

Lancaster Theological Seminary

**The Spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin:
Transformation through
Group Engagement
in Evolutionary
Process**

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Doctor of Ministry

by

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The Spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin:
Transformation Through Group Engagement in Evolutionary Process
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Abstract

Drawing on 50 years of combined experience as a religious educator and spiritual director, I have created a resource for spiritual growth that engages people who want to more fully understand and integrate evolutionary principles into their lives. The pedagogical method as well as the content in the resource is based on principles of evolution, as described by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., a Jesuit scientist of the early 20th century. This paper describes how the resource is grounded in the faith development work of James Fowler, uses the dynamics of contemplative dialogue and small group interaction, and is informed by theories of transformative learning for adults. I also demonstrate how Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's work reflects a Process Philosophy view of God and the universe and is related to consciousness development and patterns of Christian spiritual growth, in particular, the spiritual tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

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Chapter 1

Project Description and Rationale

Introduction

Creative evolution is happening right now! God is dynamically active in the streets and churches! I can see it - wherever Confederate statues, now symbols of slavery, are removed from pedestals, previously denied women are ordained in the church, civil rights are extended to the LGBTQ community, and clergy are defrocked for sexual misconduct rather than reassigned. Particulars may change in each decade that passes, but people are moving together towards the Dream of God for the human family, as they give shape to emerging ideas.

Woefully, I have also witnessed the opposite. As I write, corporate lobbyists still block environmental legislation, refusing to accept climate change data. Government officials walk around unmasked, dismissing the science of disease contagion. As a parish Director of Religious Education, I recently had a thirteen-year-old boy come to me convinced that he could not be confirmed since he believed in evolution. Additionally, I saw one of my religion teachers who is gay run out of Mass crying, after hearing the pastor compare unnatural sex with animals to sex between people of the same gender.

Daily, I waver between exaltation and despair. I wonder, as citizen and church-member, what I can personally do that moves us forward. Each morning, I look again to a God of love who is luring us all towards the future. And I ask: Is there a way I can affect human progress? What gifts and experiences do I have that God can use to bring about Love's Primacy on earth? Realizing I can't do it alone, even with the grace of heaven, is a vital start. We have to do this together.

Project Description

Drawing on 50 years of combined experience as a religious educator and spiritual director, I have created a resource for spiritual growth that engages people who want to more fully understand and integrate evolutionary principles into their lives. This resource will be of interest to those who are still within the Christian church, but are troubled by its limited engagement with science, and those who are outside the church, but are still interested in what Christians might have to say about science and faith. Within my program, which I have entitled “Center to Center,” scientific ideas are placed in conversation with the language of faith, allowing participants to have opportunities for deeper self-understanding, as well as growing relationship to other people, the cosmos and the Sacred. The words “Center to Center” refer to the process of connecting to and from one’s personal center of consciousness to that of others and to God, the Center of centers, which unites us all.

The pedagogical method, as well as the content, in the resource I have created is grounded in principles of evolution, as described by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., a respected geologist and paleontologist of the early 20th century and a priest-professor. Teilhard is a foundational source for modern discussions of evolutionary science and faith within Roman Catholic circles. As an example of Teilhard’s widespread notoriety, one anthology on the legacy of Teilhard de Chardin includes such experts in their fields as John Haught, Senior Fellow of Science and Religion at Georgetown University, James Salmon, professor of chemistry and theology at Loyola, Maryland, Ewert Cousins, professor emeritus of theology at Fordham University, Ludovico Galleni, zoology professor at the Pontifical University in Rome, Philip Hefner, the former editor of the journal “Religion and Science,” James Skehan, professor of geology and geophysics at Boston College, John Farina, editor in chief of the *Classics of*

Western Spirituality series, and Harold Morowitz, professor of biology and natural philosophy at George Mason University.¹

Although an anti-modernist hierarchy, fearful of heresy, kept Teilhard from disseminating his ideas during his lifetime, since his death, two major books and multiple collections of essays written by Teilhard de Chardin have been translated and published. *The Divine Milieu* deals with Teilhard's spirituality most directly and *The Phenomenon of Man* (recently republished as *The Human Phenomenon*) integrates his scientific studies with his theological vision of the cosmos. Teilhard's writings stand at the forefront in many discussions of spirituality, including creation spirituality, process theology, and ecologically responsible faith.

Process theology in this paper's analysis will provide a broader theological context for Teilhard's work. Process theology was developed around Teilhard's time, in the early 20th century, based on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Its initial theological applications were made most notably by Charles Hartshorne and John Cobb, but many other process theologians have followed.

In the process view of reality, one of the essential attributes of God is God's capacity to both affect and be affected by what happens in the cosmos. However, God remains Absolute, in that God lives forever and is unchangeably good. Process theologians understand the universe to be creative, evolving, dynamic, and inter-relational, to the extent that the future of a free universe, even to God, is completely open. Still, God can know all that can be known in any moment. In process theology, God's power is the power of persuasive love, calling us all to salvation. God is relational and influentially present in each moment of life.

¹ James Salmon, SJ and John Farina, Ed., *The Legacy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press), 2011.

Theories of faith development and transformative learning have also contributed to the project's construction. Transformative learning is a process in which adults encounter something new, reflect on it as they talk with others to assess the adequacy and accuracy of their assumptions, and come to new insights that may change attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.²

Additionally, dynamics of Ignatian spirituality are integrated into the program, as this is the foundation of Teilhard's own spiritual formation.

Central Claim and Rationale

Adults seeking spiritual growth and transformation can benefit from a small group process that integrates both the content and process of Teilhard's evolutionary principles.

Many contemporary adults seek a worldview that is comprehensive and coherent. Since science and religion both illuminate the mysteries of the universe, evolutionary concepts and spirituality can be fruitfully married, without contradicting one another.

For most of history, people looked at the world through a religious lens. God was the answer to all the mysteries of the universe. But with the advent of the Rational Age, science began to replace religion in answering life's questions.

Today, people must choose their stance regarding the relationship between science and religious faith. Ian Barbour delineates the four most popularly-held views. The first is a stance of conflict: science and religious faith contradict. The second sees science and religion as completely independent, yet complementary, to one another. Barbour describes these two popular views this way:

Biblical literalists believe that the theory of evolution conflicts with religious faith. Atheistic scientists defend a philosophy of materialism and argue that evolution is incompatible with any form of theism. For both groups science and religion are enemies.

² Marmon, Ellen L., "Transformative Learning Theory: Connections with Christian Adult Education," *CEJ*: Series 3, Vol. 10, No. 2, 425.

This view receives most of the attention in the media. . . . Conflict can be avoided if science and religion are kept in separate compartments of human life. Science asks how things work and relies on objective public data. Religion asks about values and a larger framework of meaning for personal life. . . . These two kinds of inquiry offer complementary perspectives.³

Barbour suggests that a third stance is dialogue between the two fields, where similarities and differences are acknowledged. The fourth option, integration, is the one Barbour himself finds the most promising and the category into which Teilhard falls. Of this last stance, Barbour writes:

Some people seek a more systematic integration of science and religion. Those in the tradition of natural theology hope to find in science . . . suggestive evidence of the existence of God. Other people start from a particular religious tradition and argue that many of its beliefs are compatible with modern science but some beliefs should be reformulated in the light of particular scientific theories.⁴

To move away from a contradictory stance between science and religion and toward a complementary, dialogical, or integrative one, certain strands within religious tradition can be magnified. For example, an important evolutionary principle that coincides with Judeo-Christian theology is the understanding that creation is continuous and that over time, human beings have a central part to play in the future's appearance. If this is so, then people have a moral responsibility to develop their knowledge and capacities the best they can, for the sake of all creation. The resource I propose addresses this goal, by supplying evolutionary content for reflective engagement, through the exercise of dialogue skills and practices of contemplation and discernment.

Teilhard de Chardin observed in detail the continuous progress of evolution in the course of his geological and paleontological pursuits. He extrapolated that evolution would continue.

³ Ian Barbour, *Nature, Human Nature, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

With the universe become reflectively self-conscious within the human species, however, evolution would be primarily cultural, rather than biological. In other words, people would be responsible for change through sharing ideas that lead to creative action for Earth and its people.

Evolution also fits with the Judeo-Christian tradition in that biblical faith speaks with regularity about God “creating something new” and of “promises” for the future, for the common good. Both the prophets and Jesus however make it clear that this “something better to come” will only happen as humanity lives in partnership with God. This partnering and co-creation is the realm of spirituality.

Spirituality, in general, can be described as how one relates to one’s deepest self, to one’s place in the world, and to some form of transcendent meaning. Someone who commits to a path of Christian spirituality lives out his or her faith journey, guided by the teachings and example of Jesus. Beyond what science can reveal, Christians participate in a Trinitarian Divine Reality, living in a mutually responsive relationship with an unconditionally loving, Self-giving, and transcendent Creator, whom Jesus called Father. Christians are also in relationship with Christ Jesus, experienced as a living human/divine encounter with God, as well as with the Holy Spirit, felt as an indwelling, immanent experience of God’s activity within all created things.

Various spiritual practices, such as personal prayer, shared prayer, Scripture and other spiritual reading, spiritual direction, mindfulness, and examinations of consciousness (Asking: what moved me toward or away from God during this day?) help bring a disciple of Jesus into deeper relationship with Divine Reality, so as to become most fully human. A follower of Jesus is committed to the process of spiritual growth, biblically defined as increasingly putting on the mind of Jesus (Phil. 2:5). Throughout a lifetime, he or she grows, becoming a new creation “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17), by asking daily for the grace to let go of selfish preoccupation, be healed

of wounds, and freed from any blocks to love, so that he or she can better do God's will, or live a life that advances God's project for the world (the Kingdom of God.)

In the Christian tradition, when individual persons do the work of spiritual transformation, they move beyond egotism and blindness to join in communion with others, for a purpose far grander than themselves. With God's grace and great moral purpose, Christians in society strive to transform the world, not only praying but working for God's Kingdom to come on Earth as it is in heaven. Ultimately, in the Christian evolutionary view, all will be drawn into God in the cosmos' final eschatological time.

As humanity increasingly becomes one in Christ, the universe, in Teilhard's words, is "spiritualized." Teilhard bases this on Ephesians 1:9-10: "God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on Earth under Christ" (NIV).

Teilhard also sees the spiritualization of the universe as the fulfillment of St. Paul's hope for the world: "Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. . . . Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Rom. 8: 19, 21-22).

God labors for us, says the founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius, through and with every creature, as we work in tandem for Earth's well-being. Therefore, the commitment to develop and share one's gifts is a moral responsibility for those who embrace their vital part in evolution.

Another central evolutionary principle that Teilhard discovered is that the coming together or convergence of atomistic elements leads to greater complexity which results in

greater consciousness. This process has been happening since the beginning of time. After the Big Bang, elements formed in space, with the tiniest of form. But as atoms converged into molecules, and molecules converged with other molecules to become cells, greater complexity happened and novel evolutionary leaps occurred. Eventually, cells combined to become more complex organisms and consciousness kept growing as well, until humans, with their highly evolved brains, emerged with the capacity to “know that they know.” The universe had become conscious of itself.

Today, as humans converge with one another, experiencing their oneness across the globe, there is still the potential for greater consciousness to grow. Thinking and feeling as a global body is what humanity is beginning to do, although such progress occurs in fits and starts. God from the future, in Teilhard’s mind, is calling humanity to greater convergence, until one united Body of Christ, with its wedding of the human and the divine, is formed by nature and grace on Earth.

Coming to understand, through the discoveries of science, that the cosmos continuously evolves (or develops over time, with greater complexity) means that a New Universe Story can be told by Christians, in addition to the Genesis creation myth. Integrating religious ideas and emergent scientific concepts becomes a more coherent way of seeing the world for contemporary believers. As a process, emergence of the new in evolutionary history builds on the old, but adds a dimension of novelty. In biology, emergence of a new feature might occur through a particular genetic mutation which helps with survival. Ideas, including theological ones, are emergent within a group when members suspend judgment and listen, both within and to one another, for new ideas that might be trying to come to light in the conversation.

In addition, the emergence of groups that intentionally and systematically gather to pool their thoughts and solve problems together is an example of an emergent feature within the century we live. As evolutionary principles are being increasingly integrated into contemporary cultural life, transformative learning groups, which help participants evolve in their perspectives and worldviews, are a central development in adult education. Likewise, future-oriented, small group processes, geared to help new thought emerge, are becoming more common within corporations. But in the world of church, people are frequently limited to offerings like lectures, one-shot sermons, or read-at-home books. Therefore, I believe that spiritual seekers could highly benefit from a transformation process that employs on-going dialogue within an intentional community.

In the broadest sense, I hope that bringing “Center to Center” into spirituality circles will be part of the earth’s evolution. Some churches have already moved in the direction of spiritual growth in small groups. But the educational choices I made in this model are based on evolutionary principles, such as: greater complexity has the potential to lead to greater consciousness. Consciousness can conceivably be greater when hearts and minds expand in relationship with others. The more diverse and multiple the viewpoints, the more likely something novel will emerge. New perspectives can lead to transformation, both individually and societally.

Process theology tells us that emergence of the new happens in each moment as we make choices from all the inputs within and around us. One constant input is the Holy Spirit’s persuasion toward the highest potential that could happen in that moment. Human beings, with their highly evolved consciousness, have the capacity, unique on the Earth, to discern the movements of God, moment to moment. Skill in more subtle discernment can lead ultimately to

growth in freedom, as one chooses among life's myriad invitations. For this reason, the spiritual practice of discernment is an ongoing feature of my resource. Discernment is a prayer endeavor in which one listens for the lure and stirrings of God, both within oneself and all around. It considers tradition's wisdom and respects authority, but trusts that God reveals God's self to all. For this reason, the resource I have prepared allows the group to decide if they would like each group member to share facilitation, rather than depend on an expert.

The primary theological assumption I make in structuring this process is that the Spirit is within all of creation and is actively present to promote greater life, love, and unity. God is revelatory, not just within personal or corporate religious experience, but in all of human activity, including science. As a Christian, I assume that God is present in the Church Body, experienced as Christ and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I believe that Christianity can best be true to its identity and contribute to the world if the church (1) actively listens to the guidance of the Spirit within contemporary movements (such as growing global and evolutionary consciousness) and (2) makes available opportunities for spiritual growth to adults at all different stages of faith.

Developmental science has burgeoned since the 20th century. It includes studies of faith development, most prominently, that of James Fowler. In line with Fowler's description of the stages of faith through which people pass, I also assume that all people have faith, even if unnamed, faith in certain ultimate meanings and values, which guide their daily choices according to what they find most trustworthy in the world. With life experience, most adults develop sequentially through stages of faith that move from conformity to society, to individuated thinking that tends to be black and white, to finally, a way of seeing the world in a

more integrated manner, where differences are respected because they shed light on who we are as a whole.⁵

Faith development in Fowler's schema is innately human, with or without religious language. It is defined by James Fowler as all "the ways we go about making and maintaining meaning in life."⁶ It is part of humankind's quest for transcendence. Faith, then, is not a separate part of life, but "the orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions."⁷

This definition of faith is not acceptable to everyone. The Reformed traditions do not welcome the concept of faith apart from faith's content, nor do they all believe that faith is something that has hierarchical stages or can be developed by human action, according to William O. Avery. They are suspicious, he says, of a person's desire for sanctification or self-fulfillment, which might lead one to engage in some form of works righteousness.⁸ This Lutheran definition of faith is explicitly Christian. But this was not the locus of the original research done by Dr. Fowler. Though a United Methodist minister, Fowler's objective was to bridge the fields of social science and practical theology, with a definition of faith that is more universal.

Whether Fowler's definition *is* truly universal, across all cultures, and for all times, is another point of disagreement among scholars. Psychologist Carol Gilligan claims that women's

⁵ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1981).

⁶ Ibid., xii.

⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸ William O. Avery, "A Lutheran Examines James W. Fowler," *Religious Education*, Vol. 85, Issue 1 (Winter 1990): 75.

faith development does not coincide completely with Fowler's stages.⁹ And others criticize Fowler's conclusions as applying only to people of late 20th century American and European culture.¹⁰

There is possible validity to this criticism that needs to be taken into account. Any stage theory is limited. For instance, Fowler's stages are not strictly discrete. People sometimes simultaneously display characteristics of more than one stage in actual life. In addition, one must avoid the trap of equating stages of faith with spiritual goodness, for God relates to all people where they are. Also to be avoided is the pitfall of thinking any stage "superior." Still, with all these qualifications, Fowler's descriptions are a helpful guide in accompanying people growing in faith. His basic premises match my professional experience. Therefore, I am convinced that people exploring or transitioning through stages of faith can benefit from engaging with others in a dialogic setting that is open-ended in their development of faith.

Jane Regan, a Roman Catholic religious educator, rightly asks a question, which I myself have asked and answered in the negative. "Does the Church, in general, or a parish faith community, in particular, support the movement from the conforming nature of the person in Stage 3 of Fowler's stages, to the distancing tendencies [of independent thinking] that are inevitable in the movement into and through Stage 4, to the embracing of the alternatives, which is at the heart of someone living and 'faithing' within Stage 5?"¹¹ In my experience as an adult in the Church, the answer is "no." Nonetheless, I am convinced that we as Church need to learn to

⁹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹⁰ P. Baxter, "From Ubuzungu to Ubuntu," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, <https://jamesbishopblog.com>, (Nov. 2, 2017).

¹¹ Jane Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 55.

do this for one another, if we are to live and serve as maturing members of the Body of Christ. I believe that developing a more integrated worldview, with theological concepts and language suitable for a scientific age, is important, and can be furthered by a multiplicity of small groups like the one I propose.

My pedagogical assumption is that adults learn best when what they are learning is directly related to their own questions, and when they are able to apply new material to life. Adults naturally learn from open-ended dialogue with one another and need freedom to explore new concepts, without undue stricture or judgment. Therefore, I believe that transformative learning happens best in small groups, without the control of someone with “all the answers.” However, many people have been taught to be solely dependent on religious authority for truth and so will need to be given tools to practice new forms of seeking truth together.

My overall assumption, central to this project, is that when anything in creation moves beyond (the illusion of) functioning as a separate unit to an intentional state of being in communion with others, such increased complexity has the potential to bear fruit in greater shared consciousness. Creative ideas emerge when people listen to one another’s insights and experiences and attend together to “the something new” that wants to arise. In spiritual language, this is contemplative dialogue. Contemplative dialogue is a process of listening to the Spirit moving within, as well as among community members, as ideas and experiences are explored by a group. Attention to “what is trying to emerge,” as hearts and minds are shared and converge, allows “the yet-unknown” to open further in an ongoing, creative process.

Communal processes in which critical inquiry is central benefit people seeking a way to hold science and faith together. Durka and Smith call this a search for a credible life-defining model:

Seeking a credible life-defining model . . . should extend the coherence of our existence. It is obvious that a model which makes more sense of more elements in our life and environment is to be embraced over competing models. However, in the attempt to extend the coherence of existence one inevitably encounters conflicts, contraries and contradictories. It is in working towards their resolution that yet newer and deeper meanings are generated. . . . A life-defining model . . . that promotes the profoundest communion with all of Reality is . . . a religious model.¹²

Religion, in this sense, is not denominational, but is a model that embraces the transcendent dimension of life. In addition, Durka and Smith claim that life-defining models have the potential to be continually self-transcendent, luring people beyond themselves toward a greater communion, to use process-theological words. A process approach in education, the authors claim:

makes more sense of more elements of our existence. Its analysis of human experience deals with interpersonal relations, memory, human freedom, the relatedness and temporality of human beings, and all their uses to illuminate the nature of God and his relation to the world. . . . In the process model all of life is taken seriously – its feelings, apprehensions, intuitions, poetic insights. . . . Everything and everybody reveals meaning. . . . The process model is societal by its very nature.”¹³

In “Center to Center,” therefore, process not only promotes new learning but is specifically part of the learning itself. Critical thinking, discernment, dialogue and contemplation *are* a person’s teachers. They work together to help participants develop coherent perspectives, out of which they will choose. In Ignatian terms, the end result is learning to see and hear God in all things, so that one can freely, responsibly and lovingly be part of the co-creation of the earth. In the words of Teilhard de Chardin:

All around us, to right and left, in front and behind, above and below, we have only had to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances in order to see the divine welling up and showing through. . . . By means of all created things, without exception, the divine

¹² Gloria Durka and Joan Marie Smith, “Modeling in Religious Education,” *Religious Education*, Jan. 1, 1976, 121.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 126.

assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers.”¹⁴

These words from Teilhard de Chardin’s book *The Divine Milieu* are eminently relatable to all who have been numinously grasped by the mysteries of the universe. Teilhard’s writings, though scientifically dense and mystically poetic, are an excellent starting point for seekers of all kinds.

I can claim this because I too have sought with both anguish and passion, and Teilhard’s writings opened a way. My first encounter with Teilhard de Chardin was through his book, *The Divine Milieu*. At the time, I was wavering in my faith because church doctrine didn’t “all make sense.” I was viscerally grabbed in the book’s introduction! “This book is not specifically addressed to Christians who are firmly established in their faith and have nothing more to learn. . . . It is written for the waverers, both inside and outside; that is to say for those who . . . either hesitate on its threshold or turn away in the hope of going beyond it.”¹⁵ Teilhard informed a wondering me that “there is no need to distinguish explicitly between natural and supernatural, between divine influence and human operation . . . As a living reality, the notion of grace impregnates the whole atmosphere.”¹⁶

At heart, Teilhard’s spirituality is about coming to see and respond to the unity of all things. Because science and religion are all of a piece, he showed me that any particular experience in nature or history can reveal the universal. Everyone has the capacity to experience God at the depth of all that is. But that does not mean that simply “experiencing things” is what

¹⁴ Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 112.

¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., 44.

Teilhard is all about. David Lewin in his article about Teilhard's mysticism, points out that, in today's age, when people desire more and more "personal experiences of God," spirituality can tend to be self-centered and take on a mindset of consumption.¹⁷ In contrast, Teilhard was focused on seeing more deeply, not as some gratifying achievement, but so that he could love more fully, and serve more effectively, with Jesus in mission.

Teilhard's spiritual writings speak frequently of developing one's gifts and directing one's energy for the advancement of the world. Teilhard speaks of zest for life and love in action. "Of the two halves or components into which our lives may be divided, the most important, judging by appearances . . . is the sphere of activity, endeavor and development. With the help of our activity and by developing it to the full, the divine presses in upon us and seeks to enter our lives. . . . Nothing is more certain than that human action can be sanctified."¹⁸

In living out my call to be an educator in my early adult years, God felt to me dynamically present. But I learned to appreciate the other half of the spiritual life after several inevitable life losses. Teilhard wisely points out that, spiritually, we also grow through events that are out of our control and in circumstances that we would not choose. Some difficulties come from inner dynamics and some from the world without. Teilhard writes:

Two [other] forms under which we consider the forces of growth: the diminishments whose origin lies within us, and the diminishments whose origin lies outside us. The external passivities of diminishment are all our bits of ill fortune. . . . Humanly speaking, the internal passivities of diminishment form the darkest element and the most despairingly useless years of our life. . . . Natural failings, physical defects, intellectual or moral weaknesses. . . . And if by chance we escape, old age little by little robs us of ourselves and pushes us on towards the end.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁸ Teilhard, 49-51.

¹⁹ Ibid., 81-82.

None of us, even the most faithful, gets through life without suffering. The trauma of sudden loss causes many people to doubt that God is good. Teilhard and many process theologians can perhaps offer a more intellectually satisfying faith, where God doesn't have to take blame for bad things that happen. Teilhard's challenging words are comforting as well:

God cannot ordain that the elements of a world in the course of growth – or at least of a fallen world in the process of rising again – should avoid shocks and diminishments, even moral ones. But God will make it good by making evil itself serve a higher good. . . . God, without sparing us the partial deaths, nor the final death, which form an essential part of our lives, transfigures them by integrating them in a better plan.²⁰

This personal example of how Teilhard's writings moved me to new places of spiritual growth is one reason Teilhard's ideas are central in my project. But I am also taken with his evolutionary view of the cosmos, which can be applied to the spiritual life.

The scientist-philosopher (and atheist) Sir Julian Huxley, in his introduction to Teilhard's most scientific work, the *Phenomenon of Man*, states several of Teilhard's key principles which I have employed in my project's construction. Huxley writes:

In Pere Teilhard's view, the increase of human numbers combined with the improvement of human communications has fused all the parts of the noosphere [thinking layer of the earth] together . . . and has caused it to become . . . more highly organized. In the process of convergence and coalescence . . . mankind as a whole will accordingly achieve more intense, more complex, and more integrated mental activity, which can guide the human species up the path of progress to higher levels of hominization [the development of humankind].²¹

In other words, Huxley supports Teilhard's often-stated view that increased complexity leads to greater consciousness. A diversity of views is a richer seed-bed for growth than one person's valuable but insular experience.

²⁰ Ibid., 86.

²¹ Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 17.

As important as Teilhard is to many, he still has critics among the Roman Catholic hierarchy of the Church, who fear that his writings will be a “danger,” especially to young people, due to “ambiguities and serious errors as to offend Catholic doctrine.” An official Vatican warning, issued in 1962, has not been lifted, and the warning appeared to be reaffirmed in 1981.²² Concerns revolve around Teilhard’s interpretations of the Genesis creation stories, with their implications for the unique creation of the human soul, original sin, the origins of death, and Jesus’ redemptive work. However, four popes since the warning in 1962 have made positive references to some of Teilhard’s ideas, including Pope Francis, who in his environmentally-conscious encyclical “*Laudato Si*” in 2015, spoke directly of Teilhard’s contributions. Many feel that Teilhard’s ideas were quietly influential on Vatican II documents that urged respect for the world, as well.

Over the years, others have had questions about Teilhard’s ideas. Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar criticizes Teilhard’s emphasis on communing with God through a world that reveals God through its natural state. He states that Teilhard’s ideas border on “an insidious pantheism” which downplays the necessity of supernatural revelation through God’s Word. Balthasar writes that there is “danger” in Teilhard’s focus on God’s “immanentism,” that can tend to “level God and the world,” ignoring “God as wholly Other.” Balthasar, rather, asserts that God reveals God’s Self in terms of love, which is “not a mere human product.”²³

²² Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office (June 30, 1962); *L’Osservatore Romano*, (Vatican City, July 20, 1981).

²³ Beata Toth, “Diaphany of the Divine Milieu or the Epiphany of Divine Glory? The Revelation of the Natural World in Teilhard de Chardin and Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *New Blackfriars*, 95, no. 1059 (Sept. 2014): 538-540.

However, closer reading of Teilhard reveals he does not see the world as identical with God. Even in union, Teilhard makes clear, God and creation are clearly differentiated. Teilhard's description of the God/world relationship is closer to "panentheism," a word popularized by Charles Hartshorne, a process theologian, where God is seen as "all in all," but always transcendent as well.²⁴

Teilhard actually agrees with Balthasar that it is love that reveals God's nature. Specifically, he affirms that it is Christ, the Word incarnate within the universe, who invites humanity to deeds of love, which help co-create the world. For Teilhard, love between persons mirrors God's love, but so does the cosmic force of attraction, which has been drawing the universe's elements ever closer since the beginning of time. In the end, it will be love alone that draws all creation into God.

Care does need to be taken when developing theological concepts. But things in nature that do not adapt have trouble surviving, and often die. Everything in the universe evolves. So, it is natural and good for the Church to be vigilant about moving with the best studies of the time. For language, ideas and processes to evolve is the most ordinary thing in the world. It is only when change is resisted, out of fear of the new or ignorance, that living organisms become sickly or scarce. Therefore, the availability of educational processes within the church which integrate both science and religion is a necessity if public perception of the church as behind the times is to be redeemed.

Not all traditions must go. Teilhard always considered himself a faithful Catholic. He himself used many traditional spiritual practices. And though the use of tested spiritual practices

²⁴ Ibid., 548.

from the past will always be important, promising too, are new developments like Process Spirituality. Process theologian Bruce Epperly states:

Rigid doctrinal and ethical absolutes no longer characterize the spirituality of most baby boomers, Generation Xers, and millennials, and with it, the influence of Christianity and the church has waned. . . . Those who explicitly embrace postmodern perspectives are comfortable with change, recognize diverse and conflicting truth claims, question authority, and focus on personal experience as the criteria for spiritual truth. . . . Those who embrace postmodern and pluralistic perspectives honor personality, intimacy, and concreteness.²⁵

Epperly's conviction is that "we need to articulate insightful and inspirational theologies to respond to our changing world and we need spiritual practices that embrace global perspectives."²⁶

At the heart of process theology are numerous affirmations, similar to those Teilhard de Chardin puts forth. Both agree that the universe is profoundly interdependent and dynamically changing, while constantly grounded in the loving creativity of God. Likewise, they share the view that God and the world are in constant dialogue, and through this relationship both parties are shaped. Epperly says, "Within the apparent chaos and free play of the universe, in which accidents happen, there is deeper non-coercive divine providence moving through every creature, calling forth new possibilities...and experiences of healing and holiness."²⁷ God not only embraces our pain in the tumult of evolution, but leads the world ever forward, providing it with grace, as humans participate in the Earth's creation.

Of course, process theology is not without its critics. The process view of God's omnipotence markedly differs from the classical presentation, which avows that God can do all

²⁵ Bruce Epperly, *Process Spirituality: Practicing Holy Adventure*, Topical Line Drives, Volume 28 (Gonzalez, FL: Energon Publications, 2017), 21, 41 Kindle.

²⁶ Ibid., 51.

²⁷ Ibid., 110.

things and, at times, *does* override creation's natural processes. Process theologians would say, in contrast, that God is all-powerfully good and loving, but either God has emptied God's Self of coercive power in creating a free world, or God's power simply cannot do any and everything.

God's effective sway can be discerned instead in God's compassionate accompaniment of those who suffer and in the healing and new possibilities that life regularly offers, as God works hiddenly to turn evil into good. For Christians, the non-dominative mode of power that characterized Jesus during his lifetime is decisively revelatory of the persuasive and loving power of God. I believe that both Teilhard's and process theology's language regarding suffering can beneficially serve contemporary Christian seekers today. Questions regarding God's love and power to control are often at the heart of people's conflicts religiously.

Not only process theology, but Ignatian spirituality can easily be integrated with Teilhard's ideas. Louis Savary and Patricia Berne, in a series of books, have done an excellent job of integrating Teilhard's thinking with an Ignatian perspective. Savary lists seventeen Teilhardian principles that align with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, among them, that the discoveries of modern science must form an important foundation to any contemporary spirituality and that any true spirituality today must be a collective spirituality. The authors also emphasize knowing, loving and serving the universe, both present and future, with a holy passion.²⁸ The resources Savary and Berne provide, however, are geared primarily toward individual readers, rather than small groups.

Also within the Ignatian tradition, and influenced by Teilhard, theologian Bernard Lonergan, S.J. describes a person's transformation of consciousness as a developmental process. First, he says, one experiences some object or event by attending to sense data and internal

²⁸ Savary, Luis, *The New Spiritual Exercises: In the Spirit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 13.

feelings. Then, one comes to understanding by raising questions about that experience. Third, one evaluates the experience, judging how it coheres with one's view of the world. Such critical reflection sometimes leads to changing assumptions. Finally, one decides how to commit one's action.²⁹ I believe this process can be enhanced for individuals, if others are present to foster each of these steps, raising questions and sharing different experiences for consideration.

Transformative Learning Theory, from the field of education, is in line with the ideas of Lonergan the theologian. Ellen Marmon describes the transformative learning process, whose originator was Jack Mezirow, in this way:

A process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience to guide future action . . . Transformative Learning Theory alters problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change. . . . If adults bring their experience and dilemmas into a social context of authenticity and mutual respect, then critical reflection, corporate discourse and holistic change often unfold.³⁰

Jane Regan, along with Mezirow, notes there are three forms of learning: technical learning, such as riding a bike, communicative learning, by which we receive and convey our understandings to one another, and emancipatory learning, rooted in critical reflection. This third mode, she says:

brings into question the foundations of one's personal and social perspective. . . . Emancipatory learning involves an examination of the presumptions that serve to make reasonable the present worldview. . . . We are able to recognize inherent distortions, limitations, and narrowness of vision. Emancipatory learning is at the heart of transformative learning and essential to the various expressions of genuinely adult education."³¹

²⁹ Barbara J. Fleischer, "Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning and Lonergan's Method in Theology: Resources for Adult Theological Education," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 3.2 (2006): 147-162.

³⁰ Marmon, 425.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

Regan, a religious educator, agrees with both Mezirow and Fowler that when prior ways of making meaning are dissatisfactory, engaging others in conversation opens one to the realization that alternative ways of meaning-making are possible.³² I concur that gathering to engage with others in dialogic, contemplative learning can be transformative, maybe even saving, for people today.

Though Mezirow's and Lonergan's learning models address the mind, heart and will, C. Otto Scharmer engages a contemplative aspect as well. He speaks of "learning from the future as it emerges...[which] involves intuition . . . feeling ourselves part of something important that is emerging."³³ Scharmer says that we are living in:

a time that feels as if something profound is shifting and dying while something else . . . wants to be born . . . a new form of presence and power that starts to grow spontaneously from and through small groups and networks of people. . . . It manifests through a shift in the quality of thinking, conversing, and collective action. When that shift happens, people can connect with a deeper source of creativity and knowing and move beyond the patterns of the past. They step into their real power, the power of their authentic self. I call this change a shift in the social field."³⁴

Teilhard, as well as process theologians and religious educators in the Christian tradition, would identify this "deeper source of creativity and knowing" as the Holy Spirit.

P.W. Heller, tussling with Scharmer, calls Theory U "a too benign naturalistic fallacy."³⁵ His evaluation is that Theory U is socio-politically naïve, as real-life conflictual situations take far more to resolve than what Otto Scharmer allows. Historically, evolutionary change, Heller reminds the reader, spirals back rather than follows a step-by-step, linear course, which

³² Ibid., 89.

³³ Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2009), xvi.

³⁴ Ibid., 1,4.

³⁵ Peter W. Heller, "The Philosophy of Theory U: A Critical Examination," *Philosophy of Management* 18 (2019): 23.

Scharmer's neat process oversimplifies. But, Heller concedes, Theory U *can* be useful in effecting change in groups. I do agree with Heller that any model has limited applicability, but Scharmer's technique for helping groups to "presence" to each other and to what is emerging is a boon for contemplative dialogue.

Basically, Theory U's presencing process involves beginning any dialogue with an open mind, which means suspending one's sense that one already knows the answers. As people deeply listen to one another, they "let come" whatever thoughts arise, listening for patterns and new insights. With continuing conversation, novel themes begin to crystalize and converge. This is a form of group discernment.

Just as Scharmer uses circles in his process, sitting in circles and talking has been part of the human pattern since the beginning. It is how people get to know one another. Margaret Wheatley, who studies organizational behavior, says that:

circle processes are not a technique, but our heritage. . . . But cultures of hierarchy and control long ago abolished the circle, because circles serve democracy. . . . The circle includes everyone without distinction, welcomes and invites all to participate, and creates equality among those gathered.³⁶

Perhaps this is why circles for spiritual formation do not occur frequently within hierarchical systems or in institutions steeped in patriarchy. But it is also why circles can affect the church's evolution.

Certainly, not every situation is addressed best within a circle. Some tasks need a quick resolution. But in the process of becoming spiritually mature, prayerful reflection and dialogue will bear more fruit than straight instruction. In spiritual conversation, Luz Marina Diaz asserts:

God offers revelatory opportunities to all in the same measure. However, whether or not these opportunities actually turn out to be revelatory depends on the human response. Hence, we have to live with "revelatory eyes" and "revelatory ears", which means living

³⁶ Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea, *The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2010), ix-x.

a contemplative and spiritual life. We find God in the process of “going deeper within” the ordinary. Spiritual conversation helps to plumb the depths of the ordinary.³⁷

Evolution is the biggest idea of the last two centuries. The New Universe Story is the abiding saga of our time. I believe that the world would suffer a tremendous loss if Christianity diminished in attraction and influence, becoming increasingly irrelevant for seekers. If the world loses this precious vessel of Christ, one fewer Body will be at work in the world, seeking to bring God’s dreams to birth.

Although anyone can benefit from a shared exploration of Teilhard’s thoughts, conversation about scientific and cultural advances as they intersect with the life of faith is essential to those for whom an integrated worldview matters. Though there are many reasons people choose not to affiliate with a church, I would hope that perceived contradictions between religion and science need not be one. It may even be true that developing a worldview which sees change as potential-rich will help the church progress, not just theologically, but in dealing with evolving social issues, too.

Methodology

My educational (B.S., M. Ed.) and professional background in elementary, special and religious education with both children and adults, my work as a religious education administrator and teacher trainer, and my later vocational development as a spiritual director and retreat leader, with focus on Ignatian spirituality, have given me the experience and conviction necessary for developing this project. My lifelong participation in Roman Catholic parish life, engagement with people who have left the church but want to continue with spiritual growth through small group process, and companioning of a diverse array of people in spiritual direction has led me to

³⁷ Luz Marina Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation” *The Way* 55/2 (April 2016): 53.

not only synthesize what I have learned, but to create, in consultation with others, a model for spiritual growth, using both evolutionary process *and* content as a catalyst.

The constructive method I employed included the following:

1. I analyzed the original writings of Teilhard de Chardin for key concepts and processes, related to spirituality and evolutionary development.
2. I read sources on process theology and Ignatian spirituality to hone in on topics and processes pertinent for group spiritual growth.
3. I engaged the literature in religious education, transformative learning and various small group processes.
4. I reviewed theories of faith formation, consciousness development, and development of spirituality in adults.
5. From all of the above, I created a resource that small, on-going faith groups can use for spiritual growth, using Teilhard de Chardin's evolution-based writings.
6. I edited the resource, in an on-going process, consulting with experts in their fields.

Kathleen Duffy, SSJ, is a physicist, professor at Chestnut Hill College, author of several books about Teilhard de Chardin, and President of the American Teilhard Association.

Edmund Gordon and Sally Russell, SSJ, are professional adult religious educators with leadership roles in Roman Catholic adult religious education in North America. Liz

Sweeney, SSJ is the creator of a contemplative dialogue process for small groups, used widely among women's religious congregations in doing contemplative discernment.

Robert McChesney, S.J. is currently writing a book about The Spiritual Exercises of St.

Ignatius. Susan Long is an educational curriculum consultant, with background in teacher training and religious education.

7. The American Teilhard Association also asked me to engage people with my educational resource via Zoom to a world-wide audience, just as I was finishing this paper. Feedback from the 24 participants also helped me hone “Center to Center.”

The target audience for my resource is seekers interested in a holistic integration of evolutionary science and faith as part of their spiritual lives. They may be Christians or simply open to insights from the Christian tradition on this topic. They may belong to parishes or be completely unchurched. I can also see how “Center to Center” might be used by pastors, religious schools, campus ministry centers and retreat houses looking for small-group, spiritual growth-oriented programs which integrate science and faith. Proponents of Ignatian spirituality and process theology may also be interested.

Having spoken to Sr. Kathleen Duffy, SSJ, President of the American Teilhard Association, I have been told that resources like the one I am creating are not currently available. My search through the internet and databases have shown no ongoing small group programs that foster spiritual growth using both Teilhardian thought and evolutionary process, or any other practical applications of Teilhard’s thought that incorporate both Ignatian spirituality and process theology.

Chapter 2

Teilhard de Chardin and the Broader Context of Evolutionary Processive Thought

Western philosophers have been speculating about how all living things are developmentally related to one another since the time of the Greeks. In the 4th century BCE, in his *History of Animals*, Aristotle, considered the Father of Science, had already conceived of a “ladder of life” where simple organisms gradually change over time and become more complex. But evolution was a minority view for nearly two millennia.

It was not until the century in which Teilhard de Chardin was born, the 19th century, that evolution, as a paradigmatic idea, came into its own. Geologists were ecstatically discovering that Earth is much older than the 4,000 years biblical creationists claimed. Naturalists like Charles Darwin were researching the evolution of species, based on paleontological findings, comparative anatomy and biochemistry as well as the geographic distribution of isolated species. Darwin published his book *The Origin of Species* in 1859, only a generation before Teilhard arrived on the scene. Born into this stimulating era of discovery, Teilhard would continue to make scientific breakthroughs in the areas of geology and paleontology, in particular, finding remains in China of the now extinct human ancestor of *homo erectus*, popularly called Peking Man.

Roman Catholicism at this time was in a strong anti-modernist phase, not yet open to developments in the science of evolution. But there was a rising theological movement called *the nouvelle theologie* in France and in several other European countries, which advocated a *ressourcement* or return to the sources of early Christianity, Scripture and the patristic writers, as well as an openness to contemporary learning. Teilhard’s writings excited many in this

theologically lively group, and his popularity spread, even though the Vatican repressed Teilhard's attempts to publish. This resistance to evolutionary thinking went beyond the Roman Catholic world. The famous Scopes trial in the United States was also at this time a public platform for the conflict between modern evolutionary science and the prevalent creationist view held by many Christians.

The Jesuit order during Teilhard's lifetime was the largest Catholic missionary order and also well-known for engagement in higher education. This allowed Teilhard to pursue multiple scientific and theological degrees and to travel globally to do his research and teaching. As a stretcher-bearer during World War I, Teilhard served shoulder to shoulder with people of diverse cultures, and through his engagement in top scientific circles, Teilhard was exposed to a wide variety of secular and religious ideas. This broadening experience convinced Teilhard that a growing alliance between nations and peoples was not only possible, but actively afoot.

French philosopher Henri Bergson wrote *Creative Evolution* in 1907, invigorating many people's interest in evolution with his notion of an *elan vital*, or vital internal impulse, responsible for evolutionary change and novelty.³⁸ This book strongly influenced both Teilhard de Chardin and Alfred North Whitehead, an important writer within the process philosophy movement. Although Teilhard de Chardin never met Whitehead, both were powerfully influenced by the evolutionary spirit of their times. Whitehead's philosophical ideas were part of a long tradition in which reality is viewed as a dynamic process. In this view, organisms, always in flux, are becoming something new, moment by moment. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (560BCE) is often seen as one of the earliest process thinkers, remembered as saying, "No man ever steps in the same river twice." Closer to the present era, German idealists of the 18th and

³⁸ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Cosimo Inc. 2005), Kindle edition.

19th centuries, Hegel notably among them, and pragmatist philosophers John Dewey and William James in the United States contributed to a growing body of literature related to process thought.

The times were ready and ripe for proponents of A.N. Whitehead's process philosophy to develop his ideas into several strands of what has become known as process theology. Although Teilhard would not have identified himself as a process theologian, drawing comparisons between Teilhard's spiritual themes and resonant ideas within process thought not only undergirds Teilhard's writings with a philosophical basis, but sheds light on Teilhard's unique view of reality as part of the broader development of evolutionary processive thought in the world.

Seeing with New Eyes

Teilhard knew, as both a scientist and a Christian mystic, that each of us carries the universe within. Though science and faith are two different kinds of knowing, Teilhard blended them together in his writings because he saw God as a natural part of the cosmic system at its very depths. Teilhard called this integral way of knowing "seeing." He believed his mission was to help others see not only the evolutionary process of which we are but a part, but the reality of God at the heart of matter. As a scientist, Teilhard could see how all things from the beginning are physically and psychically related. He also extrapolated from Earth's pattern of development to the conclusion that a universe more complex and conscious is still coming to birth. As an intuitive man of prayer, Teilhard could "see" God's Presence everywhere. He knew himself to be immersed in a divine milieu. As a Christian, Teilhard described this phenomenon as God become incarnate in the world.

Alfred North Whitehead also saw the need for an integrated mode of seeing the world. In response to the revolutionary development of relativity theory and quantum physics in the early

days of the 20th century, Whitehead's philosophy made room for more than material- based knowledge gathered through sense-perception, saying that sense data actually draws "from the vast background and foreground of non-sensuous perception with which sense perception is fused and without which it can never be... The most compelling example of non-sensuous perception is our knowledge of our own immediate past...happening a tenth of a second ago."³⁹ In other words, reality has both physical and mental poles which have an influence on each moment of becoming.

Whitehead, in his later writings, described the action of God as the first among the mental influences affecting each choice, although God was only one of many influences and often operated at an unconscious level. God, the Source of all Ideals and the one who knows all that can be known of what actually is, draws us toward the best possible decision for the circumstances, whether it is toward continuing order or creative novelty and change. In agreement with Teilhard's idea that all things, right down to the sub-atomic level, are imbued with spirit or psyche, Whitehead wrote, "On a grand scale, our cosmology discloses a process of overpowering changes - from nebulae to stars, from stars to planets, from inorganic matter to life, from life to reason and moral responsibility. . . . There is an urge in all things which carries the world far beyond its ancient conditions."⁴⁰ John Cobb further spells out God's non-sensory influence. He writes, "God can be conceived as a very special kind of energy event . . . sharing immediately in human as well as subhuman experiences. . . . [However] God as Spirit radically transcends our categories of space and time."⁴¹

³⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 180-181.

⁴⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and Philosophy* (The Philosophical Library, Kindle), Loc 2953.

⁴¹ John Cobb, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 71, 76-77.

Process philosopher Charles Hartshorne further expounded on Whitehead's conviction that a more fully integrated worldview is essential for contemporary minds. "Philosophy and science, like food and water, have different functions. The scientist asks, what ideas will fit and explain the facts? The philosopher asks, what ideas will explain the ideas that fit the facts, and in addition, will explain the ideas which do not fit the facts?"⁴² Science reveals much about particulars, but philosophy's realm is with general principles. In humble dialogue, each can contribute to the other's development.

Process theologians, in line with Teilhard de Chardin, are concerned to develop a more adequate worldview that reasonably integrates faith and science. They see reality as participating in both materiality *and* mentality (consciousness, spirit), distinct though interrelated forces. Process theology's worldview is "panentheistic," that is, all finite beings exist in God. Creation is intimately related to and yet distinct from God, who is ever more than creation.⁴³

Besides an evolutionary processive view of the cosmos, other worldviews prevalent today are those of scientific materialism, with its insistence that "all there is" *is* matter and that physical matter alone causes mental capacities; the common Eastern view that matter is an illusion; and the pantheistic view that God *is* everything and everything God in an identical way. There is also a worldview, common to certain strands of the Abrahamic religions, that sees God as intervening occasionally (or often) within the cosmic system in supernatural or miraculous ways. Such believers often also think of God as a cosmic Lawgiver and Judge, who has controlling power, and is unaffected and unchanged by creation.

⁴² Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1953), 29.

⁴³ David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: On Postmodernism, Morality, Pluralism, Eschatology, and Demonic Evil* (Anoka, MN: Process Century Press, 2017).

Process theologians vary about whether God created the universe ex nihilo (out of nothing) or brought a certain order out of chaos at the beginning of time. They lean toward the latter position, seeing non-material “creativity,” which is formless, spontaneous, and free, as having existed with and in God in an everlasting manner. Because, in their view, creativity is at the heart of reality, God therefore does not “give” people, or anything else that exists, freedom. Creative spontaneity is inherent within reality. This eliminates the problem of theodicy – the question of why an all-good God could let horrific things happen. In process thought, God, being all-good, works to bring a beneficial result out of everything that happens, but cannot eliminate or override the free choices nor the reality of chance which is natural to a creative cosmic system. God’s power is therefore not coercive, but faithfully and lovingly persuasive within every moment. Adapting to our responses at every turn, God, Supremely Good and Loving, works toward bringing forth the universe’s potential and strives to use history’s crooked past to achieve every being’s eventual fulfillment.⁴⁴

Why does how we “see” things – our worldview – matter so much? Philosopher Eugene Fontinell, in “Process Theology, A Pragmatic Version,” sheds light on the importance of our assumptions:

Our manner of living is profoundly influenced, if not determined, by a set of assumptions that constitute our world view. . . . In most people, their worldview acts unreflectively upon them, and it is this lack of consciousness that tempts people to believe that their worldview is coextensive with reality, hence, objective. . . . For this reason, I believe that a crucial step in any effort to resolve a human problem is to surface as explicitly as possible those assumptions that play a central and decisive role in whatever resolution is forthcoming. . . . I would caution against two views: . . . that one’s metaphysical assumptions are capable of being established by rational arguments that produce absolute certainty of their truth [and] the temptation to posit a relativism that despairs of making any evaluation whatsoever of competing assumptions. . . . Not all options or beliefs are of equal worth. Hence, a fundamental task of human thought is that of constructing and

⁴⁴ Norman Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love: Human Experience and Christian Faith in a Process Perspective* (New York City: The Pilgrim Press, 1979), 3-4, 80.

communicating arguments and evidence for or against the various worldviews that the human community has created.⁴⁵

Becoming

Scientists have discovered that deep currents of evolution are moving within the universe, creating a tremendous diversity of form. Each being sums up the universe differently. The whole history of the world resides in every new-born child. And yet, while we are highly influenced by what has come before, beings still have a measure of freedom to act, to respond, both Teilhard and Whitehead believed, to the God who is up Ahead, luring the cosmos to something greater.

Teilhard not only saw God involved in the birth of the universe, but as part and parcel of its daily growth and a loving catalyst towards its cosmic end. But God does not do this alone. God works hand in hand with a free creation. Our work also serves to fulfill the world.

Creativity within God and creativity within us work together to bring forth the new, producing greater value and intensity of experience, along with increased satisfaction. “Creativity involves the production of value-experience by the inflow from the infinite into the finite.”⁴⁶ In other words, God, who sees all potential, invites all beings, consciously or unconsciously, to make the best possible choice in that moment.

In a departure from classical theology, God, within process theology, is also seen as “becoming.” In Hellenistic and later Christian thought, “perfect” had to mean there was nowhere “more” or higher to go. But this is seeing perfection as part of a hierarchical model of reality. If God is essentially Love, as Christian theology asserts, then we know, by human experience, that giving oneself mutually to another changes both partners through their interaction. Therefore, the

⁴⁵ Harry James Cargas and Bernard Lee, ed., *Religious Experience and Process Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 24-25.

⁴⁶ Whitehead, *Science and Philosophy*, Loc 1678.

richness of God's life, through God's relationship with myriad creatures, must logically keep increasing without end. "More is always possible, even for God; especially for God."⁴⁷ Because of God's perfect inclusivity of creation, what God holds within God's self continually grows and changes, *in this way* increasing God, not God's nature.

Along these lines, in *The Divine Relativity*, Charles Hartshorne says, "Deity is the supreme case of social principle, rather than the exception to it. . . . If ordinary sociality is, in a humble sense, creative, eminent sociality will be eminently creative, divinely creative."⁴⁸ The interaction of divine and human creativity keeps the advance of the world on-going.

As Teilhard asserted, evolution is moving toward ever more complex actualities, so that consciousness might gradually grow and greater zest and beauty (both in harmony and intensity) might be enjoyed. But the art of progress is in balancing order and change. Neither order nor novelty is intrinsically good, unless it has greater intrinsic value. God stimulates us to new possibilities when the old ones are no longer sufficient for our greatest enjoyment. Then, God becomes a Source of unrest, for survival is not just about physical regeneration but increasing the joy of psychic satisfaction.⁴⁹ Cobb elaborates:

In every moment, there is the aim to be and to be in a particular way that is as satisfying as the circumstances allow. That aim is fundamental to the becoming of the experience. . . . The aim at becoming . . . is the principle of novelty, spontaneity, growth and self-transcendence . . . a refusal of mere acquiescence in the given.⁵⁰ . . . The limits and burdens of the past are constantly transcended by God's agency. What man is offered is the fulfillment – not of every passing desire – but of his capacities for vital and full life.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, 203.

⁴⁸ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 29-32.

⁴⁹ John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 59, 64.

⁵⁰ John Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 69.

⁵¹ Cobb, *God and the World*, 64.

Greater Consciousness Together

People who share affinities, passions and desires are often drawn together in mutual attraction. When this greater union is formed, psychic energy is shared. Teilhard believed in community for its tremendous potential to create something new. But also, because in giving of themselves, people become uniquely who they are. Love's synthesizing energy both deeply personalizes and differentiates one from another. Attraction or love is, in Teilhard's estimation, the greatest power in the cosmos, for it can generate a higher nature, born from union.

Coming together with others leads to richer, if often more difficult, living. Forming intentional relationships can be far more complex than doing things alone. But Teilhard saw a universal pattern within the cosmos in which greater complexity leads to an advance in consciousness, when there is a common organizing center that works for all.

Crowds don't exhibit greater consciousness if there is no center holding them together. There needs to be mutual presence in which inquiry and dialogue takes place. A common vision must be embraced and a freely chosen commitment made to one another out of love, since a community is not a fearful hoard, an aggregation of egotists, nor a mindless machine. It is purposefully living in communion in a way that benefits oneself *and* the many, the whole. This free and loving coming-together is Teilhard's vision of how the universe evolves.

Every successful organism, every living body, in this sense, is a society of parts, working together for the good of the whole, just as the whole consistently functions for the well-being of each part. But what is it that holds a human community together? Whitehead mused that "civilization develops only where considerable numbers of men work together for common ends. Such unity is brought about, not so much by community of bare ideas as by community of *the*

feelings by which ideas are ‘emotionalized’ and become beliefs and motives.”⁵² But this cannot be forced. Whitehead quotes Plato’s dictum: “The creation of the world...is the victory of persuasion over force.”⁵³

Still, community-life is not about every person thinking the same way. Communities are creative of new life precisely because of their diversity of ideas. Without contrast, communities stagnate. If one’s repertoire consists of only “Johnny One Note,” it won’t be long till the music dies. Charles Hartshorne stresses:

For all organisms, there needs to be enough unity (distinctive boundaries, coherence, cooperation) to preserve the whole, a we-ness which affects every individual ‘I.’ But we do not need a ‘group-mind’ that precludes every individual mind. We need minds that enter into and contribute to the life of the higher mind. . . . To be social is to weave one’s own life out of strands taken from the lives of others and furnish one’s own life as a strand to be woven into their lives. It is giving and receiving, neither to have priority over the other.⁵⁴

We all are what we are because of our past *and* the aims or goals that we choose in each moment. But when we are gathered in common, the significance of each particular past and each person’s projection toward the future gains in weight and power. One of religion’s accelerative roles in history has been to organize communities around memories of events and of people’s lives that offer inspiration; in effect, strengthening the force-field of past influence by concretizing them once again in the present. Religious communities also have provided stimulating ideals and rousing goals for the future that have grown out of their ever-developing traditions. These principles include the value of human life, the unity of humankind, and the

⁵² Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 232-233.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁴ Hartshorne, *Reality As Social Process*, 65, 136.

ideal of selfless dedication to others. These values not only affect religious believers, but today are embraced by humanists around the world.

If, as Charles Hartshorne says, God is the most social of all realities, “Individualism no more expresses the life of God than the life of men. God, as well as man, is a social being. God is in earnest when he enters into social relations with us creatures. These relations go to the center of God’s being, as they go into the center of ours.”⁵⁵

It is not God’s absolute, essential and primordial nature, but God’s relationality that adapts and becomes “more” or evolves, as the content of every new moment is absorbed into God. Process theologians describe this adaptability as God’s consequent nature in that God’s relationships with created beings are truly consequential to God. Creaturely responses influence how God will act in subsequent moments.

Now that science is realizing that no being is a completely independent substance, but a constantly fluctuating nexus of influences from within and without, the idea of selfhood itself is broadening. Our individual selves grow in consciousness and become fulfilled within the deep creative interconnections of community.

Practices for Spiritual Development

Critical self-reflection, especially within the context of community, increases our knowledge of ourselves as well as expands our horizons. We gradually come to understand our patterns of thinking, feeling, and social interaction and are thus better equipped to manage our choices. Maturing people of faith also grow in awareness of their spiritual connection to God.

Expanding self-knowledge assists us in naming both our talents and limitations, so we know what we have to offer and the areas in which we need to grow. Taking responsibility for

⁵⁵ Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 56.

self-development is not only personally fulfilling but vitally contributes to the community's well-being. Teilhard frequently acknowledged the correlation between being an agent of progress and being a person committed to growing self-awareness and spiritual development.

During adulthood, in order to gain healing and freedom, many people revisit memories that have caused them pain, hurts to which they react or defend against long after the occasion. Over and over, "parts of the past [are] incorporated into the present through memory."⁵⁶ Through these memories, people continually influence each other, entering into each other's psyches. But a person can creatively respond to, rather than be determined by, his or her past because people have real, if somewhat limited, freedom. Hopefully, in each person's life, there are life-giving influences available, including the lure of the divine. Certainly, the more supportive and enlightened the environment, the greater likelihood recovery occurs and wisdom results. "Always, God, the divine Eros, [is] urging, luring the world to new heights of enjoyment of value. This lure is God's initial aim."⁵⁷ God's call leads to novel possibilities, to intensity and richness of life.

Teilhard modeled the importance of being in regular conscious connection to God through his strong prayer and liturgical life. He knew that spiritual receptivity helps one's desires or aims to be aligned with God's in daily life. Imaginatively praying with the Gospel stories of Jesus' life, as Ignatius suggests, Teilhard came to know, love and follow Christ's heart and mind in ways that flowed into his life and service to all.

Prayer with Scripture, particularly the stories of Jesus, is a central mode of Christian connection to God. Process Christians see in Jesus what Norman Pittenger describes: "Jesus is

⁵⁶ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 22.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

the One in whom God actualized, in a living human personality, the potential God-man...The difference between Jesus and all other instances of divine operation in manhood is of immeasurable degree, *not* absolute kind.”⁵⁸ David Griffin points out that Jesus can be understood as special or unique in terms of his total response to the divine aims for him, the particular content of the divine aims, which were that he actualize in human form God’s nature and God’s purposes, and that God’s aims became the absolute center around which Jesus ordered his life. This mode of existence is open to anyone, in principle.⁵⁹

Ongoing relationship with Jesus Risen is a matter of “prehension,” as we take him into ourselves in moments of prayer, Scripture reading or sacramental rituals, such as Eucharist. This relationships is possible because Christ Jesus everlastingly lives on, one with God, in a mutual abiding, just as we one day will. Teilhard and many process theologians assert that we, like Jesus, will retain distinct consciousness even as we live as one with God after death.

Teilhard’s worldview reminds us that inside or outside the church, God is always there. Prayer is paying attention to how and when the Source of Love and Goodness comes. “The power by which God sustains the world is the power of himself as the ideal. He adds himself to the actual ground from which every creative act takes its rise.”⁶⁰ But we must have eyes to see and ears to hear. Sometimes we may feel God’s presence, but most of what happens is unconscious. When a sense or feeling of God does rise to consciousness, we say we’ve had a religious experience. But praying, with confidence that God is faithfully self-giving during our prayer, we need not rely on any felt experience. One can remain detached, trusting that the fruits

⁵⁸ Brown, *Religious Experience and Process Theology*, 59.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

⁶⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 156.

of prayer, grounded in one's "Yes" to God, flow into everyday life. This is foundational to centering prayer, where all thoughts, feelings and images are intentionally let go.

Whether or not divine love is "felt," the praying person has faith that "to God each of us is dearer than wife to husband, for no human being knows the inner experiences of another human being so intimately as they are known to God."⁶¹ This personal relationship of love is one end of prayer, but so is transformation for greater service. "Prayer unites us to God when it informs our actions with God's heart and mind. Prayer opens me to what matters in creation; it opens me to conformity with the intentionality of God. . . . [But] union with God – or with anyone – is a process. There is union when two persons are letting each other into their lives. . . . The purpose of prayer is to support that process."⁶²

Moral Decision-Making and Discernment

Teilhard felt passionately that morality had to be much more than about moral prohibitions as humankind evolves. Instead, moral decision-making needs to center on creating a favorable environment for the well-being of all. Necessarily, moral development has to include an individual's movement beyond egotism, so that diminishment and exclusion of others can be eliminated. Constant purification and inner renewal, both personal and corporate, must happen if the community is to work together towards God's dream for the world.

According to process thought, God is always actively inviting humanity toward the highest of ideals. "We can only rise to our full human stature by availing ourselves of every resource open to us. Is not the supreme resource the possibility of consciously and willingly

⁶¹ Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 47.

⁶² Bernard Lee, *The Becoming of the Church: A Process Theology of the Structure of Christian Experience* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 271-, 275-276.

accepting the operation in us of the Love which infinitely transcends but inspires our own?”⁶³

Hartshorne goes on to say, “Reliance on naked self-interest is repellent once one sees it for what it is, a confession of disbelief in love as the principle of principles and a glorification of egocentricity. . . . Unless being loving is its own reward it is not really loving.”⁶⁴

Evil occurs, says process theology, when a choice could have done less harm or have given greater meaning, in other words, when things are less good than they might have been. John Culp describes sin’s constraining effects: “Sin opposes salvation by limiting the possibilities that are present in a situation.”⁶⁵ In contrast, a moral person is always considering, “What election is optimal here? What choice will contribute most to the future?” As the moral ideals God holds out to us become progressively incarnated, we evolve toward what Teilhard would call the fullness of Christ.

Teilhard called on people to actively discern the ways they can uniquely contribute to the advance of the earth, to discover their own part in generating progress. Having made one’s best discernment, one then trusts that God endeavors to make the best out of every effort offered.

There is deep satisfaction in pursuing a purpose that promotes the creative process and contributes to the common good. Knowing that one has not just intrinsic value but instrumental value in the world adds to life’s meaning and value. John Cobb equates process spirituality with such daily discernment. He writes, “Whitehead tells us that in every moment we are being directed, called or lured by God to that self-actualization that is best for the moment and also for

⁶³ Hartshorne, *Reality As Social Process*, 149-150.

⁶⁴ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 99.

⁶⁵ Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman, ed., *Handbook of Process Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 42.

future occasions in our own personal life and in the lives of other creatures. [Discernment] is distinguishing this lure from the many other impulses and urges that function in our experience.”⁶⁶ Cobb acknowledges Teilhard’s Jesuit roots in this regard:

A special strength of Jesuits and Quakers, from a process perspective, is that they both emphasize deep individual interiority and the community. The call comes to each one of us individually moment by moment. . . . Nevertheless, our capacities for confusion and self-deception are great. . . . Accordingly, it is important to talk with others. . . . What is needed, of course, is to develop a habit of openness to God and readiness to respond, even when this is somewhat costly in relation to our other appetites and desires. The special practices of spirituality may help develop such an attitude.⁶⁷

From Life to Death to New Life

Death is constantly occurring. For new forms to arise, old ones must pass away.

Biological evolution could only transpire because less adaptive species were replaced by those who better fit the environmental challenges. Spiritually, too, growth comes when defenses and habits that hold us back are released. In all of the cosmos, the figurative grain of wheat must die in order to bear greater fruit. This process of dying to what is for the sake of something more is especially painful for emotionally sensitive beings. But spiritually-sensitive humans learn to detach themselves from objects of lower value as more significant values are embraced. Self-denial or willing sacrifice for the common good is humanity’s growing spiritual edge. This struggle, Christians would say, is an example of the cross on the road to resurrection.

Teilhard insisted that suffering should never be welcomed for suffering’s sake. But sometimes suffering is chosen so that a greater good might ensue. And often, suffering happens simply because we live in a fallible, finite world. If it is possible, fighting against the conditions that cause suffering is a noble pursuit. But accepting suffering when it is unavoidable, unites us

⁶⁶ John Cobb, *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions about Process Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

in solidarity with all those who suffer - from the deer who falls prey to the lion's hunger, to the wife grieving the loss of her husband to cancer, to the man on a cross refusing to surrender his integrity to violent powers of domination. Teilhard asserted that we must fight against the causes of suffering with all our energy, but accept suffering when it is inevitable, and center ourselves in a God who brings life out of death. Holiness is about fighting the forces of injustice that cause pain at every level of creation, but it is also about enduring struggle and loss, companioned by the compassion of God and caring others.

In the end, the material universe will die. That is why Teilhard was so convinced that there is an Omega Point up ahead, calling for greater convergence and greater consciousness which will lead to a leap of new life. When humanity has developed to its greatest potential and become centered in the loving unity that is the Cosmic Christ, then matter will shift completely to spirit, Teilhard hypothesized, and all that has been will live on in God, a resurrected body. We will know God and one another in a unitive state, while retaining the distinct consciousness that is individually ours.

Process theology, as well, recognizes the dynamic of loss and displacement which is central to the creative momentum of the cosmos. Whitehead's stance is similar to Teilhard's. He writes:

The universe shows us two aspects: on one side it is physically wasting; on the other side it is spiritually ascending. It is passing with a slowness, inconceivable in our measures of time, amid which the physical world, as we at present know it, will be represented by a ripple barely to be distinguished by non-entity. . . . There remains the inexhaustible realm of abstract forms and creativity, with its shifting character, ever determined afresh by its own creatures, and God, upon whose wisdom all forms of order depend."⁶⁸

In other words, there are ways of being, beyond imaging, that are yet to emerge, if one is to trust what we have seen so far of both God and the cosmos.

⁶⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 160.

John Cobb agrees with Teilhard that the world is undergoing a process of Christogenesis, which is about “uniting humanity in a new community of love . . . Christ transforms the world by persuading it toward relevant novelty...in secular and pluralistic consciousness,”⁶⁹ not just within the church. Though not all would want to give the energy of this creative process the name of “Christ,” Teilhard and many process writers would also describe this as the natural transformative process of the universe.

How the soul exists without a body beyond death is a matter of disagreement among process theologians. But they agree that all that the universe has become *will* live everlastingly in God. Whether we will remain conscious of ourselves as both one and distinct is for process thinkers a matter of debate. But there is agreement in this: “God’s reception of the effects of the world is in fact the resurrection of the world into God’s own life. . . . Materiality will fall away, since the conditions for materiality do not exist in the single reality of God. Resurrection is to a spiritual body.”⁷⁰

Need for an Integrated Worldview

In the past 200 years, a new worldview that sees reality as evolving, has been deeply implanting its roots within human consciousness. A widely-accepted understanding of the world in process has begun to blossom, most particularly, in science and philosophy. There has been ground-breaking work done in the theology of process as well. But although people in their everyday lives assume that they have choice and freedom, are creative beings, and can develop in every aspect of their lives, the deep implications of evolutionary-processive thought have not yet fully penetrated the conservative catechisms of the churches. In his day, Teilhard de Chardin

⁶⁹ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 186-187.

⁷⁰ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God Christ Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 34, 206.

was concerned about this as well. It motivated him to write and speak whenever he could to people seeking greater integration between the burgeoning ideas of science and the realm of faith.

In an essay entitled “On My Attitude to the Official Church,” Teilhard admitted that he was caught in a struggle between a Christianity that preferred to dig in and stay with a worldview of the past and a world that was being drawn rapidly toward a processive worldview, in response to discoveries in many areas of science. Teilhard also admitted that he feared persecution for his opinions from religious superiors, but that nothing could hold him back from promoting what he saw to be the truth. At the same time, Teilhard said that he would feel disloyal to life itself if he tried to free himself from the organic current that the Church provides “in spite of the unvoiced and instinctive wish I have at certain times to find a positive reason for dropping everything. . . . But if we are to mount higher, we have to outdistance it by growing with it; we must not abandon it to seek our road by ourselves.”⁷¹

In a subsequent essay, “My Intellectual Position,” written 25 years later, Teilhard was still vigorously restating his commitment to the necessary partnership between science and religion: “Religion and science obviously represent two different meridians on the mental sphere...but these meridians must necessarily meet somewhere at a pole of common vision (that is, coherence.) Otherwise, all that is ours in the domain of thought and knowledge collapses.”⁷²

“Notes on the Presentation of the Gospel in a New Age,” a confidential document Teilhard produced in 1919, expressed his desire that the Church become more open to the processes revealed by evolutionary science, so that people might more confidently affirm

⁷¹ Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *The Heart of Matter* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 115-116.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 144.

Christian faith, while maintaining their intellectual integrity. He wrote, “So long as we appear to wish to impose on the men of today a ready-made Divinity from outside, then . . . we shall inevitably be preaching in the desert. . . . We must embrace the ideal they reach out to . . . to seek, with them, the God whom we already possess but who is as yet amongst us as though he were a stranger. . . . The time has come to examine, through study and prayer, the area in which God and the Cosmos come together.”⁷³

⁷³ Ibid., 211, 219.

Chapter 3

Evolutionary Principles and Developing Stages of Faith

In the 21st century and beyond, an evolutionary worldview will underlie all disciplines. Already, physical, chemical, biological, geological, and cosmological sciences acknowledge the centrality of creative development in material and energetic processes. Likewise, pursuits in the humanities, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, history and philosophy, now assume that development is the norm in workings of thought and human society.

People of faith are becoming increasingly aware that theology and spirituality have an evolutionary character as well. Dynamics of spiritual growth, schemas of developing consciousness, and studies of stages of faith have become increasingly part of the spiritual landscape. I find James W. Fowler's work particularly enlightening, not just regarding personal maturation, but in relation to cultural and spiritual evolution in church and society. Fowler writes:

Changes in human consciousness are underway. Paradigm transformations are arising due to worldwide movements...with the resulting pluralization of voices and standpoints that must be counted in, with global telecommunication, the reimagining of Earth as a fragile ecological spaceship, requiring interdependence with and care for all life, international economics in which even political enemies have a common stake, and the intercultural awakening to spiritual cosmology, which involves solidarity with Earth and the universe. [In the midst of this] we all participate in dynamic patterns of action and being, which include the finding and making of meaning, both corporate and personal, the shaping and forming of community, both ecclesial and secular, the interpretation and transformation of tradition and the discernment and relation to God's involvement in these times. . . . Stages of faith can be a framework for focusing on paradigm shifts that are occurring.⁷⁴

Fowler's recommendations concerning development of faith stages through supportive communities and spiritual practices I find particularly insightful in promoting evolutionary faith.

⁷⁴ James Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), xi-xiii.

James Fowler's Stages of Faith

Fowler's work on faith development is, in part, an extension of the work of theologian H. Richard Niebuhr. Following Niebuhr's understanding of "human faith" as "shared visions and values that hold human groups together" as well as an "overarching, integrating and grounding trust in a center of value and power sufficiently worthy to give our lives unity and meaning,"⁷⁵ Fowler approaches faith in a generic sense. As a human universal, faith is an act of meaning-making and involves lived commitment to ultimate centers of value and power which, in practice, sustain and direct our lives. People have faith in that "something" or "someone" for which they are willing to pour out their lives. One's loyalty and dedication may be towards God, towards particular people, or towards some object, cause or institution. One's faith may be religious or people may be compelled most by family, prestige, power, sex, money, work, sports, or nation. Sometimes faith is "polytheistic," in that the heart and will become invested in multiple allegiances. But whatever claims our deepest love and trust, our relationship to it fundamentally undergirds and gives coherence to our lives.⁷⁶ As a result, this focal point will consistently receive a person's greatest attention, energy, trust and resources.

We are often drawn into a community of people who share the same center of faith. This gathering gives further form and content to our experience of ultimate reality.⁷⁷ Dialogue helps uncover basic assumptions which had been unconscious. But the fact that these beliefs are tacitly

⁷⁵ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-24

held makes them no less influential or operative. Conversation can help people explore and bring their own meanings to expression.⁷⁸

Fowler's faith development theory is not about the content of a person's faith, but about the structures of knowing and valuing with which a person functions. "Each stage is a kind of consciousness or way of knowing, that is working toward a relationship of mutuality with the cosmos."⁷⁹

In a broader context, faith development theory has parallels to stage theories of cognitive development (Piaget), social-emotional development (Erikson), and moral development (Kohlberg) in that "development happens as a result of the interchange between an active innovative subject and a dynamic, changing environment. The subject constructs new modes of knowing and acting in order to meet new challenges. When the previous equilibrium has been disturbed...it requires changes in our ways of seeing and being in faith."⁸⁰ In all areas of human development, a combination of biological maturation, time, and experience lead to new ways of seeing, interpreting, and making sense of one's life in the world.

Prior to development of faith stages in a person, Fowler acknowledges a kind of pre-stage in which an infant orients toward life. During a child's first two years, "the seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are planted, as the infant contends with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies and deprivations in the environment. This phase underlies later faith development's progress."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ibid., 31, 32, 37.

⁷⁹ Jim Fowler and Sam Keen, *Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishers, 1978), 139.

⁸⁰ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 100.

⁸¹ Ibid., 121.

The first definable stage of faith occurs in young children, ages 3 to 7 years, who live in a fantasy-filled, imitative phase of faith. In this Intuitive-Projective stage of faith, children are powerfully influenced by important care-givers in their lives. Imagination pervades thought rather than logic and the child is naturally egocentric in perspective. It is through images that the child begins to grasp his or her world. Only as the cognitive capacity to think more concretely emerges, will the ability to clarify distinctions between what is real and imaginary grow.

In Stage 2, the Mythic-Literal stage which lasts throughout childhood, “a person takes on the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community. Beliefs [and symbols] are appropriated with literal interpretations...There is a linear, narrative construction of coherence and meaning...and increased accuracy in taking the perspective of others.”⁸²

Once adolescents develop the ability to think with abstract logic, however, they can reflect more upon their own thinking. A person transitioning into Synthetic-Conventional faith (Fowler’s Stage 3) is able to not only create (synthesize) an over-arching pattern of meaning through integration of previous experiences and stories, but can construct a sense of personal identity, in large part by trying on various roles and perspectives. Acutely attuned to the expectations and judgments of others, a person at this stage does not maintain an independent perspective but derives his or her viewpoints from valued authorities.⁸³ For many adults, Stage 3 becomes a permanent home.

⁸² Ibid., 149.

⁸³ Ibid., 172,

Should a person experience felt contradictions between valued authority sources or undergo experiences that lead to doubt about whether one's beliefs and values any longer hold water, a move into Stage 4, Individuative-Reflective faith, may ensue. At this juncture,

a person begins to take responsibility for her or his own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes. They no longer let themselves be defined by a group, but become concerned with critical reflection and self-actualization as a primary concern. This transition can be frightening and disorienting, as one loses one's conventional moorings. There is reflection on one's previous assumptive or tacit system of values and a relocation of authority within the self. . . . One chooses affiliations that shape a lifestyle. . . . Often, meanings are separated from symbols and translated into concepts instead.⁸⁴

Stage 4 can become a period of black and white self-certainty.

But once one confronts paradoxes not easily dismissed or encounters others whose worldviews break down the neatness of one's faith, disillusionment can lead to a stage of Conjunctive Faith in which life is seen as more complex and truth becomes multi-layered. A person with Conjunctive Faith (Fowler's Stage 5) can see many sides of an issue and sense how all things are organically related. These adults are open to learning others' perspectives, yet confident in elucidating their own position. Always seeking greater clarity and adequacy of knowledge, people at this level of faith value the mutual give-and-take of dialogue, which can result in revision of one's language, feelings, concepts, and choices for action. Often, during this time, which, if reached, can occur at mid-life, a person comes to terms, as well, with the hidden truths of the shadow self. These once-hidden aspects of the psyche become humbly integrated into one's self-identity. One also comes to a realization that symbols, stories, doctrines and rituals, though limited, can reveal a deeper truth than the literal.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid. 178.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 185-187.

Stage 6, Universalizing Faith, is an extension and a living out of the qualities of Stage 5. Exemplified by such people as Moses, Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., people of Universalizing Faith lucidly incarnate what Christians call the Kingdom of God, through willing self-investment and sacrifice for the greater whole. While people at Stage 6 are not perfect, Fowler describes the dramatic action of grace in these lives this way: “Life is both loved and held loosely. [Stage 6 people] can be in relationship with persons at any of the other stages or any faith tradition. They are drawn into this stage because of the providence of God and the exigencies of history. They intervene where futurity is being crushed.”⁸⁶

In Fowler’s opinion: “Conjunctive faith is most likely the normative end point of faith development. It meets the criteria for life in an interdependent, pluralistic, global world.”⁸⁷ In reality, however, Fowler contends that the majority of adults in U.S. society are arrested in either the Mythic-Literal or the Synthetic-Conventional stages of faith, with a small number getting to Individuative-Reflective consciousness and an even smaller number evolving into the Conjunctive stage.⁸⁸

A modern (Enlightenment) mentality, which is still taking hold in some parts of the world, shares many of the structures of the Individuative stage. People who hold this faith stance value individual rights and personal dignity; they exalt individualism and distrust external authority. Many proceed to sever science from theology and demythologize symbols and religious stories. Ultimately, they give primacy of place to rationality. People at this stage are developing in their faith, but often in individualized, isolated ways. Providing opportunities for

⁸⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁸⁷ James Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development & Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 58.

⁸⁸ Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation*, 21.

dialogue with circles of others, whether in churches or other settings, can assist those in this stage to further grow, since group interaction serves to broaden perspective.

Globally, the next stage of consciousness is just beginning to emerge. People at the stage of Conjunctive faith are in the process of personally integrating and even promoting many of the ideas that underwent development in the time of Teilhard: evolution, a reflectively-critical stance toward ideology, a greater grasp of the role of the unconscious, the social sources of religion and language, the fundamental participation of everything in process, relativity between all beings and the resulting effect on what we observe, and the ecological interdependence of all systems.⁸⁹ What structures their approach, however, is an acceptance of what has come before, a valuing of what can be adapted and a creative approach to what is ready to emerge. Conjunctive Faith is not about content, but about being able to hold a diversity of perspectives respectfully, in an open stance that seeks deeper meaning.

“Center to Center”

Teilhard de Chardin’s strong assertion is that we are individually, corporately, and cosmically evolving in the direction of greater complexity and consciousness. Embracing this, we can freely choose to accelerate our consciousness (or spiritual selves) through personal reflection on expanding experience, open sharing and critical thinking with others, and a practice of deepening awareness of Ultimacy. Through this dynamic process, we can include and retain all that is good and transcend limitations creatively together.

But “having a holding environment during transitions that allows one to safely name and explore what is happening can be helpful in moving forward the transition.”⁹⁰ We need safe

⁸⁹ Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation*, 21-24.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 72.

environments for dialogue, that allow nuanced exploration of issues. Opportunities need to be created and maintained where deep, civil exchanges transpire.

Fowler suggests four areas for dialogue that engage postmodern experience: (1) practical applications of our reflections on suffering and liberation, which is the reality of human experience and for Christians, the locus of God and Christ; (2) integration of theology with the evolutionary sciences, resulting in the creation of a new common story, which includes the role of God in creation; (3) dialogue between classic religious texts and the present context, to experience greater clarity and sense of direction; (4) and extending language and ritual to name and express new dimensions of truth.⁹¹ The content of “Center to Center” is focused primarily on integration of theology with evolutionary science, but also looks to offer new language and ritual to express new dimensions of truth. The structure of “Center to Center” however can be built around a variety of content.

Evolutionary principles used in “Center to Center” are meant to deepen and advance participants’ structures of faith. For those in conventional Stage 3, belonging to a supportive community of significant others and engaging in meaningful dialogue can help to sanction beliefs and values. The richness of interpersonal perspective-taking helps people at Stage 3 synthesize disparate elements into unity.

The emphasis of “Center to Center” on critical reflection and examination of tacit assumptions can help those transitioning into Stage 4. Participants functioning at a more independent Stage 4 will find safety to explore new roads, as they mature in reflective self-consciousness and test burgeoning ideas against widened experience for felt congruence.

⁹¹ Ibid., 181-188.

People moving into or dwelling at Stage 5 of Conjunctive Faith will enjoy the opportunity to see many sides of any issue, momentarily suspending their own views to absorb the full impact of others'. Not over-identifying with their own symbolizations of truth, people who function at Stage 5 will model equanimity in the dialogic process.

Overall, individuals ready to transition into the next stage of faith will benefit from having a holding space, people with whom they gather center to center, on a regular basis, should they feel disoriented as they let go of one faith stance to enter another.

The process used in "Center to Center's" structure is derived from evolutionary principles underscored in Teilhard's writings:

1. The universe (and each group participant) is in constant process of evolution.
2. The universe (and each participant) has the capacity to develop in the direction of greater complexity and greater consciousness.
3. Integration of scientific and religious thought is a movement toward greater complexity in perspective.
4. If humans desire to accelerate consciousness, they can choose to open themselves to the experiences and insights of a diversity of others.
5. Groups of people, converged and centered around a common goal, form a community which can promote evolution.
6. Contemplative dialogue skills promote a "dying to self" as one sincerely listens to understand another. Death of the self-absorbed ego is necessary to emergent new life.
7. Contemplative dialogue skills promote a deeper "seeing and hearing" of the spiritual depths at the center of one's self and of the entire group.

8. Contemplative dialogue is a form of discernment providing direction for future growth and for one's call to serve an evolving world.
9. As human beings, through prayer and dialogue, become more aware of their connection to the Ultimate Center, as well as of their own inner dynamics, they can be freer to choose how they will live.
10. As human beings experience themselves as part of an evolving whole, they are aware of the responsibility for doing their part, which can promote further self-development and connection.

My hope is that participation in the contemplative dialogue process of "Center to Center," using content that describes evolution through Teilhard's eyes, will help move people toward greater consciousness, unity, and love, as Teilhard visualized. Should society and church advance toward Fowler's Stage 5 of Conjunctive Faith, and a new paradigm for inter-relationality emerge, in effect, human beings might become world-wide partners in weaving a new creation with God.

Chapter 4

Spirituality, Growth in Consciousness, and Development of Society

Ask any five people their definition of spirituality and their definition of consciousness and you'll get five unique answers for each. Each definition will likely seem identifiably familiar with one's own experience and still ineffably mysterious. But though these two words are used in many ways, they seem to be pointing to what lies at the deepest level of what it means to be human.

Consciousness can be described most simply as the sentience or awareness of any entity which acts with responsiveness to the environment. Teilhard and other scientists see the beginnings of this capacity even within sub-atomic structures. *Self-consciousness* or awareness of a person's own thinking does not emerge until the advent of human life. Studies have shown changes in the operation of human consciousness over time, both culturally and within individuals. In addition, levels of sub-conscious and unconscious mental activity have been discovered to exist, as well as alternate states of consciousness, for example, states induced by drugs or yogic meditation. Self-consciousness, then, is an experience of one's reality and includes images, emotions, physical perceptions, and interpretations. Reflective consciousness gives a person a sense of identity, an awareness of his or her "inner life," as well as a sense of freedom to choose among alternatives.

The work of Jean Gebser (1905-1973) author of *The Ever-Present Origin* has been foundational in the study of the evolution of human consciousness. Gebser considered Teilhard de Chardin's work corroborative of his own.⁹² Studying the historic structures of human

⁹² Jeremy Johnson, *Seeing Through the World: Jean Gebser and Integral Consciousness* (Revelore Press, Kindle edition, 2019), Loc. 118.

consciousness, Gebser describes the qualitatively different ways people at differing stages experience and interact mentally with the world.

In the earliest **archaic** stage, humans feel one with the environment and have no separate sense of self or perspective, whether one is talking about Paleolithic cave dwellers or today's newly born infants. Cultures and persons enter the second stage of consciousness, the **magical** stage, as self-consciousness begins to grow. At this stage, there is no logical understanding of how the world works, but connections are intuited in an imaginative way as things unfold. All the elements of the world have a lively capacity to "speak" within the perspective of young children as well as within cultures that view the world animistically.

As people and cultures develop more capacity for narrative understanding, a **mythic** kind of consciousness predominates. Numinous meaning is captured in ritual, symbol, sacrament and story in a literal way. But as individualism grows within cultures as well as during an individual's adolescence, seeing things separately, logically, and abstractly becomes the norm. At this point, "the world withdraws its numinous qualities, its enchantment, as the self incorporates those qualities alone (meaning is merely within *us* and not *out there* in the world).⁹³ The cosmos becomes measurable, religion is rationalized or discarded, and anthropocentrism prevails, as we look upon the gods and nature from our separated **mental** perspectives. We know we create ourselves and our world.

Finally, arriving at an **integral** stage of consciousness, individuals and cultures regain the perspective of the whole, rather than seeing each thing atomistically. From this vantage point, a person or a group can appreciate human, ecological, and cosmic interrelationships as well as draw from the capacities of previous stages of consciousness. Teilhard's dream of planetization

⁹³ Ibid., Loc. 517.

can become a reality here. With an integration of all previous mental structures, one can have an egoless experience of being part of the whole, possess an intuitive appreciation of the wonder inherent in creation, discern a depth of meaning in story and symbol, and exhibit the capacity to analyze and synthesize scientifically. All are possible and important. For Gebser, this is “the emergence of the a-perspectival world. This is the integral mutation.”⁹⁴

Each movement from stage to stage is an evolutionary leap that often emerges in the process of solving a crisis, in Gebser’s view. But one stage is not better than another; the procession of stages is more like the organic growth of a plant that first puts down roots, then grows a stem, then leaves, and a flower. And although the spiritual, the Origin or “presence,” as Gebser calls it, can be discerned within any level of consciousness, with this last integral mutation, the world becomes diaphanous, and we see ourselves as one with all matter and spirit. Accordingly, he says that “if there is any practice for us to integrate this insight into our lives, it is the contemplative’s life. . . . One who is present with presence has the means to bring forth the integral human being, as we live through climate change and civilizational catastrophe.”⁹⁵

In his book on Gebser, Jeremy Johnson quotes Teilhard’s “Hymn of the Universe,” as similarly describing the secret forces of a divine evolution that a person’s contemplative eye can reveal: “Blessed be you, mighty matter, irresistible march of evolution, reality ever newborn; you who, by constantly shattering our mental categories, force us ever further and further in our pursuit of truth. Blessed be you, universal matter, immeasurable time, boundless ether, triple

⁹⁴ Ibid., Loc. 636.

⁹⁵ Ibid., Loc. 1777.

abyss of stars and atoms and generations: you who by overflowing and dissolving our narrow standards of measurement reveal to us the dimensions of God.”⁹⁶

Besides affinity to Teilhard, one can see strong resonances between Gebser’s theory of consciousness and James Fowler’s delineation of faith development. Development of consciousness necessarily affects the way a person makes meaning in the world, his or her values, desires, and commitments, and his or her way of living out a personal, concrete relationship to God or the Ultimate.

Physical scientists, like Teilhard de Chardin, have affirmed that consciousness evolves within the universe as complexity increases, whether it is through complexification within a particular culture or an individual’s mental operations. Human persons and larger communities are capable of growing in consciousness, as they incorporate both external experiences they undergo *and* interior aspects of their own psyches which come to awareness. Contemplative practice and reflection, done either singularly or with others, are both efficacious in introducing what was previously unknown to consciousness for consideration and integration.

Participation in a community can foster exchange of information and provide greater impetus for self-reflection. When people create groups that have a shared intention, a nexus of shared interpretations and understandings is often formed which can take on a kind of life of its own. Such a community is a “joining of subjects into inter-subjects, which brings forth a world perceived by neither alone.”⁹⁷ Individuals retain the freedom to surrender themselves to the purpose of the social whole, or not. Societies are not physical/psychic entities in the same way that biological organisms are, for there is no centralized “I” in a society, as there is at the heart of

⁹⁶ Ibid., Loc. 1710.

⁹⁷ Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Boston: Integral Books, 2007), 157.

a person.⁹⁸ “When you and I come together, and we begin talking, resonating, sharing, and understanding each other, a “we” forms – but that is not another I.”⁹⁹ Individual integrity and free will remain.

Still, social systems do evolve, like everything else in the universe. For instance, humans have survived throughout history by increasingly complexified social organization. Societally, people have moved from being foragers of the land, to being farmers, industrial workers and information analysts. They have developed to a point where they may choose to interact as tribalists or ethno-centrists, nationalists or global citizens, each societal form more complex and inclusive than the last. But people are not subsumed into evolving systems without individual choice (which, admittedly, is limited if force is used.) Both individuals and human societies generally progress through communication of information, persuasion of value, and strong affective motivation or desire.

Transformation in society is intrinsically related to individual personal development. As persons psychically develop, grow in consciousness, and deepen in faith and spiritual connection, an effect is cast into the public world. Without personal development, social change cannot be sustained, for societies are made up of individuals who must consent to and cooperate with change.

Integral theorist, Ken Wilber, believes that 50-70% of the world’s population functions primarily at an ethnocentric stage. Most people, he says, pass through archaic, magic, and mythic waves of consciousness, similar to the early stages Gebser and Fowler describe, and end with an embrace of absolutist values and conventional moral norms typical of pre-modernism and mythic

⁹⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 153.

religion. But modern and postmodern modes of thinking are also available to the human community, Wilber advises, with the help of educational and environmental stimulation, including prayer and contemplation.¹⁰⁰

Living an integral life, as Wilber defines it, is to continuously transcend and include prior stages of development in one's self-identity, one's values, and one's capacity to relate to others, including the Transcendent. Wilber, like Teilhard de Chardin, believes that humanity can and must promote movement along higher stages of consciousness, states that are more rational, world-centric, pluralistic, holistic, and illumined by the divine, if our world is to positively evolve.¹⁰¹

With chagrin, however, Wilber quotes a poll conducted by UCLA, showing that though 79% of college juniors say that spirituality and prayer is important in their lives, neither the churches they go to nor professors who often profess atheism actually offer students a place to explore their questions. "In the development of their spiritual intelligence, they are frozen at Fowler's Mythic-Literal Stage, and have no avenues where they can explore higher levels in the development of spiritual intelligence,"¹⁰² even though the Individuative-Reflective level is ready to emerge at this age.

Optimistically, Wilber sees the world's religions as a great conveyor belt which has both the legitimating power and wide potential to move people forward to deeper and higher meanings on the path of spiritual growth. Religious and spiritual teachers are well-suited to help

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 181.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 24-25.

¹⁰² Ibid., 183.

people learn and practice forms of meditation and contemplation, both methods that witness the mind, the core mechanism of consciousness development, Wilber says.¹⁰³

Consciousness, mind, psyche, and interiority are often referred to by Teilhard de Chardin as the realm of spirit. Some of these terms are used more by psychologists, some by spiritual practitioners. But all of these words point to a part of creation that is largely still a mystery. James Fowler might refer to spirituality as one's lived relationship to what is transcendent or most meaningful in one's life. Roman Catholic spiritual director Benedict Groeschel defines the spiritual life as "the sum total of responses which one makes to what is perceived as the inner call of God . . . integrated into the complex behavior patterns of human life. . . . When the individual . . . strives to make this call the center of activity and choice, he or she may be called a truly spiritual person."¹⁰⁴ Note that contemporary definitions of spirituality need not refer to a religious affiliation. But they do refer to the ongoing work of a lifetime, involving deepening understanding of one's personal depths and conscious connection to something More than one's limited self, manifested concretely in one's desires, choices and acts.

Similarly, Brennan and Brewi write: "What is spirituality? It is the spilling out of an inner reality. It is the incarnation of a spirit. In the first half of life, our spirituality...flows out of our ego...We discover our values, what is of prime importance to us, what sets our spirits on fire, and how we enact or incarnate that spirit."¹⁰⁵ Later in life, however, consistently letting go of the ego's prominence is the path to spiritual growth.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 193, 197.

¹⁰⁴ Benedict Groeschel, *Spiritual Passage: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 4.

¹⁰⁵ Janice Brewi and Anne Brennan, *Mid-life Spirituality and Jungian Archetypes* (York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 1988), 55.

Although there is definite regularity in the way that spirituality and consciousness develop, the divine immensity does show itself uniquely within individuals, cultures, and religions. As Von Hugel emphasizes in his study of mysticism: “The mystery of the spiritual life is ultimately seen as unity in unimaginable diversity.”¹⁰⁶ So, though God is within all of creation, a Christian’s experience of God and salvation is distinct; it is mediated by his or her experience of Christ as a revelation of God. Christ, in the form of Jesus, and yet greater than this one decisive moment of the Word’s incarnation, is the divine image Christians recognize within themselves. Guided by the ongoing life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, a shining sign of Christ enfleshed, Christians are led to union with the One Jesus called Father, and are empowered by the Spirit to accomplish, along with the whole of Christ, “the transformation of the old world into a new, spiritual, and divine one.”¹⁰⁷ Groeschel is agreeing with Teilhard that matter is becoming progressively spiritualized, until all is made one in God, by the power of the divine working within us.

But until the world as we know it ends, the spiritual life can never be divorced from the material. Holistic Judeo-Christian spirituality is integral. It includes a humble, mutual relationship with God, interpersonal relationships of compassionate, merciful love, and commitment to the triumph of justice in society.¹⁰⁸ “This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: that you act justly, that you love tenderly, that you walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Irish author Donal Dorr writes that these three aspects of spirituality create Shalom, an all-embracing peace in every sphere of life:

¹⁰⁶ Groeschel, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Donal Dorr, *Integral Spirituality: Resources for Community, Peace, Justice, and the Earth* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 1.

. . . the peace of being in harmony with nature and the cosmos; peace based on justice and reconciliation in society and the world; peace in our relationships with family, friends, and community; a deep personal peace arising from being at home with oneself; and opening oneself up to experience peace as an utterly undeserved gift of God, a peace that passes all understanding in all or any of these areas of life.¹⁰⁹

Achieving peace through justice, love, and prayer leads to “the transformation of our world into a just and humane society; the transformation of groups of all kinds into real communities; the transformation of individuals into fully mature and free persons; and the transformation of the Church into a more effective witness and agent of God’s love for the world, for communities, and for each person.”¹¹⁰

Becoming a person who is inwardly transformed, with the freedom and wisdom to be a transformative agent of justice and peace in a sin-ridden world, is not a quick or easy task. The camel can only pass through the needle if there has first been a process of spiritual practice that successively opens one to transcending grace. In Christian tradition, the path of spiritual development has been said to pass through phases, described as **purgation** or purification of the ego-self, then, a growing **illumination** or understanding of the true Self in relation to transcendent reality, and finally, a sense of **union** or oneness with ultimate reality or God.

An example of this can be heard in the words of the Jungian, Sister Helen Thompson, who speaks as a professor of religion and personality sciences at a Jesuit university, and who explicitly references Teilhard’s theory of tangential energy (which pulls parts into a centered whole) and radial energy (which pull wholes toward greater complexity and consciousness):

Development can be described as the movement from the unconscious, undifferentiated beginning toward a subsequent point of personal, integrated wholeness. During ‘the first half’ of life, the ego emerges and then moves toward greater conscious control; the outward influence of tangential energy predominates. During ‘the second half’ of life,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

elements of the unconscious emerge seeking integration; the inward influence of radial energy predominates.¹¹¹

Thompson sees a parallel between Teilhard de Chardin's understanding of evolution as a directed movement through a series of critical thresholds and Jung's stages of psychic development through a series of death-rebirth encounters, namely, physical birth, adolescence, mid-life, and physical death.¹¹²

Spiritual authors today frequently borrow from the insights of Jungian and other psychological frameworks, as they employ terms that contrast the "ego-self," "false self," or "small self" with a person's "True Self" or "Self in God." According to psychologist Carl Jung, ego-development necessarily happens in the first half of life. Emergence of the Self, which follows death to ego-control and an integration of gradually recognized material from the previously hidden unconscious, is a potential seen more often in the second half of human life. Usually, up to about the age of 40, we acquire conventional values, attitudes and roles espoused by our families and surrounding culture, but then, dissatisfaction or crisis may thrust us beyond this, into what Teilhard calls personalization and Jung labels individuation.

In the second half of life, when integration of the conscious and unconscious is taking place, the archetypal Self, a deep common psychic reality, expresses itself with greater intensity. "The ego is nourished from within by expanding its consciousness ever deeper toward its own psychic center."¹¹³ Jung unites the realms of science and religion when he claims that, "Christ is the Archetype of the Self, and the process of individuation that is called for in life's second half

¹¹¹ Helen Thompson, *Journey Toward Wholeness: A Jungian Model of Adult Spiritual Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 14-15.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

is uncovering the Image of God within oneself.”¹¹⁴ Though we never completely plumb the depths of the unconscious, we can integrate its once-hidden contents into self-understanding, as emerging, revealing Shadows (previously repressed aspects of ourselves) come to light.¹¹⁵ This process of psychological unfolding mirrors the spiritual path of personal conversion, progressive enlightenment and loving union with a greater Whole that includes God and all Earth.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) was one of the most widely read writers on Christian mysticism in the early 20th century. She describes the purgative, illuminative and unitive stages of spiritual growth in the mystical life. For a person who has a breakthrough of strong attraction to the Divine, feelings of joy and love naturally arise at the beginning of the spiritual journey towards God. The desire to be closer to God leads to attempts at greater self-discipline, to remove anything standing in the way of that growing relationship. Full of desire, a person is willing to do the difficult work of detaching him or herself from the ego-centered ways of the world and from attachment to things in themselves. This is the first **purgation**. Passing through this purifying process, a person increasingly awakes to Divine Reality. This is the stage of **Illumination** when, moved by love, one progressively comes to see God in all things.

“Illumination is the ‘contemplative state’ par excellence,”¹¹⁶ Underhill states. This often ecstatic experience strengthens the desirous soul toward continued growth in the Way of Christ.

It is only when purification of the self is complete that **union** with God is able to be received. This purification has been called “mystic death,” “spiritual crucifixion,” and “the Dark Night of the Soul.” The once again purgative self learns to give itself over in complete surrender

¹¹⁴ Brewi and Brennan, ix.

¹¹⁵ Thompson, 25.

¹¹⁶ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (12th Revised Edition, 1930. Kindle), Loc. 4095.

to God, desiring nothing at all for itself, neither emotional satisfactions nor even a separate will. Only then will come a state of equilibrium, characterized by peace, joy, some enhanced powers, and steady faith.¹¹⁷

The mystic **unitive** way is about living life with a daily awareness of its Transcendent reality. Though some have named this the stage of Mystical Marriage, like in human marriage, it is not about the ecstasies of love that may come with first knowledge of God's love. This mature marriage union instead focuses on bearing fruit in the world, though this looks different with every personality and particular vocation. Now living beyond the constraints of an egoic life, participating in a vaster consciousness, the mystic's life becomes revelatory of the Divine and divine Love. Both hands of the mystic are extended freely – one towards God and the other towards humanity and the world. No longer distracted by ego fears and cravings, Underhill says the mystic has “gone up the mountain alone and come back as an ambassador to the world. This has ever been the method of humanity's best friends.”¹¹⁸ She reminds us of the words of the 14th century mystic, John Von Ruysbroeck who calls the mystic's unitive and deeply fecund stage “the crowning stage of evolution.”¹¹⁹

Through these three spiritual stages, the individual has undergone Teilhard's process of decentration, where the “small self” is no longer one's center or prime focus, but has come to live a life of love and oneness now centered on the Whole. The journeyer has become a “conscious vehicle of some power not herself,”¹²⁰ as St. Catherine of Siena describes it.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 4110.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 4181.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 4181.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 4208.

Catherine was an uneducated woman during the 14th century who stood up to the corrupt powers of church and state, calling them boldly to accountability and effecting both outrage and change. Catherine's long spiritual journey through purgation and illumination to ultimate union was what prepared her to be eminently fruitful for the life of her world, and a leading, glorious edge in evolution.

What moves seekers along this path, both yesterday and today? Psychologists and spiritual teachers say that it is desire – a felt yearning or dissatisfaction with life as it is, often catalyzed by some form of suffering. Jung wrote in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* that “it is from need and distress that new forms of life take their rise.”¹²¹ Many people, particularly in the first half of life, begin the search for “more” within the world of material things. People crave more wealth, power, status, accomplishment, security, health, expertise, possessions, and experiences (through sex, travel, adventure or even spiritual venues.) These physical objectives become goals for a while, but ultimately, they are not fulfilling.

At this point, many long for deeper satisfactions – more truth, more freedom, more joy, more connection, more peace, more love, more *something*. Christianity's insight about this yearning is summed up well by St. Augustine: “Because God has made us for Himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him.”¹²² For Christians, following the lure of one's deepest desires is what leads us in due course to the Mystery of God, because this is how we are made.

Bernard Lonergan, a later 20th century Jesuit theologian, advances much of the foundational spiritual thought of Teilhard de Chardin. Lonergan writes that a human's development “is a matter of getting beyond himself, transcending himself, ceasing to be an

¹²¹ Brewi and Brennan, 10.

¹²² St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Digireads.com Publishing, Kindle, 2009), Loc. 28.

animal in a habitat and becoming a genuine person in a community.”¹²³ Development occurs, Lonergan says, in successive stages by which an individual attends to the data of his life, makes sense of it through understanding and judgment, which includes a process of dialogue with others, and after deliberation, reaches decisions and takes action, in love. People move through this lifelong progression by following the built-in desire of their spirits - for meaning, truth, goodness, and love, all orientations that open reflective beings to God.¹²⁴

Lonergan claims that a person’s “many levels of consciousness are just successive stages in the unfolding of a single thrust: the eros of the human spirit.”¹²⁵ He maintains that this “dynamism of desire” is a divine grace, the gift of God’s love, inviting self-transcendence within all of creation.¹²⁶ Lonergan urges us to become aware of “the pulsing flow of your life...so as to reach forward with the whole of our consciousness towards the fullest truth and the greatest good.”¹²⁷

But while feelings of desire, including insatiable curiosity, drive people forward on the human journey, intellectual understandings and feelings can be ambiguous and self-serving. All people, both individually and in groups, suffer unconscious biases which block or distort thinking and motivations. Spiritual practices of self-transcendence help one to be attentive, sort

¹²³ James L. Connor, S.J., *The Dynamism of Desire: Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., on The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 29.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 32.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 37.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 43-44.

out skewed facts, feelings, and values, and come to a place of greater freedom from which to choose the best good for the whole in this moment, an expression of a person's will to love.¹²⁸

The Teilhardian-Ignatian Approach to Consciousness Development and Spirituality

Ignatius of Loyola, in the 16th century, was a man of intense desires. His aspirations propelled him from the fields of soldierly valor and a courtier's life of romance and fortune to a pilgrim's ascetical pathway and eventually to priestly ordination and the institution of a religious order. Jesuit men, under Ignatius' leadership, traveled all over the world, as companions of Jesus, sharing Jesus' mission of saving souls to the glory of God. But this would never have happened had Ignatius not been laid low by a cannon ball as a young man, leaving him with nothing but time to pay attention to all his desires. Ignatius gradually learned to discern through the leading of his feelings which desires were deepest of all. His greatest longings, in the end, pulled him to follow Jesus, in the heroic manner of Saints Dominic and Francis.

Over the years, Ignatius examined the dynamics of desire, coming to understand how, in people who leaned toward the good, consoling faith, hope, love, peace, courage, and joy were increased whenever the focus was towards God and God's service. In contrast, Ignatius noticed that desolating confusion, agitation, and darkness of spirit were the result each time he spiraled in upon himself in self-obsession or felt captured by the egoic values of the world. By observing such inner movements and counter-movements, Ignatius learned to judge or discern which of his choices were more of God and which were the leadings of the enemy spirit. He expanded these discernment practices and put them at the heart of *The Spiritual Exercises* which he shared with his religious brothers and lay women and men.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 74-75.

As a contemplative person committed to action for the advancement of God's Kingdom, Ignatius knew from experience that God can be found in all things. But all things lead to God, Ignatius additionally counseled, *only* if our relationship with each of them is properly ordered. Inner freedom is liberation from disordered attachments. Such holy indifference results from necessary self-examination so as to understand and disentangle oneself from unhealthy or inordinate loves. This intentional purification of our preferences and motives is the purgative stage in spiritual growth. To be effective, it too must arise from desire, not simply from fear or a societal "should."

The primary role of the Exercises is to foster the dynamism of desire. Ignatius himself felt inflamed with the love of God, a great desire to imitate the saints, and to serve God in any way God might ask of him. His self-centered grandiose desires were transcended and transformed into something new. The action of the Holy Spirit follows the bent of our being and orients us to more abundant life through the natural path of our desire, which God keeps inviting towards something greater. Spiritual desire gently moves the soul towards its end. It is love that engenders and nourishes this desire. . . . Ignatius wanted us to be people of great desires, including the desire to be identified with Christ as closely as possible. . . . He also wanted us to be mature enough to place our desires and the energies they give us at the service of God and the corporate body, and have the courage and self-discipline to control any desires which dissipate our energies. . . . The retreatant's effort is to keep responding to the need he feels in the depths of his being. The soul becomes more and more aware of the only motivation that counts, a movement which engages one's whole life. . . . Ignatian indifference does not dampen desire but purifies it, allowing it to reach greater ardor and love.¹²⁹

Following our desires in this way is re-creative. Creation for Ignatius was not about the beginning of the universe, but about how God creates the world moment by moment. This is why Ignatius warns overly eager spiritual directors to leave retreatants in the hands of God, who is actively at work, and knows each person deeply and best. Each creature becomes *more* of who he or she can potentially be, through the potency of nature cooperating with grace. Embraced by God's continuous mercy in our imperfect striving, God the Potter, through the Holy Spirit,

¹²⁹ Ibid., 38-40.

conforms us to Christ, enabling us to respond to the divine invitation to engage in God's creative plan for the evolving universe.

This unrestricted drive in us for “the *More*” is what Jesuits call the standard of the *Magis*. All throughout a Christian's life, one is to ask: To what more am I being summoned? How can I become freer and more loving for the sake of the greatest possible good? How well is my will aligned with God's, towards the salvation, wholeness, and full becoming of all people in loving community, which Jesus called the Kingdom of God and Teilhard hailed as Christ-Omega? “There may be no blueprint in God's mind with which we have to comply...but we are called to exercise our freedom responsibly and well by choosing what honestly seems the best course of action in a given set of circumstances, using all the relevant aids that we have been given for that purpose.”¹³⁰

Willi Lambert, a German Jesuit, says that a number of internal dispositions are decisive in the spiritual journey, namely “the ability to reflect on what one perceives, the willingness to . . . be attentive, an attitude that is magnanimous and generous, the desire to attain inner freedom, the willingness to patiently follow the path, and openness during conversation.”¹³¹ By speaking honestly and freely, we reveal ourselves *to ourselves*, as well as to others. This is why, in the Ignatian tradition, an on-going relationship with a spiritual director as well as with a church community is considered so important.

Personal spiritual development is meant to influence the growth in holiness of the entire community. Communal advance in spiritual maturity is affected through the quiet witness of a

¹³⁰ George Traub, S.J., editor, *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 174.

¹³¹ Willi Lambert, *The Sevenfold Yes: Affirming the Goodness of Our Deepest Desires* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2005), 19.

Christian life, but it can be accelerated by practices of intentional communal growth, such as “Center to Center.”

Lambert points out some questions that community members in dialogue would do well to ask themselves and one another: “Do we listen well to one another? Do our questions probe more deeply? Is some kind of fear preventing us from doing so? Are we able to stand by our feelings and opinions? Is each one of us able to say “I” when speaking our thoughts and feelings? Is there anyone dominating the conversation?”¹³² Engaging in mutual conversation in this way is practicing love in deeds, a core Ignatian ideal. It exercises the discipline of setting aside ego, a form of dying to self, for the sake of the community’s growth and service to the world.

Dialogue can be a mode of contemplation in action, for contemplation “happens in moments when we are open, undefended and immediately present.”¹³³ Richard Rohr, however, describes the difficulty of this:

The false self seems to have the first gaze at almost everything . . . but when I am open, undefended and immediately present, I can sometimes . . . get there later and even end there, but it is usually a second gaze. The True Self seems to always be ridden and blinded by the defensive needs of the false self. It is a daily battle, at least for me. I can see why all spiritual traditions insist on daily prayer . . . The first gaze is busy weighing and feeling itself: “How will this affect me? How does my self-image demand that I react to this? How can I get back in control of this situation?” This leads us to an implosion, a self-preoccupation that cannot enter into communion with the other or the moment.¹³⁴

A contemplative stance brings us to that second gaze, the one that sees with greater fullness. It sees itself, the other, and God, with an attitude of love. Rohr recommends a practice of Centering Prayer in order to build up one’s muscles for attending to the false or ego-self as it regularly

¹³² Ibid., 48.

¹³³ Richard Rohr, *Contemplation in Action* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 15.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 16.

arises and then learning to let it go. But he warns of the danger of contemplation without the accountability of a spiritual community:

Right now, contemplation is ‘in’ within many religious and even secular circles. It is a way of being spiritual without any usual accountability, social action, or quality control. . . . It utterly appeals to the Western individualist and introvert, and the ego payoff is major – a very superior self-image: I live in serenity above the fray. . . . There are no outer reference points of Scripture, society or symbol to call me out of myself and back to Reality.¹³⁵

In order to be in alignment with Christian biblical teaching, personal growth in holiness, with its dying to self, is concomitantly a social affair. As St. Paul wrote to the Galatian community, “You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. . . . The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. . . . Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not . . . provoke one another” (Galatians 5: 13, 22-26). For disciples sharing in Jesus’ mission, Jesus’ work was about forming a loving community, with God at its heart and center.

Such a community, writes Lonergan, is “not just an aggregate of individuals” but dedicated people who share a common field of experience, a common understanding, reach common judgments, and bring changes into existence by their decisions and choices.¹³⁶ In community life, we are in relationships that support and empower one another. We belong to a larger body which can organize corporately for action. In solidarity, we are able to face all offenses and injuries - should the work of Christ require it. Community members can assist one

¹³⁵ Ibid., 83.

¹³⁶ Connor, 164.

another's material and emotional needs, if poverty befalls some of the members or if poverty is what some are called to for the sake of the Kingdom.

In making an offering of oneself to the work of God's Kingdom, one *desires* to participate in the redemptive recovery of a sinful world in decline. Indeed, the offering is inescapably political, for it affirms allegiance to God and denies allegiance to all that is *not* God, be it the powerful imperialist, the multinational corporation, the military-industrial complex or any other claimant to worship.¹³⁷

As Jesus and Teilhard knew, in this work, neither coercion nor logic have the power to convert the human heart. Love alone transforms, But non-violent love may mean insecurity and insult, frustration, or even death to the follower of the crucified. This is why *The Spiritual Exercises* actively cultivate in us likeness to Christ.

In order to take on the mind and heart of Christ, Ignatius, in *The Spiritual Exercises*, has retreatants contemplate with all five senses what it would be like to be with Jesus within the settings of the Gospel stories. "The dynamic structure of human coming to know and coming to decide is also the common core of the method of the Exercises and, specifically, of the Ignatian Contemplation, where a Christian comes to know, love, and serve Christ by being attentive, intelligent, rational, and responsible."¹³⁸

The use of imagination in prayer stirs the heart, as the Spirit uses archetypal and creative imagery which arouses deep feeling. Interiorly, it is revealed and powerfully realized how our personal stories merge with the story of Jesus Christ, who functions as an archetype of human union with the divine. Through these prayerful contemplations, we come to deeply know Christ's ideals and values, the quality and centrality of his relationship with the Father, and the courage and compassion that characterize Jesus' life. These prayer experiences provide illumination, a

¹³⁷ Ibid., 181.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 231.

window into Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and into our own as well, if the Holy Spirit is the one leading the prayer. Entered into with faith, *something* in the Scripture story can be a personal invitation and a saving event for me.

Each prayer period during *The Spiritual Exercises* is preceded by the retreatant asking for a particular grace, a gift that one desires from God, to be received during the course of the prayer. One boldly petitions God, with confidence in God's generosity and caring wisdom. Stated desires include deeper felt knowledge of one's disordered inner state and God's ever-faithful mercy and love, and also to know Jesus more intimately, love him more deeply, and follow him more closely.

Near the end of the retreat, we imagine ourselves at the cross with Jesus, moved with compassion for him as he suffers and dies, knowing we ourselves have added to the sin of the world that causes such suffering. We are simultaneously moved to consider the cost of the commitment we have made as a Christian. By the side of Christ, we are strengthened in our desire to imitate Jesus' sacrificial love, as we do our own part to absorb and transform evil into good. We accept the possibility of the Cross, and even desire it, so as to more fully identify with Christ in his self-emptying love. Love alone can pour out such desire. Although Ignatius tends to see the relationship with Christ as interpersonal, there is a strong sense of being united with Christ, both in mission and in suffering, so as to rise with Christ to glory.

Javier Melloni, SJ, provides the insight that:

the Ignatian name for union with God is "election." Union comes about in the act and art of choosing in each moment in terms of God's will, which declares itself in history for the transformation of the world. . . . This ultimately is what discernment is about: allowing oneself to be taken by God, allowing God to act through oneself in every event of history. Thus, for Ignatius, union is always a quest and a tendency, never a definitive state. . . . In Ignatius, the movement of union is one of incarnation, not elevation, or more accurately, a descent. The search for union with God – that aspiration which is within the heart of every human being – comes about for him not through the flight from the world

of monastic tradition, but through the kenotic (self-emptying) movement of incarnation in the world and for the world. . . . The will of God is the divinization of every creature.¹³⁹

Submitting one's whole self to God, one comes to share in the very life and nature of God Who is Love. This cannot be anything but transformative for both the person and society.

Benedict Groeschel writes that "one of the great spiritual psychologists and mystics of the Middle Ages, Meister Eckhart, is of the opinion that the essence of the psychological process of union with God is not the awareness of God, but rather the openness of the mind and will to God – undisturbed by contradictory desires, hidden goals, and unresolved conflicts, and open to reality on all levels."¹⁴⁰

The reality to which Christians remain open embraces the realm of resurrection as well. Walking with the Risen Christ, confident in the mystery of everyday union, retreatants end *The Spiritual Exercises* energized, hopeful and consoled. As a final exercise, they contemplate the expansiveness and profundity of God's love in all of creation and are invited to offer themselves and all their gifts to God in return. Retreatants go forth, mindful of God in all things, and ready to be radical in love. They desire that God be the passionate center of their living and that they can love, like Christ, without condition, or reserve. Those who complete the Exercises want their full physical and spiritual potential to be activated for God and the Kingdom. All that is asked is God's love and grace, given to and *through us*, for the world.

Although the language of Ignatian spirituality is decidedly Christian, with adaptation, it can find resonance among a people who bear a humanist viewpoint. This is because "Jesuit

¹³⁹ Traub, 131.

¹⁴⁰ Groeschel, 165.

spirituality is at once worldly and humanistic, seeing God as deeply immersed in all creation and in all human endeavor.”¹⁴¹

The Jesuit phenomenon arose out of an age of burgeoning humanism in which individual freedom and human rights were blossoming ideals. As a result, Jesuits were among the first to develop a university system, which not only taught theology but all academic disciplines, for there was nothing in which God could not be found. For Jesuits, the sacred and the secular are never separate and nothing human is merely human in a world infused with grace. Within creation itself, the paschal mystery of life, suffering, death and new life, can be recognized by both religious and non-religious people as the pattern of living evolution.

For fifteenth century Renaissance humanists, study was not only directed toward the development of virtue and understanding, but to eloquence and active engagement in the world. “Insight without action was barren, and action without insight was barbaric. Holding up *humanitas* as an ideal meant striving to strike a balance between action and contemplation.”¹⁴² So involvement in the secular sciences eventually became a hallmark of the Jesuits. From their very beginnings, Jesuits have been at the center of the dialogue between science and religion. Teilhard de Chardin’s writings would not have been possible without the spiritual humanism of his Jesuit roots.

Ignatian spirituality may be grounded in the Christian Church, but it sees its role as calling the world to discernment (a world that includes the Church itself) as it challenges conventional practices and values, through processes of dialogue and continuous learning.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Traub, 10.

¹⁴² Ibid., 11.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 74.

Ignatian spirituality also sees the need for enculturating the Gospel message afresh, adapting Christian symbols and practices to the concrete reality of persons and cultures. This is because, “ultimately, Ignatian spirituality trusts the world as a place where God dwells and labors and gathers all to himself.”¹⁴⁴ All things hold together in Christ.

Ignatian spirituality can be considered a form of incarnational or sacramental spirituality. It is grounded in the belief that to appreciate anything in its depth is to see it as revelatory of God. Spirit is shining through matter, and all creation is wedded to the divine by outpouring grace. Anything that exists signifies a deeper reality. Whether one receives a Jesuit education in any subject or undergoes *The Spiritual Exercises* in daily life, Ignatian spirituality’s goal is to produce “sacramental beholders. . . . Another principle inevitably follows: whatever humanizes divinizes. That is to say, whatever makes you more genuinely human, more authentically, richly, powerfully human, whatever calls into play all the reaches of your intellect, your freedom, energy, your talents and creativity, makes you more like God. This is how we encounter God in our incarnational tradition.”¹⁴⁵

Learning to see sacramentally can be enhanced by spiritual and educational processes that develop all of what it means to be human. In discussing Friedrich von Hugel’s theory of integrated religious development, outlined by him in the early 20th century, Noreen and Wilkie Au comment that:

healthy spiritual growth includes three aspects of religion: the institutional, the critical, and the mystical. The institutional dimension of religion is of central importance in the early stages of personal development, when children depend on sense impressions, memory, and instruction from others for their apprehension of religious belief. In the institutional stage of faith development, people believe because they have been taught by those they trust. . . . The second stage, that of the critical, is a period of trustful questioning, first others, then oneself. . . . The human spirit’s reasoning, argumentative,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 78.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 232.

abstractive side demands recognition. . . . Finally, the third stage of religious development calls for the cultivation of an inner life and sensitivity to the world of interior experiences. . . . Faith will be at its richest and deepest and strongest, insofar as all three motives are fully and characteristically operative . . . towards one and the same ultimate end.¹⁴⁶

One can see a resemblance to James Fowler's faith development theory in von Hugel's model of integrated religious growth.

Without value being set on intentional development in faith, infantilization and loss of freedom can result within members of a religious institution. However, abiding by the critical element alone, people may function out of a purely intellectual system in their devotion to God. On the other hand, when the mystical dimension is cultivated in isolation, at the expense of institutional wisdom and rational thought, distortions and extremism can arise, separating Christians from one another and promoting a kind of emotionalism that refuses to submit itself to the critical element. With too narrow an approach, the doors to self-deception are left wide open. Therefore, both religious tradition and individual experiences must be judged critically, dialogically, and prayerfully, honoring both external and internal authority in an integral manner.¹⁴⁷ This is how consciousness develops, spirituality deepens, and institutions evolve.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 208.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 212-213.

Chapter Five

Educational Process and Transformation

Education as a Transformative Process

How does consciousness expand and grow? How do individuals develop – intellectually, emotionally, morally, and spiritually? How do institutions, cultures, and societies evolve? These questions are at the heart of the educational process. Such considerations are important for professional educators, but they also need to be at the forefront for all agents of change, whether in government, science, business or church, for change in one area affects the workings of the whole. Since the goal of “Center to Center” is spiritual growth via a designed procedure that engages people with Teilhardian ideas, it falls within the purview of education, as an intentionally transformative process.

Alfred North Whitehead, renowned today for his writings on process philosophy, wrote an essay called *The Aims of Education* which illuminates the role of education in human evolution. Education’s subject matter, he asserts, is universal: “There is only one subject matter for education and that is Life in all its manifestations.”¹⁴⁸

Remarkably, Whitehead, a Harvard professor of metaphysics who, as an adult, was never a member of any church, made this claim:

The essence of education is that it be religious. Pray, what is religious education? A religious education is an education which inculcates duty and reverence. Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events. Where attainable knowledge could have changed the issue, ignorance has the guilt of vice. And the foundation of reverence is this perception: that the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1929), 7.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

This challenging statement about the essence of education goes far beyond the notion of education as socialization into the culture of a particular nation or as a preparation to enter the workforce. Education's purpose is as large as "potential control over the course of events," in other words, societal and planetary change. To effect change, one needs both knowledge of the past and the capacity to envision the future, which arises out of every present moment. "The only use of a knowledge of the past is to equip us for the present."¹⁵⁰ Otherwise, in Whitehead's opinion, educational efforts are inert:

A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth . . . but culture, the activity of thought and receptiveness to beauty and humane feeling, can lead as deep as philosophy and as high as art. . . . We must beware of what I call "inert ideas" which merely are received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations.¹⁵¹

Whitehead sees education as a response to the creative impulse that resides within each individual. Education is what guides an individual towards "comprehension of the art of life; and by the art of life, I mean the most complete achievement of varied activity expressing the potentialities of that living creature in the face of its actual environment."¹⁵²

Although increased knowledge is one of the aims of education, a greater aim is growing wisdom, Whitehead says. "Wisdom is the way in which knowledge is held. It concerns . . . the selection of knowledge for the determination of relevant issues [and] its employment, which adds value to our immediate experience."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 1.

¹⁵² Ibid., 39.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 37.

Along the same line, progressive philosopher, social reformer and educator John Dewey emphasized that:

All genuine social life is educative. To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience. One shares in what another has thought and felt and . . . has his own attitude modified. . . . The very process of living together educates. It stimulates and enriches imagination; it creates responsibility for accuracy and vividness of statements of thought. . . . It makes individuals better fitted to cope with later requirements. . . . It is a continuous leading into the future.¹⁵⁴

“Center to Center,” a small-group contemplative dialogue process, aligns with Dewey’s concept of the educative and creative power of social communication. It is also geared toward transforming persons for the sake of the future, after the ideals of Teilhard de Chardin.

Some theories of education focus on the development of the individual; others on either social maintenance or social progress as an end. Dewey points to the integrated reality of individual and societal advance. He describes education as a freeing of individual capacity for the sake of growth toward social aims. Therefore, people must decide on the kind of society in which they want to live, so that educational pursuits can bind people together for cooperative engagements in that direction.¹⁵⁵ Taking time to examine one’s worldview in concert with others, to clarify one’s desires for the future of Earth, and to explore spiritual practices that lead toward personal freedom and deeper insight are all aims of “Center to Center,” congruent with Dewey’s vision.

Education not only plays an important role in the transformation of a person’s life; it also has a vital function as societies, religious and secular, evolve over time. As cultures mature and global consciousness grows, in the way that Teilhard de Chardin imagines, we will need ways to learn the cosmic story and connect around a vision of the future.

¹⁵⁴ John Dewey, *John Dewey: The Complete Works* (Kindle), Loc. 6978-6985, 7809.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Loc. 8491-8518.

Educator Edmund O’Sullivan believes that Earth has now reached the limits of modernity, with its emphatically rational, industrial, and individualistic modes of being. We must retain what is good from the past, he says, but transcend the confines of an outdated worldview, passed on within our educational system geared toward promoting economic globalization, under the power of a patriarchal few.¹⁵⁶ Such systemic practices are fundamentally implicated in the possible extinction of planetary life, O’Sullivan projects, so he passionately summons educators toward planetary education and development of what he calls an “ecozoic” vision:

The fundamental educational task of our times is to make the choice for a sustainable planetary habitat of interdependent life forms over and against the dysfunctional calling of the global competitive marketplace. . . . An ecozoic vision can be called a transformative perspective because it posits a radical restructuring. To move towards a planetary education, it will be necessary to have a functional cosmology. . . . We are in need of a cosmological story that can carry the weight of a planetary consciousness to where we know we must move. The educational framework appropriate for this movement must . . . critique the dominant culture’s formative appropriateness, propose a vision of what an alternative might look like and give concrete suggestions as to the process of change that will need to be created.¹⁵⁷

In this vein, “Center to Center” is an educational process which integrates a deepening cosmological sense with scientific insights and the wisdom of spiritual tradition, through the use of critical reflection and contemplative prayer.

Situating ourselves within the unfolding universe, the Universe Story can be a focal point of reference for cultures around the world. Already,

there is a widespread, cross-cultural occurrence of the perception of interconnectedness, which makes the integral cosmological perspective more than a mere narrative. . . . The sense that the natural world is alive and that we are inherently connected with that life force is a core perception of most native people’s world view and it evolved into Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu and Confucian philosophies of organicism. Contemporary science itself

¹⁵⁶ Edmund O’Sullivan, *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21st Century* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 1-2.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 2-3, 5.

– in the areas of biology, chemistry, physics, and chaos theory – has also concluded that subtle interconnectedness and molecular relatedness are indeed the nature of being.¹⁵⁸

Holistic education is an emergent trend in education which challenges the fragmentation of modernism and attempts to bring education into alignment with the fundamental realities of nature, which are at core interrelated and dynamic. Part of this fragmentation is a lack of shared meaning in society. The modern worldview of scientific materialism may give an in-depth view of nature's parts, but a coherent pattern that fits with the whole of one's experience, not to mention, a sense of awe and reverence. is missing and missed by many today. Therefore, in holistic education, more emphasis is placed on spirituality.”¹⁵⁹

Holistic education involves exploring and making connections as it attempts to move from fragmentation to connectedness. The focus of holistic education is on relationships: the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships among various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, the relationship to the earth, and our relationship to our souls. In the holistic curriculum the student examines these relationships so that he or she gains both an awareness of them and the skills necessary to transform the relationships where it is appropriate.¹⁶⁰

Programs like “Center to Center” model an integrative framework that respects the natural relationship between science and religion, the individual and society, the non-human and human.

O’Sullivan echoes Teilhard’s vision as he describes the emergent evolutionary story as “at every level a story of differentiation, subjectivity and communion.”¹⁶¹ It is appropriate then that educational processes, like “Center to Center,” encourage participants to develop their affinities and gifts, cultivate their interior capacities, both rational and intuitive, and provide a

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 30-31.

¹⁵⁹ John P. Miller, *The Holistic Curriculum* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶¹ O’Sullivan, 98.

community of learners who can expand one another's consciousness through ideas both shared and communally generated.

An insidious and lingering social influence in our time is patriarchy, which takes form within societal structures and leads to the unjust power dynamics of sexism, racism, classism, militarism, colonialism and anthropocentrism. O'Sullivan believes that adherence to or ignorance of these underlying forces can be remedied through the consciousness-raising of communal education, which critically considers the content and process of power relations. In patriarchal systems, "power comes from the center, from western culture and white heterosexual men. The marginalized positions are occupied by the majority of the world. . . . The [patriarchal] center defines the normative structure of the whole and is in the dominant position...The assumption is that 'margins' must be assimilated to the 'center' or differences suppressed."¹⁶²

In contrast, educational processes among adults, like "Center to Center," are structured to promote equality of participation so that no one has all the control or is expected to be an expert on everything. The very experience of being part of such a group empowers those accustomed to being voiceless on the margins. We are all "centers of sentience and spontaneity" and with the design of "Center to Center" and other forms of transformative education, people can sense how they are connected, center to center, in a deep communion, "for to be is to be in relation. But too often we are locked up in egocentrism, or our community is limited and anthropocentric...Self-encapsulated individuals have lost the cosmological sense."¹⁶³

But a sense of connection can be developed. As Teilhard, Fowler, Wilber and others have insisted, evolving forms move to higher levels of complexity and integration. But in the process,

¹⁶² Ibid., 131-132, 152.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 194.

there is a necessary dialectic of harmony and disharmony, uncomfortable but essential to transforming systems. Chaos theory teaches that when fluctuations of energy in a system become sufficiently turbulent, the old connecting points no longer work and the system then transforms itself into a higher order, one with new and different connecting points. The parts reorder into a new whole...each new level more integrated and connected than the preceding one.¹⁶⁴ Processes grounded in reflection and dialogue, like “Center to Center,” help people practice holding the tension of uncertainty and paradox, as part of its purpose and method.

We can also look at transformative learning, O’Sullivan says, from the point of view of systems theory. “In the process of learning, the mind organizes itself by virtue of feedback – that is, by monitoring its interactions with its environment. In open systems, like the mind, the mind watches what it is doing and adjusts.”¹⁶⁵ Though the mind inevitably begins with preconceptions which shape interpretations of the world, receiving feedback can lead to changes in understanding. Should enough information suggest that one can no longer interpret experience in terms of old assumptions, the cognitive system reorganizes itself so that it can deal more adequately with the new data. “In this way living systems adapt by transforming themselves and learning occurs . . . Breakdown, or crisis, motivates the system to self-organize in more inclusive ways of knowing, embracing, and integrating data of which it had been previously unconscious.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 209.

¹⁶⁵ Edmund O’Sullivan, Amish Morrell, and Mary Ann O’Connor, Ed., *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning*, “The Project and Vision of Transformative Education: Integral Transformative Learning,” Edmund O’Sullivan (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 3.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.

Living systems in the universe renew themselves continuously. They are self-regulating, self-nurturing, and self-healing. To this end, “Center to Center” incorporates, within every session, opportunities for self-evaluation, which ask participants to look at the intellectual quality, emotional health and skillful performance of the dialogue group. Provided as well are provisions for group interaction should disagreement or conflict erupt. The group has the responsibility and inherent capacity to evolve, through both harmony and disharmony, according to the uniqueness, motivation, and need of those assembled. The structure of “Center to Center” mirrors the working of a living, evolving system by design.

Learning to participate in constructive discourse is an important aim of “Center to Center.” It is a skill meant to be transferable into situations beyond the educational setting. In this sense, “Center to Center” is not just about individual transformation but asks questions that encourage group-members to become catalysts toward transformation of dialogue within broader society. Daniel Schugurensky points out that transformative learning leads to transformative politics:

Discourse is ideally a conscious collective effort to find agreement, to search for common ground, to resolve differences and to build a new understanding. To do so implies an effort to be open, to set aside bias and prejudice, and to listen to our own purposes, feelings, values, and meanings, in the context of those expressed by others. This is a particularly important point for the practice of participatory democracy, as we live in a culture of polarized argumentation in which dialogue often is reduced to a debate between two opposing sides in which reality is dichotomized and in which winning an argument seems to be more important than understanding different ways of thinking and reaching consensus.¹⁶⁷

Schugurensky reminds us that Jack Mezirow, a central thinker on the theory of transformative learning for adults, relays an important caution for programs like the one I am creating. Mezirow points out that transformative learning groups need:

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., “Transformative Learning and Transformative Politics: The Pedagogical Dimension of Participatory Democracy and Social Action,” Daniel Schugurensky, 64.

. . . a certain level of maturity, education, safety, health, economic security, and emotional intelligence. Given these preconditions, hungry, homeless, desperate, threatened, sick or frightened adults are less likely to be able to participate effectively in discourse to help them better understand the meaning of their own experiences. This begs us to consider the question of unequal power. A process that excludes many people and includes mostly privileged members of society needs to look at ways to include disadvantaged sectors of the population.¹⁶⁸

For this reason, actual use of “Center to Center” needs to be adapted. Some groups will need to practice more with dialogue skills or engage with content in different ways. Some groups will not be ready to take responsibility for their own facilitation, so a facilitator might provide a mentoring role for a while. Participants who are physically hungry will benefit from enjoying a meal when gathering together, and promoters of “Center to Center” will need to consider either going out to where people live or providing a safe environment for people to gather. Partnering with other services that empower participants may be a necessary component in particular situations. Unconsciously serving only those within one’s inner circle adds to the often subtle elitism which is endemic to patriarchy. It is suggested that direct invitations to others of different religions, races, classes, ethnicities, and social situations be part of gathering a group of learners who have a wide variety of experiences to share. Taking such an approach is a response to knowing we are part of a universal community, a social and deeply spiritual reality.

Religious Education

Adults interested in spiritual growth will be those most interested in “Center to Center.” Many women and men look to churches to provide such programs as a regular part of religious education. Different from catechesis, which has the intention of forming people in the traditional beliefs and practices of a particular faith, religious education has a broader agenda. Roman Catholic religious educators, Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, put it this way:

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 66.

Religious education has a priestly role in that it preserves the tradition and acts as mediator of a great and holy reality; a prophetic dimension, in that it encourages living fully in the present out of the future, refusing to let false words pass and caring for the stranger, widow and the poor; and a political dimension, which directs religious educators to shape systems of organization and community that will provide forms that are both lifelong and life-wide. . . . The prophetic dimension incorporates a critical consciousness, continually raising questions concerning curricula. These questions may take such forms as “Says who? On what grounds? How do we know this? Who will benefit from doing things this way and who will lose?” It addresses the use of power in our midst.¹⁶⁹

With such parameters for Harris and Moran’s vision of religious education, issues of developmental readiness for such a process must be considered. It is not until adolescence that most students are ready for this level of critical thinking. Additionally, parents may be most concerned for their children’s catechetical formation in the early years.

There must also be an atmosphere of safety and freedom for adults to seriously explore these prophetic questions, which is sometimes difficult in a strongly patriarchal church setting. Those who create religious education programs must keep in mind that there is always a hidden curriculum at work. Limits and boundaries placed upon discussion or controlled only by a theological authority can negate content that includes concepts like “freedom” and “responsible choice.”

The purpose of religious education is to integrate the best of religious tradition with what is emerging in the world of today. In the words of Anthony Padovano, “Religious educators may make their finest contribution to the life of the community when . . . they bring forth things old and new in such a manner that people prefer neither because they are inseparable and because

¹⁶⁹ Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 26, 28.

possessing both alone allows wholeness . . . a response in a world too complicated for single-mindedness.¹⁷⁰

Since education is a lifelong enterprise, presenting necessary boundaries and limits that help first-learners situate themselves within a particular tradition is appropriate in early stages of religious formation. However, as a person intellectually grows and experiences a wider slice of life, Harris suggests that it is also appropriate that:

boundaries and limits be widened outward toward all realizable reality. . . . One partakes in an ever-widening horizon. . . . Religious education is movement toward the stage in life which Fowler speaks of as universalizing, where persons' love for and communion with God seems unself-conscious and fully integrated into a life of activity, responsibility, and generative practical concern for the fulfillment of what Jews and Christians call the Kingdom of God. It must be a movement toward the stage where the community of persons is universal in extent.¹⁷¹

This is the Teilhardian vision, calling all people into God's dream of the future.

Durka and Smith agree with James Fowler that "faith is the fundamental category of existence. It is the condition of our human interaction with all of reality. . . . What we believe is an interpretation of reality that seems to make the most sense of our experience. . . . One accepts the possibility of these interpretations being modified . . . as others seem to make even better sense."¹⁷² One can see, therefore, how Whitehead could claim that all education is really religious education. In other words, what we "know" is actually what we "believe," an evolving interpretation of the whole of reality.

¹⁷⁰ Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, Ed., *Emerging Issues in Religious Education*, "Theological and Ascetical Reflections" Anthony Padovano (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 15.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., "Isms and Religious Education" Maria Harris, 43.

¹⁷² Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, *Modeling God: Religious Education for Tomorrow* (New York, Paulist Press, 1976), 1.

Durka and Smith's contention is that we are always creating intellectual models that help us clarify and illuminate phenomena we experience. "The best we can do is construct less and less inappropriate models."¹⁷³ In dealing with spiritual realities as well as with the mysteries of the cosmos, an attitude of humility is indispensable and fundamental. On the other hand, "in a world where no viewpoint is better than another, all education becomes superfluous. Such a world is irrational. Choice becomes a matter of taste and there is no accounting for taste."¹⁷⁴ Education is about people and processes committed to the creation of more and more adequate models of reality over time.

"Center to Center" aligns with Durka and Smith's preference for "proposing" content and questions for people to consider, which "steers a narrow course between simple presentation and indoctrination in its manipulative sense. Proposing means literally to put forth something."¹⁷⁵ There is always a judgment call on the part of the person who designs any form of education, a judgment about the value of the concepts or model being proposed for consideration. There is a measure of power in being the person who discerns which content is most helpful to consider. Self-emptying prayer best accompanies selection of material as well as the process for which a religious educator opts. In religious education, the criteria for choosing both curricula and process always needs to have a life-encompassing purpose:

A life-defining model is more adequate when it satisfies questions . . . [and] when the model suggests that meaning will accrue to one's entire life as a result of embracing this model. It is a model through which one can address oneself to all the loose ends of one's life, gathering them into a whole that enhances and advances. It must intimate that living out commitment to this model will offer an increasingly . . . satisfactory mode of integrating the apparently disparate aspects of one's life. . . . Such a model is best

¹⁷³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 25.

described as religious. In effect, we are suggesting that education is commitment to more and more adequate religious models.¹⁷⁶

An evolutionary worldview is the most integrative model available in the 21st century. In addition, the spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin accomplishes the task of drawing Christian faith and scientific theory together.

The authors of *Models of God* in their work as religious educators have seen a yearning among many adults for a presentation of Christian faith which both reflects the historical emphases of the Christian tradition and incorporates contemporary experience. In the opinion of Durka and Smith, process theologians who use evolutionary categories as a framework for theological formulations offer the best model of God for today:

The process model of God is societal. . . . In this model, the universe is pictured as a community of beings, rather than as a monarchy. God possesses the greatest conceivable degree of real relatedness to all others and is for that reason the most truly absolute that any mind can conceive. . . . God is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness. . . . God is concerned with the world and is involved in its suffering. . . . The world and human events make a difference to him. The deepest reality of God is revealed, not in his detachment or in his power, but in his love. . . . Neither God nor the world reaches static completion, but both are involved in change, and change involves the emergence of real novelty. . . . God calls us beyond all that we have become to what we might be. . . . Yet God never determines the outcomes of any moment and never violates the self-creation of each being.¹⁷⁷

Within this process framework, “rather than possessing ‘the faith,’ a Christian is engaged in the process of ‘faith-ing’ . . . It is itself a living process . . . not fixed, but dynamic, always moving and developing. . . . Faithing means always to ask further questions: What more can I do? How better can I love? . . . Prayer is aligning our desires with the great cosmic desire of God.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 37.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 60-61.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 73, 75.

The decision to live a life in accordance with God's will has social, political, scientific, technological, and economic ramifications. So, educational content will need to be well-rounded and the process of inquiry lifelong. Therefore, the process used in "Center to Center" is one that is adaptable to many strands of content and can be used repeatedly as adults decide over time on material beneficial for them to explore.

Small Group Contemplative Dialogue with Adults

Since 1978, interest in transformative learning has soared. Since Mezirow's early works on perspective transformation in adults, lifelong learning has received greater attention within the educational community.¹⁷⁹ Since adult learning is usually voluntary and self-directed, with people identifying their own needs, goals, resources and methods of learning, the decision to acquire new knowledge and skills is usually a response to a felt need. Adult learners are looking to answer questions important to them, solve practical problems, increase their work capacities, develop in new directions which interest them, and deepen self-understanding for greater quality of life.

Adults bring a set of rich experiences into the learning environment and the capacity for critical inquiry. They are ripe to forge meaning out of lives extensively lived. Though much of adult learning is independent, casual or directly experiential, "Center to Center" focuses on "adult education as collaborative and participatory. Sitting in circles, working in groups and interacting with others are hallmarks of adult education practice. Educators describe themselves as facilitators rather than teachers and seek to establish a co-learner role with their students."¹⁸⁰ Therefore, the program originator is not there to evaluate whether the learners have appropriated

¹⁷⁹ Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), v.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 4.

the course's ideas. If personal or social transformation is to happen, it will be because those who join the group choose to invest themselves in such a commitment.

In her guide for adult educators, Patricia Cranton explicates Mezirow's ideas, which have roots in the writings of the philosopher Jurgen Habermas, from the fertile progressive era of the early 1900's. Cranton relays that outside of technical and leisure-related learning, emancipatory knowledge is what many adults are seeking: knowledge which leads to "self-knowledge, growth, development and freedom."¹⁸¹ Emancipatory knowledge is gained through a process of critically questioning ourselves and the social systems in which we live. As adults become more critically reflective, they can participate more fully and freely in rational discourse as well as action within the social setting, but with meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative of experience.¹⁸²

Cranton also points out the centrality of reflection on questions in three areas: content, process and value (premises) for thought.

Content questions include: What do I believe about this? What are the social norms about this? What knowledge do I have about this? What are the facts here? What are my assumptions? Process questions include: How did I come to this perception? How have these social norms influenced me and others? How did I obtain this knowledge? How do I know this is true? How do I know my assumptions are valid? How have my values been formed? How has my worldview been shaped? Premises have to do with the question: Why should I believe this? Why is this important? Why do I stay with this world view? Why do I care about this? Why should or shouldn't I revise my perspective?¹⁸³

Engagement with such questions can be unsettling. Therefore, being part of a community with an ambiance of safety and support for exploration is a valued remedy for feeling isolated and lost, especially important during times of developmental transition.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸² Ibid., 14.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 36-37.

The facilitator of a learner-directed process offers materials and a learning design, but “the emphasis is on learner empowerment and the necessity of the educator’s giving up power. For this reason, the facilitator remains open and explicit about all strategies...He or she avoids the position of providing all the answers or making all the decisions...Equal participation and freedom from coercion are central to discourse.”¹⁸⁴ Group members do on-going evaluation to determine how things will proceed.

One of the unique aspects that small community learning allows is the creative emergence of new ideas. When dialogue-partners deeply listen to others, to themselves, and to the Greater Whole, a group will create knowledge for itself. As the group reflects together, it begins to see patterns and relationships that arise by connecting threads of thought. These novel ideas carry a spirit that reflects the group as a whole.

An increasing number of people are researching how alternate futures can be created through contemplative group conversation. The word “contemplative,” in this context, refers to dialogue’s silent listening and tentative words, while each participant attends to all the ideas, feelings, and images being presented. Each offering is received and considered as a valuable part of the process, seen as both arising from and manifesting the whole, a whole which is dynamic and alive, coming into being in every moment, as process philosophy asserts. Always evolving and affected by everything within its matrix, the universe, as well as the small group, continue to unfold with every choice and activity.¹⁸⁵

Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers describe a design for small group dialogue they have created together, which they liken to the movement around a “U.” In order to see the whole

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 108, 123-124.

¹⁸⁵ Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Betty Sue Flowers, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2005), 6, 13.

as well as the creative arrival of thought and reality, these authors say that people need to suspend their assumptions and redirect awareness toward the generative process that lies behind what is normally seen. They do this through mindfulness:

As in meditation, first there is focus or concentration. Then, if you bring a certain kind of open, moment-to-moment, nonjudgmental awareness to what you're attending to, you'll begin to develop a more penetrative awareness that sees beyond the surface of what's going on in your field of awareness. This is mindfulness. Mindfulness makes it possible to see connections that may not have been visible before. The seeing comes out of the stillness.¹⁸⁶

In this process, participants move through what the authors describe as a visual “U” movement. Starting at the left top of the “U”, each group member senses, observes, takes in what is happening in the present moment, within the conversation. The second step, “presencing,” is a movement down the “U,” an inner retreat, to contemplatively reflect and allow inner knowing to emerge. Arriving at the bottom of the “U,” participants are required to drop the baggage of preconceptions, assumptions, and judgments they begin to realize they have been making. They let go of “already knowing” and stay present to the here and now of what comes to mind, heart, body, and spirit. Here they can experience the world as unfolding through themselves in that very moment. Here, there is a connection to Spirit, to the Higher or Deeper Self, the True “I.” As they start moving up the right side of the “U,” the future, something new, begins to emerge.¹⁸⁷ This is how new knowledge comes to birth.

Whether one accepts Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers’ model, which acknowledges the mysterious element of spirit or intuition that takes place in contemplative silence (as I do) or whether one prefers an emphasis on simply developing dialogue skills, it is

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 50.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 88-110.

clear that new knowledge evolves from skillfully bringing minds together. William Isaacs, another expert on the role of dialogue in organizational thinking, describes dialogue as:

a living experience of inquiry within and between people. . . . The most important parts of any conversation are those that neither party could have imagined before starting. . . . Dialogue seeks to harness the collective intelligence. Together we can perceive new directions and new opportunities more clearly than we can on our own . . . [for] dialogue is a conversation with a center, not sides. It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it toward something that has never been created before. . . . It accesses the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people.¹⁸⁸

Isaacs points out that dialogue cultivates maturity. Dysfunction happens in groups when people unreflectively react to one another, rather than considerately respond. A true dialogue process is a means by which we learn to maintain our equilibrium, by suspending our habitual reactions and taking into account experiences and ideas that are different from our own. Those who choose to engage in dialogue are taking responsibility for their thinking in a more conscious way.¹⁸⁹

Isaacs uses the images of “fields” and “containers” to describe the movement and holding of energy during a conversation. In dialogue, he says, dynamic fields of energy arise from both the ideas and the sharp quality of attention created by the group. The bodies, minds, and emotions of those who are connected create a container, a vessel, or setting in which the intensities of listening, suspension, and speaking are held.¹⁹⁰ Within this cauldron, ingredients combine and are transformed. Poured out is new knowledge, the result of collective energies, which have touched personal center to personal center and, as Teilhard might add, have touched into the Center of all.

¹⁸⁸ William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (New York: Currency, 1999), 9, 11.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 242-243.

What happens as one develops in the art of dialogue is much like what happens as one passes through the stages of the spiritual journey, for purgation, illumination, and union are normal human experiences in the process of growth. In both arenas, one learns through practice to let go of self-preoccupation and focus attention beyond surface impressions. One learns to listen to one's authentic center, beneath the monotony of repeated memories and the thrashing of ego-defenses. Examination of resistances and emotional triggers becomes revelatory and freeing. When tempted to judge and reject, we realize with humility we harbor similar qualities, if in shadow. Examining our reactions, we learn to hold the tension of what feels hidden or is still becoming. We learn to loosen our grip on the need to be right more than the rightness of love. And in the give and take of dialogue, we offer the gift of ourselves for the common good while the stranger becomes an angel bearing gifts. In contemplative dialogue, we risk ourselves, find our voice, ponder questions, and relinquish our frightened, rigid hold on reality. We open ourselves to holy surprise.

As group members share, new visions arise, and from these, fresh commitments come. "Something resonates between people who have a similar intent and values. It is as if the universe wants to help."¹⁹¹ And why not? Twentieth-century physics has taught us that relationships are more fundamental than things and that there is an unbroken wholeness in the universe, so much so that events that are separated in space can be shown to have a causal relationship to one another, a phenomenon known in physics as nonlocality.¹⁹²

Developments in science identify three basic characteristics of living systems, which one can see in small groups. Senge recounts the insights of physicist Fritjof Capra: Living systems

¹⁹¹ Senge et.al., 160.

¹⁹² Ibid., 193-194.

create themselves (autopoiesis); they generate new patterns of organizing (self-organize) in ways that could not be predicted from their past (emergence); and they're aware, in the sense of interacting effectively with the environment (cognition.)¹⁹³ Scientists' findings therefore provide plausible support for the possibility and efficacy of contemplative dialogue.

Support for growth through contemplative dialogue can also be found within contemporary spiritual writing. Many forms of group spiritual direction use this technique. Parker Palmer offers one mode of spiritual direction called the Circle of Trust. Palmer introduces his process by quoting monk-activist Thomas Merton: "There is in all things...a hidden wholeness."¹⁹⁴ Palmer, speaking as a Quaker practitioner, says that he can experientially confirm what Merton has said. Quakers speak of each person having an inner teacher, an Inner Light, connected to the Transcendent/Immanent Spirit that connects us all. In contemplative prayer and in contemplative dialogue, Palmer says, "the soul shows up to offer us its guidance."¹⁹⁵ Quakers have always relied on the guidance of an inner teacher as well as the prayerful input of other people in Clearness Committees who together help a person discern the inner teacher's voice.

Parker's "Circle of Trust" is designed to be a space where group members help one another with their own discernments. Group members' roles are to ask gentle, probing questions that help the seeker attend to the Truth within, for it is difficult to reach clarity alone. Parker affirms the role of an intentional community in seeking personal growth: "A strong community

¹⁹³ Ibid., 195-196.

¹⁹⁴ Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 5.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 22.

helps people develop a sense of true self, for only in community can the self exercise and fulfill its nature: giving and taking, listening and speaking, being and doing.”¹⁹⁶

Although Circles of Trust are aimed at illumination of each person’s individual story, Parker also speaks of the social role we all share in the co-creation of reality. He invites us to stay awake to the mutual impact between ourselves and the world: “What are we sending from within ourselves out into the world and what impact is it having out there? What is the world sending back at us, and what impact is it having in here? We are continually engaged in the evolution of self and world – and we have the power to choose moment by moment, between that which gives life and that which deals death.”¹⁹⁷

Palmer’s description of what happens during a Circle of Trust is similar to what happens as one moves through Senge’s transformative “U.” Palmer writes:

How does a larger truth emerge in a circle of trust? Together we create a tapestry, a complex fabric of experience and interpretation, woven from the diverse threads of insight that each of us brings to the circle. Organically, a sense of what seems true arises. Truth evolves within us, between us, and around us as we participate. . . . Truth in a Circle of Trust resides neither in some immutable external authority nor in the momentary convictions of each individual. It resides . . . in the tension of the eternal conversation, where the voice of truth we think we are hearing from within can be checked and balanced by the voices of truth others think they are hearing.¹⁹⁸

Quantum physics, process theology, and contemporary spirituality concur that everything in the cosmos is related and that we are all creating the next moment together. Dialogue which opens us to our depths and into true community may be, not only a means of spiritual growth, researchers say, but:

the best hope for eventual world peace and environmental sustainability. . . . Our purpose [must be] to enhance mutual understanding and improve the quality of human

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 127-128, 182.

relationships. Our belief is that by using dialogue communication principles, humans can capitalize on the richness that lives among individuals' diversity. . . . Dialogic communication could be the operational medium for social transformation in our world today.¹⁹⁹

Margaret Wheatley, a global consultant on organizational behavior and change, challenges us to return to the basics and to learn to do them well.

Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change – personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change. If we can sit together and talk about what's important to us, we begin to come alive. . . . Human beings have always sat in circles and councils to do their best thinking, and to develop strong and trusting relationships. . . . As we slow down the conversation to a pace that encourages thinking, we become wise and courageous actors in our world. . . . Relationships are all there is. Everything in the universe only exists because it is in relationship to everything else. Nothing exists in isolation. We have to stop pretending we are individuals who can go it alone. . . . Meaningful conversation can change the world.²⁰⁰

Teilhard de Chardin envisioned a world beautifully differentiated yet gathered around a single Center whose Heart is Love. This miracle can only happen, I believe, if people do the work of developing their consciousness, building social relationships through honest, humble dialogue, and treading the path toward spiritual maturity. It is my hope that the community of Earth will thrive once its people become at home with a cosmological story in which evolutionary change is not only celebrated but taken on as a responsibility. Discovering that we are one through the revelations of science and the world's spiritual traditions, as well as through dialogue and the gift of grace, is not only how Earth will reach fulfillment, but likely the only way Earth survives.

¹⁹⁹ Doug Ross and Friends, *The Tao of Dialogue: A Manual for Dialogic Communication* (Createspace.com, 1998), 17.

²⁰⁰ Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2002), Kindle Loc. 60, 213, 1135.

Chapter 6

“Center to Center” - A Small Group Resource for Spiritual Growth

Introduction

Goal of “Center to Center”

The overall goal of “Center to Center” is growth in consciousness, which includes personal awareness of oneself (one’s own center), other beings, human and nonhuman, the cosmos, and the spiritual dimension of life (a shared divine Center.) In particular, this resource’s goal will be accomplished as the participants gain:

- Familiarity with the core spiritual themes and evolutionary principles of Teilhard de Chardin, which integrate science and faith
- Practice in contemplative dialogue skills within a small group
- Practice of spiritual practices which enhance spiritual consciousness and growth, many from the Ignatian tradition, in which Teilhard de Chardin was immersed
- Practice in taking shared responsibility for one another’s growth in consciousness through engagement with a small community of co-seekers

Participation

Participants who will benefit from this program:

1. Spiritual seekers interested in integrating ideas from evolutionary science and faith
2. Persons who want to experience evolutionary principles applied to spiritual growth within a group setting
3. Persons who want to explore evolving theological ideas and language
4. Christians or non-Christians open to learning from Teilhard de Chardin and one another for the purposes of personal growth

5. People concerned for growth in unity and consciousness on our planet

Ideally, there should be 4 to 6 people in a dialogue group, so that there is breadth of sharing but also adequate time for every person to express themselves within a 2-hour period. If larger numbers of people are interested, it is best to break the large group down into smaller circles for the dialogue sections. Using different rooms for break-outs helps preserve a contemplative atmosphere.

Although there can be one facilitator for the whole process, the program is also designed for participants of the group to take co-responsibility for the facilitation of the group. Simple guidelines for facilitation are provided. The facilitator is not meant to be an expert. The facilitator's role is to keep the group process on task and moving forward, while maintaining a contemplative stance.

The group may decide to rotate the facilitation role after having a module modeled first by an experienced facilitator. That being said, everyone has shared responsibility for ensuring that the provided Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue are practiced during group sessions.

Time

Participants meet prior to the beginning of the program for a planning meeting and orientation. Allow one hour to cover the material found in the Introduction. Each subsequent session of the program is designed to last 2 hours.

Scheduling of the process is up to the group. If the group is small, dates can be selected that fit everyone's schedules.

It is recommended that the modules be done in order. Sessions could be done weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. A break could be taken after completion of a module. A full-day schedule could allow for a session in the morning, lunch together and a session in the afternoon.

Materials Needed

- “Center to Center” Resource Booklet or session handout for each participant
- For physically gathered groups, a circle of chairs, one for each participant; movement of chairs or additional chairs for small groups, if there is more than one dialogue group
- A surface for writing (either tables off to the side or clipboards etc.)
- Paper and pens; participants may want to bring their own journals for reflective writing
- Timer or watch for use by the large and small group facilitators during the session
- Tall candle for center of room, if program is done in person, and candle for each participant. Preferably, each person will provide one of their own.
- Matches (unless battery-powered candles are used)
- If in person, a small table is to be placed in the center of a circle of chairs, to hold candles; a cloth to cover the table is an option; if no small table is available, the circle of candles can be placed on the floor at the center of the circle of chairs.
- Refreshments are at the discretion of groups that gather in person; time might be added before or after the session to share refreshments and conversation; alternately, rest room visits, stretches, and gathering of refreshment could happen during the silent reflection time.

Orientation Session

1. Introduce oneself and why one is drawn to this program.
2. Go through the Introduction of “Center to Center” together, covering the goals, description of participation, time required, scheduling desired by the group, materials needed, option for refreshments, overview of content and principles, guidelines for dialogue (this section will be reviewed during individual sessions in more detail), and

procedure for rotating facilitation of the group. Decide on location and how materials will be provided. If on Zoom, decide who will send the Zoom invitation and assure that all know how to mute, use chat etc.

3. Decide whether one is able to commit to the program for the number of sessions the group wants to initially take on, for example the four sessions of Module One. Since this is a community learning process and the group depends on regular participation, what allowances is the group comfortable making for absences, i.e. sickness and emergencies only? If the group decides that they will welcome newcomers to the group, it is recommended that someone from the group orient the newcomer to the process, guidelines, and content that were missed, prior to the new person's attendance.

Session Content

Series One: Spiritual Themes in the Writing of Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Module One:

1. Seeing with New Eyes: The Experience of Wonder
2. Everything is Becoming
3. The Power of Attraction
4. The Evolutionary Force of Love

Module Two:

5. Growing Consciousness
6. Greater Consciousness Together
7. The Call to Community: Beyond Individualism
8. Community as Personalizing

Series Two: Individual Transformative Practices

Module Three:

9. Self-knowledge and Self-development
10. Contemplation and Prayer I
11. Contemplation and Prayer II
12. The Evolution of Holiness/Wholeness
13. The Path to Discernment

Module Four:

14. Dying to Self: Embracing Action's Sacrifice
15. Dying to Self: Undergoing Suffering
16. Through Death to New Life: The Omega Point

Evolutionary Principles Used in "Center to Center"

- The universe (and each participant) is in constant process of evolution or becoming.
- The universe (and each participant) is developing in the direction of greater complexity and greater consciousness.
- Humans can choose to become more conscious through taking in the complexity of the world which includes both scientific and religious insights.
- Humans can choose to become more conscious by opening to the insights of others.
- Groups of people, converged and centered around a common goal or vision, can form a new living organism (a community).
- Growth in human society will depend on growth in collective consciousness or spirituality.

- Becoming integrally and intentionally related to a community involves a process of “dying to self,” the gradual setting aside of an individualistic worldview for one that sees and values the whole. This whole includes all people and the well-being of Earth itself.
- As human beings become more aware of their own inner dynamics, they become freer to choose how they live.
- As human beings see themselves as part of a whole, they can realize their responsibility to care for the whole and to advance it evolutionarily.
- As people become united to one another, freely and with love, they can develop more of their individual potential. They can become the unique person they have the capacity to be, which ultimately benefits the whole.

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue in Small Groups

Why guidelines? Teilhard de Chardin believed that learning to come together as one mind and heart was the future of human evolution. This does not mean that all agree, but that all respectfully bring to the circle the unique gift of perspective each has to offer. Learning to fruitfully dialogue as part of a group in which all the members are seeking greater consciousness and spiritual growth is just as important as the content that the group is exploring. Together, through dialogue, greater understanding of reality is gained and the forward movement toward unity accelerated.

Individual sections of the Guidelines will be re-introduced one by one during the session for more focused discussion and practice.

Basic Guidelines for Speaking

1. When speaking, speak from your own experience; Use “I” language, rather than statements using words like “You” or “They” or “We.” (For example, say: “I don’t

usually think of science and religion as related in any way.” Instead of: “People don’t usually think of science and religion as related.” Or: “We really should put science and religion together.”)

2. When speaking, be authentic and open about your experience. Dialogue is not about teaching others or giving advice, but sharing one’s mind and heart to be understood by others.
3. When speaking, monitor yourself, so that you neither dominate or disappear in the dialogue.
4. When speaking, choose words that are sensitive and caring of one another. (Example: “I know it’s hard to understand if you haven’t been through what I’ve been through.” Rather than “You people don’t get it.”)

Basic Guidelines for Listening

5. When listening, temporarily suspend your own judgments and opinions so you can focus only on understanding what the other means.
6. When listening, simply try to understand what the person is saying from their point of view, without inner commentary. Put yourself in their shoes.
7. When listening, be aware of both a person’s verbal and non-verbal communication, in trying to understand. Body positions and facial expressions are revelatory, too.
8. When listening, never interrupt. This honors the speaker.
9. When listening, give eye contact to the speaker.
10. When listening to the dialogue, see if something rises up in you that builds or elaborates upon the thoughts of others.

Basic Guidelines for Pace of Dialogue

11. In the silences, take time to ponder what is arising in you; also, listen for a thread that may be developing in the group.
12. Before you share with the group, test within yourself whether what you are about to say will build on and enrich the dialogue. Wait for an opening. Don't be surprised if someone else speaks what you have in mind while the group is on the same wavelength.
13. When you have something to say, pause to let the last person's statement have time to sink in before you speak. Silence between speakers is vital for processing.
14. Anyone in the circle can call for silence or politely suggest that the group pay attention to a certain Guide to Dialogue when the process falters in some way.

Basic Guidelines for Staying Connected to the Circle's Center (Shared Spirit)

15. When listening, be mindful that God's Spirit dwells uniquely within each person. Seeing that is a gift.
16. As you both listen and speak, be mindful that we are all one Body, connected in God.
17. Be aware of that connective energy. Be aware of the energy flowing within the group. Stay in touch with being center to center with other members and center to Center with Spirit.

Basic Guidelines for Paying Attention to What is Happening Within

18. Take note of resistances within you as you listen. They are worth exploring. Is some assumption you hold being challenged?
19. Be aware of expectations or judgments you might have of others in the group that color how you may hear them. Listen from a clear, open space.

20. Notice fears, defenses, and prejudices that rise up in you as you listen. They can be a gift if you learn from them about yourself.

Further Guidelines for Speaking

21. When speaking, remember that being loving is more important than being right. We are all exploring for the truth.
22. When it feels important to better understand what someone in the group has said, ask clarifying questions such as, “I’m trying to understand. Can you say more about that? Could you say that another way?” or rephrase what you heard someone say, then ask, “Did I understand you correctly?”
23. Query whether someone who has not spoken much would like a chance to add something.
24. Know that honestly giving feedback in the evaluation of the dialogue process each session is a contribution to the health of the group, even though this growth might feel painful.

Further Guidelines for Facilitation

25. If you feel there is a new Guideline needed or a revision to a current one, bring this up during the Dialogue processing time for discussion by the group.
26. Stay on track with the current task of the group. If conversation wanders, the facilitator or anyone else may inquire if the group needs to regain focus on the task at hand. Unless the entire group decides to shift away from the task at hand, the group refocuses.
27. When you are the group facilitator, your role is to help the dialogue along, not provide answers. Always look to the wisdom of the group.

28. A group's work is two-fold: relating lovingly to one another and accomplishing a task together.

Guidelines for Handling Difficult Situations

- 29.** If someone disagrees with you and you feel criticized, consider how criticisms in your past history may be conditioning your response. If it feels important to respond, decide whether it feels right to do it now or after the session. Paraphrase what the speaker said and ask for more information. Agree with the speaker regarding whatever truth was spoken. If you were not understood accurately by the other person, clarify your position. If charged words were used, say, "I felt _____ when the word _____ was used. Instead, I need _____. Acknowledge that each of you has the right to see things differently. Aim at mutual understanding.
30. Should hard feelings arise between group members, without harsh language, blaming or name-calling, those involved will alternately share the following, without interrupting one another: their experience of "what happened" and how they feel when it happens. The listener repeats back her or his own understanding of what she or he heard the other say about what happened and the feelings evoked, for accuracy. Using "I" language, more information may be offered by those involved, if it will add to shared understanding. Then, each person asks for what they would like to happen in the future. Several acceptable alternatives may be discussed and then decided upon.

Facilitator's Guide for Use in Each Session

Although one person may facilitate throughout, this program is written so that everyone may share in the facilitation. Sharing responsibility for nurturing one another's relationships and growing consciousness is one of the explicit goals of Center to Center. Facilitation can be rotated week to week and takes no special preparation.

The large group facilitator initiates steps 1 through 5 below. Small group facilitators (if there is more than one small group) direct steps 6-8. The large group facilitator completes the session with steps 9 and 10. A timer or watch will be needed by both large and small group facilitators.

Prior to the session beginning, allow about 1 minute for each person to inform the group of anything important that happened for them since the last time the group met. It may be either an event or an inner experience of importance. (5 min.) If the group is large, this formal check-in may be dispensed with.

1. Opening Prayer

- a. Say: **We begin together by closing our eyes and taking 1 minute of silence to be aware of breathing in and out, letting any distractions that appear gently be released.**
- b. After a minute, say: **Now image a light at the center of your body; focus on this center, the quietest, deepest part of yourself. (Pause) Now imagine that light spreading throughout your entire body.**
- c. After a minute, say: **Now image that light spreading beyond yourself and enveloping all of us. Feel yourself connected to one another, center to center.**

- d. After a minute, say: **Opening your eyes, still aware of how each and all of us remain connected, be aware of how we are also connected in God, the divine loving Center in our midst.**
 - e. After a minute, say: **Amen. Let's go now to the content section of our session.**
2. Reading the Session Content

(The content should be available to participants a couple of days ahead of time. Pre-reading the content is often helpful to people new to Teilhard's ideas.)

The facilitator is the first person to read a paragraph in the content section. If gathered in person, invite the person to the facilitator's right in the circle to read a paragraph and go around, taking turns reading paragraphs. In a small Zoom meeting, people take turns alphabetically by first name. In a large Zoom meeting, readers' order can be listed in the Chat box. People may pass if they do not want to read. (5 min.)

3. Questions to Clarify Facts and Terms

Ask if anyone needs further clarity on what statements mean in the content session. The facilitator is not meant to be the expert. Let the group respond with their ideas. For example: "I don't know what is being referred to by the Burning Bush story that Moses encountered. Does anyone else know?" "What does 'metamorphosing' mean?" (5 min.)

4. Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

Read all the questions aloud. Then, invite people to begin reflection and journaling about the question they find most interesting and move on to the others, if there is time. Remind participants that they can continue to think about the questions

between sessions at home. Give the group 10 minutes of silence to reflect, then call them back.

5. Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue (5 min.)

- a. Invite the group to turn to the Guidelines for Dialogue. *Read aloud only the section indicated* for this session.
- b. Ask the group to discuss: Why do you think these particular guidelines are important to our dialogue? People respond casually to one another with their ideas.
- c. In the final minute, have the group re-read to themselves silently only the guidelines that have been presented in prior sessions. Ask people to bring to mind a particular guideline they intend to work on for themselves during this session. It can be a guideline from today's new list or from prior sessions. There is no need to share this intention with the group at this time.
- d. Series Two only: Participants will read all of the Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue to themselves, rather than doing the steps above, and choose one guideline on which to focus their practice during the session.

6. Contemplative Dialogue (50 min. to accomplish parts a, b, and c)

Move into small dialogue groups, if the total group is larger than 6 people. Small group leaders will be designated to facilitate steps 6, 7, and 8 of the process. Small group leaders will keep time as well as read aloud the words in boldface. Once the group is fully familiar with the process, they may decide to co-facilitate this section and directions given may not need to be so formalized.

- a. Opening Ritual: (In person only) Set an unlit candle in front of each participant. If you are meeting in person, there is a lighted candle in the center of the circle, representing the Divine Center to which each of us is connected. The facilitator begins by lighting the center candle and then, going around the circle, one by one, people light their individual candles, repeating the phrase designated for the session. Follow the candle-lighting with one minute of silence. Ask participants to bring to awareness their unity with one another and God, our common Center. At the end of the minute, the facilitator says, “**Amen.**”

In Zoom meetings, the candle ritual is ineffective. Simply begin with one minute of silence. Ask participants to bring to awareness their unity with one another and God, our common Center. At the end of the minute, the facilitator says, “**Amen.**”

- b. First Go-Around: Say: **Let us begin. Starting to my right in the circle (or in alphabetical order by first name, if in Zoom), we will each share our response to the questions we spent time with during the reflection time. Those who wish to pass, may add their contribution at the end of the Go Around, if they choose. Each person may speak for up to 3 minutes. I will raise my hand when there are 15 seconds left.**

As we dialogue today, we remember that, in between speakers, we want to leave enough silence to absorb what others have said. We want to notice what rises up in us as we listen. The question is: What moved each of us most in the reading and reflection today?

- c. Free-Flowing Dialogue: Say: **Anyone may begin now in this free-flowing part of the dialogue. Each of us may speak more than once, but we want to take care to neither dominate nor disappear. We will keep a contemplative pace, with pauses between speakers. And we will keep noticing what happens within us as the sharing continues. We will pay attention to whether there is a general theme or flow emerging for the group to hear. The question is: What did you hear in others' sharing that touched you and moves you to add something to today's dialogue?** (Facilitator should end this section when there are 20 minutes left in the small group's time.)
7. What New is Emerging? (15 min.)
- Say: **Considering what we shared today, we will now ponder these questions:**
- **What experience, awareness or idea has been new to you, what has become clearer, expanded, or something more to think about?**
 - **Did you experience any awareness of or shift in your underlying assumptions?**
 - **Where during this dialogue did you feel an invitation, desire, or challenge for your life?**
 - **Did you hear a common theme or direction emerging in the dialogue today?**
- Let's now take 1 minute to reflect silently. Then we will go around to share responses around the circle (or in alphabetical order, if in Zoom), allowing each person about one minute. After that, we will move directly into free-flowing dialogue.**
8. How Was Our Dialogue Process Today? (5 min.)

Say: Take a moment to ponder the following questions. Respond to any one of the questions as you are ready, no particular order.

- **What went well or was helpful in our dialogue process today?**
- **What can we improve as a group?**
- **How did the specific dialogue skill you chose to work on help you today?**

9. Large Group Closing Thoughts (10 min.)

Each person states a new insight, question, feeling or challenge to which this session brought them.

10. Closing Prayer for the Large Group (1 min.)

- a. Large group leader invites the entire group to regather and take one last minute of silence, eyes open or closed, and feel the energy connecting them to one another and to the divine Center.
- b. If the group is gathered in person, invite the group to read aloud together the closing prayer. If the group is on Zoom, the large group Facilitator reads the prayer for the group.

If applicable for the group, choose a Facilitator (for large and/or small groups) for next time. This person may want to review the guidelines for facilitation ahead of time and if the group gathers in person, come to the next session at least 5 minutes early to set up for the Opening Ritual.

During the first module, reassure participants that there is a learning curve in becoming comfortable with the 10 steps. Also, inform them that the steps need not be followed rigidly, but neither should facilitators wander too far away from the timing or the script.

Specific Content for Individual Sessions

Series One, Session One: Seeing with New Eyes: The Experience of Wonder

In France of 1881, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born to parents who introduced him to his two great loves. Teilhard's father, an amateur naturalist, often took the child with him to collect rocks, insects and plants, introducing Teilhard to the wonders of the natural world. Teilhard's mother was a devoted Christian, with a special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a symbol of radiating divine love. She nurtured young Teilhard's faith, which included sending him to a Jesuit school. Describing his childhood, Teilhard recalled that the world gradually "caught fire" for him, "becoming luminous, lit from within," as he saw God's own Heart at the heart of matter. He likened this "Diaphany [or sacred shining] of the Divine at the heart of a glowing universe" to the Burning Bush that Moses encountered in the desert, "the Divine radiating from the depths of a blazing Matter."²⁰¹

To Teilhard's eyes, God was at the depth of all creation. He could feel God enveloping him in the world as a whole. He describes his own experience as glimpsing something behind "a song, a sunbeam, a glance"²⁰² - a presence existing everywhere; The person who has learned "to see" perceives that he or she is immersed in a universal Milieu, higher than sensibly-apprehended life.

Teilhard felt an affinity with the sky, the sea, and the Earth, a solidarity with every creature, for at the center of every being was a spark of God, joining all things together at their deepest point. In fact, parallel to Einstein's theory that matter and energy interchange, Teilhard saw matter and spirit (the higher state) as two aspects of one and the same cosmic stuff. Over

²⁰¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 16.

²⁰² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in Time of War* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1968), 117.

time, Teilhard saw matter metamorphosing, becoming increasingly expressed as Spirit or consciousness. He wrote, “Through the centuries, a general plan appears truly to be in course of realization around us. Something is afoot in the universe; a result is working out which can best be compared to a gestation and birth: the birth of a spiritual reality.”²⁰³

For Teilhard, there was no need to distinguish between natural and supernatural happenings in daily life. The entire cosmos exists in God, though God is even greater than the cosmos. Grace, or active divine presence, impregnates nature with possibility at every turn, through both the predictability and the chance within nature. God is incarnate in our world, enlarging our natural capacities. “Grace is the unique sap passing from a single trunk into the branches; blood flowing into the veins from the pumping of a single heart.”²⁰⁴

Coming to consciousness of our connectedness to the world around us and awakening to the wonder of God in all creation is the first step in Teilhard’s spirituality. Being aware of the dynamic nature of the universe and feeling oneself a part of that adventure is a basic spiritual practice. Beholding in awe the mysterious vastness of space and time and knowing ourselves bathed in God’s pervasive presence is mindfulness in its most religious sense.

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. *Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. *Recall moments when you have experienced wonder and awe at creation and sensed depth, mystery or divinity within some natural setting or situation (which, for Teilhard, includes the human.)*

²⁰³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 49.

²⁰⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 304.

- c. *How have science and religion/faith played a part in your sense of what is true, meaningful, beautiful or holy?*
- d. *What is your perception or understanding of (1) the transcendence of God: God's hiddenness, mystery, or beyond-ness (2) the immanence of God: God's deep working presence within and around all that exists?*

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue

Before the sharing begins, read aloud only "Basic Guidelines for Speaking."

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: We carry within us the wonders of the universe.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

"All around us, to right and left, in front and behind, above and below, we have only had to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances in order to see the divine welling up and showing through. . . . It has sprung up so universally, and we find ourselves so surrounded and transfixed by it, that there is no room left to fall down and adore it, even within ourselves. By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us and molds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers. . . . As Jacob said, awakening from his dream, the world . . . is in truth a holy place, and we did not know it. Venite, adoremus!"²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 112.

Series One, Session Two: Everything is Becoming

In each one of us, the whole history of the world is in part reflected. We each sum up the world in a different way. We have inherited our unique genetics, our particular family, our society, and our environment, which all likewise directly emerged from what preceded them. Some of what we have received is healthy and wholesome and some has the capacity to poison our souls. So, part of the spiritual journey is seeing or becoming aware of the myriad influences that affect our being, so that we can more freely act on what life presents us through our choices.

“Matter is infinitely shifting and varied. . . . On the one hand matter is the burden, the fetters, the pain of sin and the threat to our lives. It weighs us down, suffers, wounds, tempts and grows old. . . . But at the same time matter is physical exuberance, ennobling contact, virile effort and the joy of growth. It attracts, renews, unites and flowers. By matter, we are nourished, lifted up, linked to everything else, invaded by life. . . . Matter is simply the slope on which we can go up just as well as go down. . . . The task assigned to us is to climb towards the light.”²⁰⁶

Teilhard was attuned to the deep current of evolution moving within the universe. The God who was Above was also experienced by him as the God who was up Ahead, luring the cosmos toward its fulfillment. God was not only at the birth of the universe, but *with* the growth of each part of it and at the end of all things.

Teilhard, through eyes of a scientist, could see the universe “becoming” as he examined the many stages of development the earth had passed through over billions of years. Seeing this maturing pattern, Teilhard extrapolated, using the Law of Recurrence (which says that events that generally occur are likely to occur in the future) that there were still countless possibilities ahead for further development even now. The universe is open.

²⁰⁶ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 106-107.

“We may perhaps imagine that the creation was finished long ago. But that would be quite wrong. It continues still more magnificently, and at the highest levels of the world. And we serve to complete it, even by the humblest work of our hands.”²⁰⁷

In Teilhard’s Christian vision, the cosmos is heading toward total fulfillment because of the power of the Incarnate Word of God penetrating all of matter. God was in matter at creation’s very beginning, but God revealed God’s Self definitively in the person of Jesus, when evolution’s time was right. Teilhard believed that Jesus Christ is the fullness of what the cosmos can become; in Christ, we see the potential full flowering of humanity reflecting its Loving Source.

Jesus’ earthly lifetime was not the end of the story of Incarnation. Christ’s full becoming continues within us, as, like Jesus, we live the Way of Love, by the grace of God. As Teilhard saw it, “Christ has not yet completed his own forming. He has not yet gathered into himself the last folds of the Garment of flesh and love which his disciples are making for him. The mystical Christ has not yet attained his full growth. Christ is the Fulfillment even of the natural evolution of beings.”²⁰⁸

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. *Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. *What things of the past have had the most influence on your becoming the person you are? Consider genetic, familial, societal and environmental factors, both positive and negative.*

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 61-62.

²⁰⁸ Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 305.

- c. *How has increased awareness of how these influences have and are affecting you led to greater freedom of choice on your part?*
- d. *What is your perception or understanding of God who is Ahead, the One who invites us to the More of the future? Where have you sensed God's energy pulling or inviting you at different points in your life?*
- e. *Teilhard assumed, in his day, that human life was progressing. He saw it in humanity's "passion for nature . . . liberty and fraternity . . . a keen intuition of the universal process of becoming . . . a tendency to make progressively more allowance for the freedom of the individual . . . the ideas of democracy and association making their way into the consciousness of the humblest worker . . . the search for a greater measure of justice . . . nationalities seeking to emerge [out of colonialism] . . . feminism has asserted itself. . . . It is, indeed, mysterious Divinity that . . . stirs up . . . Evolution."²⁰⁹ Do you assume that the world is progressing, becoming worse, or is always going to stay the same? Trace back why you think this way.*
- f. *How would you imaginatively describe the earth fulfilled or Christ coming to full growth?*

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue

Before the sharing begins, read aloud Basic Guidelines for Listening.

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: All creation is in process of becoming.

²⁰⁹ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 77-78.

“O God...it is you who are at the origin of the impulse, and at the end of that continuing pull which all my life long I can do no other than follow. . . . It is you yourself . . . who makes me participate in your being, you who molds me. . . . O God, whose call precedes the very first of our movements, grant me the desire to desire being – that, by means of that divine thirst which is your gift, access to the great waters may open wide within me. . . . Grant that, after having desired, I may believe, and believe ardently and above all things, in your active presence. . . . I shall work together with your action. . . . I shall respond by taking great care never to stifle nor distort nor waste my power to love and to do.”²¹⁰

Series One, Session Three: The Power of Attraction

Although in reality, we are interconnected, inseparable from the cosmos, one another and God, we often *feel* isolated and alone. We do not see or feel the oneness when our egos are locked in either ignorance or fear. We prefer to disengage from strangers, not knowing what threat they pose. We resist the wearying business of interaction when we get depressed or are fatigued by life. The law of inertia takes hold when we lack motivation and zest for life.

But though there are forces of repulsion, forces of attraction are a continual counter-balance. We discover others with whom we share affinities, and encounter people who ignite our passions and desire. We are drawn, center to center, together.

The phenomenon of mutual attraction is built into the universe. Hydrogen atoms attracted to oxygen create an entirely new being – water. Attraction instincts invite sexual partnerships which not only pass on life to others, but allow unique new forms of being to evolve through

²¹⁰ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 78-79.

genetic chance. Human beings bond together seeking fulfillment of myriad desires, forming families, friendships, and civilizations. All of creation is perpetually drawn into deeper relationship, through a universal force of attraction. “What name shall we give to the physical-moral energy . . . to which all activities in the universe can be reduced? Love. The physical structure of the universe is love.”²¹¹

“Love is the attraction which is exercised upon each element of the universe. It is the call toward greater union, the only real business in nature. . . . Love is primitive, universal psychic energy . . . the very blood stream of spiritual evolution.”²¹²

“Driven by the forces of love, the fragments of the world seek each other, so that the world may come to being. This is no metaphor and it is much more than poetry. . . . Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves.”²¹³

Love is not about losing oneself in the other. We become more ourselves by the giving of ourselves. “Love is the only synthesizing energy whose action can more deeply personalize us and differentiate us.”²¹⁴

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. *Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. *What attracts you to someone? For what qualities have people been attracted to you?*

²¹¹ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 72.

²¹² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Building the Earth* (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 64-65.

²¹³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 264-265).

²¹⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Activation of Energy* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 47.

- c. *What causes or involvements attract you?*
- d. *Recall how a particular relationship of love has fulfilled or developed you as a person. Also, consider the health of any attraction you have had in which you felt lost, lessened or belittled as a person.*
- e. *How has your loving someone or something contributed toward its greater flourishing?*

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue

Before the sharing begins, read aloud Basic Guidelines for Pace of Dialogue.

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: Something in us yearns for union.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

“God...I would proclaim from the house-tops and in all places where people meet together: that You do more than simply stand apart from things as their Master; You are more than the incommunicable splendor of the universe; You are the dominating influence that penetrates us, holds us, and draws us, through the inmost core of our most imperative and deep-rooted desires.”²¹⁵

Series One, Session Four: The Evolutionary Force of Love

Love is the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces. . . . The moralists have tried to submit it to rules. . . . In science, business, and public affairs, men pretend not to know it. . . . Huge, everywhere, and always unsubdued – this wild force seems to have defeated all hopes of understanding and governing it. . . . We are conscious of it, but all we ask of it is to amuse us, or not to harm us. Is it truly

²¹⁵ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 51.

possible for humanity to continue to live and grow without asking itself how much truth and energy it is losing by neglecting its incredible power of love?²¹⁶

Recently, in Western history, morality has focused primarily on the individual, emphasizing how one person should not harm another. But Teilhard asks us to think more expansively - to direct our love towards creatively shaping the community in ways that contribute to fullness of life for everyone. Since love is the energy that pulls all things toward unity, love in human society must be aroused and ordered to the purpose of greater union, not through coercion but through love. Evolutionarily, our understanding and practice of love has a long way to grow.

But we have also come a long way. Many people have been and still are attracted by the loving life that was lived by Jesus. They see in Jesus everything humans have the possibility to be. Longing for and pulled toward a life in union with God and shaped by love, saints of all times and places have lived the Christ-life in ways that touch and deeply attract others – in slums, hospitals, schools and kitchens. God loves through human eyes, smiles, and hands, with the goal of creating a Spirit-filled Body on Earth.

“God is at work within life. He helps it, raises it up, gives it the impulse that drives it along, the appetite that attracts it, the growth that transforms it.”²¹⁷ This happens whether we are aware of it or not. But when aware of a deeper Wellspring of Love, “Through grace, we become more than kin or [sisters and] brothers; we become identified with one and the same Reality – Christ. Assimilated in him, lovingly submitting our autonomy to his, his Body is built up, is realized in each one of us.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 32-33.

²¹⁷ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 61.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

Teilhard challenges us to see Love as the greatest power for evolution. “Christian love is more than making good the harm done by selfishness and easing the injuries afflicted by human malice. It is more than applying a soothing lotion. It brings souls together in love, so that a higher nature may be born from their union.”²¹⁹

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. Teilhard speaks of love as a universal, incredible, mysterious, unsubdued, even wild force within the cosmos. What evidence do you see of this in your own life or in the world?*
- c. If love were to be established as the norm of society and union across the globe was to be its goal, what rules would you suggest to flesh this out? Realistically, what would be our next steps, evolutionarily?*
- d. Jesus spoke of love as the new commandment. But he also said, “Love one another as I have loved you.” When you look at Jesus, what does his life teach you about love?*
- e. In what ways do you see your own loving as part of the world’s evolution?*

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue

Before the sharing begins, read aloud Basic Guidelines for Staying Connected to the Circle’s Center (Shared Spirit).

²¹⁹ Ibid., 109.

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: We abide in God when we love.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

“You said to me, I am at hand. I am at hand, at the common heart of your own being and of all things, to welcome even the wildest of your longings and to assure you that not one single fragment of what is useful in them will be lost. . . . Do you yourself know from whom came the idea that excites you and which you cherish as though it were your own? I am ready to save, for those who are to come, the treasure that would otherwise be lost, but which the future will inherit. For it is I who am the true bond that holds the world together.”²²⁰

Series One, Session Five: Growing Consciousness

Teilhard de Chardin became a Jesuit priest, as well as a geologist and paleontologist. Blending science and religion added much complexity to Teilhard’s life. It led to rich and unique spiritual insights but also to a lot of pain, as the Church of his day lagged in their acceptance of his revolutionizing work. Being open to complexity often means moving beyond what was previously “known” or accepted, and allowing new information to influence our understanding.

In his spiritual writings, we see Teilhard’s two vocations, both of which he treasured, seamlessly joined. As a research scientist studying rocks that formed over eons and analyzing skeletons of primates and early humans, Teilhard became convinced that evolution had a discernable direction. Individual elements were growing toward greater complexity as increasingly they joined together. Atoms converged into molecules, molecules eventually into

²²⁰ Ibid., 141-142.

living cells, and living beings became ever more conscious. In fact, Teilhard asserted, the universe's increasing complexity had directly led to a leap of reflective consciousness in humankind, meaning the universe had become conscious of itself. Teilhard believed that one day each center of human consciousness would converge with others until there was a single vision, a shared love for the whole of creation, and a new global level of being. Matter would keep evolving into shared spirit, up to the threshold of cosmic death.

Consciousness did not begin with humankind. "At every degree of size and complexity, cosmic particles have a small 'within,' an infinitesimal psychic center of the universe. In other words, consciousness is a universal molecular property."²²¹ Although in more primitive stages of matter's development, consciousness is directed primarily toward survival, it leans in the direction of convergence with other entities to form more complex structures. But "more complexity alone is not enough. There must be a center of convergence that structures how the complexity functions. It needs to be internally centered for the complexity to give rise to greater freedom and consciousness. . . . Without a center there is either a dispersion or an agglomeration . . . but with a center, there can be a more complex vitalization in the gathered elements."²²² At critical points of sufficient complexity and centration, new properties emerge and consciousness is increased in the newly-born element.

Teilhard named this process the Law of Complexity-Consciousness. It was evident in the direction of evolution and therefore, logical to assume it would continue beyond the state of human consciousness today. Teilhard described this ongoing progress as the spiritualization of the universe, matter becoming more and more conscious, until it reaches its maximum

²²¹ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 101.

²²² *Ibid.*, 30-31.

complexity. “Omega is the maximum complexity, cosmic in extent, coinciding with a maximum cosmic centrality.”²²³ As a Christian, Teilhard saw this cosmic center and end-point as Christ, come to full maturity through the unification of human minds and hearts in love, one body joined by a single Center.

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. Consider how as you matured and experienced more of life, there was increased complexity in the way you saw yourself, others, the world, and God. How did this complexity give birth in you to new consciousness in these areas?*
- c. How has increasing complexity and consciousness both added richness to your life and caused anxiety or pain?*
- d. Has greater consciousness resulted in greater freedom for you?*

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue

Before the sharing begins, read aloud Guidelines to Paying Attention to What is Happening Within.

Contemplative Dialogue

Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: We are the universe become conscious of itself.

²²³ Ibid., 111.

“O God, lay hold of me fully, both by the Within and the Without of myself. Grant that I may never break this double thread of my life.”²²⁴

Series One, Session Six: Greater Consciousness Together

Teilhard believed that Earth’s immediate and urgent task was to psychically concentrate the energies of Earth upon itself. “It is a matter of bringing together a large enough number of minds that are open and in tune with the cosmic order. This takes inquiry and dialogue . . . specifically connected to the gradual awakening in us of the consciousness of the universe.”²²⁵

This coming together, however, must be done freely, by individuals drawn by a common vision and a chosen commitment to universal love. People united by fear or coerced by power, as in the history of Communism and Nazism in the early 20th century, tend to form a controlled, mechanistic society instead, without a deep personal center to hold them together.²²⁶ Teilhard lived through the human destructiveness of both of these political uprisings, and so he was clear and adamant: “Our consciousness must change – to see that ‘love one another’ is the *only* imaginable precept for the future earth’s equilibrium.”²²⁷

Even more than in Teilhard’s time, today’s world is drawing together globally through innovations in transportation and communication. These creative advances increase humanity’s capacity to immediately connect with and influence one another. Computer technology also has a

²²⁴ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 80.

²²⁵ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 293-294.

²²⁶ Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 74-75.

²²⁷ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 20.

centralizing function, acting like a super-brain, freeing human minds for creativity, rather than tedious calculations and the need to hold facts in memory.²²⁸ “No one can deny that a network (a world network) of economic and psychic affiliations is being woven at ever increasing speed which envelops and constantly penetrates more deeply within each of us. With every day that passes it becomes a little more impossible for us to act or think otherwise than collectively.”²²⁹

Though it presents a challenge to ego for humans to learn to think together, it is the way evolution will continue. If the spirit of the earth is meant to eventually coalesce by living in communion with others, each of us must develop our consciousness in concert with others. This not only benefits the world, but every person. For the individual cannot fulfill him or herself. “It is only when opposed to other men that he can discover his own depth and wholeness.”²³⁰

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. *Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. *If you have ever felt part of a group that is cohesively united, what is it that held you together? If you have been part of a group that felt fragmented or fell apart, what was it that caused its demise? What is your experience of being forced to be part of a group?*
- c. *What is a vision or goal that you would like to adhere to in unity with others?*
- d. *How has dialoguing with others increased your consciousness?*

²²⁸ Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 167-168.

²²⁹ Ibid., 171.

²³⁰ Ibid., 133.

- e. *What role might scientific and technological innovations play in the growth of consciousness in the future? What role might spirituality and religion play in the growth of consciousness in the future?*

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue

Before the sharing begins, read aloud *Further Guidelines for Speaking*.

Contemplative Dialogue

Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: We must come together in freedom.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

“Grant, O God . . . that I may see you, even and above all, in the souls of my brothers [and sisters], at their most personal, and most true. . . . The gift which you call on me to make to these brothers [and sisters] – the only gift which my heart can make – is not the overwhelming tenderness of those specially privilege affections which you have placed in our lives . . . but something less sweet, but just as real, and more strong. . . . You want me to be drawn towards ‘the other,’ not by simple personal sympathy, but by what is much higher: the united affinities of a world for itself, and of that world for God.”²³¹

Series One, Session Seven: The Call to Community: Beyond Individualism

Teilhard de Chardin was a stretcher-bearer in the trenches of World War I. There he discovered a kind of solidarity he had never known. Men from several continents and of different races and religions were thrust together towards a common goal. Lives were put on the line for

²³¹ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 145-146.

the sake of something every one of them believed in. Teilhard glimpsed the possibility for the world's greater union during his military service. This experience of service to the world with others became a touchstone for his life.

Unfortunately, when the war ended, people returned to smaller lives. "Elements brought together only out of necessity or fear cohere only on the surface. When the wave of fear or common interest has passed, the union dissolves without having given birth to a soul. Not through external pressure but an inward impulse can the unity of humanity endure and grow."²³²

What can bring us together today? "There needs to be a concentrating agent to bring people together and increase their powers to act as a community."²³³ Besides war, "another cause must emerge to direct our energies permanently and for the good. . . . The pursuit of a positive ideal can give us that same consciousness."²³⁴

People are drawn together frequently to accomplish good purposes. Churches do charitable work, protestors march in the streets, sports teams pool their efforts to win games, people marry and raise families. Possibilities are so often greater when we collaborate. Teilhard's stance is that evolution is calling us to go further. "Human synthesis is our destiny, but we must choose the forms that promote greater consciousness and love."²³⁵ "If our cosmic destiny is to become one, then we must encourage the synthesis by associating more closely."²³⁶ Our community-building must become more conscious – a matter of urgency and moral choice.

²³² Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 190.

²³³ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 42.

²³⁴ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 285.

²³⁵ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 39.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

But communities consist of individual people. Accelerating since the age of science, industry, democracy and religious Reformation began, emphasis on the individual's right and values has been an important step in human evolution. Awareness of a person's unique value and civil rights is a necessity, if communities are to be strong and healthy.

However, as single individuals, we can feel lost and alone, insignificant, even afraid, especially when individualization and introspection become extreme. People, at a deep level, want to be part of something bigger - because that is exactly what they are!

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today's reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. What is your experience of feeling isolated? Of wanting to be part of something bigger?*
- c. What personal or individual rights must be preserved within a community? Why is this important?*
- d. Do you agree that community-building must become more conscious, a matter of urgency and moral choice? Give reasons for your answer.*

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue

Before the sharing begins, read aloud Further Guidelines for Facilitation.

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: The road will open as we advance together.

“O Ever-Greater Christ . . . as humankind emerges into consciousness of the movement that carries it along, it has a continually more urgent need of a Direction up ahead, to which it will at last be able to consecrate itself. Who then, is this? No longer the God of the old cosmos, but the God of the new Cosmogenesis. . . . It is You, the Lord of Union, whose distinguishing mark is the power indefinitely to grow greater, to the measure of all matter, whose heart you fill.”²³⁷

Series One, Session Eight: Community as Personalizing

People sometimes hesitate to get “too involved” in being part of a community. Family and work make enough demands and we are so often tired. Is the benefit of joining a group worth the time and effort? Will it really help me or the world? Though Teilhard himself struggled at times with the decision of whether to leave behind the Jesuits and a Church closed to modern ideas, he still gave a resounding “Yes.” The downside of community participation was far outweighed by the good it could bring. To reach our fullest being, we must develop along with others. “It stimulates dormant properties, fertilizes and completes us. . . . The interrelations of [various people] are an essential cosmic work of nature.”²³⁸

Often, we develop our strongest character traits by working through conflicts that arise with others. We see models of character strength around us that we desire to emulate. And because we are needed within the group for the gifts we bear, we are encouraged to develop and use our talents.

²³⁷ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 57-58.

²³⁸ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 36-37.

In times of difficulty, a community gives support. In times of inertia, we are challenged by others. In times of blindness, we become enlightened, in times of shared listening, truths arise that point the way.

Being part of a community should not make one a nameless number. In Teilhard's words, it should "personalize." In true community, we do not lose our individuality. By relating deeply with others, we become our fullest selves. "Souls develop only collectively and will be completed only in union."²³⁹ Collectivization and personalization are not opposed. It happens through the internal workings of . . . sympathy.²⁴⁰ Sympathy is thinking and feeling with another, so as to understand where they are coming from. The selflessness of this kind of listening is a spiritual practice in itself.

Teilhard believed that communities, such as the Church, were not about personal pleasure or even mainly about personal salvation. "Religion can become an opium. It is too often understood as simply a soothing of our woes. But it is to sustain us and spur us on in the progress of life."²⁴¹ "We represent, all of us together, the front line, the crest of an evolutionary wave still in full flood."²⁴²

"We must give people a Gospel in which moral teaching and the precepts of Christ are presented not simply as the guarantees of an individual reward, but as the road organically essential to the collective success of the whole of life."²⁴³

²³⁹ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 61.

²⁴⁰ Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 194.

²⁴¹ Teilhard, *Building the Earth*, 44.

²⁴² Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 241.

²⁴³ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 251.

“Christ encompasses his mystical members in a higher finality, a higher consciousness. Christ really lives in us. He informs us, in a very real sense. We are not destroyed or dissolved. Our human nature and personality are not wiped away. On the contrary, by melting us into Himself, He completes our differentiation as individual persons.”²⁴⁴ Differentiation through union was a core theme of Teilhard’s spirituality. When freedom and love are at the center of a community’s practice, each person is respected and thrives. Likewise, in prayer, when in communion with God, we are fulfilled, rather than disappearing or losing our identity in a kind of fusion.

As others help us become who we have the potential to be, our joined efforts, by the grace of God, advance the world towards its final fulfillment. Together, with God and each other, “The future is in our hands.”²⁴⁵

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. Consider a time you were part of a community that helped bring out the best in you. What helped that to happen?*
- c. Have you ever felt “lost” in a group? What occasioned that?*
- d. What has been your experience of Church as a community that personalizes?*

Guidelines for Contemplative Dialogue

Before the sharing begins, read aloud Guidelines for Handling Difficult Situations.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 266.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 285.

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: Though many, we are also one.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

“Christ, Word of God, you are incarnate in the world and we are all of us dependent upon you. . . . We are all of us together carried in the one world-womb; yet each of us is our own little microcosm in which the incarnation is wrought independently, with degrees of intensity and shades that are incommunicable. . . . The offering you really want, the offering you mysteriously need every day to appease your hunger, to slake your thirst, is nothing less than the growth of the world borne ever onwards in the stream of universal becoming.”²⁴⁶

Series Two, Session One: Self-knowledge and Self-development

Although, in the course of living, each person’s body and mind naturally develop, the more conscious and purposeful one is about physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual growth, the greater personal development can be. Just as people take care to regularly exercise, take in appropriate nourishment and be actively concerned for the body’s health, so, too, do people need to care for other aspects of who they are and who they want to become. Expanding the horizons of what we learn and practicing critical thinking skills are ways we develop the mind. Becoming aware of, understanding, and coming to manage our emotions is part of emotionally healthy living. And attention to our spiritual connection to the Creative Source of Life and Love is another way to move toward integral wholeness, to become the full person we have the capacity to be.

²⁴⁶ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 120-121, 126-127.

In this process of growth, we discover and develop what is unique within ourselves. Our experiences when reflected upon bring forth deeper character. Our desires and talents when discerned reveal the distinctive work we can offer the world. We participate in our own self-creation as we cultivate what life has given us, both within and without, and make choices, when possible, to change or increase yet unrealized options. Taking responsibility for holistic self-development is personally beneficial, but self-differentiation also contributes to the whole of which we are but a part. Teilhard notes that individuals work on building up their strengths and capacities in order to “confer upon the whole the maximum of power...the greatest possible amount of personality.”²⁴⁷ We bring what is most unique in ourselves to the group. Then, together, “we also collaborate in another work, in another opus...the completing of the world.”²⁴⁸

As a member of the Jesuit order, Teilhard de Chardin made part of each day a spiritual exercise which today is called the “Examen of Consciousness.” St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, insisted that this daily prayer practice be the one thing done in a day, if people actively involved in serving others got too busy to sit a long time at prayer. The purpose was an increase in self-knowledge so that one could prayerfully reflect on how one went through the day with attention to God, and with grace, make even better choices tomorrow.

There are a variety of ways the Examen has been adapted in modern times. Basically, it involves 1) Asking for light from the Spirit to see. 2) Remembering the events of the past 24 hours, giving thanks for specifics. 3) Focusing on the two strongest feelings of the past day, one that felt positive, one that felt difficult, and bringing these to God, conversationally, in prayer, to come to greater understanding of what was happening in those moments. The general awareness

²⁴⁷ Teilhard, *Building the Earth*, 76.

²⁴⁸ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 60-61.

is that God is with us in all things. 4) Asking for a particular grace (a gift you need from God) for the future, as regards patterns of interaction or for particular problems you face the next day.

In actuality, everything we do to promote life is a spiritual practice. Teilhard believed that in the first half of life, it is necessary and appropriate for human beings to develop every part of themselves in order to each be the irreplaceable beings they only can be. Only then, in the second half of life, will self-renunciation, in the sense of giving oneself away to the world, be possible.

“The life of each one of us, as it were, is woven by two threads: the thread of inward development, through which our ideas and affections and our human and religious attitudes are gradually formed; and the thread of outward success by which we always find ourselves at the exact point where the whole sum of the forces of the universe meet together to work in us the effect which God desires.”²⁴⁹

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. What physical, mental, emotional and spiritual practices help you in your self-development? Is there a balance or a need for something more in one or more areas?*
- c. What unique characteristic do you bring to this group that benefits the way we are together?*
- d. Do the Examen of Consciousness during this quiet time. Consider making it a part of your daily spiritual practice. What benefit might such a daily commitment have for you?*

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 79.

Contemplative Dialogue

Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: We bring what is most unique in ourselves to this group.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

God, I am grateful for matter which you have blessed with your presence. In matter, is “inexhaustible potentiality for existence and transformation . . . a universal power which brings together and unites . . . a melodious fountain of water whence springs the souls of men [and women]. I acclaim you, Matter, as the Divine Milieu, charged with creative power, as the ocean stirred by the Spirit, as the clay molded and infused with life by the Incarnate Word.”²⁵⁰

Series Two, Session Two: Contemplation and Prayer I

Spiritual practices acknowledge that there is a Deep Well or Source of Life and Love within each one of us. Christianity and many other religions call this Creative Energy with whom we are in relationship “God.” Whether one refers to this Ultimacy as Spirit or by some other name, those who pray often say that finding ways to be in regular, conscious awareness of God is vital to the fullness of who they are and are becoming. “Sustained and guided by the tradition of the great human mystical systems, along the road of contemplation and prayer, we succeed in entering directly into receptive communication with the very source of all interior drive. The vital charge of the world . . . is poured directly into the depths of our being.”²⁵¹

Prayer forms differ person to person and around the globe. There are various ways body movements, breathing, and posture aid concentration and express the heart’s feelings. There are

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 68-76.

²⁵¹ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 242.

prayer forms that use prescribed words, chant repetitively, are spontaneously verbal or utterly silent. There are prayer rituals that have a long tradition and rituals that are individually meaningful. In some forms of meditation, one thinks about God, self, and the world. In others, memory or imagination is key. Any way that connects a person to the divine is prayer, whether in a church or on a mountain or at one's place of work.

Everything we do can become a prayer, if we are flowing with Life. "I adhere in each action to the creative power of God. I coincide with it. I become not only its instrument but its living extension."²⁵² All prayer is meant to flow into life, for connection with the Sacred is not just a gifted moment for us as individuals, but for all creation. What we receive from God, because we are all one, is consciously or unconsciously shared with all. Out of love, we stay connected to the Divine Current, to the Universal Center, because we desire our being to have a favorable effect on the world. "Because we have turned toward the Center, its Reality will make itself felt by the light and heat which descend into us."²⁵³ This spiritual light and heat is like a living current that transforms. One traditional word for this is grace. Grace building upon nature is the wedding of the supernatural and natural. Living out of this unity is what the Christ-Life is about.

"Effectively to influence a vital current . . . a man must himself belong to that current."²⁵⁴ Christians have discovered through the ages that praying with the Gospel stories of Jesus' life have been a powerful way to open to the mind and heart of Christ. Putting ourselves imaginatively into the Gospel stories and interacting freely with Jesus in our minds' eye is what

²⁵² Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 62.

²⁵³ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 89.

²⁵⁴ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 210.

St. Ignatius called contemplation. Creative imagination that uses all of our senses and allows our personal stories to come alive, as they parallel those in the Gospels, is at the heart of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

Teilhard several times in his life “made *The Spiritual Exercises*,” which was a 30-day experience of meditation on God, self, and the world, as well as imaginative contemplation of himself with Jesus. The goal of doing *The Spiritual Exercises* was to be able to know and love the person of Jesus, as a human embodiment of the Love that is God. Knowing the beauty of this love, incarnate in Jesus, a person is moved to follow His Way. This most often takes form in service to others.

Through the centuries, Jesus has had a wide and deep “influence on the development of the noosphere [or collective world consciousness].”²⁵⁵ In Jesus, Christians recognize God’s Word become incarnate and immanent within the universe. When we open ourselves to the Word of God in Christ, in a way that is mutual and free, then “Christ acts on us as a form. Interiorly, we take form in Him,”²⁵⁶ so that we together become the Body of Christ on Earth, building a commonwealth of justice and unity.

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. *Consider your thoughts and feelings about today’s reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. *What helps you to stay aware of and flowing with Spirit? Do you find a difference in your day when you make this effort and when you don’t?*

²⁵⁵ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 147.

²⁵⁶ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 266.

- c. *What does the life of Jesus say to you about being human? About union with the divine? About the Way to live?*
- d. *Do a Contemplation in the style of St. Ignatius during this quiet time. Imagine you are one of the disciples of Jesus. Before the final Passover meal you will share together, Jesus kneels down and begins to wash the disciples' feet, a custom of the time that servants would have performed. Using all your senses, imagine watching Jesus, particularly as he washes your feet. What is it like for you? What might your dialogue with Jesus be like in that time? When finished washing feet, Jesus asks all of the disciples to do for others as he has done, for humble service is what love looks like. What feelings and thoughts does this provoke in you? Does this shed light on elements of your own life today?*

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: There is a Spring of Love within.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

“In the beginning was Power, intelligent, loving, energizing. In the beginning was the Word, supremely capable of . . . molding whatever might come into being in the world of matter. In the beginning there were not coldness and darkness: there was the Fire. . . . You, my God, are the inmost depths, the stability of the eternal Milieu, without duration or space, in which our cosmos emerges gradually into being and grows gradually to its final completeness.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 121-122.

Series Two, Session Three: Contemplation and Prayer II

Teilhard at times wrote in the mode of a mystic. He used poetic imagery to approach the Mystery of That which could not be explained. But to be a mystic was nothing extraordinary. To be a mystic was simply to see with new eyes, to see God in all things, as Ignatian spirituality invited. This contemplative vision would lead to new quality of action.

Anyone who has the mystic's insight and who loves will feel within himself Something that seizes him and drives him on to integrity and the use of all his powers. He is willing to self-correct and self-develop in order to become perfectly resonant to the pulsations of the Rhythm of Reality; the mystic makes himself docile to the unobtrusive demands of grace. To increase his creative energy, he tirelessly develops his thought, dilates his heart and intensifies his activity. He works to purify his affections and remove all blocks to the light. He seeks an identification (with Christ) that will fulfill his being. He will not disappear, but become an ever more perfect instrument, one with the creative act.²⁵⁸

A counterpart of seeing more deeply is coming to awareness of those aspects of oneself that tend to block out or distract from the Light. Being open to and responding to knowledge of one's patterns and intentions as they rise to consciousness is part of the path toward freedom and love.

Today, there are many methods for arriving at deeper self-awareness. Psychology has become a tremendous gift in our age. Mindfulness has moved beyond its Buddhist roots to become a global practice, both for being in the moment and for awareness of one's arising and passing thoughts. Centering prayer, strong early in the Eastern church, has spread broadly within contemporary circles. Its purpose is to do exactly that: center us. "The deeper I descend into myself, the more I find God at the heart of my being."²⁵⁹ God is the Center of centers.

Centering prayer focuses on the breath moving in and out in order to empty the mind of inner conversation. As thoughts or feelings naturally bubble up, one notices them gently and lets

²⁵⁸ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 134-135.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

them go, returning to awareness of breath. Some Christian forms of centering prayer use a sacred word, such as “Love,” “Jesus,” “Peace,” etc. as a means to return to “emptying” whenever one gets distracted. The intention of Centering Prayer is to be open to God beyond words or images.

The praying person trusts that this practice of daily openness will be transformative within ordinary life. Practically, centering prayer increases one’s capacity to be mindful of thoughts and feelings all throughout the day, so that one can, minute by minute, make choices about either staying with certain thoughts and feelings or letting them go because they are not helpful in that moment. Awareness allows more freedom to love.

Welcoming the Silence of the Heart of the Cosmos into one’s quiet prayer cannot help but make a difference in one’s life. Additionally, in knowing oneself, one is better able to understand others. Compassion is the natural result of deep awareness. “What change is there in one who is conscious of the cosmos and allows it to enter his or her interior life? He loves himself in a different and better way. The petty well-being of his own person is no longer the central concern of the universe, nor of paramount importance to him. He sees that countless others have the right to be happy, successful. He sees their struggling. He discerns what his part is in the vast work to be done. The axis has shifted outside himself.”²⁶⁰

Prayer, faithfully embraced, brings deeper relationship with God and others and personal growth. The highest environment in which we flower is God, “a living Loving Being; All-embracing in immensity and intimately warm, God is the Infinite Center . . . that knows, attracts, and loves.”²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 41-42.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 48.

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today's reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. Consider whether you have had mystical moments when God was glimpsed or felt.*
- c. What processes help to make you mindful and self-aware?*
- d. Do a period of Centering Prayer during this quiet time, using the description above. Remember that "distractions" are natural and simply need to be noticed and gently released.*

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: Love embraces the whole earth.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

"Radiant Word, blazing Power, You who mold the multiple so as to breathe your life into them all, I pray you lay on us your hands and touch us here and now . . . for you know how your creatures can come into being only, like shoot from stem, as part of an endlessly renewed process of evolution. . . . Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day, say again the words: This is my Body."²⁶²

Series Two, Session Four: The Evolution of Holiness/Wholeness

Morality is evolving. Previously, moral prohibitions and laws were primarily written to defend individuals or nations from encroachment by other individuals or nations. Killing,

²⁶² Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 122-123.

stealing, lying and so forth were forbidden, and they still are the bottom line for order in society. However, Teilhard declares that evolutionarily there must be more. “The morality we must look toward must be based on progress. We don’t just want inter-personal lubrication, but fuel!”²⁶³

The morality of today must direct our spiritual energies into the world. For at this stage of humanity’s development, “What is of value now? What is only finally good is what makes for the growth of spirit on earth.”²⁶⁴ Not doing harm cannot be the only criteria for morality. Moral living must include development of every part of ourselves, teaches Teilhard, for we have no “right” to leave parts of ourselves dormant. We belong to each other and our “riches” must be shared.²⁶⁵ Not only this, “society must be constituted to create the most favorable environment for full development, physically and spiritually, chosen (not forced) by the individual.”²⁶⁶ This is certainly a new norm for holiness!

Teilhard believes that humanity is ready to begin the next step – beyond individualization as a final goal, the result of which is a scattering of isolated people. It is time for the world to be built up by communal effort. As human culture matures, we realize that the center of the world can no longer be one’s single self. We must discover together what we have to build.

“In practice, what will aid our forward march? 1) A great hope in every generous soul in the face of his or her anticipated work which will lead to needed growth of being. 2) A sense of working in common - towards greater synthesis and unity; individualistic egoism and exclusion and diminishment of any of our brothers and sisters must end. We need human solidarity.”²⁶⁷ “We

²⁶³ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 52.

²⁶⁴ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 106.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 107.

²⁶⁶ Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 194-195.

²⁶⁷ Teilhard, *Building the Earth*, 92-93.

must press on towards this evolution with all our strength. We do not know yet where it will lead us, but we have faith that it will be towards some supreme value.”²⁶⁸

For Teilhard, there is no division between the sacred and the secular. Everything we bring to the world can serve the good of the whole – our forms of social organization, our attitudes toward work, our engagement with the arts, our commitment to scientific research, the education of consciousness, the creation of new technology. God “awaits us every instant in our action, in the work of the moment. There is a sense in which God is at the tip of my pen, my spade, my brush, my needle.”²⁶⁹ Our efforts assume a holy role, even in realms inaccurately called profane. “It is collaboration, trembling with love, which we give to the hands of God.”²⁷⁰

But even as we strive to center on something greater than ourselves alone, even as we set out courageously to create a strong community with like-minded others, we find we need constant purification and inner renewal. This is where the daily practice of the Examen of Consciousness can be a vital tool. One might ask oneself, “Where did I act with goodness, peace, forgiveness, kindness, patience and justice in the past 24 hours? And where did I miss opportunities to respond in these ways? When did I act generously and courageously with concern for the greater good and when did I let fear pull me defensively into myself? Other questions focus on one’s relationship to the broader community: What have I learned or received from others today and what have I contributed? Also, how have my choices affected the poorest and weakest in society this day?” Feeling satisfaction in any of these areas encourages and consoles us in our efforts. Feeling guilt motivates us to make a change. Focusing on one area to

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 75.

²⁶⁹ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 64-65.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 97.

intentionally improve in the next 24 hours is the way our mistakes can move us forward. This is all part of deliberately developing consciousness.

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today's reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. What moral principles might make for human progress, where morality is not just about "inter-personal lubrication, but fuel?"*
- c. How do you feel about not having the "right" to keep parts of yourself "dormant" and the moral mandate to share all of your personal "riches?" Does this cross some of your assumptions?*
- d. Consider whether you have had a sense of God working with or within you in any aspect of your work or interaction with others.*
- e. Ponder one or more of the questions proposed in the content piece above, as a variation on the Examen.*

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: Evolution now is about human choices.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

God, we are here before you, united with "the whole vast anonymous army of living humanity, those who surround us and support us, though we do not know them; those who come and those who go; above all, with those who in offices, laboratories, and factories, through their vision of truth . . . believe in the progress of this earthly reality and who today will take up again

their impassioned pursuit of the light.”²⁷¹ We ask you this day and every day to bless abundantly the works of our hands.

Series Two, Session Five: The Path to Discernment

Zest for life is the energy of evolution in all things which wells up in each of us. We feel it in the moment and it often leads in a particular direction. But we must feed and develop this zest. It is a will to “live fully,” which involves becoming more complexly connected and conscious. In Teilhard’s experience, the practices of religion can help with this, as avenues of inspiration, sustenance, discernment and solidarity with others who share in the great project of human evolution.²⁷²

Teilhard also felt that far too many Christians, interested in heavenly reward and consoling feelings, are insufficiently conscious of their responsibility to advance God’s Kingdom of justice and unity. He felt it was imperative for Christians to intentionally participate in the building of the earth through the natural occupations of their lives, with awareness that through their words and actions, Christians can be a sign that reaches “the heart and mind of humanity with the Good News of a greater work to be accomplished that calls for the whole entire body of their effort.”²⁷³

But what to do? “We are called by the music of the universe to reply, each with his own pure and incommunicable harmonic . . . As love for the All advances in our hearts.”²⁷⁴ We

²⁷¹ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 120.

²⁷² Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 234-235.

²⁷³ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 222.

²⁷⁴ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 150.

follow this call “like the Magi the star. The star leads each man differently, by a different path, in accord with his vocation. But all the paths it initiates have this in common – they always advance upward.”²⁷⁵

Since, in humanity as a whole, evolution has become reflectively conscious of itself, it is time for those who compassionately care about the world to ask the questions, “What shall I do and how? In what concrete direction am I able to extend the generative forces of the world?”²⁷⁶ Then, with trust that God can make good use of every effort we offer, we say, “I only want to be an instrument of progress. I have faith that every good and useful thing done will be assimilated in some way.”²⁷⁷

St. Ignatius of Loyola, in his practical wisdom, knew that discernment of what we best could be doing was not always obvious or easy. He was well aware that, with different personalities, people made decisions in a variety of ways. Therefore, Ignatius used a wide range of discernment methods with people seeking to understand where the Spirit was inviting them to engage. In times when strong feelings of desire and dread, excitement and avoidance, hope and fear were activated, Ignatius counselled attention to what feelings were revealing. One should lean toward a certain choice when feelings of consolation, such as joy, peace, love, hope, and faith are strongly associated with the opportunity. Feelings of agitation, fear, confusion, and depression where one descends into oneself, rather than towards Love, are indicators that one should not move in that direction.

²⁷⁵ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 139.

²⁷⁶ Teilhard, *Human Energy* 29.

²⁷⁷ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 42-43.

In times when feelings do not help bring a situation to clarity, Ignatius advised making a list of pro's and con's for each possible choice. One was to look both for a preponderance of items on one side or for items listed that had the most personal weight or importance. Thus, reason could reveal the way.

Imagination can also play a role in discernment. Ignatius advised imagining one's self at the end of one's life and seeing if one might wish one had made a decision a certain way. Or one might imagine what a wise and loving friend who knew you well might advise you to do. In all of these methods, consultation with others and prayer for guidance is absolutely integral to the process.

After making the best discernment possible, Ignatius directed people to see if subsequent happenings seemed to confirm the decision. Then one was to peacefully and courageously proceed. One can rest in knowing that a person can only make the best decision possible in the moment, with the information that is at hand. And ultimately, how one serves may be more important than the particular kind of service done.

Ignatius trusted that "there is a vital spirit, an absolute, that draws us, yet lies hidden. If we are to see its features, answer its call and understand its meaning, we must plunge boldly into the vast current of things and see whether its flow is carrying us."²⁷⁸ For we are all part of something much bigger.

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. *Consider your thoughts and feelings about today's reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 27-28.

- b. *Recall a time when you have felt buoyed by the energies of life welling up within you, when you experienced a zest for life! Is there something that helps you stay connected to these zestful energies?*
- c. *How would you describe the ultimate role or gift of Christians or other religious people in the world?*
- d. *In what ways do you feel you are an instrument of progress?*
- e. *Which of Ignatius's methods of discernment have you used? If there is a current decision you are making, take a moment to see if one of these practices sheds light on your choice.*

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights his or her candle: "God is a moving Center which we follow."²⁷⁹

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

"O God, your main purpose in the revealing to us of Your Heart was to enable our love to escape from the constrictions of the too narrow, too precise, too limited image of You which we had fashioned for ourselves. What I discern in Your breast is simply a furnace of Fire; and the more I fix my gaze on its ardency, the more it seems to me that all around it the contours of Your Body melt away and become enlarged beyond all measure, till the only features I can distinguish in You are those of the Face of a World which has burst into Flame."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 139.

²⁸⁰ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 131.

Series Two, Session Six: Dying to Self: Embracing Action's Sacrifice

In developing oneself, there is great joy, but there is also a necessary letting go of previous ways of seeing and behaving. Seeing certain truths about oneself and life in general, and letting go of defensive habits can be a painful but liberating part of healing and growth.

The pain of growth has a role in the cosmos. It stimulates us to react against conditions inimical to full development. It forces us to leave unprofitable roads. It stimulates us to more fruitful work and induces us to attain harmony. It can detach us from lower delights in order to reach higher ones.²⁸¹ God also converts our pain into good as our character is strengthened, renewed, tempered and becomes wiser. Suffering can hollow us out so God can penetrate deeply.²⁸²

On every religious path, including that of Jesus, we must die and be reborn, to ourselves and others, if we are to share in the Spirit of the Earth. We must change our fundamental valuations and action, which is a conversion.²⁸³ There is much that must be expelled and pruned. The center of one's being must eventually grow to be outside one's small self. It can be anguishing, but the price is worth it: to give up the secure and tangible unity of the egocentric life and risk everything for something More in God. "If the grain of wheat does not fall into the ground and die, it remains just a grain."²⁸⁴

There is another form of pain that is inherent in working toward the fulfillment of God's Project. "A Christian immersed in the concerns of the earth must be a person of great

²⁸¹ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 43.

²⁸² Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 80, 89.

²⁸³ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 38.

²⁸⁴ Teilhard, *Writings in Time of War*, 112-114.

detachment, attached only to Christ and Christ's work."²⁸⁵ One must be detached because one is not working for one's own satisfaction or for honor and affirmation *and* because our work does not always have obvious or immediate success or receive appreciation from others.

A first painful step can sometimes be the effort it takes to move beyond inertia. It is comfortable to not feel responsible and definitely safer to stay out of the fray. Then, there is the endurance needed for "the painful pangs of birth, the inner tensions and anxieties of 'creation.' One must have the courage and energy to move toward new forms, and not stop to bask in or possess" the results.²⁸⁶ Untiringly, we must try everything for Christ. We must hope everything for Christ. Or we shall never know all that is possible for the world, for Christ's complete Earthly incarnation.²⁸⁷

Something dying so that something new may arise is the age-old way of evolution. It always has been and will continue to be. "Suffering in whatever species is what we pay for the forward march and triumph of all. They are all casualties fallen on the field of honor. . . . But seeing the world in a state of growth gives our human effort and the pain that goes with it great value. In all birth there is pain. In its gropings, progress can only take place at the expense of many failures and wounds."²⁸⁸

Higher states are yet to be achieved – but by struggle. We cannot be content with mere survival.²⁸⁹ Far too often the Cross has been presented as a symbol of sadness. But in its highest

²⁸⁵ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 173.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁸⁸ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 49-50.

²⁸⁹ Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 185.

sense, the Cross is about the vast movement and agitation of human life opening upon a road that leads ever upward. The cross is the road of human endeavor.²⁹⁰

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today's reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. What has been your experience of the pain of growth, of letting go so something new can come?*
- c. What have you been involved in that required letting go of egotistic preferences for the sake of the other?*
- d. What can be a challenge for you in the work you do – inertia, the constant groping, desire for success or appreciation, the need to see an end result? Or is it something else?*
- e. Being a part of this group is part of the “work” of growing consciousness. Keeping to time guidelines, monitoring the amount and style of your participation in the group and so forth is a form of self-denial for the sake of the whole. How has the dialogue process helped you to grow?*

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights their candle: In all birth there is pain.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

“All the things in the world to which this day will bring increase, all those that will diminish, and all those too that will die – all of them, O God, I gather into my arms, so as to hold

²⁹⁰ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 102-103.

them out to You in offering. This is the material – the matter – of my sacrifice, the only offering you desire.”²⁹¹

Series Two, Session Seven: Dying to Self: Undergoing Suffering

Each person’s life has two parts – what we do and what we undergo, the active and the passive. In each, God waits for us, unless God advances to meet us first.²⁹² “We undergo life as well as death.”²⁹³

Most people like to think of their lives as something about which they actively make choices. And much of life *is* like that. But there is a portion of our lives, actually the greater portion, about which we have no choice at all. We initially inherit our genes, our family, our race, our religion, the country in which we live, our socio-economic status, and our environment. Disease, ill fortune and the process of aging inevitably make an appearance uninvited. These are what Teilhard calls our “passivities:” things that happen to us.

There are both favorable and unfavorable forces which affect us. Favorable are the passivities of growth which uphold, empower and direct us, for example, a strong intellectual or creative capacity, a supportive family, a fine education. Unfavorable are the passivities of diminishment which obstruct, hamper, and deflect progress toward heightened being and thwart our capacities for development.²⁹⁴ These might entail our lack of artistic, verbal, athletic or other

²⁹¹ Teilhard, *The Heart of Matter*, 120.

²⁹² Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 47.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

abilities, being someone of a disadvantaged gender or gender identity, or having an absconding parent or spouse that leaves the family destitute.

Suffering was never to be valued or sought for its own sake, Teilhard insisted. “We first aim to defeat suffering, if possible. But at some point, we may have to rationally accept it. Suffering can act to center us on God and join us to the Body of Christ who suffers.”²⁹⁵ Teilhard exhorts his readers to resist evil with all their strength; but if laid low, even this can be a means of renewal, if done in faith that God can bring good even out of evil. We are to trust in what is Greater than ourselves to bring transformation.²⁹⁶

Teilhard also believed that the energy involved in suffering could be “offered up” or directed for the good of others. “What if the sick and suffering turned that intense energy towards a common desire that the Kingdom of God should come to fruition on the earth? . . . This might become a unique act of consciousness, elevation and union.”²⁹⁷

Teilhard in his elder years embraced the suffering and diminishments involved with his own aging and approaching death. He shared with us this prayer:

Now that I have found the joy of utilizing all forms of growth to make You, or to let You, grow in me, grant that I may willingly consent to this last phase of communion in the course of which I shall possess You by diminishing in You. . . . When the signs of age begin to mark my body (and still more when they touch my mind) . . . and above all at that last moment when I feel I am losing hold of myself and am absolutely passive within the hands of the great unknown forces that have formed me; in all those dark moments, O God, grant that I may understand that it is You (provided only my faith is strong enough) who are painfully parting the fibers of my being in order to penetrate to the very marrow of my substance and bear me away within Yourself. . . . Teach me to treat my death as an act of communion.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 249.

²⁹⁶ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 91-92.

²⁹⁷ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 51.

²⁹⁸ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 89-90.

Some have misinterpreted Teilhard, thinking that he was all and only about the holiness of action. Teilhard, who had been through two world wars, and witnessed a Jewish and an atomic holocaust, was well aware that God sanctifies also within life's sufferings. Holiness is also about how we handle our struggles and losses, in compassionate company with God and one another.

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today's reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. What has happened to you, without your choice or consent, that you have had to struggle with in life? How did you first try to defeat it? Did there come a point when you had to rationally accept it? Was there spiritual growth in this for you?*
- c. Have you observed someone aging or dying in a way that inspired you?*
- d. How do the diminishments of aging and prospect of death figure into your spirituality?*

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights their candle: God transfigures the broken.

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

“What would our spirits be, O God, if they did not have the bread of earthly things to nourish them, the wine of created beauties to intoxicate them, and the conflicts of human life to fortify them? What feeble powers and bloodless hearts your creatures would bring You if they were to succeed in cutting themselves off prematurely from [their difficult settings]. Teach us, Lord, even how to contemplate . . . the hidden mystery in the womb of death.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 106-107.

Series Two, Session Eight: Through Death to New Life: The Omega Point

Many scientists project that the cosmos will naturally end in extinction, but both Teilhard's scientific studies and his faith brought him to the conclusion that increasingly complex convergence would continue until human consciousness was united within the consciousness of Christ. Already, Teilhard believed, we were moving toward a Center of universal convergence, which he called the Omega Point. "Are we not already moving toward a Center of universal convergence – the Omega? Do we not fall under its 'field of attraction,' acting on or directing our centers? . . . We are becoming grouped together, connected, center to center to one another, because in common we are being pulled forward by the Center up ahead."³⁰⁰

Exultantly, Teilhard wrote, "When I consider the inexorable nature of the universal impulse, which for more than 600 million years has ceaselessly promoted the global rise of consciousness on the Earth's surface, driving on through an endlessly multiplying network of opposing hazards, I am forced to the conclusion that the Earth is more likely to stop turning than is Mankind, as a whole, to stop organizing and unifying itself."³⁰¹

Omega, which Teilhard equated with Christ, is already acting upon us. The attraction of Christ provides magnetism toward unity and growth. Gathered by Omega, all responding centers personally deepen into this Ultra-Center. They enter into its immortality. In Christ, all are in

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 45, 47.

³⁰¹ Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, 152.

contact, center to Center.³⁰² This metamorphosis is slowly being accomplished under the Spirit's influence in the heart of humankind.³⁰³

Though there may be several evolutionary leaps yet ahead, Teilhard hypothesized that the final movement of oneness in Christ will be the cosmos' final evolutionary leap. Teilhard had faith that there is more light and more love, somewhere, somehow, beyond our reach and even beyond the reach of death.³⁰⁴ In Christian terms, Teilhard believed that Christ in the end will gather or incorporate all things into himself and return to the Father. He will creatively carry the cosmos to the natural term of its maturity.³⁰⁵

The end of time, for Teilhard, is more akin to a maturing than to a destruction. Dispersed physical energy is not to be the universe's fate, for the cosmos is becoming progressively more conscious or spiritualized. Matter will shift to spirit as humanity self-develops to the end. Then there will be a luminous attainment of a new stage of life in Christ.³⁰⁶ The death of the physical universe will bring a new resurrection³⁰⁷ for God is making us one with the divine, a unitive transformation.³⁰⁸

Union will take thinking spirits to new levels. We will be governed by a higher soul. And if up to now, inner union has personalized us, this next step of union is going to super-

³⁰² Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 112-113.

³⁰³ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 128.

³⁰⁴ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 240.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 401-402.

³⁰⁷ Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 113.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

personalize us.³⁰⁹ Death, in which we seem to disappear, will simply be another phase of growth. We will enter a super-human sphere of self-consciousness or personality which will complete us as we join a union greater than ourselves.³¹⁰

Questions to Consider in Quiet/Journal

- a. Consider your thoughts and feelings about today's reading. What is attractive, expansive or challenging here for you?*
- b. How have you experienced in your life "a field of attraction" drawing you toward greater life, creativity, hope, and love?*
- c. Although no one, including Teilhard, knows the future, particularly beyond death, how might Teilhard's projection provide hope?*
- d. What vision do you entertain of where the universe is headed and of what happens after death? How does this affect how you live your life?*

Contemplative Dialogue

Opening Ritual: Phrase to repeat as each person lights their candle: There is a Center of our centers in which we meet.³¹¹

What New Is Emerging?

Additionally, how has the completion of this series changed the way you see things and affected you interact? Describe how community process has influenced your own spiritual growth.

³⁰⁹ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 63.

³¹⁰ Teilhard, *Human Energy*, 104-105.

³¹¹ Teilhard, *Activation of Energy*, 47.

How Was Our Dialogue Process Today?

Additionally, now that the series is completed, how have any of these dialogue skills moved out into your daily life?

Closing Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin

O Christ, I have discovered you in matter, “matter, in whom I find both seduction and strength. . . . I surrender myself to your mighty layers, with faith in the heavenly influences which have sweetened and purified your waters. . . . Let your attractions lead me forward, let your sap be the food that nourishes me; let your resistance give me toughness; let your robberies and inroads give me freedom. And finally, let your whole being lead me towards God.”³¹²

A Surprise Chance to Try Out the Process – A General Summary of Feedback

The American Teilhard Association asked me if I would use this material with a Zoom group during the time that lock-down for covid was in place. We called the program “Catching Fire.” We gathered a group of 24 people from all parts of the U.S., from Canada, and New Zealand. Someone from France wanted to participate but the time zone difference was prohibitive. Sister Kathy Duffy, SSJ functioned as the moderator of the Zoom room, handling registration and the technological piece. I functioned as the large group facilitator. After completing the first module, about half of the original group moved on to do the rest of the modules together.

After the first module, I asked participants to give me feedback, if they were willing. Twelve people sent me responses. People said that they enjoyed the content portion very much; it

³¹² Teilhard, *The Divine Milieu*, 110-111.

helped them focus on one aspect of Teilhard's thought at a time. They preferred to have the reading material ahead of time so they could ponder the content before the meeting.

People generally felt that 1½ hrs. was long enough for a Zoom program, so we cut back the time. People enjoyed the reflection questions, saying they helped them to explore their spiritual being in the light of evolutionary thought. They also found the Guidelines for Dialogue of assistance in reminding them of different aspects of the dialogue process. Some thought the directions too wordy; others found them to be fine. One person felt that the directions and process should be simplified.

People wanted the large group to all be able to fit on one Zoom screen (24 people max). People varied about whether they liked 4, 5, or 6 people in a small group. They liked being with the same small group members for the entire module so that they could get to know one another better, which aided the depth of the dialogue. Some wished they had more time to dialogue with people other than the ones in their small group. People liked the idea of rotating the small group facilitator's role.

As far as prayer, the candle prayer ritual was ineffective on Zoom, but the participants liked both the opening centering prayer and the closing prayers, which were Teilhard's own compositions.

Half the respondents could see themselves facilitating their own group like this after having participating in a module themselves. Some were excited to share the material with others.

All but one person loved having the program available on Zoom, mainly because of the opportunity to meet people from all over the world with diverse viewpoints and to have access to the program themselves. One person would have preferred an even more diversified grouping.

Since the participants were self-selected and all connected to the American Teilhard Association, they were mainly white, Catholic, and over 50 years of age.

People named the benefits of participation as 1) meeting other Teilhard devotees, 2) having their own consciousness expanded by engagement with both Teilhard's writings and dialogue with others, 3) learning and practicing dialogue skills, 4) the joy of meeting new people, and 5) a way to use Teilhard's writings to enhance spiritual development.

People who chose not to continue were looking for a program with more input on Teilhard, from a workshop leader. Some preferred to have more emphasis on discussing Teilhard's concepts.

When asked if what we *did together* during the module felt like it had something to do with what Teilhard was writing about, they responded: 1) We evolved individually and as a group. 2) We took Teilhard's words into our own lived reality. 3) We enacted the very thing Teilhard was talking about: greater complexity leading to greater consciousness through a centered community. 4) Gathering as a group works against our culture's tendency toward going it alone. 5) Our coming together paralleled Teilhard's writing in so many ways: consciousness raising, interconnectivity, community building across the globe, dialogue, expansiveness of thought, experiences that deepen the spirit, and unity as we move toward the Omega Point.

This feedback, and feedback solicited all along, helped the group have partial ownership in the shaping of the program to meet their needs. The only suggestion that I do not plan to consider is the request for more input from the leader during the session, as this is not the purpose of the program. However, additional source material might be made available for those who are interested.

Chapter 7

Why Talk About Teilhard Now?

Evolution has a power, slow and sure, of its own. But evolution in the 21st century is also a human decision and commitment. Today, people have immense influence over the future of Earth. In this current moment of time, I have witnessed people of every age, religion, and hue gathering in the streets to demand criminal justice reform and declare that Black Lives Matter, as well as the U.S. Congress, split according to party over charges of election fraud and whether to give aid to citizens during a pandemic. Every day, we have opportunities for choice as individuals, as a populace, and as a Church about whether we want to progress towards greater unity, consciousness and justice – or whether we do not.

Learning to talk with those who differ from us about matters of value and concern is not an easy task, however. We are not taught to dialogue, but to debate (or avoid the issues) in a generally competitive and divided culture. We may abhor the rifts and ruptures between religious, political and racial groups, but we are still uncomfortable about direct conversation, anxious about whether we'll be deeply heard and accepted by "the other." Virtuous intentions and prayers for good will may get us ready, but I believe that practice in dialogue skills is necessary to bring about change. As we assemble as people of diverse backgrounds, we need practical ways to share one another's experiential riches, without defensiveness or attack.

Every day people are being exposed to more and more information through both the internet and an increasingly globalized and mobile culture. Composing a worldview in which everything fits is therefore a process in which we are continually engaged. We want both coherence and meaning in the beliefs we hold, but it is not enough to explore ideas by ourselves.

Individual perspective is always limited - by definition. We need to learn from the viewpoints of others in order to include more of the picture.

But core questions remain to be answered: Are we content to be in conflict with or complete separation from those with whom we differ? Are we only superficially interested in naming how we are different and the same? Or might dialogue become valued and normalized as a form of learning, a feast of plentiful and fruitful new perspectives, and most importantly, as love demands, a conduit to collective, creative solutions that alleviate suffering and enhance life for all? In schools and libraries, in churches and via Zoom, we need to be listening and talking *and* in silence with one another, deeply open to the wisdom that arises.

But with all the problems in the world to ponder, why do I suggest we talk about the musings of a single Jesuit scientist from a century ago, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin? Because Teilhard's writings engage the biggest idea before the world today – the evolutionary process which encompasses our lives and its creative possibilities for our anguishing planet. As one of the first to integrate the discoveries of modern science and the theory of evolution with Christian theology, Teilhard's genius should not go unexplored by those who call themselves spiritual seekers, for I believe that Earth's future depends on humanity's embrace of being one people, made of both stardust and Spirit, capable of flourishing together, as we grow in consciousness and love. Our efforts to have dialogue across differences could be informed, deepened and inspired by situating it not just in sociology or ethics, but in Teilhard's cosmology.

Ewert Cousins, renowned theologian, is one of many who have declared that a new age of consciousness is currently dawning with the rise of mass communication and modern science. Cousins calls this new age the second axial period because a breakthrough in human consciousness has begun to swirl with growing energy around the planet. The first axial period,

occurring around 500 B.C.E. in many civilizations, gave rise to an increased consciousness of the individual. This second great axial shift in consciousness is a transformative awareness that we are one global family, integrally related to both Earth and cosmos. Cousins remarks that the bridge from the first to the second axial period is still under construction, but that bridge builders of this new age, whom he calls “mutational persons” are inspiring others to think in new ways. Teilhard de Chardin is one of these people.³¹³

The recent discoveries of 20th century science include a deeper understanding of the origins of the cosmos as well as the wonders of quantum physics. We now see more fully how infinite, how infinitesimal and how complex Reality is. Theories of evolution are ushering in new perceptions of humanity’s place and significant role in an emergent cosmos.

Such change raises unsettling questions, especially for people reared with a worldview which locates God “in heaven” and people higher than “nature.” Because the result of such revolutionary thinking is disruptive, it necessarily requires a choice - either to question scientific theory or one’s image of God or to compartmentalize science and religion as different worlds.

Teilhard de Chardin doesn’t think compartmentalization or rejection of science is the answer. As Teilhard traveled around the world doing scientific research, he encountered people rejecting religion altogether for its outdated views. Teilhard felt passionately moved to put forth a new vision of God and the cosmos that combines the latest insights of science with a developing understanding of God and creation. In Teilhard’s experience, both religion and science are revelatory of the Divine.

Not every scientist or theologian agreed with Teilhard’s approach in his day. Teilhard walked a line between faith and science, speculating about both and often weaving in mystical

³¹³ Delio, Ilia. ed. *From Teilhard to Omega: Co-creating an Unfinished Universe* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 1.

language. Some scientists found Teilhard's use of words like "energy" inexact and his belief that there was a directionality to evolution patently absurd. Especially after World War II and the Holocaust, critics considered Teilhard, with his hope for progress, foolishly naïve. Religionists denounced Teilhard's tampering with traditional concepts and censured him for being pantheistic. They also faulted him for emphasizing the Cosmic Christ rather than Christ as Redeemer.³¹⁴ Personally, I was put off by Teilhard's early 20th century mindset about "conquering nature," his excitement about genetic manipulation as a means of better shaping the future, and his assuredness that Catholicism was the superior religion for the progressive age. But to my mind, this in no way taints Teilhard's broader contribution, that of creatively relating Christianity to the culture and spirit of contemporary times.

Teilhard wrote in *The Heart of Matter* that theology needs a God "as vast and mysterious as the Cosmos," a deity "as immediate and all-embracing as Life," and "linked (in some way) to our effort as Mankind." Rather than people giving up on God altogether or pushing down their growing understanding of the world in order to believe in an increasingly improbable God, Teilhard believed that people need an image of God who can embrace two hundred billion galaxies, a cosmic epic of 14 billion years, and perhaps a multiverse. He felt that conceptions of Christ and what it means to be Christian also needed to flower and find their place within the full breadth of a universe that is evolving.³¹⁵

In Teilhard's view, God poured out or expressed God's Self as the Word Incarnate, which has become the vitalizing Center of every created thing. The Sacred from the beginning of time has been present at the depths of all. For Teilhard, God is also the supra-personal Whole,

³¹⁴Ibid., "The Integral Visions of Teilhard and Lonergan," Patrick Byrne, 94-95.

³¹⁵ Ibid., "Teilhard de Chardin: Theology for an Unfinished Universe," John F. Haught, 10, 13.

containing all that is personal, though greater than all and more than person only. Because of this, people can experience God as relational and loving and yet beyond imagining as the Ground of All Being.

Teilhard's God is not only Alpha but the cosmos' Omega, calling creation to evolve, from up ahead, as Lure and Guide.³¹⁶ Responding to invitations of grace, one by one, people join together as Christ's Living Body, so that all may flourish and reach final fulfillment through unity and love. Even those who do not use religion's language are affected by attractions of grace. In the end, God, beyond time and death, will be the ultimate center of convergence, all diversities honored and made complete through union.

Teilhard's God, Transcendent and Immanent, ever-becoming in relationship to creation, is a rendering of the Sacred worthy of adoration in this age, a God for those who believe in science and for those who trust in their mystical experience. Even for those who feel the need to move away from institutional religion, Teilhard's God can be found in all things, in the process of creativity, and in the fire of love. Teilhard's God inspires to action those who want to contribute something More to the good of Earth. This is a God who has given creation the capacity for growing consciousness and freedom and labors with us to bring good out of evil and resurrected life out of diminishment and death.

Teilhard's spirituality reflects his Christic mysticism, his love of the world as a scientist-explorer, and the central Ignatian invitation to see God in all things. It also reflects his commitment to the Gospel and to being a faithful person of the Church. Although religious authorities prevented Teilhard from teaching and publishing his controversial ideas, Teilhard struggled through all he suffered to remain with the Jesuit and Catholic communities that had

³¹⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *Man's Place in Nature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 121.

given him life. His love for the Church and what it could be was, in the end, deeper than his disappointment and anger. Teilhard quietly remained true to himself and to the call he discerned, as he passed on his writings to family and friends who published them after his death. Though sometimes doubting and depressed, feeling it might be easier to go it alone, apart from the Jesuits or the Catholic Church, Teilhard felt called to persist. He was adamant that God would bring good out of what he offered in love, both the activities of his creative work and the stressful events he had to endure. This man of faith saw his pains and his total self-emptying as a participation in the cross of Christ, which Teilhard understood as the death-to-life pattern in all transformation, individual and cosmic.

Teilhard's spiritual journey was one that all humans are called to make, regardless of faith. It is both a graced and a natural process that involves becoming a centered, well-developed, and autonomous individual who contributes actively to the well-being of others. As a faithful pilgrim matures, he or she learns to cling to something infinitely greater and more trustworthy than any private undertaking. Such decentration is a humble acknowledgement of one's limited place in the Web of Life. It follows long practice of surrendering love over many years and is a uniting with the Deep Center of All.

Teilhard saw Earth as an unfinished divine project, brimming with opportunities for progress toward fullness of life. He believed that Christianity could be *the* religion of evolution, but only if its followers heeded the call of Christ the Evolver. Though humans have been continuously evolving in their understanding of God, themselves, and the world since the beginning, Teilhard believed that the Gospels hold the promise of an evolutionary leap, though the words of Scripture have been too often twisted towards destructive ends.

Expert on Teilhardian spirituality, Louis Savary, writing about Jesus' message for an evolving world, says that Jesus' teachings themselves are evolutionary.³¹⁷ They reveal something deep and new: God as loving Father of all. Savary hears Jesus' parables as a revelation of God's grand project for abundant life, a visionary dream in process of becoming. The stories of Jesus invite people to greater consciousness in their relationship with God, as well as to unique participation in and commitment to God's project.

The Spirit, within evolution's drive, has been prompting people in every moment and in every place toward communal love. The Universal Christ, in whom we live, move, and have our being, is today empowering evolution through the mind, heart, and hands of the living Body of Christ on Earth, in Savary's view.³¹⁸ He writes, "To increase love's output of energy, we must expand our loving connections with others. When groups of people work together for a shared purpose, the ability of the group is often greater than the sum of what each can accomplish alone."³¹⁹

Ursula King, another Teilhardian scholar, confirms that Teilhard had "faith in the shared destiny of the human community. Above all, it was a faith grounded in and crowned by faith in God's incarnate presence in the world, believing in the beauty and wholeness of a redeemed world whose promise remains, in spite of all contrary experiences and events."³²⁰ It is loving relationships that deepen personal development as well as each society's good. King elucidates this further by quoting Teilhard in *The Phenomenon of Man*:

³¹⁷ Louis Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin on the Gospels: The Message of Jesus for an Evolutionary World* (New York: Paulist Press, 2019), xvii.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 7, 188-190.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 196.

³²⁰ King, Ursula, *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 45.

Teilhard speaks of Christian love as “a specifically new state of consciousness” and what is distinctive about Christianity: “the fact that the infinite and the intangible can be lovable and that the human heart can beat in true charity for its neighbor.” Teilhard wanted to “harness for God the energies of Love,” believing that a greater stronger, more inclusive love for all people and for all of life must be an integral part of the further evolution of the human species. For Teilhard, the “physical structure of the universe is love.”³²¹

Teilhard actually wanted to do systematic research on how to better produce and apply love-energy, so as to transform both individuals and social institutions. Full of the “zest for life” that he desired for all, Teilhard wanted to “activate” love so that the whole of humankind could form a single body and a single soul, in love. He believed, from his own experience, that new discoveries and syntheses could emerge from trans-disciplinary encounters.³²² I believe that “Center to Center” is one means of activating such love and unity, as can other forms of Transformative Learning with adults.

The process of evolution, as Teilhard beholds it, is a process of growing spiritualization through greater unification and complexity, centering and convergence.³²³ This is why development in faith, individual and corporate, requires continual integration of widening experience and factual data from multiple sources. Religion, for Teilhard, has a vital evolutionary function in society. He envisions all religions as potential channels of wonder, growth in consciousness, mysticism in action, and schools of love.

Jesuit geologist James Skehan proposes that Teilhard’s new mysticism is a promising spirituality of eco-theology. “One who regards all of Creation as Sacred must necessarily think

³²¹ Ibid., 48-49.

³²² Ibid., 50, 55.

³²³ Ibid., 62.

of the Earth with reverence.”³²⁴ Although strong ecological awareness was not yet developed in Teilhard’s time, Teilhard did affirm that environmental and psychic conditions that were whole and healthy would help humanity move forward, as God desires. Our spiritual stance in the world is important, too: only with awe at creation’s wonders and a felt sense of Earth’s organic oneness, in which we humans integrally abide, will this planet’s abundance of life be here for future generations.

This is why we must talk together of Teilhard now. People, in my experience, are ready – for dynamic new ideas and dialogic interactions. However, as a Roman Catholic of the liberal persuasion, I have had difficulty finding parish venues to explore religious questions and new ideas for most of my life. Much of the energy for education in local parishes goes toward forming people in conventional church practice. This is most important in the early years of faith. But when adults want more expansive education or are interested in dialogue about things controversial, they often have to create settings for themselves or look for other places in the wider community.

Casually interviewing a host of my friends, I discovered that many had left the church altogether and formed their own small support and discussion groups. Friends who stayed in the church also sought out small groupings (not parish-sponsored) where they could explore significant spiritual concerns and feel at home. There were a few friends that were part of small faith-sharing groups that had begun long ago in parishes. And then, there were others who felt all alone: some sought refuge in books, online courses, and retreats, while others just threw up their hands.

³²⁴ James Salmon and John Farina, ed., *The Legacy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, “Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Priest, Scientist, and Mystic,” James Skehan, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press. 2011), 137.

“Center to Center” is a response to this need. If the church is to minister to adults growing in consciousness, they will need to create numerous other venues as well. People who are not fed as they grow will go elsewhere looking for food and perhaps miss the unique nourishment Christian community life offers.

Additionally and vitally, beyond the way the Church educates and supports its members, the Church has an important role to play within the public realm. Parker Palmer writes:

In my view, the mission of the church is not to enlarge its membership, not to bring outsiders to accept its terms, but simply to love the world in every possible way – to love the world as God did and does. The body of Christ is a network of organic connections between people, connections which make one’s joy another’s joy, one’s suffering another’s suffering. . . . I do not believe the church enters the public realm to aggrandize itself, but to glorify God; and God is glorified as we manifest the unity in which we were created without dishonoring the diversity we have become. . . . Christian experience protects pluralism with the recognition that we need many angles of vision, many ways of reflecting and refracting the light of the Spirit in our midst. . . . Every point of view is put forward for corporate testing. [What an] awesome obligation to serve as a channel of reconciliation in a world in love with divisions . . . to live out the truth that underneath our diversity we are one.³²⁵

It is only through the stillness of prayer and contemplation, Palmer says, that we will be able to “overcome our polarities as contradictions, rather than two ends of a dynamic tension which can work together in a powerful whole.”³²⁶ He suggests that congregations offer small group experiences in prayer and study to supplement liturgy, for it is incumbent that we learn to reflect on our shared experience of prayer, to ask each other probing and caring questions, to share divergent experiences and drop the plumb lines of Scripture and tradition into our gathered

³²⁵ Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America’s Public Life* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 98-101.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

midst. In this way, the congregation becomes a community of mutual spiritual guidance.³²⁷ And the Church becomes a beacon to the world of Jesus' evolutionary spirit and way of life.

Nonetheless, of this, I have confidence: if the church is not up to the challenge of supporting, even challenging, people to grow in consciousness, the Spirit will be active elsewhere. This gives me true hope and joy. But my heart is sorrowful, as well. For the needs of the Earth are so great, why would we not all join in its evolution? We need not think alike in our unity, but it is to Earth's detriment that we ignore the "mutational persons" on the margins, God's guiding lights. People like Teilhard de Chardin have ever been there to invite us forward. And as always, God eagerly awaits.

³²⁷ Ibid., 183.

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