

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THOUGHT OF TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AS A CATALYST FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

David John Ayotte, S. J.¹

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, as he is more commonly known, was a Jesuit priest who died in 1955, having worked for some twenty years as a paleontologist in China. While being a renowned scientist, who assisted in the finding of the Peking Man fossil, Teilhard's main desire and scholastic efforts were to reshape modern Christian theology in the light of contemporary science, especially in his own creative and synthesizing interpretation of the various theories of evolution. My hope is to discuss the following: the implications of the findings of modern science for how we understand time, space and mind; the theological concepts that Teilhard developed to help us to deepen our faith traditions: namely the ideas of personalization, complexity-consciousness, noosphere, omega point, and convergence; the ethical concepts for an evolving global ethic valuing the person, action and growth; a few concrete applications in the areas of research, the United Nations, an option for the poor and the need for global leadership.

Time, space and mind

The late Jesuit scholar, Thomas M. King, would begin his annual undergraduate class on Teilhard with a simple diagram encompassing the entire [span of the] wall-length chalkboard. The board would be divided into twelve equidistant sections on a single horizontal line. Commencing with the cosmic calendar now made famous by Carl Sagan,² all of evolutionary time was fitted onto this line [spanning] twelve months. January began with the Big Bang. Our own Milky Way Galaxy formed sometime in March; our sun and the initial traces of our solar system [arrived] in the month of August. The earliest known single-celled life forms began soon after in [the month of] September. Not until November would we have multi-celled

1. Gregorian University, Faculty of Missiology (David_Ayotte4@Hotmail.com)

2. Sagan, Carl, "Cosmic Calendar," <http://visav.phys.uvic.ca/~babul/AstroCourses/P303/BB-slide.htm> (accessed April 20, 2010).

organisms. In the middle of the last month, on December 15th, there would be the Cambrian Explosion³ of new life forms, a recent 545 million years ago. Vertebrates would show up on the 17th, and early land plants only the next day. Insects flourished by the 21st. Hard to believe, dinosaurs showed up late on December 24th. By December 25th, we have the early ancestors of today's mammals. The dinosaurs would continue to rule supreme until the Chixulub Comet hit the earth. The same comet that shaped the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico some 65 million years ago also brought the global winter that led to the extinction of these creatures and 75% of all species on the earth.⁴ On the cosmic calendar, the giant dinosaurs had only six days of existence, ending on December 29th. If we go to the last day of December, apes appear at 10:15 in the morning. Our first human ancestors show up late, [at] around 9:24 pm. *Homo erectus* is recognizable some two million years ago, at 10:48 pm. The common female root for all *Homo sapiens* (Mitochondrial Eve) lives 150,000 years ago, or at 11:54 pm – six minutes before today. With each second being the equivalent of 500 years, writing emerges in the last fifteen seconds. The Pyramids [were created] ten seconds ago. Jesus of Nazareth was born four seconds ago. Mohammed [was born] three seconds ago. The new world was discovered by Columbus (1492) one second before midnight. Then, here we are.

The nearly unimaginable expanses of evolutionary time narrated above have also become the measuring rod for *space*. For example, in 1987 scientists witnessed the explosion of the Supernova 1987 A. The actual explosion, given the speed of light, occurred 170,000 years ago.⁵ Such enormous distances can only be simulated in computer generated scenarios and popular planetariums that leave us pondering whether we are anything more than a speck in the universe. To view the earth from (outer) space situates the world, as well as ourselves, in a new way. Our unconscious foundation changes. Images from the moon looking back at the earth reveal [that] we swim in an ocean that has now become black with distant stars, with more and more exoplanets (earth-like planets) being found daily by exploratory missions such as the Kepler telescope.⁶

3. Lane, Abby, "Cambrian Explosion," *Bristol University: Earth Sciences*, <http://palaeo.gly.bris.ac.uk/Palaeofiles/Cambrian/timing/timing.html> (accessed April 26, 2010).

4. Department of Planetary Sciences, Lunar and Planetary Laboratories, "Cosmic Collisions: Impacts," *University of Arizona*, Fall Course 2009, www.lpl.arizona.edu/undergrad/classes/fall2009/Yelle_102-13/.../L19.ppt (accessed April 26, 2010).

5. Sagan, Carl "Cosmic Calendar," <http://visav.phys.uvic.ca/~babul/AstroCourses/P303/BB-slide.htm> (accessed April 20, 2010).

6. NASA Ames Research Center, "Kepler: A Search for Habitable Planets," *Kepler Space Telescope*, <http://kepler.nasa.gov/Mission/discoveries> (accessed April 26, 2010).

Amidst the vastness of this dark ocean, this apparent speck called Earth questions its significance, uniqueness, and meaning through humanity. Even the very visible *matter* that makes up our own bodies, [as well as] the [rest of the] world, has required substantial revision due to contemporary physics. It is now generally accepted that our universe of “visible” atoms comprise only 4% of the actual “substance” of galaxies. Another 73% is made up of dark energy and the remaining 23% are [comprised of] unknown invisible particles known as dark matter. Both the classic Greek distinction of matter and spirit/mind and the later autonomous Enlightenment mind freed of matter are now exceptionally problematic. Materialism, when it understands mind as being nothing more than the epiphenomena of matter, trembles as well. Modern evolutionary physics has itself collapsed the [idea of the] substance – the ground upon which matter once stood secure.⁷

The theories of physics and evolution in transforming past notions of time, space and matter have undermined the notion that the observer exists separate from the object observed. There has been a partial betrayal of the autonomy of the individual from the process of observation. The mind itself is tied to the very relationships being observed. We are not observing the cosmic ocean but [instead] are a part of it, shaping it by the very *process of mind*. The resurgence of the term “spirit,” in reference to the classic[al] Greek sense of mind, is not simply due to a Whiteheadian process [of] thought; rather, in work such as that of Teilhard’s, matter and spirit express a relationship whereby spirit organizes and governs matter into ever greater complexity. It is a movement towards consciousness and personhood – an evolution of mind.⁸

Teilhard grasped the import of the fundamental revisioning of all our understanding of time, space, and matter around mind. Accordingly, a new epistemology is required once evolution is accepted. As the late Pope John Paul II would affirm,⁹ the theory of

7. See David Grumett, “Transformism and the End of Enhancement” in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

8. Grumett states that Teilhard’s notion of matter moves away from Aristotle’s sense of self-sufficiency. It is closer to the [notion of the] “indefinite needing a forming principle” of Plotinus. Further, Teilhard follows Leibniz’s use of the neo-Platonism of the Alexandrian School where matter expresses a privation and disunity. Matter is infinitely divisible like Descartes’ notion; but unlike Descartes, matter is unable to exist on its own. David, Grumett, *Teilhard de Chardin: Theology, Humanity and Cosmos*, p. 15, 27.

9. Pope John Paul II, “Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences” in *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology*, ed. Robert John, 2-9 (Berkeley: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1998), p. 4.

evolution is no longer one among many that can either be accepted or neglected. It is no longer a choice. We are evolutionists [simply] by the condition of how our world is now perceived, lived, and directed. As long as the responses to our questions maintain that thought is peripheral to the expanses of space, time and matter, perpetuating a classic split of matter and mind, a dichotomy of matter and spirit,¹⁰ then the universe and the capacity to read the book of nature remains a puzzle of pieces that do not fit, [that] do not indicate meaning. But when the data and collection of all these findings from space, time and matter are reorganized according to an evolving principle or process of mind/consciousness, a pattern of intense direction and meaning arises that resonates with what has historically been termed the religious sense, a sense common both to our Islamic and Christian traditions. The world's genesis, this connection of [everything] into a history of direction and meaning is what Teilhard termed a *cosmogensis*¹¹ – the unfolding complexification and convergence of consciousness, the revelation of the meaning of mind.

Given these reflections from the sciences, Teilhard offers several theological concepts that flow from his specific interpretation of evolution. These serve as structures with which each faith tradition can explore and interpret the world given the findings of the contemporary sciences. It is a task that Teilhard specifically took up in shaping contemporary Christian theology. His vision, I believe, can also offer creative and fruitful theological tools for Islam, [as well as] some of the other great religious traditions, in not only deepening the life of the peoples of our respective faiths, but in that larger vision of what he termed the convergence of religions due to the biological and spiritual necessity of human and global evolution.

Theological concepts

At the root of Teilhard's interpretation of global history is the principle that evolution testifies to a process of ever greater **personalization**. Writ large, personalization is the "*telos*," or goal of evolution, a process of "involution," whereby persons are becoming persons while remaining persons. Humanity spreads over the earth and intensifies its presence through culture. The very process of socialization is an intensifying of the personality of individuals and an incubus for the formation of a global mind and personality. This ever-

10. The French use the same word for spirit and mind, "l'esprit."

11. "L'univers évolutif conçu comme un système animé d'un mouvement orienté et convergent. Conception moderne et dynamique de l'univers. S'oppose au cosmos statique." Claude Cuenot, *Nouveau Lexique de Teilhard de Chardin* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1968), p. 66.

intensifying conscious pressure cooker convergence of individuals upon a growing center, what we have too narrowly defined in economics as globalization, has expanded the capacities of the mind in not only the collective wealth of culture but through technology, in its *power*. Before us the rapid rise of the internet, [the] power to break and even fuse atomic structures, genetic engineering, [and] artificial intelligence all testify to this cumulative and complexifying of the nature of our knowledge, and so with it of a growing power to shape and control the very process of evolution. The creations of our collective cultural mind seem to be on the edge of superseding us as their original creators. Discussion is now not how evolution has shaped us over the millennia, but what we can do within a few decades to change the very biology it took millions of years to form. We are exploring an exponential sense of evolution when the fusion of human and machine points to the transhuman.¹² This is not [the] esoteric ruminations of computer gurus but [instead] reflects [the] concerns of philosophers, theologians, business entrepreneurs and military think tanks.¹³ It is an exciting opportunity [that is] before us, yet if there is not also a concomitant evolution of our moral capacity to live, work, and pray together across all our faith traditions, we will destroy the very sacred nature of the creation that is before us. Evolution, as Teilhard grasped, is today much less about where we have come from, but where we are heading and how our religious traditions can help us to evolve a deeper and more profound way of living together as a single human family. Or, as Teilhard would say – we are becoming a single organic reality. A global person is taking shape that does not destroy the individual but can deepen our sense of having a place in a very sacred personal presence that is emerging – a unified humanity.

12. Ray Kurzweil goes so far as to speak about the approaching singularity, “a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed. Although neither utopian nor dystopian, this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give meaning to our lives.” The text is an important introduction to the current work in futures forecasting and such fields as informatics, nanotechnology, genetic engineering, robotics, artificial intelligence, and space travel. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

See David Grumett’s response to Kurzweil and the thought of Nick Bostrom from a philosophical/theological perspective using Teilhard. Further discussion is made of this article in the chapter on discernment. David Grumett, “Transformation and the End of Enhancement: Insights from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin” (unpublished, 2010), pp. 1-18.

13. *Ibid.*, The 2009 gathering in Montreal of the American Academy of Religion, with its 15,000 participants, took up discussion of the theme of transhumanism, citing specifically the work and concerns of Kurzweil. The consultation was led by Jeffrey Bishop, Brian Green, M. Dominic Eggert, Stephen Garner and Robert Ross. See http://www.aarweb.org/Meetings/Annual_Meeting/Past_and_Future_Meetings/2009/default.asp?ANum=&DayTime=&KeyWord=Transhumanism&Submit=View+Program+Book.

In the past, material bodies were measured by the two “infinities” of the microscopic and macroscopic, from atoms to galaxies. But there is also the axis of **complexity/consciousness**, the internal that is one with the external/material. With complexity there is more involved than simply bringing experience before scientific consideration. Biology becomes connected to physics, the science of life to the science of matter. Similar to Whitehead, consciousness, freedom, and creativity are joined to the phenomena of matter.¹⁴ Consciousness is more than a quality of the human. It is the quality of organizing matter present in degrees in all that exists. While unable to be detected at the lower levels of inanimate matter, consciousness gradually emerges. Within the expanding universe is an involution¹⁵ of greater complexity – consciousness. Though complexity does not necessitate teleology, for Teilhard there is an inexorable nature to this greater centration. Just as entropy serves to describe the processes at the beginning of the evolutionary process (stars, planets, life), through involution there is a sublimation produced by the synthesis of spirit.¹⁶ This directionality in evolution challenges the notions of many noted scientists with a materialist metaphysic.¹⁷ For Teilhard, any argument that [says that] life in the universe is only a chance process needs to be revised in favor of viewing consciousness as central to recognizing the direction of matter through life to mind, the apex to the cosmic vortex.

The essential phenomenon in the material world is life, and for the living world – humanity. But going further, the evolutionary process has not ceased. It continues in what is termed the totalization of humanity where individuals “super-reflect” upon themselves. Socialization, then, is part of the process of complexification and consciousness building. New forces are germinated within humanity that facilitate the process of collective reflection and unification while

14. “Teilhard shared with Whitehead, for example, the conviction that every mental event is an aspect of nature, and not something that occurs outside the cosmos.” John F. Haught, *Christianity and Science* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), p. 307.

15. Involution here refers to the process where, after a life form expands in size and quantity as a species, they reach a point of extension where they can no longer expand numerically but begin to intensify their internal relations and complexify. This turning in upon itself – involution – channels energy into an evolution of greater consciousness.

16. Teilhard, *TF*, p. 168.

17. “The French Nobel laureate and biochemist Jacques Monod accused (Teilhard) of systematically ‘trucking’ to millenarian dreams. Stephen Jay Gould, annoyed by Teilhard’s conviction that evolution is patently directional, arbitrarily exiled him to the province of scientific cheaters. Daniel Dennett recently referred to him as a ‘loser’ ultimately because of Teilhard’s firm rejection of materialist metaphysics and his allowance that evolution does not entail atheism.” John F. Haught, *Christianity and Science* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), p. 303.

preserving the individual. Through such processes as collective heredity (memory through education, mechanization, and progressive cerebralization), the development of thought by technology frees up enormous reserves of energy for further centration. Growth as an organism occurs at the level of the **noosphere**...“the pan-terrestrial organism in which, by compression and arrangement of the thinking particles, a resurgence of evolution (itself now become reflective) is striving to carry the stuff of the universe towards the higher conditions of a planetary super-reflection.”¹⁸

Today humanity has seized control of the biological forces of evolution. We stand able, and are already acting, to shape the corporal dimension of our self-understanding. Even with respect to [both] the freedom and terror this entails, Teilhard believed strongly that the process has a certain “statistical infallibility” to continue towards greater unification and *spiritualization* – that increase of reflection/thought over instinct and automatic reactions.¹⁹ [Everything] is progressing towards *Omega*.²⁰ The **Omega Point** is an ultimate, self-subsistent pole of consciousness. It is postulated as a reality due to the principles of 1) an irreversibility, 2) an attractive force, the inverse of gravity, that is the centering source of evolution, and 3) a force of unanimity whereby individuals are not repelled by the process but drawn to a person. Evolution, then, is a movement towards a supremely personal, supremely personalizing, being.²¹

In postulating the Omega Point, Teilhard is establishing a connection between the natural evolutionary process and the supernatural consummation of humanity. This both points towards an end in what is termed in Christian theology as the *Parousia*, or, end of history. The end shines light upon the direction of the entire evolutionary story. For Teilhard, this is an expansion of [the] Christian understanding of divine revelation into a process – a genesis. By genesis he means not simply that there is chance in the cosmos, but that the “universe has been pursuing an aim, that a single pattern has

18. Teilhard, *TF*, p. 180.

19. This optimism concerning nature grows primarily from Teilhard’s confidence in the “success” of the incarnation that forms the evolutive process without negating the place of chance/freedom.

20. For Teilhard, the physical spatial limits of the planet accelerate, expanding humanity’s dynamic of concentration. Teilhard did not consider planetary travel as a reasonable option for alleviating or diminishing the pressures of global centration. However, he did propose the possibility, although improbable, of psychic communication between planets, between noospheres. Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre *The Future of Man* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964), p. 174. *Oeuvres* 5, pp. 227-228.

21. Teilhard, *TF*, p. 188.

been running through the whole, and that the pattern has been oriented towards man.”²²

The advent of the Omega Point introduces a psychic, mental reality that goes beyond humanity and serves as a milieu for growth. Over time there is a gradual elemental concentration of a worshipping force within humanity. Among the religious traditions, Teilhard views Christianity as having those special qualities that are supported by the evolutionary findings of science; namely, an 1) intense vitality, 2) adaptability, 3) affinity for development in the noosphere, and 4) a convergence in its dogmatic views with an organic model. Of all these qualities, I am aware of the first three existing strongly within the Islamic tradition. The last I believe might find resonances [with]in the cosmology of Avicenna and some of the interpretive work of Mulla Sadra. That requires the expertise of the scholars present to hopefully make comment.

For Teilhard, the image of God takes on the self-reflective activity of the noosphere. The natural human movement towards Omega is met by the revelation of Omega. For Teilhard, this meeting point is both in the Jesus of Nazareth and the Resurrected Christ that now lives through the community of the Church. He would speak of the same church as a “phylum of love,”²³ a place where the incarnation takes on its global body.

“The Church” is gradually formed, its influence animating and assembling in their most sublime form all the spiritual energies of the noosphere: the Church, the reflexively Christified portion of the world – the Church, the principal focus-point at which inter-human affinities come together through super-charity – the Church, the central axis of universal convergence, and the exact meeting point that springs up between the universe and Omega Point.²⁴

It is important to see that the Church – as the praying community, with all its difficulties and stumblings, is for Teilhard a living “global” person that is also the encounter/place for **convergence**. Convergence is how Divinity shapes and concentrates the spiritual evolution of the cosmos. So too the Catholic Church is involved in this evolutionary process towards a deeper fullness that she herself cannot yet fully perceive. All faiths participate by their truthfulness in this

22. Mooney, p. 74.

23. “Phylum is a zoological group or branch, a living bundle, one of the natural unities of life. What defines a phylum is its power and specific law of autonomous development. It behaves as a living thing, though it does so in its own way, it grows and expands. They exemplify one of the most essential laws of organized matter.” Mooney, p. 166.

24. Teilhard, *TF*, pp. 191-192.

convergence. Or, using a different metaphor that Teilhard often expressed: “All that rises, converges.” Foundationally, it is the Divine Spirit as an attractive love that serves as the source for this evolutionary convergence of the cosmos and the formation of the community as living person.

Global ethics

Given the above findings of the sciences and the theological principles that Teilhard has offered, there are enormous implications for the shaping of not only an ethic reflective of one particular religious tradition, but for the foundation of a global ethic. While Teilhard was not a trained ethicist, his theology impacts what we have traditionally understood to be individual morality and the larger picture of communal social teaching common to most religious traditions. This dual foci within Christian ethics more specifically has led to often picturing distinct formational issues concerning the individual, and then the community,²⁵ while maintaining their relationship. In regard [to] the individual, such themes would consider the person as made in the image of God, our vocation to happiness (beatitude), freedom, the importance of moral acts, and there being moral passions [and] conscience, and the development of a virtuous versus a sinful life.²⁶ In the second area, concerning communal life, the social teaching would concentrate upon the themes of the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, rights and responsibilities all persons have within society, an option for the poor, the value of work and the rights of workers, the solidarity of humanity, and our responsibility as stewards of God’s creation.²⁷ These themes rely heavily upon a natural law ethic undergirding principles of order and stability in shaping the harmony of humanity within creation. Teilhard would say that such an ethic describes the metaphysical principles with which one views the world. To change that worldview, however, impacts the very ethic in its concrete expression.

25. Anna Lisa Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment and Our Place in the World* (London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 35.

26. Pope John Paul II, *Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1994), pp. 474-511.

27. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Themes of Catholic Social Teaching,” *Justice, Peace and Human Development*, 2005. <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml> (accessed April 30, 2010). There is a more thorough treatment of the social teaching in the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” 2004. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html (accessed April 30, 2010). See also Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006).

If indeed, as we have assumed, the world culminates in a thinking reality, the organization of personal human energies represents the supreme stage of cosmic evolution on earth; and morality is consequently nothing less than the higher development of mechanics and biology. The world is ultimately constructed by moral forces; and reciprocally, the function of morality is to construct the world: an entirely new valuation leading to an altered program of morality.²⁸

For Teilhard, this shift from a classic morality of balance to a morality of movement has led to three fundamental principles for evaluating the morality of actions; namely [that] 1) the good is only that which fosters the growth of the spirit on earth; 2) good is everything that brings a spiritual growth in the world; 3) the best is what assures the highest development of the spiritual powers of the earth. To take up these principles in light of a Teilhardian worldview dramatically reshapes how we understand the notions of *personhood*, *action*, and *growth* in contrast to simply viewing life as a pursuit of virtue and an avoidance of sin.

Personhood

The world as a whole is being personalized. This could be said to be the central tenet of a Teilhardian ethic. Personhood, however, is not focused upon the individual for its understanding but upon the whole from which the individual emerges. The health of the community as person shapes and renews the individual. When essential life processes, such as thought, communication, and [the] security of the community, are hampered or even non-existent, then the identity and fullness of life of the individual is crippled. Through the model and actuality of the religious community, there is witness to an ontological reality of a collective person in formation in relationship to God. For Teilhard, then, an *imago dei* theology is more than simply an issue of likeness. The risen Christ is active as person physically, biologically through the body of Church as the world and cosmos are taken up in an evolving process of global divinization. Our ethical life as a result is rooted in this relational openness to God's primary activity in the universe. This energy of transformation is none other than the loving communication of God.

Love is the driving force that undergirds the process of evolution, critiques and heals it and forms the community that Christians call the "body of Christ." Love is the unifying drive of Teilhard's metaphysics and the primary form of action of the universe. "If it is taken to its

28. Teilhard, *HE*, p. 105. *Oeuvres* 6, p. 131.

limit in the direction of a cosmic pole of unification, everything we experience and even everything we see displays a singular ‘bias’ for transforming itself into love.”²⁹ While initially this evolutionary drive can have a sense of being pulled into a “whirlpool”³⁰ leading to a sensed loss of the individual, this very action of cosmic centering eventuates in a centering and greater personalizing at a loving center. Matter becomes spirit at the same pace as love spreads universally. The spiritual process, which is also an organic biological process, is a letting go of the individual ego for the sake of finding its more authentic expression in a personhood centered in God. One must die to herself in order to have life. This decentering activity is a love that serves as the foundation for all later ethical action. We take up an ethical lifestyle as an expression of the loving relationship we have found with Christ and as a result express an identity that aids in the blooming of our own individuality.

Action

“In human action, soul and matter, and spiritual and material principles, are fused, and matter is subdued, formed and reformed. [The] soul gives form to matter and implicates matter in a telos.”³¹

In its organizing activity, [the] soul is the active expression of humanity in formation heading in a direction that ascends, like John of Damascene’s ladder of perfection, ever higher rungs of complexifying integration of the matter of the cosmos. Through the soul an active synthesizing principle of unity is present from the smallest atom to the greatest complexes of human self-reflection. The cosmos takes on an order, meaning and direction; it takes on an ever-deepening expression of [the] soul. In a Teilhardian metaphysic, the soul is not a moment of infused distinction from the rest of creation,³² rather it is expressive of

29. Teilhard, *HM*, pp. 51-52.

30. Teilhard, *HM*, p. 50.

31. Grumett, *Teilhard*, p. 37.

32. While affirming of his statements on the theory of evolution, Teilhard would not be supportive of the recent statement of John Paul II maintaining a separation of soul and the developmental nature of humans in matter with the idea of the infused soul at conception. Rahner already speaks of this contradiction forty years previous between the scientific and theological models if there is maintenance of the unity of the body soul reality of the person. George Coyne highlights this continued contradiction in church teaching. Karl Rahner, *Hominization: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (London: Burnes and Oates, 1965). Pope John Paul II, “Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences” in *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology*, ed. Robert John Russell (Berkeley, California: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1998), pp. 2-9. George Coyne, “Evolution and the Human Person: The Pope in Dialogue,” *Science and Theology: The New Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998).

the degrees of unity within matter on the way to becoming spirit, both centering and pointing towards greater centration.

The human soul...is inseparable, in its birth and in its growth, from the universe into which it is born. In each soul, God loves and partly saves the whole world which that soul sums up in an incommunicable and particular way. But this summing-up, this welding, is not given to us ready-made and complete with the first awakening of consciousness. It is we who, through our activity, must industriously assemble the widely scattered elements. By action our soul deepens in its unitive capacity and vocation.³³

Yet this action is not simply an experience of building up but is one of the more significant processes of decentering ourselves from any action that we tend to worship. Through those events in our life where we act in order to further our growth, we must foster at times a detachment from other actions so that the greater dynamism of communal formation is manifest.

Teilhard's emphasis upon action also distinguishes him from Spinoza's pantheist fusion of humanity with nature and the divine. Teilhardian action testifies to a freedom within our action, an agency that allows us to recognize that there is greater diversity within divine union, and an ultimate divine transcendence. We are not lost in an ocean but actually, in the ocean of God's action, find our place, uniqueness and role through our own action, freely chosen. In this regard, Teilhard builds upon the metaphysics of action of Maurice Blondel. The free human act naturalizes or assists in the incarnation of the transcendent, analogous to a wedding but referring to the union of human and divine wills which express a "synthesis of man and God."³⁴ Freedom, for Teilhard, is thus an ever-growing condition correlative with growing consciousness. Humanity emerges through reflection with greater freedom. But equally so, with this consciousness comes responsibility for participating in the expanded vision. We act not indifferent to the end, but direct our actions to a purpose and goal. Ultimately all action has an absolute as a goal that gives the same action a ground from which to move forward.³⁵ Our actions reflect that self which is grounded in the divine, and not one that we can know separate from this end. This end is part of a larger four-fold process of unifying our action with the salvific activity of the whole. Building on the thought of Paul, "Laboring with, suffering

33. Teilhard, *DM*, pp. 23-24. *Œuvres* 4, pp. 45-46.

34. This is to be contrasted with Aquinas' sense that "created beings possess only the potential for activity, which is actualized by divine power." Grumett, *Teilhard*, p. 45.

35. Grumett, *Teilhard*, p. 52.

with, dying with, and being raised with, form a theological series of moments in the life of the soul: action, passion, death and resurrection.”³⁶ In a collaborative activity, humanity acts to complete the work begun in Christ, through us who are his body manifesting his identity reaching fullness. Or in Teilhard’s own words, “With each one of our works, we labor – in individual separation, but no less really, to build the Pleroma; that is to say, we bring to Christ a little fulfillment.”³⁷

Growth

The future fullness, or the *pleroma*, as the Apostle Paul narrates, is sought through a process of growth by which we compare our present to the future goal of life in God. To the extent that the world conforms to this “God ahead” is a reflection upon the condition of the global moral state. The moral formation of the individual is related to the condition of the world since they are not separate realities.³⁸ The moral agent as individual must be a shaper of the world community. Virtue, therefore, is not simply a quality of the individual but is a condition that is continually drawing one into the communal being made present. Holiness, from this perspective, is more to be likened as an encouragement toward greater wholeness of the community. Sanctity, in a Teilhardian structure, locates the individual within a sanctifying growth activity in the larger community. The ethical question becomes then the quality of a person as leaven, not a perfection acquired, nor a purity preserved. “The principle of movement calls humanity to perceive new consequences of action, new duties to follow, and new virtues to nurture.”³⁹

Given this, Teilhard will speak of the primacy of the three virtues of purity, faith and fidelity. They are each reflective of the conditions of the soul and not to the operations of the body. Purity represents a submission to the will of God and makes room for inner self-illumination. “The purity of beings is measured by the degree of attraction that draws them towards the divine center, or, what comes to the same thing, by their proximity to the center.”⁴⁰ Faith is an operative power that allows one to see the integrating quality of all events, most especially the diminishment as a sur-animation – as a unifying higher action of providence. Lastly, fidelity provides the

36. Grumett, *Teilhard*, p. 63.

37. Teilhard, *DM*, p. 26. *Oeuvres* 4, p. 50.

38. Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment and Our Place in the World*, p. 35.

39. Grumett, *Teilhard*, p. 122.

40. Teilhard, *DM*, p. 108. *Oeuvres* 4, p. 165.

bond between the two previous virtues by which the centering self and the larger animated world are held together. “Through fidelity we situate ourselves and maintain ourselves in the hands of God so exactly as to become one with them in their action.”⁴¹

From the vantage point of having a vision of God’s will for the world, we are empowered by God to be instruments of the divine will’s creative reformation of the world. To see the end gives us a structure for making decisions today not alone but in rising consciousness – [for] there is also a growth in action converging with the action of others. Vision serves to concretize what Christian tradition termed the body of Christ as a single reality of the risen Jesus with the active embodying activity of the Church. Divine inspiration incarnates.

Such a vision leads to social imperatives based upon the structures of personhood, action and growth described above. Past natural law ethics, with its establishment of minimums for individual and social rights such as in the case of those of the family, labor, survival, and the relation of nation-states, does not go far enough to inspire the fullness of personalization. To be the most, rather than the minimum, is what Teilhard is expressing. An ethic that is not minimalist would see human decisions as unfinished, growing with expanding consciousness – it would be an ethic of continual formation, change and development. This ethic then would go beyond a simple defense of the person or the community in its formation [and] seek the maximizing of the energies of purity, faith and fidelity in such a way that we would expand our lived expression of personhood and community – showing the collective face of God. Such an ethic is expressive of not an arrival but of an expanding of the call to love. So a traditional ethic of balance is challenged by a question not of did I love, but how may I love more. Solidarity is not a point of simply walking with others, but is the call to [a] greater fullness of the whole body. The concrete expression of solidarity, the condition of an option for the poor, is by necessity a recognition that the entire body cannot advance spiritually when fifteen percent of the world lives on less than one dollar a day and nearly half eke out a survival at two and a half dollars a day. Sin, in this case, deals with not only contributing to the depersonalization but the perpetuation of indifference to the call for growing freedom and others participating in a fuller life. If we were to use an example of the refugee, refugees are not peripheral to a global conscience, but essential for its growth. Their fragility invites a

41. Teilhard, *DM*, p. 113. *Oeuvres* 4, p. 173.

network of personalizing support in structures, resources, and presence to be formed embodying the genuine condition that those most fragile are at the heart of God's presence. Refusal to participate constructively in the issue, maintaining indifference whether as individuals or nation-states, is a choice against the maturation of the world's ethical constitution as an organic thinking whole. We are, if you will, "tying up Christ" from his full expression in the world, and such a condition obligates persons with vision to oppose the choices and structures that perpetuate such concrete evil.

Applications

These ethical ideas require concrete applications. A few I would suggest that stand out are:

- A Teilhardian ethic [that] would encourage the expansion of joint efforts of research whereby peoples learn to work and think together on a common task of development.
- A Teilhardian theology [that] would seek to support and reform those global institutions, such as the United Nations, that exist for the collaboration of the people of the world. The United Nations is not a final solution, but a necessary evolving institutional expression of this personalizing quality of globalization of which Teilhard speaks. No one denies the need for [the] reform of the U.N., as is well documented by such studies as the Commission on Global Governance led by Ingvar Carlsson and Shridath Ramphal.⁴² However, it is a body that needs to be supported adequately by national governments politically and financially in the fulfillment of its mandate.⁴³
- Because of [the Teilhardian] view that all are part of the one developing communal body, the voices and sufferings of the poorest in our world must serve as the starting place for hearing and healing this holy presence of God incarnate. As the theologian Ignacio Ellacuria stated before he was murdered in El Salvador, we can find the face of God in those people who are today being crucified – the very poorest and forgotten of our nations.
- Leadership that inspires humanity to love, to be united in a

42. The Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood*, International Commission Report (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

43. See Sanks in his own encouragement of the Church supporting the UN. T. Howland Sanks, "Globalization and the Church's Social Mission," *Theological Studies*, 60, pp. 625-651 (1999), p. 645.

common task, is central to this task. While Teilhard does not develop a theory of leadership, one can recognize the importance of such a structure in the thought of the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose “sociality” theology and principle of *stellvertretung*⁴⁴ clearly recognizes the relationship of the leader as symbolically personifying the vision of the dual nature of person as individual and community. Fostering leadership that respects the individual, unifies the community, and moves them forward in a personalizing fashion is true to the spirit of Teilhard. This integrates that force that Teilhard described of a need for biological organization – a hierarchical arrangement within the organism serving as the ego of the noosphere. The leader, by his or her “attractive” presence, serves as that organizing and authoritative living symbol of a world becoming person.

These four areas of application – research, the United Nations, an option for the poor, and leadership – are definitely not exhaustive of a Teilhardian theology. But they do serve to give substance to the larger task of an hermeneutic that places personalization at the heart of its ethic.

In conclusion, I offer a reflection on discernment, a spiritual skill at the heart of Jesuit formation and education. In all our efforts to dialogue, to deepen the faith of the peoples of our respective traditions, we begin, live and move within a continual atmosphere of discernment. The question must remain at the forefront of all we do: “What is the will of God for ourselves as individuals and as a community?” Discernment means a continual state of prayer. It is a continual attentiveness that the other who sits beside me, whomever they may be, is a divine gift from whom I can hear the voice and living word of God seeking to transform my life and the world around me. It is this same attitude of continual discernment that makes possible such a gathering as that of today –where we care for each other, and wish the best, and so give whatever treasures we have from our traditions, our sciences, and our hearts so the other may grow. It is a holy giving and receiving, ever conscious that the real Giver is present among our explorations.

44. “(*Stellvertretung*) literally means standing in the place of another, but it means more than words like ‘proxy,’ ‘deputy’ and ‘representative’ convey. Bonhoeffer’s meaning is best expressed by speaking of people who personify their communities, and act vicariously on their behalf.” Clifford Green, “Human Sociality and Christian Community,” ed. John W. de Gruchy, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 118.

Teilhard was adamant that one of the greatest dangers we could have in the area of the dialogue of religions, especially within his very own tradition of the Catholic Church, was to believe that we had arrived, that we were no longer growing or evolving as persons or as a community; or even worse, that we did not need each other. With great gratitude, this gathering expresses just the opposite. For myself, I wish to say it is a blessing to be with all of you, to explore and discern, respective of our genuine differences, and to hear and see through each of you that Good God who is so much more than we can ever imagine.

Bibliography

- Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Coyne, George, "Evolution and the Human Person: The Pope in Dialogue" in *Science and Theology: The New Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998).
- Cuenot, Claude, *Nouveau Lexique Teilhard de Chardin* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1968).
- de Gruchy, John W., *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Department of Planetary Sciences, Lunar and Planetary Laboratories, "Cosmic Collisions: Impacts (Power Point)," *University of Arizona*, Fall Course 2009. www.lpl.arizona.edu/undergrad/classes/fall2009/Yelle_102-13/.../L19.ppt (accessed April 26, 2010).
- Grumett, David, *Teilhard de Chardin: Theology, Humanity and Cosmos* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).
- _____, "Transformism and the End of Enhancement" in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, by Ronald Cole-Turner (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011).
- Haight, John F., *Christianity and Science* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007).
- Kurzweil, Ray, *The Singularity is Near* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).
- Lane, Abby, *Cambrian Explosion*, April 26, 2010. <http://palaeo.gly.bris.ac.uk/Palaeofiles/Cambrian/timing/timing.html> (accessed April 26, 2010).
- Mooney, Christopher, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1968).
- NASA Ames Research Center, *Kepler: A Search for Habitable Planets*, April 26, 2010. <http://kepler.nasa.gov/Mission/discoveries/> (accessed April 26, 2010).
- Peterson, Anna Lisa, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment and Our Place in the World* (London: University of California Press, 2001).
- Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006).
- Pope John Paul II, "Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences" in *Evolutionary*

and *Molecular Biology*, ed. Robert John Russell et al. (Berkeley, California: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1998).

_____, *Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1994).

Rahner, Karl, *Hominization: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem*

(London: Burnes and Oates, 1965).

Sagan, Carl, "Cosmic Calendar," *Cosmic Calendar*, April 20, 2010 (accessed April 20, 2010).

Sanks, T. Howland, "Globalization and the Church's Social Mission," *Theological Studies*, 60 (1999), 625-651.

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, *Human Energy* (New York: William Collins and Sons, 1969).

_____, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).

_____, *The Future of Man* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964).

_____, *The Heart of Matter* (New York: William Collins and Sons, Inc, 1978).

_____, *Toward the Future* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1975).

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Themes of Catholic Social Teaching," Justice, Peace and Human Development, 2005. <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml> (accessed April 30, 2010).