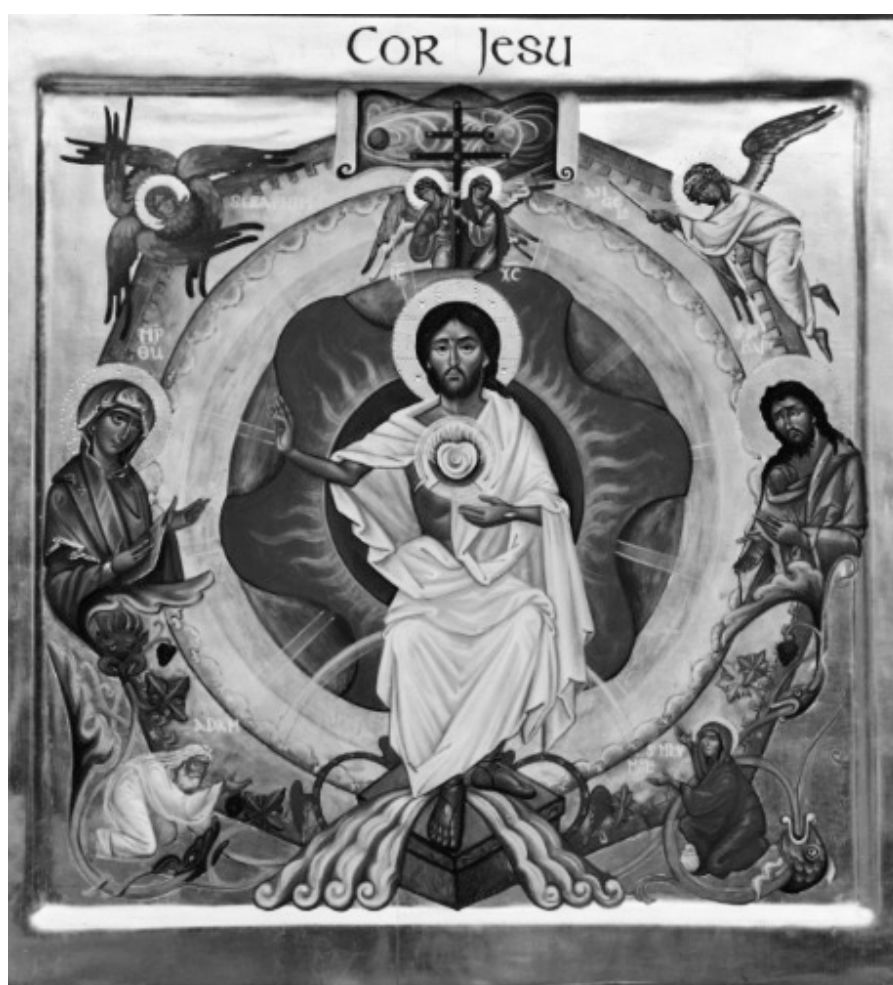


Evolution & Christ in the Mystical Theology of Teilhard de Chardin



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French paleontologist and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881 – 1955) was an influential and highly regarded scientist in his field, and a tireless advocate for a Christianity capable of meeting the needs of the age. Teilhard was deeply distressed by the one-sidedness of both science and religion, and by the unnecessary and tragic consequences of their bifurcation. The title of this presentation catches the spirit of Teilhard’s abiding concern – to stand confidently in both the empirical knowledge of science, and in the centrality of Christ. Teilhard’s great synthesis was the fruitful consequence of this devotion equally to the external domain of empirical science, as much as to the interior domain of spiritual experience. A mystic may be described as one who is willing to take the inner facts as seriously as the outer. So it may be said that Teilhard’s rich legacy is the witness of a faithful pilgrim who devoted equal commitment to both external and internal facts. This commitment was very costly, as the story of Teilhard’s life with his church bears witness. That Teilhard was willing to bear this cost is relevant to his enduring legacy. That Teilhard’s essential message, 60 years after his death, remains richly enlivening to those familiar with it, yet revolutionary news to an anxious and fearful church, is testimony to relevance of his spiritual vision in our time.

David Moore’s initial tertiary studies were in chemistry, working for a few years as an industrial chemist. Crossing the great academic divide, communication studies and an education diploma led to secondary teaching in Media Studies, prior to theological studies and formation as priest – having served in that ministry in the dioceses of Perth and Christchurch, prior to moving to St John’s Camberwell in late 2013. David initially ‘met’ Teilhard during formation as spiritual director in Perth in the late 1980s. The relationship became serious in Christchurch at the start of the new millennium. This is a modified version of an address first given at the Institute for Spiritual Studies, St Peter’s Easter Hill, Melbourne. The icon on the front cover is by Ian Knowles: Cor Jesu, Christ Omega, the Universal Christ.

NOTE: This address is offered in the context of spiritual exploration, and assumes that those who participate appreciate the value of the inner life and a broad understanding of the contemplative orientation. In such a context no attempt is made to present anything approximating a ‘definitive’ theology. The thoughts in these meditations are tentative, but an interim staging post upon the ongoing work of my own reflection, with the assistance of Teilhard as I have understood him. They are offered in this spirit, with the hope that there might be something here to assist and foster the reader’s inner life. Therefore, these meditations are intended only for those receiving them in such a context of contemplative reflection.

Introduction

I wish to begin by expressing my gratitude to Marie Makinson and the C G Jung Society of Queensland for this very kind invitation to speak about Teilhard de Chardin – especially since this year marks the 60th anniversary of Teilhard’s death. There are many fine commentators on Teilhard and his vision. What follows is not an academic analysis of Teilhard and his legacy – there are excellent books in the list provided. I can’t offer anything that might be considered comprehensive or authoritative. All I can speak about with any authority is the reality of my own experience as one who is a spiritual seeker - in a post-modern, post-Christianity, multi-faith, quantum context; within the limitations of being a priest within the context of a specific Christian tradition - about how Teilhard has assisted in that endeavour.

Four factors seem to have caused me to gravitate towards Pierre Teilhard de Chardin:

First: the sheer expansiveness and the large-heartedness of his exploration and vision.

Second: his costly decision to remain faithful to the church which treated him so appallingly.

Third: that a unitive transformative vision (not purity and legal-moral boundaries) is Teilhard’s abiding concern.

Fourth: and most crucially, an experiential vision of a Christ and a Christian faith which seems to me to have a future – albeit with limitations, some of which were identified by C G Jung.

Teilhard diagnosed crucial Western spiritual problems of our time:¹

1. Christian confession has rendered Christ as a static figure
2. Christ’s principal business is judgment
3. Christ has become a law of life, instead of being a way of life

¹ Iliia Delio, **Christ in Evolution**, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008, p173. “For too long, the Christian confession has rendered Christ a static figure who looms in judgment over the world. Christ has become less a way of life than a law of life... The static world of the Greek / medieval cosmos was the world in which the traditional understanding of Jesus Christ was conceived. In this world, marked by order, hierarchy, and structure, Jesus Christ was portrayed as a single, individual existent, born in absolute space and time. A static, ordered, and hierarchical world gave birth to a static, ordered, and hierarchical understanding of Jesus Christ as God and human... Through a labyrinth of Greek cosmology, terminology, ecumenical councils, and political battles, we have locked the mystery of God into a single, individual human person, Jesus of Nazareth, so that Jesus Christ has become a single, individual superhero and we are mere spectators to the divine drama.” I have added to Delio’s list of seven with the last two items.

4. Christ is portrayed as single, individual existent – static & absolute in space & time
5. The mystery of God has been locked into an externalised, single individual human person
6. This individual, Jesus of Nazareth, has been rendered as the single individual superhero
7. This reduces the rest of humankind as mere spectators to the divine drama
8. The consequent doctrines of Original Sin and the Fall, have induced the Christian fixation on rescue religion
9. Which has fostered the radical and complete separation between God and the creation

Of course, this is a particularly Western theological problem. Eastern Christianity, with its emphasis on Θεωσις *Theōsis*, does at least have a way by which some of these problems are ameliorated.

The mystical theology of Teilhard has assisted me greatly in finding a way through: beyond a static Christ; past the passivity of the Christ-follower and our irrelevance to the Divine drama; transcending the schizophrenia that rescue religion encourages.

‘Mystic’

Let me briefly explain how I am using the term ‘mystical’. I am not offering a technical definition – this is beyond me. I assume a theology taking full account of revelation handed down by scripture and tradition, yes, yet fully informed by subjective personal experience.² Such experience can extend across the full range of human sensory perception: not just the rational-intellectual, but also the organic-experiential. I warm to the saying that the goal of the mystic is to be ‘immersed in God like a drop of water in the ocean, or like the light shining through the pane of glass’.³ Union with God, and with the whole creation, is the abiding preoccupation of the mystic. Ursula King expresses it thus: “someone who seeks, above all, the knowledge and love of God and who experiences to an extraordinary degree the profoundly personal encounter with the energy of divine love.”⁴ At this level it may be that all religions – and indeed all that’s truly human – come closest to each other. The mystical orientation liberates from the tyrannies of externalism, literalism, legalism, and historicism. Jesus and

² Though I am aware that for the early Church ‘fathers’ mysticism referred to an objective participation in the mystery of Christ – by ‘objective’, meaning the individual’s subjective experience was not relevant. See for instance, Andrew Louth ‘Mysticism’, in Gordon S Wakefield (ed.), **A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality**, London: SCM, 1983, pp272-274.

³ William Johnston, **Christian Mysticism Today**, London: Collins, 1984, p13.

⁴ Ursula King, **Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages**, London: Routledge, 2001, p3.

Paul are mystics in this sense. Teilhard certainly fits the bill. Some say that it's in this spirit that all persons are called to be mystics.

Brief Biography

Perhaps you may already know a great deal about Teilhard, or perhaps none at all? There are many good accounts of the life of Teilhard, so this is a mere sketch for those unfamiliar with Teilhard. Teilhard was one of the foremost paleontologists of his day – prolific researcher, writer, teacher, and contributor to significant paleontological discoveries. And Teilhard was a Jesuit priest – faithful to his vocation to the end, to his last day, Easter Day 1955. During WW1 he volunteered for service, and chose to serve not as a chaplain but as a stretcher-bearer at the front. It was during his 5 years at the front that many of his central insights came to birth.⁵ About half of his life he was an exile from his native France – much of it in China. He died in exile.

I am glad to have been given this opportunity to reflect on Teilhard in this the 60th anniversary year of his death. Sixty years ago on Friday 10 April, Teilhard died in a small NY apartment, alone – having earlier in the day returned from celebrating the Easter mysteries. This 20th century giant in the faith whose ideas have influenced so far and wide was given a near-private burial in a Jesuit cemetery in up-state New York on Easter Monday.

During his lifetime his voluminous paleontological writings were widely published. But his church repeatedly refused permission to publish his spiritual-philosophical writings. We are exceedingly fortunate that near the end of his life Teilhard handed his writings over not to his religious order – which would have destroyed them, or buried them for centuries – but to Jeanne Mortier, a lay woman! This feels to me somewhat like the resurrected Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene! Following his death Mademoiselle Mortier set about having Teilhard's extensive writings published. Within a matter of years about 18 volumes of collected works had appeared, first in French, then in English! In addition, there are now 9 published volumes of his letters. Critics both positive and negative agree that Teilhard's thinking had a profound effect in the 20th century well beyond the confines of the church - from theology to ecology, international politics to the development of the Internet.⁶

⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, **Writings in Time of War**, London: Collins, 1968.

⁶ See for example A Fabel & D St John (eds), **Teilhard in the 21st Century**, Maryknoll: Ordus, 2003; Thierry Meynard, **Teilhard and the Future of Humanity**, New York: Fordham Press, 2006.

Critiques Of Teilhard

A very brief word about critiques of Teilhard. At the time of first publishing, much was made of the entirely negative critique by the then-famous biologist and Nobel laureate Peter Medawar. Many took up Medawar's critique - without critiquing Medawar! Richard Dawkins, following Medawar, "savagely attacked" Teilhard for gross "self-deception"⁷ But Medawar has been taken to task for failing to grasp the nature and type of Teilhard's synthesis and for claiming rather too much - Peter Todd being one of those to do so.⁸

Theologians of a rigidly rationalist bent – especially Barthians⁹ – tend to condemn Teilhard completely: promoting 'dangerous, misleading, and heterodox' ideas – "undermining the faith of many sincere Christian believers," making "evolution ... a Christ-inspired salvation by works,"¹⁰ pronouncing him to be the gnostic founder of a new religion,¹¹ declaring Teilhard's evolutionary optimism as 'ultimately unhelpful'.¹² Teilhard being silenced by his church meant there could be no meaningful intellectual debate of his ideas during his lifetime.

It is a matter of regret that Teilhard did not really engage with other world faiths. It has been observed that Teilhard's cosmic Christ has something of the taint of an old-fashioned Christian imperialism – perhaps a Jesuit

⁷ Peter Todd, **The Individuation of God: Integrating Science and Religion**, Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 2012, p5.

⁸ Charles E Raven, *Teilhard de Chardin: Scientist and Seer*, Edinburgh: R & R Clark, 1962, pp197-214. "[Medawar's] review of the *Phenomenon of Man in Mind*, LXX, pp. 99-106, though called a Critique violates most of the principles of criticism." See also Peter Todd pp5, 78; also Donald Wayne Viney, 'Teilhard, Medawar, and the New Atheism', in Ilija Delio (ed.), **From Teilhard to Omega: Co-creating an Unfinished Universe**, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014, p127-148.

⁹ Teilhard was especially critical of Barthian theology for severing humanity from its source within creation. See John P Dourley, **Jung and the Religious Alternative: The Rerooting**, Edwin Mellen Press, 1995, chapter 4 'Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian Attempt to Reconnect'.

¹⁰ David H Lane, **The Phenomenon of Teilhard: Prophet for a New Age**, "In passing a decisive judgement on Teilhard's writings, I do so fully aware that many may be deeply offended. If Teilhard has been a beacon of light to them and truly assisted in moving them closer towards Christian faith, or even embracing it, then I rejoice with them. However, in my view, the devastating impact of his erroneous "theological" fictions far outweighs any morsels of spiritual truth that can be gleaned from his writings. These fictions have been instrumental in undermining the faith of many sincere Christian believers, as many scholars have noted. A warning needs to be sounded, loud and clear (see Jas. 5:16) against the deceptions, ambiguities, and errors which are rife in his writings." p170. Ian R W Macdonald, **Contingent and Created: The Significance of the Concept of Createdness for a Theology in Dialogue with Science, with Special Reference to the Works of Colin E. Gunton**, PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, "This leads onto our treatment of Teilhard, whose astonishing vision of a world in evolutionary christic development lead him to overlook ultimately the createdness and rational contingency of evolution. For Teilhard the significance of the end far outweighs that of the beginning, and the significance of unity far outweighs that of the disunited or disunity itself. Ultimately, evolution loses its createdness in Teilhard's vision as radial energy resolves itself into a christogenic force. Evolution is the redemption of the multiple which has for all time confronted God with disunity and evil. This virtually otiose God can only act to encourage this escape, by making himself known in history as Jesus Christ, the redeemer from multiplicity, and then by becoming an explicit element of evolution. Evolution is a Christ-inspired salvation by works.", p265.

¹¹ Wolfgang Smith, **Teilhardism and the New Religion: A Thorough Analysis of the Teachings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**, Rockford: Tan Books, 1988, pxiv, 210, 242-244.

¹² John Polkinghorne, **Science and Christian Belief: Theological reflections of a bottom-up thinker**, London: SPCK, 1994, p162.

failing? Though we should remember the religious environment of the early decades of the twentieth century in which he was writing.

There are others, such as Jungian analyst, priest, and theologian John Dourley, who have suggested that Teilhard simply didn't go far enough in terms of his reflection on consciousness and the psyche, being "restricted by his commitment to Christianity and the image of Christ".¹³ Even so, Jung might have applauded Teilhard's intuition that though

It is Christ, in very truth, who saves,
- but should we not immediately add that at the same time it is Christ
who is saved by
Evolution?¹⁴

Also, I am reminded of Jung's advice to an agonising Victor White – that Christ is still a valid symbol.¹⁵ I'm not qualified to sort out the intellectual aspect of such arguments. In any event, I don't approach the spiritual enterprise as primarily an intellectual problem to be solved; but a praxis, a way, an enfleshed experience. Though I am acutely aware of what I'll call the Victor White problem!

The Spiritual Problem

Teilhard is a compelling figure for me because, as I have suggested, the church's salvation cosmology – in this era which has been called the second axial age¹⁶ - has ceased for many to be viable, intellectually, and morally. In evolutionary terms, it's what Teilhard might have called a 'terminal phylum' – a dead end, though bitterly, aggressively, and grimly (even joylessly!) defended. Christian doctrine is still largely stuck in a pre-Copernican mind-set – imaged as a static, finite, three-decker cosmos, upon which Christianity's imperial-crusader-missionary-headhunting mindset is founded. Teilhard recognised this:

Our Christology is still expressed in exactly the same terms as those which three centuries ago, could satisfy men [sic] whose outlook on the cosmos it is now physically impossible for us to accept... What we now have to do without delay is to modify the position occupied by

¹³ John P Dourley, 'Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian Attempt to Reconnect'.

¹⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'The Christic', in **The Heart of Matter**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, p92.

¹⁵ Carl G Jung, 'Jung-White Letters', Ashville Jung Centre, video presentation; "Christ as a symbol is far from being invalid, although he is one side of the Self, and the devil the other."

¹⁶ Term coined by German philosopher Karl Jaspers in 1949, "to refer to the centuries between 800BC and 200BC when a new kind of thinking arose in the major areas of the world, termed axial because 'it gave birth to everything which since then, the human person has been able to be,'" in Ilia Delio, **Christ in Evolution**: Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008, p23.

the central core of Christianity – and this precisely in order that it may not lose its illuminative value.¹⁷

It's worth emphasizing that Teilhard was quite emphatic that his desire was to reinvigorate Christianity. Essay after essay, volume after volume testify to Teilhard's intense devotion to Christ.¹⁸ Of course, his Christian critics might say that well-meaning devotion should not be confused with misguided heterodoxy. On the other hand, beyond the confines of the Church there may be critics, perhaps Jungians, who might say that his devotion to Christ belongs to empire and the past – and thus impeded his horizon. Teilhard could see how the churches were driving sensible people away and making it impossible to admire Christ in any way apart from being a model citizen. The duration and extent of cosmic time and space demanded a revision, Teilhard insisted, for the sake of a *workable faith in Christ*.¹⁹ He made many impassioned pleas that theologians take science, in particular evolutionary science, seriously:

If the theoreticians of Christianity wish to use language that is intelligible and (what is even more important) convincing to our contemporaries, one thing, above all, is indispensable: they must understand and accept with real sympathy, the new ideas of himself which modern man has been *scientifically* obliged to develop.²⁰

Apart from his intellectual integrity and generous humanity, it seems to me that a crucial factor in Teilhard's persistence was his trust in spiritual experience. He records the arresting impact at age 5 or 6 when a few curls of his hair burned in seconds when held close to the fire: "A terrible grief assailed me; I had learned that I was perishable." Likewise the tremendous impression of his boyhood encounter with the rocks of the volcanic hills of the Auvergne.²¹ Teilhard's great synthesis – possessed "by the need to harmonize the absolute but apparently contradictory truth of science... within his Christian faith in God"²² – was the fruitful consequence of devotion equally to the external domain of empirical science, as much as to

¹⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, **Christianity and Evolution**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p77.

¹⁸ "To Christify Matter: that sums up the whole venture of my innermost being ... a grand and glorious venture; (and I still tremble often, even as I pursue it) - but I found it impossible not to hazard myself in it, so powerful was the force with which the levels of the Universal and the Personal came together and gradually closed up, over my head, to form one single vault." 'The Heart of Matter', p47.

¹⁹ "How can one expect [a person who has been taught to worship on the scale of individual life and death], without breaking through the framework of tradition, to expand his faith, his hope and his charity to the measure of a terrestrial organization which is destined to continue throughout millions of years?" 'Christ the Evolver', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p142

²⁰ 'Christ the Evolver, or a logical development of the idea of redemption', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p139.

²¹ Quoted in Ursula King, **Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin**, New York: Orbis, 1996, p7.

²² John P Dourley, Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian Attempt to Reconnect'

the interior domain of spiritual experience.²³ This is crucial: it situates Teilhard among a long line of reliable guides of the soul; and places him firmly in the category of dangerous ‘gnostic’ to his critics.

Teilhard & Evolution

Evolution is crucial to Teilhard’s entire outlook. He considered religion’s only legitimate role being the rerooting of humanity in the evolutionary energies.²⁴ Evolution is equally central to criticisms of Teilhard. So I had better say something about the ‘e’ word - which so excites the passions, especially among Christians, but also among some scientists. Again, I am not offering a technical or comprehensive definition. Interestingly, the word ‘evolution’ “first appeared in the English language in 1647 in a non-biological connection... [to signify] all sorts of progressions from simpler beginnings.”²⁵ Teilhard most definitely had Darwin and biological evolution in mind. Yet, unlike Darwin – whose vision was merely terrestrial – Teilhard clearly envisaged ‘progression from simple beginnings’ upon the largest and longest canvas possible, to the full duration and extent of the cosmos. He declared that ‘evolution’ “haunted my thoughts like a tune: which was to me like an unsatisfied hunger, like a promise held out to me, like a summons to be answered.”²⁶

Teilhard was emphatic that it is necessary to bring Christianity and evolution “into line with each other”,²⁷ and that “a Christ whose features do not adapt themselves to the requirements of a world that is evolutive in structure will tend more and more to be eliminated out of hand.”²⁸ He boldly declared that “the *Christ of Revelation* is none other than the *Omega of Evolution*”.²⁹ Such ‘adventuresome Christology’³⁰ was obviously too much for some – whose separation of revelation and creation is radically and terminally dualistic.

Two issues, which I have briefly mentioned, and which recur, are crucial here: the problem of Christ being an *outsider*, outside of the processes of

²³ “Julian Huxley suggested that Teilhard was possessed by ‘uncommon integrity’. And because of this integrity he was able to synthesise, where scientists and religionists alike remained in hermetically sealed ghettos.” Dave Pruett, **Reason and Wonder: A Copernican Revolution in Science and Spirit**, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012, p309.

²⁴ John P Dourley, Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian Attempt to Reconnect’.

²⁵ “The word evolution derives from the Latin *evolvere*, which applied to the ‘unrolling of a book’... contrary to popular opinion, neither the term nor the idea of biological evolution began with Charles Darwin”... Ilia Delio, **Christ in Evolution**, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008, p15.

²⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, ‘The Heart of Matter’, in **The Heart of Matter**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, p25.

²⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, **Christianity and Evolution**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p77.

²⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, **Christianity and Evolution**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p78.

²⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, ‘The Christic’, in **The Heart of Matter**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, p92.

³⁰ John P Dourley, Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian Attempt to Reconnect’.

evolution, an extra-terrestrial; and the problem of the *fixation on an initial fault*, judgment and the consequent need for legalistic-juridical atonement to fix the fault. Teilhard became convinced that these two factors prevent modern people from access to Christian prayer – and from experiencing Christ as the term of their own evolutionary development. The atonement problem is especially thorny – and I’ll come back to this later.

A brief word about Teilhard’s neologisms, for which he has been criticised – and which can make reading him hard going. It has to be remembered that he was searching for language that could adequately contain his rich synthesis of ideas. The traditional vocabulary simply couldn’t manage.

In using the term ‘convergence’ Teilhard refers to the observable fact that as systems become more complex they don’t tend to lead to dissipation – which is the prediction of the Second Law of Thermodynamics (entropy)³¹ – but in fact the greater the complexity the greater the degree of convergence towards union.³² He called this the law of complexity-consciousness. The ultimate union – towards which Teilhard envisaged the entire creation moving – he termed the Omega. Teilhard’s Omega is an eschatological³³ insight. But in contrast to the characteristically traditional Christian dualism – which carves up everything according to the static three-decker cosmology – this is a *τελος* (*telos*) The *πληρωμα* (*plērōma*)³⁴ it envisages synthesises the ‘Above’ and the ‘Ahead’ – not merely the vertical axis but also the horizontal axis of the entire creation – again, in contrast to the static three-decker cosmology that envisages an above and a below as terminally (and eternally!) dualistic options. Teilhard was greatly influenced by St Paul’s mystical intuition: The fullness of the One who fills all in all.³⁵

By ‘cosmogogenesis’ Teilhard suggests that ‘genesis’ cannot have been a singular moment in which everything was made – in contrast to a static cosmology - but that the entire cosmos is in an ongoing state of creating, consistent with the principles of evolution, in the direction of the Omega. Some churchgoing people panic at the thought of evolution, perhaps partly

³¹ See Donald Wayne Viney, ‘Teilhard, Medawar, and the New Atheism, in Ilia Delio (ed), **From Teilhard to Omega: Co-Creating an Unfinished Universe**, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2014, p134-135.

³² “As the physical universe marches inexorably toward heat death [entropy], life swims upstream against entropy, extracting order from a universe in decline. Life persists at the nexus of countervailing trends.” Dave Pruett, **Reason and Wonder: A Copernican Revolution in Science and Spirit**, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012, p274.

³³ In the Greek scriptures of the Christian Bible the word *ἐσχάτον* *eschaton* denotes the end point, or final trajectory, of not only God’s purpose for humankind, also the entire creation. ‘Eschatology’ is sometimes referred to as the doctrine of last things. It is reckoned that there is no Christian theology apart from an eschatological vision.

³⁴ John Dourley observes that while for Teilhard the *pleroma* is a state of completion, for Jung it’s an initiating power. ‘Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian Attempt to Reconnect’.

³⁵ Ephesians 1:23

because it undermines rescue religion, especially substitutionary atonement³⁶; and because it seems that Christ has no role.

But Teilhard envisaged Christ as the very driver of cosmogenesis - consistent with Johannine and Pauline intuitions about the pre-existing Word.³⁷ Teilhard was looking for “Christ the Evolver” –

not Christ the King and master, whose universal power over creation is primarily seen in an extrinsic and juridical manner, but a Christ who “physically and literally ... fills all things: at no instant in the world, is there any element of the world that has moved, that moves, that ever shall move, outside the directing flood he pours into them... it is he who gives its consistence to the entire edifice of matter and Spirit.”³⁸

What mattered was unification of the world in God, through incarnation.³⁹ In this, Christ’s role is central:

Take the world, honestly, as we see it today in the light of reason; not the four-thousand-year-old world, surrounded by its eight or nine spheres *for which the theology of our textbooks was written*, but the universe which we can see organically emerging from a boundless time and space. Spread out this vast, infinitely receding panorama, and then let us try to see how we shall have to modify Christ's apparent contours if his figure is to continue today, just as before, to stamp itself triumphantly on everything.⁴⁰

³⁶ This term refers to a theory by which God saves humanity, a theory which has never been adopted as necessary to orthodox Christian belief, but which some Christians insist upon as an essential foundation of belief. The theory is that the scale of human sinfulness was such that no human person could pay the necessary ‘satisfaction’ to God. The justice of God demanded a satisfactory punishment for the crime. Since no human could pay such a satisfaction, God sent his only Son, who, being divine, was capable of paying the infinite satisfaction, which he did for all people and for all time. Many have observed that this theory envisages a violent and retributive deity, and that it makes for violent and retributive humans who adhere to it. A very accessible critique of this theory can be found in Simon Barrow & Jonathan Bartley, **Consuming Passion: Why the killing of Jesus really matters**, London: Darton Longman Todd, 2005.

³⁷ “In a more extended sense Christ, sometimes called the cosmic Christ, becomes for Teilhard functionally coincident with God as this unifying energy. Thus Teilhard can refer to the operation of Christic energies prior to the historical incarnation of Christ.” John P Dourley, ‘Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian attempt to reconnect’.

³⁸ Teilhard de Chardin P, **Science and Christ**, London: William Collins, 1968, pp166, 167, quoted in King U, p73.

³⁹ Ursula King summarises Teilhard’s quest thus: “Teilhard was looking for a God of evolution, a God whose image is truly commensurate with the complex dimensions of our universe; a God who is not an outsider, a prime mover, but is deeply involved with the entire cosmic process of which we form an integral part; a truly living God, with us here and now, fully incarnate in matter and all-becoming. For him, the essence of Christianity is a belief in the unification of the world in God through the incarnation.” King U, **Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin**, London: SCM Press, 1997, p63.

⁴⁰ ‘Christology and Evolution’, in **Christianity and Evolution**, p78

Taking the facts of the universe seriously requires a radical reinterpreting of the idea of 'creation'⁴¹ - and inevitably focuses attention on the Christological:

The predominant concern of theology in the first centuries of the Church was to determine, intellectually and mystically, Christ's relation to the Trinity. In our own time the vitally important question has become for it to analyse and define the links between Christ and the universe: how they stand in relation to one another, and how they influence one another.⁴²

The pressure of facts is now such that it is time to return to a form of Christology which is more organic and takes more account of physics. A Christ who is no longer master of the world solely because he has been *proclaimed* to be such, but because he animates the whole range of things from top to bottom; a Christ who dominates the history of heaven and earth not solely because these have been *given* to him, but because his gestation, his birth and gradual consummation constitute *physically* the only definitive reality in which the evolution of the world is expressed: there we have the only God whom we can henceforth worship sincerely. And that is precisely the God suggested to us by the new aspect the universe has assumed.⁴³

Consciousness

The thesis that elements of consciousness are active at all levels of the universe is one of Teilhard's main themes.⁴⁴

He coined the term noosphere in order to be able to locate consciousness within an evolving, and ascending, trajectory: life begins with the geosphere; which gives rise to the biosphere; which he saw as now becoming enclosed within a sphere of complex consciousness, moving in the direction of union, the noosphere. His idea of the noosphere came out of his biological-paleontological observation. The newly-developing quantum physics may have also played a part.⁴⁵ Teilhard's concept of the noosphere

⁴¹ "God and creation are so integrally united that Teilhard does not speak of a creator but of creative union. The term "creation" is not an act or event but a fundamental relatedness, a kenosis of divine love... creation is the Beloved of God and the becoming of God in love since all that God is, is poured out in creation." Iliia Delio, 'Evolution and the Rise of the Secular God', in Iliia Delio (Ed), **From Teilhard to Omega: Co-creating an Unfinished Universe**, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014, p45.

⁴² 'Suggestions for a New Theology', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p176-7

⁴³ 'Christology and Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p89.

⁴⁴ Lothar Schäfer, 'The Emergence of Consciousness', in Thierry Meynard, **Teilhard and the Future of Humanity**, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, p132.

⁴⁵ "Teilhard was influenced by the discovery of quantum physics and knew the French physicist Louis de Broglie, who developed the double-slit experiment and helped to advance quantum physics." Iliia Delio, 'Evolution and the Rise of the

is reckoned to have been the stimulus for what technology would later make possible – the internet.

Not only were theologians uncomfortable with this, so were scientists – confidently, though bizarrely, declaring there to be no objective proof for consciousness. However in our time we find physicists and others highlighting the hubris of this blinkered classical physics vision. Teilhard’s intuition regarding the primacy of consciousness is now gaining support from quantum physics.⁴⁶ “The Universe,” declared thermodynamicist and astronomer James Jeans, “begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine.”⁴⁷ Your keynote speaker Peter Todd devotes a chapter in his book to ‘consciousness as an organizing principle’.⁴⁸ Teilhard has been reckoned to be a pioneer in the ‘holy grail of both science and philosophy’ what has been called a ‘3rd Copernican revolution’ – the revolution in psychology/spirituality?⁴⁹

Secular God’, in Ilia Delio (Ed), **From Teilhard to Omega: Co-creating an Unfinished Universe**, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014, p41.

⁴⁶ “In the center of all processes of emergence in the universe we find *virtual states*. Every quantum system consists not only of the state in which it is observed, but also of other countless other, invisible states that are vacant. ... In general, all things contain countless empty states. Quantum chemists call empty states *virtual states*... they can become real when a system jumps into them. ... Since [*virtual states*] are not real in a material sense, the order that they define is a transcendent cosmic order, and *virtual-state actualization* (VSA) is the mechanism by which the material world is secreted and separated from the wholeness of the transcendent order of the universe. ... It is suggested that the creation of complex structures by VSA is immensely more satisfactory because it has a well-established empirical precedent: At the molecular level, the emergence of complex order from actualizations of a coherent virtual order is so commonplace that it is a trivial phenomenon. Molecules do not create complex order *de nihilo*, bit out of their virtual states.” Lothar Schäfer, ‘The Emergence of Consciousness’, in Thierry Meynard, **Teilhard and the Future of Humanity**, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, pp115-120. “For Teilhard, the “primacy accorded to the psychic and to thought in the stuff of the universe” was a main theme of his vision. This view is now finding some foundation in the VSA [*virtual state actualization*] hypothesis, in that virtual states are mind-like, not matter-like. Cosmic virtual states are ultimately expressions of the mind-like background of the universe which may be the source not only of the principles needed to construct our bodies, but also of the universal principles that make up our mind.” Lothar Schäfer, p120. “It appears that Teilhard considered the omega point as a gateway to a transcendent reality outside of space-time... the assumption of such a reality is no longer in conflict with contemporary physics and may even be suggested by it... We can only speculate and guess what the nature of the transcendent part of reality might be. The signs are that it is mind-like rather than matter-like and that *consciousness, not matter, is the primary reality*. Thus, it is perfectly plausible to think that the completion of the processes of the universe will be the merger of two different streams of consciousness, human and divine.”, Schaeffer, p130. “That consciousness may exist without a supporting material structure is a notion that science has always specifically denied, but may have to get used to.” Schaeffer, p132.

⁴⁷ “The stream of knowledge is heading toward a non-mechanical reality; the Universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine.” James Jeans, thermodynamicist and astronomer, cited in Dave Pruet, **Reason and Wonder**, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012, p314

⁴⁸ Peter B Todd, **The Individuation of God: Integrating Science and Religion**, Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 2012, p72ff.

⁴⁹ Dave Pruet, **Reason and Wonder: A Copernican Revolution in Science and Spirit**, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010, p259ff. “Teilhard was a pioneer in the great enterprise Pruet describes as ‘The Holy Grail of both science and philosophy’: the nature of the relationship between the psychological/thermodynamic, the cosmological, and evolutionary arrows of time” (p278), and “of the material and physical world with the world of mind and spirit; of the past with the future; and of variety with unity, the many with the one.” p309.

Teilhard & Christian Praxis

Regarding the Church, in Teilhard's vision it exists to foster the energies of evolution.⁵⁰ And though he remained essentially optimistic, he was realistic about the ways in which the churches could thwart this necessary movement – because of its regressive commitment to a static three-decker cosmos, in particular, the consequential problem of 'original sin' and 'fall' doctrines. This left the church obsessed with bogies: "A primary disorder cannot be justified in a world which is created fully formed: a culprit has to be found."⁵¹ It's impossible to escape the observation that all the heresy hunting and silencing and excommunication and crusading are in truth diabolical expressions of fear, power and control. I hardly need name the obvious to a group such as this: that depth psychology calls this the unconscious projection of the unacknowledged shadow. Christian theology and practice suffers from a profoundly distorted preoccupation with reparation: with *expiation, purity, redemption and the shedding of blood*.⁵² The problem is that the Cross "is constantly held up before us to remind us of our world's initial miscarriage."⁵³ "But in a world which emerges gradually from matter there is no longer any need to assume a primordial mishap in order to explain the appearance of the multiple and its inevitable satellite, evil."⁵⁴ Teilhard was severely criticised for regarding evil merely as a 'satellite'.⁵⁵

To my mind, the answer is that if the dogma of original sin is constricting and debilitating it is simply because, as now expressed, it represents a survival of obsolete static views into our now evolutionary way of thinking. Fundamentally, in fact, the idea of Fall is no more than an attempt to explain evil in a fixed universe. As such,

⁵⁰ John P Dourley, 'Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian attempt to reconnect'.

⁵¹ 'Christology and Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution**, pp83, 149

⁵² "In spite of the subtle distinctions of the theologians, it is a matter of fact that Christianity has developed under the overriding impression that all the evil around us was *born from an initial transgression*. So far as dogma is concerned, we are still living in the atmosphere of a universe in which what matters most is reparation and expiation. The vital problem, both for Christ and ourselves, is to get rid of a stain. This accounts for the importance, at least in theory, of the idea of sacrifice, and for the interpretation of baptism almost exclusively in terms of purification. It explains, too, the pre-eminence in Christology of the idea of redemption and the shedding of blood. It is, in short, because Christ is still today projected upon a static world, as he used to be, that he is presented to us in official ecclesiastical documents chiefly through *the shadow of his cross*." 'Christology and Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p81-82; "Ecclesiastical institutions and most religious education still cling at least tacitly and sometimes literally to ancient and medieval images of a fixed universe, primordial human innocence, a historical fall, and a creator who watches over the natural world from above." John Haught, 'Teilhard de Chardin: Theology for an Unfinished Universe', in Ilia Delio (Ed), **From Teilhard to Omega: Co-creating an Unfinished Universe**, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014, p9.

⁵³ 'The Christic', in **The Heart of Matter**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, p98.

⁵⁴ 'Christology and Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution**, pp83-84

⁵⁵ "The recognition that 'God cannot create except evolutively' provides a radical solution ... to the problem of evil (which is a direct 'effect' of evolution), and at the same time explains the manifest and mysterious association of matter and spirit", 'Suggestions for a New Theology', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p179 "The necessity of the evils of an evolutionary process, which is in fact the way God created", John P Dourley, Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian attempt to reconnect'.

it is completely out of keeping with the rest of our representations of the world; and that is why we find it oppressive.⁵⁶

As a consequence,

The truth about today's gospel is that it has ceased, or practically ceased, to have any attraction because it has become *unintelligible*.⁵⁷

I am reminded of Jung's remark, in which he described the earnest but unthinking repetition of Christian doctrine as 'sacrosanct unintelligibility'.⁵⁸ Teilhard identified the constriction which renders Christian faith impossible to the modern mind: "Christ must no longer be *constitutionally* restricted in his operation to a mere 'redemption' of our planet."⁵⁹ In tackling the problem of sin he argued that: 'to bear the sins of the guilty world' means precisely, *translated and transposed into terms of cosmogenesis*, 'to bear the weight of a world in a state of evolution'.⁶⁰ Envisaged in this manner, 'sin' is not so much an individual legal-moral matter – but the human choice to disengage from cosmogenesis, from evolution's sacred energies.⁶¹ This strikes me as an evolution-adjusted Pauline concept of cosmic sin.

Whereas rescue religion only makes sense in a three-decker static cosmos, "If a Christ is to be completely acceptable as an object of worship, he must be presented as the saviour of the idea and reality of evolution."⁶²

I can be saved only by becoming one with the universe.⁶³
I shall become the Other only by being utterly myself. I shall attain spirit only by bringing out the complete range of the forces of matter.

⁵⁶ 'Christology and Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p80. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ 'Christology and Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p91; "So long as the Church neglects, by means of a refashioned Christology... to solve the apparent conflict that henceforth exists between the traditional God of revelation and the "new" God of evolution, so long, too... will there be increasing distress not only on the fringe of the believing world but at its very core; and... Christianity's power to attract and convert will grow less." 'What the world is looking for from the Church of God at this moment: A generalizing and deepening of the meaning of the Cross', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p212

⁵⁸ "I have to ask myself also, in all seriousness, whether it might not be far more dangerous if Christian symbols were made inaccessible to thoughtful understanding by being banished to the sphere of sacrosanct unintelligibility. They can easily become so remote from us that their irrationality turns into preposterous nonsense." C G Jung, "A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity" in Carl G Jung, **Psychology and Religion: West and East**, Collected Works Volume 11, Hull R F C (trans), 2nd edition, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, para 170, pp107.

⁵⁹ 'The God of Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution** p241

⁶⁰ 'What the world is looking for from the Church of God at this moment: A generalizing and deepening of the meaning of the Cross', in **Christianity and Evolution**, pp218-9

⁶¹ John P Dourley, 'Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian attempt to reconnect'.

⁶² 'Christology and Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p78.

⁶³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, (Rene Hague, trans.), 'How I Believe' in **The Heart of Matter**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, p128.

The total Christ is consummated and may be attained, only at the term of universal evolution.⁶⁴

Teilhard's mystical intuition, "My self is given to me far more than it is formed by me,"⁶⁵ seems very close to St Paul's "It is no longer I who live; but it is Christ who lives in me,"⁶⁶ as to Jung's, "It is not I who create myself, rather I happen to myself."⁶⁷ The idea of a 'universal evolution' was obviously too much to swallow for a Christianity still committed to supernaturalism, and its consequential dualistic separation of the 'saved' and the 'damned'.

Another malaise besetting Christianity is the churches' still-dominant fixation with individualistic salvation. While it is evident that there remain a great many Christians for whom personalistic salvation still galvanises – nevertheless the evangel of the Church is bound to falter in a time when increasing numbers of modern men and women can no longer be energised or activated by such a vision of the cosmos and God. In passing, perhaps Jung's 'individuation' may also suffer from something similar – in spite of his conviction that the purpose of individuation was to serve the collective's transformation?

My final remark regarding Teilhard's critiques of Christian salvation is the problem of the absolute separation of God from the created order demanded by Western Christian teaching. When Christian proclamation is framed by static cosmos original sin and fall – and the consequent juridical redemption and rescue – we find that in the entire creation-redemption enterprise God does not in fact *need* humankind, other than as a proving ground for God's greatness:

It is astonishing as we look around us, to note how artificial, and almost infantile, is the normal Christian way of presenting the origins and vicissitudes of the World.

In making God personal and free, Non-being absolute, the Creation gratuitous, and the Fall accidental, are we not in danger of making the Universe intolerable and the value of souls (on which we lay so much emphasis!) inexplicable?⁶⁸

While, in the case of a static world, the creator ... is still, on any theory, structurally independent of his work, and in consequence,

⁶⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, (Rene Hague, trans.), 'How I Believe' in **The Heart of Matter**, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, p129.

⁶⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, **The Divine Milieu**, London: William Collins, 1960, p77.

⁶⁶ Galatians 2:20

⁶⁷ cited in John P Dourley, 'Teilhard de Chardin: the Christian attempt to reconnect'.

⁶⁸ 'Note on the Presentation of the Gospel', in **The Heart of Matter**, p219.

without any definable basis to his immanence - in the case of a world which is by nature evolutive, the contrary is true: God is not conceivable (either structurally or dynamically) except in so far as he coincides with..., but without being lost in, the centre of convergence of cosmogenesis.⁶⁹

Defensive of an absolute separation between Creator and creation, alarmed Barthians and others condemn Teilhard as a pantheist.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In spite of all opposition he faced, Teilhard remained astonishingly optimistic: not sentimental, but confident in 'Christ the Evolver', in Christogenesis, in Cosmogenesis. He claimed: "In truth, it is not the sense of contingency of the created but the sense of the *mutual completion of the world and God* which gives life to Christianity."⁷¹ The mutual completion of God and the world!⁷² God has *need* of the creation: an unacceptable thought to Christian 'orthodoxy'. Nothing less than totality, union – the mutual completion of God and creation – can satisfy.

In truth it is impossible to keep one's gaze constantly fixed on the vast horizons opened out to us by science without feeling the stirrings of an obscure desire to see men drawn closer and closer together by an ever-increasing knowledge and sympathy until finally, in obedience to some divine attraction, there remains but one heart and one soul on the face of the earth.⁷³

One heart and soul – clear echoes of Johannine 'abiding' here.⁷⁴ God remains the transcendent – but this transcendence is no longer the static, isolated,

⁶⁹ 'The God of Evolution', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p239.

⁷⁰ The term 'pantheism' describes the opposite of 'deism', for which the absolute distinction between creature and Creator is essential. Pantheism denotes the view that the whole universe is divine, and is thus regarded as heretical by 'orthodox' Christianity.

⁷¹ 'The Contingence of the Universe', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p227. My emphasis

⁷² "At a time when man is awakening, apparently for ever, to consciousness of his planetary responsibilities and future, Christianity (for all the beauty of its gospel) would lose all religious value for us, if we had reason to suspect that by exalting the Creator it was robbing the universe of any spice of interest. For, on that ground alone, Christianity would cease to figure among the dynamically possible forms of belief... It would be no use to the Church, we must finally understand, to make the world lovable to our hearts if, from another angle, we saw that she was making it less desirable, or even contemptible, as a field for our effort." 'The Contingence of the Universe', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p226; "God is entirely self-sufficient; and yet *the universe contributes something that is vitally necessary to him*: those are the two apparently contradictory conditions which participated being must in future satisfy explicitly, if it is to fulfil its twofold function of, 'activating' our will and 'pleromizing' God." 'Suggestions for a New Theology, in **Christianity and Evolution**, p177. My emphasis

⁷³ 'Pensees', in **Hymn of the Universe**, p75

⁷⁴ John 14

un-changing deity 'without passions or body parts.'⁷⁵ Rather, the transcendent is now organic, within creation rather than outside it. "The organic vastness of the universe obliges us to rethink the notion of divine *omni-sufficiency*: God fulfils himself, he in some way completes himself, in the pleroma."⁷⁶ Teilhard affirmed the Divine freedom and transcendence – but argued that the doctrine of the Incarnation means that God *requires* human participation: The mutual completion of the world and God! This is a paradoxical statement, of course – a mystical intuition rather than a scientific statement. And yet, there is some resonance with quantum physics' complementarity principle, by which waves and particles are two completely contradictory yet complementary aspects of the one reality. Hence Teilhard's passionate plea for what he called a change in the geometry: "We must do what the physicists do when mathematics is found wanting - change our geometry."⁷⁷ Teilhard expended his considerable energies and his deep love in the service of a creation in which human consciousness is now the engine room of evolution.⁷⁸

The enormities of evolution of cosmic duration and scale, and the troubling state of institutional religion could lead to paralysis or despair. Teilhard is a worthy spiritual guide for the very reason of his courage and testament in this regard. So let me conclude with three suggestions for those who have not given up on Christian spirituality altogether, who still do look to a spiritual praxis influenced by Christ:

1. A mystically-oriented spirituality seems to me to be the only reliable and truly salvific way through our current impasse.
2. It is helpful, necessary in fact, to shift our gaze from institutional religion in order to perceive the evolving cosmic consciousness in which we are immersed – 'fixing our eyes on the crucified', cosmically!
3. We may feel alone or even overwhelmed, but do not be afraid, since one individual coming to consciousness can change the world.

On this last point, Teilhard speaks not only for himself, but for all of us: "Truth has to appear only once, in one single mind, for it to be impossible

⁷⁵ This idea is central to Reformed Protestant confessions of faith, and in the case of the Anglican Church finding its way from the continental Reformers into Article 1 in the **Book of Common Prayer**.

⁷⁶ 'Suggestions for a New Theology', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p178

⁷⁷ 'The Contingence of the Universe', in **Christianity and Evolution**, p227.

⁷⁸ "A Religion of Evolution: that, when all is said and done, is what Man needs ever more explicitly if he is to survive and 'super-live', as soon as he becomes conscious of his power to ultra-hominize himself and of his duty to do so. 'In a system of cosmo-noo-genesis, the comparative value of religious creeds may be measured by their respective power of evolutive activation.'", 'The Christic', in **The Heart of Matter**, p97.

for anything ever to prevent it from spreading universally and setting everything ablaze.”⁷⁹ One last word from Teilhard:

To live the cosmic life is to live dominated by the consciousness that one is an atom in the body of the mystical and cosmic Christ. The man who so lives dismisses as irrelevant the host of preoccupations that absorb the interest of other men: his life is projected further, and his heart more widely receptive. There you have my intellectual testament.⁸⁰

Glorious Lord Christ:
the divine influence
secretly diffused and active in the depths of matter,
and the dazzling centre
where all the innumerable fibres of the multiple meet;
power as implacable as the world and as warm as life;
you whose forehead is of the whiteness of snow,
whose eyes are of fire,
and whose feet are brighter than molten gold;
you whose hands imprison the stars;
you who are the first and the last,
the living and the dead and the risen again;
you who gather into your exuberant unity every beauty,
every affinity, every energy, every mode of existence;
it is you to whom my being cried out
with a desire as vast as the universe,
'In truth you are my Lord and my God.'⁸¹

⁷⁹ 'The Christic', in **The Heart of Matter**, p102. Episcopal priest and Jungian Analyst John Sanford expressed something similar: "When the consciousness of a single person is increased, it affects the general consciousness of humanity. Mystically and psychologically, Christ's sacrifice was his death on the Cross in order that the new consciousness might be disseminated throughout the world and the powers of Light over spiritual darkness be manifested and made complete. This would be the mystical meaning in Christ's statement in John 12-24: 'I tell you most solemnly, unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.' By dying on the cross the grain of consciousness in Christ was sown in the psyche of humankind. With this a new order began and a new development became possible for human life everywhere." John A. Sanford, **Mystical Christianity: A Psychological Commentary on the Gospel of John**, New York: Crossroad, 2000, p330.

⁸⁰ 'Cosmic Life', cited in Ursula A King, **Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin**, New York: Orbis, 1996, p55.

⁸¹ Mass on the World, in **Hymn to Matter**, p33

