CHAPTER 5

Giving Teilhard His Body

Both Teilhard and Xiao were thinking in complex theological environments, and their theologies respond with equal complexity. Though he appeared to have outdistanced the intellectual framework of the Catholic community at the time, Teilhard worked to remain within the ecclesial boundaries of his church, while attempting to live from the convictions of his scientific education and discoveries; Xiao used a number of different sources for his commentary in the elaborate intellectual climate of the Song. Both writers questioned humanity’s relationship with the cosmos and Ultimate Reality. They answered that the cosmos is the means for relating to God or the Dao, rather than viewing it as an obstacle to the divine. Teilhard’s emphasis has an initial outward orientation into the cosmos through experiences, most especially through work. Divinization happens through what people do and what happens to them in their daily lives. His writing assumes bodyliness, but it never directly addresses it. In order to discover what Teilhard thought of the body, one must derive the body from his overall scheme.

On the other hand, Xiao’s alchemy embraces the cosmos by an inward movement that views the body—the immediate cosmos—as the site of divinization. First the mind divinizes the body, then that divinizing activity radiates outward to the rest of the cosmos.

Putting Teilhard and Xiao into conversation will serve to clarify the role the body plays in divinization. The intent of the dialogue is to advance Christian, theological formulations of the body and divinization and not to make theological judgments regarding Daoism (see Clooney 2010). Therefore, some of the language of the comparison will be more fitting to Christian metaphysics, but inappropriate for Daoism. For example, ‘beings’ only applies to Christianity. Daoism sees all things as manifestations, events, ‘happenings’ of a self-generating Dao (Graham 1989, 3; see Charles Jones in Kohn 2009, 385; see Clooney 2010). And divinization is a Christian term that assumes an essential distance between people and God; such a distance would be inaccurately applied to the Daoists’ monistic worldview.

Part I: The Body

The divinized body for a Christian is the beatified body, the model for which is the body of the resurrected Christ. The body of Jesus in John 20 gives clues
about what beatification might be like. Mary Magdalene experienced Jesus in the garden on the first Easter as a transformed Jesus both continuous and discontinuous with the pre-Resurrection Jesus. His resurrection body is definitive for any Christian examination of the body: it is numerically singular, self-contained, and capable of intersubjectivity (Schneiders 2005, 20).

**Body as Cosmos**

What Teilhard proposes in *The Human Phenomenon*, Xiao presents in the *Mountain Diagram*; what Teilhard explains with Neoplatonic metaphysics of ancient Greece, Xiao shows with the correlation theory of ancient China. They write: the notion that the body is only related to a single, isolated person is misconstrued; instead, people are constantly interacting with their environments. The immediate environment supplies the body with air, water, and food. In return, the body exhales and releases waste. But Teilhard and Xiao go further to say that the body has an intimate relationship not only with the immediate environment, but also with the entire cosmos. Their works reveal unitive theologies that present the cosmos—the desert, mountains, trees, space, the furthest star—as a reflection of the human body. The body recapitulates the cosmos. Teilhard says this in words; Xiao expresses this with an image:

Thus each one of us has, in reality, his own universe; he is its center and he is called upon to introduce harmony into it, just as though he were alone ‘in natura rerum.’ (ww 238–239)

My own body is not these cells or those cells that belong exclusively to me: it is what, in these cells and in the rest of the world feels my influence and reacts against me. My matter is not a part of the universe that I possess totaliter: it is the totality of the Universe possessed by me partialiter. (sc 13)

Without metaphor, it is through the whole length, thickness, and depth of the world in movement that human beings see themselves capable of experiencing and discovering their God. To be able literally to say to God that we love him, not only with our whole body, our whole heart, and our whole soul, but with the whole universe in process of unification. (hp 213)