

TEILHARD DE CHARDIN'S THEOLOGY OF REDEMPTION

ROBERT L. FARICY, S.J.

Catholic University of America

THE NEW TESTAMENT theology of the redemption has a twofold point of view corresponding to what might be called the negative and the positive aspects of the redemption. The negative aspect of the redemption is Christ's atonement for the sins of the world, "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures."¹ The positive aspect lies in the fact that the redemption is a victory over the powers of evil. "During our minority we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe, but when the term was completed God sent His own Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to purchase freedom for the subjects of the law in order that we might attain the status of sons."² "Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, He humbled Himself and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross. Therefore God raised Him to the heights and bestowed on Him the name above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—in heaven, on earth, and in the depths—and every tongue confess, 'Jesus Christ is Lord,' to the glory of the Father."³ Since the end of the age of the Fathers of the Church, Christian theology of the redemption has paid more attention to the negative aspect than to the positive. Teilhard de Chardin in his reflections on Christ's redemption of the world, while not neglecting the ideas of reparation and expiation for sin, stresses the positive aspect.

Teilhard tries to formulate the beginnings of a theology of the redemption that he feels is in the direction of answering the questions and the needs of contemporary man. His theological reflection emphasizes the constructive side of the redemption, the victory over the forces of evil, and it allows more room than most past theology for

¹ 1 Cor 15:3.

² Gal 4:3-5.

³ Phil 2:8-11. R. Schnackenburg mentions that "Paul's soteriology, which embraces the whole world, needs clarification on more than one point—on the question of its cosmic import (cf. Col 1:20), for example" (*New Testament Theology Today* [tr. D. Askew; London, 1963] p. 75).

man's place in the redemptive process, more room for active as well as passive human participation in the redemption of the world. Teilhard sees past views as giving great stress to the dark side, the negative aspect of the redemption; he himself tentatively suggests a point of view that gives more stress to the positive aspect.

Concerning the dogma of the redemption, Christian thought and piety have up to now emphasized above all, for obvious historical reasons, the idea of expiating reparation. Christ has been regarded above all as the Lamb burdened with the sins of the world, and the world above all as a fallen mass. But from the very beginning there was another side of the picture, another element—a positive one—of reconstruction or re-creation. A new heaven and a new earth: these were, even for Augustine, the result and the reward of the Sacrifice of the Cross.

Is it not conceivable—even more, is it not coming about in conformity with... the evolution of dogma, that these two aspects of Christ's power, the positive aspect and the negative aspect, reverse their respective importance and even their natural order in the outlook and the piety of the faithful, who are guided by the Spirit of God?

Under the pressure of modern events and discoveries, the tangible world and its influence are in our time certainly taking on a growing interest for the followers of the gospel. And so there is a "humanistic" renewal in religion, a renewal which—without in any way rejecting the dark side of things—prefers nevertheless to emphasize the luminous side of creation. At this moment we are witnessing and participating in the irresistible rise of a Christian optimism.

How does this optimism react on the form that our adoration takes?

In the first place, Christ seems to attract us more and more as Leader and as King as well as and as much as Reparator of the world. Purification, of course, but at the same time vitalization: these two functions, although still thought of as independent, already appeal to our heart as joined together and having equal force.

But this seems to be only an intermediary position. . . . The religious expansion and *élan* that we are all more or less consciously waiting for—should not it come from a renewed Christology where the idea of reparation, no matter how integrally preserved, would pass to the second place "in the order of nature" in the Incarnate Word's work of salvation? *Primario*, to lead creation to its fulfilment in union with the divine, and for this purpose *secundario* to eliminate the evil forces of regression and dispersion. No longer first to expiate and in addition to restore, but first to create—or to re-create more perfectly—and for this purpose, in inevitable consequence, to fight against and to compensate for evil.

With this approach . . . the Cross would appear as symbolizing not just the expiation of sin, but the upward and laborious rise of all creation; . . . the Lamb of God would appear to us as carrying, with the weight of sin, the weight of the world's progress; the ideas of pardon and sacrifice would be enriched with the aspects of fulfilment and of conquest.⁴

⁴ "Le Christ évoluteur" (1942, unpublished essay) pp. 6-7. Unless otherwise indicated,

This long quotation from Teilhard gives an idea of what he is trying to do in his theology of the redemption. Teilhard sees the redemption primarily as a creative effort, as a positive victory over the forces of evil. With Teilhard's general point of view in mind, we can turn to a short outline of his thought on the nature and the problem of evil.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In classic Thomist philosophy evil is considered as a privation of being, as "nonbeing," as a certain lack of that "being" which a creature should have. Teilhard, on the other hand, sees evil as an incompleteness of the creature, the incompleteness of organization of a creature that is progressing toward a higher state of unity. In the static cosmos of the medieval philosophers it was impossible to give any kind of a really satisfactory answer to the problem of evil, to the question "Why is there evil in the world?" Evil could be described in terms of nonbeing, but not really justified. But now that the universe is seen to be in evolution, evil is at least to some extent explainable.

In a universe in process of evolution, "for implacable statistical reasons, and at every level—preliving, living, reflectively conscious—it is impossible that there not be some disorder or lack of organization in a multiplicity that is *progressively* moving toward a higher degree of organization."⁵ For in an evolutionary system it is inevitable that each advance in organization, in order, be paid for by failures and discords. Evil is a secondary effect, an inevitable subproduct of the forward progress of a universe in evolution. This is basically Teilhard's position on the problem of evil, stated generally and abstractly. Let us take a closer look at this position, in order to see some of its implications for a theology of the redemption.

God's creative act is best understood as a gradual process of unification. That is, to create is to unite. Teilhard views creation as a gradual reduction of the multiple to unity; God's creative act is expressed in the converging evolution of the universe, a universe moving gradually

all works referred to in this study are by P. Teilhard de Chardin. In the case of his essays, the date when each was written is given immediately after the essay title.

⁵ "Du cosmos à la cosmogénèse" (1951, *L'Activation de l'énergie* [Paris, 1963] p. 268; this is Vol. 7 of *Oeuvres de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, cited hereafter as OE 7). In "La pensée du Père Teilhard de Chardin," written by Teilhard himself in 1948 (*Les études philosophiques* 10 [1955] 581), he describes evil even more concisely as "the statistical necessity of disorder at the interior of a multitude undergoing organization."

through higher states of unity to the fulness of the Pleroma, when all things will be united in Christ. If creation is seen as a long process of unification beginning with an infinite multiplicity and proceeding through the ages along an axis of increasing organization toward a final synthesis in Christ, then, according to Teilhard, the problem of evil is no longer a real problem. "In the ancient cosmos that was thought to have come ready-fashioned from the hands of the Creator, it is natural that the reconciliation between a partially bad world and the existence of a God who is both good and all-powerful should appear difficult."⁶ But in a cosmos in a state of evolution, of becoming, the problem disappears. It is not because He lacks omnipotence, but by the very structure of the void itself—considered as an infinite multiplicity—that God, in creating, can proceed in only one manner:

by arranging and unifying little by little, through His attracting influence and His utilization of the random combinations that occur in quantities of large number, an immense multitude of elements, at first almost infinitely numerous, extremely simple, and possessing negligible consciousness, then gradually more rare and more complex, and finally gifted with reflection. Now what is the inevitable counterpart of any success obtained by following a process of this kind if not the necessity of paying for success by a certain amount of waste? Disharmony or decomposition in preliving matter, suffering among living things, sin in the domain of liberty: there is no order in the process of formation that does not at every stage of the process imply disorder. There is nothing . . . in this condition of participated being which would lessen the dignity or limit the omnipotence of the Creator. Nor is there anything whatever savoring of Manicheism. Pure unorganized multiplicity is not bad in itself. But because it is multiple—that is, essentially subject in its arrangements to the play of chance—it is absolutely impossible that it progress toward unity without giving rise to evil here and there by statistical necessity.⁷

The above is an explanation of evil *in general*; it includes both physical evil—that is, every kind of disorder and failure and suffering and

⁶ "Comment je vois" (1948, unpublished essay) p. 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20. For an earlier and much longer general consideration of evil, see "La lutte contre la multitude" (1917, *Ecrits du temps de la guerre: 1916–1919* [Paris, 1965]) pp. 113–24. This book of Teilhard's early essays is hereafter referred to as *Ecrits*. On the problem of evil, see also "Les noms de la matière," *Ecrits*, pp. 419–32. For a more scientific treatment of evil, see "L'Hominisation" (1925, *La vision du passé* [Paris, 1957]) pp. 105–6; this is Vol. 3 of the *Oeuvres de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, hereafter cited as OE 3. For a personalistic but still general consideration of evil, see "Esquisse d'un univers personnel" (1936, *L'Energie humaine* [Paris, 1962]) pp. 105–10; this is Vol. 6 of the *Oeuvres de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, hereafter cited as OE 6).

death—and the moral evil of sin. Evil appears necessarily in the course of the unification of the multiple, for evil is “the very expression of a state of plurality that is not yet completely organized. . . . Evil is not an unforeseen accident in the universe. It is an enemy, the shadow that God raises by His very decision to create.”⁸ At every level of created being, precisely because of the evolutionary structure of created being, evil is “relentlessly imposed by the play of large numbers at the interior of a multitude undergoing organization.”⁹ In our universe “evil appears necessarily and abundantly . . . not by accident (which would not much matter) but by the very structure of the system”; a universe in evolution is necessarily “a universe which labors, which sins, which suffers.”¹⁰

The existence of evil “seems to be the rigorously inevitable concomitant of creation.” To think that God could create from nothing a world without pain or risks or breakage or sin is simply a conceptual fantasy. To say that God could “obtain a creature united to Himself without entering into combat against evil” is, for Teilhard, to say a contradiction. God cannot make a square circle; He cannot perform a bad act; and “there are certainly physical equivalents to these inflexible laws of geometry and morality.”¹¹

Evil, then, for Teilhard is basically disorder and failure, and we find it at every level of created being. “Statistically, at every degree of evolution, we find evil always and everywhere, forming and re-forming implacably in us and around us.”¹² We will consider in brief detail the two kinds of evil to which Teilhard gives the most attention, the “evil of decomposition” which includes suffering and death, and the evil that is sin.

⁸ “Christologie et évolution” (1933, unpublished essay) p. 7.

⁹ *The Phenomenon of Man*, tr. B. Wall (New York, 1965) p. 312; hereafter referred to as *PM*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

¹¹ “Note sur les modes de l’action divine dans l’univers” (1920, unpublished essay) pp. 10–11. Teilhard’s thought is in an evolutionary framework; in a system of thought that takes evolutionary process into account, evil does seem to be rigorously inevitable. To think of an evolving universe without any evil in that universe does seem contradictory. In the static cosmos of Thomistic philosophy, of course, this is not true. It seems quite possible within Thomistic categories to imagine the creation of a universe that would have no evil in it.

¹² *PM*, p. 312.

One form of evil is suffering. It is inevitable, "bound to the very structure of the cosmos . . . and part of the very law of becoming."¹³ "Everything that is not yet finished being organized must inevitably suffer in its residual lack of organization and in its possible disorganization";¹⁴ this is the human condition, and more—it is the condition of the universe.

In a bouquet, we would be surprised to see imperfect or "suffering" flowers, because the flowers were picked one by one and artificially arranged together. On the other hand, on a tree which has had to fight against the interior accidents of its development and the exterior accidents of weather, broken branches, torn leaves, blossoms that are dried up or drooping or pale—all these are "in their place." They are manifestations of the more or less difficult conditions of growth met by the tree itself.

The tree is Teilhard's metaphor for the evolving world. Changing metaphor, he goes on to speak of the world's progress as a battle,

a work of conquest that is going on right now; . . . by our birth, we are thrown into full battle. For the success of the universal effort in which we are both the collaborators and the disputed field of battle, it is inevitable that there be suffering. The world, seen experientially from our point of view, is an immense groping, an immense enterprise, an immense attack; its progress is made at the price of much failure and of many wounds. The sufferers, no matter to what species they belong, are the expression of this austere but noble condition. They don't represent useless and lesser elements. They pay for the forward progress and the victory of all. They are fallen on the field of honor.¹⁵

The "evil" of decomposition that is manifest in suffering has its most serious and aggravated form in death. Taken simply in itself and from a purely natural viewpoint, death is a scandal and a failure, "the worst weakness and the worst enemy."¹⁶ It is the sum and consummation of all the evils of the universe; "it is *evil* itself."¹⁷ All the evils of our life have "a common envelope: the fundamental obligation to be born and to live whether we should have wanted to or not, and they

¹³ "La foi qui opère" (1918, *Ecrits*, p. 324).

¹⁴ "Esquisse d'un univers personnel" (1936, *OE* 6, 107).

¹⁵ "La signification et la valeur constructive de la souffrance" (1933, *OE* 6, 63). There is an English translation: "The Meaning and Constructive Value of Suffering," in *Teilhard de Chardin, Pilgrim of the Future*, ed. N. Braybrooke (New York, 1964) pp. 23–26.

¹⁶ "Mon univers" (1924, *Science et Christ* [Paris, 1965] p. 91; this is Vol. 9 of the *Oeuvres de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, hereafter cited as *OE* 9).

¹⁷ *The Divine Milieu*, tr. B. Wall et al. (New York, 1960) p. 82; hereafter cited as *DM*.

all converge to the same inevitable center: death." As seen by the living, "death is the summing up and the common basis of all that frightens us . . . , the inevitable destiny that is implied in our birth and that circumscribes our life."¹⁸ In an evolutionary universe, death is the law, "the regular indispensable condition of the replacement of one individual by another along a phyletic stem."¹⁹

As an explanation of most evils, including death and suffering, Teilhard's ideas seem to be not only original but satisfactory. But his general explanation of evil as a statistical necessity in an evolving world applies also to moral evil, to sin. How can Teilhard consider sin in more or less the same terms as he considers other forms of evil? And does not his idea of sin as statistical *necessity* tend to deny human freedom?

SIN

Nowhere in Teilhard's writings is there a full theology of sin, nor even a single very full treatment of any one aspect of the theology of sin. The theological questions that interested Teilhard were those that touched on the question of the evolution of the universe toward Christ-Omega. It is natural, then, that Teilhard's consideration of sin should be in the context of cosmic and Christ-oriented evolution, and that he should consider the theology of sin only insofar as it is in that context. We should not look in the writings of Teilhard for considerations of sin as a subjective psychological phenomenon, nor of sin as a subjective existential act, nor of sin as a personal and subjective rejection of God's love. These notions are outside the scope of Teilhard's chosen interest: the evolution of the cosmos and what that evolution means for man and for Christianity. Teilhard's view of sin is in no way impersonal or "cold," but in the context of the evolution of the universe it is fitting that sin be considered not insofar as it is a properly individual and subjective rejection of divine love, but as the evil that is proper to that part of evolution which has become reflexively conscious. Teilhard's reflections on sin are almost always in the context of evil in general as the inevitable concomitant of the creative process.

In Teilhard's cosmic perspective, the evil of sin is the form of dis-

¹⁸ "La foi qui opère" (1918, *Ecrits*, pp. 312-13).

¹⁹ *PM*, p. 312.

order corresponding to the conscious state of the multiple. In a universe moving toward always greater unity, sin is a return to the multiple, a descent from a more or less unified state to a less unified state.²⁰ The unity and the multiplicity in question here are spiritual, although of course sin has repercussions, leaves traces, in the material order. Sin is precisely the deliberate movement of the will away from unity; it is evil at the level of moral consciousness. "There is *only one evil*: disunion. We call it moral evil when it affects the free zones of the soul."²¹ Objective moral evil is disunion, disorder, and this is why Teilhard can say that sin is inevitable, that it is statistically necessary in a universe in the process of unification. "Physical disharmony or decomposition among the pre-living, suffering among the living, sin in the domain of freedom: there is no order in the process of being formed that does not at every stage imply disorder."²²

There is no real difficulty in saying that sin is freely committed and that sin is, at the same time, a statistical inevitability "relentlessly imposed at the interior of a multitude undergoing organization."²³ The inevitability of sin applies to the "multitude" of men, not to any one individual at any particular time. In the multitude of human beings, *because* they are free to choose good or evil, at least some will—in a given period of time—choose evil instead of good; some will sin. This situation could be compared to a national presidential election;

²⁰ See the somewhat abstract analysis of sin in "La lutte contre la multitude" (1917, *Ecrits*, pp. 120-22). See also C. Cuénot, *Teilhard de Chardin*, tr. V. Colimore (Baltimore, 1965) pp. 257-58, for a report of a discussion between Teilhard and A. M. Dubarle, O.P., on the nature of evil. Teilhard often describes sin as a return to multiplicity, as a movement away from unity and organization. Teilhard obviously does not mean that sin is something quantitative; he is using an analogy taken from the scientific concept of entropy, the gradual movement of a more or less organized system to a lower state of organization and energy. Teilhard's idea of sin as a kind of moral entropy seems to be the chief cause of criticisms that his theology of sin is too "impersonal." At any rate, it is quite surprising to find H. de Lubac, who criticizes Teilhard for not giving "more room to the drama of sin," asserting of Teilhard's thought that "we can find in him hardly a trace of that 'supernatural or trans-natural entropy' which, in the lives of each of us, and until our final consummation, continues to provide a disconcerting obstruction that Christ alone can remove" (*Teilhard de Chardin: The Man and His Meaning*, tr. R. Hague [New York, 1965] p. 104). The point of view of which de Lubac finds little trace is precisely Teilhard's habitual point of view.

²¹ "Mon univers" (1924, *Ecrits*, p. 109, footnote 2).

²² "Comment je vois" (1948, unpublished essay) p. 20.

²³ *PM*, p. 312.

there is a statistical inevitability that at least some voters will vote for candidate A instead of candidate B; yet each voter chooses *freely* for whom to vote. A large part of the statistical methods of modern sociology is based on a certain statistical necessity that holds for large populations even in matters of free choice. Sin, for Teilhard, is the free choice of disunion, of disorder; it is free in each case, but it is a statistical necessity for the entire human population moving gradually and even somewhat gropingly toward higher organization and unity. The statistical necessity of sin does not imply obligation, nor does it minimize man's freedom.

Teilhard's opinion is that "Christianity has developed in itself to a probably exaggerated degree—exaggerated because not balanced by compensating factors—and to the point of hypertrophy the ideas of guilt and damnation."²⁴ Teilhard reacted to what he considered an excessive stress on the negative aspects of Christian doctrine, especially man's guilt and the everlasting punishments of hell. Nevertheless, in Teilhard's writings the existence and the importance of human freedom to choose good or evil and of human responsibility in choosing are strongly underlined. And in a world in evolution, where evil is the inevitable corollary of creative union, "hell is the natural corollary of heaven,"²⁵ and the mystery of eternal damnation takes on a cosmic awfulness. It seems well to look briefly at Teilhard's ideas of human freedom and of hell to the extent that these ideas help to understand his conception of sin.

The progress of evolution, far from diminishing freedom in the cosmos, increases it. "Spirit is the term pursued by Nature in its long travail. All that lives—that is, perhaps, all that acts—tends from the beginning toward a little more freedom, power, truth."²⁶ Man is evolution become conscious of itself, and in man the evolutionary process continues toward an always fuller freedom. "The real evolution of the world takes place in men's souls, and in the union of men's souls. Its inmost agents are not mechanistic, but psychological and moral."²⁷ Evolution, continued in man, follows an axis of increasing

²⁴ "L'Evolution de la chasteté" (1934, unpublished essay) p. 2.

²⁵ "La vie cosmique" (1916, *Ecrits*, p. 58).

²⁶ "Le milieu mystique" (1917, *Ecrits*, pp. 156–57). See "L'Homínisation" (1923, *OE* 3, 103).

²⁷ "Mon univers" (1924, *OE* 9, 76–77).

complexity and consciousness, and the increase of human reflexive consciousness necessarily implies the increase of human freedom to choose good or evil. Human freedom "appears everywhere, and is everywhere increased" by the progress of the evolution of mankind toward greater unity.²⁸ For this evolution is in the direction of greater spiritualization, and so in the direction of greater freedom. Socialization increases freedom because "union differentiates"; man becomes more human and so more free by associating with other men. Just as man's freedom grows in the evolutive history of mankind, so does human responsibility; as mankind becomes more tightly organized in a more and more complex society—that is, as human evolution continues to converge—human responsibility grows along with human freedom. This responsibility or moral obligation is not simply juridical, but based on the organic nature of evolving human society. Finally, with the progressive growth in society of consciousness and freedom and responsibility, evil inevitably increases—if not in quantity, at least in intensity.²⁹ For evil—and, in the domain of human freedom, sin—is the inevitable counterpart of progress in unity. There is no order in the process of formation that does not imply disorder, and the gradual forging of unity in the realm of the specifically human inevitably means the moral disorder that is sin. It is in the context of the progress of humanity toward greater unification that Teilhard speaks of a growing temptation to revolt. In face of the choice between fidelity and infidelity to the movement of life toward Omega, in the choice between good and evil, man is more and more tempted to choose evil, to sin.

This crisis of human action is as old as man. It is quite clear, however, that we should not think of it as limited to a few short moments or only to the origins of the human race. Born with intelligence, the temptation to revolt must constantly vary and grow with it. And this is why it has never shown itself more acute and more universal than in our time.³⁰

Teilhard's consideration of the mystery of hell and eternal damnation throws more light on his idea of sin as disunion in the domain of human freedom.

²⁸ "The Formation of the Noosphere" (1947, *The Future of Man*, tr. N. Denny [New York, 1964] pp. 182-83; hereafter referred to as *FM*).

²⁹ "L'Evolution de la responsabilité" (1950, *OE* 7, 211-21).

³⁰ "L'Hominisation" (1925, *OE* 3, 106-7).

The existence of hell is, with the mystery of the Cross, one of the most criticized and disconcerting elements of the Christian creed. And yet, reduced to its essence, nothing could be more in conformity with the perspectives of a universe in evolution than this dogma. All evolution within the limits of our experience entails selection and waste. And so it is impossible for us to imagine, in the totality of its process, the unification of the world in God without making a place for that which might eventually escape this process.

Catholic dogma, Teilhard goes on, does not state that all men will be saved. The dogma of hell tells us that some men may be lost forever, thrown out "to the antipodes of God." Hell is the inverse of heaven, like an "opposite pole" from God.³¹

The history of the kingdom of God is, directly, one of a reunion. The total divine milieu is formed by the incorporation of every elected spirit in Jesus Christ. But to say "elect" is to imply a choice, a selection. We should not be looking at the universal action of Jesus from a fully Christian point of view if we were to see it merely as a center of attraction and beatification. It is precisely because He is the one who unites that He is also the one who separates and judges. The Gospel speaks of the good seed, the sheep, the right hand of the Son of Man, the wedding feast and the fire that kindles joy. But there are also the tares, the goats, the left hand of the Judge, the closed door, the outer darkness; and, at the antipodes of the fire that unites in love, there is the fire that destroys in isolation. The whole process out of which the New Earth is gradually born is an *aggregation* underlaid by a *segregation*.³²

The final choice is "revolt or adoration," and those whose final option is revolt will be forever torn away from the ultimate Center of all real organization and unification.³³ Those men who finally resist union with Christ-Omega will be rejected into a conscious and unending decomposition and descent into multiplicity.³⁴ Hell, for Teilhard, terrible though it is, is "a structural element in the universe," and it "adds an accent, a gravity, a contrast, a depth" to total reality. The knowledge of the existence of hell, "this negative pole of the world," doubles our understanding of the urgency of Christ's call to all men to union with Him. "The peak can only be measured from the abyss which it crowns."³⁵

³¹ "Introduction à la vie chrétienne" (1944, unpublished essay) p. 8.

³² *DM*, pp. 146-47.

³³ "A Note on Progress" (1920, *FM*, p. 19); "Panthéisme et christianisme" (1923, unpublished essay) p. 12.

³⁴ "Mon univers" (1924, *OE* 9, 113).

³⁵ *DM*, p. 148. Teilhard writes in 1918: "Only sin is excluded [from the Pleroma]. And

We have not yet considered one of the most important aspects of Teilhard's thought on the existence of evil in the world. It is his theological hypothesis of original sin. Teilhard anticipated by several years the contemporary trend among theologians to reformulate the classical theology of original sin. He considered such a reformulation as vitally necessary to a proper and coherent understanding of Christ's redemption of the world.

ORIGINAL SIN AND CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Teilhard's most complete presentation of his views on original sin was written in 1947 explicitly to be read and criticized by qualified theologians.³⁶ Teilhard begins the essay with his reasons for proposing his theory of original sin. He wants to safeguard the Christian understanding of Christ as Lord of the universe, and he wants to be sure that man's place in the forward movement of the universe is not minimized.

In the first place, Christ's power as Lord is a specifically redemptive power.

Christ must continue to be understood as the Head of all creation. . . . The radius of Christ's Lordship and power is "by definition" the radius of the redemption. No one questions this. Now what would happen from the point of view of Christology if, in our modern perspectives of historical cosmogenesis, original sin were to continue to be thought of on the same small scale—that is, as an accident that happened toward the end of the Tertiary Period in a corner of the planet Earth? Obviously this: Christ's power would not *directly, organically, and formally* go beyond . . . a short and narrow spindle of the universe around us. In name and juridically, of course, Christ could still be declared Master of the remaining sectors of the cosmos by virtue of His divine dignity. But in a full and real sense, in the sense of St. Paul, He would cease to be "Him in whom all things hold together." And so . . . we are obliged to reflect on the phenomenon of the Fall so that we

yet, since the damned are not annihilated, who can say what mysterious complementarity is furnished to the Body of Christ by this immortal waste?" ("Le prêtre" [1918, *Ecrits*, p. 293]). For other texts on hell and its significance, see "La vie cosmique" (1916, *Ecrits*, pp. 57–58); "La lutte contre la multitude" (1917, *Ecrits*, pp. 131–32); "Forma Christi" (1918, *Ecrits*, pp. 349–50); "Terre promise" (1919, *Ecrits*, p. 395); "Les noms de la matière" (1919, *Ecrits*, p. 429).

³⁶ "Réflexions sur le péché originel" (unpublished essay, 1947). Among the theologians for whose consideration this short paper was written was almost certainly Pierre Charles, S.J., of the University of Louvain, a thoroughly Thomistic and imaginative theologian and lifelong friend of Teilhard; see Cuénot, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 13.

might conceive and imagine it not as an isolated fact, but as a general condition affecting the whole of history.³⁷

Teilhard says the same thing in earlier essays. "The *spirit* of the Bible and the Church is clear: the *entire* world has been corrupted by the Fall, and it is the *entire* world that is the subject of redemption."³⁸ "To safeguard the Christian view of Christ the Redeemer, it is clearly necessary that we keep original sin as large as the world; otherwise Christ will be understood as having saved only part of the world, and not understood as the Center of everything."³⁹

Further, Teilhard feels that the common understanding of the dogma of original sin tends strongly to devalue the place of Christian endeavor in the world, that it tends to devalue the temporal realities around us and so to devalue Christian responsibility in promoting human progress. To begin with, it is not clear how the dogma of original sin is consonant with the general contemporary view of the universe. Dogma, of course, is not intrinsically affected by any world view; nevertheless, so that the interior unity of the contemporary Christian's view of reality be preserved, it seems necessary that theology show how the doctrine of original sin and man's knowledge of the universe fit together. "Without exaggeration we can say that the doctrine of original sin as it is still formulated today is one of the principal obstacles right now for the intensive and extensive progress of Christian thought. . . . The story of the Fall paralyzes the necessary establishment of a Christian world view that is fully human and humanizing."⁴⁰ Teilhard's real purpose is not to reconcile science and religion, but to integrate the doctrine of original sin into an over-all Christian vision of reality, a vision that will not minimize the importance of the world and of Christian responsibility in the world. As long as the dogma of original sin is not somehow seen in the perspective of a unified Christian outlook, it tends to distort Christian ascetical principles. In his first mention of original sin, in 1916, Teilhard points out the necessity of providing the theological basis for a healthy Christian outlook on suffering by a

³⁷ "Réflexions sur le péché originel" (1947, unpublished essay) p. 3.

³⁸ "Chute, rédemption, et géocentricité" (1920, unpublished essay) p. 2.

³⁹ "Note sur quelques représentations historiques du péché originel" (1924, unpublished essay) p. 8.

⁴⁰ "Réflexions sur le péché originel" (1947, unpublished essay) p. 1.

further reflection on what "original sin" means. "According to 'classical' views, suffering is *above all a punishment, an expiation*; its force is the force of a sacrifice: born of a sin, suffering makes reparation for it. It is good to suffer so as to check oneself, conquer oneself, liberate oneself." But for Teilhard, "suffering is above all the consequence and the price of a *project of development*. Its force is the force of *effort*. . . . The Cross is the symbol of the difficult work of evolution rather than the symbol of expiation." How can these two different points of view be made to coincide? By a rethinking of the theology of original sin so that the original Fall be seen as placing "man in his connatural framework of progression and work 'by the sweat of his brow.'"⁴¹ The negative emphasis on expiation and reparation should be balanced by a positive emphasis on the value of effort and labor. Again, in 1933, Teilhard deplores the negative outlook imposed by the current understanding of original sin, an outlook that "opposes at every point the normal expansion of our religion. It cuts the wings of our hope. Every time we strike out into the wide spaces of optimistic conquest, it inexorably pulls us back toward the oppressive gloom of reparation and expiation." Original sin as it is usually pictured "suffocates our thought and our heart," it "binds us and weakens us."⁴² In 1954 Teilhard writes in a letter that

Christianity is not going to recover its power of contagion until it rejects the last traces of Manichaeism and Platonism and begins to think of original sin no longer in terms of a Fall but in terms of progress. This means that Christians must cease looking upon cosmogenesis as something tainted, outside of God's plan, and representing in its totality a haphazard pasting together with which they need not concern themselves.⁴³

TEILHARD ON ORIGINAL SIN

What, then, is the theological hypothesis of original sin that Teilhard proposes, and how does it differ from the traditional presentation? The dogma of original sin is customarily interpreted as though the state of original sin depended on an event interior to history, a historical event with a "before" and an "after." But, Teilhard asks, for important

⁴¹ "La vie cosmique" (1916, *Ecrits*, pp. 60-61).

⁴² "Christologie et évolution" (1933, unpublished essay) pp. 3-4.

⁴³ Letter of June 19, 1953, to Mme. Jean Carhian, quoted by C. Mooney, S.J., *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (New York, 1966) pp. 79-80.

theological reasons should not original sin be considered to be a reality of a transhistoric order, affecting the totality of the world as we know it? The specific effect of original sin is death, but death is present everywhere in the experimental world. In the form of decomposition death shows itself even at the level of the atom. "If there is original sin in the world, then it must be everywhere and from the very beginning." Furthermore, this universal existence of original sin is confirmed "by the most orthodox exigencies of Christology."⁴⁴ How does Teilhard visualize this universality of original sin? He takes as a postulate that the void, the utter nothingness out of which God began His creation, be thought of as an infinite multiplicity and that God's creative act be understood as a gradual process of arrangement and unification. The history of the world, then, can be imagined as a cone with an infinite multiplicity as its base and with the future synthesis of all things in Christ as the apex. In such a universe in a state of converging evolution, evil at every level—moral as well as physical—is, as we have seen, a statistical necessity. And this is original sin: the inevitable existence of evil in the world, a universal condition. Thus, original sin for Teilhard is a negative and inevitable structural element in an evolving universe, a universal condition of existence in a progressively converging world.

It is true that in this explanation original sin ceases to be an isolated act; it becomes a state affecting the whole human population. . . . Far from diminishing, this helps to intensify the dogmatic characteristics of the Fall. For on the one hand, the redemption is truly universal since it is the remedy for a *state* of things, the universal presence of disorder—a state that is bound up with the most profound structure of the universe undergoing continuous creation. On the other hand, individual baptism keeps and even increases its whole meaning. In our perspective, each new soul that awakens to life is contaminated in the solidarity of

⁴⁴ "Réflexions sur le péché originel" (1947, unpublished essay) pp. 2-3. See the similar explanations of original sin in "Note sur le Christ universel" (1920, *OE* 9, 41); T. Fleming, S.J., "Two Unpublished Letters of Teilhard," *Heythrop Journal* 6 (1965) 36-45. Teilhard briefly sets out his theory of original sin in the following unpublished essays: "Chute, rédemption, et géocentricité" (1920); "Note sur le Christ universel" (1920, *OE* 9, 41); "Notes sur quelques représentations historiques" (1922); "Christologie et évolution" (1933, 3-8); "Quelques vues générales sur l'essence du christianisme" (1939, 2); "Le Christ évolutif" (1942, 8-9); "Introduction à la vie chrétienne" (1944, 8). See Teilhard's brief remarks on original sin in: "La vie cosmique" (1916, *Ecrits*, pp. 60-61); "La lutte contre la multitude" (1917, *Ecrits*, pp. 122-23); "L'Âme du monde" (1918, *Ecrits*, p. 231); "Mon univers" (1924, *OE* 9, 108-9); *Hymn of the Universe*, tr. S. Bartholomew (New York, 1965) p. 311.

mankind by the total influence of all the sins . . . inevitably and by statistical necessity spread in the world by mankind. Something in that soul, then, has to be purified.⁴⁵

In a footnote to this text Teilhard adds that among the most harmful to all mankind are the first sins committed on earth, committed with a minimum human consciousness but with a maximum influence on the newly-born human race. For each person, the sins committed in his social group and in his family line are particularly harmful.

In Teilhard's theory of original sin, original sin cannot be localized in time or in space; it is not an event in a historical chain of events. Rather, it is "a global modality of evolution." From this point of view our conception of original sin "considered in its cosmic basis—as opposed to its historical actuation by the first human beings—tends to be absorbed by our conception of the very mechanism of creation." For if creation is thought of as progressive unification, then "original sin represents the action of the negative forces of counterevolution."⁴⁶ This does not mean that original sin cannot, in Teilhard's hypothesis, also be considered in a more limited sense, insofar as it affects mankind. There is no difficulty in admitting within the boundaries of Teilhard's hypothesis the idea that "the evil inherent in the world by virtue of the world's mode of creation should be regarded as being particularly individualized on earth at the time of the appearance of the first responsible human persons. This would be, in the strict sense, the original sin of the theologians."⁴⁷

Teilhard did not propose his ideas on original sin as a way to avoid the necessity of subscribing to the doctrine of monogenism, the doctrine that all men are descended from one couple. Still, as he points out, the acceptance of his hypothesis would "incidentally free us from the obligation, heavier every day, of paradoxically making the whole human race derive from one couple."⁴⁸ In Teilhard's theory Adam is "universalized."

⁴⁵ "Réflexions sur le péché originel" (1947, unpublished essay) p. 8.

⁴⁶ "Le Christ évolutif" (1942, unpublished essay) p. 9.

⁴⁷ "Quelques vues générales sur l'essence du christianisme" (1939, unpublished essay) p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* See Fleming, *art. cit.* As Teilhard points out, although the problem of the monogenetic or polygenetic origin of man is a theological problem—since science deals not with individuals but with populations—there should be at least no contradiction between theological explanations and scientific findings. "The scientist cannot directly prove that the

Original sin is the necessary reaction of the finite to the creative act. . . . It is the "other side" of the whole creative process. . . . The properly human fall is the more or less collective and perennial actuation in the human race of that "*forma peccati*" that was inherent in the entire universe well before the appearance of man. . . . Strictly speaking, there is no Adam. Under this name is hidden the universal and infrangible law of reversion or perversion. (Evil is) the ransom of progress.⁴⁹

In Teilhard's view Adam is a symbol that all men are born fallen, that all are marked by original sin the instant they become members of mankind. But men are not born in sin because of some aboriginal sin of a primitive Adam. Men are born in original sin because this is the law of the universe, the cosmic condition of a world in evolution.

It is not our purpose here either to attack or to defend Teilhard's proposed theological hypothesis of original sin. We have presented it because it seems to be an integral part of his thought on evil and on the redemption and a very important element in the whole structure of his religious thought.⁵⁰ We should remark, however, that there are trends

hypothesis of an individual Adam should be rejected. Indirectly, however, he can judge that this hypothesis is made scientifically untenable by all that we believe we know at this time about the biological laws of the genesis of species. . . . So either the scientific laws of speciation will change essentially in the future, and this is improbable. Or—and this seems to accord with recent progress in exegesis—theologians will perceive in one way or another that in a universe as organically structured as we are finding today that ours is, . . . human solidarity is easily accounted for by the extraordinary internal bonds of the world around us in a state of cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis" ("Monogénisme et monophylétisme" [1950, unpublished essay] pp. 1-2). For an excellent treatment of the problem of monogenism from the dogmatic, scriptural, and metaphysical standpoints, see K. Rahner, S.J., "Theological Reflections on Monogenism" *Theological Investigations* 1 (tr. C. Ernst, O.P.; Baltimore, 1961) 229-96. It seems at least rash to state apodictically, as does C. Connolly (*The Voices of France* [New York, 1961] pp. 127-28), that Teilhard's views on polygenism and evolution bring him into "unavoidable conflict with the ordinary Teaching Authority of the Church as expressed by Pope Pius XII in *Humani Generis*." For a more moderate and balanced position regarding Teilhard's ideas on evolution and polygenism, see Philippe de la Trinité, *Rome et Teilhard de Chardin* (Paris, 1964) pp. 25-28, footnote 12. Philippe de la Trinité, however, finds Teilhard's views on original sin to be in direct opposition to the Council of Trent. In general, his book is an aggressive attack on Teilhard and "teilhardisme."

⁴⁹ "Chute, rédemption, et géocentricité" (1920, unpublished essay) p. 3.

⁵⁰ Teilhard's hypothesis of original sin was modestly presented to professional theologians precisely as a hypothesis to be considered and reflected on. Nevertheless, its importance for all his theological thought is immense; his theology of creation and of redemption depends on it intrinsically. Teilhard's religious thought cannot logically be accepted piecemeal; if an element as important as his theory of original sin is rejected in its essentials, then much more of his original religious thought must be rejected.

today in Catholic exegesis and dogmatic theology that make Teilhard's suggested theory of original sin seem much less startling than it surely was when he first proposed it. The emphasis in biblical scholarship has shifted from the idea of the Fall to the equally biblical idea of "the sin of the world," the solidarity in sin of all men. And many modern exegetes see in the story of the Fall not the story of an individual event but a kind of parable that illustrates the universal fact of sin in mankind. In general, the Fall has come to be considered less as a localized and unique event and more and more as the expression of a general condition of sin, a condition that envelops mankind and that is actuated, ratified, and continued by the particular sins of individual men. Fr. Peter Schoonenberg, for example, doubts that Genesis affirms that sin was committed by the first parents of the human race or that we all descend from one human couple. In Genesis Adam is

first of all man unqualified, "Everyman." And even when Adam, as in Romans, Chapter Five, is pictured as a historical figure, we notice nevertheless that the sins committed after him are taken jointly with his in contrast to Christ's redeeming obedience. There is also the fact that John does not mention the sin of Adam but only "the sin of the world," which is "taken away" by Christ (John 1, 29).

Is it perhaps permissible to connect the situation induced by original sin, not with the sin of one single individual, but with the sin of the whole world? In such a case it might perhaps be of no importance exactly when and where sin entered the picture, and as a consequence, we could say that revelation tells us nothing about the degree of self-consciousness and freedom of the first human generation.⁶¹

Even in the light of the councils, might it not be possible to avoid attributing a separate proper influence to a first sin committed at a definite time by a first universal couple of parents? "If this is possible, . . . we can then refuse to worry about the precise time of the first sin

⁶¹ P. Schoonenberg, S.J., *God's World in the Making* (Pittsburgh, 1964) pp. 82-83. See the balanced account of recent research on original sin presented by A. Dubarle, O.P., *The Biblical Doctrine of Sin*, tr. E. Stewart (New York, 1964) pp. 218-45. On the "sin of the world," see especially L. Ligier, S.J., *Péché d'Adam et péché du monde* (2 vols.; Paris, 1961); two books by J. de Fraine, S.J., *Adam and the Family of Man*, tr. D. Raible, C.P.P.S. (New York, 1965), and *The Bible and the Origin of Man* (New York, 1962). On the Genesis story of the Fall, see Dubarle, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-87; Dubarle discusses both the mythical and the historical values of the story. On original sin in St. Paul, see especially T. Barrosse, C.S.C., "Death and Sin in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953) 438-59; S. Lyonnet, S.J., "Le péché originel et l'exégèse de Rom. 5:12-14," *Recherches de science religieuse* 44 (1956) 63-84; Dubarle, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-200.

and we do not have to affirm anything about the way the first human beings experienced their relation to God."⁵²

Moreover, original sin is being thought of by theologians today more in the light of the redemption.

Instead of drawing attention to the central reality of the redemption, some have tried to synthesize history beginning not with salvation itself, with Christ dead and risen, but with a human paradigm that—paradoxically—is supposed to explain everything negative in the world, . . . and this before bringing to light the positive order that governs the world. But if the history of humanity is in fact, by revelation, a holy history, is it not an error in method to make all axes converge backward toward sin? . . . Is this not to inverse the perspective of revelation such as Scripture proposes it?⁵³

Contemporary theologians tend to see original sin in the context of mankind in evolution toward the fulness of the Body of Christ; there is less stress on original sin as an accident of the past and more stress on original sin as a general disorientation toward the future Pleroma.⁵⁴

Whatever progress present-day theology makes in its investigations of original sin, it will be a progress in the Church guided by the Holy Spirit. Any theory or investigation must take into account the Church's teachings and her directives. It is impossible to say exactly to what extent future progress of the Church's understanding of original sin will be in the direction of or consonant with Teilhard's theological hypothesis.⁵⁵

⁵² Schoonenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁵³ C. Dumont, S.J., "La prédication du péché originel," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 83 (1961) 117.

⁵⁴ See P. Smulders, *La vision de Teilhard de Chardin*, tr. A. Kerkvoorde, O.S.B., and C. d'Armagnac, S.J. (Paris, 1964) pp. 173–200. Smulders gives his own views on original sin as the weight of evil that each man carries by reason of his solidarity with mankind and anterior to his own personal sins, a condition that he freely accepts and ratifies by each personal sin. See especially P. Schoonenberg, S.J., *Man and Sin*, tr. J. Donceel, S.J. (Notre Dame, 1965) pp. 177–91. Schoonenberg, although stating that "there is a presumption in favor of the classic doctrine of original sin" (p. 191) advances the hypothesis that original sin is identical with the sin of the world. Schoonenberg seems to equate the sin of the world—and so by hypothesis original sin—with the sinful condition of mankind. This is right in line with Teilhard's hypothesis of original sin, except that Teilhard's explanation is much more complete in that it tries to account for the existence of evil throughout the universe and not only in mankind.

⁵⁵ Certainly any investigation of original sin must be guided by and cannot be in conflict with Catholic dogma, in particular with the dogmas of the Council of Trent. Can original sin be equated with a general condition of humanity, a condition that is freely

THE REDEMPTION

Christ's death was much more than a historical accident or a consequence of evil in the world and much more than simply an example for Christians. Christ's death marks "the complete immersion of the Divine Unity in the ultimate depths of multiplicity." The coming of Christ into the world by some oblique or indirect route would be incomprehensible. Christ had first to steep Himself in the matter of the cosmos so that He could raise it up to Himself. "It is because Christ has 'inoculated Himself' in matter that He is inseparable from the growth of spirit and so ingrained in the visible world that He could not be uprooted without shaking the foundations of the universe."⁵⁶ Christ could not have become the "way out" for the universe and the point of fulfilment for the universe without first becoming immanent in that universe. And to immerse Himself in the experimental world meant to undergo that world with its inevitable evil. Christ could not be Omega without being immanent to, immersed in, the world, and the price of immanence is suffering and death.⁵⁷

ratified and perpetrated by the collectivity of personal sins of individual men? This would be in line with Teilhard's hypothesis. The Council of Trent clearly assumed the existence of an individual Adam and the origin of original sin in a unique act; but it did not define these things. "Infallibility guarantees from all error the proposition of the object of faith, but not exactly the theology around it." The theological reasons adduced for showing the truth of what is defined "receive from such a use a very high authority . . . but they are not necessarily free from error, . . . and can be bound up in a still quite imperfect theology" (M. M. Labourdette, O.P., *Le péché originel et les origines de l'homme* [Paris, 1953] p. 200). It is not defined that original sin "proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which through generation is passed on to all . . ." (Encyclical *Humani generis* of Pope Pius XII, Paulist Press, no. 66.) Nonetheless, that part of the Church's teaching which is not strictly infallible must be followed responsibly and serve as the guideline for further research in the area of the interpretation of the dogma of original sin. Teilhard was well aware of the teaching of the councils and especially of the teaching of the Council of Trent. "I am clearly aware of the gravity of the changes that these new views introduce. I am familiar with the solemn canons of the Council of Trent on original sin. . . . A transposition on the order of what I have suggested would leave entirely intact and even safeguard in its essence the precise reality and the urgency of the redemption that it was the Council's purpose to define" ("*Christologie et évolution*" [1933, unpublished essay] p. 8).

⁵⁶ "Mon univers" (1924, *OE* 9, 89).

⁵⁷ See "Du cosmos à la cosmogénèse" (1951, *OE* 7, 270-73). See F. X. Durrwell, C.S.S.R., *In the Redeeming Christ*, tr. R. Sheed (New York, 1963) pp. 5-7: "It is not just a question of cancelling a debt; condemnation is built into my nature, and the redemption must be accomplished in a physical transformation" (p. 5).

We know that God is supremely free as regards His will to create the universe and to become incarnate and to redeem mankind. But God's plan of creation and salvation is perfect, and all the parts of that plan are integrally and perfectly related. As a result, from our standpoint in the experimental world and in the light of divine revelation, all the elements of God's plan appear to us—because of their perfect interconnection—to have a certain necessity. The Incarnation and the redemption are so organically a part of God's whole creative plan that in the cosmic perspectives of Teilhard we cannot understand the mysteries of creation and the Incarnation and the redemption without understanding them as intrinsically interrelated. In spite of the perfect freedom of each of God's salvific acts, we cannot understand "creation without God's immersion in the world through the Incarnation, nor the Incarnation without redemptive compensation."⁵⁸ Because we ourselves are part of God's plan and can see that plan only "from the inside," the redemptive Incarnation appears to us as necessarily connected with the creative process. Teilhard by no means contests God's freedom; he does contest a conceptual pluralism that would artificially separate redemption from Incarnation or either from the creative process. Teilhard's viewpoint is the viewpoint of the Old and New Testaments: the history of salvation begins with creation. And for Teilhard as for St. Paul, Christ's redemption is the redemption not just of man but of the universe.⁵⁹ Because of the nature of this evolving universe where evil is statistically inevitable at every level, Christ's work of the unification of all things in Himself appears to us as in-

⁵⁸ "Comment je vois" (1948, unpublished essay) pp. 20-21. On the ontological distinction and fundamental unity of the order of creation and the order of redemption, see K. Rahner, S.J., *The Christian Commitment*, tr. C. Hastings (New York, 1963) pp. 38-74. Rahner's idea of Christian spirituality, however, is quite different from Teilhard de Chardin's. In making an application of his distinction between the creative and redemptive orders to the life of the Christian, Rahner seems to take the "order of creation" as a category of the Christian's positive approach to the world, the "incarnationalist" component of the Christian life. He seems to consider the "order of redemption" as the category of the "eschatological" component, implying renunciation and flight from the world. For Teilhard, of course, there is only one Christian spirituality, the spirituality of the Cross, and it has both "incarnational" and "eschatological" components. The redemptive order implies both renunciation *and* a constructive approach to the world.

⁵⁹ On the redemption in St. Paul, see S. Lyonnet, S.J., "The Redemption of the Universe" in *Contemporary New Testament Studies*, ed. M. Rosalie Ryan, C.S.J. (Collegeville, 1965) pp. 423-36; M. Emmanuel McIver, O.S.U., "The Cosmic Dimensions of Salvation in the Thought of St. Paul," *Worship* 40 (1966) 156-64.

evitably involving the pain of the redemption. Christ's work of the redemption of the world was a painful work, a work of suffering, because it included reparation for the sins of the world or—in Teilhard's somewhat esoteric expression—"compensation for statistical disorders."⁶⁰ Teilhard sees Christ's redemptive work as also including the "creative pain" of a "specific effort of unification that goes against a kind of inclination or inertia of existence in virtue of which participated being tends constantly to fall back toward multiplicity."⁶¹ Reparation for evil, compensation for disorder in the world, is the negative aspect of Christ's redemptive effort. But it is the positive aspect of the redemption that is most stressed in Teilhard's perspective: the specific effort of the unification of a disordered world. "Jesus is truly He who bears the sins of the world; moral evil is mysteriously compensated for by suffering. But more fundamentally, Jesus is He who structurally overcomes in Himself, and for all of us, the resistance to spiritual ascent, a resistance that is inherent in matter."⁶² Although Teilhard's vision of the whole structure of the universe, a vision that is theological as well as phenomenological, did not take on definite lines until after 1930, he considered the redemption in terms of unification from the time of his early works. He writes in 1917:

The principle of unity that saves a guilty creation from returning to dust is Christ. By the force of His attraction, by the light of His moral and spiritual teaching, by the binding power of His very existence, Jesus comes to reestablish at the heart of the world the harmony of efforts and the convergence of all things. When we read the Gospel in a straightforward way we see that no idea translates better for our understanding the redemptive function of the Word than the idea of the unification of all flesh in one same Spirit.⁶³

Very early too, Teilhard saw the necessity of understanding Christ's redemptive function as *universal*. In 1920 he writes that "if Christ is to be understood as truly universal, then the redemption and the Fall must be understood as extending to the whole universe."⁶⁴ The idea that Christ's work of redemption is a *universal* work of unification is not without difficulties, as Teilhard well knew. For one thing, it seems

⁶⁰ "Comment je vois" (1948, unpublished essay) p. 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² "Christologie et évolution" (1933, unpublished essay) p. 8.

⁶³ "La lutte contre la multitude" (1917, *Ecrits*, p. 124).

⁶⁴ "Note sur le Christ universel" (1920, *OE* 9, 41).

to imply a naive notion of the earth as the center of the entire universe. Is the choice of this one small planet among countless possibly inhabited planets an arbitrary choice on the part of the Redeemer as the scene of His painful work of saving the universe? In the face of these and other difficulties, without being able to resolve them all, Teilhard holds firmly to the principle "that there is one Christ in whom all things have their stability. All secondary beliefs must cede to that one fundamental proposition. Christ is everything or He is nothing."⁶⁵ Christ the Redeemer is, as Redeemer, also Christ the Unifier, so much so that it is not from Adam that mankind derives its real unity and solidarity but from Christ.⁶⁶

It is, then, the creative and unificative aspect of Christ's redemptive function that Teilhard emphasizes. Again, in 1933, he writes that "the complete and ultimate sense of the redemption is not only expiation but labor and conquest."⁶⁷ And in 1944 and 1945: "The suffering Christ, without ever ceasing to be He who carries the sins of the world, and precisely *as such*, is being understood more and more by the faithful as He who carries and supports the weight of the world in its process of evolution."⁶⁸ Christ is "He who carries with the sins of the world the whole weight of the world in progress."⁶⁹ By His passion and cross Christ did make reparation for the sins of the world, taking them on Himself, and making atonement for them; this is the "negative" aspect of the redemption. But there is a positive aspect that is brought into relief when the redemption is put into the context of a world in process, in evolution; this positive aspect of the redemption is the

⁶⁵ "Chute, rédemption, et géocentricité" (1920, unpublished essay) p. 5. For a discussion of this problem, see C. Davis, *Theology for Today* (New York, 1962) pp. 164-70.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4; "Mon univers" (1924, *OE* 9, 109).

⁶⁷ "Christologie et évolution" (1933, unpublished essay) p. 8. Cf. however, C. Mooney, S.J., *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (New York, 1966) p. 133: "We should expect a very strong affirmation of the negative aspect of Redemption, namely, the reparation made by Christ for the sins of the world. . . . Yet no such affirmation is anywhere to be found." This statement seems somewhat exaggerated. Mooney makes a good point, however, when immediately after the above statement he criticizes Teilhard for not explicitly stating that Christ's reparation for sin is "a bearing of the weight of man's refusal to love." The notion of sin as a "refusal to love" is implicit in Teilhard's writings, but he never brings it out. See also J. LeBlond, S.J., "Consacrer l'effort humain," *Etudes* 296 (1958) 63-68.

⁶⁸ "Introduction à la vie chrétienne" (1944, unpublished essay) p. 8.

⁶⁹ "Christianisme et évolution" (1945, unpublished essay) p. 6.

redemptive effort of Christ to unite all things to Himself. Thus, in the context of a world in a state of becoming, in a state of converging evolution, creation and the Incarnation and the redemption are seen as three complementary facets of one single process: pleromization, the gradual unification of all things in Christ in the fulness of the Pleroma. Creation, considered as "creative union," implies a certain immersion of the Creator in His work. Because the creative process inevitably engenders evil as a secondary statistical effect, a certain redemptive compensation on the part of the Creator is implied. Creation, Incarnation, and redemption, in the framework of Teilhard's thought, are understood as structural elements of one single great mystery. "Taken in their full sense, creation, Incarnation, and redemption are not simply facts localized in time and space; they are truly dimensions of the world."⁷⁰

THE CROSS: REALITY AND SYMBOL

Teilhard's views on the cosmic significance of the historical reality of the suffering and death of Christ are summed up in his understanding of what the Cross stands for. Teilhard's idea of the redemption and what it means for men is condensed in a short but very rich paragraph from *The Divine Milieu*.

To sum up, Jesus on the Cross is both the symbol and the reality of the immense labor of the centuries which has, little by little, raised up the created spirit and brought it back to the depths of the divine milieu. He represents (and in a true sense, he is) creation, as, upheld by God, it reascends the slopes of being, sometimes clinging to things for support, sometimes tearing itself from them in order to pass beyond them, and always compensating, by physical suffering, for the setbacks caused by its moral downfalls.⁷¹

Christ's suffering and death on the Cross are not simply the suffering and death of an individual nor a simple expiation. The death of Christ was an act of creative power. "Jesus crucified is not a reject; He is not defeated. On the contrary, He carries the weight of the universal course of progress with Him toward God."⁷² "The Cross is the symbol and the real act of Christ raising the world with its whole burden of

⁷⁰ "Quelques vues générales sur l'essence du christianisme" (1939, unpublished essay) p. 2. See "Du cosmos à la cosmogénèse" (1951, *OE* 7, 270-73).

⁷¹ *DM*, p. 104.

⁷² "La signification et la valeur constructive de la souffrance" (1933, *OE* 6, 66).

inertia and with all its natural vitality—an act of expiation, but also a hard journey of conquest.” In Christ’s death on the Cross we see “creation in the category of laborious effort.”⁷³

The Cross is not “a symbol of sadness, of limitation and repression”; it is the symbol of the difficult and painful effort of creative unification. Christianity does not ask man to live in the shadow of the Cross, but in the fire of its intense zeal.⁷⁴ In this life, man remains in what we can call the existential structure of the Cross. It is true that we are already “risen with Christ” by the sacrament of baptism and that our life here is pointed toward our own resurrection just as Christ’s passion and death are pointed to and inseparable from His resurrection. But in this life the Christian is in the structure of the Cross; it is the life to come that is to be in the existential framework of Christ’s resurrection. The Cross, then, is not only the symbol of Christ’s whole redemptive function, but also the symbol of the life of the Christian. In Christ crucified “each man must recognize his own true image. . . . The truth about our situation in this world is that we are here on the Cross.”⁷⁵ By its birth and by its very nature, Christianity is marked by the sign of the Cross, and it can remain what it is only by identifying itself always more intensely with the meaning of the Cross. What is this meaning of the Cross? What does the Cross mean as a symbol of Christianity and in particular of the life of the Christian? A few years before his death, Teilhard wrote to his superiors in Rome setting forth his own ideas of how Christianity should be understood in the light

⁷³ “Quelques vues générales sur l’essence du christianisme” (1939, unpublished essay) p. 2. J. Daniélou, S.J., writes that the earliest sermons about the Cross celebrate its cosmic character, and quotes from a sermon of Gregory of Nyssa (*Catechetical Discourse* 23, 3): “I know thy mystery, O cross, for which thou wast raised up. Indeed, thou wast raised up over the world, to make steady that which was unsteady. One part of thee rises into the heavens, to point to the Word on High; another part stretches to right and left, to put to flight the fearsome power of the adversary and to gather the world together in unity; and one part of thee is planted in the earth, so that thou mayest unite the things that are on the earth and the things in hell with the things that are in heaven” (*Christ and Us*, tr. W. Roberts [New York, 1961] p. 141).

⁷⁴ *DM*, p. 102; “Christologie et évolution” (1933, unpublished essay) p. 8.

⁷⁵ “La vie cosmique” (1916, *Ecrits*, p. 56). That man in this world is in the structure of the Cross is as true for Teilhard as for St. Augustine, for whom historical humanity, both the heavenly and the earthly “cities,” are in the interior of the mystery of the Cross of Christ. See J. McCallin, “Christological Unity of the ‘De Civitate Dei,’ ” *Revue des études augustinienes* 12 (1966) 85–109.

of contemporary events and attitudes and how it should be presented in the contemporary world. In the brief essay intended for his superiors, Teilhard puts his ideas in the form of an answer to the question: How can we best state today the meaning of the Cross?⁷⁶

In its traditional and elementary form, and as it is still currently presented in pious books, in sermons, and even in seminary teaching, the Cross is first of all a symbol of reparation and expiation. And, in this interpretation, the Cross is the vehicle and the expression of a whole psychological attitude in which can be recognized at least as tendencies the following elements:

- a) the world is viewed as dominated by the catastrophes of evil and death, the normal and chronological consequences of an original Fall;
- b) human nature is viewed with suspicion . . . ;
- c) there is a general almost Manichean mistrust of anything material. . . .

All this, of course and fortunately, in the context of a powerful love for the crucified Saviour. But this love is almost exclusively of the "ascensional" kind, characterized by acts . . . of painful purification and suffering detachment. . . .

This should be changed. . . . The Cross should be to us not just a sign of *escape*, but of forward movement. The Cross should shine before us not just as purifying, but as motivating. Is such a transformation possible without deformation? Yes, I answer emphatically; it is possible and even demanded—if one goes below the surface of things—by all that is most traditional in the Christian spirit.⁷⁷

In Teilhard's theology of the redemption, Christ not only bears the sins of the world, but also the weight of the world in evolution. For Teilhard, then, the Cross is the symbol not only of reparation and expiation, but the symbol of the redemptive unification of the world, of the progress of the world toward Christ-Omega. The Cross is the symbol of the synthesis of the "upward" component of sacrifice and adoring reparation and the "forward" component of progress through laborious effort. This is the Cross that Teilhard venerates; "it is the same Cross" as the Cross of traditional Christian piety, "but much more true." It is not only the symbol of the victory over sin, but "the complete and dynamic symbol of a universe in the state of personalizing evolution."⁷⁸

The notion of the Cross as the symbol of true progress runs through

⁷⁶ The full title of this unpublished essay is "Ce que le monde attend en ce moment de l'église de Dieu: Une généralisation et un approfondissement du sens de la croix" (1952).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5. See W. Whitla, "Sin and Redemption in Whitehead and Teilhard de Chardin," *Anglican Theological Review* 47 (1965) 81-93.

Teilhard's writings. The symbolism applies not only to Christ's redemptive work, but also to the sharing in that redemptive work by the Christian. Christ's suffering and death are not only the model for the Christian; it is Christ's redemptive act that gives meaning and efficacy to man's work in building the world toward Christ. "The Cross, as well as being the expression of what we have to undergo in the way of expiation, is also, and I would say primarily, the expression of the creative but laborious effort of mankind climbing towards Christ who awaits it."⁷⁹ "The Cross is the symbol not only of the dark and regressive aspect of the universe, but also and above all of the luminous and conquering aspect; it is the symbol of progress and victory . . . through difficult labor."⁸⁰

Towards the peaks, shrouded in mist from our human eyes, whither the Cross beckons us, we rise by a path which is the way of universal progress. The royal road of the Cross is no more nor less than the road of human endeavour supernaturally righted and prolonged. Once we have fully grasped the meaning of the Cross, we are no longer in danger of finding life sad and ugly. We shall simply have become more attentive to its barely comprehensible solemnity.⁸¹

⁷⁹ "Intégration de l'homme dans l'univers" (1930, unpublished essay) p. 13. See "La vie cosmique" (1916, *Ecrits*, p. 82); "Le prêtre" (1918, *Ecrits*, pp. 288-89); "La route de l'ouest" (1932, unpublished essay) p. 15: "The Hindu saint recollects himself and exhausts himself in order to shake loose from the matter in which he is imbedded; the Christian saint recollects and exhausts himself to penetrate and transform that matter. The first seeks to isolate himself from the multiple; the second works to concentrate and to purify it. The Oriental seeks to escape by abandoning time, space, and himself. The Occidental emerges from the plural carrying it with him. Of these two attitudes only the second is capable of expressing to the modern mind the truth, the power, and the attraction of the Cross."

⁸⁰ "Introduction à la vie chrétienne" (1944, unpublished essay) p. 8.

⁸¹ *DM*, pp. 103-4. See "The New Spirit" (1942, *FM*, p. 95): the Cross is "the Symbol, the Way, the very Act of progress." In spite of the fact that the Cross occupies such an important position in Teilhard's writings, some theologians continue to criticize him for not giving sufficient place to the Cross. This is hard to understand except as indicating a lack of familiarity with Teilhard's writings. H. Urs von Balthasar objects that Teilhard's Christology seems to leave no place for the Cross; he has other objections to Teilhard's Christology, but this seems to be the main objection; see his "Die Spiritualität Teilhard de Chardin," *Wort und Wahrheit* 18 (1963) 339-50. See also H. Riedlinger, "The Universal Kingship of Christ," tr. T. Westow, in *Who is Jesus of Nazareth?*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P. (*Concilium* 11 [New York, 1966] pp. 119-27); Riedlinger wonders whether "the absence of a theological treatment of the cross in Teilhard constitutes an irreparable and basic lacuna in his synthesis or whether it can still be inserted as an afterthought" (p. 124). The fact is that this theological treatment of the Cross is not absent in Teilhard.