

Teilhard's Vision as Agenda for Rahner's Christology

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Abstract: To what extent does Teilhard's vision set an agenda for Rahner's Christology? In response to this question, this article sketches Teilhard's vision of the relationship between the Omega of evolution and the Christ of Christian faith based upon his late works. Then it explores some of Rahner's explicit comments on Teilhard's work, and proposes that Rahner set himself an agenda with regard to Teilhard's vision. After noting the different methodological approaches of Teilhard and Rahner, it takes up three aspects of Rahner's Christology that develop Teilhard's vision: Rahner's view of the unity of creation and redemption in a theology of divine self-bestowal; his evolutionary Christology with its theology of creation's self-transcendence; and his view of the resurrection as the beginning of the deifying transformation of the whole creation.

PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN (1881-1955) was not only a geologist and paleontologist but also a Jesuit priest who developed an integrated vision of the inner relationship between the Omega of evolution and the Christ of Christian faith. In this article, I will ask the question: To what extent did his younger Jesuit confrere, Karl Rahner (1904-1984), who was not a scientist but a theologian, take up and develop the agenda set by Teilhard?¹ I will begin to explore this question by examining Teilhard's view of the relationship between the Omega of evolution and Jesus Christ, focusing particularly on Teilhard's two late essays, "The Heart of Matter" and "The Christic". Then I will trace Rahner's explicit comments on Teilhard's work, and propose that Rahner set himself a theological agenda with regard to Teilhard's vision. After noting the different methodological approaches of

1. This article had its origin in a paper delivered at the "International Symposium in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of Matteo Ricci 1552-1610: The Genesis and Development of East-West Dialogue", held at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taipei, Taiwan, 19-22 April 2010.

Teilhard and Rahner, I will explore how fundamental aspects of Rahner's Christology develop Teilhard's vision.

TEILHARD ON EVOLUTION AND CHRIST

At the end of his life, Teilhard looked back and traced the development of his thought in *The Heart of Matter*. In a first line of thought, he describes how, beginning from his early love of matter, his personal discovery of evolution enabled him to begin to see how "Matter is the matrix of Spirit" and "Spirit is the higher state of matter".² What became central for him was the conviction that the evolutionary law of complexity-consciousness does not stop with the biosphere but continues into the noosphere, the sphere of the human mind and of interpersonal consciousness and love. He became convinced that evolution now takes the form of a movement towards a global convergence and union of the human, to a point of irreversibility that he called Omega. He saw the universe, the whole world of matter, as in the process of becoming fully personalised in this Omega Point.

In a second line of thought Teilhard reflects on the emergence of the "Christic" in his life. Beginning from his early initiation into the symbol of the heart of Christ, he began to discover how the fire of love symbolised in this heart permeated everything in the universe. This discovery coincided with a view of God not simply as the God above, but as the God ahead, the God who draws all things to their completion in Christ. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ reveals a God who is radically involved with matter. The risen Christ, sharing in the divine immensity, is at work in the whole of creation.

Teilhard tells us that his vision of reality was formed when he was able to understand together his insight into evolution of the cosmos to the point of Omega and his conviction of the presence of Christ in all things. Then he was able to see the cosmic and the Christic not only as converging, but as one:

The cosmic sense and the christic sense: these two axes were born in me quite independently of one another, it would seem, and it was only after a long time and a great deal of hard work that I finally came to understand how, through and beyond the Human, the two were linked together, converged upon one another, and were in fact one and the same.³

On the one side, based on his scientific training, Teilhard saw a vision of a universe that was becoming personalised through convergence. On the other side, based on his theological commitment, he saw a vision of a person, Christ, who was becoming universalised. The result in him

2. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1978) 35.

3. Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 40.

was his conviction of Christ as the very heart of the evolving matter of the universe: "To Christify matter: that sums up the whole venture of my innermost being."⁴ This process of christification happens through the energy of incarnation, flowing into, illuminating and giving warmth to the universe of matter. He insists that this action of the risen Christ occurs not in a metaphysical sense, but in a physical sense.⁵ For Teilhard there is a wonderful confluence between Christ, who can be seen as "evolver", and the cosmic centre that emerges from evolution. In this way, he says, the "heart of a universalised Christ" coincides with the heart of "amorised matter".⁶

Just two months before his death, Teilhard began to write "The Christic", which he saw as bringing together the quintessence of *Le Milieu Divin*, "The Mass on the World", and "The Heart of Matter". In this essay he argues that there is more in the total Christ than humanity and divinity. There is also the whole creation. He speaks of creation as a third "aspect" or "function" of Christ, and as "in a true sense of the words", a third "nature" of Christ.⁷ Teilhard asks himself how such an "immensified" view of the Christ avoids depersonalising him. He finds the answer to this precisely in the union between the Omega of evolution and the Christ, since this constitutes a Divine Milieu in which all opposition between the universal and the personal is wiped out. What is most cosmic is now most personal and what is most personal is most cosmic. For Teilhard, then, cosmogenesis reveals itself first in biogenesis and then in noogenesis, and culminates only in a true christogenesis.

Teilhard's work was resisted by some other biologists, and not simply because of his bold linking of evolution with Christ. The philosopher of science Ernan McMullin has pointed to a neo-Lamarckian tendency in Teilhard that may help to explain the violence of the opposition to him on the part of some leading neo-Darwinian biologists.⁸ Teilhard divides the energies that propel the universe forward into two types, tangential and radial.⁹ Tangential energies are those that are normally associated with the natural sciences. But Teilhard introduces another form of energy, the radial, as necessary to account for the evolutionary process. This radial energy is fundamentally psychic in nature. It can be discerned by seeing the

4. Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 47.

5. Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 48.

6. Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 49.

7. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Christic", in *The Heart of Matter*, 93.

8. Ernan McMullin, "Natural Science and Belief in a Creator: Historical Notes", in Robert John Russell, William R. Stoeger, and George V. Coyne (eds.), *Physics, Philosophy and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory, 1988) 68-70.

9. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, trans. Sarah Appleton-Weber (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999, 2003) xxii, 30-32, 37, 227-32.

larger patterns of evolutionary process, rather than through the normal modes of inference at work in biology. Teilhard himself writes of this as a neo-Lamarckian addition to Darwinism.¹⁰ Rahner, by contrast, will see God as acting at a metaphysical level through secondary causes, in a way that is not accessible to science, which does not fill gaps in the scientific account, and which leaves science with its own integrity.

Towards the end of *The Christic*, Teilhard asks himself why is it that he seems to be the only one who has seen this vision: "How is it, then, that as I look around, still dazzled by what I have seen, I find that I am almost the only person of my kind to have *seen*? And so I cannot, when asked, quote a single writer, a single work, that gives a clearly expressed description of the wonderful 'Diaphany' that has transfigured everything for me?"¹¹ This is a poignant question, made all the more so by the difficulties Teilhard experienced with restrictions on his theological work by church authorities during his lifetime. Since Teilhard wrote "The Christic", of course, other theologians, including Henri de Lubac, have taken up and defended his vision and, in our own time, scholars working in the area of science and theology, such as John Haught, continue to build creatively on his thought.¹² I will focus on some key aspects of Rahner's response to Teilhard's vision.¹³

RAHNER'S EXPLICIT COMMENTS ON TEILHARD

Cardinal Karl Lehmann was Rahner's assistant from 1964 to 1967. In an interview, he notes that Rahner did not see himself as a disciple of Martin Heidegger, Joseph Maréchal, or any other thinker, and then he goes on to speak of Rahner's relationship to the thought of Teilhard:

It is also difficult to document where Rahner is dependent on someone else's thought. There are only faint clues, not that he wanted to cover that up, but his primary concern was his own independent thinking. Many maintain, for example, that he borrowed much from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. That's not true. He did not read much Teilhard de Chardin, but he did have a seminar in Innsbruck on him. When others made their

10. See his footnote in *The Human Phenomenon*, pp. 97-98.

11. Teilhard, "The Christic", 100.

12. See two recent books by John F. Haught, *Christianity and Science: Towards a Theology of Nature* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2007), particularly 65-81; and *Making Sense of Evolution: Darwin, God, and the Drama of Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), particularly 137-48.

13. Some of these themes have been taken up in a thesis by H. K. Kodikuthiyil, "Faith Engaged in Dialogue with Science. A Comparative Study of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's and Karl Rahner's Reception of the Theory of Evolution" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of Leuven, 1998). See also Leo J. O'Donovan, "Der Dialog mit dem Darwinismus: Zur theologischen Verwendung des evolutiven Weltbilds bei Karl Rahner", in Herbert Vorgrimler (ed.), *Wagnis Theologie* (Freiberg: Herder, 1979) 215-229.

presentations during the seminar it stimulated new ideas for Rahner to think about.¹⁴

Rahner himself seems to have agreed that while he had not read Teilhard closely, he had been influenced by his ideas in a more general way. In response to an interviewer, Rahner recalled how a Dutch theologian had complained that while Rahner's thought had been largely inspired by Teilhard, Rahner had failed to acknowledge Teilhard. Rahner comments:

I could only answer that at least up to that time I had read practically nothing of Teilhard de Chardin. But if you concluded from this that Rahner's theology is independent of Teilhard, I would answer that I don't make any such claim. I would conjecture that in the investigation of someone's thought, that there is obviously an "atmospheric communication" of a non-literary kind.¹⁵

It is this atmospheric communication and its effects in Rahner's Christology that I will explore in the rest of this article. Rahner is sparing in his direct references to other thinkers, but in fact he does mention Teilhard de Chardin many times. Sometimes Rahner refers to Teilhard simply as an example, as when he lists Teilhard with Augustine, Aquinas and Pascal, as orthodox Christian thinkers who have different understandings of the human.¹⁶ In another instance, reflecting on the future of the Jesuits on the two hundredth anniversary of their suppression in 1773, Rahner invokes the name of Teilhard to bring to mind the way Jesuits have been seen in "leftist" or "progressive" terms.¹⁷ In an article where he is discussing the difficulty of theologians and natural scientists finding common ground, Rahner writes: "So it happens, for example, that a Teilhard de Chardin is recognised by theologians as a natural scientist but not as a philosopher and theologian, whereas the natural scientist will think of him as a theologian who has not quite managed to keep up to date with the most recent findings of the natural sciences."¹⁸

14. Karl Lehmann "He Simply was Unique: In Conversation with Karl Cardinal Lehmann, Mainz", in Andreas R. Batlogg and Melvin E. Michalski (eds. and trans.), *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those who Know Him* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009) 118.

15. Karl Rahner, "The Importance of Thomas Aquinas: Interview with Jan van den Eijnden, Innsbruck (May 1982)", in Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (eds.), *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of his Life* (New York: Crossroads, 1990) 53.

16. Karl Rahner, "Christian Humanism", in *Theological Investigations* 9 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972).

17. Karl Rahner, "The Jesuits and their Future", in Philip Endean (ed.), *Karl Rahner: Spiritual Writings* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2004) 170.

18. Karl Rahner, "A Small Question Regarding the Contemporary Pluralism in the Intellectual Situation of Catholics and the Church", *Theological Investigations* 6 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969) 25.

In a late article on natural science and faith, Rahner speaks of the church's resistance to the heliocentric system of Copernicus and then says of Teilhard: "In reprimanding Teilhard de Chardin and repressing his endeavors it manifested too little understanding for an ontology in which created being is conceived in principle and in the very beginning as being which is in the process of becoming within an entire evolution of the cosmos, which is still in the process of becoming."¹⁹ In one of his important articles on Christology and evolution, Rahner describes his understanding of the self-transcendence of matter to spirit and, in a footnote, points out that "a similar line of thought, though developed from a different starting-point, is to be found in Teilhard de Chardin's *Man's Place in Nature*."²⁰ Rahner also consciously uses Teilhard's language of Christ as "Omega Point."²¹ In his article on evolution in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Rahner uses Teilhard's concepts of the "noosphere" and speaks of the relationship between growth in "complexity" and in "interiority" in a way that seems to echo Teilhard's law of complexity-consciousness.²² Naturally, Rahner refers to Teilhard's work in the introduction he agreed to write to Robert North's book, *Teilhard and the Creation of the Soul*.²³

Rahner's most fundamental contribution to an evolutionary Christology is undoubtedly his "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World", first published in English in 1966. It contains three references to Teilhard. In the first, Rahner makes an important methodological distinction between his own work and that of Teilhard:

To put it another way: we will try to avoid those theorems with which you are familiar from your study of Teilhard de Chardin. If we arrive at some of the same conclusions as he does, then all to the good. Yet we do not feel ourselves either dependent on him or obliged to him. We want to confine ourselves to those things which any theologian could say if he brings his theological reflection to bear on the questions posed by the modern evolutionary view of the world.²⁴

19. Karl Rahner, "Natural Science and Reasonable Faith: Theological Perspectives for Dialogue with the Natural Sciences", *Theological Investigations 21* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 25.

20. Karl Rahner, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of his World", *Theological Investigations 11* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974) 218.

21. On Christ as omega-point see Rahner's "Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today", *Theological Investigations 5* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 13; "Evolution: II Theological, Encyclopedia of Theology", in *A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (London: Burns and Oates, 1975) 481.

22. Rahner, "Evolution: II Theological", 481.

23. Robert North, *Teilhard and the Creation of the Soul* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1967) ix.

24. Karl Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World", *Theological Investigations 5*, 159-60.

I read this as Rahner saying that he may well arrive at some of the same conclusions as Teilhard, but he will attempt to get there on the basis of a theological methodology, rather through the unitary approach of Teilhard and his attempt at a full integration of science and theology. In a second reference to Teilhard in this same article, Rahner says that he can go no further in applying his concept of self-transcendence without "the more a-posteriori method proper to the natural sciences and with the aid of concepts such as are developed by Teilhard, for instance".²⁵ In the final reference Rahner defends Teilhard against the accusation that does not have a proper concept of sin: "It is also well-known that Teilhard has been reproached with rendering sin harmless in this way – a reproach which H. de Lubac has surely invalidated most lucidly in his most recent book about Teilhard."²⁶

In a late discussion on the love of Jesus, Rahner points to the difficulty of connecting the Teilhardian Christ-Omega with Jesus of Nazareth, and with the Jesus whom Christians seek to love here and now.²⁷ Finally, about the same time, in 1982, Rahner published a short article on "Christology Today" where he said, among other things: "It would do no harm for a present-day Christology to take up the ideas of a Teilhard de Chardin and to elaborate them with more precision and clarity, even though in his work it is not very easy to find an intelligible and orthodox connection between Jesus of Nazareth and the cosmic Christ, the Omega Point of world evolution."²⁸ I see this comment as more than a suggestion for other theologians. I propose that it might be seen as a description of what Rahner had tried to do in his own theology. He had taken up aspects of Teilhard's agenda, and tried to develop these in ways that showed their intelligibility and their orthodoxy in the light of the Christian tradition. Before exploring three of the ways in which Rahner took up this project in his Christology, I will make a brief comment on their very different methodologies.

TWO METHODOLOGIES

Teilhard's methodology can be characterised as a unitary one. He brings together science, the inter-personal and the religious into a unity of knowledge. Thomas King, a helpful guide to Teilhard's thought, points out that for Teilhard the unifying theme of all knowledge is evolution. Evolution does not remain simply a biological concept but becomes a universal one. Evolution is understood as far broader than biology, but biology still remains dominant in Teilhard's thought. As

25. Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View", 167.

26. Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View", 185.

27. Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbour* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 20.

28. Karl Rahner "Christology Today", *Theological Investigations* 21, 227.

King says, "By his broad understanding of evolution Teilhard is introducing a biological model by which to understand the universe."²⁹ Teilhard sees the universe in bodily terms, as an organism, and then unites all fields of knowledge within his biological and evolutionary model. He sees everything as inter-related and understands these inter-relations as increasing and progressively converging in evolutionary process. As opposed to reductionists of both materialist and idealist kinds, Teilhard seeks to manifest a unity of the without and the within, of the bodily and the spiritual. He sees the material and biological universe coming to consciousness in the human. In the human, the universe can itself turn to God in love.

Rahner's methodology is radically different. It is true that he shares with Teilhard a great unifying vision of God's action in creation, redemption and in final fulfilment, which I will discuss in the next section. But Rahner's methodology can be distinguished from Teilhard's in four important ways. First, unlike Teilhard, Rahner sees God's action with regard to creation as occurring not at the physical or psychic level, but at the metaphysical level of a God who acts dynamically in and through created entities. In principle, this divine action is not open to scientific investigation. Secondly, Rahner writes only as a systematic theologian thinking within the Christian tradition, who seeks always to show the way that new theological approaches and insights remain faithful to what is central to the tradition. Thirdly, while Rahner has a strong sense of the reciprocity of matter and spirit, and hence of science and theology, and while he engages with science creatively and often, he does this in a dialogical stance, conscious of the difference between science and religion, rather than through any attempt at the kind of full integration that Teilhard undertakes.³⁰ Finally, as opposed to Teilhard's unitary approach to knowledge, Rahner insists over and over again on the irreducible pluralism of knowledge today in all disciplines, including theology. He is deeply convinced that any one thinker can have only a partial approach to truth.³¹ With their different methodologies in mind, I turn now to consider three ways in which Rahner builds on Teilhard in his Christology.

29. Thomas M. King, "Teilhard's Unity of Knowledge", in Arthur Fabel and Donald St. John (eds.), *Teilhard in the 21st Century: The Emerging Spirit of Earth* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2003) 34.

30. See Karl Rahner, "Natural Science and Reasonable Faith", *Theological Investigations* 21, 16-55.

31. See, for example, Karl Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church", *Theological Investigations* 11, 3-23

DIVINE SELF-BESTOWAL: THE UNITY OF CREATION AND REDEMPTION

In Christian theology there have been two traditional views about the relationship between Christ and the whole creation. In one view, the incarnation is thought to have been caused as a remedy for human sin. In the other, associated with Franciscan theology, particularly Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308), God's plan of creation always had the incarnation of Christ as its centre. Long ago, N. M. Wildiers drew attention to the importance of this Scotist position for Teilhard de Chardin.³² Rahner, too, follows this Scotist line of thought and develops it. He holds that God freely chooses, from the beginning, to create a world in which the Word would be made flesh and the Spirit poured out.³³ It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this insight for Rahner's theology. Harvey Egan has said that the briefest possible summary of Rahner's theological enterprise can be found in "his creative appropriation of Scotus's view that God creates in order to communicate *self* and that creation exists in order to be the recipient of God's free gift of *self*".³⁴

One of Rahner's most characteristic theological concepts is his idea of divine self-bestowal. What is revealed in the Christ-event, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in Pentecost, is a God who gives God's self to us in the Word made flesh and in the Spirit poured out in grace. God is revealed as a God who bestows God's very self to creatures. Based on what is revealed in Christ, Rahner sees this divine self-bestowal as defining every aspect of God's action in creation and redemption. The story of the universe and of life on Earth, and everything that science can tell us about its evolution history, is part of a larger story, the story of divine self-bestowal.³⁵ When God wills to bestow God's self in love, creation comes to be as the addressee of this self-bestowal. This means that the story of salvation is the real ground of the history of nature, and not simply something that unfolds against the background of nature.³⁶ The evolution of the universe, and of life on Earth, exists *within* this larger vision of the divine purpose to give God's self to us.

32. N. M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin* (London: Collins, 1968) 130-141.

33. Karl Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World", *Theological Investigations 5* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966) 184-87.

34. Harvey D. Egan, "Theology and Spirituality", in Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 16.

35. Karl Rahner, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of himself and of his World," *Theological Investigations 11* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974) 219.

36. Karl Rahner, "Resurrection: D. Theology", in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (London: Burns and Oates, 1975) 1442.

Once sin exists, of course, the incarnation is the radical event of divine forgiveness and reconciliation. But at a more original level, the incarnation expresses the meaning and purpose of creation, the self-bestowal of God to a world of creatures. Creation and incarnation are not separate and independent acts of God, but are, in all their distinctiveness, united in the one act of God: they are “two moments and two phases of the *one* process of God’s self-giving and self-expression, although it is an intrinsically differentiated process”.³⁷ For Karl Rahner, self-bestowal in love characterises God’s action in creation, grace, incarnation and the final fulfilment of all things in Christ. In this radically Trinitarian theology of self-bestowal, I believe that Rahner achieves what Teilhard sought, a way of showing the inner connection between creation and Christology, that is thoroughly theological and deeply grounded in God’s self-revelation.

EVOLUTIONARY CHRISTOLOGY – CREATION’S SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

Working simply as a theologian, Rahner asks how Christology might be understood in terms of the evolutionary worldview proposed by contemporary science. At the heart of his contribution on this issue is his concept of self-transcendence. Rahner comes to this concept in a transformation of scholastic theology’s understanding of the God-world relationship that builds on Aquinas. In this view, God’s action with regard to creatures had been understood as the dynamic creative presence by which God sustains creatures in being (*conservatio*) and enables them to act (*concursum*). Rahner takes up and develops this fundamental metaphysical position into something new with his concept that God gives to creation itself the capacity for self-transcendence. In this new vision, divine self-bestowal and creaturely self-transcendence are mutually inter-related. It is precisely the creative presence of God in self-bestowing love that enables created entities to go beyond what they are to become something new.

Rahner’s idea of the God-given self-transcendence of creatures is explored particularly in his evolutionary Christology, but it functions in his anthropology, his eschatology and many aspects of his work.³⁸ In all the transitions to the *new* in the history of the universe, particularly when matter becomes life, and when life becomes self-conscious spirit, Rahner proposes an evolutionary dynamism that is truly intrinsic to creation, but which occurs through the creative, saving power of the immanent God. The idea of *self-transcendence* indicates that at the

37. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978) 197.

38. Karl Rahner, *Homination: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (London: Burns and Oates, 1965) 98–101; “Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World”; *Theological Investigations* 5, 157–92; *Foundations*, 178–203.

empirical level, the emergence of the new is completely open to explanation in scientific terms. But at a deeper, theological and metaphysical level, it is the immanent presence of the divine being that enables creation to become more than it is in itself.

Rahner proposes the following pattern of evolutionary self-transcendence that brings out the inner connection between evolution and Christology. The material universe transcends itself in the emergence of life, and life transcends itself in the human. In human beings, the universe further transcends itself, becoming self-conscious and free and capable of personal response to God's self-bestowal in grace. The Christ-event is the radical self-transcendence of the created universe into God. In his humanity, Jesus, like us, is part of the evolutionary history of life on Earth, and a product of long history of the universe. As a creature, and unlike us, Jesus in his life and death is wholly open to God, and lives a radical free response of love to God's self-bestowal.

Considered from below, Jesus Christ can be seen as the self-transcendence of the evolving universe into God, the culmination of the process of evolutionary emergence, although one that has not yet reached its final fulfilment. Considered from above, Jesus Christ can be seen as God's irreversible bestowal of God's very self to creation. In this one person, we find the event of salvation: God's irreversible self-giving to creatures and full creaturely acceptance of this self-bestowal, united in the one person.³⁹

In this theology, Rahner builds an evolutionary theology in a critical engagement with two fundamental parts of the Christian tradition. First he engages with Aquinas's metaphysical view of the God-world relationship, transforming it with his concept of self-transcendence. In doing so, he preserves Aquinas's view of a God who works consistently through secondary causes. God is not seen as an interventionist, but as one who works in and through the regularities and the laws studied by the sciences.⁴⁰ This means that God is not an alternative to what science can discover. Gaps in science are to be filled by science, not by invoking God. God is not an alternative to natural selection, but works through natural selection, through randomness and lawfulness, through all the processes of nature, which it is the role of science, not theology, to discover.

The second aspect of the tradition that Rahner takes up, and transforms, in this theology is the Christological teaching of the Council of Chalcedon. Rahner's view of Jesus as both the evolutionary self-transcendence of creation to God and God's self-bestowal to creation, united in the one person, as the event of our salvation, respects and

39. Rahner, *Foundations*, 193.

40. Karl Rahner and Karl-Heinz Weger, *Our Christian Faith* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980) 78-79.

dynamically develops the doctrine of the two natures united in the one person of Chalcedon.

RESURRECTION AS DEIFYING TRANSFORMATION OF CREATION

A third fundamental dimension of Rahner's evolutionary thought is his eschatological theology of the resurrection of Christ. He contrasts the traditional, Western, juridical focus on the death of Jesus with the theology of the East, where the resurrection plays a fundamental role in the theology of salvation: "the redemption was felt to be a real ontological process which began in the incarnation and ends not so much in the forgiveness of sin as in the divinization of the world and first demonstrates its victorious might, not so much in the expiation of sin on the cross as in the resurrection of Christ".⁴¹ Along with this Eastern theology, Rahner sees salvation as ontological rather than juridical, understands salvation as a deification that involves human beings and with them the whole creation, and sees the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of this divinizing transfiguration. He thus locates a basis for something like the Teilhardian vision in the theology of great Eastern thinkers like Irenaeus and Athanasius.

According to Rahner, what happens in the death of Jesus is that a piece of this evolutionary, fleshly world is handed over freely into God, in complete obedience and love. In the resurrection, God irrevocably adopts creaturely evolutionary reality as God's own reality. Because of the unity of the world that springs from the Creator, this is an event for the whole world. What occurs in the resurrection of Jesus, as part of the physical, biological and human world, is *ontologically* and not simply juridically, "the embryonically final beginning of the glorification and divinization of the whole of reality".⁴² As Rahner puts it in another place, the resurrection is "the beginning of the transformation of the world as an ontologically interconnected occurrence".⁴³ The final destiny of the world is not only promised, but already begun. The risen Christ is the "pledge and beginning of the perfect fulfillment of the world". He is the "representative of the new cosmos".⁴⁴

On this basis, Rahner holds that we Christians are really "the most sublime of materialists". Matter will last forever, and be glorified forever in Christ. But, Rahner believes, it will also undergo a transformation, "the depths of which we can only sense with fear and trembling in that process which we experience as our death."⁴⁵ In this

41. Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Questions on Easter", *Theological Investigations 4* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971) 126.

42. Rahner, "Dogmatic Questions on Easter", 129.

43. Rahner, "Resurrection: D. Theology", 1142.

44. Rahner, "Resurrection: D. Theology", 1142.

45. Karl Rahner, "The Festival of the Future of the World", *Theological Investigations 7* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971) 183.

way, Rahner holds with Teilhard, that the transfiguration of the world has already begun in the risen Christ and is "ripening and developing to that point where it will become manifest".⁴⁶ In dialogue with Eastern patristic theology, Rahner argues that the resurrection of the Crucified is the beginning of the transfiguration in Christ, not only of humanity, but with them, in ways that are appropriate to different creatures, of the whole universe.

CONCLUSION

Earlier I referred to Teilhard's lament that he could not quote a single writer that gave expression to the insight into the relationship between Christ and evolution that had transfigured everything for him. I have proposed that Rahner can be counted as one who does this. I also referred to Rahner's suggestion at the end of his life that present-day Christology should take the up the ideas of a Teilhard de Chardin, elaborate them with precision and clarity, and show an intelligible and orthodox connection between Jesus of Nazareth and the cosmic. It has been proposed that this formed something of an agenda for Rahner throughout his life. Rahner stays with a more traditional metaphysical notion of divine action than Teilhard, and I think this enables his theology better to respect the integrity of science, including neo-Darwinism. And he places evolutionary theology within a profoundly trinitarian and incarnational theology of a God who bestows God's self to us in the Word and the Spirit.

At the same time he transforms the metaphysical tradition of divine action by showing how God's self-bestowal enables creation to transcend itself in evolutionary emergence. In a way that is faithful to Chalcedon, he shows how Jesus Christ can be understood as both the evolutionary self-transcendence of the universe to God, and God's radical self-bestowal to the universe, united in one person. Finally he builds on the Eastern patristic tradition to show the resurrection of Jesus can be seen as the beginning of the deifying transformation of human beings and with them of the whole universe in Christ. Rahner takes up some of Teilhard's agenda in a theology of divine self-bestowal, a self-bestowal in love that enables not only creaturely self-transcendence but also the transfiguring deification of human beings and of the whole universe in Christ.

46. Rahner, "The Festival of the Future of the World", 184.

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