to understand the position of Christ with respect to the Trinitarian mystery; today, the Church's main interest needs to be to make clear the relation between Christ and the universe. Science has discovered the evolutionary nature of the universe, a "universe . . . knit together and convulsed by a vast movement of convergence."⁵⁵ This new image of the world forces us to change our image of God and God's relationship to the world. In order to understand this new image of God we must begin by changing the traditional metaphysics of being into a metaphysics of union. In this new perspective, the essence of being consists in establishing new relations through union and by creating new unities. This new metaphysics of union must be applied also to the Trinitarian mystery and its relation to the world. It is precisely the union of the three divine Persons which forms the essence of God. From this point of view, we have to recognize that God creates only through union, that is, through an evolutionary process which tends to ever greater unions. The final union of the created world with God is achieved in the Universal Christ. Thus the three fundamental mysteries of Christian faith, namely, creation, incarnation, and redemption, are the three faces of one fundamental process, "a fourth mystery . . . the creative union of the world in God" designated by Teilhard as "pleromization."⁵⁶

Teilhard used his metaphysics of union to express this mystery of creation and consummation of the world in Christ that will take place at the end of time. The Universal-Christ, Omega-Point of the universe, is transforming the cosmogenesis in a Christogenesis, that is, the formation of the Total-Christ in which the whole world is united through a personal union of all the rational elements of the world. In this process, the world itself is personalized, since the ultimate union is a personal one, achieved in its union with Christ. Teilhard concludes that we must literally love Evolution, since it is through it that the Universal Christ is generated. Charity acquires a new form consisting in the love of God in and through the genesis of humanity and the world.⁵⁷ In these essays, Teilhard insists on the Christian orthodoxy of his thought which he relates to the texts of Sts. Paul and John and to the writings of the Greek Fathers. Moreover, in this essay, he expresses his desire and hope that his religious thought be accepted as a form of "*sentire cum Ecclesia*" or more exactly "*praesentire cum Ecclesia*." Here Teilhard is referring to the rules proposed by Saint Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises to have true sentiments with the Church.⁵⁸ In spite of all difficulties and misunderstandings, Teilhard always remained totally faithful to the Church and to the Society of Jesus.

TEILHARD'S LAST WRITINGS: THE CHRISTIC

The final stage in Teilhard's elaboration of his Christological thought corresponds to the last five years of his life. The fundamental text of this period is his spiritual autobiography, "The Heart of Matter" (1950), where he dedicates its third part, "The Christic," to the relation

between Christ and the evolution of the world. He begins with the ideas we have found in previous writings identifying the Omega-Point of a convergent evolution with the Christ of Christian faith, adding that the cosmic sense must become a “Christic” sense. The “Christic” encompasses the influence and presence of the Universal Christ who drives evolution at all levels of the universe to their final union with him. The Christic introduces a new dimension to the universe, a dimension that realizes the synthesis of the traditional “religions of the Above” with what the modern world expects of the “religions of the Ahead.”⁵⁹ To this dimension corresponds “a new faith which unites the upward faith toward a transcendent God and a driving faith toward an immanent God and a new charity also where the driving passions of the earth are combined and divinized.”⁶⁰ Teilhard admits that the two axes of his life, faith in the world and faith in God, have emerged independently. They are like the two halves, Christian and pagan, of his inner being which have finally converged into a fundamental unity. Christian mysticism, whose earliest seeds he received in infancy from his mother under the form of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, has culminated in the burning fire of love, the Omega attraction with which this heart is identified. In this essay, Teilhard’s preferred image for Christ’s influence in the universe is “fire,” a fire that penetrates the universe with its presence. Teilhard also uses the term “Christic diaphany” to stress the transparency of Christ’s influence in the universe. “The Heart of Matter” ends with a prayer that begins: “Lord, whom I have never ceased to seek throughout my life and to place in the heart of universal matter,” and ends with the desire that the ever-greater Christ’s “universal Presence spring forth in a blaze that is at once Diaphany and Fire.”⁶¹

Teilhard presents briefly the relation between the cosmic and the Christic in “The God of Evolution” (1953).⁶² “The God of evolution” is not only the God who creates through evolution, but the God made man, the Universal Christ, who is at the same time the Omega-point discovered by science and the center of Christian faith. In him a synthesis is made between the Omega of science and the Omega of Christian mysticism. The presence of Christ-Omega turns the cosmic dimension into a Christic dimension. In this form the cosmic sphere expands and increases the Christic sphere while the Christic sphere fills the cosmic sphere with the energy of love. Teilhard again uses the image of fire to express the enlivening action of Christ in the world. Science and mysticism are united about the figure of Christ finally identified as the Omega-Point of the universal convergent evolution.

One month before his death, Teilhard wrote an essay that can be considered his spiritual testament, *The Christic* (1955).⁶³ Here he reflects again on the ideas he has already developed in *The Divine Milieu* and the “Mass on the World.” In the introduction he warns that this is not a speculative dissertation but a testimony of an inner personal experience. In his words: “today, after forty years of continuous reflections, I experience exactly the same vision and feel the need to present it for a last time . . . with the same wonder and passion.”⁶⁴ He begins with the idea of a convergent universe and identifies the Omega of evolution with the Christ of revelation. In this form he finds both a consummation of the universe in Christ and of Christ by the universe, which he describes as a “Christified universe” and a “universalized Christ.”⁶⁵ The evolving cosmogenesis becomes in this form a true Christogenesis, that is, the convergence of the whole universe in the universal Christ. The active presence of Christ in the world constitutes what he calls the “evolving super-milieu.” The encounter between the spiritual potentialities of a convergent universe and the cosmic demands of the Incarnate Word form the “Christic Milieu,” where heavenly and earthly forces meet. Christianity, born again under these perspectives, is the religion “specifically driving evolution,” in other words, the “religion of the future.”

However, a shadow of doubt passes through the last paragraphs of this essay, when Teilhard realizes that he alone has been aware of this wonderful diaphany which has transformed his whole life. He is not able to quote a single author or a single work in sympathy with this vision. Perplexed, he asks himself: "The Universal Christ? The Divine Milieu? Are they, after all, the result of an inner mirage? This is what I often ask myself."⁶⁶ But, he reaffirms, "three successive waves of evidence emerge in my interior every time I feel these doubts, erasing in my spirit the false fear that my Christic may be no more than an illusion."⁶⁷ He summarizes this evidence as the fundamental coherence between his thought and his heart, the passion which allows him to love at the same time God and the evolving universe, and the superiority of this new vision over the traditional ones. Love for God and faith in the world can be found together elsewhere, but it seems that only in Teilhard have they been united with such force. With renewed hope he ends saying: "It is enough that truth appears just once, in a single spirit, so that nothing can prevent it from spreading universally and setting everything ablaze."⁶⁸

THOUGHT AND LIFE

We can still ask ourselves whether Teilhard's Christological conception was merely a theoretical construction or whether it was truly the center of his life, that is, whether it also constituted the core of his personal spirituality and interior life. We find an answer in his notes written during his yearly Spiritual Exercises. The Spiritual Exercises are eight day retreats Jesuits make in groups or alone every year following the guidelines established by Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It is common that during these retreats Jesuits make personal notes that they use afterwards for meditation and prayer. Teilhard's personal notes written during some of these retreats have been preserved. These notes allow us to follow the evolution of his personal meditation.⁶⁹ In these notes we find that the ideas in his writings are also the constants that form the core of his personal meditation and prayer. In his Exercises, Teilhard doesn't exactly follow the traditional lines established by St. Ignatius. He considered his vision much more expansive than the *Exercises* rather than contrary to them. For example, he thought that ideas in the meditation on the "Principle and Foundation" correspond to a static conception of the world and that they are full of legalism since he never considered the created world as only a means to save our souls. Rather, Teilhard saw the world as the object of what he calls a "conquering communion."⁷⁰ In 1952 he wrote to Fr. Leroy, a fellow Jesuit, "I am becoming more and more aware of the deep rift that little by little has been made between my religious vision of the world and that of the Exercises. Rift not of contradictions but of expansion."⁷¹ On the other hand, he found himself in total consonance with the last meditation of the Exercises, the "Contemplation to Attain Love" in which the presence and action of God in all things is considered.

Throughout these notes we find that Teilhard's vision of Christ and the world belong not only in the realm of ideas, but formed also the motor and core of his spiritual life. Year after year, his Exercises centered on the same ideas, the place of Christ in an evolving universe. The term Christ-Omega already appears in his notes of 1922 and is repeated in all of the following years. In 1940 he coins the term "omegalize" to express the union of the universe with the Total-Christ. A year later he presents two perspectives which from then on summarize the focus of his activity: to "universalize Christ and Christify the Universe."⁷² Teilhard conceived his life as one of fidelity to Christ-Omega. Thus, in 1948 he wrote "more than ever it is Christ-Omega who sheds light and guides my life." He admits that this image of Christ has little to do with that presented by Church people.⁷³ Finally in 1950 he expressed his desire that into his life nothing should enter which is not "Christifiable" and shows his

concern about “ending well,” that is, with total faith and confession to Christ-Omega and the Cosmos. Ending well, meant for him, having had the time and occasion to formulate the essentials of his message.⁷⁴ On the last day of his last Exercises in 1954 he summarized his vision in a single word: “Pan-Christism.”⁷⁵ He finds that it is the same to “Christify” as “to be Christified.”⁷⁶ The pantheistic temptation, which we have already made reference to, is finally overcome. His notes for the last Exercise end with the words “abandonment to the end”—an intuition, perhaps, of his death in April of the following year. These few references to his notes of the Exercises show clearly that Teilhard’s vision of Christ-Omega was not a mere speculation, but constituted the core of his life. To spread this message was his true vocation, one to which he dedicated all his strength.

Another source that sheds light on the extent to which Teilhard’s conception of Christ’s role in the world constituted the inspiration of his life and work is present in the prayers found in many of his works, some of them already quoted.⁷⁷ His “Mass on the World,” written first in 1918 during the war and later in 1923 in the Ordos desert in Mongolia, deserves special mention.⁷⁸ This very beautiful prayer follows the guidelines of the celebration of the Mass and presents the consecration of the world as an extension of that of the Eucharist. It is full of the ideas of Christ present in the world: “mysteriously and in very truth, at the touch of the supersubstantial Word, the universe, an immense Host, becomes flesh. All matter is henceforth incarnate, O my God, through your Incarnation.”⁷⁹ To this Jesus incarnate in the world he addresses his prayer:

To your Body, in all its extension, that is, to the World converted by your potency and by my faith in the wonderful and living crucible where everything disappears in order to be born again, I give myself up in order to live and die in it, Jesus . . . Glorious Christ, divine influence secretly diffused and active in the depth of matter and the dazzling center where all the innumerable fibers of the manifold meet, . . . it is you to whom my being cries out with a desire as vast as the universe, “in truth you are my Lord and my God.”⁸⁰

The text of his prayers clearly shows that his Christology was not only the result of theological reflection, but, above all, the fruit of a deep mystical experience. For him, neither can Christ be conceived separated from the universe nor can the universe be separated from Christ. Teilhard lived this presence of Christ in the world with an ardent passion and tried to share it with those with whom he came into contact despite all the misunderstanding and suspicion he encountered.

CONCLUSION

Teilhard’s Christology developed in the context of his evolutionary cosmology. It was clear to him that the evolving nature of the universe proposed by science implied not only the abandonment of a static worldview but also the need to reformulate the Christian mysteries of Incarnation and Redemption. This led him to propose a new Christology. In his conception of a convergent universe toward an Omega-Point, Teilhard identified this center with the Christ of revelation. Thus the figure of Christ acquires cosmic dimensions and Teilhard can apply to Christ the adjectives cosmic, universal, and total. The evolutionary process, that is cosmogenesis, becomes for him a true Christogenesis, that is, the formation of the Universal Christ. The universe, seen under this perspective, becomes a new milieu transparent or diaphanous to the action of God, which Teilhard calls the Divine Milieu and the Christic Milieu. For him, the cosmic and the Christic are so intimately united that they cannot be separated. Teilhard’s notes from his Spiritual Exercises and his prayers confirm that these

ideas were the core of his whole life and the font of his spirituality and action. Over against today's tendency to overemphasize the human aspects of the man Jesus of Nazareth who took the side of the poor and the oppressed and suffered in his own flesh injustice and death, Teilhard's ideas about the cosmic dimensions of Christ may appear strange and out of place. Often the mystery of Jesus' divinity becomes difficult to understand and to integrate it into our vision of a world perceived as broken and unjust. Today, however, faced with the all-pervading influence of science, with its secularizing consequences, Teilhard's conception of the Christ-Omega is a font of inspiration. In Teilhard's writings, we find a synthesis for our faith in the world and our faith in God and an optimistic view of the progress of humanity which with the whole universe will finally achieve its consummation in Christ.

Notes

¹ Among the works which deal with Teilhard's mysticism we find the already classic work of Christopher F. Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the mystery of Christ* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday-Image, 1968) and the more recent of Thomas M. King, *Teilhard de Chardin* (Wilmington: Michel Glazier, 1988); E. de la Héronnière, *Teilhard de Chardin, une mystique de la traversée* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003); A. Danzin and J. Masurel, *Teilhard de Chardin visionnaire du monde nouveau* (Paris: Rocher, 2005) and Gustave Martelet, *Teilhard de Chardin, prophète d'un Christ toujours plus grand* (Paris: Lessius, 2005).

² I will give the references to Teilhard's works using the edition of his complete works in French, *Œuvres de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, 1-13, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1955-1976. In order to follow the chronological development of his thought the year each essay was written is given in the text. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le phénomène humain*, *Œuvres* 1, 25.

³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Comment je vois," *Œuvres*, 11, 177-223.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le phénomène humain*, *Œuvres*, 1, 324-344; "Comment je vois," *Œuvres*, 11, 181-223.

⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Comment je crois," *Œuvres*, 10, 117-52.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸ See Michael Heller, "Teilhard's Vision of the World and Modern Cosmology," *Teilhard Studies* 58 (Spring 2009): 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "*Le phénomène humain*," *Œuvres*, 1, 263-72.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 287-325.

¹² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "L'énergie humaine," *Œuvres* 6, 180-92.

¹³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Du cosmos à la cosmogénèse," *Œuvres* 7, 258-77; "La convergence de l'Univers," *Œuvres* 7, 295-309.

¹⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le phénomène humain*, *Œuvres* 1, 324-44; "Comment je vois," *Œuvres* 11, 203-20.

¹⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Comment je vois," *Œuvres* 11, 204.

¹⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "La nostalgie du front," *Œuvres* 12, 227-41, 239.

¹⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "La vie cosmique" (1916), *Œuvres* 12, 19-81, especially 57-75.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

¹⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Le Christ dans la Matière," *Œuvres* 12, 109-27.

²⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Le Milieu mystique," *Œuvres* 12, 155-92, especially 188-92.

²¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Le prêtre," *Œuvres* 12, 309-333.

²² *Ibid.*, 318-319.

²³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Forma Christi," *Œuvres* 12, 365-385.

²⁴ Ibid., 384.

²⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “L’élément universel,” *Œuvres* 12, 430-445.

²⁶ Ibid., 445.

²⁷ What Teilhard refers to as the Christian solution to pantheism and later “Christian pantheism” is more properly referred to today as panentheism, meaning that God is in all created things; all created things are in God; but God is greater than all that is created.

²⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Note sur le Christ-Universel,” *Œuvres* 9, 38-44.

²⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Mon univers,” *Œuvres* 9, 65-114, especially 81-94.

³⁰ Ibid., 82.

³¹ Among the quoted texts are: Col 1, 15-20; 2, 9-12, 19; 3, 10; Eph 1, 10, 19-23; 4,9; Rom 8, 18-23.

³² Teilhard de Chardin, “Mon univers,” 84.

³³ Ibid., 93-94.

³⁴ Teilhard always wrote Matter in this context with a capital letter.

³⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Panthéisme et Christianisme,” *Œuvres* 10, 73-91.

³⁶ Ibid., 73-74.

³⁷ Eph 1, 10; Col 1, 19.

³⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, “Panthéisme et Christianisme,” 87.

³⁹ 1 Cor 15, 28.

⁴⁰ See note 27

⁴¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le milieu divin*, *Œuvres* 4, 1-202.

⁴² Ibid., 147-64.

⁴³ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 178-86.

⁴⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le phénomène humain*, 286-303.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 324-32.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 332.

⁵⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Christologie et évolution,” *Œuvres* 10, 95-113.

⁵¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Comment je crois,” *Œuvres* 10, 117-52.

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- ⁵² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Le Christ Évoluteur,” *Œuvres* 10, 163-76.
- ⁵³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Super-humanité, super-Christ, super-charité” *Œuvres* 9, 195-218.
- ⁵⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, “Christianisme et évolution,” *Œuvres* 10, 203-30.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.
- ⁵⁸ G. E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992).
- ⁵⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Le Cœur de la matière,” *Œuvres* 13, 50-74.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 67-70.
- ⁶² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Le Dieu de l’évolution,” *Œuvres* 10, 285-91.
- ⁶³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Le Christique,” *Œuvres* 13, 95-117.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 97-98.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.
- ⁶⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Notes de retraites, 1919-1954*. Paris: Édition du Seuil, 2003. Notes of the yearly Spiritual Exercises between 1919 and 1954 except those of the period 1923-1938.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 181, n. 9.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 324, n. 2.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 202-3.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 291.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 303.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 348-49.
- ⁷⁷ A selection of these prayers can be found in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymne de l’univers* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1961). Pensées choisies par F. Tardivel, especially, “Présence de Dieu au monde,” 79-98 and “Dans le Christ total,” 144-68. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).
- ⁷⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “La Messe sur le monde,” *Œuvres* 13, 141-56.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 156.