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# The Cosmic Christ: Some Recent Interpretations

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The term 'Cosmic Christ' may seem unfamiliar to many Christians. Yet it is the term rather than what it tries to express that is new. What it stands for is indeed one of the crucial questions that is being discussed and investigated in modern theology. What the term 'Cosmic Christ' attempts to express, however, is easier felt than clearly expressed. We may in general describe it as 'the presence of Christ in the world' or as 'the presence of the world in Christ'. World, 'cosmos', refers primarily to what we call the 'material universe', but it is clear that man appears in it as its centre and focal point. Hence we could study the 'Cosmic Christ' theme from a cosmological, from a Christological and from an anthropological point of view. As it stands, the term denotes primarily a cosmological and hence an impersonal approach, whilst a Christological or anthropological approach would involve the 'personal'.

I mean to discern two main trends in modern Christian thinking along which the theme 'Cosmic Christ' is being developed. We may describe the one as 'physical' or 'cosmological' or 'ontological'. The other could be described as 'personal' or 'relational'. I prefer the words 'physical' for the one and 'personal' for the other because I think they express more clearly the ways and methods of those two approaches to the *Christus cosmicus* theme. It is obvious that the two approaches, clearly distinct though they are, are not mutually exclusive. Rather are they complementary and this is the reason why we are to consider them both.

Since other papers have dealt with the Scriptural and Patristic backgrounds of the theme, there is no need to dwell on these. Yet it is good to remember that 'cosmic' is a word that comes to us from Greek philosophy and religion. In the Scriptures and in the Fathers, too, this has to be kept in mind. It is especially linked with Stoicism and Gnosticism where it has an exclusively 'physical' and 'monistic' meaning. The physical, but not monistic, understanding of *Christus cosmicus* we find in the N.T., in such Pauline expressions as *pleroma*,

'total Christ', 'body of Christ', *instaurare omnia in Christo*, and in the saying of St. Paul: 'in Him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28); in the Johannine themes of 'new Jerusalem', 'new heavens and new earth' and 'Alpha and Omega'. The 'personal' understanding of the 'Cosmic Christ' theme is obviously centred on God (or Christ) and man, in such categories as creator, redeemer, father, spouse, Lord, to whom man responds in faith, obedience, love, service. We feel at once that the personal does not quite agree with the 'cosmic' as the physical does. Yet it seems to me, we must keep both, as the Scriptures do, otherwise we run the risk of landing into monism.

Both approaches aim at expressing union. In the physical-cosmic it is a union of man, in his cosmic dimension, with Christ, for which 'physical' expressions are used: 'immersion', 'absorption', 'to be filled', 'to put on', 'to partake' or simply 'to be'. This approach, in the course of history of Christian thought and spirituality, if taken too one-sidedly, has meant that 'physically' has sometimes given rise to monistic coloured trends: a union of absorption where all duality and mutuality cease: an *advaita*. This is why the physical-cosmic has to be, and has always been, counterbalanced by the personal-cosmic. Personal union is never an *advaita*: it is 'presence', 'communion', 'sonship', 'friendship', 'nuptials', expressed in terms 'to know', 'to love', 'to believe', 'to see', 'to obey', etc.

Recently, in a remarkable study, comparing the theologies of St. Paul and St. John, Père Benoit, O.P., comes to the conclusion that St. Paul's theology is more 'physical' whilst that of St. John is more 'personal'.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that the double approach runs all through tradition, too, up to our times. We could even, with the unavoidable simplification, say that Protestant theology is more 'personal' whilst Catholic (and Orthodox) theology is more 'physical' or as the Schoolmen say 'ontological'. But ontological and physical are not exactly the same. Both personal and physical can be expressed in ontological categories, for both are ways of being. But it is no doubt true that Scholasticism was more interested in a 'physical' ontology than in a personalistic one.

This by way of introduction. The 'Cosmic Christ' theme may then be considered in a 'physical' perspective and in a 'personal' perspective. In making this distinction, we are fully in line with scripture and with tradition.

## I

Let us first consider the physical implications of the *Christus cosmicus* theme. Among modern Christian thinkers, no one has better developed this than Teilhard de Chardin. It is difficult

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<sup>1</sup> Père Benoit, O.P.: *Pauline and Johannine Theology: a Contrast*. Cross Currents, 1965, pp. 339-53.

to label Teilhard a scientist or a theologian or a philosopher or a mystic. Some of his works are purely scientific; his field was palaeontology; but other writings of his are spiritual, if not mystical in nature. His ideal was precisely to draw the outlines of an 'ultra-science' or an 'ultra-theology' corresponding to the 'ultra-human' (nothing to do with Nietzsche's Superman) where much of the antagonism and separation between the various fields of human research and reflection would be overcome, especially in the field of the study of man.

What is the basic vision of Teilhard? It may be summed up in one word: 'Cosmogogenesis'. Cosmogogenesis sums up both his scientific and his mystical or theological vision of the cosmos. With this, Teilhard tries to overcome and to transcend an antiquated approach to the cosmos, that of cosmology where the cosmos is analysed and described as a static phenomenon. This is what the Greek thinkers and the Schoolmen were doing: the physical world reflected in the thought-patterns of Aristotelian metaphysics. Yet we may notice that in Aristotle there is a theme which Teilhard is to take up and make into the focal point of his cosmic vision: the *motor immobilis* or 'final cause' theme. Teilhard is to develop this on a cosmic dimension and also on a 'Christic' dimension.

'From cosmology to cosmogenesis' is Teilhard's slogan. The concept of cosmogenesis as distinct from cosmology is first, in Teilhard's own words, 'an organic universe in which no element and no event can appear except by birth, i.e. in association with the development of the whole . . .'<sup>2</sup> In other words the cosmos is 'organic': in it everything and every event is interrelated. This applies especially to man as organic part of the cosmos. We cannot isolate man as a phenomenon apart from all the rest: man is rooted in the cosmos with all the fibres of his being, not only body but also soul, and it is only in this perspective that 'the phenomenon man' can be observed and understood.

This principle also applies to the incarnate Christ. The incarnation means that the Word has entered the cosmos, in a fullness not known before. For Teilhard holds, with the Scriptures, that the Word was not a stranger to the cosmos. In fact, the whole cosmos is 'Word' of God: the cosmos has a divine origin. However, this theme of cosmic origins is not further developed by Teilhard. Though his field was palaeontology, eminently a science of the past, spiritually he was not interested in the past but in the future. And, as he grew older, even his palaeontology he considered as a means and method to enable him to gauge the growing 'Christogenesis' of the cosmos.

The first point, therefore, in 'cosmogogenesis' is that the cosmos, including man and Christ, is 'organic'. The second characteristic of the cosmos is that this organicity is progressive, i.e. it

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<sup>2</sup> Cuénot, *Teilhard de Chardin*, p. 36.

develops, it has a finality. In other words, evolution is the fundamental law of the cosmos. Teilhard's branch of science aimed precisely at establishing the cosmic evolution, culminating in man. When we read Teilhard's main work on this subject, 'The Phenomenon of Man', we cannot avoid recalling to mind the *rationes seminales* of St. Augustine. All is interrelated because it all grows from a primitive something into what the cosmos is now. The main stages of the cosmic evolution are 'biogenesis', where life is 'born' out of matter and brings with it the 'biosphere' and 'anthropogenesis', where man is 'born' from living beings, and with him the 'noosphere'. Hence the whole cosmos is understood by Teilhard as a 'cosmic travail' that so far has resulted in man, as he is now. Teilhard studies man as a 'phenomenon', i.e. as a cosmogenetic fact. He does not consider all the theological implications involved in the genesis of man, such as the emergence of the 'personal' or 'soul' and the vexing problem of 'original sin'.

Evolution is taken out of its restricted meaning it had with Darwin and Lamarck, a meaning which it still has for many 'evolutionists' today, limited to the origin of the living species. For Teilhard, evolution is a cosmic law, the principle of cosmogenesis. He says that science is making it 'daily more apparent that the ontogenesis of the microcosm (which we all are) has no meaning and no possible physical place, unless we see it not simply within the phylogenesis of some particular zoological branch, but within the cosmogenesis of a whole universe'. Evolution, therefore, has come to mean 'realizing this fundamental dynamic unity'.<sup>3</sup>

If the new dimension in evolution, according to Teilhard, is that it is cosmic and hence all-embracing, a second new dimension lies in this that man, as spearhead of the cosmic evolution so far, has been able not only to discover the 'fact' of evolution, and thus has become evolution conscious of itself; man has also been enabled thereby to give it sense and direction. Whatever the obstacles, cosmogenesis is irreversible: it has become self-conscious in man and from then on it goes to its goal consciously and purposefully.

And here we reach the third point of cosmogenesis and, for our purpose, the most important. Why is the cosmos what it is? What is the link of the cosmic organicity? What is the direction of cosmic evolution? What is the centre of the reflective and purposive consciousness of the cosmos in man? It is what Teilhard calls: the 'Omega Point'. Omega is Christ. Christ, therefore, is not only the *raison d'être* of the whole cosmic phenomenon, its efficient and exemplary cause we would say; He is also its end, its final cause and even its quasi-formal cause: for whatever shape (*forma*) the cosmos takes, whatever the direction it goes, all has its reason and consistency in Christ. Christ

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<sup>3</sup> Cuénot, *Teilhard de Chardin*, p. 292.

is the *motor immobilis* of cosmogenesis. Hence man, if he lives in a true cosmic perspective, gives to the cosmos, and to himself as part of it, a true 'Christic' sense. Christians are thus much ahead that they do this consciously, and hence the Christian is the spearhead of cosmogenesis, the beginning of the 'ultra-human'.

The cosmos has always been 'Christic', for Christ is not only the 'Omega', He is also the 'Alpha', the creative Word: everything is 'uttered' in Him. There are then three phases in the Christic encompassing of the cosmos: first, the beginning, the uttering of the cosmos in the Word; second, the incarnation, when the Word became flesh or 'cosmos', or when the cosmos became 'body' of the Word; third, the Parousia, where the 'union' of the Word and the cosmos will be complete. The Omega 'point' is the crossing point, the final intersection of the cosmos with Christ: the *totus Christus*.

In his earlier works Teilhard paid greater attention to the second phase of the Christification of the cosmos: the incarnation. This is most beautifully expressed in *The Priest* (1917), in his *The Mass on the Altar of the World* (1923) and in *Le Milieu divin* (1927). In these writings the cosmic presence of Christ revolves mainly around two poles; the historic incarnation of the Word and its 'prolongation' in the Holy Eucharist. In his last work *Le Christique* (1955) Teilhard even speaks of a kind of 'third nature' in Christ. Besides the divine and the human, there would be in Christ a kind of 'cosmic nature': 'In the total Christ', he says, 'there is not only man and God; there is also He who in His "theandric" being gathers (*assembles*) all creation, *in quo omnia constant*.'<sup>4</sup> So far, Teilhard says, we have overlooked this third dimension of Christ. It is especially in the Eucharistic mystery, the transubstantiation of cosmic elements, bread and wine, that this 'cosmic nature' of Christ appears. On this we have beautiful texts, especially in his *The Mass on the Altar of the World* which he wrote—or at least was inspired to write—in the Ordos desert in China in 1923 when he could not say Mass for want of a Mass-kit. After he has called to memory (an *anamnesis* as it were) all the variegated cosmic forces that begin their work in the morning under the impact of the rising sun, especially man in his role as master of the cosmos, Teilhard prays, addressing Christ: 'Do you now, therefore, speaking through my lips, pronounce over this earthly travail your two-fold efficacious word: the word without which all that our wisdom and our experience have built up, must totter and crumble. Over every living being which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day, say again the words: This is my body. And over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding word which expresses the supreme mystery of faith:

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<sup>4</sup> *Le Christique*. Quoted by Smulders, p. 337.

This is my blood.'<sup>5</sup> In an earlier work, *The Priest* (1917), Teilhard has the same idea: 'The central mystery of transubstantiation is aureoled by a divinization, real though attenuated, of all the universe.'<sup>6</sup> It is obvious that Teilhard is not using here the technical language of the Schoolmen or even of the Council of Chalcedon. His is an attempt to bring out the cosmic presence of the incarnate Christ through the Eucharistic consecration. The Word, in becoming man, has divinized the cosmos. This is a pure Patristic saying: 'God became man in order that man may become divine', say the Fathers. But Teilhard has widened this Patristic teaching beyond man, over the whole cosmic reality. For man is not an isolated phenomenon, rather is he part and centre, product and spearhead of the cosmos: he is the cosmos in its quintessence, cosmogenesis in its most advanced stage, the result of millions and billions of years of cosmic travail under the magnet 'Christ Omega'.

In his later works, Teilhard focused his contemplation more on 'He that cometh', on the Christ of the Parousia. It is in this perspective that he developed his theme of the 'Omega Point': the Omega point is precisely the Parousia, seen by Teilhard as the final union of the cosmos with Christ. Christ here is not seen *in abstracto*: it is Christ as 'end' of cosmogenesis. If cosmogenesis can be expressed as 'primitive seed + time', Christ Omega is Christ at the Parousia uniting man and his world to himself. It is the 'end' in the sense of fulfilment of cosmogenesis. Cosmogenesis then is also Christogenesis in the Pauline sense of the *totus Christus, caput et membra*. The Omega point is that to which the whole cosmos is directed by its inward dynamism. It is towards this ultimate meeting that all the evolutive cosmic travail is directed. No flower would blossom forth, no star twinkle, no man could lift his finger except in the perspective of this final meeting. The whole cosmos, therefore, is on its way to the Parousia, the Omega point, and in man, the Christian especially, this being directed becomes a conscious going towards Christ, even an accelerated going to the Parousia for the more conscious man becomes of it, the straighter he can go, the less waste there will be on his way, the better he is able to fulfil God's cosmic design.

The modes of the union of Christ and cosmos in the Omega point, the Parousia, are not clearly discerned by Teilhard. His is the language of a visionary, a prophet. But it is clear from his writings that it is not a union of absorption. Teilhard has been tempted by monism but he has always been able clearly to locate it and to avoid its pitfalls: 'What I experienced,' he says, 'as I stand in face of this world which your flesh has assimilated, this world which has become your flesh, my God, is not the absorption of the monist who yearns to be dissolved in the unity

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<sup>5</sup> Mass over the World. In *Hymn to the Universe*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

of things . . . Yet like the monist I plunge into the all-inclusive One ; but the One is so perfect that as it receives me, and I lose myself in it, I can find in it the ultimate perfection of my individuality.”

It follows from these premises that all human labour, not to speak of the whole travail of the cosmos, each in its own degree of consciousness, is ‘Christic’ because in reality its deepest motive force (final causality) is the Christ Omega. This makes the Christian not only into the greatest and truest ‘materialist’ but also into the most complete ‘humanist’. For man cannot go to God, to the Parousia meeting of Christ, except in the context of the cosmos. It is through his earthly labour that he goes to God, that he is united with God. The more ‘humanly’, the more consciously, he fulfils his earthly task, the greater his union with and his tension towards the Omega point, the final union with Christ.

Teilhard speaks of a ‘diaphany’ of God next to the ‘epiphany’ of the incarnation. By this he means that for a Christian the cosmos becomes what it really is, ‘word’, image, expression of God: in it we discern the face and features of Christ. Hence, for Teilhard, science and mysticism are really one. Truly, in his existential experience, Teilhard has overcome the antagonism between science and faith which has plagued Western man—both as Christian and as scientist or humanist—ever since the Middle Ages. ‘I am not speaking metaphysically,’ says Teilhard, ‘when I say that it is through the length and breadth and depth of the world in movement that man can attain the experience and the vision of His God.’<sup>8</sup>

Such then is the ‘Cosmic Christ’ vision of Teilhard de Chardin. It incorporates the best of Tradition and of modern Christian thinking and in several directions ventures daringly beyond where even progressive Christian thinkers have advanced. It is true that Teilhard has not solved all the problems created by his vision. The most serious difficulty is the fact of sin: how and where does it fit in the *Christus cosmicus* vision of Teilhard? It must be said that on the one hand Teilhard was terribly aware of the fact of sin. Yet in his optimism he has as it were left it aside, keeping his gaze fixed—as the Greek Fathers did—on the positive factor, so immense, so fascinating: the divinization, the ‘Christification’ of the cosmos. Sometimes he speaks of evil as ‘waste’: the waste that is unavoidable in the forward thrust of the cosmos and of humanity in it. This might account for what we call ‘physical evil’ but it is not a sufficient answer to ‘sin’ which is the possibility of refusal, of even inverting, at least partially or temporarily, the Christic direction of the cosmos. But this, says Teilhard, can never happen on an universal scale. The cosmic thrust towards

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<sup>7</sup> Mass over the World. In *Hymn to the Universe*, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Le Milieu divin*, p. 36.



the Omega point cannot be reversed. Hence sin is 'accidental' and cannot blur the vision or shake its constancy. Teilhard is an optimist.

A second observation we may make is that Teilhard does not always clearly show the transcendence of man over the cosmos, at least over the infra-human in the cosmos. We have to look for a less 'physical' and a more personalistic approach to have this clearly brought out. One might doubt whether with man, anything really 'new' appears in the cosmos, since all is organic and interrelated. Teilhard affirms that 'consciousness' is an attribute not only of man but also of matter: only 'time' in the sense of irrepeatable historic time, would be needed to make it 'grow' into human consciousness.

Thirdly, we must not look in Teilhard for precise theological language. His theological training had been along the rigid lines of the Schoolmen and proved totally inadequate as a mould wherein to cast his thought. Teilhard has created so many new terms and expressions that we often feel uneasy when trying to gauge their true meaning. Teilhard's language is closer to that of the mystics, and mystics are often—look at Eckhardt, Tauler, Ruysbroeck and even John of the Cross—philosophically and scholastically imprecise.

Such then is, in bare outline, the vision of the 'Cosmic Christ' as we are made to share it in reading the works of Teilhard de Chardin. He never thought that he had said the last word: he saw himself as a pioneer and was content to be 'a stone dropped into the foundations'. It remains for us to investigate further along the guiding lines traced for us by Teilhard, the implications of the cosmic presence of Christ, Creation, incarnation, Parousia, the relation between cosmogenesis and Christogenesis.

## II

We are now to consider the other approach to the 'Cosmic Christ' theme, the approach which we have termed 'personal' or relational. The reason why many feel uneasy when reading Teilhard's works—at least when reading them for the first time—lies perhaps in the fact that Teilhard's approach was too one-sidedly 'physical': he sees man, as a 'mass' or a 'wave' or a phenomenon (he rarely speaks of 'man'), images that betray his 'physical' approach to the problem. The same is true of the way he speaks of Christ. Though he has admirable prayers addressed to Christ and though his faith was eminently personal, yet in the perspective of his branch of science, he usually speaks of Christ as of 'something' rather than 'somebody': the 'Omega Point', the 'Parousia', the 'Christic', 'Christification', etc., apart from the very term 'Cosmic Christ'. This is no doubt to be explained a great deal by the fact that Teilhard was a scientist by calling and by profession and that he uses the language of his branch of science even in his more spiritual

writings. The 'personal' is not absent in Teilhard's works: we find it in many places and it is sometimes described as the highest attainment of 'anthropogenesis' leading towards the ultra-human. But even there, the personal becomes a 'stage', a 'wave': its contents are not further investigated.

The philosophy of man as person and a corresponding theology are rather of recent origin. True, from Patristic times onwards, the term 'person' (*persona*, *hypostasis*, *prosopon*) entered the Christian philosophical and theological vocabulary. But this was almost exclusively in the elaboration of the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines: little attempt was made to investigate deeper the content of this notion, especially as it applies to man.

The Schoolmen too did not reach far. They defined person in categories of substance and accident (and found that it was neither the one nor the other), or of essence and existence. They thought of person as a *modus substantialis* or a *modus essendi* or simply identified it with actual existence. With them, too, the interest in person was almost exclusively limited to the doctrine of the Trinity and of the incarnation. In moral theology, scholars stuck to the Roman juridical definition of person: *Subiectum iurium et officiorum*. The *modus* by which they described the proper of 'person', added over and above substance or essence or existence, the Schoolmen did not investigate further, nor has the implicitly relational definition of moral theology been further elaborated (for rights and duties are relations to others and to others as persons).

Modern philosophy, to a considerable extent, may be qualified as 'personalistic' philosophy. The same may be said of modern theology, though theologians rather speak of 'anthropology'. It is particularly among Protestant theologians that a personalistic theology has been developed. There is no need to mention names here, nor do I propose a synthesis of these modern personalistic theologies.

To throw some light on the 'Cosmic Christ' theme in the perspective of the 'personal' I have chosen Martin Buber. Though Buber was not a Christian, as a Jewish philosopher and theologian he was truly Biblical in his vision of man as person in his relation to God. There is in Buber, a son of Abraham not only by faith but also according to the flesh, an affinity in thought, temperament and experience, to those categories and values in which God has designed to reveal Himself to man; an affinity, which we, children of Abraham in faith only, cannot claim to possess. The personalism of Buber has this (Biblical) characteristic, that, apart from being deeply rooted in God, it is also healthily embedded in the world. Hence we may call it 'cosmic' even though the term seems a little out of place here.

Let us first in short draw the main lines of Buber's personalism, which is more than a philosophy: it is a theology. For his aim in all his writings, his 'most essential concern', as he

himself says, is 'the close connection of the relation to God with the relations to one's fellowmen'. I think this is precisely the point we are concerned with.

The principle on which Buber's thought is based, is called not the dialectical but the 'dialogic' principle. It means that man is constituted 'person' in and through an 'I-Thou' relationship. The 'I-Thou' relationship is sharply distinguished from and contrasted with the 'I-It' (or I-He or I-She) which, if it is relation at all, is in no way constitutive of the personal. Buber investigates the profound difference between the 'I-It' and the 'I-Thou' relation. The main difference lies in this that the 'I-It' relation is one of utility: the other is apprehended and experienced in as far as it (or he or she) is useful; there is no mutuality. The personal I-Thou relation is by its very nature mutual and disinterested: it is communion. The I-Thou relation posits the being as person also in its contingency since the Thou comes to stand over against the 'I' as the 'other', thus marking limits. However intense the reciprocity, the communion, it can never result in a total one-ness. Monism would not only destroy the relation but also the very 'I' and 'Thou': it would destroy man as person. It is therefore in the intense mutuality of two (or more) that man acquires the dimension of person, the most profound attribute of his being.

Buber holds, and this is important for our 'Cosmic Christ' theme, that the I-Thou relationship extends not only over the wide range of inter-human relationships but also—to some extent at least—to other creatures: animals and things. It extends in the fullest sense and most profoundly to our relationship with God. The I-Thou communion with God is as it were the *analogatum princeps* to which all others revert as to their pattern, source and fulfilment.

Let us examine the ascending range of the person-constitutive I-Thou relationship. At the lowest ring the I-Thou relationship extends to nature. Buber says: 'We can stand in the I-Thou relationship not merely with other men, but also with beings and things which come to meet us in nature.'<sup>9</sup> He gives two examples: man and a tree and man and his dog. We may refer in this connection to St. Francis of Assisi and his hymn to the sun and to the same saint's familiarity with animals. This communion, quasi-personal, with nature, is, as we shall see, in reality a communion with God, in and through nature. This is again very clear in St. Francis: his communion with nature was a dimension—and an important one—of his communion with God.

Buber was aware that in the relationship with irrational beings, there is a problem of reciprocity. This relationship then is not properly 'personal', is not properly an 'I-Thou' relationship, yet it is in the direction of the personal. Buber calls

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<sup>9</sup> *I and Thou*, p. 125.

it the 'pre-threshold' or the 'pre-liminal' of the personal. Between nature and man, there is the sphere of the 'spirit', which Buber calls the sphere 'above the threshold' or the 'super-liminal'. Buber gives us two examples: the first is the quasi-personal encounter with another person, long dead, through the encounter with his teachings: 'Making present to oneself one of the traditional sayings of the master who died thousands of years ago.' The second example of the I-Thou quasi-personal encounter in 'spirit' is the encounter in art. Buber gives as example the contemplation of a Doric pillar.<sup>10</sup>

Then there is thirdly the rich I-Thou encounter with other men. Here too, however, the reciprocity is not always—and cannot or even should not always be—perfect: in other words the I-Thou is often mixed with the I-it. As an example of this Buber gives the imperfect I-Thou relationships between teacher and pupil and between doctor (psychiatrist) and patient, and he concludes: 'Every I-Thou relationship, within a relation which is specified as a purposive working of one part upon the other, persists in virtue of a mutuality which is forbidden to be full.'<sup>11</sup>

The final and all-inclusive I-Thou communion is that of man with God. This relation is at once exclusive and inclusive. Buber discusses in this context two points. The first is: in what sense can we say that God is 'person'? For 'it is the property of a person that its independence should consist in itself but it is limited in its total being by the plurality of other independent entities'.<sup>12</sup> This latter property can of course not be true of God. Buber speaks of God—paradoxically—as an 'absolute person'. It is from God, as absolute person, that all men receive their being as person. It is therefore only from and in God that all I-Thou reciprocity among men and with creatures and spirit is possible. If the I-Thou relationship among men is truly constitutive of man as person, *a fortiori* and much more is this true of the I-Thou relationship of man with God. This relationship is not only constitutive but creative of his being as person. We could then truly define man as person as: a being which is addressed by God as Thou. Buber says: 'As person, God gives us personal life; He makes us as persons become capable of meeting with Him and with one another.' Yet on our part, our relationship with God is in no way constitutive of God as person. Still less does it 'limit' God's being.

The I-Thou relationship to God embraces all the other relationships. Buber says: 'The man who turns to Him, need not turn away from any other I-Thou relation: but he properly brings them to Him and lets them be fulfilled in the face of God.' Hence our deepest relationships with men, with spirit and with things are not 'something happening solely alongside

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<sup>10</sup> *I and Thou*, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

or apart from our I-Thou relationship with God.<sup>13</sup> We do not live in two worlds as it were, the divine and the earthly, completely exclusive of each other. Nor are our actions and our existence of two kinds: our personality is not split between our relation with God and that with creatures. Buber says that 'God's speech to man penetrates what happened in the life of each one of us, and all that happens in the world around us, biographical and historical, and makes it for you and me into instruction, message, demand.'<sup>14</sup> In other words our I-Thou communion with God is clothed, encompassed by and expressed in and through our communion with men and with nature. Buber says: 'Men do not find God if they stay in the world. They do not find Him when they leave the world. He who goes out with his whole being to meet his Thou and carries it to all being that is in the world, finds Him who cannot be sought.'<sup>15</sup>

Buber does not believe in the incarnation of God's Son, his faith is not the fullness of Christian faith, yet his thought, so deeply steeped in the Old Testament revelation, tends towards and is fully open to a theology of incarnation. Buber says: 'Of course, God is the wholly Other; but He is also the wholly Same, the wholly Present . . . He is the *Mysterium tremendum* that appears and overthrows; but He is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than my I.'<sup>16</sup>

It is not difficult to prolong Buber's thought and apply it to the incarnation and so we come to a truly personalistic 'Cosmic Christ' theology. For even more profoundly than in man's I-Thou relation with God without or before the incarnation, do we now have communion with God in Christ, in and through the world of men and things. The world is the 'sphere' of the incarnation: ever since the Word of God came to address us in a truly theandric communion with men and with creatures, our I-Thou relationship—as believers especially—with one another and with all creation, is first of all an I-Thou communion with Christ, the Son and in Him with the Father.

### III

And so we come by another way, through the 'personal' approach, to the conclusions which were also those of Teilhard. We may sum them up as follows: First, God is present in and through His Word in all creation. Creation, that is the whole cosmos in all its depth and dimensions, is truly 'Word' of God. This is the primary and ultimate meaning of the cosmos. This applies especially to man. But man, as we have seen, is precisely the cosmos in its highest state of evolution: the 'noosphere' result of anthropogenesis. We may therefore discover, with St. Augustine, in his *De Trinitate* a trinitarian structure of

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<sup>13</sup> *I and Thou*, p. 136.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

the cosmos and of all its constituents. The pre-Christian religions for the Jews as well as for the Gentiles are therefore a communion with God, however incipient and precarious, through cosmic realities (the 'nature' religions of the Gentiles and the 'historic' religion of the Old Testament).

Secondly, the incarnation has profoundly affected the theophoric structure of the cosmos. In one way, the incarnation is not absolutely 'new': the Logos came into what was already his own, says St. John. Yet the incarnation has given to the cosmos a 'Christic' dimension, in this sense that the Word of God has now come to address us in a most personal manner, in an I-Thou communion unheard of before, yet again, in and through the cosmos, as integral part of it as man. It follows that the cosmos is carrier now of the Logos in an altogether new way. The new presence of God in Christ in the cosmos, in the era of the Church, is most intense in the Holy Eucharist, in the Sacraments, in the Scriptures, in the neighbour, in one word, in the 'Church' taken in its broadest meaning. Yet this presence extends beyond and is found everywhere, in various intensities.

It follows from this that our I-Thou relationship with Christ in the present cosmic era can only be in and through cosmic realities, men and things. Here lies the profound meaning of the Church, its human 'order', its sacraments, its 'word', its hierarchy. The cosmos, through the *perichoresis* of nature and grace, is progressively being transformed into the 'Body of Christ', into the *Pleroma* or to put it in Johannine categories, into the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth. Since the incarnation, and even before, nothing is 'profane', nothing 'a-theistic' or 'a-Christian'.

Thirdly, the cosmos, springing from the Word, carrying the Word, has the Word for its only end. Hence, all creation, all history, all human endeavour, all labour and travail are going the same way, towards the Parousia, the Omega point of Teilhard. This is the irreversible sense of history, comprising all, even man's failures: to prepare for, to go out to meet, 'Him that cometh'. This covers not only the proper religious activity of man, especially the Christian, it comprises also all his so-called secular or profane or temporal activity.

In these three Christic dimensions of the cosmos, Creation, incarnation and Parousia, the Word is present to man and is addressing him with the divine intimacy of the fully personal. It is to be noticed that the reciprocity on the part of man is far from what it should and could be. It is not enough to ascribe this failure to the 'evolutive process where everything from imperfection reaches out towards perfection. There is another mystery at work which, without overlooking it, we have not considered here. It now remains for us to investigate further the rich consequences of this triple Christic encompassing of the cosmos, both in the rich perspectives of the 'physical' and of the 'personal'.