

Boston College  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

10<sup>th</sup> Annual Evelyn Underhill Lecture in Christian Spirituality

presented on July 16, 2016 by  
Ilia Delio, O.S.F.

Thank you for the very kind introduction. And thank you for coming on a Saturday morning on a beautiful sunny day in Boston. It's not snowing here, and I can understand why you want to get out. And thank you for this opportunity to give the Underhill Lecture.

I have been working at the intersection of theology, philosophy, spirituality and culture —yes, I bring them all together —because we are living in conflictual times. And part of my work is trying to understand, how can we move beyond, you might say, the walls of conflict into a new breath of life?

Last year, Pope Francis issued a wonderfully comprehensive encyclical called *Laudato Si*. And there has been much discussion on this encyclical. But the subtitle of this work is “On Care for Our Common Home”—our common home. And Pope Francis looks around at the world and, for one, begins this encyclical, unusually, on the experience of a global warmed earth. In other words, the earth —global warming continues to proliferate. It is stripping the world of natural resources. It is causing glaciers to melt and polar bears to migrate. The poor are being affected disproportionately. And he asks us to wake up to a new consciousness of interconnectedness. In his view, option for the poor is option for the earth.

# Boston College

three-tiered cosmos—and now I know this is not you, you're a very enlightened group—but there is still this operative image of God as the benevolent grandfather, the one who is watching over all from a distance.

This of course was challenged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Nicolaus Copernicus and others began to measure, you might say, the best they could, the rotation of the planets. And poor Nic, he was a Polish Catholic, and that didn't go well, because he said, I don't think we're the center here, I think we're moving, and I think the sun is the center. And he said, no, this can't be. So he buried his results under his pillow, and Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler, and others said no, Nic, you're right. We are moving. And that, I think, is the beginning of our troubles.

Now, Cardinal Bellarmine was not happy about this; he had plenty of good things, but not happy about this. Galileo, with a more powerful telescope, who confirmed the Copernican heliocentric cosmos said, indeed, we are moving with other planets around the sun. Bellarmine said no, the doctrine attributed to Copernicus that the earth moves around the sun and the sun stands at the center of the world without moving, is contrary to Holy Scriptures and therefore cannot be defended or held.

And we have had, you might say, a long journey since then to try to accept modern science. In some ways, we are, in a sense, here in some ways because the shift is slow and it's variable. We are not facing the east here, but we could be, but the fact is we still now have this conflictual relationship between science and religion. And we're not quite sure how they might fit together.

I think Descartes, in a sense being the true Catholic that he was, was trying to in a sense confirm the Thomistic world by, in a sense, separating out the mental from the physical. On one hand, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, because I am a thinking, non-extended thing. And on the other, I have a clear, distinct idea of a body, in fact as an extended non-thinking thing. And it is certain I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it. Well, into the world [of artificial intelligence], right, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

But we began to build a world where, not like Thomas or Bonaventure



# Boston College

And they said, “no, I think it’s true.” This was later shown to be true by the Scottish physicist John Bell.

And so this term quantum entanglement means that two particles that have interacted will be interactive forever, so that, if one particle changes in one locale, the other particle will also change as well. So we call this non-local action at a distance.

And one of the common phenomena, I think, of this is, you might say, in our everyday experience, consciousness. I often give the example, I have a friend, actually I’m going to visit her this afternoon but we worked together for a number of years. One day I was thinking, gee, I wonder how Pat is doing. I no longer had thought that, how Pat is doing, and about a half an hour later, the phone rang. And it was Pat. I said I can’t believe this. I just thought about you. We used to say before, “what a coincidence, I was just thinking about you.” Now we can say we’re quantumly entangled. Be careful who your friends are, really they are with you forever.

Now, what scientists are beginning to tell us is that increasingly we’re beginning to realize that reality is non-local, that the nature of material substances is deeply entangled fields of energy, so that the nature of the universe is undivided wholeness—undivided wholeness. Paul Dirac, in a little dinner they gave for him before he accepted the Nobel Prize in physics, said this, and I think it’s meant to be descriptive rather than, it’s meant to make a point: “Pick a flower on earth, and you move the farthest star.” Our actions, our local actions, can have cosmic consequences. But we do not think like this. We have no awareness that my actions can actually impact the cosmos itself.

David Bohm, a contemporary of Einstein, had a slightly different view on quantum physics. He thought that there was a quantum potential that was holding this realm of quantum reality. And he said this at one point, he said, as human beings in societies, we seem separate. But in our roots, we are part of an indivisible whole and share in the same cosmic process. What does that mean for us, as we look about our world at this moment? We are sharing in the same cosmic process.

And that process, and this is where Teilhard really, you might say, brings to light a new view, that process is not a static process. The word process itself lends itself to a lawful orderliness in the openness of life, that there is a role, you might say, for spontaneity. I might say God is not that boring, really, that there’s a playfulness even within nature, so that it is not a static, fixed, mechanistic world. Rather, it’s dynamic, it’s changing, and it’s open to newness.

Now, for those of you who are bibliophiles, if we were to think of evolution as an encyclopedic volume, 30 volumes, just to give you an idea of where we fit into this story, each volume, 450 pages, each page, a million years. That’s a big book. Volume one is the Big Bang; volume 20, lifeless and mindless matter; volume 21, that’s where our earth story begins, about four billion years ago, million years ago; and volume 22 is where life begins; volume 29, that’s where Jurassic Park enters in; and volume 30, the dinosaurs go extinct as a new type of hominid emerges. We are on volume 30, page 450, and the last line, the last two words of that line would be homo sapiens, and that would be us.

This volume, this set, is not complete. We are not just simply the last word of evolution. We are evolution, now on a new level of self-consciousness. So what we are saying is that nature is marked by change. This change is orderly. It does have chance and law within it. But what we are saying is that new things happen. There are no fixed essences. And time is irreversible.

Teilhard saw evolution as a threefold process—a process of convergence. Given sufficient amount of time and the proper conditions, things will converge. They will be drawn together and unite. As they unite, they form new degrees of relationships, complexity. And he said, in that complexity, consciousness rises. I take consciousness here as the flow of information. So what he’s saying is that evolution is not just background to the story, because people always ask me, well, do you believe in

# Boston College

you can carry around. And I said you're kidding. In New Jersey, we had a phone on the wall. It had a cord. And so, sure enough, this huge thing came around, and people are walking around now with cell phones. And it was rare. I mean you really had to buy one of these things, it was costly.

In just a short amount of time, we're saying 40 years, we have gone from the phone on the wall to the computer in my hand; from having telephone operators to the fact that you can reach out and touch someone in Australia at the click of a button. Technology is our fastest evolver today. But we know that there's still part of the species that is still evolving. It's a slow process. I live in hope because it's an expanding universe with a long future.

Now, here is where I think Teilhard really helps, you might say. To me, he brings new light. For one, he did not see evolution just simply as the emergence of a human species. He described evolution primarily as the rise of consciousness. It's not just things that are coming together and complexifying, but consciousness itself is increasing. Now, this of course is the hot topic today, because up until now we were pretty sure that mind was an epiphenomenon, a phenomenon exclusive to the human species. Now we're beginning to realize more and more that mind may indeed be part of matter.

Thomas Nagel, in his book *Mind and Cosmos* a few years ago, made this about turn, he who was warranted against any mindful matter now in a sense is acceding to it. What we are beginning to see is that the Big Bang seems to emerge out of a quantum wholeness. Quantum is the name of the game here, so that life might begin with consciousness and wholeness.

Now, we don't know what exactly this means. It is speculative at this point. But what we are beginning in a sense to perhaps turn toward is the fact that our consciousness has emerged from this wholeness and continues to be part of it. In other words, what accounts for the human mind is already active in the universe. So I would say this, that in and through our minds, and that's a deep consciousness, all this

# Boston College

Big Bang onwards. And it's an energy of attraction, it's an energy of union, and it's an energy of emergence.

So what Teilhard sees is that, as love energy attracts elements together, there is in a sense a flow of consciousness and an increase of consciousness, so that we can speak about mindful matter as relationality and informational flow, so that this whole cosmic process is in a sense a process of attraction and transcendence, love in a sense increases

# Boston College

God is actively, you might say, self-giving love, empowering reality into new life, Trinity at work in this creative reality.

And of course this is consonant with what we know from the New Testament of love. God is love. Love is self-giving and self-gift. But I think Teilhard would say love is not something that God does, like hanging out in this heavenly realm deciding that he should love or she should love. Rather, love is what God is. And I think that's hard for us, because even conceptually we think of God as person, and we put features to that person. And yet what we are saying is love is what God is. And love is always personal and relational. And therefore it speaks to us of a God who is dynamic Trinity, so that we can say a relational God empowers a relational universe.

This is the image, a stained image, of a neuron here on the left, and this is a NASA image of the universe. It's pretty incredible to see the amazing intrinsic relationality of this thing we call life.

Teilhard in a sense sees this active presence of God in this world as something alive, new. Meister Eckhart said centuries ago, he said God is the newest thing there is, the youngest thing. And when we are united to God, we become new again, new and young. And we act old, very old, and static. And yet this is what Teilhard's saying: God is up ahead drawing us within and ahead, drawing us to something new.

And therefore it begs the question, what is the meaning then of Jesus in evolution? Because we've got the whole story, from the medieval cosmos, what is the story now in the world we actually live in? So Teilhard saw that God is active and involved from the beginning. We can say the Word becomes evolution, so that he does not, in a sense, separate Creation and Incarnation. I think we do that to get a three-year degree, course in creation, you can have one incarnation, and you can have one in eschatology. Then you get a degree, and you go on.

But he says, no, really it's all one act of God's self-involving life, self-gifting love. God brings into being, God enters into that which is brought into being. As God enters into it, things are reconciled, brought together. So he sees Creation, Incarnation, Redemption as three dimensions of one self-gift of love. And therefore he calls this Christogenesis, not just Christ, but Christogenesis, a birthing of the Christ.

Now, Teilhard discovered Scotus's primacy of Christ late in life. I am pretty sure that, had he discovered Duns Scotus's primacy of Christ, in other words, Christ is first in God's intention to love, whether or not sin ever existed, Christ would have come. Now, if Teilhard found Scotus early, he would have been Teilhard, OFM. And he would have published his writings.

So what he's saying is that this—again, this is not, we all went along, we had a major mishap, and then God had to fix the damage. It is, rather, that the whole thing is oriented out of love, in love, for love, and that fullness of growing in love is the Christ. And therefore Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is not some strange exception to an otherwise evolutionary universe. Jesus emerges by way of evolution. He is that long, you might say, flow out of this Big Bang cosmos.

But we see in Jesus, in a sense, those things which are typical of the cosmos itself, consciousness, wholeness, relationality. These are the things that God is always





# Boston College

So what some say is we're in a new form of cyber -Platonism , that there's something out there for me that's better than here. And as Margaret Wertheim says, "we are in a process of making one another disappear by living more of our lives apart from other humans and in the company of machines. " I've worked with people that they won't even talk to, they'll—I'll e -mail you; I'll text you. Young people, those , you have children, the phone is now in the American Museum of History. No one uses a phone. You text, Twitter, tweet, or Instagram or whatever , you Snapchat.

But here it is , we are wired to be active players in evolution. It makes a difference where our minds are, and it makes a difference where our hearts are. I do think we need a new consciousness of catholicity. And this is where I think Pope Francis is calling us to. And in fact, a lot of what I'm talking about here is in Laudato Si in its own way. He talks about technology creating vast internal deserts. All of our lives now are lived outside us. And so we need a new space for inner reality, for involution. No evolution without involution. And that means solitude, cyber -Sabbaths. Maybe some of you have practices in your classroom , put your cell phones outside the door. It's hard for younger generations. It's hard for me, actually. I'm like, oh my God. One kid said to me, " if I lose my phone, I lose my self. " That's how self -extended we are.

So we need, in a sense, to renew a spirit of prayer, interiority. The Jesuit spiritual discernment could not be more apt than in this moment. What Teilhard said is we need to harness the energies of love, to harness, to gather those energies within ourselves, among ourselves for the forward movement of life.

Etty Hillesum , that wonderful, insightful young Dutch woman writing from a conceincr6(th)(,)T2(.).2.3(i)12n