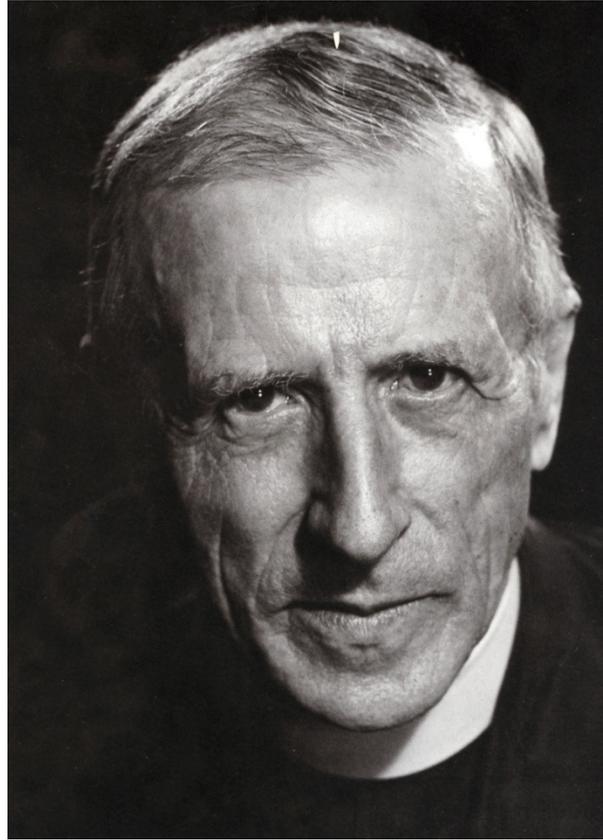


# The Cosmic Plenum

## Teilhard's Gnosis: Cosmogenesis



**Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest-theologian and a distinguished geologist-paleontologist, who was born in France in 1881 and died in New York City in 1955. Following teaching posts in Paris and Cairo, he was assigned to China for many years. In China, He became imbued with a vision of working to build the future.**

**By the future he meant more than the building up of the physical world; he envisaged the irreversible ascent, through man's collective efforts materially and mentally, to reach what he called the Omega Point. For Teilhard the Omega was the cosmic apex, the Christ who was the Spirit of the Earth. He began writing out his ideas. Teilhard the scientist began to view the cosmos as a holistic entity in process. The foundation of his ideas is scientific, based on the principles of geological and biological evolution. Teilhard the theologian intermixed these evolutionary cosmic concepts with Christian creedal theology. Because of these innovative efforts he was considered subversive and so he was silenced by the Vatican throughout much of**

his adult life. His works, written over a period from 1924 to 1955, were only published after his death.

This essay will deal mainly only with those aspects of Teilhard's Cosmogogenesis theory that are based on the rationale of geological and biological evolution. Although the essay will certainly consider Teilhard's cosmological and ontological ideas, it will *\*not\** address his religious creedal theories.

The main thrust of Teilhard's gnosis was a foundational understanding of the Universe, which was expressed in his theory of Cosmogogenesis. According to Teilhard, the universe is no longer to be considered a static order, but rather a universe in process. And it is a continuing, upslope trajectory of evolution that Teilhard declares a Cosmogogenesis. The process of Teilhard's holistic cosmos is broken into the following categories: the Without and Within of things; the evolution of matter, life, consciousness; and the Omega Point.

The world without consists of inorganic and organic matter. Looking at elemental matter, Teilhard notes that the characteristic of minerals have "chosen a road which closed them prematurely in upon themselves." He calls this condensed matter. Eventually, in order to develop, molecules of an innate structure have in some way to get out of themselves. They do. Teilhard observes that atoms aggregate, in geometrical patterns, into simple groups, then into "Äomplex groupings. This is crystallization. During this crystallizing state of elemental matter, Teilhard observes that energy was constantly being released. The earth's energy became capable of building up "carbonates, hydrates, and nitrates." This led to polymerization, in which molecular particles "group themselves and exchange position," thus developing into "larger and more complex" organic compounds.

Teilhard considers the earth's early inorganic and organic developments to be "two inseparable facets of one and the same telluric operation." Teilhard's refrain to this is boggling: "In the world, nothing could ever burst forth as final across the different thresholds successively traversed by evolution which has not already existed in an obscure and primordial way." Teilhard believes that there is a Within in the heart of things!

Teilhard specifically stresses that the Within is used to "denote the psychic fact of that portion of the stuff of the cosmos enclosed from the beginning of time within the narrow scope of the early earth." The exterior world is lined with an interior one! He links this Within with enfoldment. He notes that the very individualization of the earth suggests that a "certain mass of

elementary consciousness was originally imprisoned in the matter of the earth." Teilhard is alluding to a kind of embedded cosmic intelligence or encoded information.

Moving from inanimate matter, the next step in Teilhard's cosmic process is the outburst of life. The cell is the "natural granule of life." The cell merges "qualitatively and quantitatively" into a multitude of living and even more complex individualized and personalized forms. In the cell, Teilhard believes that "we have...the stuff of the universe reappearing once again with all its characteristics...only this time it has reached a higher rung of complexity," and thus has advanced "still further in interiority, i.e. in consciousness." Teilhard labels this vast network of living creatures the \*biosphere.\* This biosphere, this advancing network of life, has thus far resulted in the culminating development of man. With the advent of man, Teilhard believes that cosmic evolution has finally become conscious of itself...at least on this planet, which is woven into the cosmic whole. Teilhard opines that the destiny of man is to culminate into a consciousness of the species. This consciousness of mankind will ultimately become the "thinking layer of the earth," which Teilhard calls the \*noosphere.\* Cosmic evolution will not cease with the noosphere. Teilhard does not consider the human species to be the epitome of the universe; rather, he believes that Nature provides us with yet another evolutionary opening...that of a "super-soul above our souls." The whole "gigantic psycho-biological operation" of cosmic evolution points toward a "mega-synthesis" of all the thinking elements of the earth forcing an entree into the realm of the super-human. Teilhard refers to the super-human as the Omega Point. It is, for him, the apex of cosmic evolution. Teilhard, scientifically speaking, can only imagine what the reality of Omega might be like...a \*pure conscious energy.\* Teilhard proclaims this cosmic energy almost in the mode of poetry. "In the discovery of the sidereal world, so vast that it seems to do away with all proportion between our own being and the dimensions of the cosmos around us, only one reality seems to survive and be capable of succeeding and spanning the infinitesimal and the immense: energy... that floating, universal entity from which all emerges and into which all falls back as into an ocean; energy...the new spirit; energy...the new god."

Now I would like to move more deeply into Teilhard's model of the cosmic process. The structural outline of this model is as follows: the Ground of All Existence; Matter; Consciousness; and the Cosmic Apex.

## THE GROUND OF ALL EXISTENCE

The stuff of the universe, according to Teilhard, necessarily has a "double aspect to its structure." By this, he means that in every region of time and space, the stuff of the universe has an inner aspect of itself: "co-extensive with their Without, there is a Within two things."

At the very depths of the ground of all existence, Teilhard believes that there exists a special energy. For Teilhard, "somehow or other, there must be a single energy operating in the world" that holds everything together. Teilhard talks of an interdependent energy between the Within and the Without; he believes that this energy is "psychic" in nature, but that it is divided into two distinct components: a tangential energy and a radial energy. Teilhard believes that tangential energy "links an element with all others of the same order." Radial energy draws an element towards "ever greater complexity and centrality," which for Teilhard means spiritual perfection. This psychic, radial energy follows what Teilhard coins the Cosmic Law of Complexity-Consciousness. Teilhard explains it thus: "if the universe, regarded sidereally, is in process of spatial expansion (from the infinitesimal to the immense), in the same way and still more clearly it presents itself to us, physico-chemically, as in process of organic involution upon itself (from the extremely simple to the extremely complex)...and, moreover, this particular involution of complexity is experimentally bound up with a correlative increase in interiorization, that is to say in the psyche or consciousness."

## MATTER-INANIMATE AND ANIMATE

Teilhard considers that matter has three faces: plurality, unity, energy. Our sensory experience, as it pursues the depths, the minuteness of matter, breaks down into an abstraction. The world becomes blurred in its plurality. And yet, says Teilhard, the more we artificially (through instruments) observe matter, the more "insistently it proclaims its fundamental unity." The realm of the atom is co-extensive with that of every other atom. There is a "collective unity" bonded by energy. Each element of the cosmos is positively woven from all the others. There is no dichotomy in this universe.

Teilhard states that "Everything, in some extremely attenuated extension of itself, has existed from the very first." Teilhard uses a marvelous term to explain this: \*cosmic embryogenesis.\* this cosmic embryo implies development. Though referring to the earth, Teilhard could be commenting on cosmogenesis. The "earth...is passing through a consecutive series of moving

equilibria; and...In all probability it is tending towards some final state. It has a birth, a development, and presumably a death ahead."

The ascent of life is an exciting expression of this Cosmogensis. Coming from the point of view of biology, Teilhard declares that "there is an ascent of life that is invincible." There is movement within life at all levels; and Teilhard detects certain characteristic attitudes in this movement. They are profusion, indifference, and ingenuity. Life is a milieu of unlimited multiplication. Accepting the concepts of Darwinian evolution, still prevalent in his day, Teilhard admits that "milliards of germs and millions of adults jostling, shoving and devouring one another, fight for elbow room and for the best and largest living space." And the individual unit of life seems to count for little in the process \*at this state.\* Admitting that there appears to be a lot of ferocity and waste, Teilhard submits that underlying all this is a certain efficiency in the struggle for life. "By reckless self-reproduction life takes its precautions against mishap. It increases its chances of survival and at the same time multiplies its chances of progress." Teilhard believes that groping...or grasping...is directed change.

There is an ingenuity in all this groping Teilhard declares. Pervading life tries out all the paths, it mutates, and eventually it accumulates in "stable and coherent aggregates." This is reflective of cleverness. Not only does life "invent" itself, but it has to "design" itself. Life also ramifies, expanding into natural hierarchical units. Even early on there is the intimation of information, of intelligence in the process of Cosmogensis.

This wonderful groping, grasping movement, at least on this planet, has led to the globalization of life, a "living substance spread over the earth." For Teilhard this stage of the cosmic process has culminated into the: "unity of the biosphere that lies beyond the plurality and essential rivalry of individual beings." What lies ahead? For Teilhard it is the development of consciousness.

## CONSCIOUSNESS

Teilhard stresses a sense of building-up, of an accumulation of a cosmic reflective nature. He puts it thus: "Under the free and ingenious effort of successful intelligences, \*something\*... irreversibly accumulates...and is transmitted, at least collectively by means of education, down the course of ages."

**On earth, the human person, individually, and mankind collectively represent cosmic consciousness at its present stage of development. Teilhard declares "man as a definite turning point,\* an upgrading of the cosmic process towards consciousness. But he does NOT consider man separate from Nature. "Man emerged from a general groping of the world. He was born a direct lineal descendent from a total effort of life, so that the species has an axial value and a pre-eminent dignity." Teilhard believes that man may be pivotal in this cosmogenic outreach towards greater consciousness. Humankind collectively, says Teilhard, is in a "state of continuous additive growth, in numbers and inter- connections." It is becoming more "tightly concentrated upon itself."**

**Teilhard calls for a push toward a new dimension of cosmic reality. He calls for the human collectivity to erect a "sphere of mutually reinforced consciousness, the seat, support and instrument of super-vision and super-ideas." Mankind has to build the noosphere!**

**Optimistic, Teilhard believes that the human collectivity has already made some progress towards achieving the construction of the noosphere. Teilhard puts it thus: "In every past generation true seekers, those by vocation or profession, are to be found, but in the past they were no more than a handful of individuals, generally isolated, and of a type that was virtually abnormal. But today...in fields embracing every aspect of physical matter, life and thought, the research workers are to be numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and they no longer work in isolation but in teams endowed with penetrative powers. Research...is in process of becoming a major, indeed the principal, function of humanity." Teilhard definitely believes that humanity is "cerebralizing" itself, and slowly but surely building the noosphere, which for him is a "stupendous thinking machine."**

**If a successful noogenesis comes to fullness, it will move and have its being within that greater dimension of reality: the Cosmic Apex.**

### **THE COSMIC APEX**

**Teilhard has a repository of labels for this greater dimension of reality. Super-soul, the Hyper-personal, the Evolutionary All, and the Omega Point. Teilhard expresses himself poetically about the cosmic apex: "Omega, He towards whom all converges, is concurrently He from whom all radiates. It is impossible to place him as a focus at the summit of the universe, without diffusing his presence in the intimate heart of the smallest movement of evolution." Teilhard believes that this most mysterious of the cosmic energies is the "attraction which is exercised**

upon each conscious element by the center of the universe." This is indeed the attraction "In whom all things hold together." What or Who is this Cosmic Center, this Universal Attractor? Teilhard's feeling is that at the "head of Cosmogeneration there stands a Pole, not simply of attraction but of \*consolidation.\*" It is an "inclusive Center in which everything is gathered together...with the power to grow greater, without distortion or loss of continuity." For Teilhard, the Cosmic Apex is Holy Intelligence!

## COSMIC CHARACTERISTICS

There are certain characteristics that can be discerned from Teilhard's cosmic model. They are Order, Intelligence, Personalization, Creativity, and a sense of Holiness.

Teilhard considers that order underlies the form and movement of the cosmic process. He believes that a special cosmic energy holds the All together, and that this cosmic energy follows a cosmic law. Teilhard calls this universal law the Cosmic Law of Complexity-Consciousness. Teilhard's law, incorporated within his perceptions of geological and biological evolution, encompasses an organic cosmic evolution (and involution) which is proportionately correlative with an increase in consciousness (interiority).

Now there is \*something\* that drives the cosmic process. Teilhard calls it Intelligence. He considers cosmic intelligence to be that "growth of powers of \*foresight and invention,\* prompting and guiding a planned rebound of evolution." Intelligence, for Teilhard, is free and ingenious, it is something that is transmitted and accumulated. Teilhard believes that the level of conscious intelligence is steadily rising...particularly by means of the human brain. Teilhard declares that this is a universe that is acquiring a personality!

Inferring that there is a fundamental cosmic intelligence, Teilhard puts it thus: "From the moment when Evolution (the evolving cosmos) begins to think itself it can no longer live with or further itself except by knowing itself to be irreversible...an irreversible rise towards the \*personal.\*"

Teilhard demonstrates through the collective transformations of the evolving cosmos that progress towards individualization has taken place. "The more highly each phylum became charged with psychism, the more it tended to granulate. The animal grew in value in relation to the species. Finally at the level of man the phenomenon gathers new power and takes definite shape. With the human person, endowed by personalization...the cell has become \*someone.\*"

Evolution, however, is an ascent towards higher and higher complexity and consciousness. Teilhard believes that there is more...that there is more beyond man. Teilhard claims there is a kind of resonance, a resonance to the All. He claims that there seems to be an "expectation and awareness of a \*Great Presence.\* Like the genetic coding of the plant, animal, or human, it is as if there is coded into the cosmos the intuited promise of its ultimate form, it's \*Ahead,\* it's Personhood.

Theoretically, for Teilhard, there is a \*Knower\*...a cosmic Knower, a cosmic Person, a cosmic Player felt to be one with all that is known. This cosmic Knower is pure energy. It is Intelligence. It is Conscious. It is a Person. This Knower, according to Teilhard, is also creative!

About this creative Cosmic Knower, Teilhard talks in terms of "creative transformation." He does not believe that creation was a "periodic intrusion of the First Cause," rather "it is an act co-extensive with the whole duration of the universe." Referring to the Cosmic Knower as "God" in the following statement, Teilhard continues. "God \*has been creating\* ever since the beginning of time, and \*seen from within,\* his creation (\*even his initial creation>\*) takes the form of a transformation. Participated being is not introduced in batches which are differentiated later as a result of a non-creative modification: God is continually breathing new being into us." There is little doubt that Teilhard considers this pure energy, this active Intelligence, this Cosmic Knower, which is the Cosmic Apex, as Holy. It is also an AHEAD!

Teilhard's cosmic paradigm shows a steady process which points in the direction of the Ahead. As Teilhard said, "the universe is no longer an Order but a Process. The Cosmos has become a Cosmogenesis." For Teilhard the long dreamed-of-higher life, that which has been considered as holy, had hitherto been sought Above now directs itself toward the Ahead.

Teilhard's cosmic model also suggests that the Ahead has existed since the foundation of the cosmos. The Ahead is present in the cyclical process of the universe. The Ahead is pure, active intelligence from which all that is manifest in the cosmos comes. The Ahead acts upon universal matter, both animate and inanimate. It acts through a kind of "spirit," inwardness in consciousness. It enfolds information into the many explicate levels of consciousness, into all of life. The Ahead is both the Ground of All Existence and the beckoning Cosmic Apex. The Ahead is both Alpha and Omega simultaneously. Now Humanity is a pilgrim in this cosmic process. What are the implications for humanity in Teilhard's cosmic vision?

## IMPLICATIONS

An aspect of the cosmic entity, humanity walks down the evolutionary path, grasping and growing, making mistakes but yet achieving mastery. Humanity is body and mind, manifest and no manifest. Humanity is not whole, but knows that it can be Whole. Humanity is a great mystery. In humanity's immediate world there is evil and evolution. There is ignorance along with consciousness and creativity. And war and destruction accompany the construction of civilization. Keeping these paradoxes in mind, how can the acceptance of Teilhard's cosmic vision modify humanity's circumstances and mindset? Teilhard addresses the place and part of evil in the cosmic process. To begin, Teilhard describes what he considers to be the different categories of evil: The Evil of Disorder and Failure is engendered by a cosmic process that is groping, taking chances, and making choices. The Evil of Decomposition, which is sickness and corruption, results from some "unhappy chance," and death, which exists because of the "indispensable condition of the replacement of one individual by another along a phyletic stem." The Evil of Solitude and Anxiety is basically the great anxiety of a "consciousness waking up to reflection." And the Evil of Growth is that which is symbolically suffered in the "pangs of childbirth."

Teilhard especially considers that the deeply engrained notion of \*original sin\* "translates, personifies...the perennial and universal law of imperfection which operates in mankind in virtue of its being in the process of becoming." Salvation beckons for Teilhard, precisely because evil (disorder) is perceived to be caused, because the creature... along with the cosmos...is in process. He believes that once this perception is fully understood, than we will be able to comprehend the other side of this evil. Teilhard notes that "Evil, in all its forms...injustice, inequality, suffering, death...ceases theoretically to be outrageous from the moment when \*Evolution becoming a Genesis\*... displays itself as the...price of an \*immense triumph.\*" Then life on this planet will no longer seem a "meaningless prison," but rather the "matrix in which our unity is being forged."

For Teilhard, the tragic, real evil in this life occurs when humanity fails to acquire a sense of the true value of the universe. Teilhard portends that for the "man who sees nothing at the end of the world, nothing higher than himself, (than) daily life can only be filled with pettiness and boredom."

The way beyond the ignorance, for Teilhard, is basically an individuation process. Teilhard opines that the human ego must make the pilgrimage into \*Self.\* He says it thus: "my ego must subsist through abandoning itself or the gift will fade away." The gift is the Self. It is the "very center of our consciousness...that is the essence which Omega, if it is to be truly Omega, must reclaim." Teilhard is not asking the human ego to self-destruct; rather, by climbing to a higher level of consciousness the ego becomes greater. The more the ego is connected with a sense of cosmic insight, the more it finds its true Self...and via the Self the more connected humanity becomes with the Cosmic Mind To be fully ourselves, according to Teilhard, we must head in the direction of "convergence with all the rest...towards the other." He puts it grandly: "The peak of ourselves, the acme of our originality, is not our individuality but our person; and according to the evolutionary structure of the world, we can only find our person by uniting together. There is no mind without synthesis."

The danger, or the evil, is not so much the ego as it is egocentrism! Teilhard denotes that egocentrism (or egoism) confuses "individuality with personality." Becoming separate, the ego "individualizes itself." It is a fatal move, it is regressive. It seeks "to drag the world backwards towards plurality and into matter."

For Teilhard, the point of the individuation process, or being open to universal insight, is to further the evolution of cosmic (and human) consciousness and creativity. Teilhard believes that there is an enfolded creative Intelligence within the depths of the cosmos...and that every aspect of human experience can be affected by this creative Intelligence, mainly via a "breakthrough" experience. For Teilhard this special \*breakthrough\* creativity is an "act co-extensive with the whole duration of the universe." This creativity takes the form of a transformation. Teilhard calls it a "creative transformation" that brings real emancipation. "It puts an end to the paradox and the stumbling-block of matter." For Teilhard this transformation, this "growth of powers of \*foresight\* and \*invention,\*" can prompt and guide the evolutionary process. This special creativity is also part and parcel of Teilhard's vision of the noosphere. Now rather than again looking once again at Teilhard's vision from the perspective of the cosmic process, it may be more fruitful to examine the noosphere from the angle of how humanity directly contributes to and benefits from its development. According to Teilhard, what is really going on in the buildin ãthe noosphere is the "super organization of matter itself," and this is done via human collectivization...collective cooperation! Using Teilhardian language: the "process cannot

achieve stability until, over the entire globe, the human quantum has not merely closed the circle upon itself... but has become organically totalized." Only through collectivization (collective cooperation) can humanity achieve this total, planetary development of the noosphere. It cannot be built by people who think only of themselves; yet every person "on earth shares, in \*himself\*, in the universal heightening of consciousness."

And finally, using anthropomorphic terms, Teilhard believes that the noosphere is not only the "stuff of the Universe...not only of \*men,\* but of the \*Man\* who is to be born tomorrow." And through the efforts of humanity building the noosphere, the earth "finds its soul." The bottom line of Teilhard's vision is that the \*point of the cosmos is to achieve multidimensional wholeness.\* Humanity, as an aspect of the cosmos, is part and parcel to this process towards wholeness.

Reference: [www.bizcharts.com/stoa\\_del\\_sol/plenum/plenum\\_2.html](http://www.bizcharts.com/stoa_del_sol/plenum/plenum_2.html)