

Articles

IN SEARCH OF A GOD FOR EVOLUTION: PAUL TILLICH AND PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

by *John F. Haught*

Abstract. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin challenged theology to reach for an understanding of God that would take into account the reality of evolution. Paul Tillich's notion of New Being goes a long way toward meeting this challenge, and a theology of evolution can gain a great deal from Tillich's religious thought. But Teilhard would still wonder whether the philosophical notion of *being*, even when qualified by the adjective *new*, is itself adequate to contextualize evolution theologically. To Teilhard a theology attuned to a post-Darwinian world requires nothing less than a revolution in our understanding of what is ultimately real. It is doubtful that Tillich's rather classical theological system is radical enough to accommodate this requirement. For Teilhard, on the other hand, a metaphysics grounded in the biblical vision, wherein God is understood as the future on which the world rests as its sole support, can provide a more suitable setting for evolutionary theology.

Keywords: complexity-consciousness; eschatology; metaphysics of the future; New Being; promise.

The world's religions, at least during the period of their emergence, knew nothing about Big-Bang cosmology, deep time, or biological evolution. Generally speaking, they have still not caught up with these ideas. Even in the scientific West the findings of evolutionary biology and cosmology continue to lurk only at the fringes of contemporary theological awareness. The sensibilities of most believers in God, including theologians, have been fashioned in an imaginative context defined either by ancient

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cosmographies or, if the believers are philosophically tutored, by equally timeworn ontologies that are static and hierarchical. Our religious understandings of ultimate reality, our thoughts about the meaning of human existence and destiny, our intuitions about what is ultimately good and what the good life is, and our ideas about what is evil or unethical—all of these at least originally took up residence in a human consciousness still unaware of the implications of deep cosmic time and of the prospect that the universe may still be only at the dawn of its journey through time.

How, then, are we to think about God, if at all, in a manner that takes into account the new scientific understanding of biological evolution and cosmic process? Probably the majority of scientists have given up on such a project, settling into their impression that the immense universe of contemporary natural science has by now vastly outgrown what astronomer Harlow Shapley once referred to as the anthropomorphic one-planet deity of our terrestrial religions. Theology, meanwhile, is just beginning to reconsider the idea of God in a way that would render it consonant with evolution.

The famous Jesuit geologist and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was far ahead of professional theologians in perceiving evolution's demand for a revitalized understanding of God. Our new awareness of nature's immensities—in the domains of space, time, and organized physical complexity—provides us, he thought, with the exciting opportunity to enlarge our sense of God far beyond that of any previous age. Moreover, as Teilhard also emphasized, the new scientific picture of the universe has not only amplified our sense of cosmic immensity; it has also altered our whole understanding of what sort of thing the universe is. Science has now shown quite clearly that the cosmos is a story. Nature is narrative to the core. As physicist Karl Friedrich von Weizsäcker argues in *The History of Nature*, the greatest scientific discovery of the twentieth century was that the universe is historical (Weizsäcker 1949; see also Toulmin and Goodfield 1965; Pannenberg 1993, 86–98). And Teilhard was one of the first scientists in the last century to have fully realized this fact. The cosmos, he often repeated, is not a fixed body of things but a genesis—a still-unfolding drama rather than merely a frozen agglomeration of spatially related objects. The world is still coming into being (Teilhard 1999).

It is therefore of utmost importance that religious ideas of nature, human existence, and reality as such be reshaped according to the idea of a cosmos still emerging in the remarkable ways that science is recording. Above all, evolution requires a revolution in our thoughts about God. But who, Teilhard asked, “will at last give evolution *its own* God?” (1969, 240)

Although Teilhard himself was a profoundly religious thinker, he was not a professional theologian, and so his own efforts to construe a “God for evolution” stopped short of the systematic development his intuitions

demanded. The project of shaping a theology fully apprised of evolution still remains to be done. It may be instructive, therefore, to look into a great theological system such as that of Paul Tillich as a possible resource for a contemporary theology of evolution. I briefly sketch Teilhard's central ideas and then scan several facets of Tillich's theology to see if it may prove capable of giving us a God for evolution.

TEILHARD'S MAIN IDEAS

For Teilhard the whole universe is in evolution and there is a clear direction to the cosmic story. He consciously extended the term *evolution* beyond its biological meaning and applied it also to cosmic process. In spite of the obvious meandering or branching character of biological evolution, he observed, the universe as a whole has clearly moved in the direction of increasing organized complexity. The cosmic process has gone through the preatomic, atomic, molecular, unicellular, multicellular, vertebrate, primate, and human phases of evolution. During this journey the universe has manifested a measurable growth in instances of organized complexity.

What gives significance to this story is that during the course of cosmic evolution there has been a gradual increase in what Teilhard called consciousness—in direct proportion to the increase in organized physical complexity. In obedience to the “law of complexity-consciousness,” as matter has become more complex in its organization, consciousness and eventually (in humans at least) self-awareness have emerged. The “inside” of things has become more and more intensified, more centered, and more liberated from habitual physical routine. And there is no reason to suspect that the cosmic journey toward complexity, having reached the level of human consciousness, will now inevitably be suspended. Indeed our own humanized planet is now developing a noosphere (a new geological stratum consisting of tightening webs of mind, culture, economics, politics, science, information, and technology), thus moving evolution in the direction of a new level of complexity-consciousness. Apparently, and in spite of the protests of many biologists, a cosmological perspective shows that there is a net overall advance or “progress” in evolution after all. Teilhard abstractly refers to the ultimate goal of this advance as “Omega” (1999, 191–94).

Omega is “God.” Nothing less than a transcendent force, radically distinct from but also intimately incarnate in matter, could ultimately explain evolutionary emergence. For Teilhard it is the attraction of God-Omega that finally accounts for the world's restless tendency to move beyond any specific level of development toward ontologically richer modes of being. In the world's religions the universe's “search for a center” finally becomes conscious. At a deep level of explanation—deeper than science itself can

reach—evolution can be said to occur because as God draws near to the world, the world explodes “upwards into God” (1964, 83). If we read beneath the surface of the world that science has discovered, we may understand both humanity’s long religious journey and the whole epic of evolution prior to it as one long cosmic search for an integrating and renewing Center. This quest recurrently gathers the past into a new present and carries the whole stream of creation toward the God who creates the world from “up ahead” (1964, 272–81).

Teilhard also thought in cosmic terms about the Christ of his own creed, deliberately following the cosmic Christology of Saint Paul and some later Christian writers. As a Christian thinker, he pictured the whole vast universe as converging on and coming to a head in the Christ of the Parousia, the one who is to come. Redemption, for Teilhard as for Saint Paul, coincides with the new creation of the whole universe in Christ (1975, 92–100, 203–8).

As his thought matured, Teilhard increasingly complained that traditional theology, insofar as it is focused on *esse* (the idea of *being*), is unable as such to contextualize the dramatic new sense of a world still in the process of becoming. Moreover, theology has conceived of God too much in terms of Aristotle’s notion of a Prime Mover impelling things from the past (*a retro*). Evolution demands that we think of God as drawing the world from up ahead (*ab ante*), pulling it forward into the future. Creation is a process of gathering the multiple strands of cosmic evolution into an ultimate unity located not so much up above as up ahead: *creatio est uniri* (creation = being united). For Teilhard, as for the author of Revelation, God is both Alpha and Omega; but after Darwin and the new cosmology we must say that God is less Alpha than Omega: “Only a God who is functionally and totally ‘Omega’ can satisfy us,” Teilhard exclaims. But he persists with his question and now ours as well: “where shall we find such a God?” (1969, 240)

TILLICH AND TEILHARD

Half a century after Teilhard’s death, we have yet to answer this question. For the most part theologians still think and write almost as though Darwin, Einstein, and Hubble had never existed. Their attention is fixed almost exclusively on questions about the meaning of human existence, human history, social justice, hermeneutics, gender issues, or the individual’s spiritual journey. These are all worthy of attention, of course, but except for a smattering of ecologically interested theologies the natural world remains distant from dominant theological interest. In the Christian churches, redemption and eschatology are still typically thought of in terms of a harvesting of human souls rather than the coming to fulfillment of an entire universe. Furthermore, the divorce of theology from the cosmos

persists no less glaringly in what has come to be called postmodern theology, most of which, ironically, seems unable to move beyond modernity's sense of the fundamental estrangement of both God and ourselves from the nonhuman natural world.

In view of the general failure of theology to respond adequately to evolution, we may ask here whether the impressive theological work of Tillich is perhaps of sufficient depth and breadth to bring out systematically the religious meaning of the new evolutionary picture of the universe that so energized Teilhard's own life and thought. In great measure the contemporary value of Tillich's thought may be assessed in terms of its adequacy to this task. Toward the end of his life Tillich had become acquainted at least vaguely with some of Teilhard's ideas, and although he considered Teilhard's vision of the universe too "progressivistic" for his own tastes he nevertheless felt "near" to the modest Jesuit in "so many respects" (Tillich 1966, 90–91). Tillich did not say exactly what attracted him to Teilhard, so we can only guess. I suspect that he found in Teilhard a deeply Christian thinker who mirrored many of Tillich's own religious and theological intuitions.

For example, Tillich and Teilhard both sought a reformulation of Christian spirituality in which we would not have to turn our backs on the universe or the earth in order to approach the kingdom of God. They agreed that life in a finite universe is inevitably, and not just accidentally, riddled with ambiguity, and that the estrangement of the universe from its essential being somehow coincides with the very fact of its existence. They both wrestled in creative ways with how to balance the vertical (transcendent) and horizontal (immanent) dimensions of human aspiration. They both looked for a way in which the human person could experience religious meaning without heteronomy (Tillich's term for our being subjected to a law alien to our authentic being and freedom). That is, they longed for a kind of communion with God, with other human beings, and with the universe that would differentiate rather than obliterate personality and freedom. They held in common an intuition that love is the key to all unity but that *agape* should never be separated from *eros*. Not insignificantly, they also shared an appreciation of the dimension of the inorganic, which had been largely overlooked, and is still seldom noticed, by theology (see Drummy 2000). Similarly, they both recognized that the materialist metaphysical foundation of modern science is, in Tillich's words, nothing less than an "ontology of death" (1963, 3:19), yet they both sought to address this baleful modern perspective without reverting to vitalism. Above all, they each placed special emphasis on the need for religious thought to open itself to the category of the New.

Both Tillich and Teilhard were also extremely sensitive to the ways in which dualism and supranaturalism had sickened Christianity. Although Teilhard was not directly influenced by Nietzsche as much as Tillich was,

he was sensitive to Nietzsche's accusations that Christian piety often fosters a hatred of the earth that saps human existence of a wholesome "zest for living" (Teilhard 1970, 231–43). He also agreed with modern secularistic critiques that Platonic influences in Christian thought had robbed the world's "becoming" of any real significance, of the capacity to bring about anything truly new. Indeed, there are passages in Teilhard's books as well as in his letters that sound hauntingly Nietzschean in tone.

In the end, however, Teilhard no less than Tillich found the Nietzschean outlook suffocating. Any vision of things that ultimately closes off the world to new being, however friendly to becoming it may initially seem to be, is no domicile for the human spirit or for the religious adventure. Both the metaphysics of eternity, in which everything important has already happened, and the modern materialist ideology that explains everything "new" as simply the outcome of a past sequence of deterministic causes have the effect of stifling hope and depleting human energy. Only a universe in which the truly new can occur will ever be a suitable setting for religious faith and hope in the future.

Another point of comparison is original sin. Aware that the traditional explanation of a historical Fall of actual humans from an earthly paradise could no longer be taken literally as the explanation of our estrangement from the essential, Tillich and Teilhard both sought new ways to account for the ambiguities of life and the presence of evil. They wrote at a time when biblical scholarship and a growing awareness of evolution had already exposed the questionable nature of a plain reading of Genesis; and they received harsh criticism as they sought deeper meanings in the story of the so-called Fall. In fact, they are still demonized by biblical and dogmatic literalists and antievolutionists.

On the question of original sin, what continues to require theological discussion is the role of human freedom and responsibility in accounting for evil. Both Tillich and Teilhard moved decisively in the direction of interpreting sin, evil, suffering, and death as tragic, or as somehow inevitable. Their intention in doing so was in each case to widen the sweep of our sense of the redemption of the world by God. They shared the belief that a one-sidedly anthropocentric interpretation of evil always risks diminishing the compass of divine love. But by pointing to the tragic inevitability of evil they raised troubling questions about how much responsibility for evil can then be attributed to individual human persons.

In one of several early notes not intended for publication (reflections that may have led at least indirectly to his being virtually exiled to China by his religious superiors), Teilhard wrote that

original sin, taken in its widest sense, is not a malady specific to the earth, nor is it bound up with human generation. It simply symbolizes the inevitable chance of evil (*Necesse est ut eveniant scandala*) which accompanies the existence of all participated being. Wherever being *in fieri* [in process of becoming] is produced, suffer-

ing and wrong immediately appear as its shadow: not only as a result of the tendency towards inaction and selfishness found in creatures, but also (which is more disturbing) as an inevitable consequence of their effort to progress. Original sin is the essential reaction of the finite to the creative act. Inevitably it insinuates itself into existence through the medium of all creation. It is the *reverse side* of all creation. (1969, 40)

For Teilhard the most noteworthy theological consequence of this universalizing of evil is that it considerably enlarges the scope and import of the redemption in Christ:

If we are to retain the Christian view of Christ-the-Redeemer it is evident that we must also retain an original sin as vast as the world: otherwise Christ would have saved only a part of the world and would not truly be the center of all. Further, scientific research has shown that, in space and duration, the world is vast beyond anything conceived by the apostles and the first generations of Christianity. (1969, 54)

It follows that by failing to expand our minds in a way that represents the temporal and spatial immensities given to us by the new scientific epic of evolution, we also inevitably fail to do justice to the notions of Christ and divine redemption: "How, then, can we contrive still to make first original sin, and then the figure of Christ, cover the enormous and daily expanding panorama of the universe? How are we to maintain the possibility of a *fault as cosmic* as the Redemption?" (1969, 54) Teilhard's answer: "The only way in which we can do so is by spreading the Fall throughout the whole of universal history. . ." (1969, 54). And in this respect he comments: "The spirit of the Bible and the Church is perfectly clear: the whole world has been corrupted by the Fall and the *whole* of everything has been redeemed. Christ's glory, beauty, and irresistible attraction radiate, in short, from his *universal* kingship. If his dominance is restricted to the sublunary regions, then he is eclipsed, he is abjectly extinguished by the universe" (1969, 39).

Paul Tillich would surely sympathize with Teilhard's attempt to widen the scope of redemption. In fact, for Tillich the redemption extends not only into the whole of the physical universe and its history but into the very heart of being as such. (See Part II of his five-part *Systematic Theology* [Tillich 1963, 1:163–210]). For Tillich no less than for Teilhard, however, the question remains as to whether by universalizing the primordial fault and correspondingly the compass of redemption he has unduly lessened the role of human responsibility in accounting for evil. Many theologians have resisted a broad extension of the scheme of redemption precisely because such expansionism seems to dilute and even nullify the role of human freedom in accounting for the most horrendous evils in our world. (See, for example, Niebuhr 1952, 219.)

Although Teilhard does not pretend to remove the mystery of evil, he rightly claims that the reality of evil has a cosmic dimension; and evil appears to be not quite the same thing when viewed in the context of evolution as

when interpreted in terms of a static universe, although too few theologians have bothered to notice the difference. We may ask whether even as significant a theologian as Paul Tillich has taken evolution and the idea of an unfinished universe sufficiently into account in his own understanding of God and the theology of redemption.

Cosmic and biological evolution instruct us as never before that we live in a universe that is in great measure not yet created. The incompleteness of the cosmic project *logically* implies, therefore, that the universe and human existence have never, under any circumstances, been situated in a condition of ideal fullness and perfection. In an evolving cosmos, *created* being as such has not yet achieved the state of integrity. Moreover, this is nobody's fault, including the Creator's, because the only kind of universe a loving and caring God could create in the first place is an unfinished one. For God's love of creation to be actualized, after all, the beloved world must be truly other than God. And an instantaneously finished universe, one from which our present condition of historical becoming and existential ambiguity could be envisaged as a subsequent estrangement, would in principle have been only an emanation or appendage of deity and not something truly other than God and hence able to be the recipient of divine love. It could never have established any independent existence vis-à-vis its creator. The idea of a world perfectly constituted *ab initio* (from the beginning) would, in other words, be logically incompatible with any idea of a divine creation emerging from the depths of selfless love.

Moreover, the prescientific sense of a nonevolving universe has tended too easily to sponsor scapegoating quests for the "culprit" or "culprits" that allegedly befouled the primordial purity of being. If creation had been originally a fully accomplished affair, after all, we would understandably want to identify whoever or whatever it was that messed things up so badly for us. The assumption of an original perfection of creation has in fact led religious speculation to imagine that the source of the enormous evil and suffering in the world must be either an extramundane principle of evil—an idea unacceptable to biblical theism according to which the principle of all being is inherently good—or else some intraworldly being or event. That such a supposition has led to the demonizing of various events, persons, animals, genders, and aliens requires no new documentation here. It is enough for us simply to wonder what would happen if religious thought were now to take the reality of evolution with complete seriousness.

In 1933 Teilhard reflected, in words that apply to much Christian thought even today,

In spite of the subtle distinctions of the theologians, it is a matter *of fact* that Christianity has developed under the over-riding impression that all the evil round us was born from an initial transgression. So far as dogma is concerned we are still living in the atmosphere of a universe in which what matters most is reparation and expiation. The vital problem, both for Christ and ourselves, is to get rid of a stain. (1969, 81)

As long as we had assumed that creation was instantaneous and the cosmos fully formed in an initial creative act, the only way we could make sense of present evil and suffering was to posit a secondary distortion. But this assumption opened up the possibility of interpreting suffering essentially as punishment and fostered an ethic tolerant of retribution. Such a view, one that still informs both religious and social life, can only render expiation an interminable affair, thereby robbing suffering of the possibility of being interpreted as part of the process of ongoing creation itself. "A primary disorder," Teilhard goes on, "cannot be justified in a world which is created fully formed: a culprit has to be found. But in a world which emerges gradually from matter there is no longer any need to assume a primordial mishap in order to explain the appearance of the multiple and its inevitable satellite, evil" (1969, 83–84).

Evolution, to repeat our theme, means that the world is unfinished. But if it is unfinished then we cannot justifiably expect it yet to be perfect. It *inevitably* has a dark side. Redemption, therefore, if it means anything at all, must mean—perhaps above everything else—the healing of the tragedy (and not just the consequences of human sin) that accompanies a universe *in via*, on a journey. Especially in view of Darwin's ragged portrait of the life story, through which we can now survey previously unknown epochs of life's suffering and struggle preceding our own emergence, it would be callous indeed on the part of theologians to perpetuate the one-sidedly anthropocentric and retributive notions of pain and redemption that used to fit so comfortably into pre-evolutionary pictures of the world.

Imagine, once again, that the created universe in the beginning had possessed the birthmarks of an original perfection. Then the evil that we experience here and now would have to be attributed to a contingent occurrence, or perhaps a "culprit" that somehow spoiled the primordial creation, causing it to lose its original integrity. This, of course, is how evil and suffering have often been accounted for by religions, including Christianity. Accordingly, any history of salvation will then consist *essentially* of a drama of restoring the original state of affairs. And although the restoration may be garnished at its margins with epicycles of novelty, it will be essentially a *re*-establishment of the assumed fullness that once was and now has dissolved.

The central biblical intuition, of course, is that salvation is actually much more than the restoration of a primordial fullness of being. But the influence on soteriology of Western philosophy has caused theologians to subordinate the expectation of novelty and surprise in the fulfillment of God's promises to that of the recovery of a primal perfection of being. This is why evolution is potentially such good news for theology. Paying close attention to evolution no longer allows us even to imagine that the universe was at one time—in a remote historical or mythic past—an integrally constituted state of being. As we look back into the universe's distant

evolutionary past with Teilhard we see only multiplicity fading into nothingness, accompanied at its birth by an almost imperceptible straining toward a future unity that still remains to be fully accomplished. For this reason, a scientifically informed soteriology may no longer plausibly make themes of restoration or recovery dominant. The remote cosmic past, after all, consists of the multiple, that is, fragmentary monads not yet brought into relationship or unity. The notion of an unfinished universe still coming into being, on the other hand, opens up the horizon of a new or unprecedented future and promises an end to expiation. After the emergence of evolutionary biology and cosmology, the whole notion of the future begs as never before to be brought more integrally into our ontologies as well as our cosmologies. Any notion of *esse* as the consummation of the vast cosmos must be qualified by the theme of being's essential futurity. Being must in some way mean the still-to-come. (*Esse est advenire.*)

IS TILlich's THEOLOGY ADEQUATE TO EVOLUTION?

How well does Tillich's theology function as a context for understanding and appreciating the reality of evolution, broadly speaking? Unfortunately, even Tillich, in spite of his awareness of the biblical theme of new creation, embeds his cosmic soteriology and eschatology in a conceptuality and terminology of "*re*-storation" that benumbs the power of his notion of New Being with suggestions of repetition. Certainly Tillich goes far beyond classical theology in taking us toward the metaphysics of the future that the logic of evolution requires. His interpretation of redemption as the coming of the New Being is philosophically rich, and it takes us in the direction of a theology that can at last take evolution seriously. But does it take us far enough? Open to New Being though his system of theology is, has it fully absorbed the impact of Darwin and others who have introduced us to evolution?¹ Tillich, as I mentioned earlier, was suspicious of Teilhard's apparently progressivist optimism. But beneath this complaint lies a much deeper disagreement, one that places in question whether Tillich's thought can, after all, give us our "God for evolution" and can move us forcefully beyond romantic nostalgia to the fullness of a hope proportionate to evolution.

Tillich distinguishes the actual state of estranged existence from what he refers to as essential being. Essential being is an idealized unity of all beings with God, the "Ground" of their being. But the Tillichian location of the essential in terms of a metaphysics of *esse* is in tension with Teilhard's sense of the inadequacy to evolution of any theological system that thinks of the divine in terms only of a philosophical notion of "being." Both Tillich and Teilhard interpret our ambiguous existence in terms of an existential estrangement from the "essential." But where the comparison between them becomes most important—at least as far as the question of

God and evolution is concerned—is in their respective ways of understanding just how and where the essential is to be located with respect to the actual or existential state of finite beings. It is on this point that I believe we can begin to notice some divergence of one religious thinker from the other.

For Tillich existence erupts as the *separation* from a primordial wholeness of being, from an undifferentiated “dreaming innocence” (1963, 2:33–36). Implied here are images of *loss* that can be redressed only by the idea of *re-union* with the primordial Ground of being. Tillich’s ontological way of putting things is likely, in spite of his attempts to highlight the newness of being in redemption, to subordinate the novelty of creation and evolution in the actual world to the motif of restoration. For even though his thought tries to introduce us to New Being, it is still in terms of the notion of being that he articulates the idea of newness. The New Being, after all, is defined as “essential being under the conditions of existence” (1963, 2:118). This way of putting things is unable to prevent us from thinking and imagining essential being in pre-evolutionary terms as an eternal sameness that resides somewhere other than in the dimension of the unprecedented, still-not-yet future toward which a sense of cosmic process now turns our expectations. In Tillich’s thought, as in the classical metaphysics of pre-evolutionary theology, the futurity of being is still subordinated to the idea of an eternal presence of being. For Teilhard, on the other hand, such a Platonic view of things implies that nothing truly new can ever get accomplished in the world’s own historical unfolding, since the fullness of being is portrayed as already realized in an eternal present. Such a picture of things, as Teilhard might put it, would only clip the wings of hope.

For Teilhard the fullness of being is what awaits at the end of a *cosmic* journey, not something that lurks either in an eternal present or in some misty *Urzeit* (primordial time). In a sense we can say that the universe is not yet, or that it not yet *is*. Its being awaits it. The foundation of things is not so much a Ground of being sustaining from beneath—although this idea is partially illuminating—as a power of attraction toward what lies ahead. “The universe,” Teilhard says, “is organically resting on . . . the future as its sole support . . .” (1970, 239). This suggestive way of locating ultimate reality arouses a religious imagery quite different from Tillich’s notion of God as Ground of being or as the Eternal Now. The gravitational undertow of Tillich’s powerful metaphor of “ground”—together with his other earthy images of “depth” and “abyss”—tends to pull our theological reflections toward a soteriology of return to what already is. Tillich’s metaphors of God as ground, depth, and abyss do respond to Teilhard’s concern that theology no longer locate the divine exclusively in the arena of the “up above,” but the same images may also fail sufficiently to open up for religious thought the horizon of the future as the appropriate domain of redemption and the fullness of being.

In a world not yet fully completed it is important for theology still to acknowledge with Tillich that the actual condition of finite existents is indeed that of estrangement from their true being. But the being from which they are estranged must be, at least in the light of evolution, in some sense not-yet-being, being which arrives *ab ante*, and not only a ground to which estranged beings eventually return. Perhaps Tillich would agree with much of what Teilhard is haltingly attempting to say about the future as the world's foundation, but his ontology places excessively rigid constraints on what we can affirm and hope for the world's future. There remains in Tillich's thought a spirit of tragic resignation that is hard to locate in terms of either evolution or biblical eschatology. The New Being, an otherwise felicitous idea, is still portrayed as a futureless plenitude of being, one that graciously enters *vertically* into the context of our estrangement and reconciles us to itself. But, consoling as such a conception may be, it still bears the weight of metaphysical traditions innocent of evolution and at least to some extent resistant to the biblical motif of promise.

Tillich's presentation of Christ as the New Being does indeed give an enormous breadth to redemption, and in this respect his theology goes a long way toward meeting the requirements of a theology of evolution. However, although Teilhard would be appreciative of Tillich's broadening of the scheme of redemption, he would still wonder whether the philosophical notion of *being*, even when qualified by the adjective *new*, is itself adequate to the reality of evolution. To Teilhard it is less the concept of *esse* than those of *fieri* (becoming) and *uniri* (being brought into unity in the future) that a theology attuned to a post-Darwinian world require (1969, 51). Even his earliest reflections on God and evolution adumbrated Teilhard's lifelong disillusionment with the Thomistic metaphysics of being, beginning at a time when it was extremely audacious for a Catholic thinker to express such disenchantment. But the young Teilhard already realized that evolution requires nothing less than a revolution in metaphysics. It seems that evolution still awaits such a metaphysics, and it is doubtful that Tillich's theological system is revolutionary enough to accommodate this requirement.

For Teilhard, as I have noted, the "essential" from which the universe, including humans as part of it, is separated is the Future, the Up Ahead, the God-Omega who creates the world *ab ante* rather than *a retro*, the God who saves the world not by returning it to an Eternal Now but by being the world's Future. The essential, therefore, is not for Teilhard an original fullness of being from which the universe has become estranged but instead a yet unrealized ideal (God's vision or God's dream, perhaps?) toward which the multiple is forever being summoned. In this eschatological setting—one that renders Teilhard's thought more biblical than Tillich's—the universe can be thought of as essentially more of a promise than a sacrament. Correspondingly, nature may be seen as anticipative rather than

simply revelatory of the ultimate Future on which it leans. If we still view the cosmos as participative being, then what it participates in is not a past or present plenitude but a future pleroma. And its present ambiguity is of the sort that we might associate with a promise still unfulfilled, rather than the seductive traces of a primordial wholeness that has now vanished into the past. Evolutionary cosmology, in other words, invites us to complete the biblical vision of a life based on hope for surprise rather than allowing us to wax nostalgic for what we imagine once was, or for what we have taken to be an eternal presence hovering either above or in the depths.

In keeping with Teilhard's futurist location of the foundation of the world's being, our own existence and action can now also be thought of as possessing an intrinsic meaning and an effectuality that alternative metaphysical conceptions of the universe, including Tillich's, do not permit. Now, much more clearly than we ever realized before we learned that the cosmos is a genesis, we may envisage human action as contributing to the creation of something that never was. Teilhard was especially concerned to develop a vision of the world in which young and old alike could feel that their lives and actions truly matter, that their existence is not just killing time but potentially contributing to the creation of a cosmos.

Evolutionary science is, therefore, both a disturbance and a stimulus to theology, because it logically requires that we think of paradise (or the "essential") as something more than a condition to be restored or returned to after our having been exiled from it. Instead of nostalgia for a lost innocence, evolution allows a posture of genuine hope that justifies action in the world. Our existence here is more than a waiting for an alleged reunion with Being-Itself. The true "courage to be" (Tillich 1952) is not therefore simply a Tillichian taking nonbeing into ourselves but an orienting of our lives toward the Future Unity that is the world's true foundation. Concretely, this would mean "building the earth" in a responsible manner as our small part of the ongoing creation of the cosmos. After Darwin the power of being is the power of the future, and we affirm ourselves courageously by orienting ourselves toward this future in spite of the pull of the multiple that defines the past.

From the perspective of a theology of evolution, once the universe arrives at conscious self-awareness it may anticipate *arriving at* the being from which it is deprived rather than merely longing for a reunion with it. In this setting, what Tillich refers to as our "existential anxiety" is not simply the awareness of our possible nonbeing, an awareness that turns us toward courageous participation in the "Power of Being" (Tillich 1952, 32–57). Even more, it is the disequilibrium that inevitably accompanies our being part of a universe still-in-the-making, and whose inevitable ambiguity turns us toward what we might call the Power of the Future (see Peters 1992). Pathological forms of anxiety (which Tillich distinguishes

from “normal” or existential anxiety) could then be understood as unrealistically premature flights from the hopeful and enlivening disequilibrium of living in an unfinished universe into nostalgic illusions of paradisaical perfection cleansed of temporal process.

Sin and evil, moreover, would be understood here as the consequence of our free submission to the pull of the multiple, to the fragmentary past of a universe whose perfected state of ultimate unity in God-Omega has yet to be realized. In an unfinished universe, we humans remain accomplices of evil, of course, even horrendous forms of evil. But our complicity in evil may now be interpreted less as a hypothesized break from primordial innocence than as our systematic refusal to participate in the ongoing creation of the world. The creative process is one in which the multiple, the originally dispersed elements of an emerging cosmos, are now being drawn toward unity. Our own sin, then, is at least in some measure that of spurning the invitation to participate in the holy adventure of the universe’s being drawn toward the future (the God-Omega) upon which it leans as its foundation. Here sin means our acquiescence in and fascination with the lure of the multiple. It is our resistance to the call toward “being more,” our deliberate turning away from participation in what is still coming into being.

Thus, there is ample room in this scheme for us to respect the traditional emphasis on our own personal responsibility for evil. But we can affirm our guilt in a way that requires not expiation or retribution but renewed hope to energize our ethical aspirations. Moreover, in an evolutionary context we might wish to go beyond Teilhard and suggest that original sin is not simply the reverse side of an unfinished universe in process of being created. It is also the aggregation in human history and culture of all of the effects of our habitual refusal to assume an appropriate place in the ongoing creation of the universe. It is this kind of corruption—and not the defilement of an allegedly original cosmic perfection—by which each of us is stained. The lure of the multiple is inevitable in an unfinished universe, but there is also the cumulative history of our own species’ “Fall” backward toward disunity. And yet past evolutionary achievement also provides a reason for trusting that the forces of unity can emerge victorious in the future. Even if the universe eventually succumbs to entropy, as Teilhard predicted, there is something of great significance—he called it the realm of spirit—that is now coming to birth in evolution and that can escape absolute loss by being taken permanently into the life of God.

NOTE

1. In some of his sermons the sense of the future seems sometimes more alive than in the *Systematic Theology*. Tillich talks about being religiously grasped by the “coming order”: “The coming order is always coming, shaking this order, fighting with it, conquering it and conquered by it. The coming order is always at hand. But one can never say: ‘It is here! It is there!’ One can never grasp it. But one can be grasped by it” (Tillich 1948, 27).

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