

# ***Theories of Love: Sorokin, Teilhard, and Tillich***

LOVE—A HIGHER FORM OF HUMAN ENERGY IN THE  
WORK OF TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND SOROKIN

*by Ursula King*

*Abstract.* Contemporary debates concerning a universal theory about the praxis of love in human society and culture can benefit greatly from the works of two twentieth-century thinkers, the French paleontologist and religious writer Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the Russian-American sociologist Pitirim A. Sorokin. Although from very different personal and disciplinary backgrounds, they share amazingly similar views on the power of love as transformative energy for transcending the individual self and for creating radically new, collaborative, and cooperative ways of acting that will transform whole societies, indeed the planet. Traditionally, ideas of love have been associated with religion, but these two thinkers advocate systematic scientific research on the production and application of “love-energy” for the change of culture, social institutions, and human beings. The article is organized in five parts: (1) altruism, science and love: what is love energy? (2) Teilhard’s understanding of the phenomenon of love; (3) Sorokin’s approach to creative, altruistic love; (4) comparison of Teilhard’s and Sorokin’s ideas; and (5) performing works of love. As far as I am aware, this is the first article comparing the remarkable parallels as well as distinctive differences between Sorokin’s and Teilhard’s ideas on love as the highest form of human energy.

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A COMPARISON BETWEEN PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN'S AND  
PITIRIM SOROKIN'S APPROACH TO THE PHENOMENON OF LOVE

What is love, praised by so many poets and mystics, philosophers and theologians through the ages? It has been noted that "the idea of love has left a wider and more indelible imprint upon the development of human culture in all its aspects than any other single notion" (*The Encyclopedia of Religion* 9:31). Love is a great power affecting almost every human activity, from religion to the arts, literature, music, drama, philosophy, psychology, and theology. Love is a universally active, creative potential that provides a strong binding force for the various types of human groupings, whether family, clan, tribe, state, nation, or global commonwealth, and it thus creates a firm basis for social coherence. We also speak about the love of knowledge, love for our work, love of nature. Love can be applied to many different experiences; it involves the idea of relating to one another, of bringing together and integrating different aspects into a larger whole. Retracing the lineaments of love in human history and civilizations would be an exciting, yet far from easy, task. Such a study would be well worthwhile and a necessary prerequisite for a truly universal metaphysics of love, one not exclusively based on this or that philosophy or religious doctrine but solidly built on scientific grounds and integrating all the religious and scientific knowledge on love that we so far possess.

It would be preposterous to suggest that a short essay could even begin to outline an integral theory and praxis of love. My aim is much more modest in that I want to draw attention to the rich resources and cognate ideas about love found in two twentieth-century thinkers, the French paleontologist, geologist, and religious writer Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) and the Russian-American sociologist Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889–1968). These men were near contemporaries but probably never met or even knew of each other, except for a brief reference late in Sorokin's life. Teilhard's ideas have previously been compared with those of the Russian philosopher Solovyev, who had a special influence on Sorokin, but to my knowledge Teilhard's work, and particularly the special position he assigns to "the phenomenon of love," has never been examined in relation to Sorokin's extensive and very important writing on love.

For Teilhard, the roots of love were cosmic, and the energy of love, the power of coming together, of unification and greater synthesis, runs through the entire epic of evolution and expresses itself as a higher form of energy

in human lives. Teilhard suggested that we need to harness the powers of love, and for this we need to draw on the help of science and develop a systematic study of the phenomenon of love. He wrote in 1934 that love is going “through a ‘change of state’” and finished with the much-quoted words “The day will come when, after harnessing the ether [or “space,” according to the editor], the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire” (Teilhard 1975, 86).

I have studied and written about Teilhard for almost forty years, but until recently I knew little about Sorokin apart from his name, his reputation as a sociologist, and his theory of culture. I discovered him through reading an article by Stephen Post about his work at the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, where he described Sorokin as a “pioneer in the scientific study of unlimited love” (Post 2002, 10) and mentioned his great, recently republished work *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation* (Sorokin [1954] 2002), to which Post has provided a very helpful introductory essay. After reading this voluminous tome (more than 550 pages) I was determined to find out more about Sorokin’s life and work. I traced many of his numerous publications that appeared from the 1920s on and learned how his thought developed over the years.

Sorokin writes about the transformative powers of creative love, the manifold dimensions of love, and their many varied expressions in human beings. From a different background and vantage point, but not that dissimilar from Teilhard, Sorokin has thoroughly analyzed “the production of love-energy,” which until now has attracted little attention since love remains still in its “unorganised, natural stage” (Sorokin [1954] 2002, 37). Its transformative powers have still to be systematically examined and increased for the greater well-being, in fact for the sanity and very survival, of the human community. Sorokin was convinced that a creative altruistic genius can greatly inspire other human beings, and I think that Sorokin himself and Teilhard are two recent examples who can help us to further the spiritual transformation of human society and culture that they both sought.

Sorokin’s scientific study of love draws mainly on the social sciences; Teilhard’s background is that of the earth sciences and human origins. In spite of the very different backgrounds, professional experience, and approaches of these two scientists, there are some remarkable parallels in their inspiring ideas about the transformative power of love. Both thinkers were great prophetic visionaries, much misunderstood by their contemporaries. Both experienced the vital dynamic of love with such force that traditional concepts could not contain their ideas. They forged their own vocabulary, at times difficult to grasp yet indicative of the newness of what they had to say. Both had a deep existential sense of the torrent of love energy in the world—unchannelled, unstudied, unused, but there to be harnessed for

the most powerful spiritual transformation of people and planet. To make creative, active use of this most tremendous of all resources, Teilhard spoke of the urgent need for greater “amorisation” and a science of “human energetics.” Sorokin captured the same idea by speaking of the process of “altruization” and of a new science of “amitology.”

I want to explore their powerful ideas on love by discussing (1) altruism, science, and love: what is love energy? (2) Teilhard’s understanding of the phenomenon of love, (3) Sorokin’s approach to creative, altruistic love, (4) a comparison of Teilhard’s and Sorokin’s ideas, and (5) performing works of love.

#### ALTRUISM, SCIENCE, AND LOVE: WHAT IS LOVE ENERGY?

I begin with a clarification of vocabulary. Our topic is “Works of Love: Scientific and Religious Perspectives on Altruism.”<sup>1</sup> But are love and altruism entirely interchangeable? Sorokin uses both terms, whereas Teilhard always speaks of love. Altruism seems to be a more attenuated and semantically less rich term than love. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1990) defines altruism as “1. regard for others as a principle for action” (which is a good working definition); “2. unselfishness; concern for other people.” Interestingly, an earlier volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1975) has an entry on altruism that refers only to animals, defining altruism as “in animals, the performance of an act from which the altruist derives no direct benefit. . . . Altruistic behaviour apparently is favoured by natural selection because it enhances the survival of individuals closely related to the altruist” (1:280). I learned only recently from a science documentary how scientists today are studying altruism in animal groups and how some have concluded that there is more altruism in nature than had been previously thought. Animal genes allow for actions that benefit the larger group rather than the individual. Among humans, however, the cultural system is more important than the genes in developing altruism, and this important point should be noted when examining the altruistic projects outlined by Sorokin and Teilhard.

*Altruism* is then a term always related to others, to collaborative and cooperative ways of acting, to transcending the individual self, whereas *love* has many different dimensions that are probably not covered by the more neutral-sounding “altruism.” Would we speak of a metaphysics of altruism? Love and altruism are of course intrinsically related to each other, for love expresses itself through “works of love,” through altruistic action, and such action can spiritually and socially transform human individuals and communities. It is perhaps clearest if we speak of “altruistic love,” as Sorokin does.

For many people, *love* is primarily allied with desire, and they relate it above all to erotic and sexual love. But love also can mean affectionate love

between friends, or it can relate to divine love, as both the love of God for us and our love for God. Many theological treatises could be quoted on the active and passive aspects of love—on human loving and being loved. The very nature and essence of God is, according to Christianity and some other religions, love itself—pure, outpouring love, which is the fountain and goal of all human love.

The definition of love covers an immense range of meanings. According to the Chinese, love is filial piety or the universal, cosmic force, “the way of Heaven.” It expresses itself as manifold devotional love in Hinduism, as self-abnegating love in Buddhism, as sacrificial love in Christianity. It differs according to what idea, feeling, or attitude love is associated with, which object or recipient love addresses, what the emotional, aesthetic, or moral quality of its expression is, and what effect it has on those involved in a loving relationship. Love has very much to do with *the other*, with personal relationships, whether human or divine, and these relationships have profound social effects.

But do the powers of love, so praised by mystics, poets, philosophers, and theologians, have anything to do with science and nature? The traditional Christian teaching about love and nature’s benevolence governed by a loving creator, so in evidence in early and medieval Christian thinkers, was abandoned during the modern period, especially under the influence of evolutionary theory, from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Nature, long interpreted by theologians as another “book,” second to that of scripture, that revealed something about God, came to be seen as governed by the struggle for existence, a realm where the survival of the fittest and self-assertion counted more than self-sacrifice. This disenchantment with nature was expressed by Tennyson when he wrote in his poem *In Memoriam* LVI:

Who trusted God was love indeed  
and love Creation’s final law—  
Tho’ nature, red in tooth and claw  
With ravine, shriek’d against his creed.

Some scientists acknowledge the presence of an infinite, eternal energy in the cosmos, but is this energy identical with what we mean by love? It is not easy to proceed from the experience of the natural world to the nature of God, especially as nature speaks with two voices, that of goodness, support, and nourishment, and that of ruthlessness and brute, savage force expressed in fire, flood, tempests, and earthquakes, to which we are still subject today in spite of the immense growth of our scientific knowledge of the natural world. Even with all the scientific data available now, the meaning of nature is by no means self-evident. The mystery of the universe is not unequivocally made clear to those who study it, as is evident from the fierce debates among scientists. The meaning of the universe and

of nature is open to widely varying interpretations, even when there is agreement on factual scientific data. For some religious scientists, creative evolution is one signature of God's many revelations. The great epic of evolution *can* be read as a rise of spirit and a way of unfolding God's purpose and ultimate goal, as Teilhard maintained and the Anglican Henry Drummond before him, when he wrote in *The Ascent of Man* (1894, 276–81), "Love is not a late arrival, an after-thought with creation. It is not a novelty of a romantic civilization. It is not a pious word of religion. Its roots began to grow with the first cell of life that budded on this earth." It is "the supreme factor in the Evolution of the world. . . . The Struggle for the Life of Others is the physiological name for the greatest word of ethics—Other-ism, Altruism, Love."

Yet the evidence is very conflicting at best, and many people may side more easily with Tennyson's than with Drummond's view. Tennyson wrote, "God is love, transcendent and all-pervading! We do not get *this* faith from Nature or the world. If we look at Nature alone, full of perfection and imperfection, she tells that God is disease, murder and rapine" (Tennyson 1897, i.314).

It is true that the idea of love stems from religion, not from science or from nature. According to Christian belief, for example, "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and creates and sustains all things in love. All finite love flows from God's infinite love, even though human beings may not always be conscious of this ultimate origin of all love. If love is God's very essence, eternal love subsists at the heart of all things and manifests itself through them. But the principle that love is the ultimate reality of everything is widely contested, and rejection of this love is part of the spiritual conflict through the ages. The acceptance of this principle of love can lead to faith and hope, to optimism and love of life, whereas its rejection produces pessimistic negation. It belongs to the heart of Christian belief that transcendent love is the creator and sustainer of the world and that love pulsates through all of life as ceaseless energy of the divine Spirit operating in nature and humanity. Yet many people hold such faith centered on the powers of love to be a delusion; numerous scientists will reject the idea that we can analyze the forces of love just as we have analyzed the forces of nature. Love as a cultural and historical phenomenon may be open to study, but how to approach and examine love as an *energy*, as both Sorokin and Teilhard have suggested?

The idea of energy holds a central position in Teilhard's thought. Two volumes of his collected essays bear the titles *Human Energy* (1969) and *Activation of Energy* (1970). The second title points clearly to the most important question of how to kindle, nourish, and increase the most vital energy resources for the human community. He was so concerned with this question that late in life he dreamed of founding an "Institute of Human Energetics," which bears some comparison with Sorokin's "Harvard

Research Center in Creative Altruism,” except that the latter existed from 1949 to 1959, whereas Teilhard’s idea was only briefly put into practice after his death.

What is *energy*? If love is a kind of energy and its power is to be studied by science, it has to be systematically analyzed and examined. When energy is defined as “the ability to do work,” people think of physical forms of energy, and it is primarily these physical forms with which science and engineering are concerned and which can be fully quantified.<sup>2</sup> It is important, however, to distinguish energy from energy sources. As Wayne Kraft explains,

A source is something capable of providing energy whereas energy is that which is actually released from a source. Energy is dynamic, not static. It is something intangible which is transferred or transmitted from one entity to another, from a source to a receiver. We can perceive the effects of energy, but not energy itself. . . . Energy is a concept, a mental construct, an abstraction. Physical energy, indeed any kind of energy, is not tangible but is nevertheless very real. (Kraft 1988, 4)

Teilhard gave the generic term “tangential energy” to all these physical forms of energy (mechanical, chemical, thermal, nuclear, and so on). But besides physical energy, there is also mental and spiritual energy, which he called “radial energy.”<sup>3</sup> Love is a higher form of energy “different from tangential energy because it cannot be measured or described in physical terms. Yet it *is* a form of energy because it is a power. It gives life, effects change and can control the lower forms of energy” (Kraft 1988, 8). Sorokin spoke of the need “to study the superorganic ‘energies of man’ [an expression taken from William James] in all their personal, cultural, and social manifestations” (Sorokin 1948, 196) and to work for the “improvement of the production of love energy” (Sorokin [1954] 2002, 39; see the whole of chap. 3, pp. 36–46). Before I examine each thinker’s specific approach to love energy and show where they are similar or different, I first want to say something about their respective backgrounds, which, in spite of profound differences, share some surprisingly similar patterns.

Both were deeply attracted to the beauty and mysteries of nature. Teilhard grew up in the volcanic mountain region of the Auvergne and later was strongly drawn to the deserts and oceans he experienced on his travels and scientific expeditions. Sorokin spent his childhood in the northernmost part of the Arctic Circle, leading a nomadic life in an immense primeval forest where he experienced “a variety of trees and bushes,” “huge rivers and lakes . . . flowering meadows and fields . . . in the summer, and pure white snow in the winter.” The endless forests were to him like “cathedrals of nature” where he spent many an hour “fascinated by their majesty, their mystery, and their God-given Beauty.”<sup>4</sup>

Both had a strong religious and mystical bent. Teilhard’s was first nourished by his mother’s great interest in the Christian mystics and then fully developed through his religious vocation to the priesthood and through

becoming a Jesuit. For Sorokin, it was his early environment of working as an icon painter and restorer of churches with his father and brother, his participation in the Orthodox liturgy and choirs, and his frequent discussions with Orthodox clergy in rural Russia that made him spiritually sensitive to religious ideas long before he received a formal education in the urban centers of St. Petersburg and Moscow.

Both assign an important place to religion and mysticism in human life and see it as a major source for nurturing the powers of love. Both also experienced a brief attraction to asceticism when young. Sorokin experimented with being a hermit but abandoned this as unsuccessful; instead he fully immersed himself in the world by joining revolutionary Russian politics. Teilhard as a young novice was much attracted to giving up science for a contemplative religious life. But a wise novice master counseled him that he could express his love for God most by developing his natural talents to the full rather than by excluding the world.

Most surprisingly, both experienced war, and in Sorokin's case also revolution, as the formative matrix for their ideas on love, harmony, and the need for a higher integration of the human community. Teilhard's creative ideas came to birth during the First World War, and Sorokin's sociological work on wars, revolutions, and the crisis of civilization culminated in his taking a new direction after the Second World War and studying the transformative powers of altruistic love. He called it *The Reconstruction of Humanity* (the title of a book published in 1948), whereas Teilhard spoke of the emergence of the *noosphere* since the 1920s. This newly coined word described a new layer of thought, action, and love arising out of the biosphere and covering the globe with a new web of connections that could best be strengthened by the bonds of love, so that greater human unity and integration would be achieved. Sorokin looked for an integral truth, an integral philosophy based on the combined use of three sources: science, reason, and intuition. Teilhard also used a threefold pattern, combining "physics [or science], metaphysics, and mysticism"<sup>5</sup> and seeking a *via tertia*, a third or new way ahead for human life on earth. These striking comparisons deserve a far more detailed analysis than I can give here.

Also remarkably similar is that the very originality of these two thinkers and their audacity in combining scientific and spiritual quests and questions led, regrettably, to marginalization in their respective disciplines. Rigorously applied disciplinary boundaries excluded Sorokin from much of sociology and Teilhard from most of theology and the study of religion. Both were castigated for seeking answers in mysticism rather than science, and the works of both suffered much neglect and are no longer readily available in print. But perhaps the combined force of their powerful thoughts on love as the most energizing source for human integration, peace, and unity will stimulate renewed interest in both Teilhard and Sorokin that could help us to try out new solutions for our present global crisis.



I now discuss the essential features of each thinker's approach to love, beginning with Teilhard.

#### TEILHARD'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHENOMENON OF LOVE

As explained in his magnum opus, *The Human Phenomenon*, Teilhard's scientific research orientation made him wish to study all phenomena with the same intellectual rigor and attention, from the smallest to the largest and the most complex. He wanted to study the whole human phenomenon in all its aspects, set within the large context of cosmic evolution and the history of life. His study proceeds from prelife to life, to thought, and then to "superlife." A scientific study of the development of the human requires not only the most detailed scientific analyses but also larger syntheses. A comprehensive study of the human phenomenon must include the systematic study of the phenomena of thought and of love and also the careful investigation of the phenomena of religion, spirituality, and even mysticism. These aspects are all closely interrelated. Here I can only briefly discuss Teilhard's approach to the phenomenon of love.

Love, for him, is a thread that stretches to the heart of the world. Like all the other themes of his work, it is deeply rooted in the experiences and personal encounters of his life. Reflections on love appear in his earliest writings, the *Writings in Time of War* (1916–19) and recur again and again throughout most of his essays until the last ones, "The Heart of Matter" (1950) and "The Christic," written in 1955. To fully explore the richness and depth of this theme, one would have to not only trace his thoughts but also root them in their experiential matrix by connecting them to his personal relationships and friendships throughout his life.

Teilhard criticized the traditional concept of love as too static, too "spiritualised," too divorced from its cosmic roots, from natural passion, in which all love, including the love of God, has its starting point. He spoke of "the transformation of love" whereby love itself is undergoing a *change of state*, which we have to study as systematically as any other aspect of the human phenomenon, for love not only makes possible and deepens personal development but is equally necessary for the development of society. As he wrote in his essay "The Grand Option,"

Love has always been carefully eliminated from realist and positivist concepts of the world; but sooner or later we shall have to acknowledge that it is the fundamental impulse of Life. . . . with love omitted there is truly nothing ahead of us except the forbidding prospect of standardisation and enslavement—the doom of ants and termites. It is through love and within love that we must look for the deepening of our deepest self, in the life-giving coming together of humankind. Love is the free and imaginative outpouring of the spirit over all unexplored paths. It links those who love in bonds that unite but do not confound, causing them to discover in their mutual contact and exaltation capable, incomparably more than any arrogance of solitude, of arousing in the heart of their being all that they possess of uniqueness and creative power. (Teilhard 1959, 54f.)

Love is a fire both human and divine. Tracing the evolution of the phenomenon of love, he saw love as a cosmic energy, a universal form of attraction linked to the inwardness of all things. In a general sense love is thus the most universal, the most powerful, the most mysterious of cosmic energies, central to the understanding of personalization and socialization. Teilhard wrote a great deal on the love of the world *and* the love of God. The dedication to his famous book *The Divine Milieu* reads “For those who love the world.” He passionately loved the world, that is, first the natural world and the cosmos rather than the social and personal world, to which he addressed his thought only later. As a young man he experienced a great tension between these two kinds of love, but he came to see that the love of God can be achieved only through a love of the world and of people. He saw it as his particular task to integrate and thereby transform the two loves into a sense of fullness and plenitude, and he considered it his mission to make other people see the great power and energy of these intertwined loves—the love of the world, understood as the love of nature and the love of human beings, combined with a love of something greater than ourselves, something Absolute and Divine.

The most comprehensive study of Teilhard’s all-embracing, dynamic vision of love has been undertaken by the German theologian Mathias Trennert-Hellwig (1993), who discusses love in relation to “physics, metaphysics and mysticism,” based on the three parts of Teilhard’s “fundamental vision” explained in his 1948 essay “My Fundamental Vision” (in Teilhard 1975, 163–208). These terms refer to the overall areas of science, philosophical thought, and religious practice, indicating that Teilhard’s approach to love involved empirical investigations, theoretical conceptualizations, and practical applications.

Another way of approaching Teilhard’s understanding of love is to follow the threefold division “cosmic-human-divine” that he uses in other essays, for example in “The Heart of Matter.” To begin with, he saw love as a cosmic energy, a mysterious force working toward the attraction and unification of divergent elements into more complex forms. We may think of love only in a rudimentary sense when considering the fusion of atoms, molecules, and cells into greater, more complex units on their way toward the emergence of life. Using “love” in this context might be regarded as inappropriate, but Teilhard wanted to express both the continuity as well as the specificity of human beings in relation to other species, all of which are marked in different degrees by processes of association and unification. For him the “physical structure of the universe is love” and “the manifestation of this fundamental power” reveals itself “to our consciousness in three successive stages: in woman (for man), in society, in the All—by the sense of sex, of humanity and of the cosmos” (from “Sketch of a Personalistic Universe” in Teilhard 1969, 72). This quotation expresses how he sees the sense of sexuality, the sense of humanity, and the cosmic sense as closely

interwoven in the phenomenon of love. All three have a structurally essential place and are interrelated in the full development of love. In his essay “The Spirit of the Earth” he links the human “sense of the earth,” what we today would call the globe or the planet, to love, to a search for greater human unity and the need for more scientific research:

Love is the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces. After centuries of tentative effort, social institutions have externally dyked and canalized it . . . the moralists have tried to submit it to rules. . . . Socially, in science, business and public affairs, men pretend not to know it, though under the surface it is everywhere. Huge, ubiquitous and always unsubdued—this wild force seems to have defeated all hopes of understanding and governing it. It is therefore allowed to run everywhere beneath our civilization. We are conscious of it, but all we ask of it is to amuse us, or not to harm us. Is it truly possible for humanity to continue to live and grow without asking itself how much truth and energy it is losing by neglecting its incredible power of love? (Teilhard 1969, 32f.)

For humanity it is now a question of not only how to survive on the planet but how to develop further as a human community and reach a higher form of life together, what Teilhard calls a “superlife.” In reflecting on this in *The Human Phenomenon*, Teilhard devotes a chapter to “Love Energy,” where he writes:

Taken in its full biological reality, love (namely the affinity of one being for another) is not unique to the human being. It represents a general property of all life, and as such it embraces all the varieties and degrees of every form successively taken by organized matter. . . .

Humanity, the spirit of the Earth, the synthesis of the individual and peoples, the paradoxical reconciliation of the element and the whole, of unity and multitude—for all these things, said to be so utopian, yet which are so biologically necessary, to actually take shape in the world, is not all we need to do, to imagine that our power of loving develops until it embraces the totality of men and women and of the Earth?

With love of spouse, love of children, love of friends, and to some degree, love of country, we often imagine that we have exhausted the various forms of natural loving. But precisely the most fundamental form of passion is missing from this list. . . . The passion of cosmic affinity, and as a result the cosmic sense.

A love that embraces the entire universe is not only something psychologically possible; it is also the only complete and final way in which we can love. (Teilhard 1999, 188, 189, 190)

Recent scientific discoveries “with their unitary perspectives” have given a decisive impetus “to our sense of the world, our sense of the Earth, and our sense of the Human” (1999, 190), but the human community needs to draw more closely together and create a greater unity, a task helped by the radiating attraction of the center of the universe, which Teilhard calls the Omega Point, and which is not unlike what Sorokin describes as “the supra-conscious.” At the human level, Teilhard spoke of the spiritualization of love whereby lovers converge on to the same divine center, thereby creating a love that is both universal and personal. The idea of “super-love” is

linked to a “super-center,” which Teilhard calls Christ-Omega. Linked to this is the specific form of Christian love, the love of the neighbor expressed through charity. Teilhard has some very moving passages on the phenomenon of Christian love, which he describes as “a specifically new state of consciousness.” He considers the dynamic of love one of the most distinctive elements of Christianity. For Teilhard, this fire of Christianity burned most ardently in a mysticism of love and union centered on the love of God in Christ but expressed in a new way.

Is this “rediscovery of fire”—the analysis of the powerful and transformative energies of love—possible in the realm of science and in the larger context of our contemporary society and culture? I simply pose this question. Teilhard often pointed to new directions but did not always provide the necessary details of how to reach these goals. After the Second World War he gave these matters considerably more attention, inquiring into “The Directions and Conditions of the Future” (Teilhard 1959, 227–37)<sup>6</sup> and the available alternatives and necessary choices for human action. Already in 1937 he had devoted a long essay to “Human Energy” (1969, 113–62), where he discussed “the conscious organization of human energy,” its maintenance and increase, describing love as “a higher form of human energy.” I cannot analyze the complex arguments of this important essay here, but I do want to quote a few passages from it. He writes about the control of energies and asks: “After oil, water, oil, what next?” (1969, 133)

At present the majority of men do not yet understand force . . . except in its most primitive and savage form of war. This is perhaps why it is necessary for us to continue for some time still to manufacture ever greater and more destructive weapons. . . . But may the moment come (and it will come) when the masses realize that the true human victories are those over the mysteries of matter and life. . . .

Spiritualized energy . . . is the flower of cosmic energy. It is consequently the most interesting part of human energy for organization. . . .

Paradoxically, love . . . has hitherto been excluded from any rational systematisation of the energy of man. . . . Love, like thought, is still in full growth in the noosphere. The excess of its growing energies over the daily diminishing needs of human propagation becomes every day more manifest. And love is therefore tending in a purely hominized form, to fill a much larger function than the simple urge of reproduction. Between man and woman a specific and mutual power of spiritual sensitisation and fertilization is probably still slumbering. It demands to be released. . . . Its awakening is certain. Expansion . . . of an ancient power. . . . (1969, 135, 128, 129)

After the Second World War, when Teilhard lived in Paris, he became involved in some pioneering efforts of interreligious dialogue. At one of the meetings in 1950 he gave a lecture on “The Zest for Living”—*le goût de vivre*—which is absolutely necessary for the further development of the earth community. In this context he comments, “It is . . . a strange prospect . . . that all over the earth the attention of thousands of engineers and economists is concentrated on the problem of world resources of coal, oil

or uranium—and yet nobody . . . bothers to carry out a survey of the zest for life: to take its ‘temperature’, to feed it, to look after it, and . . . to increase it” (Teilhard 1970, 236). Here he sees an important role for “the combined effort of religions” (p. 238) and their “mystical currents” to move forward “the general movement of planetary hominization” (p. 240) and to disclose to the world in its most heightened form “love, as an effect of ‘grace’ and ‘revelation’” (p. 242). Love is a “higher form of zest” (p. 243). Such an approach to the “zest for life” shows “a supremely intimate bond between mysticism, research, and biology” (p. 242).

Teilhard applied his ideas about love energy to global society. Many external forces of compression and revolutionary means of communication have created new links among humanity, but external forces alone are not enough. They have to be strengthened by more internal, spiritual forces of attraction and unification, by the powers of love among human beings. He speaks of “creative union,” which allows for unity-in-diversity where the forces of greater personalization and socialization are held in balance.<sup>7</sup> He understands humanity as an organic collectivity; the noosphere as a sphere of reflective consciousness, creative links, human sympathy, and collaboration is a further development, a flowering of the biosphere. Just as biological evolution has led to a global equilibrium of the biosphere, a further cultural evolution must eventually lead to an equilibrium of global humanity. But this does not happen automatically; the future is a human task and responsibility that can be met only by drawing on all available energy resources—physical, mental, moral, and spiritual—and love energy is the most tremendous power of all. These ideas invite further systematic analysis, which I do not undertake here.

Comparing Teilhard’s thought on love energy with key ideas found in Sorokin’s work, many striking parallels become immediately evident.

#### SOROKIN’S APPROACH TO CREATIVE, ALTRUISTIC LOVE

Sorokin has been described by biographer Barry V. Johnston as “the most widely published and translated sociologist in history” (Johnston 1995, ix), but one would hardly think so, considering the relative silence about his work at the present time. Johnston also speaks of him as “one of the most erudite, stimulating, and controversial figures in the history of sociology” who “made substantial contributions to the study of rural sociology, social mobility, war and revolution, altruism, social change, the sociology of knowledge, and sociological theory.” Yet his career was “largely out of step with the sociological community. . . . [Sorokin was] viewed by some as a leader and by others as an outcast. His search was for a body of ideas, founded on historical and sociological understanding, that could address the crises of modernity and provide principles and strategies for human emancipation” (Johnston 1996, 3). Whenever sociologists do discuss

him, it is largely in relation to his earlier work in empirical sociology, on the basis of which he was appointed in 1930 to the founding Chair in Sociology at Harvard University. His pioneering research on altruism during his last ten years at Harvard (1949–59), when he established the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism, is either ridiculed or completely ignored by most sociological commentators.

As Roger William Westcott has perceptively stated, Sorokin “was a marginal man in several different senses.” Ethnically he was half Russian and half Komi, a small ethnic group in northern Russia steeped in rich folklore and myths, with beliefs in nature spirits and the power of shamans; politically he was estranged from both the czarist autocracy and the communist revolutionaries; and intellectually “he was out of step with sociological functionalism and the technocratic scientism” that increasingly dominated Harvard in the 1940s and 1950s (Johnston 1996, Preface, viii). When he moved from sociology and psychology into philosophy, history, economics, and theology, developing his theory of cultural change and the dynamic of civilizations in the late 1930s,<sup>8</sup> he was written off as a philosopher of history with perhaps little to say to scientific sociologists, a “cacophonous pioneer” (Johnston 1995, xi) with rather odd ideas, even before he had begun the study of altruism.

Sorokin’s key texts in sociology (1928; 1937–41; 1947), on which his international reputation is based, do not discuss the concept of love. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that sociologists have not commented on his more specialized works on altruistic love of his later years. These ideas are first sketched in *The Reconstruction of Humanity* (1948), then applied in his study on *Altruistic Love: A Study of American Good Neighbors and Christian Saints* (1950), and examined in great detail in his magisterial work *The Ways and Power of Love* ([1954] 2002) and the symposia published by the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism. Because Sorokin considered his wide-ranging theories as an “integral philosophy,” wherein theories of personality, civilizations, and cultures and their dynamic of ongoing change and transformation are closely interdependent, it is necessary to mention these briefly in order to understand the wider context of his thought on altruistic love.

Sorokin disagreed profoundly with Freudian psychology and proposed a different theory of personality wherein he distinguishes between the *biologically unconscious*, the *bioconscious*, and the *socioconscious*, explaining the different human needs, drives, energies, and activities of human beings. Beyond these he postulates a still higher level of *supraconscious* energies and activities where genuinely creative love originates and is linked to a transcendent source of *supraconsciousness*, the ultimate source of all love, called God, Heaven, Tao, Supreme Wisdom, or Inner Light ([1954] 2002, 127). It is from this ultimate source that the “eminent apostles of love”—

Buddha, Jesus, Gandhi, Simone Weil, or Dorothy Day, to cite some random names from the many examples he gives—have nourished their selfless love for others.

Sorokin's all-embracing philosophy of history, following in the tradition of Edward Gibbon, Oswald Spengler, and Arnold Toynbee, sees civilizations and cultures as unities with limited life cycles. Their growth and decline is marked by what he calls *ideational*, *idealistic*, and *sensate* stages. The ideational stage of culture is based on authority and faith and tends toward the mystical and intellectual; the sensate phase encourages and depends on the natural sciences and is oriented toward the material and empirical; the idealistic stage is a mixture of the two. According to Sorokin, Western civilization is in the last stages of a post-medieval, sensate culture, now entering a traumatic transitional period of great crisis where selfishness and altruism are strongly polarized. He advocates the necessity and possibility of achieving consensus and peace in contemporary society through love and mutual aid, which can be systematically promoted through a study of nonsexual, altruistic love as a science that he sometimes called *amitology*, although not in his book *The Ways and Power of Love*. Johnston has described Sorokin's "amitology" as "the applied science or art of developing friendship, mutual aid, and love in individual and intergroup relations." It focused on "determining the characteristics of the altruistic personality; the techniques for developing and using love as a force in social interaction, the influence of 'significant others' on prosocial relationships; and the characteristics of an environment that promote altruistic action" (Johnston 1995, 191).<sup>9</sup>

Sorokin's ideas about love must be seen against the wider background of earlier Russian discussions of altruism that began with Russia's first philosopher Chaadayev (1794–1856) who, in turn, had been influenced by European continental Catholic social philosophies. He was the first to introduce the problem of "egoism" in relation to altruism into the Russian intellectual debate.<sup>10</sup> The theme was then taken up by Dostoyevsky and by Solovjev (especially in his book *The Meaning of Love*), whose direct influence Sorokin acknowledges. The Russian discussion of love related to the social question of how to build a unified humanity, whether conceptualized in traditional Christian religious terms as "the kingdom of God," "the body of Christ," or "*sobornost*," an "all-unity," an ultimately mystical idea of corporate life and organic unity in which each individual, while retaining personal freedom and integrity, can at the same time share in the common life of the whole—an idea particularly applied to fellowship in the Orthodox Church. Solovjev, like Teilhard, placed love in an evolutionary context and taught that a selfless, altruistic love will lead to the unification of humanity and that this unification needs to be both a physical and a spiritual reality.

Sorokin began to turn his thoughts more explicitly to love during the Second World War. In 1941 he published *The Crisis of Our Age*,<sup>11</sup> frequently reprinted since, in which he spoke of “the twilight of sensate culture” and the end of industrial civilization as we have known it but refers little to love. It is in *The Reconstruction of Humanity*, published in 1948 and dedicated to Gandhi, that he first outlines his theory of creative altruism after dismissing “quack cures for war and impotent plans for the future.”<sup>12</sup> He looks at cultural and social factors of altruism and egoism and devotes the last part of his study to “personal factors of creative altruism,” advocating the “methods and techniques of the great masters of altruism” who provide us with powerful exemplars for “the altruization of man” and with “great systems” for “the transfiguration of man” (1948, 223–24).

Summarizing his diagnosis of the calamities of our contemporary sensate culture, Sorokin writes:

Since, besides the complexity of mental phenomena, the main reasons for our helplessness in rendering man creatively altruistic are the neglect of these phenomena by science during the past four centuries, the wrong conception of man and the socio-cultural universe entertained by this science, and the disregard of the existing body of Oriental and Occidental experience in the field of the superconscious, the first remedial steps evidently consist in the correction of these grave defects. . . .

An incomparably greater proportion of scientific research and cognitive effort must be devoted from now on to the study of the superorganic “energies of man”. . . . If during the next fifty years no important discovery should be made in the field of natural science, this would not seriously matter. But if our knowledge and control of man’s highest energies are not markedly expanded, this will mean a real catastrophe. For the sake of man’s very survival, the governments, foundations, universities, private endowers of research funds, and science itself must shift the bulk of their resources and activities to this field. A series of research institutions should be established. The most productive minds should be dedicated to this purpose. (1948, 196)

Sorokin advocates a threefold change—that of culture, of social institutions, and of human beings themselves—and the way he speaks of the institutional changes in the above quotation resonates with some remarks made more recently by Thomas Berry (1999). Berry argues that to create a viable Earth community and a viable human future, the politics, education, and financial arrangements around the globe, that is to say governance, universities, and corporations, need fundamental restructuring, and we need “to reinvent the human” and to rediscover the spiritual sense of the universe.

Sorokin describes the methods of “the great altruists,” of “all the great mystics, stoics, ascetics and other true followers” of genuine altruistic love, in the following words:

As a preliminary condition for obtaining control of the unconscious and conscious by the superconscious and for unlocking the forces of the superconscious, they unanimously demand the liberation of a person from all forms of egoism and the



development of a love for the Absolute, for all living beings, for the whole universe, in its negative aspect of not causing pain to anybody by thought, word, or deed, and in its positive aspect of unselfish service, devotion, and help to and sacrifice for others.

They all unanimously say that the practice of kindness and love is one of the best therapies for curing many mental disorders; for the elimination of sorrow, loneliness, and unhappiness, for the mitigation of hatred and other antisocial tendencies; and above all, for the ennoblement of human personality, for release in man of his creative forces, and for the attainment of union with God and peace with oneself, others, and the universe. (1948, 224, 225)

Sorokin advocates “effortful self-education in altruism on the part of every individual”—without it no social transformation is possible. But he also envisages “a well-planned modification of our culture and social institutions through the concerted actions of individuals united in groups merging into larger federations and associations.” Their tasks are defined as first “to increase our knowledge and wisdom and to invent better, more efficient techniques for fructifying our culture and institutions and rendering human beings more noble and altruistic,” and second, “through this increased knowledge and these perfected techniques to draw up more adequate plans for the total process of transformation . . . and to convince ever-larger sections of humanity of the urgency, feasibility, and adequacy of the proposed reconstruction” (1948, 234, 235).

From now on Sorokin was passionately devoted to the theme of altruistic love, as can be seen from the further ramification of his researches and the tremendous amount of work he put into the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism. The definition, forms, and gradations of altruism, its methods and techniques, presented in *The Reconstruction of Humanity*, were further elaborated, refined, and systematically supported by a truly dazzling amount of historical, psychosocial, philosophical, and cross-cultural data. His massive scholarship and penetrating perception are clearly evident from the more than five hundred pages of *The Ways and Power of Love* ([1954] 2002), in which his earlier work found its mature expression and crowning glory. Its range of ideas and historical examples is truly breathtaking. No other sociologist has ever mastered so many facts and wrestled with so many phenomena from different world faiths. Sorokin’s study is unique in the way it analyzes and explains the emergence, growth, and effects of transformative altruistic love, supported by numerous cross-cultural examples. It also is unique in its systematic enquiry into how the production of “love-energy” can be significantly increased and actively used as a source of personal and social transformation.

Not unlike Teilhard, Sorokin writes that “we know about ‘love energy’ much less than about light, heat, electricity, and other forms of physical energy.” He maintains that “Unselfish love has enormous creative and therapeutic potentialities, far greater than most people think. Love is a life-giving force, necessary for physical, mental, and moral health.” It is

the universality of love for all which is essential, for “only the power of unbounded love practiced in regard to *all human beings* can defeat the forces of interhuman strife, and can prevent the pending extermination of man by man on this planet” ([1954] 2002, Sorokin’s Preface, xii, xi, xii).

Sorokin distinguishes between seven aspects of love—religious, ethical, ontological, physical, biological, psychological, and social—all of which he discusses in considerable detail, although his main interest focuses on the psychosocial aspects of love. As Stephen Post has commented on Sorokin’s approach: “Methodologically committed to new scientific knowledge that can move our understanding of love forward, he was also attentive to a wider cosmic context and to the fullness of human experience and history” ([1954] 2002, Introduction, xviii).

The cosmic aspects of love are not worked out by Sorokin in any scientific detail, however, and do not compare with Teilhard’s attention to the physical and biological roots of love. Under “The Physical Aspect of Love” Sorokin simply writes one sentence: “According to Solovyev and others, the physical counterpart of love in the inorganic world is shown in all physical forces that unite, integrate, and maintain the whole inorganic cosmos in endless unities, beginning with the smallest unity of the atom and ending with the whole physical universe as one unified, orderly cosmos” (p. 8f.). This can hardly be compared with the detailed scientific analysis presented by Teilhard in *The Human Phenomenon*, although Sorokin has somewhat more to say on “The Biological Aspects of Love.” He speaks of “biological love energy” necessary for the maintenance of the species. Citing several authors, he mentions the relatively close balance between cooperative, altruistic tendencies and disoperative egoistic ones in biological organisms. But in the long run, “the group-centred, more altruistic drives are slightly stronger” (p. 9).

Particularly helpful is Sorokin’s distinction of the five dimensional variables of psychosocial love—the intensity, extensity, duration, purity, and adequacy of love. It is impossible to measure these variables on scales or present the details of Sorokin’s argument here, but it is striking to realize that a very intensive love may not be very extensive; it may only apply to one other person or a small group of persons. The “extensity of love ranges from the zero point of love of oneself only, up to the love of all mankind, all living creatures, and the whole universe.” There is a vast scale of extensities from “love of one’s own family, or a few friends, or love of all the groups one belongs to—one’s clan, tribe, nationality, nation, religious, occupational, political, and other groups and associations.” The maximal point of intensity, Sorokin says, is “the love of the whole universe (and of God)” (p. 16). The detailed analysis of the multidimensional aspects of love provides a helpful basis for further work.

Equally inspiring and challenging is Sorokin’s discussion of the “*production, accumulation and distribution of love energy.*” Viewing love “as one of

the highest energies known," he rightly points out that the generation of love has been given "little thought, time and effort" in practically all societies; "it still remains in the most rudimentary form, corresponding to the primitive manual technology of material production in preliterate tribes" (pp. 36, 37).

Until now little effort has been made in the human community to produce love deliberately beyond what is produced "naturally." Just as Teilhard was interested in "the technicians and engineers of the spirit" to calculate and attend to our "spiritual energy resources," Sorokin speaks of the "inventors and engineers of love production" (p. 38) who have helped to produce love in groups or in humanity at large, but this has happened spontaneously and haphazardly rather than deliberately. This shows an astounding lack of organized effort, and this neglect threatens the very future of humanity. So far, the family has been one of the most efficient agencies in producing altruistic love, but this love has to be extended beyond the family "for the human 'world market'" (p. 39).

Sorokin sketches a truly bold picture of the power of love and of the systematic possibility of developing, accumulating, and storing it for the benefit of individuals and communities. He speaks of the great geniuses, heroes, or apostles of love as "great power stations producing love for generations of human beings" (p. 40). But their example alone is not enough. What is needed is an increase in love production by the rank and file, by groups and institutions, in fact, by the total culture, so that "love, radiated by culture and by social institutions, would form a permanent atmosphere that would pervade all human beings from the cradle to the grave" (p. 45). Sorokin considers this to be not merely a utopian dream but something that can be socially engineered. Social and cultural "power systems of love" can be purposely created and produce all the love energy needed

for all the practical purposes of humanity: (a) for the prevention and elimination of crime, revolution, wars, and other forms of conflict where there is underlying hate, envy, and unhappiness; (b) for the maintenance and growth of man's creative activity; (c) for decreasing and eventually eliminating the worst forms of suffering, unhappiness, loneliness, illness and unnecessary death; (d) for making the whole world a friendly, warm, and inspiring cosmos for everyone and for all. (p. 45)

Sorokin has a marvelous chapter on the power of creative love as the mainspring of life in the individual and in social movements. Following that, he devotes more than the remaining two thirds of his book to different types of altruists, different ways of altruistic growth, and different techniques of the altruistic transformation of persons and groups. The practical examples he gives for these consist of Yoga techniques, spiritual techniques of early Christian monasticism, and practices of contemporary free brotherhoods, especially the Hutterites in the United States. These chapters provide what one might call "thick descriptions," but they lack overall integration into his love-energy theory. They neither fit nor can be easily

applied in practice among the manifold social groups that exist on our planet today.

Sorokin's concluding chapter provides a passionate plea for the transcendence of tribal egoism through an immense extension of love, the deliberate, planned creation of a universal altruism. He contends that the extension of love beyond tribal solidarity "does not require elimination of all interpersonal and intergroup dissimilarities. It requires only a thorough cleaning of individuals and groups from the poison of exclusive selfishness." Using medical metaphors, not unlike the Buddha long ago, Sorokin proposes a diagnosis of the ills of the human community and recommends a specific medicine to heal "sick humanity." He comments, "If this diagnosis is correct, can the prescription of the universal love be carried through? Can one indeed love equally every human being, the strangers and the enemies as much as the members of his family and friends? Is not such love a biological and psychological impossibility?" (pp. 462, 463)

Teilhard asked a similar question and found the answer in "the phenomenon of Christian love," exemplified in the mystics and saints. Sorokin's stance is similar in many ways; the sources of his thought on love also are deeply rooted in the Christian tradition and make repeated reference to the biblical Sermon on the Mount, to which Teilhard also refers. But Sorokin also gives practical advice in general terms and states categorically that

The extension of love over the whole of mankind neither means nor requires an equal distribution of love among all human beings. At its initial stage it means three things: first, that *everyone* loves the members of his family and the limited circle of his friends and acquaintances. . . . Second, universal love means that *everyone* must abstain from all actions harmful to any human being. . . . Third, it means that *everyone*, within his capacity, extends his loving hand beyond his special group to *everybody* who is in need of help and warm sympathy—first of all, in one's immediate community and second, in the whole human universe. . . . If each community does the same in regard to other communities in need of help, then the whole human population will be blessed by, at least, the minimum of love and vital help. . . . This extension of love can be done privately and publicly, in individual and social forms. ([1954] 2002, 463f.)

Such an extension of love can begin through an extension of existing "networks of love," but the more arduous task of the "solidarization of humanity" requires conscious scientific efforts, a great deal of scientific research, and new techniques of altruistic education. Sorokin's great visionary study on the transformative power of selfless, altruistic love concludes with an affirmation of "The Supreme Role of the Supraconscious in Moral Ennoblement of Mankind," making passing reference to the Orthodox idea of human "divinisation" (see p. 481). It is clear that the resources of religions are vital here, even though Sorokin expresses his ideas in more general terms, but with a strong conviction:

Cultivation and multiplication of the supraconscious genius in the human cosmos is possibly the most hopeful way for a creative solution of humanity's difficult problems. For this reason, the prevalent neglect of the supraconscious by scientists, scholars, governments, foundations, universities, and other agencies is not only shortsighted but truly ruinous. It undermines the most important roots of the most important tree in the human garden—its tree of creativity without which *Homo sapiens* would have been but one of the innumerable animal species.

... Without the supraconscious genius the main mission of humanity on this planet—its creative mission—cannot be successfully continued. Without its continuation, the human race is bound to degenerate. (p. 486f.)

On the last pages of his book Sorokin apodictically reiterates his conclusion of “the necessity of the transcendence of all tribal solidarities by the universal solidarity of mankind, if interhuman warfare is to be eliminated from the human universe,” finishing with the statement:

By the mysterious forces of destiny mankind is confronted with a stern dilemma: either to continue its predatory policies of individual and tribal selfishness that lead it to its inevitable doom, or to embark upon the policies of universal solidarity that brings humanity to the aspired for heaven on earth. It is up to everyone of us which of the two roads we prefer to choose. (p. 489)

Teilhard, too, often speaks about the choice of roads and the responsibility of the human community for its own social, moral, and spiritual transformation. The ideas of both thinkers invite more detailed critical analysis than can be given here.

I conclude with some brief comparisons and contrasts, leading to the most important question of all, namely, how we can apply the ideas about love energy in practice by performing “works of love.”

#### COMPARISON OF TEILHARD'S AND SOROKIN'S IDEAS

Read in conjunction with each other, Teilhard's and Sorokin's ideas about love energy display a remarkable parallelism and convergence of spirit in spite of some distinctive differences. As sociologist and social and cultural philosopher, Sorokin draws with great skill on the work of social scientists, historians, philosophers, and scholars of religion but not on natural scientists. Teilhard is little concerned with historical details but has greater strength in showing the cosmic and biological roots of the powers of attraction, unification, and complexification within the evolutionary epic of life leading to unifying love as the highest form of human energy. He also has more to say about the spiritual nature and mystical power of love in human-divine union, on which I comment elsewhere (see King 1980). By contrast, Sorokin's professional expertise and detailed understanding of the socio-psychological aspects of love are much greater than Teilhard's, and he proposes far more detailed plans for the systematic cultivation of love energy at the sociocultural level.

One aspect that Sorokin does not seem to attend to at all is the powerful attraction of love, including self-transcending and sacrificing love, between men and women, whereas Teilhard devotes considerable space to this and reflects many times on the connections between sexual and spiritual love. He defines “the Feminine” as “the Unitive” or “the Spirit of Union.” To appreciate the central importance of this element would require a separate critical assessment. Writing about his own development in his spiritual autobiography “The Heart of Matter” (1950),<sup>13</sup> he affirms in general terms that no spiritual maturity is possible without some emotional influence which will sensitize and stimulate the capacity for love: “every day supplies more irrefutable evidence that no man at all can dispense with the Feminine, any more than he can dispense with light, or oxygen, or vitamins” (1978, 59).

On the last pages of Sorokin’s autobiography *A Long Journey* (1963)<sup>14</sup> he mentions among his activities as an emeritus professor that he published in 1962 “Remarks on P. T. de Chardin’s *The Phenomenon of Man*” (p. 309), the only reference in his work to Teilhard I have been able to find. It is a discussion paper of just over five pages given at a session of the American Catholic Sociological Society on “Teilhard de Chardin and Sociology” in September 1962 and published that same year in *The American Catholic Sociological Review*. Sorokin’s comments on Teilhard are brief and somewhat dismissive if not arrogant, indicating that Teilhard said nothing in *The Human Phenomenon* Sorokin and others had not said before and that his theory of evolution was “not only similar but almost identical” to that of the Hindu thinker Sri Aurobindo. Nor were Teilhard’s views on love and “its unifying, integrating, harmonizing, creative role in cosmic, biological, social, mental and moral processes” new (1962, 332). Moreover, Sorokin claims that he and Teilhard share a similar conception of the phenomenon of man and that his own book *Society, Culture and Personality* (1947) defines “the superorganic form of reality in exactly the same way in which de Chardin defines his noosphere. Since this noosphere is a special field of study by psychosocial sciences we know about it far more and in much greater detail than de Chardin’s very sketchy outline of the noosphere informs us” (Sorokin 1962, 333).

Sorokin admits their basic affinity but claims prior and more solid knowledge of all that Teilhard has to say when he writes,

Since our conception of the noosphere and of the phenomenon of man happens to be quite congenial and similar to that of de Chardin, it is comprehensible also that for us as for him the fact of the emergence of man in the evolutionary process signifies a basically new phase in the life-process of this planet and in cosmic evolution. Therefore, in this point also de Chardin’s book hardly tells us anything new which we did not know. (p. 334)

In a rejoinder, French sociologist Paul Chombart de Lauwe from the Sorbonne, who contributed a substantial and very well informed paper on

Teilhard to the same conference and *Review* (1962), chided Sorokin for his insufficient knowledge of Teilhard's work, much of which was written between 1916 and 1955, some time before Sorokin's own ideas were developed. While disagreeing with Sorokin's critique, Chombart de Lauwe nonetheless felt that Sorokin emphasized the success of Teilhard's synthesis: "That everyone should find himself in Teilhard is confirmation of the importance of his work!" underlining "the contribution Teilhard's ideas can bring to sociologists" (pp. 336, 337).

Teilhard was certainly no specialist in the patterns of psychosocial dynamic of cultures and civilizations, the area where Sorokin had undertaken some of his greatest empirical work, but neither was Sorokin a specialist in evolutionary science and the paleontological history of humankind on Earth, where Teilhard's particular professional expertise and strength were grounded. Nor does Sorokin really understand the complex pattern of the noosphere in its close interaction with the biosphere. The empirical aspects of both thinkers' work will eventually be superseded by new research of other scholars and are thus of less lasting interest than their great original insights and powerful theoretical articulations about the immense potential of transformative love-energy for creating a more united, peaceful society on Earth. However motivated by practical social realities both thinkers were, there is no doubt that ultimately their prophetic vision is closely tied up with deeply religious and spiritual views, relating to the supraconscious in Sorokin's case and to Omega as the universal pole of attraction in Teilhard. How can their ideas then be applied in contemporary Western society, which is widely secular? How can people of different faiths and worldviews collaborate in performing works of love and seeking human "transfiguration"?

#### HOW TO PERFORM WORKS OF LOVE?

Is it actually possible to move from tribal and group egoism to universal altruism, as both Sorokin and Teilhard claimed and hoped? The ideas of both have often enough been derided, so what is their strength? The combined insights of their thoughts on love as the most powerful transformative energy source in human society and culture provides a remarkable convergence of ideas, as does their insistence on the need to study the production and use of this energy systematically and scientifically. At present we possess no further developments beyond Teilhard's and Sorokin conceptualization of "love-energy," but are scientists, as we know them today, open to the analysis of love?

It is predictable that there will be scientific supporters as well as opponents. To make real progress in the understanding and practical application of love as an energy source, the collaboration of many disciplines and institutions is needed. The rigor of scientific research must be combined with humanistic and religious wisdom, as both Sorokin and Teilhard

argued. Sorokin gave more examples from different faiths than Teilhard did, but he never looked at Islam and also seemed unaware of the fact that his extension of love from family and friends to an ever wider circle of beings in the universe forms an important part of some Buddhist meditation practices.

Today we know more about different faith and wisdom traditions around the world, and we have more advanced scientific knowledge at our disposal to attempt a real breakthrough in the systematic understanding and practice of love. As far as vocabulary is concerned, *love* seems to be a stronger and more energizing concept than *altruism*, for love covers more comprehensive meanings and has a more direct appeal through its interpersonal resonances. Love is also part of the title of The Institute for Research on Unlimited Love,<sup>15</sup> which is devoted to the investigation of altruism, compassion, and service. As mentioned earlier, its director considers Sorokin a “pioneer in the scientific study of unlimited love” (Post 2002, 10), and one could extend this accolade to Teilhard. For the ideas of both pioneers to become better known, more influential, and effective, I think we need a true summary of their thought, a succinct synthesis and explanation of what they meant by love energy, since only a few will study their large and difficult corpus of writings in depth. A simplified exposition of their thought on love, without losing any of its power and inspiration, could be ever so stimulating and helpful.

There are many social agencies of altruization already at work in the world today—in the areas of health, education, peace, and development work, in the activities of the different branches of the United Nations and the NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), in charities and religious organizations that work for mental health, greater happiness, and well-being of particular social groups (such as the elderly or those suffering from disabilities, social disadvantages, or particular diseases)—so that the family is not necessarily always the primary agency of teaching practical works of love, as Sorokin maintained. To strengthen and develop further what exists already, more coordination and collaboration is required across a far larger, global spectrum. Declarations such as the *Global Ethic* and the *Earth Charter*<sup>16</sup> are splendid instruments for greater conscientization and motivation, but we need above all more “noospheric institutions”<sup>17</sup> as active agents of practical, ethical, moral, and social change among all people.

At the social, intergroup, and planetary levels, the question is twofold: first, how to advance consciousness, experience, and critical reflection to a more inclusive understanding of the meaning of love, and second, how to translate such deeper understanding into reflective action and social praxis. Think how simple the tools of our Neolithic ancestors were to extend their range of action, social organization, and human experience as a group. Today we should ask ourselves what more sophisticated and complex tools we possess in our present global cultural system that can help us extend



our range of consciousness and action through the practice of altruism and creative “works of love” and take significant practical steps to overcome enmity through amity, as Sorokin envisaged, forging stronger bonds of love and attraction throughout the global human community.

From a religious perspective this will not be possible without drawing on all of the spiritual energy resources that humanity has accumulated over centuries and can now claim as its global heritage. Many passages on love could be quoted from the sacred writings of the world. I end by quoting from the Christian Bible: “Everyone who loves is born of God,” and “We love because God loved us first” (1 John 4:7, 19). These passages express well that love is both a gracious gift and an arduous task for humans. Love is one of the great hierophanies of the mysteries of God. The experience of love, of being loved, discloses something of the loving ground of all life and existence. But to love, to learn to love others and to love life itself, is also a task to aim for and to be practiced; love is indeed the highest commandment. We must follow this “law of love” far more observantly—for the better understanding of ourselves, for greater emancipation, collaboration, and mutual support, and for a life of more abundance and flourishing among the entire human community.

#### NOTES

1. A version of this article was presented at the Works of Love Conference: Scientific and Religious Perspectives on Altruism, 31 May–5 June 2003, Villanova University, Pennsylvania.
2. This discussion draws substantially on the excellent essay by R. Wayne Kraft, *Love as Energy* (1988).
3. Discussed in his well-known work *The Phenomenon of Man*, now retranslated as *The Human Phenomenon* (1999); see pp. 28–32 on “Spiritual Energy” and “The Problem of the Two Energies.”
4. Quoted from his Autobiography in Elena Sorokin’s article, “My Life with Pitirim Sorokin” (1975), 1.
5. See his essay “My Fundamental Vision” in Teilhard 1975, 163–208.
6. See also “The Grand Option,” “Turmoil or Genesis,” and “The Formation of the Noosphere” in the same volume.
7. See King 1976 (reprinted in King 1989, 45–63), where I have discussed Teilhard’s views in greater detail. See also my essay “Socialization and the Future of Humankind” (King 1989, 29–43).
8. See the four volumes of his *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (Sorokin 1937–41).
9. According to this source, Sorokin published a brief article on “Amitology as an Applied Science of Amity and Unselfish Love” (1951).
10. I am indebted to Dr. Beatrice de Bary Heinrichs for pointing out these historical links to me.
11. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1941, reprinted twelve times by 1956, and again in 1992.
12. This is the title of Part One of *The Reconstruction of Humanity* (1948).
13. The autobiographical essay is found in Teilhard 1978, also entitled *The Heart of Matter*, 15–79.
14. Chapter 15 of the autobiography describes The Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism.
15. Supported by the Templeton Foundation, this new Institute is located in the School of Medicine, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, and directed by Dr. Stephen Post.
16. The *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* was signed at the Parliament of the World Religions held in Chicago in 1993. The *Earth Charter* was developed through an international process

of consultation and approved by UNESCO, Paris, in March 2000; for more information see [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org).

17. These are both explained and advocated in Samson and Pitt 1999; see pp. 181–88, “The Noosphere and Contemporary Global Issues,” especially p. 184f.

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