
FR. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, SJ (1881-1955) - "THE AWAITED WORD"

Written: Peking, 31 October 1940

Published in 1963 in the Teilhard de Chardin Foundation's Cahier IV, without the additions provided later by Fr Bernardino M. Boransea, OF.M, of the Catholic University of Washington. These manuscript additions appear in copies given by Père Teilhard to Père Allegra, O.B.

A way into this way of thinking is to reflect on the connection between one's body (one's material aspect; one's organic structure) and one's spirit (one's spiritual aspect; one's "heart"; one's personality). **Notice how Christianity has had a difficult time keeping in unity our organic/material aspect and our spiritual aspect, and often articulating an opposition to the body, or at least a strong discounting of its importance.** To the degree that this is true, Christianity will have difficulty putting in unity the created world/the natural world/the organically constituted aspect with the human world.

Part I - A Possible Diagnosis of the Situation: A Crisis of Growth

Some are so distressed by the intellectual and moral disorders that are today confusing the human mass that they are inclined to believe that what we are doing is simply to drop back and disintegrate.

The capital sin of Sloth/Accidie - Physical or mental slothfulness, esp. as a condition leading to listlessness and lack of interest in life; apathy, lethargy, torpor; (also) †an instance of this (*obsolete*). Regarded esp. in early use as characteristic of or equivalent to the 'deadly sin' of Sloth, and in Christian asceticism as a condition to which monks and hermits were particularly liable.

To my mind, the nature of the disease is completely different - and in consequence calls for a completely different remedy. The more I question myself, and the people I meet, **the more convinced I am of this: disregard of traditional rules certainly plays a large part in the troubles from which we are suffering, but that disregard itself is not so**

much lack of principle as dissatisfaction. There is something too narrow and something missing in the gospel as presented to us. In spite of appearances, our age is more religious than ever: it is only that it needs stronger meat. *A crisis not of spiritual weakness and frigidity, but one of transformation and growth - that is the sort of ordeal we are experiencing.*

That being so, **it is useless or even dangerous to recommend a mere return to the past.** It is because man needs and hopes for something other, that he is now rising up in protest and kicking over the traces. *Wider horizons*, and not a tighter rein - that, if I am not mistaken, is the only remedy that can effectively bring our generation back to the ways of truth.

Part II - The Deep Roots of the Crisis: The Rise of a New Sun

Until the dawn of modern times, the problem of salvation could be expressed for man in no more than two terms: the existence on earth of each man, and his ultimate end; the brief years of life, and eternity; the human individual, and God. And between the two - nothing.

Recall the creedal language about Jesus, the Son of God: "Born of the Virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, on the third day he rose." Notice how it is about Jesus who was born, who died ... but nothing in the Creed about how He lived and why that matters.

It is this, in any case, that accounts for the irresistible emergence of the great myths (the communist, the nationalist myths), whose appearance and whose impact are shaking the old civilization. **It is no longer a matter of mere heresies within Christianity, but of Christianity's being confronted by what seems to be an entirely new religion, which threatens to make a clean sweep of everything.** You may call it the Temptation on the Mountain, if you wish; but there is an infinite subtlety in it, since, in this context, it is not a question of self-gratification in worship, but of disinterested conquest, productive, without any doubt, of lofty spiritual forces. It is the replacement in human consciousness, of charity by the 'sense of the earth'. What is the duty of us Christians at this juncture?

Part III - General Solution of the Problem: Conjunction of the Two Stars in Mankind's Heaven

Whether we like it or not, not one of us can exist without thereby experiencing the deeply penetrating influence of this new star. Each one of us (those of us whose faith is strongest) is faced by the spiritual problem of balancing not two but three co-existing

realities: our own soul, God, and also the earthly future of the world lying ahead of us. To deny the existence of this last object would be to falsify ourselves, to lie to ourselves and, in consequence, to our faith.

If that, however, is so, then the general solution of the problem becomes clear. It emerges automatically. **There is only one way of escaping from the threatening, absorbing, thing which we cannot remove from our sky, and must not try to remove, simply because it exists: and that way is to overcome it by a Force greater than it. Would it not be possible to assimilate it, to baptize it, to Christianize it, to *Christify* it?**

Part IV - The Great Remedy: The Manifestation of the "Universal Christ"

PLEROMA pli-roh´muh [πλήρωμα **plērōma**]. *Pleroma* is that which fills or completes; fulfillment (of prophecy) or perfection. In theology *pleroma* acquires a technical referent, the full divine perfection, especially as present in Jesus (John 1:14) or salvation conveyed through him to believers (John 1:16). Second-century CE Valentinian Gnostic theologians (*see* GNOSTICISM) employed the word as a technical term for the reality of the divine cosmos in contrast to the deficiency of the fallen, material universe (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.1.3; 1.11.5; 1.12.4).¹

The association between Christ as divine fullness and his body, the church, reappears as the conclusion to an elaborate celebration of the lordship of the exalted Christ in Eph 1:23*b*. As in the other examples, their relationship to Christ ensures that believers are filled "with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19).

Therefore, any cosmological or metaphysical overtones that these passages employ in using *fullness* as a term for the way in which Christ participates in and mediates God can be grounded in the NT understanding of salvation.²

In our own day, this, it seems to me, is the part reserved for the grand and essentially dogmatic idea of the Christian *pleroma*: the mysterious synthesis of the uncreated and the created - the grand completion (at once quantitative and qualitative) of the universe in God. It is impossible to read St Paul without being astounded by three things simultaneously: first, the fundamental importance attached by the apostle to this idea,

´ Secondary Stress

Haer. Adversus haereses; Against Heresies

¹ PHEME PERKINS, "[Pleroma](#)," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009) 548.

² PHEME PERKINS, "[Pleroma](#)," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009) 548.

interpreted with the utmost realism; secondly, the relative obscurity to which it has hitherto been relegated by preachers and theologians; and thirdly, its astonishing appropriateness to the religious needs of the present day. **Here we have the concept of God gathering to himself not merely a diffuse multiplicity of souls, but the solid, organic, reality of a universe, taken from top to bottom in the complete extent and unity of its energies - and do we not find in that precisely what we were feeling our way towards?**

[T]he love of Christ being seen as the energy in which all the chosen elements of creation are fused together without thereby being confused. Rome has recently made a gesture which marks a decisive stage in **the development of dogma**, expressing and sanctioning in **the figure of Christ the King** this irresistible advance of Christian consciousness towards a more universalist and more realist appreciation of the Incarnation.

Development of Doctrine – It was only in the nineteenth century that various theories attempting to explain doctrinal development began to appear. A number of currents of thought contributed to this. One was the development of the systematic study of history, and with it, the study of the history of Christian doctrine. Another was the emergence of evolutionary thinking, particularly through the influence of the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. **In Germany Johann Adam Möhler of the Catholic faculty at Tübingen described doctrinal development as an aspect of the total life of the church which continues to grow and develop under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.** And in England, working independently of the continental philosophical tradition, John Henry Newman developed his famous theory in the process of the study of early church history which led him into the Roman Catholic Church; his classic *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* appeared in 1845. **In it he stressed how the divine reality grasped by faith gradually becomes clarified, expressed, and formulated in doctrines recognized as true when defined by the church's magisterium, all under the guidance of the Spirit.**³

What I have in mind, and what I dream about, is that the Church should follow up the logical extension of this movement, and so make plain and actual to the world, as St Paul did to his converts, **the great figure of Him in whom the *pleroma* finds its physical principle**, its expression, and its consistence: **Christ-Omega, the Universal-Christ.** *Descendit, ascendit, ut repleret omnia* - "He descended, and he ascended, that he might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:9-10).

³ Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane, [*The New Dictionary of Theology*](#) (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 281–282.

Ephesians 4 (NAB) – ⁹What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended into the lower [regions] of the earth? ¹⁰The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. ⁴

The Universal Christ, born from an expansion of the heart of Jesus, requires the historical reality of his human nature if he is not to disappear; **and at the same time, as a function of the mechanism specific to love, he does not absorb but completes the personality of the elements which he gathers together at the term of union.** Nor, again, is there any danger that the faithful who are drawn to the Universal Christ will forget heaven and allow themselves to succumb to a pagan naturalism and be drawn into a materialist conquest of the earth: for does not the Universal Christ, in his full glory, always emerge from the Cross?

It is only the Christian (and he only in so far as he absorbs into himself the *humano-divine* properties of the Universal Christ) who is in a position today to answer **the complex demands of nature and grace** by an incredibly rich and simple act, **by a completely synthetic act, in which the spirit of detachment and the spirit of conquest combine, correct and elevate one another - the spirit of tradition and the spirit of adventurous enquiry, the spirit of the earth and the spirit of God.**

⁴ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Eph 4:9-10.

GANZ NOTES TO SHARE

TNS 13, 2 (17 OCTOBER 2023) – FR. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, SJ

Version: 10, 15, 16, 17, 18 October 2023

Thomas M. King, S.J.: "Teilhard was striving for sanctity by working in science, and this effort would require a new understanding of what it means to be holy."

James Keane, SJ - Flannery O'Connor used a quote from Teilhard for a 1961 short story that later became the title of a collection, "Everything That Rises Must Converge." And probably Teilhard's most famous quote comes from his 1936 essay, "The Evolution of Chastity": "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The way that I would prefer to read this scene is that regularly, as in very often, we humans lose touch with the real depth and mystery of the people we walk amidst, and most poignantly the depth and mystery of those whom we stand the closest and dearest. **Perhaps this moment was the one when the disciples were granted, for a moment, the ability to see the reality of Jesus.**

Remember that the divine and holy reality of Jesus—the second Person of the divine Trinity—*was in fact* the truth about Jesus. **The Transfiguration, then, is not so much about a vision of Jesus in his post-resurrection existence as it is a moment of *comprehension* about who Jesus actually is, but it is *revelatory*;** that is, such an insight is not something that even the most perceptive and gifted disciple could have grasped on his or her own; it needed for Jesus to show him or her who actually He was.

Matthew 17 - The Transfiguration of Jesus.^{* 1 a}After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.^{* 2 *b} And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.^{3 *} And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him.⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents^{*} here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."^{5 c} While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them,^{*} then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."^{6 *} When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid.⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid."⁸ And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. [1]

THE MASS ON THE WORLD – “THE OFFERING”

**Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
for through your goodness we have received
the bread we offer you:
fruit of the earth and work of human hands,
it will become for us the bread of life. [2]**

**By the mystery of this water and wine
may we come to share in the divinity of Christ
who humbled himself to share in our humanity.
[3]**

**Written: April 1923 to September 1924 in China. He
was 42-43 years old.**

In June 1923 Teilhard and Licent undertook an expedition into the Ordos Desert west of Peking/Beijing near the border with Inner Mongolia. The journey was an arduous one, with rough physical conditions and a harsh summer climate. It was during this journey that Teilhard de Chardin completed his famous “Mass on the World”, which is a mystical masterpiece.

This meditation suggested itself to Père Teilhard when, in the course of a scientific expedition, he found himself one day out in the Ordos desert where it was impossible for him to offer Mass. This happened, it seems, on the feast of the Transfiguration, a feast for which he had a special love. His thoughts therefore turned to the radiation of the

eucharistic presence of Christ through the universe.

LIMIT SITUATIONS

My point here is that what Teilhard experienced in those trenches of World War I on the Western Front *forced*, but by grace and by his unceasing availability to grace, a transformation of his consciousness. How is it that from Hell itself – what human beings can do to one another; the unceasing blood-lust of our species – Teilhard had a profound experience of HOPE when he witnessed the presence of LOVE among the soldiers with whom he lived and fought and wept.

In the way that Julian of Norwich was given her profound *shewings*, and who then needed twenty years to begin to understand what she had been given, shown, so Teilhard sought to be faithful to what had been given him during those four years that he served as a stretcher-bearer in the trenches.

A Baptism of Metanoia (Mark 1:4)

Mark 1: 4 ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης [ὁ] βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ³ κηρύσσων βάπτισμα **μετανοίας** εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.^[4]

Mark 1: ⁴ John [the] Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of **repentance** for the forgiveness of sins^[5]

Mark 1 (*The Message*):

4–6 John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a **baptism of life-change** that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, **were baptized by him in the Jordan River into a changed life**. John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey.^[6]

41.52 μετανοέω; μετάνοια, ας *f*: to change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness—'to repent, to change one's way, repentance.'^{5[7]} Though in English a focal component of repent is the sorrow or contrition that a person experiences because of sin, **the emphasis in μετανοέω and μετάνοια seems to be more specifically the total change, both in thought and behavior, with respect to how one should both think and act**. Whether the focus is upon attitude or behavior varies somewhat in different contexts. Compare, for example, Lk 3:8, He 6:1, and Ac 26:20.^[8]

Sebastian Moore, OSB – “Communicating a Dangerous Memory”

I suspect that not nearly enough thought has been given to the idea that Jesus had a consciousness greatly beyond the normal.

...

Christian belief depends entirely on what Johann Baptist Metz calls **a dangerous memory**. Its massive formulas embody centuries of reflection on that memory, that original impact of one life on a few other lives, that has quite changed the world.

...

Now since sin was the early, pre-psychological name for the negative, anti-life, anti-growth tendency in us, and since our many schools of psychology have recognized in this tendency a matter of crucial importance, one who believes today that Jesus was sinless is making an enormous psychological assertion. **He or she is describing a human psyche unimpeded by that huge inertial force that operates below the level where we distinguish between sins and mistakes, that deep reluctance to understand, to change, and to grow, that instigation of the flight from understanding.** We shall have to exercise our creative imagination to fill out the description of such a psyche.

...

Sin is a deep-seated refusal to grow.

...

Sin is not a disregard for others: it is a mis-regard for others. It is a centering on myself on the beam of others [Matthew 7:5]. And the beam is not noticed - ***the failure to notice it being sin in action***. Thus, the socio-centrism, the anthropocentrism, of sin is never observed - until finally its effects reveal themselves in geocide in its many forms.

...

Now **this state of arrested development**, initiated in a partially flunked growth crisis, means that instead of **our basic sense of the goodness and greatness of our life directing us to look beyond the human to the all-embracing mystery**, our reduced sense of our goodness continues forever to wrestle with the socio-dramatic context never transcended. In this way we create our own limit for desire, the human world with its endless history of injustice and revenge. Far beyond this limit, stands our real limit, death.

C.S. LEWIS

C.S. Lewis - *An Experiment in Criticism* (from the Epilogue)

We seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves.

Each of us by nature sees the whole world from one point of view with a perspective and a selectiveness peculiar to himself. And even when we build disinterested fantasies, they are saturated with, and limited by, our own psychology. To acquiesce in this particularity on the sensuous level—in other words, not to discount perspective—would be lunacy. We should then believe that the railway line really grew narrower as it receded into the distance. But we want to escape the illusions of perspective on higher levels too.

We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with

other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own.

...

Good reading, therefore, though it is not essentially an affectional or moral or intellectual activity, has something in common with all three. In love we escape from our self into one other. In the moral sphere, every act of justice or charity involves putting ourselves in the other person's place and thus transcending our own competitive particularity. In coming to understand anything we are rejecting the facts as they are **for us** in favour of the facts **as they are**. The primary impulse of each is to maintain and aggrandize himself. **The secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness. In love, in virtue, in the pursuit of knowledge, and in the reception of the arts, we are doing this.** Obviously, this process can be described either as an enlargement or as a temporary annihilation of the self. But that is an old paradox; 'he that loseth his life shall save it'.

...

Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom fully realise the enormous extension of our being which we owe to authors. *We realise it best when we talk with an unliterary friend. He may be full of goodness and good sense, but he inhabits a tiny world. In it, we should be suffocated.* The man who is contented to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison. **My own eyes are not**

enough for me, I will see through those of others. Reality, even seen through the eyes of many, is not enough. I will see what others have invented. Even the eyes of all humanity are not enough. I regret that the brutes cannot write books. Very gladly would I learn what face things present to a mouse or a bee; more gladly still would I perceive the olfactory world charged with all the information and emotion it carries for a dog.

Remember how T.H. White, *The Sword in the Stone* (Part I of *The Once and Future King*), writes of the education of "Wart" – the young Arthur – by Merlin, when the latter turns the young boy into a bird, a fish, an ant, etc. Merlin was doing in the young Arthur what Lewis is talking about above: he is transforming/expanding Arthur's **horizon**.

FOOTNOTES (to above texts)

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- The account of the transfiguration confirms that Jesus is the *Son* of God (Mt 17:5) and points to fulfillment of the prediction that he will come *in his Father's glory* at the end of the age (Mt 16:27). It has been explained by some as a resurrection appearance retrojected into the time of Jesus' ministry, but that is not probable since the account lacks many of the usual elements of the resurrection-appearance narratives. It draws upon motifs from the Old Testament and noncanonical Jewish apocalyptic literature that express the presence of the heavenly and the divine, e.g., brilliant light, white garments, and the overshadowing cloud.

a Mk 9:2–8; Lk 9:28–36.

*
- These three disciples are also taken apart from the others by Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt 26:37). *A high mountain*: this has been identified with Tabor or Hermon, but probably no specific mountain was intended by the evangelist or by his Marcan source (Mk 9:2). **Its meaning is theological rather than geographical, possibly recalling the revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:12–18) and to Elijah at the same place (1 Kgs 19:8–18; Horeb = Sinai).**

*
- *His face shone like the sun*: this is a Matthean addition; cf. Dn 10:6. *His clothes became white as light*: cf. Dn 7:9, where the clothing of God appears “snow bright.” For the white garments of other heavenly beings, see Rev 4:4; 7:9; 19:14.

b 28:3; Dn 7:9; 10:6; Rev 4:4; 7:9; 19:14.

*
- See note on Mk 9:5.

*
- *Three tents*: the booths in which the Israelites lived during the feast of Tabernacles (cf. Jn 7:2) were meant to recall their ancestors’ dwelling in booths during the journey from Egypt to the promised land (Lv 23:39–42). The same Greek word, *skēnē*, here translated *tents*, is used in the LXX for the booths of that feast, and some scholars have suggested that there is an allusion here to that liturgical custom.

c 3:17; Dt 18:15; 2 Pt 1:17.

*
- *Cloud cast a shadow over them*: see note on Mk 9:7. *This is my beloved Son ... listen to him*: cf. Mt 3:17. **The voice repeats the baptismal proclamation about**

Jesus, with the addition of the command *listen to him*.

The latter is a reference to Dt 18:15 in which the Israelites are commanded to *listen to* the prophet like Moses whom God will raise up for them. The command to listen to Jesus is general, but in this context, it probably applies particularly to the preceding predictions of his passion and resurrection (Mt 16:21) and of his coming (Mt 16:27, 28).

*
- A Matthean addition; cf. Dn 10:9–10, 18–19.

[1] [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Mt 17:1–8.

[2] [The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II](#), Third Typical Edition. (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), 529.

[3] [The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II](#), Third Typical Edition. (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), 529.

[4] Barbara Aland et al., eds., [The Greek New Testament](#), Fifth Revised Edition. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), Mk 1:4.

[5] [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Mk 1:4.

[6] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Mk 1:4–6.

f feminine

*5 Though it would be possible to classify μετανοέω and μετάνοια in Domain 30 *Think*, **the focal semantic feature of these terms is clearly behavioral rather than intellectual.**

[Z] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996) 509.

[8] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996) 509.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS ON THE WORLD

This meditation suggested itself to Père Teilhard when, in the course of a scientific expedition, he found himself one day out in the Ordos desert where it was impossible for him to offer Mass. This happened, it seems, on the feast of the Transfiguration,* a feast for which he had a special love. His thoughts therefore turned to the radiation of the eucharistic presence of Christ through the universe. He did not of course confuse that presence, the effect of transubstantiation in the strict sense, with the omnipresence of the divine Word. His faith in the mystery of the Eucharist was not only ardent: it was also as exact as it was firm. But his faith was sufficiently strong and realistic to show him its consequences (or, as he put it, the "prolongations" and

* Père Teilhard could not have written *The Mass on the World* on Easter Sunday 1923, as was reported by friends from Peking, for he did not reach the desert till August of that year. There was doubtless a confusion between the two feasts of Christ's glory. On a number of occasions Père Teilhard expressed his special love for the feast of the Transfiguration. (Ed. note.)

6 Hymn of the Universe

extensions). At a time when individualism was still, generally speaking, obscuring the fullness of traditional Catholic teaching on this mystery, he wrote: "When Christ comes to one of his faithful it is not simply in order to commune with him as an individual; . . . when, through the mouth of the priest, he says *Hoc est corpus meum*, these words extend beyond the morsel of bread over which they are said: they give birth to the whole mystical body of Christ. The effect of the priestly act extends beyond the consecrated host to the cosmos itself The entire realm of matter is slowly but irresistibly affected by this great consecration." *

Earlier, in 1917, Père Teilhard had written, in *Le Prêtre*:

"When Christ, extending the process of his incarnation, descends into the bread in order to replace it, his action is not limited to the material morsel which his presence will, for a brief moment, volatilize: this transubstantiation is aureoled with a real though attenuated divinizing of the entire universe. From the particular cosmic element into which he has entered, the activity of the Word goes forth to subdue and to draw into himself all the rest."

Such passages as these not only contain an exact affirmation of the essence of the eucharistic mystery, but also make an equally exact distinction between the essential mystery and the further effects in which its fecundity is manifested: the growth of

* This was written in the same year as *The Mass on the World*.

Introduction to the Mass on the World 7

Christ's mystical body, the consecration of the cosmos. They also bear witness to a plenitude of faith in which Père Teilhard's thought is revealed as being authentically and profoundly in accord with the thought of St Paul. He "shows himself preoccupied above all with giving his daily Mass a *cosmic function* and *planetary dimensions*. . . . This, of course, he considered could be linked up with the most orthodox theology of the holy Eucharist."^o

A year after writing *The Mass on the World*, Père Teilhard further defined his thought, in *Mon Univers*: "To interpret adequately the fundamental position of the Eucharist in the economy of the world . . . it is, I think, necessary that Christian thought and Christian prayer should give great importance to the real and physical extensions of the eucharistic Presence. . . . As we properly use the term "our bodies" to signify the localized center of our spiritual radiations . . . so it must be said that in its initial and primary meaning the term "Body of Christ" is limited, in this context, to the consecrated species of Bread and Wine. But . . . the host is comparable to a blazing fire whose flames spread out like rays all round it."

N. M. WILDIERS, S.T.D.

^o Nicolas Corte: *The Life and Soul of Teilhard de Chardin* (Eng. trans. Barrie & Rockliff, 1960), p. 26.

*THE MASS
ON THE WORLD*



The Offering

Since once again, Lord—though this time not in the forests of the Aisne but in the steppes of Asia—I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and sufferings of the world.

Over there, on the horizon, the sun has just touched with light the outermost fringe of the eastern sky. Once again, beneath this moving sheet of fire, the living surface of the earth wakes and trembles, and once again begins its fearful travail. I will place on my paten, O God, the harvest to be won by this renewal of labor. Into my chalice I shall pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the earth's fruits.

My paten and my chalice are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit. Grant me the remembrance and the mystic presence of all those whom the light is now awakening to the new day.

My paten and my chalice are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit. Grant me the remem-

12 Hymn of the Universe

brance and the mystic presence of all those whom the light is now awakening to the new day.

One by one, Lord, I see and I love all those whom you have given me to sustain and charm my life. One by one also I number all those who make up that other beloved family which has gradually surrounded me, its unity fashioned out of the most disparate elements, with affinities of the heart, of scientific research and of thought. And again one by one—more vaguely it is true, yet all inclusively—I call before me the whole vast anonymous army of living humanity; those who surround me and support me though I do not know them; those who come, and those who go; above all, those who in office, laboratory and factory, through their vision of truth or despite their error, truly believe in the progress of earthly reality and who today will take up again their impassioned pursuit of the light.

This restless multitude, confused or orderly, the immensity of which terrifies us; this ocean of humanity whose slow, monotonous wave-flows trouble the hearts even of those whose faith is most firm: it is to this deep that I thus desire all the fibers of my being should respond. All the things in the world to which this day will bring increase; all those that will diminish; all those too that will die: all of them, Lord, I try to gather into my arms, so as to hold them out to you in offering. This is the material of my sacrifice; the only material you desire.

Once upon a time men took into your temple the first fruits of their harvests, the flower of their flocks. But the offering you really want, the offer-

ing you mysteriously need every day to appease your hunger, to slake your thirst is nothing less than the growth of the world borne ever onwards in the stream of universal becoming.

Receive, O Lord, this all-embracing host which your whole creation, moved by your magnetism, offers you at this dawn of a new day.

This bread, our toil, is of itself, I know, but an immense fragmentation; this wine, our pain, is no more, I know, than a draught that dissolves. Yet in the very depths of this formless mass you have implanted—and this I am sure of, for I sense it—a desire, irresistible, hallowing, which makes us cry out, believer and unbeliever alike: "Lord, make us *one*."

Because, my God, though I lack the soul-zeal and the sublime integrity of your saints, I yet have received from you an overwhelming sympathy for all that stirs within the dark mass of matter; because I know myself to be irremediably less a child of heaven than a son of earth; therefore I will this morning climb up in spirit to the high places, bearing with me the hopes and the miseries of my mother; and there—empowered by that priesthood which you alone (as I firmly believe) have bestowed on me—upon all that in the world of human flesh is now about to be born or to die beneath the rising sun I will call down the Fire.

Fire over the Earth

Fire, the source of being: we cling so tenaciously to the illusion that fire comes forth from the depths of the earth and that its flames grow progressively

14 Hymn of the Universe

brighter as it pours along the radiant furrows of life's tillage. Lord, in your mercy you gave me to see that this idea is false, and that I must overthrow it if I were ever to have sight of you.

In the beginning was *Power*, intelligent, loving, energizing. In the beginning was the *Word*, supremely capable of mastering and molding whatever might come into being in the world of matter. In the beginning there were not coldness and darkness: there was the *Fire*. This is the truth.

So, far from light emerging gradually out of the womb of our darkness, it is the Light, existing before all else was made which, patiently, surely, eliminates our darkness. As for us creatures, of ourselves we are but emptiness and obscurity. But you, my God, are the inmost depths, the stability of that eternal *milieu*, without duration or space, in which our cosmos emerges gradually into being and grows gradually to its final completeness, as it loses those boundaries which to our eyes seem so immense. Everything is being; everywhere there is being and nothing but being, save in the fragmentation of creatures and the clash of their atoms.

Blazing Spirit, Fire, personal, super-substantial, the consummation of a union so immeasurably more lovely and more desirable than that destructive fusion of which all the pantheists dream: be pleased yet once again to come down and breathe a soul into the newly formed, fragile film of matter with which this day the world is to be freshly clothed.

I know we cannot forestall, still less dictate to

you, even the smallest of your actions; from you alone comes all initiative—and this applies in the first place to my prayer.

Radiant Word, blazing Power, you who mold the manifold so as to breathe your life into it; I pray you, lay on us those your hands—powerful, considerate, omnipresent, those hands which do not (like our human hands) touch now here, now there, but which plunge into the depths and the totality, present and past, of things so as to reach us simultaneously through all that is most immense and most inward within us and around us.

May the might of those invincible hands direct and transfigure for the great world you have in mind that earthly travail which I have gathered into my heart and now offer you in its entirety. Remold it, rectify it, recast it down to the depths from whence it springs. You know how your creatures can come into being only, like shoot from stem, as part of an endlessly renewed process of evolution.

Do you now therefore, speaking through my lips, pronounce over this earthly travail your twofold efficacious word: the word without which all that our wisdom and our experience have built up must totter and crumble—the word through which all our most far-reaching speculations and our encounter with the universe are come together into a unity. 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 waits in readiness to corrode, to

16 Hymn of the Universe

wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which express the supreme mystery of faith: This is my Blood.*

Fire in the Earth

It is done.

Once again the Fire has penetrated the earth.

Not with sudden crash of thunderbolt, riving the mountain-tops: does the Master break down doors to enter his own home? Without earthquake, or thunderclap: the flame has lit up the whole world from within. All things individually and collectively are penetrated and flooded by it, from the inmost core of the tiniest atom to the mighty sweep of the most universal laws of being: so naturally has it flooded every element, every energy, every connecting link in the unity of our cosmos; that one

* As was pointed out in the *Introduction*, there is no confusion here between transubstantiation in the strict sense and the universal presence of the Word: as the author states explicitly in *Le Prêtre*, "The central mystery of transubstantiation is aureoled by a divinization, real though attenuated, of all the universe." From the cosmic element into which he has entered through his incarnation and in which he dwells eucharistically, "the Word acts upon everything else to subdue and assimilate it to himself." (Ed. note.)

might suppose the cosmos to have burst spontaneously into flame.

In the new humanity which is begotten today the Word prolongs the unending act of his own birth; and by virtue of his immersion in the world's womb the great waters of the kingdom of matter have,