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activating the
energies of love
as an ecological
response

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Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a French Jesuit as well as a paleontologist of significant academic repute. For Teilhard, the world was a spiritual as much as a physical reality and this union of both spiritual and material was especially observable in the human. Love was central to Teilhard's evolutionary vision and he optimistically believed that the universe was moving towards deeper spiritualisation and deeper 'amortization'. In Teilhard's view the universe as it develops through time is undergoing a transformation through this spiritual growth and development. Part of what constitutes and facilitates this growth was his idea of 'human energy'¹ most explicitly expressed in his book of the same name and of which love energy has the potential to play a large part.

THE 'SENSE OF THE EARTH'

In this book Teilhard speaks about the '*sense of the earth*'. The '*sense of the earth*' is "the passionate sense of common destiny that draws the thinking fraction [consciousness] of life ever further forward"². What this refers to is how humanity is unified not by family, country or race, but by the earth. With the discovery through the sciences of our shared origins (13.8 billion years ago) in addition to the discovery of time and history (Earth has an age and a history and the universe has an age and a history), we have learned that the universe is not static or 'fixed' but developing. Teilhard believed that as the universe develops so too is human psychology changing and that a new 'force' shaped by this understanding of 'common destiny' is emerging. This force has come 'just in time' he writes to

1 De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *Human Energy*. Great Britain: Collins, 1962

2 Ibid.,p 31

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control, excite and order the ‘newly freed’ energies of human unity, research and love. Through these three ‘newly freed’ energies and with this sense of common destiny, Teilhard believed humanity to be building a ‘spirit of the earth’.

In order to understand this force of human energy and its power to effect change, it is necessary to explain these *three* energies.

ENERGY OF HUMAN UNITY

The *first* of these ‘newly freed’ energies exercised on earth through the human is the energy of human unity. This is similar to the idea of a common destiny. Teilhard’s point is that the individual often instinctively seems to isolate and to distance herself from her fellow human being. This he attributes to a reluctance or nervousness when faced with a task of expansion. Teilhard goes on to state how our powers increase if, for example, in research or competition we feel affection, comradeship or team spirit. There is personal fulfilment and illumination on being admitted to and sharing in a common endeavour and spirit. For Teilhard such brief and pale illuminations give us a glimmering insight into the huge “power of joy and action”³ that is humanity and what Teilhard names the “human layer” of earth⁴.

As humans, we suffer and vegetate in our isolation and so we need a ‘higher impulse’ to force us beyond that dead point at which we become static. This ‘sense of the earth’ or common destiny Teilhard calls the irresistible pressure for uniting in a common enthusiasm. Pressure can be read in two ways, the pressure of the increasingly urgent ecological crisis⁵ and the innate pressure ‘to belong’ to something more than my own being. In our contemporary context the earth is evolving as a unit and humanity, whether we accept it or not, is involved in a common fate. Later Thomas Berry would articulate it much more clearly when he stated ‘we go into the future as a single sacred earth community – or we do not go into the future at all.’

ENERGY OF RESEARCH

The *second* newly freed energy is the ‘energy of research.’ Teilhard viewed research and, in particular, scientific research as one of

3 Ibid. p 35

4 Teilhard uses the term ‘human layer’, and his is very much a collective interpretation of humanity. In other writings he uses the words species or phylum, cf. *The Human Phenomenon*. Teilhard was hugely anthropocentric in his view and indeed held an often unwarranted optimism about humanity and the history of humanity

5 This is not a pressure that Teilhard would have included, being unaware of the possibility of such an ecological crisis, in addition to the fact that his views did not include the other than human community and remained singularly anthropocentric.

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the highest functions of humanity, which he believed illustrated, through its constant pressure and probing of reality, a supreme faith in 'Being'. This desire to 'know' was for Teilhard a form of worship. It also emphasised for Teilhard that the world functions through the production of living beings. At the same time, and this is most relevant today and thus worth inclusion, the human has in a manner become *subordinate* to these productions. Not only the computer, the machine, construction and money but also things which are considered luxuries or curiosities such as transport, travel and 'things'. Teilhard writes and it merits reproduction in full:

'Too much iron, too much wheat, too many automobiles – but also too many books, too many observations; and also too many diplomas, technicians and workmen – and even too many children. The world cannot function without producing living beings, food, ideas. But its production is more and more patently exceeding its powers of absorption and assimilation. Here again, as in the case of love, we must ask what this excess production means. Is the world condemned as it grows to automatic death by stifling beneath its own excessive weight?'⁶

Teilhard's confidence in an earth unaffected by such gross production is troubling and indeed out-dated. His view that the world functions by producing living beings and the insight that these living beings share a common destiny is the point we are concerned with. It is this common destiny or 'sense of the earth' that provides humanity with the reason he states for their abundance of love and ways in which to effect it. In other words, the earth ties us unbidden to a common home, environment and quality of life. We drink the same water, breathe the same air, share the same sunlight and walk on the same land, the land that grows *all* our food. Our destiny is unavoidably involved. Our interaction and involvement, in terms of research, production and development will impact not just on human life but on the planet in its entirety.

ENERGY OF LOVE

For Teilhard, *love* is the attractive force of the world and the way in which it seeks unification. Not only does love make possible and help to deepen personal development but Teilhard also saw it as necessary for the spiritual development of the world. Teilhard believed love, as human psychology, to be undergoing a change of state and so needing to be studied like any other phenomenon. In

6 Ibid., p37

The Human Phenomenon he defines it simply as “the affinity of one being for another”⁷. He writes that “if some internal propensity to unite did not exist, even in the molecule...it would be impossible for love to appear higher up in ourselves”⁸. This indicates that the attractive energy of love has always been present, however latent, in the universe.

THE EVOLUTION OF LOVE

Teilhard attempts to trace a brief outline of the *evolution* of this attractive force of love. He argues that at the level of the molecule, love is not a distinguishable element from the molecule but can be understood as chemical activity or relationships. It holds together the atoms that make the molecule up. It is a primitive and functional form of love and also worth noting, a practical form. Gradually through time, this attraction evolves. It becomes slightly more distinct although for a long period of time it remains confused with the function of reproduction. With the arrival of the mammal, it takes on a more explicitly identifiable form in the act of parental care and concern. With hominisation⁹, there are further developments.

Initially however, love is in Teilhard’s word ‘restricted’. This is so as it is only associated with, understood as, and moralised about in relation to producing children and the propagation of humanity. However because there is less need and desire today (in some societies) to propagate the species, love is free Teilhard argues to *serve* a much larger function. He writes that:

‘love ... has hitherto been excluded from any rational systematization of the energy of man [sic]. Empirically, morality has succeeded more or less successfully in codifying its practice with a view to the maintenance and material propagation of the race. But has anyone seriously thought that beneath this turbulent power (which is nevertheless well known to be the inspirer of genius, the arts and all poetry), a formidable creative urge has remained in reserve, and that man will only be truly man from the day when he has not only checked, but transformed, utilized and liberated it? Today, for our century avid to lose no energy and to control the most intimate psychological mechanism, light seems to be beginning to break. Love, like thought, is still in full growth in the noosphere. The excess of its growing energies

7 De Chardin Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. Appleton-Weber, Sarah (ed.). Great Britain: Sussex Academic Press, 2003, p188

8 Ibid.

9 The process of becoming human, the evolutionary development of human characteristics that differentiate hominids from primate ancestors

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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 to reproduction.’¹⁰

Here Teilhard describes love not only as something unique but as an energy inherent in the cosmos that is uniting people on a level that is *not* primarily physical but contributing toward an evolution of greater consciousness. The universe evolves in a physical manner but it is also increasing in consciousness and it is love that holds the key to this development. This love is most present in the realisation of our relatedness and so plays out in the way in which we relate to each other – human to human, human to earth and human to divine. Love for Teilhard is the most universal, the most powerful and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces. However, in restricting our understanding of it to the human world it has been reduced to a level of empiricism which is influenced by conceptions of matter that are out of date. The understanding of love has become too ‘static’ and ‘spiritualised’, too divorced from its cosmic roots, from natural passion, in which all love, including the love of God, has its starting point.”¹¹ Love, Teilhard insists, must finally be recognised as the cosmic force that it is.

‘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 world 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?’¹²

Love has transformed from an energy that is a basic binding attraction, to that which procreates, to that which ‘cares and takes care of’, to that which through the self-reflective human can *choose* to be expressed for no apparent biological end but for the joy of entering more deeply into being.

ACTIVATING THE ENERGY OF LOVE

I turn now to the concept of energy and I wish here to emphasis a point made by R. Wayne Kraft. He explains how we can perceive the effects of energy but not energy itself. No one can see a calorie

10 *Human Energy*, p 129

11 King, Ursula. Love – A Higher Form of Human Energy in the work of Teilhard de Chardin and Sorokin’ *Zygon*, vol. 39, no. 1, March 2004, p 86

12 *Human Energy*, p32

or feel a footpound. We can't hear a joule or touch a kilowatt. Thus energy is, in some manner, a mental construct. Physical energy is not tangible but it is however, very real. Food and fuel are *sources* of energy but they are not energy. For example, when we eat bread, we receive energy. But the bread is not energy. The bread is simply food – a source of energy. Wind that doesn't perform some kind of an action is not energy only an air current. A transformation must occur from the potential or actual energy source to the receiver in order to speak about energy in a meaningful way. An action, activity or transformation is necessary because energy is dynamic.

THE SEARCH FOR ENERGY

Historically our human quest for energy has led to ever older, more powerful and simpler sources of energy. Wood (biomass) was first used between 200,000 and 1.5 million years ago. Wood was substituted for coal around 1000 years ago and in the Industrial Revolution coal became the primary energy source. At this time the population was increasing as was the need for energy. The forests were disappearing with the onslaught of industry and coal seemed more plentiful, so increasingly more industries became dependent on it. The fossil fuels (petroleum/oil and natural gas) came much later in the late 1800's and early 1900's. In 1859 Edward L Drake drilled the world's first oil well in Texas which began the modern oil industry. In the past few decades only we have moved into the area of nuclear energy whose source is atomic. Nuclear power uses sustained nuclear fission (division) to generate heat and electricity. Most nuclear power points are powered by uranium and it remains a very controversial activity.

The point here is that the energy sources or 'resources' exploited first are historically the youngest. However, as the world has developed we have begun to use older and older sources. Trees on the surface of the planet have an age of decades or centuries. Fossil fuels formed with the earth are millions of years old. Uranium was formed around 6 billion years ago in supernova explosions but whose radioactive decay provides the main source of heat inside earth and can be found in rocks and the earth's crust. Hydrogen is the oldest and was formed when the universe was created, 13.8 billion years ago. So there is a pattern, humankind in our need and desire for energy to sustain life inevitably seeks more and more ancient sources. As we have moved from food to wood, to coal, to oil, to natural gas, to uranium, and to hydrogen, the energy density rises sharply. Energy density is the quantity or the amount of energy released per kilogram of substance when the fuel is burned and so older sources are more powerful. The older

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sources are also simpler in their structure and make-up. However as we now also know, they are *non-renewable*, except for wood. In short, our world of Big Business and Industry that encourages a compulsive consumerism is being quite literally consumed by this thirst for physical energy and material things. The tragedy of this is that those who benefit most from this energy consumption make up a small fraction of the global population while it is the planet and most particularly the poor who suffer the consequences.¹⁴

LOVE: THE MOST ANCIENT ENERGY

And this returns us to love. The universe is a single unfolding of energy and matter in time and space. It is a spiritual and a physical reality that is becoming more expressed through time. As Teilhard believed and argued, it is increasing its growth in love and spirit – or at least it has the potential to, a potential that resides in my own personal *choices* and actions. On a planet in the midst of the 6th mass extinction, rising sea levels, global warming, and unconscionable disparities between rich and poor, never have my actions and choices held more significance. In his encyclical letter '*Laudato Si*'¹³ Pope Francis calls us to such a realisation. He states that never has our common home been so mistreated by human activity as it has been in the past two hundred years. The earth “burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor”¹⁴. The devastation of our natural environment affects the soil, water, air and all forms of life, even the processes of life itself. It affects our social environment and, finally, it affects our spirit. Thomas Berry writes that a degraded outer world leads to a degraded inner world, while Pope Francis accentuates this vital connection between our natural landscape and our spiritual landscape when he writes that “the external deserts are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast”.¹⁵

The world was a spiritual reality long before the arrival of the human. The world had an attractive force of love long before the arrival of the human. It is a strange irony that it has taken the sciences to point out our single destiny as earth and human. But it is precisely at this time that the energy of *unity, research* and most significantly, *love* are needed. Human unity and human research are an epi-phenomenon of the human, but love is what brought us into being, sustains us in being and holds together the entire cosmic process. To begin to activate this energy is to trust in that which goes beneath language and concepts, to trust in the great

13 Pope Francis. *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home*. Veritas, 2015

14 Ibid.,p9

15 Ibid., p109

unfolding of this all-encompassing cosmic mystery. *We* did not invent, construct or create love. We merely allow it to be activated within us and hopefully to pass it on. In 1 John 4:7 19 it states that “we love because God loved us first”. In terms of the universe, we could not love as human beings, if love and the ability to love were not already an intrinsic part of the universe, of that which formed and shaped us providing us with our desire and our need to love and to be loved. It cannot be described or measured in physical terms and yet it is an energy because it is a power. It can effect change and it can control the lower forms of energy. Perhaps it is the most ancient of energies. But one thing remains without doubt, by neglecting it we ignore one of the most powerful tools left to us.

*“The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire.”*¹⁶

16 De Chardin, Teilhard. *Toward the Future*. N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, p85-86

Divine Precept? The non-ordination of women is the customary practice of the Church but it is not “Tradition” in the strong sense of the term. It is not a “Tradition” unmistakably “received” from Christ and the apostles which immutably reveals the will of God for his Church for all ages. It is not one of those “things without which the deposit [of faith] cannot be properly safeguarded and explained.” The practice and presumption of the non-ordinability of women is a matter of ecclesiastical law and not one of divine precept. That law is reformable. Women have been and can be ordained in the Catholic Church

– John O’Brien, *Women’s Ordination in the Catholic Church*, (Oregon: Cascade Books) p. 194.