

## “*L'éternel féminin*” in Teilhard de Chardin Intoning the Creation Octave, with Promises to Keep!

Was Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) really “a scientist among theologians and a theologian among scientists,” as Karl Rahner describes him in one of his studies?<sup>1</sup> The judgment may sound ironical or simply too harsh,<sup>2</sup> but paradoxically it may also suggest an alternative way of reading Teilhard de Chardin. To those familiar with the Eastern way of thinking, spirituality is

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Rahner, “Kleine Frage zum heutigen Pluralismus in der geistigen Situation der Katholiken und der Kirche,” in *Schriften zur Theologie* (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1968), 6:38. The judgment is not pronounced aphoristically, but with poise and backed by arguments. Rahner refers to Teilhard several times with a respect combined with criticism, ultimately with reserve as to his evolutionistic framework. See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Longmann & Todd, 1978), 180, where he speaks of the underlying unity of spirit and matter, while at the same time trying to avoid, albeit not deliberately, theories which Teilhard made current. And yet: “If we reach the same conclusions, so much the better.”

<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, Rahner thoroughly shows his appreciation of Teilhard. Thus, in his “Laudatio auf Erich Przywara,” in Karl Rahner, *Gnade als Freiheit* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 272, he says that Przywara (1889-1972), on whom he lavishes so much praise, is not less in stature than Teilhard. Significantly, in view of former admonitions against Teilhard’s writings on the part of the Holy Office, Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, in their short compendium of the council’s documents, *Kleines Konzilskompendium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 434, refer to the concluding paragraph of Part I of *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II’s pastoral constitution on “The Church in the Modern World,” no. 45, with the stress on Christ, *alpha* and *omega*, as the goal of history’s efforts, as an honorary reference to Teilhard, though he is nowhere mentioned in the document itself.

dogma seen from within. Teilhard had plenty to say about the outside (“outer face”) and the inside (“inner face”) of things in general, and as a palaeontologist he laid stress on the latter. This same approach, through the interiority of things rather than through their exterior appearance, is recommended in seeking access to a thinker of Teilhard’s complexity. There are many things which elude a facile categorization, either because they are the elementary blocks on which everything else is built, such as protoplasm, or because they afford the highest criteria available, as do transcendentals in metaphysics, which help define but cannot be defined. Many of the great discoveries were not made by experts scrupulously applying a sophisticated method but rather by those who used method in an unorthodox way, thereby poaching on neighbouring territory at the risk of many a surprising twist and turn.

As a comparable example Thomas Merton (1915-68) comes to mind. He was more of an artist than a professional theologian; and his poem, “Hagia Sophia,” structured on an hour of the Breviary, has of late been studied by Sven Boenneke for its sophianic content.<sup>3</sup> Merton’s experience on Fourth Street in Louisville, Kentucky, USA, which liberated him from the illusion of being better than others, his dream of the Jewish girl Proverb, and the wisdom themes he discovered in St Bonaventure (c.1217-74), Meister Eckhart (c.1260-1327) and others: all this concurred to set a tone to wisdom as a theological theme, which says less than a formal treatise does but more at a different level. In a like vein, Teilhard de Chardin is instructive because he is not a professional theologian and so offers a preferential track different from and yet parallel to that of professional theologians.

### “L’Éternel féminin” as a Wisdom Theme

If we may try to approach Teilhard as a sort of intellectual “nomad in no man’s land,” spirituality will turn out to be the shortcut to reach the mainspring of his inspiration, and his early prose poem “L’Éternel Féminin” a sure path to it. A short description of this dense ten-page composition in view of the method pursued is thus in order.

In 1916, as a soldier serving in the French army during World War I, the thirty-seven year old Pierre Teilhard de Chardin set his heart on a theme that had long been humming in his heart: virginity.<sup>4</sup> Not in vain. A Jesuit since 1899,

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<sup>3</sup>S. Boennecke, “Sophia spielt in der Welt: Sophianisches Gut bei Louis Thomas Merton OCSO” (Doctoral dissertation, Pontifical Theological Faculty of St. Bonaventure, Rome, 2007), 170-231.

<sup>4</sup>Henri de Lubac, *L’Éternel Féminin: étude sur un texte du Père Teilhard de Chardin* (Paris :

he had gone through the long Jesuit curriculum, that, among other things, had taken him to Jersey and Hastings for his philosophical and theological studies, and a four year apprenticeship (“regency” in the Jesuit jargon) teaching physics in Cairo. He was ordained priest in 1911. By now he would have probably already absolved the last phase of Jesuit training and taken his last vows were it not for the War. The feast of the Annunciation 1918 seemed like an ideal target date,<sup>5</sup> and, indeed, the poem was factually finished after a two year incubation period on precisely 25 March of that year,<sup>6</sup> feast of the Annunciation. The last three weeks before that date were the real time of composition.<sup>7</sup> From Teilhard’s notes of the two year preparation one gathers the following strains: (a) Chastity is the *unmistakable sign left by revelation* on its sudden appearance on the cosmic scene, (b) while at the same time forming a *natural development within the cosmos*. (c) As a struggle against the centrifugal forces of the soul,<sup>8</sup> chastity works hand in hand with the other fundamental virtue of charity so as to re-establish equilibrium. (d) Yet, whereas chastity unites the monad, charity unites the monads.<sup>9</sup> Chastity as a divine gift with a logistic base in the natural developments of the cosmos serves as a force of personal integration and source of social integration alongside charity and thus offers parameters for the further explication of the prose poem within Teilhard’s own production.

This inner creativity, however, was not without precedents, but brought to a boiling point something that had long been simmering in recent cultural history but that now called for a more tangible expression, which is what happens in the focus of Teilhard’s concrete interests. A brief consideration of the title, “L’Éternel Féminin,” illustrates this. The expression was not coined by Teilhard himself, but had been in use for about a century. It had been first used by Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) in the conclusion of *Faust*, II,<sup>10</sup> and in German it runs as follows: “das Ewig-Weibliche.”

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Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), 9-10. Following Teilhard’s notebooks, de Lubac informs us that by May 1, 1916, he decided that the poem will be “in honour” of Our Lady and that, by the following May 8, a first plan was sketched.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 27. As a matter of fact, the ceremony took place on May 26, 1918, at Sainte-Foy-lès-Lyon, in the noviciate chapel of his province.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 32. There are no more notes in Teilhard’s notebook after March 18.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 21. On March 7, 26, Teilhard states that the Prologue will bear the title: “In front of a veiled woman. To Béatrix” (ibid. p. 26).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 19. This comes from “L’Union créatrice” (octobre-novembre) 1917, 194.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14. This comes from “L’Union créatrice” (octobre-novembre) 1917; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Écrits du temps de la guerre (1916-1919)* (Paris: Grasset, 1965), 192-194.

<sup>10</sup> According to Walter Kaufmann, “Introduction,” in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe’s Faust: The Original German and a New Translation and Introduction*, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 30, *Faust*, II was completed in the summer of 1831 and

<p>Alles Vergängliche Ist nur ein Gleichnis; Das Unzulängliche, Hier wird's Ereignis; Das Unbeschreibliche, Hier ist's getan; Das Ewig-Weibliche, Zieht uns hinan.</p>	<p>What is destructible Is but a parable; What fails ineluctably, The undeclarable, Here it was seen, Here it was action; The Eternal-Feminine Lures to perfection.<sup>12</sup></p>
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Henri de Lubac has not much to say about Goethe as forerunner of Teilhard's "L'Éternel Féminin." Rightly he wonders whether Teilhard would have read *Faust*, II, even if the expression in the meantime had become common literary property. As an independent confirmation we may adduce Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) who considers the desire for perfect happiness the greatest prop for the idea of "mystery," adding that Goethe sees Faust ever striving for higher goals and crowns his struggle "with that eroticism of the Eternal Feminine whence to reach paradise."<sup>12</sup> From Goethe Teilhard took something more than simply the phrase. Already in the German poet, immediately before the "Chorus mysticus" intones the last chant, just quoted, the "Doctor Marianus" makes the Eternal Feminine refer to the Virgin Mary: "Penitents, behold elated / The redeeming face; / Grateful, be regenerated / For a life full of grace. / That all good mind would grow keen / To serve thee alone, Holy virgin, mother, queen, / Goddess on thy throne!"<sup>13</sup> While acknowledging that Goethe thus covers part of the function which Teilhard assigns to "L'Éternel Féminin," de Lubac remarks that Goethe could not possibly have had the same appreciation of the Virgin Mary which Teilhard had.<sup>14</sup> This important aspect in understanding Teilhard's contribution, a comparison between Goethe's and Teilhard's conception of the Eternal Feminine, has not received enough attention.

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was published posthumously as vol. 41 of Goethe's *Werke: Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1987); cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Gotthard Erler (München: Goldmann, 1978), 959.

<sup>11</sup> Kaufmann, *Goethe's Faust*, 502-503.

<sup>12</sup> "[...] *Con l'eroticismo della eterna muliebrità onde si attinge il paradiso*," Benedetto Croce, *Filosofia, Poesia, Storia* (Milano: Ricciardi, 1955), 37. As for Croce's positive judgment on Goethe this took place under the influence of Croce's master, Francesco De Sanctis, who accounted for a big difference in Goethe's reception in Italy; see Heinz Kindermann, *Das Goethebild des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), 152.

<sup>13</sup> Kaufmann, *Goethe's Faust*, 502-503.

<sup>14</sup> De Lubac, *L'Éternel Féminin*, 54.

This calls for a short literary analysis of Teilhard's "L'Éternel Féminin," that will be attempted in part two of this study, followed by a summary comparison with the point of departure, Goethe's initial conception in part three.

### **A Love Song amid the War Dirge**

The very first strains of the dedication at the beginning of "L'Éternel Féminin," ("À Béatrix") reveal the veiled woman's<sup>15</sup> identity to be Béatrix, who herself, however, stands for someone else, and is thus a symbol.<sup>16</sup> To this we are alerted by the peculiar spelling employed, which does not correspond exactly to Dante's *Beatrice*, but is transfigured to *Béatrix*. Why did not Teilhard choose one of the many virgin saints, but rather one who was an object of human though unrequited love on the part of the Florentine poet? Beatrice Portinari (1266-1290) died young and apparently Dante only saw her once without ever speaking to her. The dedication, therefore, calls for some justification of this borrowing from Dante as well as the larger implication of the symbolical character of the woman as guide and as inspirer.

### ***Dante and Beatrice***

As de Lubac points out, through his friend Auguste Valensin, SJ<sup>17</sup> Teilhard could not help becoming acquainted with the Florentine poet from the days of the novitiate.<sup>18</sup> Even closer to the goal comes the article which Pierre Charles, SJ, Teilhard's companion of theological studies in Hastings, England<sup>19</sup> had written in 1921 on "Dante et la mystique," when he writes that "a desire prods on the world, unaware of its various destinies, towards that universal dénouement

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<sup>15</sup> On the symbolism of the "veiled woman," *ibid.*, 179, 201.

<sup>16</sup> Contrary to Dante's *Beatrice*, de Lubac observes, *Béatrix* is not a concrete person who becomes - or which in her persisting concreteness becomes as well - a symbol, but a universal principle that becomes the symbol of a concrete person, *ibid.*, 26. In this interpretation, one may question whether *Béatrix*, as the veiled woman from the start, *becomes* a symbol for Mary or not rather *gradually reveals* her true identity. Romano Guardini, *Studi su Dante*, trans. M. L. Maraschini and A. Sacchi Balestrieri (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1979), 67-69, reiterates that *Beatrice Portinari*, for Dante, was not an allegory, but a concrete person throughout.

<sup>17</sup> The French Jesuit Auguste Valensin (1879-1953) later founded, in Nice, the "Société d'Études Dantesques," see Philip Duclos, "Valensin, Auguste," in *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, ed. Charles E. O'Neill and Joaquim Maria Domínguez (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), 4: 3872-3873.

<sup>18</sup> De Lubac, *L'Éternel Féminin*, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Charles (1883-1954) studied in Hastings in 1907-10. On this Belgian Jesuit theologian see Georges Meessen, "Charles, Pierre," in *Diccionario Compañía de Jesús*, 1: 752-753.

which is the *omega* of all reality.”<sup>20</sup> According to Cardinal de Lubac, Teilhard could not possibly ignore the last line of *La Divina Comedia* describing love as “*l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle*”<sup>21</sup> (“the Love which turns the sun and other stars”).<sup>22</sup> Is Béatrix meant to serve as a counterpoint to Margarete, in *Faust I*? This may be debated, since Margarete is therein portrayed as a tragic figure who sins and is punished by execution; though she exercises a beneficent influence on Faust and is ultimately saved, her life on earth was hell and as a guide she would come closer to Virgil. Beatrice, it may be recalled, accompanies Dante in heaven until St Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) takes over at the end; it is Virgil who accompanies him through purgatory and hell. Béatrix’ real identity is revealed once she begins to speak, with a quote from Prov 8:22, in the old Vulgate then familiar to Teilhard and often used in Saturday votive masses of Our Lady: “*Ab initio et ante saecula creata sum ...*”<sup>23</sup> This is the second strain which reveals the identity of Béatrix: she speaks as wisdom in person, created wisdom, not divine wisdom. As the poem moves ahead, Béatrix will reveal even more of her own identity.

### *Wisdom-Sophia*

Wisdom as a theological theme is thoroughly known in the West, but has been much less articulated than in the East. The theme has a guaranteed place in Christian thought, inasmuch as it has roots already in the Old Testament, where we come across

<sup>20</sup> De Lubac, *L’Éternel Féminin*, 55.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. De Lubac, however, fails to point out that there is a progression from the end of the first book of *La Divina Commedia* to the second, and from the second to the third. At the end of the “Inferno” Cantos, the very last line reads: “*E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle*,” Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. and ed. Howard Russell Huse (New York: Rinehart, 1965), 166 and 233 (“Inferno,” Canto 34, v. 139), relaying the sense of being relieved after the gruesome walk through hell. Following the experience of purgatory, Dante speaks of himself as being “*puro e disposto a salire a le stelle*,” *ibid.*, 326 and 434 (“Purgatorio,” Canto 33, v. 145) - not just watching the stars, but reaching out to them, at least in desire. In “Paradiso,” Canto 33, which starts with St Bernard’s memorable hymn to the Virgin, “*Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio*,” *ibid.*, 477, 481, finishes with Dante apostrophising “*l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle*.” For Teilhard, this *progressive* rise to a fixed point would have been very attractive indeed - assuming he did know it - especially for a thinker whose whole approach was growth and evolution towards the Omega point that is Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., “Paradiso,” Canto 33, 144.

<sup>23</sup> The quote is taken from the “Lectio Libri Sapientiae,” 24: 1-16, in Gaspar Lefebvre, ed., *Missel quotidien et vespéral* (Bruges: Abbaye de Saint André, 1940), 236. But the Bible quote at the beginning of Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, “L’Éternel Féminin,” in *Écrits du temps de la guerre*, 281, is assigned to Prov. 8: 22, which in the *NRSV* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1989), reads as follows: “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.”



that personification of wisdom which is found in Béatrix. The basic issue here is how to portray God's relation to man and the world. One inadvertently thinks of the woman, symbol of Sophia, guiding God the Father's hand in Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam."<sup>24</sup> The interpretations given to the Old Testament wisdom literature have varied from personifications of wisdom to poetical downplaying of such personifications, whereas others have preferred to see in it the problem of Divine transcendence and immanence, whereby divine wisdom makes itself felt in the souls of the saints in the world who act on it and direct it.<sup>25</sup> But the problem goes farther and involves us willy-nilly with the wisdom theories which were particularly rampant at the time Teilhard wrote, namely, Russian sophiology. To this we are adverted by H. de Lubac himself when he regrets that Teilhard was not in a position to know Vladimir Soloviev's work, *The Meaning of Love*, which though published in 1894 had not yet been translated into French by the time Teilhard wrote.<sup>26</sup> In his article, "Auguste Comte's Idea of Humanity" Soloviev (1853-1900) takes Comte (1798-1857) to task for laying the wrong stress on the role of woman in religion, better still, in the religion he had concocted, while ignoring the Immaculate Conception (defined as a dogma in 1854) adding that the principle of "the Eternal Feminine" was only one.<sup>27</sup> The origin of this principle can only be wisdom and the Wisdom literature found in Scripture, though the universal thinker Soloviev could not help feeling the influence of the Kabbala and other non-Christian commentators, thus amalgamating the truly inspiring Christian principle of wisdom with some dubious elements such as the world-soul as the counterpart of the divine wisdom.<sup>28</sup> Suffice it here to point out to the importance that Sophia represents for Soloviev and those who followed him on this point. It is with Soloviev that we find for the first time the interpretation of Sophia as the Eternal Feminine.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Le trône de la sagesse: essai sur la signification du culte mariale* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1957), 74-76, 208.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Gilbert, "Sagesse: Ancien Testament," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol.14 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1990), 72-81, especially 80.

<sup>26</sup> De Lubac, *L'Éternel Féminin*, 57. For Soloviev's work itself, see "Der Sinn der Geschlechtsliebe" in Vladimir Soloviev, *Werke: Deutsche Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Vladimir Soloviev*, ed. W. Szykarski and L. Muller (Freiburg: Wewel, 1953-80), 7: 193-272. We cannot do justice to the great work of wisdom which is sexual love if we judge it exclusively by means of moral standards, instead of seeing in it the divine goodness and truth working for the benefit of human beings by establishing proper order.

<sup>27</sup> Soloviev, "Die Idee der Menschheit bei Auguste Comte," *ibid.*, 1:270. Soloviev again criticizes Comte for replacing the heart with woman in his anthropology.

<sup>28</sup> "Die Weltseele als Prinzip der Schöpfung, des Raumes, der Zeit und der mechanischen Kausalität," *ibid.*, 3:348-358. See also Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Kleines Konzilkompendium*, 382, who recall that wisdom is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick C. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy: Selected Aspects* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1988), 82.

Soloviev could look back on a long tradition in Russia and its predecessor Rus', with its capital Kiev, of representing Sophia. Yet already in the eleventh century the magnificent cathedrals of Kiev, capital of Rus', and Novgorod in the North, departed from the tradition received from Byzantium, for they were not dedicated to the Logos, but to the Theotokos (Mother of God), to show the connection between the Mother of God and Mother Earth, the latter title being a typical Russian theme.<sup>30</sup> The tendency immediately before Soloviev had swung back again to identifying wisdom with the Mother of God, because the scriptural wisdom passages speak of wisdom as "she." But until the sixteenth century, wisdom was generally identified with Christ.<sup>31</sup> For Soloviev, wisdom came to play an important part as the interconnecting link between God and the world in his metaphysics.<sup>32</sup> Two extremes are to be noted among those who appealed to Soloviev. Whereas the symbolist poets such as Alexander Blok (1880-1921) loaded Sophia with erotic connotations, Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948), who held Soloviev responsible for such an aberration, saw in Sophia the vision of the transfigured world.<sup>33</sup> On account of what one side retained to be uncontrolled speculation, sophiology came to divide Russian thinkers among themselves, with S. Bulgakov and P. Florenskij advocating it, and G. Florovsky and V. Lossky opposing it.<sup>34</sup> Greek Orthodox theologians not only do not propound "sophiology" as the Russians do, but they are usually very critical of it.<sup>35</sup>

And yet, while none of Soloviev's three visions of Sophia are dedicated to Our Lady, behind Béatrix' veil of wisdom are the concrete traits of Mary and of the Church, alongside a series of other identifications which we have to decipher as we go along in this poem. Thus Béatrix is a real symbol, an actually existing

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<sup>30</sup> Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963), 285-286.

<sup>31</sup> See, on this point, Albert M. Ammann, "Darstellung und Deutung der Sophia im vorpetrinischen Russland," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 4 (1938): 120-156.

<sup>32</sup> Copleston considered Sophiology as a theological-philosophical theory to be for all intents and purposes a creation of Soloviev, and, moreover, that his use of it is vague and inconsistent, Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, 86-87. Gnosticism and pantheism are the dangers which Sophiology as practised by Soloviev and some of his disciples are said to incur, Bernard Schultze, "Sagesse VI: Sophiologie," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 14:125. For the ambiguities of *l'Éternel Féminin*, see Louis Bouyer, *Sophia ou le Monde en Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 118-119.

<sup>33</sup> Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, 83.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Hagia Sophia, in Constantinople, is dedicated to the Logos.



reality which stands for a reality yet to come.<sup>36</sup> For this reason we now need to carry out the literary analysis of this poem.

### *Literary Analysis*

Teilhard's prose poem<sup>37</sup> is divided into two parts. Couching her message in the sapiential words of the Old Testament she thus intones "the unfathomable octave of creation" (*"l'immense octave de la creation"* - Paul Claudel, [1869-1955]).<sup>38</sup> Since everything in the universe is made out of fecundation of two disparate things in search of one another, God has spread wisdom in the initial manifold of reality as a force of condensation and concentration. Given the christological orientation of this poem, one is reminded instinctively of the *"multiformis sapientia Dei"* ("the manifold wisdom of God") of which St Paul speaks in Eph 3:10, so long as we distinguish carefully, as Teilhard does even if he does not refer to this passage, between God's own wisdom and that found in created reality.<sup>39</sup> At any rate, this characterization marks the world as being sealed by that love that integrates (Prov. 8:22-31), which helps also qualify Béatrix as *"l'essentiel Féminin"* ("the essential Feminine").<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, this force cemented the bases of the universe; on the other hand, every monad in the universe responded to a first inkling or principle of the love for me, says Béatrix thereby qualifying herself as *"l'universel Féminin"* ("the universal Feminine").<sup>41</sup> This principle of attraction began to take form in the various beings, ever more differentiated, according to souls' receptiveness of a richer, deeper and more spiritual union - that human effervescence that incorporates *"l'attrait Féminin"* in the various forms of power and splendour.<sup>42</sup> On her part, wisdom started revealing herself in all things, so that man discovers that, in feeling this attraction, he is dealing with a great secret

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<sup>36</sup> See De Lubac, *L'Éternel Féminin*, 191.

<sup>37</sup> A prose poem is printed as prose but has some elements in common with poetry, such as vivid imagery, see John Anthony Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Penguin 1987), 536.

<sup>38</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, "L'Éternel Féminin," 281; De Lubac, *L'Éternel Féminin*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> The passage is worth quoting in its entirety. "Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places," Eph 3:8-10 (*NRSV*, 1989).

<sup>40</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, "L'Éternel Féminin," 282.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 282-283.

Force.<sup>43</sup> Wisdom brings in its train a knowledge of good and evil. On making his *début* on the world-scene of wisdom, man gave in to the temptation of having wisdom at his beck and call, and so succumbed to the attraction of evil.<sup>44</sup> In this attempt to manipulate and monopolize wisdom there remains in one's hands nothing but matter, for matter is the face of spirit when one recoils from it.<sup>45</sup> Man might just have managed to make me evil through and through, Béatrix admits, had Christ not intervened.<sup>46</sup>

The second part of the prose poem starts with the liberation brought about by Christ. Then, telescoping together two quotations from St Paul, Béatrix adds: "It is better not to marry."<sup>47</sup> In this perspective, true fecundity is seen to be the generation in the Spirit, and Béatrix waxes eloquent on the creativity of virginity as woman and mother, sign of the new times ushered in by Christ.<sup>48</sup> Here one could perhaps object, with an eye to Christ's interchange with Nicodemus (John 3:1-16) that this is *re*generation and *re*birth, rather than generation in a literal sense. Christ has thus revealed that the highest form of love is virginity.<sup>49</sup> To heed Christ's call does not in the slightest imply banishing love from the heart, for the heart must remain essentially human.<sup>50</sup> Béatrix puts this in a lapidary way: "Christ has left me all the jewels."<sup>51</sup> Teilhard thus tries to save both the gratuity of this supreme love, revealed and secured by Christ, and human freedom, adorned anew after the initial Fall in the signs of the new times. This liberation imparts a new *élan* to human beings and enables humanity to keep ascending and progressing without let or hindrance, so long as it corresponds with grace, of which the jewel in the crown will be chastity.<sup>52</sup> In this optimal way of viewing future progress, Béatrix exclaims: "I am the imperishable Beauty of the times to come—the Feminine ideal."<sup>53</sup> And then, touching a theme so dear to the Greek Fathers, Béatrix speaks of the transfiguration of the body ("sublimier le Corps") in terms of divinisation. But this transfiguration requires that the one who would

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 283-284.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 284-285.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 285-286.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 286. The two Scriptural references are 1 Cor 7:9 ("better to marry than to burn") and 1 Cor 7:38 ("to marry is good, but to remain a virgin is better").

<sup>48</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, "L'Éternel Féminin," 286-287.

<sup>49</sup> See the editor's note in *ibid.*, 287.10.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

retain Wisdom keep pace with her.<sup>54</sup> In a world completely under the sway of virginity, there would only remain God as object of desire; and, to attain this goal, God has strewn a scent of beauty, capable of awakening the great desire for him, until the encounter between Creator and created takes place on the terrain of Wisdom.<sup>55</sup>

At the climax of her self-disclosure, Béatrix makes the final declaration:

“I am the Church, Spouse of Jesus.  
I am the Virgin Mary, Mother of all human beings.”<sup>56</sup>

At this point, this declaration may first come across as too abrupt a conclusion, but this is what one could expect from the liturgical praxis of the times, which considered Mary to be created wisdom personified. Teilhard does not explain how this relates to the title in the Lauretán litanies of Mary as the *throne* of wisdom (“*sedes sapientiae*”) and at the same time to the Church in embryo.<sup>57</sup> At any rate, having reached this high form of divinisation, the world will *a fortiori* not try to do away with “me, Béatrix”, but rather continue to progress by becoming ever more simplified and do away with the accumulated complications of life.<sup>58</sup> For, indeed - I am *l'Éternel Féminin!*

### ***L'“Éternel Féminin” and “das Ewig-Weibliche”:***

#### ***Truth Gains by Comparison***

The upshot of the foregoing discussion is that Teilhard considers chastity as being a matter of *revelation* but with cosmic urges meeting it half way, and approaches it from the viewpoint of *wisdom*, knowledge and experience brought to bear in concrete situations. In this way, chastity is seen to have a content of *knowledge*, but not just any kind of knowledge, but *life* knowledge. The good word for it, when it is properly understood, is *Gnosis*. Gnosticism, on the contrary, indicates a dualistic approach to life, which disqualifies matter as intrinsically evil since it was created by an evil God, the God of the Old Testament, and consequently rejects the sacraments with their symbolism designed to sanctify matter.<sup>59</sup> This dualism easily led to a dichotomy between faith and knowledge.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Bouyer, *Sophia ou le Monde en Dieu* (Paris : Cerf, 1994), 92-93.

<sup>58</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, “L'Éternel Féminin,” 291.

<sup>59</sup> How much gnosis defies a facile definition may be gathered from the following comment: “Gnosis has left an indelible imprint ... on Goethe's *Faust*. During the nineteenth century, several

For this reason, Gnostics rejected the Church's idea of a public revelation with publicly verifiable criteria for its contents without impairing the mystery character of these revealed contents themselves, and resorted instead to private revelations to special individuals around which grew not a Church with a universal claim to salvation, but a *numerus clausus* for a chosen few.<sup>60</sup> Inasmuch as it inevitably recalls the first big struggle the Church had to lead against heresy in the early times, even gnosis as a word enjoys a bad reputation, but need not. In order to combat the heresy, the Alexandrian Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215) called for the development of a good Gnosis<sup>61</sup> and a Christian Gnostic, whose vital knowledge will enable him to become a mature Christian.<sup>62</sup> Although not every Christian had the prerequisites to see his faith deepen in the sense intended here, Christian Gnosis did not divide Christianity into two groups, but looked for leaders in the community capable of leading others to the same sacraments and a common praxis of perfection.<sup>63</sup>

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Romantic poets seemed to reinvent gnostic myth, to describe a position that was no longer gnostic but was essentially nihilistic. These poets were P. B. Shelley (*Prometheus Unbound*, 1818-19), Lord Byron (*Cain*, 1821), ... and Mihail Eminescu (*Muresanu* and *Demonism*, 1872). ... Their desire to foster human liberation from the bonds of Christianity, especially as far as its Old Testament inheritance was concerned, stimulated these inventions. One way or another, each of these Romantics arrived at the Marcionite idea that the god of the Old Testament, who is also the creator of this world, is an evil god who must be opposed. ... For them, the world and man had become worthy of salvation from the clutches of the religious tyrant, and a sort of active nihilism was the way to reach that goal. This position of the Romantics was precisely the reverse of the gnostic position, insofar as the latter expressed a metaphysical denial of the world on behalf of transcendence, while the former expressed a nihilistic denial of transcendence on behalf of this world. Thus, while the mythological products of Romanticism were surprisingly akin to those of gnosticism, they were expressive of a completely different ideology. In recent scholarship, the confusion between gnosticism and modern nihilism has grown. All sorts of philosophical and literary works were labelled as 'gnostic' because of their nihilistic implications. Only in a few cases are analogies with Gnosticism meaningful ...," Ioan P. Culianu, 'Gnosticism from the Middle Ages to the Present,' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 5 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 574-578.

<sup>60</sup> See Antonio Orbe, *Cristologia gnóstica*, I-II (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1976).

<sup>61</sup> Already St Irenaeus had proposed a Christian gnosis to counteract the heretical gnosis; Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery*, trans. Iltyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 134-135

<sup>62</sup> Walther Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Klemens von Alexandrien* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1952). When Card. Martini starts his Spiritual Exercises based on St John's Gospel by calling the first meditation, "Exercises for the Mature Christian," he puts the thoroughly orthodox idea of the Christian gnostic in a new key, Carlo Maria Martini, *Il Vangelo secondo Giovanni* (Roma: Borla, 1980), 11-21.

<sup>63</sup> Bouyer, *Gnosis: La connaissance de Dieu dans l'Écriture* (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 1988),

(a) The expression “*das Ewig-Weibliche*” comes at the end of *Faust*, II, in the work generally considered to be the greatest work of the greatest German poet. Yet whereas *Faust*, I comes close to current everyday language, *Faust*, II, on the contrary, sounds far removed and is much less read than Part I. Yet, besides the fact that Goethe had less time to revise it than Part I, so - as W. Kaufmann explains - Goethe accomplished a truly revolutionary feat by adopting hitherto unknown forms in German literature and was a hundred years ahead of his time.<sup>64</sup> The point is not academic, for it is related to the further question pertinent to the understanding of “*das Ewig-Weibliche*”, whether namely the expression, as forming the very last verse but one of Part II, and therefore of the whole *Faust*, forms the conclusion to Part II alone or maybe to both Parts. This question cannot be separated though it has to be distinguished, from the further question whether the figure of the main hero Faust stands for Goethe himself as an individual. Since both Faust and Mephisto, the devil, represent engaging personalities it would be partial to identify Goethe with either one of them alone, if only for blatant contradictions with Goethe’s known character.<sup>65</sup> The claim of this short study here is that there is a greater underlying unity in both Parts of *Faust* than is generally assumed especially by those for whom Part II remains a closed book. An analogy may be drawn with the way Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541-1614), alias El Greco, who paints *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* with two different perspectives. The scene on earth, that of the burial itself, is carried out with a more direct perspective that corresponds more to the natural proportions in life, whereas the upper scene of Christ coming in glory to receive his soul in heaven is depicted by what is called, imprecisely, “reverse perspective”, better still, by a different sort of perspective than the natural one used in Renaissance paintings, and it is precisely this that makes out the great fascination that the painting has exercised.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, Goethe uses two kinds of perspectives in his *Faust*, I and II, but it is the same play throughout. We need

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155-168. Christ is presented not only as the teacher, but also as the real meaning of the Old Testament, in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, thereby healing the gap created by the “pseudo-agnostics,” i.e. the bad gnostics, that would reject the Old Testament as relating the story of the bad god, the demiurge Yahweh who created the world (ibid., 160-161). And St Irenaeus (d. 202), taking up the Pauline word, “knowledge inflates, whereas charity edifies” (1 Cor 8:1), applies this precisely against the pseudo Gnostics (ibid., 161-162).

<sup>64</sup> Kaufmann, “Introduction,” *Goethe’s Faust*, 30-31.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 22, 51-53.

<sup>66</sup> Pavel Florenskij, “La prospettiva rovesciata,” in *La prospettiva rovesciata e altri scritti*, ed. Pavel Florenskij, Nicoletta Mislser, Carla Muschio (Roma: Gangemi, 1990), 103-104; See Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheehan (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 98-114.

only look at the framework. It starts out (after the Prologue in the Theatre) with the Prologue in Heaven, with the same sort of “intonation of the Great Octave of Creation” as in Teilhard, with the added poignancy of the Job-inspired scene of the devil making a bet with God as to his good servant Faust. *Faust*, II ends with a whole series of religious figures, such as the Choir of Angels, Pater Ecstaticus, Pater Profundus, Pater Seraphicus, the Choir of Blessed Boys, Younger Angels, More Perfected Angels, Doctor Marianus, Choir of Penitent Women, Magna Peccatrix, Mulier Samaritana, Maria Aegytiaca (St Mary of Egypt, c.344-c.421), the Three, Una Poenitentium (A Woman among the Penitents), and culminating in Doctor Marianus pointing to Jesus’ Mother Mary as the Eternal Feminine. The point of *Faust*, I and II could be captured under the words of the Prologue: “Man errs so long as he will strive”<sup>67</sup> and the words in the last scene of the drama, “Whoever strives with all his power / We are allowed to save.”<sup>68</sup> This emphasis on striving points to the *conatus* or that effort, identical with a thing’s essence, as thematized in the philosophy of Benedict Spinoza (1632-77).<sup>69</sup> Within these coordinates, the Eternal Feminine functions as the entelechy, or ultimate point of attraction, of a person’s striving; nay, it brings to fruition what is inadequate (“*das Unzulängliche*”) and realizes what defies description (“*das Unbeschreibliche*”), perhaps a reference to grace.<sup>70</sup>

(b) The whole *Faust*, so interpreted, has a religious point to make, which is by no means secondary. Certainly, Goethe himself protested against the interpretation that there is a central “idea” to the drama,<sup>71</sup> rather than life impressions in the recollection of the artist, but this does not contradict the fact that the kind of hero Faust is depicted to be *lives out* this struggle. There is no idea<sup>72</sup> if by that is meant that Goethe *ex professo* wanted to propagate a given philosophy, rather than use available models, such as Spinoza’s philosophy, or that he wanted Faust to represent some special programme, pretty much as Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-96) does in her moralising way in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, rather than reproducing the manifold of experience with its contradictions but also with its salient points.<sup>73</sup> This said, however, one cannot

<sup>67</sup> Kaufmann, *Goethe’s Faust*, I, 86-87, verse 317.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 492-493, verses 11936-11937.

<sup>69</sup> Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 4 (London: Search Press, 1976), 240. G. W. Leibniz (1646-1716), too, developed the idea of *conatus* as the “positive tendency to action, which inevitably fulfils itself unless it is hindered,” *ibid.*, 299.

<sup>70</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, I (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1998), 514.

<sup>71</sup> Kaufmann, “Introduction,” *Goethe’s Faust*, 53-54.

<sup>72</sup> See von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit*, vol. 2 (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962), 707.

<sup>73</sup> Kaufmann, “Introduction,” *Goethe’s Faust*, 53-56. For a short biography see Arturo Farinelli,



deny that Goethe had his pet ideas and favourite theories, that he had a clear bias for the Enlightenment; and, besides, one would have to demonstrate that a work which engaged Goethe for most of his mature life in no way reproduces his personal “life philosophy.” Moreover, the *literary genus* used by Goethe and Teilhard in their deployment of religion are not only different in their audience (theatre, theological public), but also in the very scope. Goethe’s unusual use of the hieratic figures at the end of *Faust II* reminds us of Gustave Flaubert’s *La tentation de Saint Antoine*, a reflection of life inasmuch as literature manages to portray religious phenomena in the spectrum of a detailed patrology;<sup>74</sup> Teilhard, on the contrary, is interested in the phenomenon of God and the way it impinges upon the phenomenon of man.

(c) Faust is usually identified with a historical figure who goes by the name of Johannes Faust, born it would seem in Knittlingen, Württemberg, c. 1480 and to have died in 1540, in Staufen im Breisgau, therefore a contemporary of Luther’s.<sup>75</sup> Although thoroughly equipped with studies in magic and apprenticeship in Cracow University, what surprises is that it is this rather obscure dabbler in magic who got so much notoriety, and not his more famous contemporaries, the French physician and astrologer Nostradamus (1503-66) and the Swiss-born alchemist and physician Paracelsus (1493-1541).<sup>76</sup> It surprises naturally, if we fail to see the link with another myth which became associated with that of Faustus. But in order to understand the tie-up we have to understand the basis in Goethe’s story.

The idea of a pact with the devil to acquire special privileges is not much different than the attempts to side-track mainline revelation through special revelations to relatively unknown apostles during Christ’s forty-day period before the Ascension. And this brings us to one such side-tracker, in whom several Church Fathers identify the origin of Gnosticism: Simon Magus.<sup>77</sup> His Samaritan origins would explain his aversion for the bad God of the Jews’ Old Testament from the good God of the New. Some historians claim that the real Gnostics were Simon’s disciples after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.<sup>78</sup> The Acts

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“Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,” *Enciclopedia Biografica Universale*, vol. 8 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2007), 519-552.

<sup>74</sup> See Jacques Suffel, “Préface,” in Gustave Flaubert, *La tentation de saint Antoine*, ed. Jacques Suffel (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), 13-21.

<sup>75</sup> Kaufmann, “Introduction,” *Goethe’s Faust*, 13-14.

<sup>76</sup> See Elisa M. Butler, *The Myth of the Magus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) and Butler, *The Fortunes of Faust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

<sup>77</sup> On Simon Magus see Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis*, trans. R. McL Wilson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 294-298.

<sup>78</sup> Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of

of the Apostles (8:9-25) recount Simon's problem with St Peter; and legend has depicted him in his bid to ascend to heaven at the Roman Forum in Rome until St Peter cursed him and he dropped to his death. For this reason Simon was known in some circles as Faustus, with the same euphemistic logic with which the Furies are called Eumenides or "Well-Disposed"; "Faustus" that is, in order not to call him "Unfaustus," the Unlucky One, on the principle of letting sleeping dogs lie.<sup>79</sup> The fact that Simon asserted to have been the companion in a previous life to Helen of Troy points to the identification with Goethe's *Faust*.<sup>80</sup> A wandering legend may thus have found abode in a notorious figure who bore the same name.

In contrast with Teilhard, Goethe has a distinctly anti-Church attitude, which reminds us of "Christ yes, Church no," a typically modern brand of Gnosticism, especially in the light of 1 John 4:1-3. A like Gnosticism is found in "Christ aye, Mary nay" [Jesus yes, Mary no], for whoever forgets that a concrete human being has a mother and that attention to the mother does not necessarily detract from that to the son does not accept that God has come in the flesh.<sup>81</sup> Teilhard, on the contrary, identifies Béatrix with Mary and with the Church.

Goethe's *Faust* thus tells the story of a savant, expert in all four domains of knowledge (theology, philosophy, medicine, and law), who at the beginning overplayed his reliance on knowledge, only to find out very soon that this does not yield anything to the vital knowledge we need in life. His dedication to magic in order to side-track these limits and rob life's secrets through forbidden channels leads him to the brink of suicide, from which he is saved by the pealing of the bells on Easter day. It would thus be an over-interpretation to depict Faust or even Mephisto as complete despisers of knowledge, for, besides the humour that colours their speeches, in an aside Mephisto confesses that he is really only

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Chicago Press, 1978-1985), 2:375.

<sup>79</sup> See Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 70ff.; Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 2:375-376.

<sup>80</sup> Helen of Troy plays a significant part in *Faust*, II. A further link is found in Michail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, which starts with the quotation, on the frontispiece, from *Faust*, I: "Part of that force which would / Do evil evermore, and yet creates the good"; Kaufmann, *Goethe's Faust*, 159. See T. R.N. Edwards, *Three Russian Writers and the Irrational* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 137-180.

<sup>81</sup> It was Martin Heidegger's disciple, Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 219, who coined the phrase for our times as "Gnostic Age", "*gnostisches Zeitalter*". In this, Card. Walter Kasper concurs, partly because of the weakening of the father figure in contemporary society, partly because of some non-Christian tendencies in contemporary feminism, Walter Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi* (Mainz: Matthias Grunewald, 1982), 174-175.

adopting a pose.<sup>82</sup> But the salient point, in *Faust*, I is when Faust, yearning to translate the most magnificent place of the New Testament where revelation is to be found, in John's Gospel, exclaims: "It says, 'In the beginning was the *Word*.' / Already I am stopped. It seems absurd. / The *Word* does not deserve the highest prize, / I must translate it otherwise / If I am inspired and not blind."<sup>83</sup> After trying to translate Word with Mind and Force, he settles for Act; again, a throwback to the currently dominant theories of acting and striving. And so, it is not Faust's earlier exaggerated striving for knowledge which marks him as a Gnostic of sorts, but his failure to appreciate the word as a real or ontological symbol, as a vehicle of ultimate communication between God and man in revelation. In this, Lutheran nominalism,<sup>84</sup> so allergic to real symbol, icons etc., did not help Goethe, in spite of his sympathy for certain Catholic imagery such as the *Dies irae*). It is here, however, that Goethe distinguishes himself most from Teilhard, for whom Béatrix is a real symbol of the Church and of Our Lady, each in its own way a guarantor of the ultimate truths of life, and, by implication, of metaphysics. What is destructible is not "but a parable"; what is ephemeral is really a symbol of eternity, for Teilhard, so long as we know how to draw Christian profit from it!

## Conclusion

Although Teilhard's "l'Éternel Féminin" is literally the translation of Goethe's "das Ewige-Weibliche", what a difference in the language the two women speak! With its Gretchen (the cosy name for Margarete), Helen and Sophia, Goethe's expression seems to be a different signature tune than that of Teilhard's time, and a different signature tune even from our own - of our time, characterized nonetheless as "Gnostic Age," whereas Teilhard's theological love poem not only avoids this trap, but also strikes a key of a poem yet to be written, "feminism after feminism."

Teilhard is one of those rare thinkers in the West who have approached reality from the viewpoint of wisdom, as is evident from his much promising

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<sup>82</sup> During the highly dramatic session with the student with whom he speaks so disparagingly of the sciences, Mephisto says: "I'm sick of this pedantic tone / The Devil now again I'll play"; Goethe *Faust*, I, 205. One may even make the point that what he is criticizing in these sciences is that they contribute nothing to life knowledge, their lack of "wisdom" or "gnosis": philosophers' logic is applauded everywhere, only it does not make you a weaver: "That is what all students believe / But they have never learned to weave!" Kaufmann, *Goethe's Faust*, 199.

<sup>83</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, I, 153.

<sup>84</sup> Martin Luther himself was influenced by Gabriel Biel (c.1420-95), noted for nominalism.

prose poem on the Eternal Feminine.<sup>85</sup> If such an approach were to be shown to strike deep roots into his thought, one could also invert the direction and seek to understand Teilhard from his sapiential inspiration. In the felicitous expression of Louis Bouyer, sophiology means “the world in God”;<sup>86</sup> in Teilhard, both ends meet: cosmology manifests the wisdom of God, wisdom uses the world not only as a scaffolding, but also as a transparent medium in which the transcendent God can manifest himself and lure his own creatures into falling in love with him. Theologies, nowadays, whether classical or sociological, tend to grant very little time to the problems of cosmology, and much to the problems of the heart, speaking profusely of love. This is one of the dichotomies Teilhard helped overcome, as also the dichotomy between faith and science. Indeed, he was probably more successful in healing the first than the second dichotomy, though ultimately both are related.

As for the relevance of *the eternal feminine* for women, we can here repeat what Nikolaj Berdjaev (d. 1948) said of the role of women in the future society:

[W]oman will play a huge role. Woman is more tied than man to the soul of the world and to the first elemental sources and it is through woman that man communicates with them .... Women are destined to be, as in the Gospels, myrophores ... . It is not the emancipated woman, nor woman made to resemble man, who will have this great role to play in the future period of the world, but *the eternal feminine*.<sup>87</sup>

Naturally, one must not anachronistically transpose what Berdjaev said into today’s discussion without the necessary adjustments, but his point is worthy of discussion.

As for chastity itself, one may say, to go beyond Teilhard himself, that the intelligent “wise” way in which he portrays chastity recalls the following comment by George Santayana (d. 1952): “Skepticism is the chastity of the intellect and must be practised over a long youth.” Conversely, cannot we say that chastity is the scepticism of life in front of such a rich offer so as to make us make the right choice? By way of criticism of Teilhard we can say that he does not distinguish carefully, in his prose poem, between the chastity or self-control appropriate for all stations of life, and the celibacy he was going to promise in

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<sup>85</sup> The authors de Lubac mentions as anticipators of Teilhard’s points amply illustrate this; De Lubac, *L’Éternel Féminin*, 42-60. On the issue see Schultze, “Sophiologie,” 122-126.

<sup>86</sup> Bouyer, *Sophia ou le Monde en Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1994).

<sup>87</sup> Nicolai Berdjaev, *A New Middle Ages* [Russian], quoted in De Lubac, *L’Éternel Féminin*, 87. Myrophores are the women who brought perfumes to anoint Jesus’ body.

a more solemn form to God as a professed religious. If he had, he could have developed a differential “epistemology” of discernment leading to the different stations of love in life.

Finally, the fact that Teilhard remained always loyal to the Society of Jesus in spite of so many difficulties adds new poignancy to his thought in this prose poem, “L’Éternel Féminin.” A loyalty which is all the more needed in a time when people generally are more inclined to embrace a project even with great generosity, so long as it does not turn out to be life-long project!

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