

## Teilhard, the Trinity, and Evolution: The Journey Continues by Cynthia Bourgeault

When anything really new begins to germinate around us, we cannot distinguish it--for the very good reason that it could only be recognized in the light of what it is going to be. -- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,

The Human Phenomenon It has often been noted that in his sweeping new vision of Christian metaphysics Teilhard makes curiously little use of the Trinity. While one can hardly second guess a mystic his sources of inspiration, clearly a significant contributing factor was that the Trinity he knew from the Scholastic theology of his times left him little to work with. Never much of a fan of Scholasticism anyway, Teilhard seemed to find trinitarian systematics particularly off-putting, describing the presentation as "over-intricate, outlandish, and superfluous."<sup>1</sup> He doubted that it would have much to offer the modern mind.

In retrospect, this appears to be one of those great missed opportunities, for had he been able to see the Trinity from the perspective of our own theological times, I believe he would have been quick to recognize a congenial terrain and a rich new vein of inspiration for his theological imagination. My essay is offered as a first attempt to bring the Teilhardian canon into direct dialogue with the emerging vision of the Trinity that has taken shape in the half-century following his death, either directly or indirectly under his influence. In the first part of my study I introduce the major players in this conversation and highlight their individual contributions, taking particular note of the pivotal contribution made by Beatrice Bruteau. In the second part I explore what happens when we attempt to transpose Teilhard's magnificent intellectual edifice onto this new trinitarian foundation. As I hope to demonstrate, not only do the two complement and contextualize each other, but in the process they allow us to glimpse a whole new "ternary" way of doing metaphysics that might well prove to be Christianity's most significant contribution to the ongoing evolutionary dialogue.

### A New Breed of Trinity

Catherine LaCugna

The trinitarian renaissance of our times was stirred into action in 1967, when Teilhard's younger Jesuit colleague Karl Rahner issued his terminal prognosis that the Trinity had become so irrelevant to the actual practice of Christianity that "should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."<sup>2</sup> But it would take another two decades before Catherine Mowry LaCugna, following in his footsteps, succeeded in rescuing the Trinity from the theological margins to which it had increasingly been relegated, restoring it to active duty as a foundational symbol of Christian life. Her 1991 book *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian life*, marked a tipping point in trinitarian studies, not only because of the rigor of her scholarship and passion of her argument, but because its publication by the prestigious popular press HarperSanFrancisco succeeded at last in putting the Trinity on the public radar screen.

In the first part of her book LaCugna traces what she calls the "defeat" of the doctrine of the Trinity over a thousand years of development, as it moved from an original participative vision of God's redemptive work in the world to an increasingly abstract speculation on the inner life of God. Once that fundamental rupture had occurred between God in se ("in himself"; the immanent or theological Trinity) and God pro nobis ("for us"; the economic Trinity), the drift continued to widen--in the Christian East through an exaggerated differentiation between the "essence" and "energies" of God, and in the post-Augustinian West through an increasing fixation on the substance and psychology of the divine Persons. More and more the Trinity came to be locked up in a speculative realm all its own, with no connection to either the physical reality of the cosmos or the practical and moral reality of Christian life.

"The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity" had been Rahner's celebrated clarion call.<sup>3</sup> LaCugna's work both nuances that assessment and develops it still further. As she sees it, "There is neither an economic nor an immanent Trinity; there is only the Oikonomia that is the concrete realization of the mystery of theologia in time, space, history, and personality. In this framework the doctrine of the Trinity encompasses more than the immanent Trinity envisioned in static ahistorical and transeconomic terms; the subject matter of the Christian theology of God is one dynamic movement of God, a Patre ad Patrem."<sup>4</sup>

While LaCugna makes no direct mention of Teilhard in her work, it is clear that her vision of the Oikonomia as a parabolic curve sweeping in one unbroken motion from Alpha to Omega certainly creates a stage on which Teilhard's evolutionary vision can play beautifully. Both dynamism and directionality are well represented, as well as that fundamental Teilhardian leitmotif that there is, indeed, a "comprehensive plan of God reaching creation to consummation"<sup>5</sup> "in quo omnia constant [in which all things hold together]."

Raimon Panikkar

Raimon Panikkar worked on the Trinity for most of his long and productive scholarly career, and in the nearly forty years that lie between his early *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (1973) and his final magnum opus, *The Rhythm of Being* (2010), we watch him moving incrementally toward an understanding of the Trinity as an all-encompassing ground of being--essentially, a dead ringer for Teilhard's "divine milieu." By his 2004 work, *Christophany*, he is characterizing the Trinity as "pure relationality"; "the dynamism of the real."<sup>6</sup> His final pronouncement on the subject is a jaw-dropping one-liner that in itself could easily furnish the agenda for the entire next generation of Christian evolutionary research: "By Trinity, I mean the ultimate triadic structure of reality."<sup>7</sup>

Panikkar's extensive body of work is complementary in many respects to Teilhard's, although he seems to make very little actual use of Teilhard in the development of his own thought. Both are concerned to open up a Christian self-understanding that has become an amor curvus, as Panikkar calls it, a closed circle, to receive new inputs from a world rapidly outpacing it in both coherence and scope. If Teilhard's primary conversation is with science, Panikkar, that great interspiritual pioneer, is primarily in conversation with the great spiritual traditions of the

world, particularly the advaita of the East. While their methods and audiences differ, the same fundamental conviction drives them; that is, that if Christianity is, as it claims, a universal vision, it must make itself universally intelligible.

Both Teilhard and Panikkar chafed against the traditional Judeo-Christian monotheism, its foundations resting squarely on an ontological dichotomy between spirit and matter and a Creator who does not personally indwell his creation. These antiquated metaphysical givens are simply no longer intellectually sustainable in a world now resting firmly on an Einsteinian foundation, where energy rather than substantia is the coin of the realm. While Teilhard perhaps injudiciously used the word pantheism to convey his holographic intuition of the divine Whole permeating all of its parts, Panikkar's equivalent term covers most of these same bases while sidestepping most of its more obvious difficulties.

Cosmotheandric is Panikkar's neologism of choice to describe the trinitarian dynamism at the heart of the divine relational ground. The word is a fusion of cosmos (world), theos (God), and andros (man) and suggests a continuous intercirculation among these three distinct planes of existence in a single motion of self-communicating love. The gist of this idea has already been brilliantly portended in those profound images that cascade from Jesus's mouth in the farewell discourse of John 13--17: "I am the vine, you are the branches; abide in me as I in you" (John 15:4); "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they may be completely one" (John 17:21--23). The vision is of a dynamic, interabiding oneness whose "substance" is inseparable from the motion itself. For Panikkar, this is Trinity, understood as a primordial metaphysical principle. It is a world of dynamic interabiding in which both unity and particularity are preserved by adding as the third term between them the dynamism itself. Advaita in motion, one might call it.

In fact, one of Panikkar's most profound contributions to the present trinitarian renaissance may well be his closely argued demonstration in Christophany that the Trinity is indeed an "original" component of Christianity--because it originates in the mind of Christ! While the fully articulated doctrine of the Trinity came into existence only in the fourth century, Panikkar argues that its real roots lie in the lived reality of Jesus's own relationship with God. It portrays that reality together in a way that is faithful to the experience itself and projects it outward as an access route through which others can enter. Between the poles of maximum unity (conveyed in Jesus's powerful assertion, "The Father and I are one") and maximum differentiation (conveyed in his shockingly tender "Abba, Father") flows an unbroken current of kenotic love (representing spirit) through which all things are invited to participate in that one great cosmotheandric intercirculation. For Panikkar, the Trinity is not a theological add-on; it is a manifesting principle of the first order, linking the visible and invisible realms together according to a single relational dynamism that he summarizes as follows: "I am one with the source insofar as I too act as a source by making everything I have received flow again--just like Jesus."<sup>8</sup>

Beatrice Bruteau

When it comes to connecting the dots between the Trinity and evolution, no one has done it more thoroughly than Beatrice Bruteau. In her 1997 book, *God's Ecstasy: The Creation of a Self-Creating World*, she explicitly identifies the Trinity as a cosmogonic principle, in fact, the cosmogonic principle. And with an academic background whose wingspan rivals Teilhard's (advanced degrees in both philosophy and mathematics), she is able to bring her considerable scientific and philosophical acumen to bear as she lays out exactly how and why the Trinity is all about evolution.

For Bruteau, the Trinity is first and foremost an image of symbiotic unity--in fact, it is "the original symbiotic unity." The three "God-persons in community," as she sees it, comprise the prototype and the prerequisite for the expression of agape love, the constituent energy of the Godhead itself. In chapter 2 she builds a detailed philosophical case for why threefoldness is the necessary precondition for agape love. She then goes on to demonstrate why threefoldness is by nature "ecstatic" or, in other words, self-projective. By its very threefoldness it "breaks symmetry" (a term felicitously borrowed from the world of quantum mechanics) and projects the agape loves outward, calling new forms of being into existence, each of which bears the imprint of the original symbiotic unity that created it. With that initial premise established, her book then leads the reader through a magnificent overview of evolution, phylum by phylum, as we see the actual mechanics of the "complexification" intuited by Teilhard being played out all under the sway of this dynamic ordering principle. "It is the presence of the Trinity as a pattern repeated at every scale of the cosmic order," she believes, "that makes the universe a manifestation of God and itself sacred and holy."<sup>9</sup>

Bruteau is arguably Teilhard's most brilliant student, and her work moves his own a significant step forward. Her Trinity, revisioned as an evolutionary template, furnishes the mechanics to fulfill the major stipulations of Teilhard's visionary mysticism. In particular, she is able to put chapter and verse under his intuition of a dynamism, a direction, and an intrinsic ordering principle, calling all things to "Be more, Be in every possible way, Communicate Being, and Be a new whole by interaction" (her pithy summation of the Teilhardian "zest for living").<sup>10</sup> From a standpoint of a half-century, farther along in the pertinent scientific fields, particularly astrophysics and cellular biology, she is also able to confirm and update his basic presentation made so brilliantly in *The Phenomenon of Man*.

But while she is overwhelmingly onboard with the Teilhard program (she is, after all, one of the original founders of the Teilhard Society!), this does not equate to a blind loyalty incapable of recognizing some of its significant shortcomings. One of these, for certain, is a curiously xenophobic Catholicism that leaves him unable to appreciate the potential contributions of other religious traditions, particularly those of the East. "We must note with sadness," she writes, "that it is one of the ironies of his brilliant career that Teilhard, whose doctrines of cosmic divinity and evolving consciousness so resemble certain strains of Hindu thought, had a very slight knowledge of this tradition and even less respect for it."<sup>11</sup> From her own extensive background in Vedanta she is able to mount a considerably more nuanced discussion of consciousness than Teilhard's, which in turn leads her to a significantly different conclusion about the ultimate outcome of the evolutionary process.

Approached from the contemporary perspective of levels of consciousness as developed in the work of Ken Wilber and others,<sup>12</sup> it becomes quickly apparent that Teilhard has basically no concept of what would now be called the third tier or non-dual states of awareness. His notion of consciousness, founded squarely in Cartesian rationalism, is entirely centered in the self-reflective property of consciousness--the capacity to stand outside itself and mirror itself back ("bend back upon itself," in Teilhard's language), so as to become aware of its own awareness. For Teilhard, this self-reflective capacity is the extraordinary human breakthrough that launches the noosphere and inaugurates a whole new rung on the evolutionary ladder. But apparently unperceived by Teilhard, self-reflexive awareness can unfold in two different ways: either by representing itself to itself, as if in third person, or by an immediate, holographic perception of its own subjectivity. This latter mode of perception, characterized by the collapse of the subject/object pole that establishes the field of perception at the lower levels of consciousness, is what is meant by non-dual awareness, and in the Eastern traditions (and much of Western mysticism as well) it comprises a much more subtle level of conscious attainment. Teilhard's inability to spot it identifies his thinking as operating exclusively within the limits of the "higher rational" bandwidths of consciousness ("pluralistic" and "integral," in Wilber's terminology); he is certainly well ahead of the curve in his own times--and even in our own--but arguably a notch below the level needed to match the mystical unity he is intuiting. From this "level confusion" in his thinking enter two of the most controversial elements in his teaching: his understanding of personhood as "super-centration," and his insistence upon an ultimate point of convergence. Bruteau's non-dual exegesis of Teilhard's work in these respects may in the long run prove to be her greatest gift to him, creating an access route for those who applaud his vision but lament his interspiritual insensitivity and apparent inability to escape the gravitational field of traditional Western rationalism.

In her penultimate chapter in *God's Ecstasy*, entitled "The Self-Creating Universe: Pathway to Consciousness," Bruteau clarifies the distinction between these two modes of perception. In contrast to the dualistic levels of consciousness, which tend to establish identity through its descriptions (the set of characteristics that define it by differentiating it from others in that same category), non-dual consciousness--or "mystical," as she calls it here,

is the immediacy and irreducibility of a subjective experience of knowing by being instead of by representing. The object of consciousness is in this case the subject itself. When the subject is aware of the subject, not by reflection--that is, not by making a representation of the subject or the act of being conscious or the concept of "being the knower--but the subject is aware of the subject by being aware as subject--aware as subject of subject by being subject, in a fully luminous (not unaware or unconscious) way, that consciousness is "mystical."<sup>13</sup>

Through the lens of this luminous perception she is able to come to an understanding very different from Teilhard's of what constitutes a person:

Usually we think of this "I" in terms of our descriptions: gender, race, age, relationships, work, history, personality type, cultural commitments, and so on. These give us a feeling of definiteness (which we confuse with reality) by defining how we are different from others. I am I by being not-you. I have a different description. . . . All those categories of descriptions may be said to characterize our "nature" as distinct from ourselves as "persons." The natures are different from each other by "mutual negation." What one has another does not; it has something the first does not. This is how their definitions are made. But persons are not defined. So persons are not "different" from one another. Persons are absolutely unique; they are not identified by reference to one another, not compared with others, even to say they are "different." But this does not mean they all collapse into some undifferentiated union with each other and can't be "told apart." Persons are different, but it's by another kind of differentiation, not mutual negation.<sup>14</sup>

What is this "other kind of differentiation"? Bruteau's unitive insight here, drawn not from speculation but from the direct practice of meditation, marks the radical fork in the road between Teilhard's evolutionary assessment and her own:

Persons are beings, and being is self-diffusive, active, and self-communicating. When we ourselves, in meditation, strip away all the descriptions and center in our bare I AM, we discover it is a radiant energy, it goes out from itself. The same reality, the same act of being that says I AM enstatically, in the same breath pronounces the ecstatic MAY YOU BE. This is how Being is, and person is fundamental Being. The act of being "I is not an act of negating another, but of affirming another."<sup>15</sup>

The immediate implication of this, in terms of Teilhardian metaphysics, is that ultimate personhood (Teilhard's "superhuman" and "hyper-personalized") is established not by centration--increasing differentiation--but by what we would today term interbeing, the capacity to mutually interpenetrate and form new evolutionary units. "What if true persons are circles whose centers are nowhere and whose circumferences are everywhere?" she ponders in her essay "Prayer and Identity"<sup>16</sup>--a thought that would no doubt have left Teilhard scratching his head. And on the basis of this, two deductions follow that represent a radical departure from his own mystical scenario:

God must exist as a "community of God-persons" to express this radically diffusive and interabiding nature of love. The Omega Point, if such there be, cannot be identified with a single person of the Trinity but is expressed in the symbiotic unity of the whole.

Because of the inherent nature of Being to "Be more, Be in every possible way, Communicate Being, and Be a new whole by interaction,"<sup>17</sup> the more likely the evolutionary trajectory does not entail an Omega Point but a continuing open-ended expansion.

Wherever one's personal preferences may lie on this issue, it is certainly good to have options so that the validity of Teilhard's entire evolutionary vision does not rest on his ultimately personal mystical intuition of a final convergence in Christ. While I tend toward that resolution

myself (on the basis of my work with the Law of Three, shortly to be introduced), Bruteau's exegesis of the Trinity on the basis of "the expansive, or radiant, character of Being"<sup>18</sup> is a brilliant bridge builder, not only with the non-dual metaphysical traditions, but with contemporary science as well. In particular, her recognition of threeness as "symmetry breaking"<sup>19</sup> and hence implicitly involved in all ongoing dynamism, brilliantly links the Trinity to evolution by logical necessity, not simply theological stipulation. At the same time it confirms that the early church's intuitive gravitation toward a model of threeness as represented in those "God-persons in community" may not be nearly so arbitrary as naysayers over the ages have claimed, but rather finds its rationale in a deeper causal ground.

### The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three

My own contribution to this ongoing trinitarian conversation takes up at exactly the point that Bruteau's leaves off. Her notion of a necessary threefoldness as the driveshaft of evolution moves our understanding of the Trinity as a cosmogonic template to a whole new level. My goal has been to see whether it might be possible to anchor this necessary threefoldness not in a hypothetical three God-persons in community (which is still a theological stipulation and as such inaccessible as a starting point to all those not already so convinced) but in a deeper universal principle that I had become familiar with through my ten years of participation in Gurdjieff's Work as the Law of Three.

G. I. Gurdjieff (1866–1949) is not a name widely known in theological circles, so a few words of introduction are probably in order. This Armenian-born spiritual teacher became convinced in his early adulthood that there still existed ancient wisdom schools preserving cosmic knowledge that had long been lost to contemporary humankind. After a twenty-year search, mostly in Central Asia (he and Teilhard were crisscrossing much of the same terrain a few decades apart), he arrived back in Russia on the eve of World War I and began sharing the fruits of his research. Displaced steadily westward by the political turmoil of the era, he wound up in France, where he attracted students from all over Europe and North America to his complex but brilliant system of transformation, familiarly known as the Work.<sup>20</sup>

The Law of Three, the centerpiece of that system, stipulates that every phenomenon, on every scale (from subatomic to cosmic) and in every domain (physical, sociological, psycho-spiritual) is the result of the interweaving of three independent forces: the first active (or "affirming," as it's known in the Work), the second passive (or "denying"), and the third neutralizing (or "reconciling"). This is not simply a Hegelian thesis/antithesis/synthesis; the third force is an independent line of action, co-equal with the other two, and not simply a product of the other two. Just as it takes three strands of hair to make a braid, it takes three individual lines of action to make a new arising. Until this third term enters, the two forces remain at impasse. Once it enters, the situation is catapulted into a whole new ballpark.

Consider a few simple examples. A seed, as Jesus said, "unless it falls into the ground and dies, remains a single seed." If this seed does fall into the ground, it enters a sacred transformative process. Seed, the first or affirming force, meets ground, the second or denying force (and at

that, it has to be moist ground, water being its most critical first component). But even in this encounter nothing will happen until sunlight, the third, or reconciling force, enters the equation. Among the three they generate a sprout, which is the actualization of the possibility latent in the seed--and a whole new "field" of possibility.

Or take the analogy of sailing. A sailboat is driven through the water by the interplay of the wind on its sails (first force) and the resistance of the sea against its keel (second force). The result is that the boat is "shot" forward through the water. But as any sailor knows, this schoolbook explanation is not complete. A sailboat, left to its own devices, will not shoot forward through the water; it will round up into the wind and come to a stop. For forward movement to occur, a third force must enter the equation, the heading, or destination, by which the helmsperson determines the proper set of the sail and positioning of the keel. Only if these three are engaged can the desired result emerge, which is the course made good, the actual distance traveled.

In Gurdjieff's Work this law (also known as the Law of World Creation) has been seriously studied for more than eight decades across a wide variety of professional disciplines represented by students of the Work: politicians, scientists, social scientists, philosophers, artists. There is a considerable body of data attesting to the accuracy of this law and its practical effectiveness as a problem solver and impasse breaker. And it continues to be stumbled on by highly credentialed individuals outside of the Work who of course have no idea at what they are staring.<sup>21</sup> But it has never been systematically applied to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This is what I set out to do in my 2013 book *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*. Taking my cue from Gurdjieff himself, who allusively suggested that "the idea of a third force is found in religion in the concept of the Trinity,"<sup>22</sup> I attempted to apply the basic operating dynamism of the Law of Three--"The interweaving of three forces produces a fourth (the new arising) in a new dimension"--to see how the Trinity might actually carry out its evolutionary work.

The results of my exploration are too complex to summarize here, but essentially I was able to confirm Catherine LaCugna's intuition of a great parabolic curve sweeping from Alpha to Omega along a broadly calculable line of direction. Applying the trinitarian "math" yielded up a cosmic map in seven stages of vastly unequal duration, narrowing to an eye of the needle at the human life of Jesus and then widening back out in two successive aeons marked by increasing spiritual incandescence as they bear down on that point of final implosion already predicted in the calculations. By a very different route I wound up in the same place as Teilhard, in the process creating an unintentional second line of bearing on his crucial mystical insight.

I say "unintentional" because I wrote my book, I confess, before Teilhard was even fully on my radar screen. I did not set out with the goal of confirming his intuitions. But having arrived by my own route, I would say that the only real difference between our paradigms is that what he calls christogenesis I would expand to read as "christogenesis as the lawful and inevitable progression of the trinitarian evolutionary dynamism."



## Ternary Metaphysics

The common denominator in all these distinctly different yet overlapping revisionings is that the Trinity emerges as a metaphysical principle, not merely a theological one. Its major function is to bear witness to "the ultimate triadic structure of reality" and to offer access to this reality both as personal entry point into the mystical body of Christ and as an evolutionary template.

In chapter 5 of *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three* I offer a new term for the metaphysical roadmap implicit in this emerging understanding of the Trinity: ternary metaphysics. Simply put, it is a metaphysical system based on threeness rather than twoness. In place of the static, binary opposites of traditional metaphysics,<sup>23</sup> it offers the inevitable characteristics of threeness: asymmetry, dynamism, an inherent predisposition to innovation, an inherent purposiveness or trajectory, and an *advaita*, or oneness, achieved not through stasis but through dynamic equilibrium.

What happens when we approach Teilhard from this new ternary perspective? For me, the picture looks like tumbler locks falling into place. Many of those critical Teilhardian ideas that remain obscure or even unfathomable in traditional metaphysical categories suddenly become immediately contextualized, and the values Teilhard so passionately championed are essentially identical with those resonating so powerfully here. We might take note particularly of the following points of convergence:

**Dynamism.** Both Teilhard and the emerging trinitarian metaphysics place primary emphasis on motion, change, and God-as-becoming. The Divine is no longer associated with the timeless and changeless, but with movement, creativity, and self-communication. Evolution. The trinitarian models here considered confirm that foundational Teilhardian insight of an evolutionary principal woven into the very "stuff of the universe" that ultimately prevails over the force of entropy and leads to progressively more sophisticated differentiation and greater consciousness.

**Consistence.** At the heart of Teilhard's lifelong spiritual quest was the search for that ultimate coherence in *quo omnia constant* (in which all things hold together). The portrait emerging from the new trinitarian metaphysics confirms his conviction that the universe is neither random nor insignificant, and that evolution itself, while "groping" its way through chance and recombination, ultimately operates under the sway of a greater unifying principle, which, like a bicycle, remains stable by maintaining forward motion. "Nothing holds together absolutely except through the Whole; and the Whole itself holds together only through its future fulfillment."<sup>24</sup>

**The heart of matter.** In Teilhard's revolutionary metaphysical vision the evolutionary ascent to the divine fullness--pleromization, in his language--does not lead away from matter, but through it. Spirit is no longer a substance but progressively attained as matter is left behind by the organizing principle operative within matter itself, drawing it on to become more and more fully realized, more and more fully itself. The new trinitarian model concurs completely,

restoring the Oikonomia to center stage as the locus of divine self-communication and matter as a crucial ingredient in these transforming fires.

Holographic reciprocity. What Teilhard means by "pantheism" is paralleled and expanded by Panikkar's "cosmotheandric" and Bruteau's "symbiotic unity." The fundamental idea is that the whole and the part exist in an interabiding unity that together comprise "the dynamism of the real." The whole is not a substance, but a field of action generated by this ongoing exchange-- "pure relationality," as Panikkar has it.<sup>25</sup>

Hyper-personalization. Through this same relational dynamism, both unity and differentiation are preserved. Advaita, or oneness, is attained not through the reabsorption of the part back into the whole (as in classic monism), but rather through an intensifying differentiation that increases capaciousness and hence the profundity of union. Oneness occurs not at the point of utmost simplicity but at the point of utmost complexification. With Bruteau's nuancing factored in, the Trinity emerges as the prototype of this hyper-personalized union, in which identity is preserved ("inconfuse, immutabilite, indivise, inseparabiliter," in the words of Chalcedon) through the continuous intercirculation of kenotic love.

Amorization. In Teilhard's most celebrated quotation he speaks of "harnessing the energy of love." In the new mode of trinitarian reflection, the Trinity becomes the mechanism par excellence for this harnessing of love. Bruteau's brilliant description of why agape love demands three terms and my own work with the Law of Three suggest that threeness is indeed the pathway along which this love must necessarily flow.

Convergence. Of all the great mystical intuitions of Teilhard, this is perhaps the most difficult to verify, even on the new trinitarian map. While a significant number of scientists would now agree that there does indeed seem to be a counter-entropic principle at work in the cosmos, Teilhard's inference that all lines must thereby radiate out from it and converge toward it is by no means established or even demonstrable within the givens of empirical science. And even the ternary systems examined here tend more toward an open-ended evolutionary trajectory (Bruteau) or a dynamic equilibrium (Panikkar). By calling on the predicative capacities of the Law of Three, I am able to confirm Teilhard's intuition of a final convergence.

Teilhard never heard the term ternary metaphysics, of course, but it seems that beneath the presenting surface of evolution, what he was actually groping for was something very like this missing threeness. We see a strong foreshadowing of this direction in his intuition of a "third nature" of Christ--"Christ the Evolver" --through which the risen Christ continues to exercise his cosmogonic agency.<sup>26</sup> From the perspective of the Law of Three, what he seems to be intuitively grappling for is the missing "third force," that missing third term that breaks the stasis and restores forward motion. As scholar James Lyons perceptively notes: "Whereas the Alexandrian Logos was the organizing principle of the stable [that is, binary] Greek cosmos, today we must identify Christ with 'a new Logos': the evolutive principle of a universe in movement."<sup>27</sup> It is this universe in motion that galvanized Teilhard's imagination and inflamed his heart. And it is that universe in motion that ternary metaphysics both invites and impels.

## The Ternary Swan

Sixty years after his death Teilhard remains a towering singularity in the world of intellectual thought. People didn't know how to categorize him--and still don't. While he positioned himself primarily as a scientist--and, of course, that was technically correct, since all other professional access points were denied to him by his religious superiors--it has been hard for scientists to claim him as their own, for beyond his immediate domain of paleontology, it is clear that science functions for him primarily as the handmaiden to what can essentially be described as a continuous visionary recital. His leaps are too grand, his navigation beyond the strict boundaries of interdisciplinary rigor too risky, his intuition of a final mystical convergence so adamant that it leaves even his most charitable colleagues in the dust. "Many scientists, as I do, may find it impossible to follow him all the way," admits Julian Huxley in his introduction to *The Phenomenon of Man*.

If he left his fellow scientists scratching their heads, his movements were even more inscrutable to his fellow theologians. His Jesuit confreres silenced and exiled him and have yet to welcome him back fully as one of their most brilliant sons. But his rejection is even more sweeping and virulent among contemporary adherents of traditionalist metaphysics, who continue to lambaste him for what are perceived as unpardonable offenses against the classic Neoplatonic roadmap. All those things he was so enamored of--dynamism, uncertainty, complexification, materiality--are inevitably associated with the corrupt and fallen, and wisdom is always and only above (or perhaps behind), never in the messy ahead. His open-armed embrace of modernity would seem to be going in exactly the wrong direction, and on that basis he is routinely castigated.

The problem dissolves, I think, when we name Teilhard for what he was and is: a ternary swan in a binary metaphysical duck pond. His lifelong groping along the pathway of evolution was at heart a bold and visionary drive to articulate the inescapable ternary basis of Christian metaphysics and to heal the artificial schism between theology and science, which had only opened up in the first place because the binary roadmap (whether Scholastic or traditionalist), always was, and always will be, too small to accommodate Christianity's intrinsic ternary ground, our most profound treasure from the mind of Christ.

### Notes

1 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974), 157.

2 Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 2013; 1st ed. 1970), ix.

3 *Ibid.*, 22.

4 Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 222.

5 LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

6 Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 103, xx.

7 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Guifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 55.

8 Panikkar, *Christophany*, 116.

9 Beatrice Bruteau, *God's Ecstasy: The Creation of a Self-Creating World* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 14.

10 Bruteau, *God's Ecstasy*, 58.

11 Beatrice Bruteau, *Evolution toward Divinity* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1974), 2.

12 See in particular Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2006). The diagram of the levels of consciousness is on an overleaf, opposite page 68. Another popular and influential map is the Spiral Dynamics model developed by Don Beck (Christopher C. Cowan and Don Edward Beck, *Spiral Dynamics* [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2013; 1st ed. 1996]).

13 Bruteau, *God's Ecstasy*, 162.

14 *Ibid.*, 27–28.

15 *Ibid.*, 28.

16 Beatrice Bruteau, "Prayer and Identity" (1983), in Thomas Keating et al., *Spirituality, Contemplation, and Transformation: Writings on Centering Prayer* (New York: Lantern Books, 2008), 110.

17 Bruteau, *God's Ecstasy*, 58.

18 *Ibid.*, 24.

19 *Ibid.*, 84.

20 Gurdjieff is most widely known in contemporary spiritual circles as the one who originally introduced the Enneagram to the West, though his understanding of this teaching differs considerably from the prevailing model in the current Enneagram of Personality schools. The

Enneagram portrays the interweaving of the Law of Three with the Law of Seven (also known as the Law of World Maintenance) to offer those who can read it a powerful esoteric tool for working with change and process.

21 A good case in point is the so-called Constructal Law, set forth by Duke University engineering professor Adrian Bejan as a universal cosmic law on the order of the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics. The Constructal Law is an elegant specific case of the Law of Three. It states: "For a finite-size flow system to persist in time (to live), its configuration must evolve in such a way that provides easier access to the currents that flow through it." In this case the current is affirming force, the structure through which it flows is denying, and the protocol of maximum efficiency is the reconciling force that allows them to meet. The new arising is the design itself, which Bejan has been able to demonstrate always develops a similar and mathematically predictable structure, whether it is the root system of a tree, the capillaries in the lungs, or the architectural engineering of Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. See Adrian Bejan, *Design in Nature* (New York: Random House, 2012), 3.

22 Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2013), 36.

23 By "traditional metaphysics" I am designating not only Scholasticism and Neo-Scholasticism, but also Neoplatonism and that great universal system commonly represented as the Perennial Philosophy.

24 Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, 71.

25 Panikkar, *Christophany*, 173.

26 For a thoughtful discussion of this "third nature of Christ," see Ilia Delio, *Christ in Evolution* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 76.

27 James A Lyons, *Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 185–86.