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## [Review of] Louis M. Savary, Teilhard de Chardin on the Eucharist: Envisioning the Body of Christ

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**Louis M. Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin on the Eucharist: Envisioning the Body of Christ*.** Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2021. Pp. xi, 199. Pb. \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-8091-5492-0.

In his fourth popular study of the French Jesuit thinker and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), Louis Savary turns to the Eucharist. A former Jesuit himself, Savary is attuned to Teilhard's cosmic sensibility and indeed develops it even further than Teilhard does himself.

The book is split into two parts: exposition of Teilhard's eucharistic vision and contemplative exercises. The first part presents a God of love who loves matter and animates it with love. The universe is evolving, and its resultant connectivity and complexity are manifestations of love. Evolution generates life, consciousness and humanity, and is continuing. Jesus was sent to show humanity God's 'evolutionary law of love'. Much of the eucharistic theology is traditionally Roman Catholic: Jesus is spiritually and physically present in the host, which produces the Church community, which is the body of Christ in the world. This community is expanding and is called to inclusivity and even universality. After these themes, Savary offers chapters on Teilhard's 'Mass on the world' and on the Sacred Heart of Christ at the centre of the universe.

The contemplative exercises may engage church and spirituality groups interested in these themes. They cover learning to see with new eyes, the use of imagination in spiritual practice and eucharistic adoration. The stage one suggestions are accessible, including seeing divine grace in the world and picturing Jesus, at different states of his life, in the eucharistic host. Seeing others and oneself in the host is also a striking devotion: if the host and the church community are each different manifestations of Christ's body, we should be open to seeing the church community, including the departed, in the host and to seeing the host in the church community. These kinds of devotion might well be fruitful around the time communion is received. Some of the stage two suggestions are more doctrinally challenging. Following Richard Rohr, creation is pictured as a first incarnation that establishes Christ's hidden presence throughout the created order. Informed by this idea, Teilhard's concept of the divine milieu is interpreted in strongly physicalist terms rather than as a perception of the world due to spiritual sensing. Nevertheless, other suggestions, such as meditating on Christ's dependence upon the physical world, both in his mother's womb and through social, agricultural and technological developments, are well grounded.

Some aspects of Savary's interpretation and approach are questionable. First, claims made are sometimes excessive. For example, it is stated that Teilhard was the 'first person to integrate the findings of modern science and evolution with Christian theology' (p. ix). However, others now less well known had already done so. For example, in 1922 the Belgian priest, theologian and geologist Henry de Dorlodot published *Darwinism and Catholic Thought*. Later it is suggested that Christianity has a history of negative portrayals of matter (p. 15), yet medievalists have uncovered an extraordinary array of devotion focused on relics and indeed on the consecrated eucharistic elements. Second, the understanding of evolutionary science is shaky, and the term 'evolution' is used equivocally to refer both to biological change and to intellectual and spiritual development. Some speculations are fanciful, such as that in future humans may, like Jesus, be able to heal by touching (p. 12). Third, Rohr's process interpretation of Teilhard's christology, according to which Christ is the product of evolution rather than its final cause acting from outside, permeates the study. 'Perhaps', Savary writes of Christ, 'the material universe has been his evolving body since the first moment of creation' (p. 17). Teilhard sets himself clearly against this notion, stating in several of his 1940s essays that Christ as Omega is immanent to the created order but also transcendent. Christ can only govern the world and its evolutionary development if existing outside of the world, at least until its evolution is fully complete and the Second Coming is prepared.