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Abstract

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) was a Jesuit priest and paleontologist well-known for his theory of Christogenesis. His idea of fashioning Christ as the end point of evolution proffers a cosmic and deeply spiritual perspective which weds the material and spiritual worlds in one trajectory of development. Lesser known is his epic poem, *L'Éternel féminin*, in which the figure of the Eternal Feminine is the personal catalyst for this cosmic evolution. Her grace and beauty triggers a process called 'amortization' by which the mutual attraction of elements within the universe tends toward increasingly higher levels of consciousness and spiritualization, until all things finally reach the absolute and personal Omega Christ. According to Teilhard, it is through the 'Eternal Feminine' – identified as the Blessed Virgin Mary - that the evolutionary process culminates in a collective consciousness which is receptive to the Omega Christ.

This article introduces Teilhard's theory of Christogenesis, surveys *L'Éternel féminin*, and analyzes the theological principles of Teilhard's work to show how he accords to Our Lady an essential role in Christogenesis. Moreover, Teilhard's acknowledgement of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a principle of cosmic unity is significant because it precludes pantheistic misreadings of his thought and potentially illumines the symphonic harmony of science and religion. The Marian dimensions of Teilhard's writings merit attention and prove to be fertile grounds for fruitful reflection.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a mystic and scientist of eclectic expertise, envisioned the world to be evolving toward a single, unified organism animated by the risen Christ. In the realm of natural science, he is most known for his part in the geological research expeditions in China in the 1920-30s which discovered the fossils of the Peking Man, a subspecies of the *homo erectus*. In the realm of religion, one might know Teilhard from the works of recent Popes who have quoted him and referenced his idea of ‘La Messe sur le Monde’ – a conception of the Eucharist as a cosmic sacrifice in which, not only bread and wine, but all of the material cosmos is progressively and radically being transformed. In popular culture, some might recall Teilhard’s unexpected appearance in the memorable sermon for the royal nuptials of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at Windsor Castle in 2018. The Most Reverend Michael Curry, head of the American Episcopal Church, captivated the world’s attention with a fiery sermon on love, brought to a climax with a quote from Teilhard. Whether it be fossil findings of late antiquity, or an evolutionary theory of Eucharistic proportions, or a formula of cosmic love for lasting marital happiness, Teilhard’s rich legacy is duly celebrated. And yet, there is one particular aspect of his thought which has not received due attention,¹ namely Teilhard’s poem to the Veiled Virgin, *L’Éternel Féminin*,² in which he accords to the blessed Virgin Mary a unique place in the evolution of the cosmos.

This article will examine Teilhard’s unique perspective in three parts. After a short introduction to Teilhard in part one, part two will present his vision of Christogenesis and survey its potential misapplications. Part three will turn to Teilhard’s poem and his vision of cosmic unity, exploring his conception of Mary as a figure of the Eternal Feminine and how she, as a principal of cosmic unity, might serve to build bridges and to delineate needed boundaries.

¹ Beyond de Lubac’s commentary, the only other book-length studies devoted to the theme of the feminine in Teilhard’s thought include André Devaux, *Teilhard and Womanhood*, Paulist Press, 1968; Catherine O’Connor, *Woman and the Cosmos: The Feminine in the Thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974; and Jean Maalouf, *Teilhard and the Feminine* in *Teilhard Studies* no. 47, Lewisburg, PA: American Teilhard Association, 2003. See also, Celia Deane-Drummond, ‘Sophia, Mary and the Eternal Feminine in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Sergei Bulgakov,’ *Ecotheology* 10.2, 2005, 215-31.

² Teilhard’s poem can be found in the collected works, *Writings in the Time of War*, trans. René Hague, New York: Harper & Row, 1968, 191-202; hereafter cited Teilhard, EF in WTW. Teilhard also discussed the Feminine in ‘The Evolution of Chastity,’ *Toward the Future*, trans. René Hague, San Diego: Harcourt, 1975, 6-87; ‘The Feminine, or the Unitive’ in *The Heart of Matter*, San Diego: Harcourt, 1978, 58-61; and ‘Sketch of a Personalistic Universe,’ *Human Energy*, London: Collins, 1969, 53-92.

Who is Teilhard?

Teilhard de Chardin was a French Jesuit priest and a paleontologist who distinctly possessed the Spirit's gift of wonder and awe. Throughout his life, he experienced creation with unceasing amazement, and this wonder nourished both his scientific work and prayer life. The dual dedication of his major work, *The Divine Milieu*, reflects the deep love he had for God and for the world: '*Sic Deus dilexit mundum*. For those who love the world.'³

From an early age, Teilhard had already manifested a profound fascination with nature and its processes. In his autobiographical work, *The Heart of Matter*, he describes his dismay in early childhood when he observed how a lock of his own hair which his mother had just clipped, dropped into a fire pit and was incinerated. This led him to turn his attention to the more 'durable' with boyish collections of small scraps of iron, but when he learned that even iron could be corrupted by oxidation, he turned to other substitutes – natural minerals such as quartz and rocks, and these awakened him to the planetary 'stuff of things.'⁴ Pierre's fascination with nature came to a pivotal point after his reading of Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* in which he discovered the continuity of faith and science. Reflecting on this discovery, Teilhard writes:

Until that time, my education and my religion had always led me obediently to accept – without much reflection, it is true – a fundamental heterogeneity between matter and Spirit, between Body and Soul, between unconscious and conscious. These were to me two 'substances' that differed in nature.... You can well imagine, accordingly, how strong was my inner feeling of release and expansion when I took my first still hesitant steps into an 'evolutive' Universe, and saw that the dualism in which I had hitherto been enclosed was disappearing like the mist before the rising sun.⁵

³ *The Divine Milieu*, HarperCollins, 2001, ii.

⁴ *The Heart of Matter*, 20.

⁵ *The Heart of Matter*, 26.

Teilhard thrilled in the discovery that matter and Spirit are not essentially at odds but are 'two states or two aspects of *one*'⁶, a reality in which Spirit becomes manifested through the medium of matter. To Teilhard's surprise, the elusive 'durable' for which he sought as a child was not to be found in rocks and metal but in a non-dualistic 'tapestry of organic complexity' which consisted of both matter and spirit.⁷

Moreover, as he observed the world about him, Teilhard encountered a universe, not static, but in progress. He posited, like the evolutionary theorists before him, that through the eons of the earth's history, the cosmos has consistently yielded a tendency to reorganize itself into greater complexity. One sees this in the many levels of atomic, molecular, and cellular organization which have advanced in increasing complexity over billions of years.⁸ Teilhard coined the term 'cosmogogenesis' to refer to this process of becoming in which creation is continuously attaining to more and more complex levels of existence and organization. In tandem with this outward complexification of matter, there is also an inward development and inner complexification of consciousness.⁹ Teilhard coined the term 'law of complexity-consciousness' to denote this dynamic in which complexity and consciousness are positively correlated. The more mature and complex reality is, the higher its level of consciousness.

The evolutionary process embodies this 'law of complexity-consciousness.' Each stage of evolution involves an expansion of the spheres of life. The 'cosmosphere,' the inner core of the created material world, has given rise to a 'biosphere' of living things. From there, reflective human consciousness has emerged with the advent of the human person in the 'noosphere' – the realm of the free and self-reflecting *homo sapiens*.¹⁰ Teilhard posited that

⁶ *The Heart of Matter*, 26.

⁷ Kathleen Duffy, 'The Texture of the Evolutionary Cosmos: Matter and Spirit in Teilhard de Chardin,' Arthur Fabel and Donald St. John, eds., *Teilhard in the 21st Century: The Emerging Spirit of Earth*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003.

⁸ According to scientific estimates, the Earth is approximately 4.5 billion years old, with the genesis of plants and animals evolving from organic structures 3 billion years old. Most of the evidence for this is contained in the rocks that form the Earth's crust which are like the records of a long and complicated history; buried within them are the remains of life.

⁹ Here we see traces of Lamarckian theory, an early concept of evolution which held that traits developed during the lifetime of an organism would be passed on to its offspring.

¹⁰ Cf. *The Phenomenon of Man*, HarperCollins, 2008, 163-183; 'Noosphere' is Teilhard's own terminology, coined in 1925 to denote this sphere of the human consciousness as opposed to the biosphere of life. It is derived from the Greek word *nous*, the term 'noosphere' denotes the sphere of human thought.



this process of cosmo-genesis would culminate in the person of Christ, the Omega Point and pinnacle of Christic evolution.¹¹ In its complete trajectory, ‘cosmo-genesis’ is ultimately a ‘Christo-genesis.’

Teilhard’s principle inspiration is St. Paul’s teaching on Christ as ‘the first-born of all creation’ (1 Col. 1.16), the Head and the unifying principle who extends his organic influence throughout the whole universe.¹² For Teilhard (as for St. Paul), it is Christ, who, ‘gathers up all of Creation’¹³ and becomes the Head and principle of the *Totus Christus* – the consummate unity of all creation in the one Nous of God, the Logos Incarnate. Thus, while the evolution of the cosmos is founded *in* matter, it necessarily extends *beyond* it to the realm of the *spirit* and is thus moving toward a consummate point in which the Omega Christ is ‘all and in all’ (Col. 3.11). In *Cosmic Life*, an early intellectual testament written in 1916, Teilhard writes of the sacramental economy and the intrinsic value of matter: ‘Christ wished to assume, and had to assume, a real flesh. He sanctifies human flesh by a specific contact. He makes ready, physically, its Resurrection. In the Christian concept, then, *matter retains its cosmic role as the basis, lower in order but primordial and essential of union.*’¹⁴

We’ve arrived at a critical point in Teilhard’s theory. The evolution and expansion of the cosmos toward the pinnacle of Christ aligns matter and spirit on one continuum. The inevitable question that arises concerns whether Christ is *the product* of this process. If material creation, according to Teilhard, possesses a tendency toward Spirit and provides the primordial basis for the dynamic transformation of the world in union with God, does the cosmos innately evolve into the Cosmic Christ *by its own powers*? In other words, is Teilhard’s cosmic theory inherently pantheistic?

This is where the necessity and impact of Teilhard’s conception of the Eternal Feminine lies. It represents a crucial point in Teilhard’s vision of Christo-genesis, one which has ironically received very little attention in contemporary scholarship. It is my contention

¹¹ Cf. *The Phenomenon of Man*, 297.

¹² Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Teilhard Explained*, Paulist Press, 1968, 16.

¹³ *The Heart of Matter*, 93.

¹⁴ ‘Cosmic Life,’ in *Writings in the Time of War*, trans. René Hague, New York: Harper & Row, 1968, 64. The essay, written in 1916, was only published posthumously in 1955.

that, when properly understood, the concept of the Feminine is essential in overcoming the dangerous pantheistic tendencies often attributed to Teilhard. In its proper role, Teilhard's concept of the Feminine dispels the accusations of his confusing the immanence and transcendence of God. Rather, what we discover from Teilhard's poem on the *Eternal Feminine* is actually a thesis at once deeply rooted in the Christian tradition and radically new, namely that *the blessed Virgin Mary stands as the peak development of the immanent, material cosmos in receptivity to Divine transcendence.*

The Eternal Feminine: A Principle of Cosmic Unity

Let us now turn to examine Teilhard's principal writing on the eternal Feminine. His personal notebook shows that his ideas on the topic germinated over the course of two years while he was serving as a stretcher-bearer in some of the bloodiest war fields of France during World War I. The poetic composition was completed on the feast of the Annunciation of 1918, the eve of his final profession of vows in the Society of Jesus. Teilhard's poem to the Feminine represents not only an early articulation of his vision of cosmic unity (to be explored briefly here), but also his personal embrace of the ideal of vowed chastity, a central theme closely aligned with Teilhard's conception of the feminine (to be expounded upon momentarily).

Approximately 250 lines in length, *The Eternal Feminine* is written in free verse and its prose has a rhapsodic quality. Its protagonist, a mysterious feminine figure, speaks in monologue. She is the 'Veiled Virgin' because her true identity is only progressively revealed. She first describes her origins with an allusion to Biblical wisdom (cf. Prov. 8.22ff): 'When the world was born, I came into being. Before the centuries were made, I issued from the hand of God – half-formed, yet destined to grow in beauty from age to age, the handmaid of his work.'¹⁵ In the first stanzas, the 'essential Feminine'¹⁶ – as she identifies herself to be – is presented as 'beauty running through the world . . . the ideal held up before the world to make it ascend.'¹⁷ She says: 'I extend my being into the soul of the world—not only through

¹⁵ Teilhard, EF in WTW, 192.

¹⁶ Teilhard, EF in WTW, 192.

¹⁷ Teilhard, EF in WTW, 192.

the medium of man's own sensibility, but also through the *physical* links of my own nature – or rather, I am the magnetic force of the universal presence and the ceaseless ripple of its smile.¹⁸

The Feminine represents everything beautiful in the universe. She is a force of cosmic attraction, and the divinely instituted cause of the co-inherence of the cosmos. She is, for Teilhard, the inner dynamism of evolution, initially present in the cosmosphere as a rudimentary force of attraction (as found in the microscopic cohesion of subatomic particles) and now maturely developed in the noosphere as a conscious force of attraction, a willful movement of love (as found in friendships or the attraction of the sexes tending toward conjugal union). As a principle of union and the personification of love, the Feminine is the cosmic focal point for *the ascent of the universe*.

Teilhard then makes an intriguing turn to the Feminine's self-identification as *Virginity*. The cosmic cohesion which the feminine represents comes to a peak expression in the integral unity of body and spirit in the Christian state of virginity, understood as a state of spiritual union achieved in the flesh, where the flesh and the spirit intersect in chaste, virginal love. It is a 'union that simplifies, and to simplify is to spiritualize.'¹⁹ For Teilhard, the virgin state, willfully embraced, constitutes a new level of harmony between the flesh and spirit. It is an expression of love having reached a new level, and at this spiritual summit, the eternal Feminine's spotless love constitutes her as the point of passionate and fruitful union between God and creation. She says: 'The Lord had conceived me, whole and entire, in his wisdom, and I had won his heart. / Without the lure of my purity, think you, would God ever have come down, as flesh, to dwell in his creation? / Only love has the power to move being.'²⁰ The lure of feminine beauty is ultimately oriented to the union of spirit and matter, of God and man.

It is thus 'virginity' that brings forth the final blossoming of the cosmos: 'I draw them both [God and the earth] together in a passionate union. – (sic) until the meeting takes place

¹⁸ Teilhard, EF in WTW, 194-95; cf. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Vincetus*, 90: 'the unnumbered laughter of the waves.'

¹⁹ Teilhard, EF in WTW, 197.

²⁰ Teilhard, EF in WTW, 200.

in me, in which the generation and plenitude of Christ are consummated throughout the centuries.²¹ At this point, the veil is swept aside and the Virgin identifies herself: 'I am the Church, the bride of Christ. / I am Mary the Virgin, mother of all humankind.'²² This is the climax of the poem, and it reveals that the consummate evolution of love and spiritual progress comes to realization in the Church as bride and in Mary as the Virgin-Mother.

Teilhard also explores this theme of love and the non-dichotomy of spirit and flesh in an essay entitled 'The Evolution of Chastity,' written sixteen years after the composition of *The Eternal Feminine*. There, he challenges the misconception of virginity as the juxtaposition of the spirit and the flesh, rivaling, one against the other.²³ In contrast to such body-spirit dualisms, Teilhard asserts that flesh and spirit can authentically develop along one trajectory. His reflections hearken on the Aristotelian concept ofhylomorphism – on the unity of matter and form, of body and soul – and reveal his understanding of Christian chastity as not the obliteration of sexual energy, but its concentration and sublimation. Chastity entails a 'spiritual detachment ... [which means] plunging into the flood of created energies [of one's passions], in order both to be uplifted and to uplift them.'²⁴ It has the power 'to unite the inner powers of the soul in the act of a single passion of extraordinary richness and intensity.'²⁵

Chastity, says Teilhard, is the virtue which focuses sexual energy and which strives for union in what is truly spiritual. It represents the climax of matter because, rather than contradicting or negating the flesh, it is the *complete sublimation* of the flesh and its sexual energy. This same dynamic characterized the movement of Teilhard's theory of Cosmogogenesis, which posited the continuity of matter and immaterial consciousness, flesh and spirit, and nature and the supernatural. As the former develops toward the latter, all creation advances to a point of unity – an intense concentration which, only then, is fully open to receive the Divine.

²¹ Teilhard, EF in WTW, 200.

²² Teilhard, EF in WTW, 200-201.

²³ Cf. 'The Evolution of Chastity,' 64; footnote 4; in particular, Teilhard critiques tutiorism which 'consists in adopting, when in doubt, the solution which involves the least risk.'

²⁴ 'The Evolution of Chastity,' 73.

²⁵ EF, 12.

In this manner, Christian chastity is the means by which the ‘spiritual potency of matter’ is made manifest. It ‘concentrates God in us and in those who are subject to our influence.’²⁶ Ultimately, this ideal is epitomized in the Blessed Virgin Mary. She represents the graced perfection of all creation. The Immaculate Conception, says Teilhard, celebrates the Virgin Mary’s pure ‘action in immobility’ in that ‘In our Lady, all modes of lower, disordered activity disappear in this single, luminous function of attracting and receiving God and allowing him to pass through her.’²⁷ In other words, her seemingly passive disposition of virginal love and receptivity is the most active stance a creature can have before God because it brings the human being with all the faculties of his body and soul to a unified state which serves to attract and receive God most completely.

In *The Mystical Milieu*, Teilhard recounts a story about a visionary who enters a chapel where a lone, virginal soul is immersed in deep prayer:

Seeing the mystic immobile, crucified, or rapt in prayer, some may perhaps think that his activity is in abeyance or has left this earth: they are mistaken. Nothing in the world is more intensely alive and active than purity and prayer, which hang like an unmoving light between the universe and God. Through their serene transparency flow the waves of creative power charged with natural virtue and with grace. What else but this is the Virgin Mary?²⁸

For Teilhard, “the whole world [is] bound up and moving and organizing itself” around the figure of the Virgin at the moment of the Incarnation.²⁹ Mary’s Immaculate Conception makes her an axis of the cosmos, an exemplary creation completely ready to receive God. He writes in *The Divine Milieu*:

When the time had come when God resolved to realize his incarnation before our eyes, he had first of all to raise up in the world a virtue *capable of drawing him as far as ourselves*. He

²⁶ *Making of a Mind*, 246-47; as quoted by Henri de Lubac, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Man and His Meaning*, Hawthorn Books, 1965, 63.

²⁷ *Making of a Mind*, 246-47; as quoted by de Lubac in *The Man*, 63.

²⁸ ‘The Mystical Milieu,’ in *Writings in the Time of War*, 144; as quoted by Henri de Lubac, *The Eternal Feminine*, trans. René Hague, New York: Harper & Row, 1971, 127; hereafter quoted de Lubac, EF.

²⁹ *The Divine Milieu*, 133: ‘All at once he sees the whole world bound up and moving and organizing itself around that out-of-the-way spot, in tune with the intensity and inflection of the desires of that puny, praying figure.’

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needed a mother who would engender him in the human sphere. What did he do? He created the Virgin Mary, that is to say he called forth on earth a purity so great that, within this transparency, he would concentrate himself to the point of appearing as a child. There, expressed in its strength and reality, is the power of purity to bring the divine to birth among us.³⁰

This passage echoes that key passage of Teilhard's poem in which the eternal Feminine says: 'Without the lure of my purity, think you, would God ever have come down, as flesh, to dwell in his creation?'³¹

In both instances, Teilhard describes the seduction of the feminine drawing the Divine to herself, even 'giving birth' to the divine. These statements seem to suggest that it is the Feminine who exercises power over Divinity, or perhaps, that the divine is immanent to the feminine cosmos. These are the real dangers of taking Teilhard's ideas out of context. Within their proper context, however, we see that any power the Feminine might seem to exercise actually comes from the purity of her being – a purity which allows God to pass through her and to act in her. Moreover, this perfect purity which attracts God is, in fact, God's own gift. Any attraction that God might have toward His own creation is the result of the splendor of His work and the absolute graciousness of His being. In other words, for Teilhard, it is as if God has gathered up every awe-inspiring beauty in the cosmos and given it to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, and his purpose for doing so is to further make His divine gift of Self to her. God has even pre-ordained Mary's response of chaste love in order to serve the luminous function of allowing the cosmos to participate in Mary's 'yes' and thus move all creation forward to its ultimate perfection, becoming fully receptive to union with God. The contemplative Virgin's faith and purity animates the world; it has become the axis on which the earth rotates and serves as the primary catalyst for the final evolution of the cosmos.

By situating the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word within the grander scheme of cosmic evolution, Mary's graced purity as the Immaculate one thus becomes exemplary for the entire created order. She is the created perfection which opens the rest of creation to

³⁰ *The Divine Milieu*, 134; as quoted by de Lubac in *The Man and His Meaning*, 64.

³¹ EF in WTW, 200.



receive the gift of Christ himself. Mary's Immaculate Conception signifies that, from the very depths of her being, Our Lady is a pure 'yes' to God. In her perfect openness and love, she 'reserves no area of being, life, and will for herself as a private possession.'³² In her, God's initiative has awakened a free and perfect human response which embraces the depth and breadth of creaturely existence. She comes to full possession of self in giving herself entirely, unconditionally to God.

By extension, all positive development in the created order must also culminate in a Marian disposition of virginal love and active receptivity. Concretely, this means that the entire created order – standing as feminine before God – must take up the 'chaste essence of the Feminine,' the pure 'yes' of Mary, so that the full mystical Body of Christ might be born through the same love and receptivity by which Mary conceived her Son.

Teilhard was not alone in his postulation that Mary's perfect response to the offer of grace is the inner principle of all creation. His ideas are consonant with the writings of the Church Fathers who identified Mary as the New Eve and 'mother of all the living' (Gen. 3.20), a bridal figure from the side of the New Adam. Moreover, the Spirit which overshadowed her in the mystery of the Incarnation is reminiscent of the winds which brooded over the waters at the dawn of creation. Mary thus represents what the cosmos is to be as it stands before its Creator. Similarly, Jean-Jacques Óliêr has hailed Mary as the 'Universal creature [and] ... the sum of perfections dispersed in all the members of the church.'³³ Paul Claudel similarly spoke of Mary as the 'form of the Church, the form of humanity, and the form of all creation.'³⁴

In Teilhard's vision of the Feminine, Mary represents the 'universalized' creature and is the mother of all because, in the process of Christo-genesis, all creation converges in the eternal Feminine, whose virginity is the archetype of complete openness to the Divine. Mary thus holds an essential place in the Christo-genesis of the cosmos, but in no way does she usurp the place of Christ. Rather, she constitutes the perfect disposition by which the cosmos reaches its *natural* fullness and opens to receive the *supernatural* fullness which Christ brings.

³² Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983, 70.

³³ Óliêr, *Traité des saints Ordres*, part 3, chapter 6; as quoted by de Lubac, EF, 123.

³⁴ Claudel, *L'Épée et le Miroir*, 1939, 43; 73; 217; as quoted by de Lubac, EF, 123.

God invites humankind to ‘come to a share in His divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1.4), but it is not – and cannot be – by way of creation evolving into Christ’s body. Rather, it is by way of all creation being gathered into the highest possible point—the pinnacle of *creaturely* perfection, and that is, in and through Mary’s total self-gift to God. She represents the peak development of what the virtue of chastity effects in the individual as a prelude to what is to be effected in the cosmos – namely, the amortization or ‘virginization’ of the universe.³⁵ Teilhard’s Mary is the ‘Pearl of the cosmos’ who stands at the heart of all things, and through her, Christ forms the core of the new creation, gathering all the scattered children of God to Himself. ‘When the day of the Virgin came to pass,’ writes Teilhard, ‘then the final purpose of the universe, deep-rooted and gratuitous, was suddenly made clear....all things are moving towards the Child born of Woman.’³⁶ Teilhard’s conception of the Feminine posits Mary as the true icon of God’s love for all of His creation. It is in her that the gift of God in Jesus Christ is perfectly received.

Conclusion

In summary, Teilhard’s exposition of the Eternal Feminine assigns a crucial role to Our Lady which effectively dispels the potential misreadings of Teilhard’s theory of evolution as pantheistic. By positing a feminine principle as the embodiment of natural perfection, a clear distinction is drawn between the natural and supernatural realms. The cosmos *does not* evolve into the Cosmic Christ. Rather, at the peak of evolution is the *spiritualization* of the cosmos, an ideal exemplified in the Blessed Virgin. It is only at this point in cosmo-genesis that creation is fully disposed to receive from God the gratuitous gift of Christ himself.

Teilhard’s contribution in this respect comes into clearer focus when one transposes his evolutionary vision to a theological key. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the mystery of the Incarnation essentially affirm God’s love for creation. God has wed Himself

³⁵ Cf. EF, 103; ‘virginization’ refers to the process by which the final term is achieved in ‘a universe where all is virgin.’

³⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, ‘Cosmic Life’ in WTW, 59; as referenced by de Lubac in *The Man*, 62.

to humanity in the womb of a Virgin, a maiden whose purity and receptivity became the worthy dwelling for the Savior of the world. Mary offers her life, particularly her body, for the Word to become 'enfleshed,' and this infuses new meaning into material reality.

Furthermore, Teilhard's figure of the Feminine provides a simultaneously personal and universal narrative in which evolutionary biology can be incorporated into theology without losing its very personal and historical context. The salvific dimension of femininity is characterized by Mary's own personal response of faith: '*fiat voluntas Tua.*' She is not the personification of an abstract principle, but rather, she is the concentration of a truly personal disposition of total self-gift in chaste love.

Teilhard's cosmic view can be found to be in accord with Christian eschatology, and his conception of Mary as the eternal Feminine figure is consistent with the dogma of Mary's Assumption into heaven.³⁷ As the first to be assumed, body and soul, into eternal glory, Mary is poised to exercise a final causality in which she draws all of creation forward to its final consummation. The Catholic Church's doctrine of the bodily Assumption of Mary into heaven underscores a victory already won at the apex of her purity. Mary prefigures the glory of the New Jerusalem, the divine pledge of God's faithfulness – even to the bodily, material order. In union with Christ, she embodies the complete and undefiled openness and expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises, and her personal cooperation with grace is the most complete model of grace perfecting nature.

We thus see in Teilhard's work both bridges and boundaries. While it is evident that Teilhard's vision goes far beyond the framework of science,³⁸ his theories do not contradict scientific evidence.³⁹ Teilhard's mystical approach seeks to bridge the all-too-common divide

³⁷ Cf. EF, 125: One of Teilhard's favorite Scriptural texts is Ephesians 4:10 in which St. Paul speaks of Christ as 'The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.' Writing in 1940, ten years before the definition of the dogma of the Assumption by Pope Pius XII, Teilhard applied this same text to Mary, suggesting that she too 'ascended [or was assumed into heaven], that she might fill all things.'

³⁸ The immediate context in which '*L'Éternel féminin*' was first written is significant in showing that this was a work of Teilhard's personal contemplation, not a scientific one. Nonetheless, one must also recognize the rich texture of his poem as derived from the perspective of a true scientist.

³⁹ Cf. Ian G. Barbour, 'Five ways of reading Teilhard,' *Soundings* 51 (1968): 115-145; David Grumett, 'Teilhard de Chardin's Evolutionary Natural Theology,' *Zygon* 42:2 (2007): 519-534.

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between science and religion, just as his ideas on chastity and the eternal Feminine attempt to bridge – or even to unite – flesh and spirit, nature and the supernatural. Yet it does so without losing the essential boundary between Creator and creation. Cosmic evolution happens on the side of the creature and comes to a peak in the perfection of the Virgin Mary when all the energies of the universe come to a focal point in her chaste love. It is this love which opens every creaturely being to its Omega Point in the gift of Christ himself.