

The Christocentric Mysticism of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

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The profoundly Christocentric mysticism of the Jesuit, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, his direct and immediate consciousness of Christ, in one sense flows naturally from his immersion in the Ignatian tradition. In another sense, however, he radically transposed this heritage because of his passionate love for science, especially its views on evolution. Radical love for the world and its projects also filled Teilhard's soul. "As far as my strength will allow me," he writes, "*because I am a priest, I desire henceforth to be the first to become aware of what the world loves, pursues, and suffers. I desire to be the first to seek, to sympathize, to toil; the first in self-fulfillment, the first in self denial—I want to be more widely human in my sympathies and more nobly terrestrial in my ambitions than any of the world's servants.*"¹

For Teilhard, moreover, the scientist is a type of priest performing a holy task. Science itself is a mysticism, a search for absolute meaning, a quest to understand and comprehend the universe as a whole. He writes: "The scientist's quest, however positivistic he may claim it to be...is invincibly animated, fundamentally—by a mystical hope."² Christians, therefore, must be shown how to discover the mystical vibration inherent in genuine scientific discovery, that God can be found in the very act of scientific endeavor.

¹ Jean Pierre Dumoulin, ed., *Let Me Explain* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 152.

² "Science et Christ," 27 February 1921 lecture, quoted by Henri de Lubac, S.J., *The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin*, (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1968), 16.

Teilhard's Personalism

Teilhard did not share the interest of his scientific colleagues in an impersonal universe. Because love dies in the presence of the impersonal, he contended that human progress and evolution itself were in jeopardy. Paraphrasing Descartes, he said of himself: "I love, therefore, I am."³ Love is the supreme evolutionary energy which requires a personal Absolute to sustain human progress and evolution. "Our world denies personality and God," he writes, "because it believes in the All. Everything depends on convincing that, on the contrary, it *must* believe in the personal because it believes in the All."⁴

During his lifetime, Teilhard never had the least difficulty in addressing God as a "Supreme Someone."⁵ His evolutionary and Christocentric perspectives facilitated his relationship with a personal Totality. Because of the incarnation, "there is a God who makes himself cosmic and an evolution with makes itself a person."⁶ For this reason, Teilhard strove to reveal to scientists that the ultimate meaning and coherence of the universe they study is personal and must be loved as such because "the science of Christ [permeates] all things."⁷

All human effort—scientific or religious—must eventually lead to a love that worships. Science, evolution, religion, and mysticism likewise belong to the one central longing of the human heart: to find a *personal* totality that the personal can ultimately love. "The more man becomes man," Teilhard writes, "the more will he become prey to a need, a need that is always more explicit, more subtle and more magnificent—the need to adore."⁸

³ Quoted in Ursula King, *Towards a New Mysticism: Teilhard de Chardin & Eastern Religions* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 288, n.34.

⁴ *Human Energy*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1969), 72.

⁵ *The Heart of the Matter*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1979), 41.

⁶ *The Activation of Energy*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1979), 381.

⁷ Quoted by Henri de Lubac, S.J., *The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin* (trans. René Hague (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Co., 1968), 17.

⁸ *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life*, trans. not named (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 128.

To Teilhard, the essential aspiration of *all* mysticisms is to be united, to become the other, while remaining oneself. Given his radical personalism, he abhors all mysticisms that diminish and eliminate individuality and personhood. Only a mysticism centered on a personal All really fulfills this aspiration. This accounts for Teilhard's almost thoroughgoing rejection of Eastern mysticism, at least in the way he both understood and misunderstood them.

Teilhard's Vision

When asked to give the briefest possible summary of the Teilhardian vision, I unhesitatingly point to his short work, *How I Believe*.⁹ He believes that the cosmos is an evolution which proceeds from matter to life, to life as spirit, which he understands as self-consciousness and freedom. In man, spirit is fully realized as person. Finally, the supremely personal is the Universal Christ. In his technical terms, cosmogenesis (the coming to be of the universe) is biogenesis (the coming to be of life) is anthropogenesis (the coming to be of man) is Christogenesis (the coming to be of the one cosmic Christ).

Another quotation also summarizes Teilhard's Christo-cosmic mysticism: "The two supreme loves, the natural and the supernatural, that, seen from a certain angle, appear to draw our hearts in contrary directions—towards the kingdom of heaven or towards mastery of the earth—are reconciled in the impassioned quest for the cosmic Christ. The two stars, whose attractive forces seem in conflict with one another, are soon to be in reality each an extension of the other; it is *through the fulfillment of the world* that we reach Jesus."¹⁰

Teilhard's Emphasis on the Cosmic Christ

The Christian tradition, for Teilhard, sees more in the "total Christ" than God and man. St. Paul spoke of Christ as the one in whom all

⁹ Trans. René Hague (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

¹⁰ "The Universal Element," *Writings in Time of War*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 299-300.

creation holds together.¹¹ *Everything* in the universe converges on Jesus' "theandric being" which Teilhard calls Christ's "third nature," a nature neither human nor divine, but cosmic.¹² If St. Bruno wanted to make Christ poor reign; St. Dominic, Christ the Truth; St. Ignatius, Christ the eternal King, Teilhard desires to underscore the cosmic Christ.¹³

Teilhard's abiding genius consists of uniting, reconciling, and synthesizing in himself the two worlds of Christianity and science, the religions of heaven and earth. He claims to have brought about within himself the "transformation...of the 'God of the Gospel' into the 'God of evolution'—a transformation without deformation."¹⁴ His life's work focuses on "christifying" evolution, on showing an ongoing incarnation, and disclosing "Christ the *Evolver*" at the heart of the evolutionary process. As he says: "There is only *one single center* in the universe; it is at once natural and supernatural; it impels the whole of creation along one and the same line—first towards the fullest development of consciousness, and then towards the highest degree of holiness: in other words, Jesus Christ, personal and cosmic."¹⁵

To Teilhard, the key to genuine human growth is seeing¹⁶ and participating in an evolution that permeates everything and literally converges on the person of Jesus Christ. He attempts to show to the scientist—whose research led to the chaos and meaninglessness of an infinity of galaxies and subatomic particles—that not only is the cosmos held together from above but is also actually becoming the cosmic Christ. He wants to convince believing Christians of the importance of

¹¹ Some contemporary commentators maintain that Teilhard made good use of the following texts: Rom 8:18f.; 14:7,9; I Cor 4:22; 6:15f.; 10:16; 12:12f.; 15:23-29; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:11; 5:4,19; Gal 3:27-28; Eph 1:10, 29-223; 2:5, 10, 13, 14; 3:6, 18; 4:9, 12, 13, 16; Phil 1:10; 3:10, 11, 20-21; Col 1:15-20, 28; 2:9, 10, 12, 19; 3:10; 1 Thess 4:17; Heb 2: 7-8. I find it strange that he never refers to Jn 1:3, although he does speak of the Christ of St. John.

¹² "The Christic," *The Heart of Matter*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1978), 93.

¹³ Nicole & Karl Schmitz-Moormann, eds., *Journal* (cahiers, 1-5, août 1915-janvier 1919) (Paris: Fayard, 1975), Journal entry for 18 August 1920.

¹⁴ *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1971), p. 234.

¹⁵ "Forma Christi," *Writings in Time of War*, 256.

¹⁶ See, Thomas M. King, S.J., *Teilhard's Mysticism of Knowing* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

taking the evolution of the cosmos seriously, because in the incarnation God descends into the very depths of matter so that "Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11). Human progress, evolution, a more humane world, and genuine Christianity are possible only by uniting with God the Evolver who is not only still creating the world but also continuing to incarnate himself cosmically. Not only does Teilhard accept the view of Duns Scotus that God creates in order to communicate himself, but he also places this vision into an evolutionary context. Creation, evolution, and incarnation are in some ways the same ongoing process. Evolutionary cosmogenesis is Christogenesis.

While Teilhard meditated on an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the metallic nature of the "mysterious patch of crimson and gold"¹⁷ at the center of Christ's breast allowed "a way of finally *escaping* from everything that so distressed [him] in the complicated, frail, and individual organization of Jesus' body."¹⁸ This event awakened him to a Christic milieu beyond the limitations of the historical Jesus. Only in this Christic milieu can one approach what Teilhard calls God's "heart."

Teilhard confesses that he believes in Jesus' divinity "because, insofar as, and in the form in which that divinity is historically and biologically included in the reality of the universal Christ to whom [his] faith and [his] worship are more directly attached."¹⁹ He also maintains that "the face of the historical Jesus, embroiled in all the historical improbabilities and moral inadequacies of the Gospel, becomes less clear and distinct for me. My basic disposition? What is past and dead no longer interests me."²⁰ Moreover, given the scientific knowledge of a vast universe replete with billions of galaxies and the statistical necessity of intelligent life on other planets, he argues that Jesus of Nazareth is only "one face" of the cosmic Christ.²¹ The Christ of St. Paul and St. John cannot be smaller than the cosmos.

Teilhard emphasizes Jesus Christ primarily as the "universal Christ," the "total Christ," the "cosmic Christ," the "super-Christ,"

¹⁷ "The Heart of the Matter," *The Heart of Matter*, 43.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "Introduction to the Christian Life," *Christianity and Evolution*, 159.

²⁰ *Lettres intimes à Auguste Valensin, Bruno de Solanges, Henri de Lubac, André Ravier* (1919-1955) (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974), 312.

²¹ *Journal*, 24 February 1918 entry, 281.

the “privileged central axis of evolution, “the “Soul of the world,” the “Evolver,” the “Christic nucleus” of an evolving cosmos which surpasses any prophet or Buddha. It is little wonder that some have called Teilhard’s view a “Christian pantheism,” a “panchristic monism,” a “Christo-monism,” and a “panchristism.”

Teilhard’s Appreciation of the Historical Jesus

However, does Teilhard’s enthusiasm for the cosmic Christ of an evolving universe dilute the unique role Jesus of Nazareth plays in salvation history? Numerous texts indicate that he considers the cosmic Christ an impossibility without the historical Jesus. “However far we may be drawn into the divine space opened to us by Christian mysticism,” he writes, “we never depart from the Jesus of the Gospels.”²² For him, only a contemporary Gnostic would attempt to divorce the cosmic Christ from the historical Jesus. Orthodox reasoning also demands that the cosmic Christ remain inexorably linked to the historical Jesus, “otherwise the historical Jesus would not be truly inserted into the cosmos.”²³

Any abandonment of the historical Jesus, Teilhard writes, “would mean the instant dismissal into the unreal of all the mystical energy accumulated in the Christian phylum during the last two thousand years. Christ born of the Virgin and Christ risen from the dead: the two are one inseparable whole.”²⁴ Although Teilhard insists that Christian orthodoxy must stay focused on Christ as the head of creation, he nonetheless maintains that “however vast the world is found to be, the figure of the risen Christ must embrace the world.”²⁵ His resurrection Christology, but transposed by his views on evolution, permeates Teilhard’s thinking.

Jesus’ human reality does not dissolve into something super-human and vanish into the cosmos. “If it is indeed true that it is through Christ-Omega that the universe in movement holds together,” Teilhard writes, “it is from...that Man of Nazareth, that Christ-Omega

²² *The Divine Milieu*, 117.

²³ *Journal*, 18 July 1920 entry.

²⁴ “Introduction to the Christian Life,” *Christianity and Evolution*, 158.

²⁵ “Reflections on Original Sin,” *Christianity and Evolution*, 190.

(both theoretically and historically) derives his whole consistence... The two terms are intrinsically one whole, and they cannot vary, in a truly total Christ, except simultaneously.”²⁶ Just as St. Paul says little about the historical details of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, but never separates his Christ from the actual Jesus, so, too, does Teilhard.

The historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ remain linked for yet another reason. Although Teilhard contends that creation, incarnation, and redemption must be understood as more of a cosmic process than an instantaneous act, he writes that they do “take the form of particular *expressive* facts such as the historical appearance of the human type (creation), the birth of Christ (incarnation), and his death and resurrection (redemption).”²⁷

Teilhard’s Searching Christology

The entire evolutionary process, to Teilhard, searches for Christ. Karl Rahner developed a “seeking Christology;”²⁸ Teilhard, a cosmic searching Christology. “When life in its lower stages is moving towards consciousness,” he says, “when men and women are passionately striving for the complete freedom and unanimity of their spirit, when thinkers and poets thrill with excitement at the emergence of a ‘soul of the world,’ it is in fact Christ whom they are seeking.”²⁹ While examining an ancient coin, he states that even before the coin was minted, Christ was already holding the universe together.³⁰

In Christ, according to Teilhard, one finds not only a human but also *the* human. He is not only the perfect, ideal human “but [also] the total human, the human gathered together in the depths of its consciousness, the consciousness of all people... Let us try to gather together in one single ocean the whole mass of passion, of anticipations, of fears, of sufferings, of happiness, of which each human represents

²⁶ “Christianity and Evolution,” *Christianity and Evolution*, 181.

²⁷ Some General Views on the Essence of Christianity,” *Christianity and Evolution*, 135.

²⁸ *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych, S.J. (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 295.

²⁹ “Forma Christi,” *Writings in Time of War*, 254.

³⁰ *Science and Christ*, 3 November 1923 entry, trans. René Hague (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 207.

one drop. It was into this vast sea that Christ plunged, so as to absorb it entirely through all his pores.”³¹ The cosmic Christ must be understood not only as the center of all moral and religious growth but also as the organic center of all created reality and natural growth—matter, humanity, intelligent life on other planets, stars, and angels.

Teilhard's "Mystical Milieu"

The short text, “The Mystical Milieu,”³² offers an excellent summary of Teilhard's mystical vision. The mystical milieu in which every person lives consists of a conjunction of five circles: presence, consistence, energy, spirit, and person. No circle can be understood and appreciated in isolation from the other circles. The text also illustrates that the Teilhardian mystical journey comprises two phases: a descent into matter that eventually forces the mystic to ascend to the circles of spirit (self-consciousness and freedom) and of person.

The Circle of Presence

In the first circle, the “circle of presence,” Teilhard's love of matter and the created world stands out. He experiences profoundly creation's allure, how it enters into him and takes him out of himself. However, through this pantheistic ecstasy the person who truly goes beyond outward appearances becomes aware of a “deeper truth...“that when the world reveals itself to us it draws us into itself: it causes us to flow outwards into something belonging to it, everywhere present in it, and more perfect than it.”³³ It is the mystic who is born to witness to this aura of presence.

When the “seer” becomes accustomed to the light from the periphery and the center of all things, “he perceives that he is immersed in a *universal Milieu*,...a milieu that knows no change ... a *homogeneous Milieu* in which contrasts and differences are toned down.”³⁴ God reveals himself to the mystic as “Universal Being.” Teilhard speaks of

³¹ “My Universe,” *Science and Christ*, 62.

³² See, *Writings in Time of War*, 117-49.

³³ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

this basic experience found in all mystical systems as “*an innate love of the human person, extended to the whole universe.*”³⁵ It says much about what he calls his “naturally pantheistic soul.”

The Circle of Consistence

In the second circle, the “circle of consistence,” the mystic suffers from the transitory nature of all created things but discovers the “ultimate Element” and the “Sovereign Consistence” that penetrates everything. Teilhard considers “consistence” *the* attribute of being and predicates it of the Absolute, the Real, and Plenitude. To see that only God is the Great Stability is to be made free.

In this circle, the mystical desire to see must give way to the phase of communion through which the seer feels, surrenders, and worships—at the risk of being accused of worshipping nature. The fleeting joys of this world effect “*the icy chill of disappointment* [and show us] that [God alone] is stable.”³⁶ Death, to Teilhard, is that “fundamental catastrophe” which destroys all that props up one’s life but leads to the vision of the “naked form of [God’s] consistence rising up from the ruins...”³⁷

The Circle of Energy

In the third circle, the “circle of energy,” the mystic bathes in God’s light and desires God as “Creative Action.” He discovers a need to become an “instrument” and an actual extension of God’s ongoing creative action. In this circle, Teilhard emphasizes the need to live and to develop oneself. If one is to adore and to allow oneself to be possessed, one must first have a self to give away. “The mystic,” he writes, “finds a joy no words can describe in feeling through...active obedience (which is a very different thing from the passive acceptance that first satisfied him) that he *endlessly adheres more closely* to the encompassing Godhead. Endlessly, the more perfect an *instrument* he becomes, the more does he become one with the creative Act.”³⁸ The

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

mystic discovers not only that God is a blazing fire whose Spirit stirs up the entire universe but also that creation has never ceased.

In this circle, the mystic realizes that through *suffering* one experiences a “joy of finding and surrendering to a beauty greater than man, the rapture of being possessed.”³⁹ Passivity, however, does not mean inertia because only when his strength is fully spent in trying to overcome what causes suffering does he accept it. “Only in the last extreme,” Teilhard writes, “will he accept suffering, and then only insofar as it is unavoidable. And when that is so, he will take it to himself as a heavenly bride.”⁴⁰

For this reason, Teilhard resolutely refuses to view Jesus’ cross “as a symbol of sadness, of limitation, and of repression.”⁴¹ It is actually the supreme paradigm of progress, ascent, supra-human effort, and of this world’s transformation, attained only by a graced willingness to transcend what is most immediately tangible and satisfying. “Jesus on the cross,” he says, “is both the symbol and the reality of the immense labor of the centuries which has, little by little, raised up the created spirit and brought it back to the depths of the divine *milieu*. [Jesus on the cross] represents in a true sense creation, upheld by God, as it ascends the slope of being, sometimes clinging to things for support, sometimes tearing itself away from them in order to pass beyond them, and always compensating, by physical suffering, for the setbacks caused by its moral downfalls.”⁴²

Teilhard understands the cosmic value of suffering as nothing less than an evolutionary energy which promotes Christogenesis. In a lovely letter to his invalid sister, we read: “O Marguerite... while I, given soul and body to the positive forces of the universe was wandering over continents and oceans, my whole being taken up in watching the intensification of all the world’s tints and shadows, you were lying motionless, stretched out on your bed of sickness, silently, deep within yourself, transforming into light the world’s most grievous shadows. In the eyes of the Creator, which of us... will have had the better part?”⁴³

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴¹ *Divine Milieu*, 102.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴³ *Human Energy*, trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1969), preface.

The Circle of Spirit

In the fourth circle, “circle of spirit,” the mystic sees that evolution’s goal is to attain more truth, power, consciousness, self consciousness, and freedom. For Teilhard, the human person is the “spearhead of evolution.” Now a passion for progress dominates the seer’s consciousness. The realization that one actually co-creates the christic milieu with God both through one’s actions and sufferings also arises. As Teilhard says, the mystic becomes aware “that the higher element in which he longs to lose himself is not only the beatifying term of human activity but also, to some extent, its *product*.”⁴⁴

In this circle, the mystic realizes that the Kingdom of God—which Teilhard seemingly identifies with the mystical or cosmic Body of Christ—is in the process of becoming. Just as individual cells do not lose their identity by belonging to the human body, so, too, with the mystical body. “To live the cosmic life,” Teilhard writes, “is to live dominated by the consciousness that one is an atom in the body of the mystical and cosmic Christ.”⁴⁵ “The mystical milieu,” Teilhard writes, “is *not a completed zone* in which beings, once they have succeeded in entering it, remain immobilized. It is a *complex* element, made up of *divinized created beings*, in which, as time goes on, the immortal distillation of the universe is gradually assembled.”⁴⁶ Somehow every person possesses the entire material universe partially which in turn becomes the mystical body of the risen Christ. We make and undergo the cosmic Christ through all we do and suffer.

At this stage, the mystic as the supreme realist fights mightily for Light. “By helping the spread of science and freedom,” Teilhard says, “I can increase the density of the divine atmosphere, in itself, as well as for me: that atmosphere in which it is always my desire to be immersed. By laying hold of the Earth I enable myself to cling closely to [God].”⁴⁷ Only the mystic realizes that to develop science, to increase human freedom, to make the world a more humane place “thickens” the divine milieu. The genuine mystic knows that *the* mystical illusion seeks presence and

⁴⁴ “The Mystical Milieu,” *Writing in Time of War*, 136.

⁴⁵ “Cosmic Life,” *Writing in Time of War*, 70.

⁴⁶ “The Mystical Milieu,” 137.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

union independently of time and evolution. Moreover, because the mystic works within and with God, he knows with certainty that the least of his efforts is both effective and an enduring possession.

Teilhard's meditation on the "circle of spirit" contains a powerful section called "Fire that comes down upon earth."⁴⁸ The mystic sees that the entire universe has burst into flame. No longer is he concerned with losing himself in this fire while maintaining his identity. He seeks nothing less than total transformation. Renouncing egotism and the fear of suffering, "now the mystic has ceased to be *only himself*. Body and soul, he has become a fragment of the divine."⁴⁹

Paradoxically the mystic's great desire for earthly achievement unites him to Christ by way of a passivity of a higher order. Teilhard writes: "Through seeking to possess and cultivate the world (so that he may feel the presence of God), he has become an ascetic and a contemplative. Through seeking the development of his own nature he has found the rapture of feeling that suffering is dissolving his being, drop by drop, and replacing it by God. Through loving life, the mystic has come to wish for death, since death alone can destroy his egoism so radically as to enable him to be absorbed in Christ."⁵⁰

In this section Teilhard also speaks of prayer and purity. "Through their serene transparency," he writes, "flow the waves of creative power charged with natural virtue and grace." By virtue of the contemplative's prayer and purity of heart, the cosmos is healed, directed, and transformed.

Teilhard was fond of a story by Robert Hugh Benson in which a visionary enters an out of the way chapel and finds a nun praying.⁵¹ He has a vision of the axis of the universe passing through the chapel and all the elements of the cosmos reorganizing themselves around it. "All at once," Teilhard writes, "he sees the whole world bound up and moving and organizing itself around that out-of-the way spot, in tune with the intensity and inflexion of the desires of that puny, praying figure."⁵² Because of this nun's contemplative faith and purity of heart, she is an energy center that spearheads the evolutionary process. Her efficacious

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 142-44.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵¹ *Divine Milieu*, 133-34.

⁵² *Divine Milieu*, 133.

and transformative contemplation gives life to, or “sur-animated,” the universe. To paraphrase a well-known Zen saying: the Christian mystic contemplates for the universe.

The paradox here is that only the person who genuinely sees that cosmogenesis is Christogenesis can heal, transform, and direct the evolutionary process in a significant way. The person who dares to believe reaches the Christic milieu in which everything retains its identity and yet simultaneously becomes luminous, animated, and filled with love. Through faith Jesus appears. Contemplative faith renders the cosmos diaphanous. It discloses the love of Christ that bathes it and the cosmic Christ that it is slowly becoming.

The Circle of Person

In the fifth circle, the “circle of person,” Teilhard speaks of the cosmic Eucharist. He writes: “Since first, Lord, you said ‘this is my body,’ not only the bread of the altar but (to some degree) everything in the universe that nourishes the soul for the life of the Spirit and Grace, has become *yours* and has become *divine*—it is divinized, divinizing, and divinizable.”⁵³

In Teilhard’s hauntingly beautiful “The Mass of the World,”⁵⁴ he finds himself in the desert without bread and wine to say Mass so he offers all his and the world’s efforts, accomplishments, sufferings, and deaths as the elements to be transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ. He writes: “Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day say again the words: This is my Body. And over every death-force which awaits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which express the supreme mystery of faith: This is my Blood.”⁵⁵ For him, the eons-old Eucharist of evolution gradually consecrates *all* the elements of the cosmos into the one cosmic Christ. Looking upon the cosmos as one immense Host, he considers the eucharist to be the very axis of evolution through which Christ produces a cosmic transubstantiation of all things into himself. “At every moment,”

⁵³ “The Mystical Milieu,” 137.

⁵⁴ In *Hymn of the Universe*, no translator given (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 19-37.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

Teilhard says, “the Eucharistic Christ controls—from the point of view of the organization of the Pleroma...the whole movement of the universe...As our humanity assimilates the material world, and as the Host assimilates our humanity, the eucharistic transformation goes far beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar. Step by step it irresistibly invades the universe.”⁵⁶ Only one thing is happening throughout the cosmos: the incarnation that completes itself in each individual through the cosmic Eucharist.

It is first by the incarnation and next by the eucharist that Christ assimilates us to himself. The incarnation inserts Christ not only into humanity but into the universe as a center towards which everything converges in harmony and love. The cosmic Christ influences us through the eucharist, but the eucharist understood in its universal power and realism. The eucharist is the means by which Christ continues to function as Omega. Moreover, “when, through the priest, Christ says... ‘this is my body,’ the words reach out infinitely far beyond the morsel of bread over which they are pronounced: they bring the entire mystical body into being.”⁵⁷

Teilhard sees all the communions of a lifetime as one communion. All the communions of all now living are also one communion. All the communions of everyone past, present, and future are one communion. “If I firmly believe that everything around me is the body and blood of the Word,” Teilhard writes, “then for me...is brought about that marvelous ‘diaphany’ which causes the luminous warmth of a single life to be objectively discernible in and to shine forth from the depths of every event...”⁵⁸ In view of the interconnectedness of the entire cosmos from which nothing can be excluded, the whole cosmos vibrates to the radiation of the consecrated Host.

In this circle, Teilhard reminds his reader that the mystical milieu slowly assumes a divine-human form, Jesus. When paying strict attention to the world, Teilhard sees “a shadow floating, as though it were the phantom of a universal soul seeking to be born...[This] mysterious Entity...is in some small way our own handiwork... Jesus!”⁵⁹ “I can feel it,” he wrote. “He has a name and a face, but he

⁵⁶ Divine Milieu, 125.

⁵⁷ “Pantheism and Christianity,” *Christianity and Evolution*, 210.

⁵⁸ “The Mass of the World,” *The Heart of the Matter*, 211.

⁵⁹ “The Mystical Milieu,” 145.

alone can reveal his face and pronounce his name: Jesus.”⁶⁰ Teilhard’s repetition of the refrain “Jesus” gives this section a personal evocative force. It also underscores his Christocentric mysticism, that is, a direct, immediate consciousness of Jesus Christ.

For Teilhard, everything in the cosmos converges on the person of Christ who possesses the power of each of the lower mystical circles, that is, the circle of presence, consistence, energy, and spirit. Jesus’ presence impregnates and sustains all things. “Everything around me that is essential and enduring has become for me,” Teilhard writes, “the dominance and, in some way, the substance of your heart: Jesus!”⁶¹ To look upon the face of Jesus is to see the glow of every reality and goodness. Everything contributes to building up the mystical or cosmic body of Jesus. Teilhard concludes this section by claiming that “No one...will understand the great mystics...unless he understands the full depth of the truth that Jesus must be loved as a world.”⁶²

Summary

I know no better way to summarize Teilhard’s Christocentric mysticism than to conclude by reciting the lovely prayer found in his essay, “Cosmic Life.”⁶³ “Lord Jesus Christ, you truly contain within your gentleness, within your humanity, all the unyielding immensity and grandeur of the world...It is because there exists in you this ineffable synthesis of what human thought and experience would never have dared join together in order to adore them—element and totality, the one and the many, spirit and matter, the infinite and the personal; it is because of the indefinable contours which this complexity gives to your appearance and to your activity, that my heart, enamored of cosmic reality, gives itself passionately to you.

I love you, Lord Jesus, because of the multitude who shelter within you and whom, if one clings closely to you, one can hear with all the other beings murmuring, praying, weeping...Lord Jesus, you are as gentle as the human heart, as fiery as the forces of nature, as intimate

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶³ “Cosmic Life,” *Writings in Time of War*, 69-70.

as life itself, you in whom I can melt away and with whom I must have mastery and freedom: I love you as a world, as *this* world which has captivated my heart; and it is you, I now realize, that my fellow brothers and sisters, even those who do not believe, sense and seek throughout the magic immensities of the cosmos." Teilhard's direct and immediate consciousness of Christ, his love for the crucified and risen Jesus, the cosmic Christ, the cosmic-eucharistic Christ, the Christ he loved as a world—this is his Christocentric mysticism. ☺

Egan Biography

Harvey D. Egan, S.J., received his doctorate in theology under the direction of Karl Rahner from Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität and is currently Professor of Systematic and Mystical Theology at Boston College. His books include *Christian Mysticism: The Future of a Tradition*, *Ignatius Loyola the Mystic*, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, and *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life*. He is well known for his studies on Christian mysticism and on the thought of Karl Rahner.