

## The last spiritual writings of Teilhard de Chardin: From *The Heart of Matter* to *The Christic*

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(translated from the Spanish text, which includes some nice photos of Father Teilhard)

Throughout his life, Teilhard de Chardin led, in parallel to his scientific work, a continuous philosophical and religious reflection, trying to rethink the formulation of the Christian faith from the scientific vision of an evolving universe. Behind this reflection, we also discover that a new and very personal spirituality is developing, the fruit of both his scientific experience and a true mystical experience<sup>1</sup>. The final elaboration of his thought and spirituality is found in the writings of the last five years of his life (1950-1955). It is there especially that Teilhard developed in a particular way his Christology, centered on the relation between Christ and the universe, which constitutes the heart of his spirituality.

As he assured Jeanne Mortier, his faithful collaborator of fifteen years, in charge of the publication of his writings, in 1948, his relationship with Christ was for him the most important thing in his life and the one for which he would eventually be called to account: "I sometimes wonder if, in the last phase of my life, — and after the search for fossil man, — after the speculations on the Noosphere, — it is not the simple practice of the total Love of the universal Christ that will be asked of me in 'annihilation'"<sup>2</sup>. On March 8, 1955, he summarized in another letter how he could not give up developing and propagating his ideas and experiences, while remaining faithful to the Church: "Father General invites me to do 'Science peacefully'. But precisely, how can I have a taste for research outside of a certain form, a way, of adoring! All my difficulties with Rome are there (and those of all the factory or laboratory priests too) ... On March 8, 1955, he summarized in another letter how he could not give up developing and propagating his ideas and experiences, while remaining faithful to the Church: "Father General invites me to do 'Science peacefully. But precisely, how can I have a taste for research outside of a certain form, a way, of adoring! All my difficulties with Rome are there (and those of all the factory or laboratory priests too)... — I repeat: all this does not develop in me any bitterness, — because I am too sure of the final result. I have never felt more bound, at heart, to the Church; — nor more certain that this Church, by rethinking more thoroughly its Christ, — will be the religion of tomorrow."<sup>3</sup> Two days before his death he had written a letter to Father André Ravier, Provincial of the French Jesuits, in which he again set forth his ideas, and at the end of which he said, "This is my faith: the one I would so much like to be able to confess publicly before I die..."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is an abundant bibliography on Teilhard's spirituality. Among the most recent works: Gustave Martelet, *Teilhard de Chardin, prophète d'un Christ toujours plus grand*. (Brussels: Lessius, 2005); André Duplex and Évelyne Maurice, *Christ présent et universel. La vision christologique de Teilhard de Chardin*, (Paris: Mame-Desclée, 2008); Kathleen Duffy, *Teilhard's mysticism: Seeing the inner face of evolution*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Book, 2014); Ursula King, *Christ in all things: Exploring spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016). Translation: *Cristo en todas las cosas. Exploring spirituality with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*. Sal Terrae, 2021 (with the collaboration and financing of the Association of Friends of Teilhard de Chardin, Spanish section).

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier*, (Paris: Seuil, 1984) (24 August 1948), 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier* (8 March 1955), 178.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Lettres intimes à Auguste Valensin, Bruno de Solage, Henri de Lubac, André Ravier (1919-1955)*. (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1975), 466.

## The Heart of Matter

The first fundamental text with which he begins this stage of his spirituality is his spiritual autobiography, "The Heart of Matter"<sup>5</sup>. Resting in Les Moulins, in his native Auvergne, Teilhard took advantage of that moment to do some writing. On August 14, 1950, he wrote to Jeanne Mortier: "And then, I finally decide to draw at least a sketch (rather thorough) of the *Heart of Matter*: some kind of a first draft. We'll see what it will look like later." A few days later, on the 19th of the same month, he wrote: "I have begun to write the Heart of Matter. Will it be a first draft, or the final one? I cannot say. In any case, it will unravel and clarify the problem for me."<sup>6</sup> The text is finally dated October 30.

The work is divided into three parts: "I. The Cosmic, or The Evolutive", "II. The Human, or The Convergent", "III. The Christic, or The Centric" and an addendum, "The Feminine, or The Unitive". We are particularly interested in the third part, "The Christic", where he develops the theme of the relationship between Christ and the evolution of the world. Starting from the ideas already developed of the identification of the Omega Point of convergent evolution with Christ, he now adds that to the "cosmic" sense of reality must be added the "Christic" sense. With this new word, used for the first time here and made a noun as "the Christic", he refers to the influence and presence of the universal Christ at all levels of the universe, which drives its evolution towards the ultimate union in him. In a certain way, the Christic can be understood as a new dimension that the universe acquires from the Incarnation.

The Christic dimension realizes the union of the traditional "God of the Above", the transcendent Creator, and "God of the Ahead", towards whom the evolution of the universe or Omega Point is oriented. These two terms will often come back in later writings. The discovery of this Christic dimension corresponds to "a new Faith where the ascending Faith towards a Transcendent and the propulsive Faith towards an Immanent are composed; - a new Charity where all the driving passions of the Earth are combined, while becoming divine."<sup>7</sup>

Teilhard confesses that the two axes of his life, which were born independently of each other: his faith in the world and his faith in God, "the two Christian and pagan halves of my deepest being," eventually converged into a fundamental identity. Christian mysticism, the seed of which his mother planted when he was a child in the form of a devotion to the Heart of Jesus, finally ignites, with the fire of love, the attraction of Omega, with which this Heart is identified. "Fire" now appears as the image he prefers when he wants to represent the influence of Christ in the universe, that permeates everything with his presence.

This presence now appears in the expression "Christic Diaphany", in other words the transparency of the influence of Christ in the universe. Previously, Teilhard had used the term "diaphanous" to refer to the presence of God in the world, similar to the expression "Divine Milieu"<sup>8</sup>. The text ends with a prayer in which the images of fire and diaphaneity appear together. It begins with the following words: "Lord, because, with all the instinct and by all the chances, of my life, I have never ceased to seek you and to place you in the heart of the universal Matter" and this is how he ends: "And may, by Diaphany and Fire at the same time, your universal Presence spring forth. O ever greater Christ!"<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "The Heart of Matter", by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Vol.13, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier* (14 and 19 August 1950) 65, 66.

<sup>7</sup> "The Heart of Matter", Vol. 13.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, in "The Divine Milieu", he introduces the term Diaphany by associating it with the terms of Transparency and Incandescence. "The Divine Milieu", Vol.4 (1957).

<sup>9</sup> "The Heart of Matter", Vol. 13.

### Working out of the words Christogenesis and Christic

The theme of Christogenesis reappears in the short essay entitled "Reflections on the scientific probability and religious consequences of an ultra-human" dated Paris, March 15, 1951<sup>10</sup>. After a short presentation of the stages of evolution: cosmogenesis, biogenesis and anthropogenesis (evolution of the cosmos, of life and of man), Teilhard goes on to consider the religious consequences in the "mystical field".

On the basis of the acceptance of a "convergent cosmogenesis", a presupposition which for Teilhard is derived from the very analysis of the evolution of the universe projected on that of man and which he considers as accepted and aimed at being part of the human heritage, a synthesis is presented between the idea of God, "Above" and "Ahead" ("vertical and horizontal images of God") in a process of the "Christic" type, i.e. based on the Incarnation, "where access to the transcendent Hyper-personal would be discovered as conditioned by the prior accession of human consciousness to a critical point of collective Reflection: the Supernatural, therefore, not excluding, but requiring on the contrary, as a necessary preparation, the complete maturation of an Ultra-human" (by Ultra-human Teilhard understands the last stage of the evolution of man).

With this somewhat obscure sentence, Teilhard refers to the way in which, in the supernatural Ultra-human, which requires its natural preparation, the final realization and incorporation of humanity, and through it of the whole universe, into Christ-Omega is achieved. To conclude, that in this process Anthropogenesis (the evolution of man) is recognized as "ultimately identical" to a Christogenesis (the formation of the total Christ) and the Ultra-human as the union of humanity in Christ. It is difficult to summarize in fewer lines the religious dimension of Teilhard's thought concentrated in these two concepts: Christogenesis and Christic.

In September 1952, while in exile in New York, he wrote a short essay on the ecclesial consequences of his thought. The long title of this essay is: "What the World is Looking for from the Church of God at this Moment: a Generalizing and a Deepening of the Meaning of the Cross"<sup>11</sup>. Teilhard begins by referring to an earlier writing (1949), "The Heart of the Problem"<sup>12</sup>, where he had raised the conflict between the hopes placed in evolution and a purely human and material progress of man that will lead "Forward" to an "Ultra-Human" and the religious hopes placed in a transcendent God, "Above". He finds the solution to the conflict in the union of the two tendencies in the Christian faith of incarnation, with the final incorporation of all in Christ, towards whom, therefore, all evolution tends. Teilhard acknowledges in 1952 that these pages were not very well received "in Rome", and he reintroduces them on the basis of the current propagation in the world of a "neo-humanism", which sees man evolving towards a purely natural "cosmic ultra-human".

Faced with this situation, Teilhard argues that it is urgent for the Church to present a "new" ("ultra-humanized") sense of the Cross. Traditionally, Teilhard says, the expiatory character of the Cross has been presented in terms of redemption from sin, and we must now begin, in an evolving world, to see the Cross as the very salvation of evolution. Thus, "bearing the sins of the guilty World" is for Teilhard, in terms of Cosmogenesis, "bearing the weight of an evolving World." Thus, for him, the Cross is the synthesis of the Transcendent and the Ultra-human, of the "Above" and the "Ahead" and he adds "it is exactly the same Cross that I adore: the same Cross, *but much more true*".

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<sup>10</sup> "Reflections on the Scientific Probability and the Religious Consequences of an Ultra-Human", Vol.7.

<sup>11</sup> "What the World is Looking for from the Church of God at the Moment: a Generalizing and a Deepening of the Meaning of the Cross", Vol. 10.

<sup>12</sup> "The Heart of the Problem", Vol. 5.

The relationship between the cosmic and the Christic is also briefly addressed in "The God of Evolution", written on October 25, 1953, during his return trip from South Africa<sup>13</sup>. In that work, Teilhard begins by expressing his concern that the traditional Christian worldview will no longer appeal to "the most progressive fraction of Mankind" because it does not incorporate the evolutionary worldview discovered by sciences. The answer to this concern is found in the presentation of what he calls "the God of Evolution". It is not only a question of God the creator through evolution, but of God made man, the universal Christ, in whom the conjunction of the Omega of human experience, towards which evolution tends, and the Omega of faith in the Incarnation is recognized, that is to say, the Omega of science and that of Christian mysticism. The presence of Christ-Omega converts the cosmic dimension into a "Christic" dimension, so that the Cosmic expands and enlarges the Christic and the Christic "amorizes", i.e. fills the area of the Cosmic with energy (the energy of love) until "incandescence". Here again we see the image of fire to express the life-giving action of Christ in the world. Science and mysticism unite around a Christ finally identified as the ultimate Omega point of a convergent evolution.

A new writing of a spiritual nature, dated March 1955, is entitled "Research, Work and Worship"<sup>14</sup>. Teilhard begins by recalling the advice given by his superiors: "Do Science peacefully, without meddling in philosophy or theology...", then he declares that for him, it is "psychologically unviable and directly contrary, moreover, to the greater glory of God". He then writes that "Scientific research has become, both quantitatively and qualitatively, one of the major forms — if not *the* major form — of pondered earthly activity". The recognition of the primordial importance of the scientific vision of the world is fundamental in Teilhard's thought. This scientific vision discovered that life is the result of an evolution and that evolution continues and progresses, through human activity, scientific activity especially, and leads to the transformation of man himself, as far as what Teilhard calls the ultra-human, the last stage of evolution. Thus, each researcher has become a believer, believing in "Ahead", believing in progress, and he is committed to the realization of the ultra-human. The consequences of this attitude lead to a solution of the practical problem between science and religion, a problem which arises from the perception of a contradiction between traditional religious values (the God above) and the future-oriented human future to which scientific progress leads. But Teilhard reminds us that it is precisely in a universe in evolution, such as the one revealed by science, that he sees the progression towards its final realization in Christ, acknowledged as "the natural and supreme center of Cosmogogenesis" or "the higher pole of cosmic Evolution". Thus, all works that tend to progress, and scientific works in particular, are already in themselves a participation in the process that ascends towards the final realization of the world in Christ. In the Christian, who has become a "worker of the Earth", a "magnificent resonance" is achieved between his worship of the traditional God of the Above and his faith in Christ of the Ahead, the ultimate pole towards which human evolution is in progress.

Finally, Teilhard compares the work of the priest-scientist with that of the priest-worker, an experience in vogue in those years. In both cases, he believes that a new spirituality is needed, in which the Kingdom of God and human effort are united "genetically" (as he puts it). Furthermore, he calls for a "spiritual education" in which the Spiritual Exercises (and even dogma) are rethought in order to appreciate the "Christic and Christifying virtues of human operations and works." The essential meditations of the Spiritual Exercises (The Principle and Foundation, The Temporal King, The Two Banners...), conceived from the point of view of a static universe, must be adapted to the vision of a dynamic universe, evolving through the human work attracted by the action of the total Christ towards whom it tends. The new universe of evolution, which is discovered by sciences, requires a new Christology. Thus Teilhard tells us as a conclusion that "the old opposition Earth-Heaven disappears (or

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<sup>13</sup> "The God of Evolution", Vol. 10.

<sup>14</sup> "Research, Work and Worship", Vol. 9.

is corrected) in the new formula: 'To Heaven through the completion of the Earth'" and "a new and superior form of adoration gradually discovered by Christian Thought and Prayer" appears.

### The Christic

The most important work of the last period of Teilhard's life, written one month before his death, is undoubtedly the one entitled "The Christic"<sup>15</sup> in which he presents a final version of his vision of the World and Christ. In 1950, in a letter to Jeanne Mortier, he already expressed his intention to write this work: "For me [...] this extraordinary Christic I would not like to die before having expressed it more or less as I foresee it with a fascination that has not finished growing."<sup>16</sup> Already in April 1952, in New York, he mentions in another letter to Jeanne Mortier: "The next thing I will write 'for me' (and for my close friends) will perhaps be a study on the 'Christosphere', - or on the Christic (what I mean with this, the Milieu, and Energy), and this brings me back, more or less, to the *Divine Milieu*"<sup>17</sup>. Finally, in September 1954, he wrote to her: "In the meantime, I am thinking more and more about writing something 'confidential' on the Christic: some kind of a quintessence of the *Divine Milieu*, of the *Mass on the World* and of the *Heart of Matter*"<sup>18</sup>.

The word "Christic" appears in the third part of the Heart of Matter, as we have seen already. Teilhard now clearly shows that an innate cosmic sense and also a certain Christic sense have appeared in him, the fruit of a spontaneous evolution. For him, therefore, what he calls "the Christic" constitutes a synthesis between the *cosmic convergence* and the *Christic emergence*. He thus unites the vision from below with that from above, what can be achieved by contemplating the evolving world and what the Christian faith tells us about Christ, present in the world through his incarnation.

On the one hand, science has discovered the cosmic evolution towards a complexity-consciousness of planetary dimensions, which continues at the human level and must be convergent. This convergence must lead to an ultimate union of everything, through the human spirit, in something that projects itself into the future as an Omega point. The Christian faith discovers the insertion of Christ in the process of evolution through the Incarnation, which, through his resurrection, develops until it integrates the whole of mankind into a single body, united with the whole universe at the end of time or parousia.

Thus, the Omega Point of evolution as seen by science is finally identified with the Christ of faith. The bottom-up view of science is complemented by the top-down view of faith. The universe and Christ are completed and combined in a *christified* universe and a *universalized* Christ. As he says before the Conclusion: "With the christified Universe (or, what amounts to the same thing, with the universalized Christ) a super-evolutionary milieu appears, — I have called it 'the divine Milieu'"<sup>19</sup>. Teilhard acknowledges that this vision of Christ has not attracted the attention of theologians, although it is vital for the future of Christianity.

Thus, the Christic is the union and the synthesis of the cosmic requirements of an incarnate Word and the potentialities of a Universe in a convergent evolution. The scientific vision of a convergent universe is thus linked to the consequences of Incarnation, the central mystery of the Christian faith. For Teilhard, this new vision, which he considers at the same time as "pan-humanizing" and "pan-christifying", constitutes the foundation of a new Christianity: "a Christianity reincarnated a second time (and as to the square power) in the spiritual energies of the Matter. Exactly the 'ultra-Christianity'

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<sup>15</sup> "The Christic", Vol. 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier* (19 August 1950).

<sup>17</sup> *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier* (30 April 1952).

<sup>18</sup> *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier* (22 September 1954).

<sup>19</sup> "The Christic", Vol. 13.

that we need at this moment to answer the rising demands of the 'ultra-human'<sup>20</sup> towards which humanity is advancing.

### The ultimate lines

Teilhard's last writing is the last page of his diary<sup>21</sup>. It consists in a few short lines written on Maundy Thursday, three days before his death, and represents a very condensed synthesis of all his religious thinking. The title is "What I believe, Syntheses", which already shows the contents of the lines that follow and which reminds us of the similar title "How I believe" of 1934<sup>22</sup>. In it, he gives a presentation from the world of evolution to the universal Christ. He begins with what he considers to be the theological confirmation of his thought with the quotation from St. Paul (in Greek) "God all in all" (1 Cor 15:25-26). This is followed by the affirmation of the dynamic and evolutionary character of the universe which ends in Christ: "Cosmos = Cosmogenesis — Biogenesis — Noogenesis — Christogenesis". The evolution of the cosmos implies the evolution of life (biogenesis), of mankind (noogenesis) and has the Universal Christ (christogenesis) as its ultimate goal. Then "The two articles of my Credo" follow, first: The Universe is centred Above, Ahead. Teilhard used these two expressions, as we have already seen, to refer to the transcendent character of God (Above) and as the ultimate end of creation (Ahead). Secondly, Christ is the center (noogenesis equals Christogenesis), that is, the evolution of mankind (noogenesis) ends in the Universal Christ, the Omega point of all evolution. The last two lines, with the title "Plan, what I believe": 1) centred Cosmos leading to "neo-humanism", by which he means "ultra-Human", that is, the last stage of the evolution of mankind, 2) Christ is the center of the Cosmos (noogenesis = Christogenesis). Consequently, the formation of a "neo-Christianity" which is understood as a new Nicaea ("Neo-Nicaea"), that is, a new Christology, identified with that of St. Paul. And he concludes that this neo-Christianity "saves noogenesis and is saved by it". These brief lines from Teilhard confirm what occupied his thoughts in the last moments of his life. However, he was also aware of the little influence his Christological vision had had, especially among theologians, and at the end of the Christic he adds: "How is it then that, looking around me... I find myself alone as it were ... having *seen*... Universal.Christ ... the Divine Milieu... After all, would I not be only the plaything of an inner mirage? ... my 'Christic' may be a mere illusion". And, full of hope, his conclusion is: "... Truth has to appear only once, in one single mind, for it to be impossible for anything ever to prevent it from spreading universally and setting everything ablaze."<sup>23</sup> Sixty-five years after these lines were written, the acceptance and the spreading of Teilhard's vision and spirituality prove this true.

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<sup>20</sup> "The Christic", Vol. 13.

<sup>21</sup> "The last page of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's diary (7 April 1955), Vol. 13.

<sup>22</sup> "How I believe", Vol. 10.

<sup>23</sup> "The Christic", Vol. 13.