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BEING IN THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Reflections on the Cosmic Christ for a New Theology of Nature*

Somebody asked me: Do you have a soul?

I told him I do. I said I believed in its eternity and its beauty.
But he asked me further: Does an animal have a soul?
And I replied that it does. And he went on:
Does a tree have a soul? And again I said that it does.
Then he got angry and in his anger asked me: a stone too?
And when I replied that it does, he turned his back on me.

How strange people are sometimes! When I say that the universe and universal soul are like sky and sea, reflecting each other, they believe it.
But when I tell them that every phenomenon has its shine
in the universal shimmering of the soul, they don't see it,
and sometimes it is in fact true that a stone has
a more beautiful soul than people.[1]

Summary – This paper is about a new theology of nature and environmental theology based on Ludwig Feuerbach's major works on religion, the cosmocentric theology of Teilhard de Chardin, and recent deep incarnation theologies, arguing for a newly conceptualized environmental theology that is able to think deeper into both Christ's presence in the world as well as into the ability of theology itself to attune to the most profound elemental-material layers of this world. In its first part, Feuerbach's elemental philosophy of religion leads toward the possibility of developing an entirely new view on the theology of nature. By further aligning deep incarnation with deep history in the second part of this paper, theological thoughts are set in dialogue with both Christian

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[1] Srečko Kosovel, 'Cosmic Life', in: *Open: Selected poems and thoughts / Srečko Kosovel*, sel. & ed. Mateja Kralj, transl. Ana Jelnikar & Barbara Siegel Carlson, Sežana: Društvo Konstruktivist, 2018, 1. The Slovenian poet Srečko Kosovel (1904-1926) is considered one of central Europe's major modernist poets.

evolutionary thought as well as recent findings of the evolution of our homo sapiens species. Finally, cosmic Christ reveals as being incarnate in the heart of the matter, with the sacredness of every living being testifying to a newly revealed environmental theology of flesh.

Prologue

This essay is an attempt to think theologically with and through nature. The introductory passage from one of the prose poems written by Srečko Kosovel reveals to us, as it were, a profoundly deep 'theological' message, which spans from mineral to stone, from plant to tree, from microorganism to any other living being, and, finally, from the various representatives of our common *homo* species[2] to the present posthumanistic woman living in the era of the death of God, and perhaps also Man. What is presented in this poem is a *score*, as it were, of various cosmic markers of *a* life throughout the creation and what we are getting at in this essay is to indicate the hidden yet strong presence of Christ in this vitalistic cosmic constellation.

Contemporary discourses on posthumanism and postanthropocentrism with related notions of vitalistic materialism will need to be accompanied by environmental thoughts on a vitalistic theological relationality within nature.[3] For us today it is necessary that we seek help in nature both for our survival in the future era of the post-Anthropocene and for our becoming in the posthumanist post-Christian era. This essay therefore argues for an environmental theology that is able to think deeper into both Christ's presence in the world as well as into the ability of theology itself to attune to the most profound elemental-material layers of this world – to the ancient elements (water, air, earth, fire), minerals, the rest of both inanimate and animate life-worlds, and, of deep historical layers as well as future (posthumanist) prospects of our own *homo* species.

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[2] Such as Denisovan, Neanderthal, Sapiens – cf. on this aspect Kennan Ferguson, 'What Was Politics to the Denisovan?', in: *Political Theory* 42 (2014) no.2, 167-187: 'What does it mean that humans were not the only hominin? Or, more importantly, what does it mean that other hominins held cultural, biological, and perhaps even linguistic equivalence to human beings?' (167) We may add 'early religious equivalence' to this list. As will be argued later, deep history must accompany deep incarnation within a search for a new environmental theology.

[3] Cf. Rosi Braidotti on the 'Spinozist indicator of raw cosmic energy', in: idem, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge: Polity, 2017, 55f.: 'Vitalist materialism is a concept that helps us make sense of that external dimension, which in fact enfolds within the subject as the internalized score of cosmic vibrations (…) It also constitutes the core of a posthuman sensibility that aims at overcoming anthropocentrism'.

1. Nature Revealed as God – Ludwig Feuerbach and the Theology of Nature

> Our bodies are the issue of solar, galactic, and cosmic stuff,
> the offspring of the elements.
> We are all stardust, made of ancient particles.[4]

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) was perhaps one of the most misunderstood thinkers of the nineteenth century. According to Marx's famous *Theses on Feuerbach* from 1845, his greatest mistake as a philosopher was to limit his philosophy (and theology, we may add) of sensitivity only to 'sensuous contemplation', and thus entirely forgetting or bypassing the 'revolutionary of practical-critical activity'.[5] Feuerbach is considered to be a transitional philosopher, to whom many authors ascribe significance for the later development of certain philosophical topics such as criticism of religion, materialism, sensibility, etc., but who nevertheless remains a thinker to whom the Western tradition did not wish to award a place of honour along with other philosophical giants of the West. But in the twenty-first century we can regard Feuerbach as an early predecessor of a contemporary theological thought, 'post-Christianity'.

Jeffrey W. Robbins rightly asserts that Feuerbach stands to Schleiermacher (from whom he took his central notions of dependency, or *Abhängigkeit*) as Hegel does to Kant.[6] However, Feuerbach's thought contains so many important

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[4] John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, Bloomington/ Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013, 250. This thought reminds us of a distant yet subtle *material* link between Christ, humans (or, various *homo* species) and the rest of creation – *including minerals and stones*. Cf. also the following statement from Niels Henrik Gregersen: 'Already in the creation story, we hear that the body of Adam was taken from the dust of the Earth (Gn 2:7). The very name of Adam is derived from the Hebrew *adamah*, meaning "ground", "earth", or "land"'. See the chapter 'The Extended Body of Christ: Three Dimensions of Deep Incarnation', in: Niels Henrik Gregersen (Ed.), *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015, 225-252: 229.

[5] Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', in: Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York/ London: Norton, 1978 (2nd ed.). For another misunderstanding or criticism of Feuerbach's thought see also Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the outcome of classical German philosophy*, New York: International Publishers, 1941. Engels's view in taking Feuerbach to be just the latter phase of German classical philosophy was therefore mistaken since in his reductionist and highly limited historicist and materialistic critique Engels could not detect the philosophical and theological core of Feuerbach's epistemology and his understanding of religion. For both Marx and Engels this kind of criticism was an obvious and necessary consequence. In the twenty-first century, marked by the climate crisis and related environmental concerns, Feuerbach's philosophy of religion again grows in importance.

[6] Cf. Jeffrey W. Robbins, 'Necessity as Virtue: On Religious Materialism from Feuerbach to Žižek', in: Clayton Crockett, B. Keith Putt, & Jeffrey W. Robbins (Eds.), *The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion*, Bloomington/ Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014, 229-241: 230.

and key elements for the development of the philosophy of religion and postmodern materialistic theology that his position can neither be confined to the framework of the critical culmination of critical German Idealism nor to any naïve or schematic form of criticism of religion from the Positivistic or Materialistic tendencies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Precisely because Feuerbach is not acknowledged as one of the classic thinkers of German philosophy in connection with the tradition from Kant to Hegel and Schelling, and also because he did not participate in the later mainstream within the criticism of religion from Marx to Freud on one side, or Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dewey on the other side, it is that much more important to emphasise Feuerbach's participation in and influences on those schools of thought.[7] But one of the most important consequences of Feuerbach's original work, in our opinion, could be found in his link to contemporary environmental theology.

Jakob Böhme was one of Feuerbach's important influences. According to Feuerbach, Böhme is, as it were, 'a mystical natural philosopher, a theosophic Vulcanist and Neptunist, for according to him all things had their origin in fire and water'.[8] Feuerbach asserts that God not only is a spiritual, 'but also a material, corporeal, fleshly being'[9] and it was precisely Böhme who (after the dawn of the pre-Socratics, we may add) was the first to provide a naturalistic context to this kind of theological reflection. Feuerbach, who himself shared great interest in geology and mineralogy, admired Böhme's passages on nature – comprising ancient elements (of the pre-Socratics), minerals, stones, plants, animals, and human beings. As stated by Feuerbach, Böhme 'feels the joys of the mineralogist, of the botanist, of the chemist (…) He is enraptured by the splendour of jewels, the tones of metals, the hues and odours of plants, the beauty and gentleness of many animals'.[10] Comparing the beauty of creation with the beauty of physical nature, an important step is taken – and let us now look at Bohme's idiosyncratic yet theologically greatly relevant words on precious stones:

> But regarding the precious stones, such as the carbuncle, ruby, emerald, epidote, onyx, and the like, which are the very best, these have the very same origin – *the flesh of light in love*. For that flesh is born in tenderness, and it is the heart in the

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[7] For more on Feuerbach's philosophy of intersubjectivity see my *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2015, ch. 5. For Feuerbach as transitional philosopher see p. 67.

[8] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, transl. George Eliot, New York: Harper & Row, 1957, 95. For German original citations I am referring to: *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841) (*Ludwig Feuerbach Werke in sechs Bänden*. Vol. 5), Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1976 (Theorie Werkausgabe).

[9] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 89.

[10] Ibid., 94.

> centre of the Fountain-spirit, wherefore those stones also are mild, powerful, and lovely.[11]

The beauty and ontologico-theological significance of this passage lies in the following: if an inanimate nature is now also subtly ontologically linked to the so called 'Fountain-spirit' (*Quellgeister*)[12] of all creation, and thus *is* a part of the highest spiritual economy of love – then important consequences follow. Feuerbach was first among the Western thinkers to be able to glean their far-reaching theological effects, by stating: 'In short, heaven is as rich as the earth. Everything that is on this earth is in heaven, all that is in Nature is in God'.[13] Both *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) and *The Essence of Religion* (1846) fully attest to this enhanced religious awareness. And first of all it is *love* that will be in the forefront of this new awareness and Feuerbach will prepare the ground for this with a series of 'anthropological' (but, in fact, they are theological) interventions into the very core of religion and theology. But it would be utterly wrong to attribute to Feuerbach any naïve or even atheist anthropological reduction of the essence of religion (as done so many times) – something much more important happens in his thought when we are able to listen more carefully to his tender theological words. The chapter 'The Mystery of the Incarnation; or, God as Love, as a Being of the Heart' from *The Essence of Christianity* presents a first important testimony for this paradigm shift. Incarnation, for Feuerbach, was 'a tear of the divine compassion',[14] clearly a material manifestation of the human nature of God. It is now love that shall be exalted into the

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[11] Ibidem (my emphasis). In German: '…die haben ihren Ursprung, wo der Blitz des Lichtes in der Liebe auffgangen ist. Dann derselbe Blitz wird in der Sanftmut geboren und ist das Herze im Centro der Quellgeister, darum seind dieselben Steine auch sanfte, kräftig und lieblich'. (Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 112). The original citation is from the early collection of the works of Jakob Böhme, *Kernhafter Auszug aller Jacob Böhme'schen Schriften*, Amsterdam 1718, 58. Cf. also about flowers: 'The heavenly powers gave birth to heavenly joy-giving fruits and colours, to all sorts of trees and shrubs (…) [L]ook diligently at this world, at the varieties of fruits and plants that grow upon the earth, – trees, shrubs, vegetables, roots, flowers, oils, wines, corn, and everything that is there, and that thy heart can search out' (94f.). This is fully in line with Luce Irigaray's new vegetal philosophy as recently presented in: Luce Irigaray & Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016 (cf. for example Chapter 1: 'Seeking Refuge in the Vegetal World').

[12] We would like to propose another possibility for the understanding of the Fountain-spirit as related to the ontological primacy of the minerals: according to Marko Pogačnik, the Earth can be regarded as a 'lithosphere', representing 'the mineral ground, out of which beings and things on the Earth ingest their smallest particles from the minerals and incorporate them into their bodies'. Marko Pogačnik, *Vesolje človeškega telesa* [*The Cosmos of the Human Body*], Ljubljana: Beletrina and Društvo za sožitje človeka, narave in prostora Vitaaa, 2016, 107.

[13] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 96.

[14] Ibid., 50.

new substance of religion, for Feuerbach, and this is what happens in incarnation – love now becomes a power that is even higher than God itself and it is only in this sense that the Feuerbachian anthropological reduction should in our opinion be understood and explained:

> Not because of his Godhead as such, according to which he is the *subject* in the proposition, God is love, but because of his love, of the *predicate*, is it that he renounced his Godhead; thus love is a higher power and truth than deity. Love conquers God. It was love to which God sacrificed his divine majesty. And what sort of love was that? another sort than ours? than that to which we sacrifice life and fortune? Was it the love of himself? of himself as God? No! it was love to man.[15]

With love being the highest, Christ can be seen as the '*être suprême* of the heart' and a suffering God is thus understood as 'a heart' of this world.[16] God as a compassionate, a feeling and material Being, as flesh *and* nature, or, perhaps more metaphorically, the very heart of the matter, is now able to penetrate as such into every single being of nature – and this is where Feuerbach meets Böhme. With an unusual yet logical manoeuvre, it is now possible to ascribe a 'kindness' or 'mildness' even to the inanimate nature – such as to a stone, or a mineral. To Feuerbach, Christ literally becomes *the plasticity* (sic!: 'die *plastische Persönlichkeit* ist nur Christus')[17], the supreme concentration and spiritually-material melting, and shining, as it were, of divine/cosmic energies, the only Being that is able to reach out *as love* to the first and penultimate of creation. Christ is a pulsation of the universe in the rhythm of love … a materially revealed cosmic Christ. *The Essence of Religion,* a beautifully written work on religion will now fully attest to this.

In *The Essence of Religion* Feuerbach further radicalizes his theological thought. In the first paragraph of this work the concept of *God* is seemingly detached from the concept of *Nature*: 'That being which is different from and independent of man, or, which is the same thing, of God, as represented in the "Essence of Christianity"; the being without human nature, without human

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[15] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 53. We can recall a similar passage on the ontological primacy of love from Schelling (who, besides Böhme, also was an important reference to Feuerbach), who states in his *Freedom essay* from 1809 the following: 'For not even spirit itself is supreme; it is but spirit, or the breath of love [*der Hauch der Liebe*]. But love is supreme. It is that which was before there were the depths and before existence (as separate entities), but it was not there as love, rather – how shall we designate it?' See F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, transl. J. Gutmann, La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989, 86. More on this later.

[16] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 62.

[17] Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 176.

qualities and without human individuality is in reality nothing but *Nature*'.[18] But in §2, there already appears a first correction to this statement: the source of all religion, for Feuerbach, is dependence (*Abhängigkeit*; which therefore was taken from Schleiermacher). In his view the object of this dependence is Nature: 'Nature is the first original object of religion, as is sufficiently proved by the history of all religions and nations', – according to Feuerbach.[19] But apart from these now obsolete questions of the origin of religion, what strikes us here are Feuerbach's elaborations on the *religion of nature* that follow in the forthcoming paragraphs of his work. Feuerbach now inaugurates a wholly new and original theory of an *ontological* dependency upon nature, bearing important theological consequences:

> But above all man is a being who does not exist without light, without air, without water, without earth, without food, – he is, in short, a being dependent on Nature. This dependence in the animal, and in man as far as he moves within the sphere of the brute, is only an unconscious and unreflected one; but by its elevation into consciousness and imagination, by its consideration and profession, it becomes religion.[20]

Feuerbach knows that in many indigenous religions of the world, animals were protective beings; and mountains and lakes, rivers and springs, trees and other plants were divinely worshiped beings, providing and securing the sacredness of the land for human beings, their animal companions and nature, and, finally, for the future generations. These beings are the guardians of life on Earth, thought of in various traditions either as divinities/gods or as a God. These correlations were forgotten and lost already with the dawn of the pre-Socratics, and Christianity, too, was blamed by Feuerbach for the forgetting of this sacred relationality, and of the 'Divine Being which is revealed in Nature'.[21] The God

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[18] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, transl. Alexander Loos, New York: Prometheus, 2004, here 1. For the German original we refer to *Kritiken und Abhandlungen* III, 1844-1866; Vol. 4 of *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1975 (Theorie Werkausgabe), 81-153.

[19] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, 2.

[20] Ibidem.

[21] Ibid., 6. With Van A. Harvey we may observe that, first of all, '[l]iberal Christian theologians and rationalists, Feuerbach argued, do not sufficiently understand the emotional power inherent in the Christian notion of the God-man. To Feuerbach, therefore, any notion of God must relate to this constellation. The figure of Jesus is not merely a model of ethics and an assurance of God's love but the guarantee that God has indissolubly joined His divine nature with human nature. The Christian finds in this doctrine the veritable identity of the divine and the human, the human elevated to the divine and the divine embodied in the human. Moreover, Jesus Christ as model is the pledge not just of the divinity and immortality of the reason but of the embodied person'. Van Austin Harvey, *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 224.

of Theism, being totally detached from nature in its role as creator thus becomes a model of divinity without any material-ontological link to nature. But creation and preservation are inseparable for Feuerbach and it is impossible to live without a vital nourishment, pouring into various beings from the minerals, plants, and the like (as in Job 36:24-37:24). As an example of an early contribution to what we now regard as the environmental theology, we can assert with Feuerbach that Nature, when regarded with a religious eye, is 'a personal, living, feeling being'.[22] And to take another step further towards cosmic Christ – in *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach used the somewhat esoteric phrase 'pneumatic water therapy' (*pneumatische Wasserheilkunde*)[23] to refer to the aim of his whole teaching. It is significant that, in addition to water, which holds the preeminent place in Feuerbach, also air/breath is invoked here (as *pneuma*). Water reminds us of our origin from Nature, according to Feuerbach, and the water of baptism thus becomes the means 'by which the Holy Spirit imparts itself to man'.[24] It is within this renewed elemental milieu, that Christ can be (re-)incarnated – now as a divine Being, having *the earthly body*,[25] filled with the *pneuma*, a body in which the four elements circulate in a mysterious-material dance of cosmic graces, or with Caputo:

> The four 'elements' circulate through the body of the earthman, in his fiery anger at hypocrisy, in the *pneuma* by which he is filled, in the earth and water of his spittle. The kingdom of God is an animal kingdom, a kingdom of animal needs to which Yeshua's divineanimal ministry responds. The kingdom of God is a field of flesh, of flesh laid low and flesh raised up. The cosmic powers come to birth (*physis*), come alive, in 'flesh', in bodies of flesh, and the body of Jesus is the channel through which cosmic graces rush. The graces of the world are concentrated in his body and through him they pass into those he touches or who are touched by him. He is the mediator between this grace and them, and those who come in contact with him are transformed.[26]

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[22] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, 26.

[23] Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 14.

[24] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 275. Cf. the elaboration on this topic in my *Breath of Proximity*: 'Thus, water is paradigmatic for entry into the field of the mesocosm as an intermediate or mediating substance while also serving as a *ritual* space for a new epistemology and ethics. In some senses water is even primary rather than breath since it is the element that surrounds humans in the womb thereby conferring their being on them. In this sense, according to Feuerbach, water is 'the element of natural equality and freedom, the mirror of the golden age'. Accordingly, any rehabilitation of sensibility must first acknowledge water as the primary element of Nature' (69).

[25] And *not* the mystical, celestial, or heavenly body – as in Paul, early Church fathers or early Christologies; cf. Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 252.

[26] Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 253f.

It is astounding to think that Feuerbach already knew about this cosmic Christ, without having available any previous theological possibilities for such a revelation of these elemental-cosmic graces.

2. From Deep Incarnation to Cosmic Pulsation of Christ's Heart

> The Word (*Logos*) spread himself everywhere,
> above and below and in the depth and in the breadth:
> above, in creation; below, in the incarnation; in the depth, in hell;
> in breadth, in the world. Everything is filled with the knowledge of God.[27]

As we know from some passages in the New Testament (Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:9-10; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:2-3), the relevance of Jesus Christ can be attested not only for humans but also for all creation – including the nonhuman animals and inanimate nature. As noted by Niels Gregersen and Elizabeth Johnson, 'the incarnation makes the incarnate One integrally part not only of the human race, but also of the whole of this material reality – not only animals (with whom Jesus shares genetic continuity) but also plants and inanimate nature'.[28] Based on an early thought of Gregory the Great on partial ontological sharing of human beings with the rest of creation (from stones to angels), it was Bonaventure who wrote that

> Christ, as a human being, shares with all creatures; 'Indeed, he possesses being with rocks, lives among the plants, senses with animals, and understands with angels'. Since Christ, as a human being, has something from all of creation, and was transfigured, all is said to be transfigured in him.[29]

As convincingly shown by Richard Bauckham in his essay on the cosmic Christ, this thought was recently reformulated by Arthur Peacocke who proposes in his works to understand these unfoldings of the multiple levels of creation as being present in Jesus Christ.[30] Bauckham further radicalizes this thought by critically viewing the Christian evolutionary thought of Jakob Klapwijk, in which theological value is elaborated through the fivefold division of being – from physical (as most basic and common to all creation), biotic and vegetative (as common to plants and animals), to a more advanced sensitive (common to animals and humans) and higher mental level (common only to humans as self-conscious

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[27] Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 16. Cited from Gregersen, *Incarnation*, 225.

[28] Richard Bauckham, 'The Incarnation and the Cosmic Christ', in: Gregersen, *Incarnation*, 25-57: here 35.

[29] Bonaventure's excerpt cit. from Bauckham, 'The Incarnation and the Cosmic Christ', 38.

[30] Cf. Arthur Peacocke, *All That Is: A Naturalist Faith for the Twenty-first Century*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

and spiritual beings).[31] But Bauckham is suspicious of any attempts that would point towards an anthropocentric direction and he rightly points to the more specific features of any of the preceding levels of 'creation' which somehow disturb or even invert the proposed ontological line-up of being. The process of photosynthesis, for example, might be one such example – for according to recent scientific discoveries, photosynthesis in plants operates on levels of *quantum superpositions* and thus evades any naïve or simplistic labelling from the point of the view of gradualist evolutionary thought.[32] Another example could be the presence of higher sensory abilities in animals, which also clearly prevent any overly anthropocentric or reductionist philosophical or theological claims. Finally, and as already mentioned in the beginning of this essay, the theological consequences of including other representatives of our common *homo* species (for example, Denisovan or Neanderthal) into Christian evolutionary thought from the point of view of a deep history have not yet been sufficiently addressed. For example, although being rather suspicious of attributing too much of a prehistoric ritual practice or religion to our predecessors, Ina Wunn is still willing to attribute to *homo neanderthalensis* at least a portion of ritualistic or religious behaviour:

> Therefore Homo neanderthalensis believed that the animal is a being quite similar to man, but talented with supernatural forces. He was convinced that gods such as the 'Master of the Animals' or 'Supreme Being' existed. The kill of the animal took place after a complicated ritual.[33]

This and similar more recent findings in the field of the studies of non-human hominin groups raise interesting but also difficult theological questions: given that recent mtDNA analyses show traces of Denisovan and Neanderthal DNA in specific groups of modern-day humans – the percentage of genetic similarity goes from 1-4% for the Neanderthal DNA within the modern-day humans, and from 6.6 up to 8.2% for the Denisovan DNA as present in selected groups of modern-day humans of Melanesia. With Ferguson we can logically claim: 'Most humans, therefore, are not entirely human'.[34] The consequences for deep incarnation theology are even more far reaching since this similarity must equally be valid in the case of Jesus Christ as God, being fully incarnated as a human being of the homo sapiens species. By using some theological imagination, we may contend that

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[31] Cf. Jakob Klapwijk, *Purpose in the Living World? Creation and Emergent Evolution*, ed. & transl. Harry Cook, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[32] Cf. Gregory S. Engel et al., 'Evidence for wavelike energy transfer through quantum coherence in photosynthetic systems', in: *Nature* 446 (2007), 782-786.

[33] Ina Wunn, 'Beginning of Religion', in: *Numen* 47 (2000) no.4, 417-452: here 431.

[34] Cf. Kennan Ferguson, 'What Was Politics to the Denisovan?', in: *Political Theory* 42 (2014) no.2, 167-187: here 173 for both DNA similarities and his citation.

through this new perspective Christ 'itself' becomes a divine being that not only cannot belong to only one hominine species anymore but also takes part in wider deep historical and pre- or non-symbolic cultures of our common co-species or even our predecessors.[35] To return to Bauckham's vision of ecotheology: for him, finally, instead of seeing the cosmic Christ as a penultimate being, encapsulating but also superseding in Himself the whole of creation, a new perspective based on diversity and interrelatedness is formulated, where Christ becomes the *ecological centre of all creation*.[36]

Let us now approach the theology of deep incarnation as originally framed by Niels Henrik Gregersen within his recent reflections on evolutionary Christianity: for Gregersen, incarnation must reach 'into the very tissue of biological existence, and system of nature'.[37] And according to one of his predecessors, Denis Edwards, the connection between deep incarnation and ecological theology could be conceptualized as follows: 'Biology does not allow us to see human flesh as an isolated entity. Human beings can only be understood as interrelated with other life-forms of our planet and interconnected with the atmosphere, the land, and the seas that sustain life'.[38] It is precisely in this vein that Elisabeth Johnson's 'Jesus and the Cosmos: Soundings in Deep Christology' can bring important insights for the understanding of our earlier Feuerbachian theology of love.

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[35] Peter S. Alterman, 'Aliens in Golding's "The Inheritors"', in: *Science Fiction Studies* 5 (1978) no.1, 3-10. Alterman writes about Golding's novel as follows: 'The Neanderthal men in The Inheritors are different from Homo sapiens in many significant ways. The five senses are expanded in the Neanderthal awareness, and this enhancement allows the Neanderthals to live sensuously in a way that humans cannot. The differences are the measure of their moral superiority and the reason for their failure. (…) The Neanderthals, in other words, are selfless, loving, gentle, religious, innocent. They are more than Noble Savages: they are Christ-like. The irony is that these ideal representatives of human goals are senselessly slaughtered by the ancestors of the readers, who, we assume, cherish these ideals. (…) The careful construction of the Neanderthals, both through descriptive technique and ascribed qualities, serves primarily to create *alien beings*. As previously noted, aliens can be human, and share many human characteristics. However, the living through the senses and the telepathy of the Neanderthals go *beyond more primitive human concepts to define an alien awareness*' (here citations on 3, 7 and 10; our emphases). One may be tempted to define Christ as an *alien being* incarnated into the violent lifeworlds of our homo sapiens species.

[36] Bauckham, 'The Incarnation and the Cosmic Christ', 57. On the historical overview of the cosmic Christ and related theologies see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, New York: Harper & Row, 1987 (chapter 5: 'The Cosmic Christ'); George A. Maloney, *The Cosmic Christ: From Paul to Teilhard*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968; and J.A. Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. For an extensive study on the typological models of incarnation see Gregersen's 'Introduction' in: idem, *Incarnation,* 10-21.

[37] Niels Henrik Gregersen, 'The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World', in: *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40 (2001) no.3, 192-207: here 205.

[38] Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006, 60.

We have seen that for Feuerbach, Christ was understood as the plasticity, or, as it were, shining of cosmic energies, pulsating and reaching out into the creation as love. Feuerbach has broadened Christ's cosmic mission into the whole of creation: inanimate nature was subtly ontologically linked to the 'Fountain-spirit' (*Quellgeister*) of all creation for Feuerbach. According to Johnson, similarly, the old anthropocentric focus of Christ as saviour for the human race needs to be widened to include further biocentric and cosmocentric dimensions. In the New Testament, more specifically, in the prologue of John's Gospel, we have God's self-expressing Word, and in this Word was life: 'This life was a light shining on all people'.[39] The Word becomes visible as flesh (*sarx*; in the Old Testament the expression '(all) flesh' would be mentioned over forty times and referred to as *kol-bāśār*) and sometimes, as also nicely observed by Johnson, human beings are even compared to grass and flowers (Isa 40:6b-8).[40] Even more closely to Feuerbach's God, as understood as Love and a Being of the Heart, comes Ezekiel, who prophesizes 'about the new creation of "hearts of flesh" that shall replace the old "hearts of stone" (Ezek 11:19; 36:26: 'I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh'). For Johnson these all are proofs that human connection to nature is indeed so strong that

> we cannot properly define our identity without including our relationship with the whole sweep of cosmic evolution. Biologically, too, the common ancestry of humans with the rest of life and our continuing essential interactions with the community of life on this planet make clear that humans do not stand alone. We evolved relationally; we exist symbiotically; our existence depends on interaction with the rest of the natural world. (…) While *sarx* in a strict biological sense may point to soft animal tissue of muscle and fat interlaced with blood vessels and nerves, that flesh itself evolved from and exists in continuing interrelationship with other nonmuscular, nonbloody living beings and the physical world itself. In a deeply real sense, the meaning of flesh/*sarx* encompasses all matter.[41]

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[39] Elizabeth Johnson, 'Jesus and the Cosmos: Soundings in Deep Christology', in: Gregersen, *Incarnation*, 133-156: here 134.

[40] This vegetal comparison also includes an elemental presence of the breath (*ruaḥ*) of God: 'All people are grass, / their constancy is like the / flower of the field. / The grass withers, the flower / fades, / when the breath of the LORD / blows upon it' (*The Holy Bible, NRSV*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989).

[41] Johnson, 'Jesus and the Cosmos', 137 and 138. Also, Johnson clearly contends that, as already explained by Arthur Peacocke ('Every atom of iron in our blood would not be there had it not been produced in some galactic explosion billions of years ago and eventually condensed to form the iron in the crust of the earth') that human beings 'are made of the stuff of the cosmos' (137).

Now, the theological insight on the all-pervasiveness of the Christ in creation is perhaps best visible in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *Hymn of the Universe*, which, although often criticized for its overly optimistic and Christocentric tendencies, still represents one of the most creative theological works of the twentieth century and its importance lies in the spiritual power of matter, or, as it were, a new spiritual-material intertwining, actually enabling matter to become *the matrix of spirit*.[42] For Teilhard, with Christ's incarnation, 'mysteriously and in very truth, at the touch of the supersubstantial Word the immense host which is the universe is made flesh. Through your incarnation, my God, all matter is henceforth incarnate'.[43] With these prolonging of the body of Christ in the world of matter, Teilhard marks a radically new ontological plane of the new spirit-matter. In *Christ in the World of Matter*, in a remembrance of a vision of Christ, Teilhard communicates the radiance of his body, 'delineating a sort of blood stream, or nervous system, running through the totality of life. "*The entire universe was vibrant!*"' Interestingly enough, as in Feuerbach's idiosyncratic yet still mystical thought, also in Teilhard's vision all this movement 'seemed to emanate from Christ, and above all from his heart'.[44] In a beautiful passage, which we want to deliver in its entirety, this movement is transformative for the mass of beings' hearts:

> It had penetrated, through the channels of matter, into the inmost depths of all hearts and then had dilated them to breaking point, only in order to take back into itself the substance of their affections and passions. And now that it had established its hold on them it was irresistibly pulling back towards its centre all the waves that had spread outwards from it, laden now with the purest honey of all loves.[45]

It is noteworthy to mention that this materially-cosmic vision of Teilhard resembles a much more ancient Upanishadic elemental and materially cosmo-theological thought on *brahman* as *honey* of all beings, penetrating through the creation as an incarnate *spirit-body*, or *ātman*:

> This self (*ātman*) is the honey of all beings, and all beings are the honey of this self. The radiant and immortal person in the self and the radiant and immortal

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[42] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, New York: Harper & Row, 1961. For criticism see Sally McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993: 'What was special about his work and why in spite of continuing criticisms of it from both scientific and theological circles it continues to draw attention is that he felt deeply the need to reimagine Christian doctrine in terms of twentieth-century science and to see the new scientific story in Christian terms. (…) My point is not that Teilhard's remythologizing of the new creation story was entirely successful; rather, it is that he attempted it at all' (82).

[43] Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 17.

[44] Ibid., 38.

[45] Ibid., 44.

> person connected with the body (*ātman*) – they are both one's self. It is the immortal; it is *brahman*; it is the Whole.[46]

This Upanishadic vision is far-reaching: the excerpt 2.1.15 with *ātman* and *brahman* being in the forefront is the culmination of this early mystical vision of ancient Vedic seers: in an analogical manner, and in its preceding passages (2.1.1-14) it refers to the earth (as the honey of all beings), waters, fire, wind, sun, quarters, moon, lightning, thunder, space, Law (*dharma*), Truth, and humanity (all of them being referred to as the honey of all beings). All these macrocosmic realities have their ancient microcosmic correspondences: physical body (for the earth), semen (for waters), speech (for fire), breath (for wind), sight (for sun), hearing (for quarters), mind (for moon), radiance (for lightning), sound and tone (for thunder), space within the heart (for space), person devoted to *dharma* (for Law), person devoted to truth (for the Truth), person existing in the human (for humanity), and, finally, the radiant and immortal *ātman*, connected with the body (for the self, or *ātman* proper). As in Teilhard's cosmic vision, the whole universe becomes an immense host, laden with the purest honey of all loves: in an even more naturalistically pregnant meaning, a *breath of air* breaks the barriers of a person's eyelids and penetrates her soul; she now feels as if she is 'ceasing to be merely herself; an irresistible rapture took possession of her as though all the sap of all living things, flowing at one and the same moment into the too narrow confines of her heart'.[47] This possibility of a synchronistic reading between Vedic and Christian cosmopoetics reveals an inherent plurality residing in the very heart of Teilhard's *noogenesis* as understood as *Christogenesis*. Christ is the synthesis, or a highest cosmic symbol of a unique and unsurpassable ontological experience representing the joining of being (element and totality, mind and matter, the infinite and the personal) which would otherwise have never been put together. But the most important point in Christogenesis as noogenesis is, that, according to Teilhard, and this now is crucial – '*Christ is not yet fully formed* (…) the mystical Christ has not yet attained to his full growth'.[48]

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[46] *Upaniṣads*, transl. Patrick Olivelle, Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 32 (2.5.15). The excerpt comes from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the earliest of all Upanishads from the seventh to sixth centuries BCE. On an idiosyncratic, even more ancient Vedic teaching on *food* as a material *hypokeimenon* of all creation, see my entry 'Food in Ancient Indian Philosophy', in: P.B. Thompson et al. (Eds), *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2014.

[47] Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 56. The masculine gender in this passage was changed into the feminine by us.

[48] Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 137.

The theological consequences of these deep incarnationalist thoughts from the ancient Vedic India as well as from Teilhard de Chardin are far-reaching: this now means that the Word of God not only became incarnated with humanity, but, as already indicated, that Jesus Christ now processually enters and evolutionarily (note also our remarks on our common *homo* species) permeates the ontological plane of creation. *Christ-Omega* is the end point of evolution, for Teilhard. For us, cosmic Christ reveals as the *Christ-Matrix*, the cosmic *pulsation of being*, or a beating heart within the life-worlds of creation.

Epilogue

We have seen that, according to Feuerbach, love shall be exalted into the new substance of religion and that he claims love represents an even higher power than that of the God itself: Christ renounces his Godhead and becomes human *out of* love – and this love still represents a mysterious ground yet to be revealed to us. In this view, Christ becomes the very heart of the matter, being able to penetrate into every single being of nature, for Feuerbach. From mineral to fungi, from plants to animals, from the descendants of our *homo* species to *homo sapiens* – in contrast to the theological ideas of *kenosis* understood as an emptying of God through his incarnation, we therefore interpret the mystery of incarnation from the opposite side as *a growth*: as argued in *The Essence of Religion*, God as incarnated is only seemingly detached from nature – in reality, God is intrinsically and essentially linked to Nature. As indicated by Feuerbach, Christ becomes the plasticity, and is the only being that is able to reach out as *love* to every single element of creation. This now becomes his 'divineanimal ministry',[49] operating on the field of flesh, and, debordering once and for all the frontiers between naturalism, humanism and theism: the cosmic body of Jesus is 'the channel through which cosmic graces rush'.[50]

We have already indicated problems that we may be facing by using any of the straightforward evolutionary Christian attempts to regard Christ-Omega as a climax of creation. In this view, Teilhard de Chardin's attempt to understand noogenesis as Christogenesis (or, understanding of the biosphere as noosphere, and finally as Christosphere) must carefully be reread and reinterpreted from the synchronistic point of view of the above debordering of previously firmly set frontiers between various levels of evolution – as already indicated by us in a synchronistic and pluralistic reading of Christogenesis; and, most importantly, and as also indicated by Teilhard de Chardin himself – with an awareness

[49] Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 253.
[50] Ibid., 254.

of the cosmic Christ as *not yet being fully formed*.[51] We now want to interpret this lack precisely as an ontological weakness in the very heart of the cosmic body of Christ. Christ revealed to us as the *pulsation of being,* a beating heart within the life-worlds of creation. But we have seen that Christ's material and vulnerable presence in this world grows from the *excess of love* that enables and marks this very presence of cosmic Christ in the materially shaped world. As flesh, that – like any other being of nature – is the issue and tissue of galactic and cosmic stuff, Christ's incarnation reveals as grace of the world, a mysteriously hidden, yet through His presence visible agapistic event – originating from *the flesh of light in love* (Böhme). As agapistic plasticity of this world, Christ reveals as the only Being that is able to reach out as a *pulsation of love* into the first and penultimate creation. Love is the heart of all living, with Jesus Christ representing the finest agapistic distillation of its cosmic energies.

[51] Cf. Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 137.