

**A NEW PARADIGM FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD BASED ON TEILHARDIAN
EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

The paper presents a model theory to meaningfully speak about God in the context of the popular atheistic claims of replacing God with Science. The paper probes the horizons of science, religion, and philosophy for a healthy and scholarly interfacing for the understanding of God. It adapts the evolutionary vision of Teilhard de Chardin as a model for this integration. The author conceives of God as the Omega of the Cosmogensis- a term that stands for an evolving cosmos that is moving towards a convergence- who is dynamically involved in the cosmos and is continually revealing oneself in and through the cosmic evolutionary process. The first part of this paper is a scientific study of the theory of evolution, and its major insinuations. The second part describes the effort of Teilhard de Chardin to resolve the conflicting situations between the theory of evolution and faith in God. The third part analyses some of problems of the current models of understanding of God and endeavours to present a new paradigm for the understanding of God based on Teilhardian evolutionary perspective. The author points out that the notion of Omega in Teilhard also suffers from the problem of defining Omega, which attempts to exhaust the Omega. The Omega cannot be defined; it will always be 'the beyond'. Our current understanding about God is limited by the human incapability to comprehend the Omega. The paper does not intend to say that all the present understanding of God is incorrect; but the understanding of God does not exhaustively contain God, who is beyond human definitions and limitations.

Key words: *Cosmogensis, Omega, Biogeography, Consciousness, Orthogenesis, Complexification*

Introduction

Ever since its origin, humanity has an inner urge for 'more' - more than 'what they are' and 'what they have' - which in turn has led to all the major inventions and discoveries in human history and still continues to experience this urge for 'something beyond'. This human search for 'the beyond' is rightly expressed by St. Augustine, "Thou hast made us for thyself and restless is

our heart until it comes to rest in thee.”¹ Humanity’s search for ‘the beyond’ is perceived to be manifested mainly in three ways namely, science, religion, and philosophy. A proper balancing among these three disciplines is very much essential for a harmonious living in this cosmos. This paper is an attempt to address one of the perennial issues of human life, the evolving human understanding of God in the light of recent scientific theories.

Though God is not an object of empirical investigation, it is an attempt to present a relevant model for understanding of God, in the context of the popular scientific claims² such as “science has replaced religion”³ and “God has become an out-dated hypothesis and delusion of human mind.”⁴ There is a real need to properly analyse these extremist claims of materialistic scientists to avoid the unnecessary confusions among the ordinary people. The study also helps the believer to have a glimpse of the broad picture of God unconcealed by the new sciences that enables him to have a meaningful ‘understanding of God’.⁵ Addressing this challenge, the paper dares probing the horizons of science, religion, and philosophy for a healthy and scholarly interfacing. In order to address this issue, the theory of evolution by natural selection as proposed by Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace,⁶ and their followers, is chosen as a sample theory

¹ St. Augustine, “The Confessions,” (Christian Classics Ethereal Library).

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/confessions.iv.html> (accessed 12 February 2013).

² Clinton Richard Dawkins is an English ethologist, evolutionary biologist and author. He is famous for his attack against God and religion through his writings like *God Delusion*, *The Ancestor’s Tale*, *The Blind Watch Maker*, etc. He is an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, and was Oxford University professor for Public Understanding of Science from 1995 until 2008. Richard Dawkins, *The Ancestor’s Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Life* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004).

Daniel Clement Dennett is an American philosopher, writer and cognitive scientist in the areas of philosophy of mind, philosophy of science and philosophy of biology. Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

Stephen William Hawking is an English theoretical physicist, cosmologist, and author of several books including *A Brief History of Time*, *The Grand Design*, etc.

³ It is the basic argument of Supersessionism by the atheistic evolutionists who claim that religion is supplanted by science in general and by evolution theory in particular as the arbitrator of meaning. See Canon Christoph Keller, “The Challenge of Darwinism,” Institute for Theological Studies at St. Margaret’s Spring Lecture Series <http://itssm.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/BeyondDarwinism.pdf> (accessed 05 December 2012).

⁴ Richard Dawkins attacks all religious beliefs and especially the notion of God as ‘an out-dated hypothesis’ and ‘delusion of human mind’ through his work the *God Delusion*.

⁵ I would like to make a distinction between the expressions ‘understanding God’ and ‘understanding of God’ in this paper. As for me, ‘understanding God’ is static and would mean a complete knowledge of God, which is impossible for humans. But the expression ‘understanding of God’ as a dynamic one that does not imply perfect knowledge, but an evolving and growing knowledge, which is meaningful in the context of the progressively evolving universe.

⁶ Alfred Russel Wallace was another great scientist who arrived at the same conclusions of Darwin independent of him. His most famous work is *The World of Life: A Manifestation of Creative Power, Directive Mind and Ultimate Purpose* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1914).

from among many scientific theories, that shook the then existing religious beliefs and even necessitated a new understanding of God. It adapts the evolutionary vision of Teilhard de Chardin⁷ as a model for the integration of science, religion, and philosophy.

The basic thesis of this paper can be stated as follows: God is the Omega of the Cosmogogenesis,⁸ who is dynamically involved in the cosmos and is continually revealing oneself in and through the cosmic evolutionary process. Any new scientific development—here in particular the theory of evolution—neither proves nor disproves the existence of God. Even then the ‘collective conscious experience’⁹ of the cosmogenesis, which has reached at present till the state of self-consciousness in humans, points to God, who is manifested as love, and expressed through his dynamically involving, suffering, and life-giving nature.¹⁰

The first part of this paper is a scientific study of the theory of evolution, and its major insinuations. The second part describes the effort of Teilhard de Chardin to resolve the conflicting situations between the theory of evolution and faith in God. The third part analyses some of problems of the current models of understanding of God and endeavours to present a new paradigm for the understanding of God based on Teilhardian evolutionary perspective.

1. The Theory of Evolution: A Critical Reflection

The theory of evolution had a long historical background.¹¹ However, it was with the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* that evolution theory got a definite shape. A significant but often not properly acknowledged is the contribution of A. R Wallace, who developed the same theory of evolution independent of Darwin. Darwin develops a long argument in his major work *The Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. The argument rests on four premises: 1) All organisms face challenges. They need habitat and nourishment. They must cope with heat and

⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a French Catholic priest and paleontologist who actively participated in the excavations of the remains of ‘Peking Human’ in China.

⁸ Cosmogogenesis is a term used by Teilhard de Chardin to denote the dynamic vision of an evolving cosmos that is moving towards a convergence. The element of consciousness, which is inherent in the matter, is being directed and attracted by God, the Omega of the universe. The foundation of Teilhard’s thinking is the directionality in the whole cosmogenesis or the cosmic process of evolution. He prefers to use the term cosmogenesis than cosmos, because the former implies in itself the very notion of evolution.

⁹ I use this term to denote consciousness of the whole universe as a whole. It has some similarity to the notion of the Noosphere in Teilhard de Chardin, which is the sphere of thought that gradually covers the earth like a skin.

¹⁰ Martin Vattamattathil, “Dynamic and Involving God: Some Emergent Understanding of God Based on Teilhardian Evolutionary Perspective” (MPh Thesis, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Pune, 2013), 75-89.

¹¹ The French naturalists Georges Comte de Buffon, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and Geoffroy St-Hilaire as well as the British naturalist Robert Chambers were some of the pioneers of this field.

cold, predators and parasites. They compete, even with members of their own kind, for place, sustenance, reproductive opportunities. 2) Organisms inherit at least some of their capabilities and disabilities. 3) Natural variations can make a difference in survival and reproduction. 4) Life has lasted long enough on earth for less effective species to die out and new ones to evolve.¹² Some of the major elements of the theory are the notion of struggle for existence, natural selection, descent with modification, variation, etc. The struggle for existence is the starting point of Darwin's evolution. All organisms produce more offspring than the availability of the food resources for them at a particular area;¹³ as a result, there is struggle and competition for survival among individual members of a species and among different species. Only the best survives this natural process of selection.¹⁴ Descent with modification would mean that all the living and the extinct species on the earth were descendants of a common ancestral form of life. Natural selection is the mechanism of selection by nature, of a particular characteristic over other that is more beneficial in leaving more progeny.

2. The Conflicting Relationship between Science and Religion

The followers of Darwin worked hard to find out the factors supporting evolution. Some of the major supporting factors of evolution are the following: evidences from comparative anatomy, evidences from embryology, evidences from fossils records, evidences from genetics, and evidences from biogeography. Even though evidences support the fact of evolution, they do not mean that evolution is directionless and blind as propagated by atheistic evolutionists. The evolution theory has been used and abused from a scientific theory to a philosophical tool to promote an atheistic, naturalistic and materialistic interpretation of the universe and to deny the existence of God. The champions of such beliefs try to convince and propagate that beneath life, consciousness, and culture, there lies only a mindless and meaningless matter and that there is no purpose and no deeper meaning for the origin and the existence of Cosmos.¹⁵ It is an instance where science goes beyond its capacity to deal with the empirical realities through scientific analysis, verification and falsification and thereby delimit the reality only to its own field of action and consider religion and philosophy as either mere superstitions or tools of evolution. Thus we see that there is a great tension between science and religion and it becomes almost

¹² Lenn E. Goodman, *Creation and Evolution* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 66-67.

¹³ *Encyclopedia of Human Evolution and Prehistory* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 2000), s.v. "Darwin, Charles Robert."

¹⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 6th ed. (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909), 23.

¹⁵ Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 49-50.

impossible for a religious person to accept the scientific theories without compromising one's religious faith.

3. Evolution and Beyond: Teilhardian Perspective

Teilhard de Chardin tried to resolve this conflicting relationship between science and religion by his new interpretation of the theory of evolution. In Teilhard's writings the term 'evolution' gets a broader meaning: it is no more a mere biological mechanism of growth from one species to another, but the cosmic movement of the growth of complexity and consciousness, from the realm of matter to the higher levels of consciousness.¹⁶ Teilhard's theory of evolution is unique with its characteristics, namely, orthogenic, dynamic, theistic and 'within and without'. Teilhard's orthogenesis is a descriptive theory the validity of which can be empirically verified. The progressive evolutionary process that has reached up to self-consciousness in human beings, shows throughout its history that there is a definite direction, namely, that of an increasing organic complexity and a correspondingly increasing inner-centrality.¹⁷ Teilhardian evolution is also theistic which conceives of God as 'Alpha' and 'Omega' or the beginning and the cosmic convergent point - though evolutionary cosmology reveals that God's nature is more Omega than Alpha.¹⁸

Teilhard envisions four stages of evolution in his theory: a) The first one is the sphere of matter. Teilhard conceives that even at the level of matter, there is a certain kind of consciousness.¹⁹ The more the matter becomes complex, the more it becomes conscious. b) The second is the sphere of life. In the process of complexification, when matter reached a certain level of complexity, it gained capacity of life, which would be roughly categorized into trees, anthropoids, and vertebrates.²⁰ c) At a still further stage in the evolution is the sphere of thought. At this stage, cerebralisation becomes the new parameter of evolution together with the existing complexification.²¹ At this stage, the humans evolve and evolution becomes conscious of itself. d) Teilhard describes that this progressive movement of evolution, which resulted in the evolution of humans, would not end at this stage. "It should culminate forward in some sort of

¹⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy*, trans., J.M. Cohen (New York: A Helen and Kurt Wolf House, 1969), 23.

¹⁷ Robert B. Smith, "Orthogenesis and God-Omega," *Harvard Theological Review* 62, (1969): 403.

¹⁸ John F. Haught, "In Search of a God for Evolution: Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard De Chardin," *Zygon* 37, no. 3 (September 2002): 541-42.

¹⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Let Me Explain*, trans., Rene Hague (London: Collins, 1970), 42-43.

²⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Man's Place in Nature*, trans., Rene Hague (London: Collins, 1966), 18; Teilhard de Chardin, *Let Me Explain*, 19.

²¹ It is the process through which in the course of time the brain of the highest order of the mammals, the primates becomes ever more elaborated and convoluted. Teilhard de Chardin, *Man's Place in Nature*, 49.

supreme consciousness”²² or to a cosmic convergent point, the Omega which he equates with the cosmic Christ. However Teilhardian theory of evolution needs to be further explained and expanded.

4. Emerging Understanding of God from an Evolving Cosmos

The next part of this paper tries to analyse the problems of current understanding of God from a philosophico-religio-scientific perspective and suggests certain insights for a new model. It proposes a model called ‘*Evolutionary Paradigm for the Understanding of God*’. The problems with the current models of understanding God in philosophy, religion, and science are the absolutist claims about God, the exhaustive attitude, and the static nature.

Teilhardian understanding of God as the Omega is the starting point. The emphasis on Omega is a little different from Teilhard’s understanding. Omega stands for the end or the beyond of the present. But Teilhard tried to define and explain Omega which ended up in an attempt to limit and exhaust the Omega. Therefore the explanation of Omega in this paper is different in the sense that God as the Omega cannot be defined; it will always be ‘the beyond’. The end can only be known at the end. The present understanding about God is limited by the human incapability to comprehend the Omega. It does not mean to say that all the present understanding of God is incorrect; but the understanding of God does not exhaustively contain God, who is beyond human definitions and limitations.

5. A New Paradigm for Our understanding of God

The *Evolutionary Paradigm of the Understanding of God* is a new model of understanding of God, which is open to the constant revealing of God through the history and which does not limit God by human definition. It does not substitute the current models, but modifies them by adding certain degree of openness. What changes here, is ‘our understanding about God’, not the being of God. The awareness of our inadequacies to understand God, makes us humble before God, and helps us to be open to the unconcealing of the divine mystery.

Even though it is impossible to have a perfect knowledge of God, the ontological inexhaustibility of the Divine does not totally ban the possibility of experiencing God, through the collective religious and cosmic experience of the humanity. Down through the human history there were

²² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1965), 108-258.

claims of knowledge about God, which were expressed in terms of certain beliefs, practices and suppositions. Among these, the image of God in terms of love stands out as a common one in every divine experience. Hence, the picture of the divine as love could be a best possible picture of God in our attempt to interface the disciplines of religion, philosophy and science. Since our understanding is not exhaustive, there may be contradictions in the pictures. Nevertheless, these contradictions do not mean that they are false, but points to the fact that they are in need of more light.

The understanding of God as love is manifested in the cosmos in three ways: namely, God as involving, God as suffering, and God as life-giving. Even though all of them are anthropomorphic, they imply a certain degree of dynamism and vitality. God's involving in the cosmos is manifested in the process of the origin of the universe, which is God's self-limitation in Love.

Creation involves a costly process. Creation is an act of the kenotic love; in creating, God limits self and allows a cosmos to emerge with its own autonomy...the God revealed in the incarnation is the same god who creates. Creation demands on the part of God, the same kenosis the incarnation demanded...the creator has to work from inside the creation, suffering its pains of growth and chancy developments.²³

God as one, who suffers with the cosmos, does not let the cosmos bear its own burden and pain but suffers with the cosmos.

A third aspect of love as we understand from God is the life-giving nature. God is the source of the life of this whole cosmos. Life giving is the result of involving and suffering of God. A beautiful analogy of conceiving the life-giving nature of God is expressed in 'feminine procreative model of God'. Traditionally God's creative activity is seen from a masculine procreative model as by giving too much stress on the externality of the process as a male fertilizing a female from outside. Whereas, the "mammalian females nurture new life within themselves and this provides a much-needed corrective to the purely masculine image of divine creation."²⁴ In this model God is the ground of being, indeed, pregnant mother, who brings the cosmos to birth within 'her'. The whole cosmos is within God, but radically different from

²³ Lucien Richard, *Christ the Self-Emptying of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 136.

²⁴ Arthur R. Peacocke, *Paths from Science Towards God: The End of All Our Exploring* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 139.

God.²⁵ This model safeguards the distinct identity of God, of the cosmos as a whole, and of individual creatures, while yet recognizing their interdependence and relatedness.

Conclusion

This paper focuses on the conflicting relationships among philosophy, science, and religion and attempts bridge the gap among them by presenting a new model for our understanding of God. A water-tight compartmentalization among these, to distinguish the areas of each one is not practical because at many places they overlap one another. The historical conflict between science and religion can be narrowed down through the medium of dialogue where philosophy can serve as a platform. The horizon of consciousness is being broadened day-by-day with new scientific developments, religious experiences, and new philosophical reflections. The new scientific theory called the 'Evolutionary Synthesis' has come up by combining various branches of sciences, which could be further integrated into the science, religion, and philosophy dialogues. The new science has brought down the distinction between material and spiritual from the traditional sense of the terms, because matter itself has got some crude forms of consciousness. The *Evolutionary Paradigm of the Understanding of God* is a 'new model understanding of God' that is dynamic and open. It does not wipe away the current models, but incorporates them opening their boundaries up to the horizons. The collective religious and cosmic experience of the humanity best describes God as love as expressed in God's involving, God as suffering, and God as life-giving. It argues that what ultimately changes is our understanding and not the being of God. Such a vision of God is neither absolute nor static. Therefore the experience of our inadequacies of the understanding of God should enable us to be humble, and open to the unveiling of the divine.

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²⁵ Gloria L. Schaab, *The Creative Suffering of the Triune God: An Evolutionary Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 153.

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