

Notes from Ilia Delio Conference

May 8, 2020

The Sacrament of Everyday Life

Sr. Ilia Delio: It's wonderful to see where everyone's coming from: South Africa, Providence, Rome, Korea, Seoul, all over the world. It is truly amazing for all of us to be together, to share our lives on this planet earth and to share our future. I want to take a moment before we begin for a moment of silence to remember the victims of Covid 19—those who have died, those who are now suffering with the disease, to remember the healthcare workers, the frontline workers who are keeping our systems going for us. We want to be united with them in the love energy that each of us has. So let's take a moment to deeply love and reflect on the time we are in.

So, there's a lot I would like to share with you this afternoon. There are more than 800 on our conference call today. So that's just how amazing Zoom is. If you have any questions, we have a wonderful team here that's really the support of our gathering this afternoon led by our director Greg Hansell and Isabelle Robinson, our program manager, and Eric Grace, the tech side of other things.

The way I'd like to proceed this afternoon: I do have slides because slides help me recount the points I want to share with you. So I'm going to move to the slide share review, and we'll take it from there. I'd like to talk for 15 minutes or so, and then I would like to open it up to Q&A. And when we come to the Q&A, we will have a process that Greg will lead us through.

The title of the talk today is the **Sacrament of Everyday Life**. I think that this title is really to call to mind that we need a new way of seeing the world in which we are making our way through. Here we are in the new normal. You hear this term today "the new normal," and while we know it, we're not all that comfortable with it. I can't tell you how many times people say to me, "Oh, I can't wait until we get back to normal." It makes me smile on the one hand and on the other it makes me think, "What do we think the normal is?" I think one of the ideas of normal is that we can resume our lives as they were. We resume going out shopping, to restaurants, and to gathering, which is all great because we love...we are social beings, right? We love to gather. Yesterday I was taking a walk in the neighborhood, and a group of undergraduates, as only undergraduates could do, were gathering for a party with a six pack in hand with no face masks. I gave them a look like, "Oh, that is a no-no." And they looked at me like, "Oh, tough," I thought it's so symptomatic of our lives, right? We hear about this pandemic. We know about it. We might know someone who lost their lives in it. Yet, there's something about us that wants to continue on in the same kind of individualism

that has in a sense brought us to this point. So we need to think about our lives on this planet in a new way.

Give us the old!	Similarities to the time of Jesus. Jesus announced the in-breaking reign of God. Something new...Matt. 24:36 – Matt. 25: The coming of the Son of Man God is doing new things
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As I was preparing for today, I could not help but reflect that our moment in time is very similar to what Jesus experienced as he began his public ministry. To put this in another way, I think we are in a new Gospel moment. If you recall, Jesus comes on the scene and announces that the spirit of the Lord is upon him. Basically he is saying God is doing new things. God is breaking into the world in a new way. Something new is happening. Of course, many of the people around him said, “This is crazy!” right? “Who is this guy, anyway?” “We just want to go about our business. We want to be faithful to our Jewish religion. We don’t want this guy Jesus telling us what we should do and not do and who God is. Who does he think he is, anyway?” There’s a passage in Matthew that reflects the kind of attitude that I think was going on in Jesus’ day that was very similar to what is going on in our own. The passage is from Matthew’s eschatological discourse. In other words, Matthew is saying that the coming of the Son of Man will be like what happened in the day of Noah. He said, “In the days before the flood, people ate and drank. Men and women married up to the very day when Noah went into the boat. Yet they did not realize what was happening until the flood came and swept them all away. This is how it will be when the Son of Man comes. At that time two men will be working in a field. One will be taken away. The other will be left behind. Two women will be at a mill grinding meal. One will be taken away. The other will be left behind. Watch out then, because you do not know what day your Lord will come.” Interesting passage. Now many people would interpret this as apocalyptic—the end of the world. But we have to interpret the Gospels in the world that we live in. We don’t live in a closed universe. We live in an open universe. Yes, the Son of Man is coming. Christ is coming, but that coming is an emergence. Christ is rising up. Another way of saying this is God is seeking to break through the narrowness of our lives and to become God in a new way. So this kind of mantra “Give us the old!, Give us the old normal” is

actually very like the Old Testament people. They just want to keep on doing the same thing. If we continue on that path, we will be swept off our feet in a sudden moment without warning. We need to begin to read the signs of the times.

So what is normal?

Closed systems:

- self-contained, self-maintained**
- little exchange with environment**
- proceeds in direction of increasing disorder**
- little complexity**

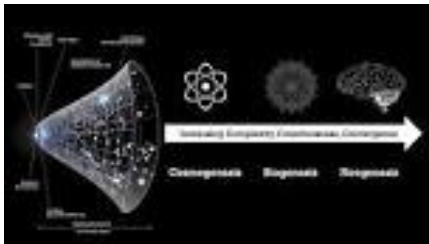
Open systems:

- far from equilibrium**
- open to the environment**
- spontaneous new order**
- complexity of environment interaction**

I think when we think of normal, we think of a routinized life. We think of it as routine: I get up, I go to work, I have my coffee. You might call the routine of life is like a closed system. Don't expect a lot of change. Expect a certain amount of predictability. We interact with the environment, but the environment doesn't really impact our daily routines. It might alter it in some ways sometimes, but my routine is set in some sense by the energy I put into my day and how I organize my life. So a closed system self-contained, little exchange with the environment. Of course if the system loses energy, it will start to wear down. In a sense we have been living in closed systems up until the twentieth century. That's how we have structured our systems.

But we know today in science that many systems of nature work as open systems. An open system is far from equilibrium. An open system is open to the environment, which means spontaneous new order can emerge, right? New things can happen. Therefore, the system is constantly interacting with the environment to form a new type of complex unity or relationship. I think when Jesus emerged on the scene in his own day, what he did was, he disrupted the old system of the Jewish law. He initiated a new open system of a God-centered world. People didn't quite get it; in fact, many people didn't

get it, right, because it didn't end well for Jesus. Because open systems challenge us to live in a radically new way. I think that's what we want to explore here.



Increasing complexity, consciousness, convergence



Cosmogenesis Biogenesis Noogenesis

Big Bang Expansion
13.7 billion years

Again, this is pointing to our reality. As Teilhard de Chardin has spoken about and wrote about many times, we are in an evolutionary universe. This is a world of expansion on a cosmological level. Biologically it is complexified, meaning that we keep moving toward greater complexity, more degrees of relationality as we are doing here with technology. We have a different level of consciousness today, a much greater consciousness of belonging to the globe, to the planet. So we are converging. In Teilhard's view, the power of this whole movement is God-Omega. There's a power of love, a power that centrates us, a power that's within. That power continues to break through our lives when we become thwarted, isolated, stifled, and refuse to change.

Teilhard saw the role of technology as one of convergence, drawing together of hearts and minds, forming a collective mind.

Teilhard saw technology is one of the ways that we can in a sense begin to grow together in a new way in this time period. Convergence, coming together. A new mind together, maybe a new heart together, and a new collective mind, and together which Zoom and Slack many other platforms are now facilitating.

Self Reflection ➡ Co-Reflection

“We should consider inter-thinking humanity as a new type of organism whose destiny it is to realize new possibilities for evolving life on this planet.”

Teilhard de Chardin, *“Christianity and Evolution*



What Teilhard thought is that we can begin to think together in a new way. This is part of the new moment. We're attracted to it, but not entirely sold on it, because we like to be our individual selves. What Teilhard envisioned is a new inter-thinking humanity that have a new mindfulness together of a new type of organism on earth. One way that would realize new life for the planet an inter-thinking planet of interbeingness.

If we cannot imagine that religion takes shape in technology, then we have eliminated the religious depth dimension of the most significant development of human becoming.”

Philip Hefner

Interestingly, religion is a most essential part of technology today. I think I have spoken about this before, but it is hard for us to get our heads around, because I think we have made religion too institutionalized. We have tided too much to institutions: too much to doctrines and laws, too much to canons, that we have failed to realize that religion is a depth-dimension of life itself – cosmic life. Therefore religion, meaning the binding power, spirituality as the energy that binds us to ultimate meaning. Religion is in a sense taking place in technology today. As Phil Hefner says, “If we can't imagine in religion what is taking place in technology, then we are eliminating the religious depth dimension of our most significant human becoming.” We're becoming something different in and through technology and religion plays a vital role. That's something we need to begin to work with and get our heads around.



“A new vision of the universe calls for a new form of worship and a new method of action.”

-Teilhard de Chardin

Now, the fact is Teilhard thought that a new vision that the universe calls for a new form of worship and a new method of action. We have glimpses of this I know from many, many nonprofit communities, many, many local communities are grappling in their own ways with this notion of a new vision of the universe, with notions of new forms of worship and prayer.

What does this mean for us? What is this new vision that Teilhard saw? Well, one



thing is here again, if I can go back to reading the signs of the time, may be our most fruitful way of engaging life in and through the crisis we find ourselves in. Here is a picture of an empty church. We mourn, those of us who continue to attend mass in church, kind of lament the fact that the churches now are empty, right? They are tomblike. You walk into one, and there is complete silence. You almost feel sorry for God. But then you remember the Easter message, right? when Jesus appears to the disciples, right? Or I should say when Mary Magdalene saw the tomb empty. And the angel said what? He is NOT here. He is not in the tomb. He is now, Christ is now everywhere. God is everywhere.

I think this is an invitation for us to rethink Church in the 21st century, to rethink religion, to rethink the power that is moving, not just our lives, but the whole universe to something more.



So I think one of the invitation is to renew something that the ancients themselves knew, right? The universe is sacred. The universe is filled with mystery. Therefore, we can return to the cathedral of the universe. This is not an either or: either you go to church or to the cathedral of the universe. Church was never meant to be an enclosed system or a closed system. It was meant to energize us **for** the cathedral of the universe. But for all sorts of reasons we separated out these things and we left the cathedral of the universe.

Incarnation



The *self* of God is in the *self-emptying* of God; God becoming “element” and thus drawing all things through love into fullness of being.

We take hold of God in the finite.

Of course, you know the radicality of Jesus, of the New Testament, is the illogical God of love. This is a God who doesn't stay in power. This is a God who doesn't stay remote. This is a God who empties godself to become element, to enter into matter, to love matter into the fullness of being. I think sometimes we are looking for God in the wrong places, as if God is there and not here. The whole point of the message of Jesus and the Incarnation is God is in **this** person, **this** drop of water. God is in the finite.



**Religious Holism =
God is the infinite depth of matter and its future**

Teilhard reflected long and deep on the meaning of the Incarnation and what kind of God is being revealed here. He really comes out with a very new theology, that I think to revitalize religion in the 21st century is to get our heads around the new kind of God that Teilhard invites us into. New, meaning this is a much more dynamic God, a God who is the infinite depth of matter, who is the energizing love of matter, who is involved in the material world. Which means that God is involved in the pandemic. God is involved in the crisis. This is not a God remote from anything. The type of theology here is a religious holism.



What we're saying here is God and the world are in a process together. It's hard for us to get our heads around this because of the way we have been formed—to think about God--all perfect, all knowing, immutable, you know, “up there,” wherever there is. And yet you know that is simply not the God revealed as Jesus. What we find are God and the world are in a tango together. This is a dance of the divine, human, cosmic life. What we are beginning to understand is that God's life is enhanced by our lives, because the world continually participates in God and God empowers the world because together God and the world are becoming something new. That newness is what the symbol of the Christ points to—that's the whole Easter message.

“Religion and evolution ... [are destined to] form one continuous organism, in which their respective lives prolong, are dependent on, and complete one another.”

-Teilhard de Chardin

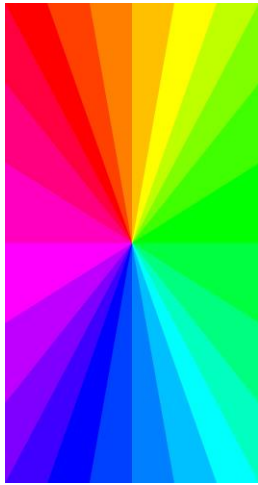


So Teilhard says that religion is not something that is tacked on to our lives, that in fact that religion is the third dimension of cosmic life. So he says that religion and evolution belong together, and that without religion evolution is simply a blind process. Without religion, evolution has nowhere to go. So religion and evolution form a single, continuous organism in which their lives prolong, are dependent on, and complete one another. It's another way of talking about this holism that Teilhard envisions where God is the power of the whole, that God is not something other than the whole. It's the beauty of what we are capable of becoming in relation to the power of love.

“Religion is primarily on the level of consciousness and human action, rather than on the level of institutions or belief systems, except insofar as these belief systems manifest and give direction to the former.”



So Teilhard says “Religion is primarily on the level of human consciousness and human action, rather than on the level of institutions or belief systems, except insofar as these systems manifest and give direction to the former.” We have unfortunately, this, I might say, goes across all world religions, we have flipped God and institution on their heads. So we have made God beholden to the institutions and religion beholden to the institution when in fact the institutions is to serve the power of religion. When it no longer does so, it needs to move on.

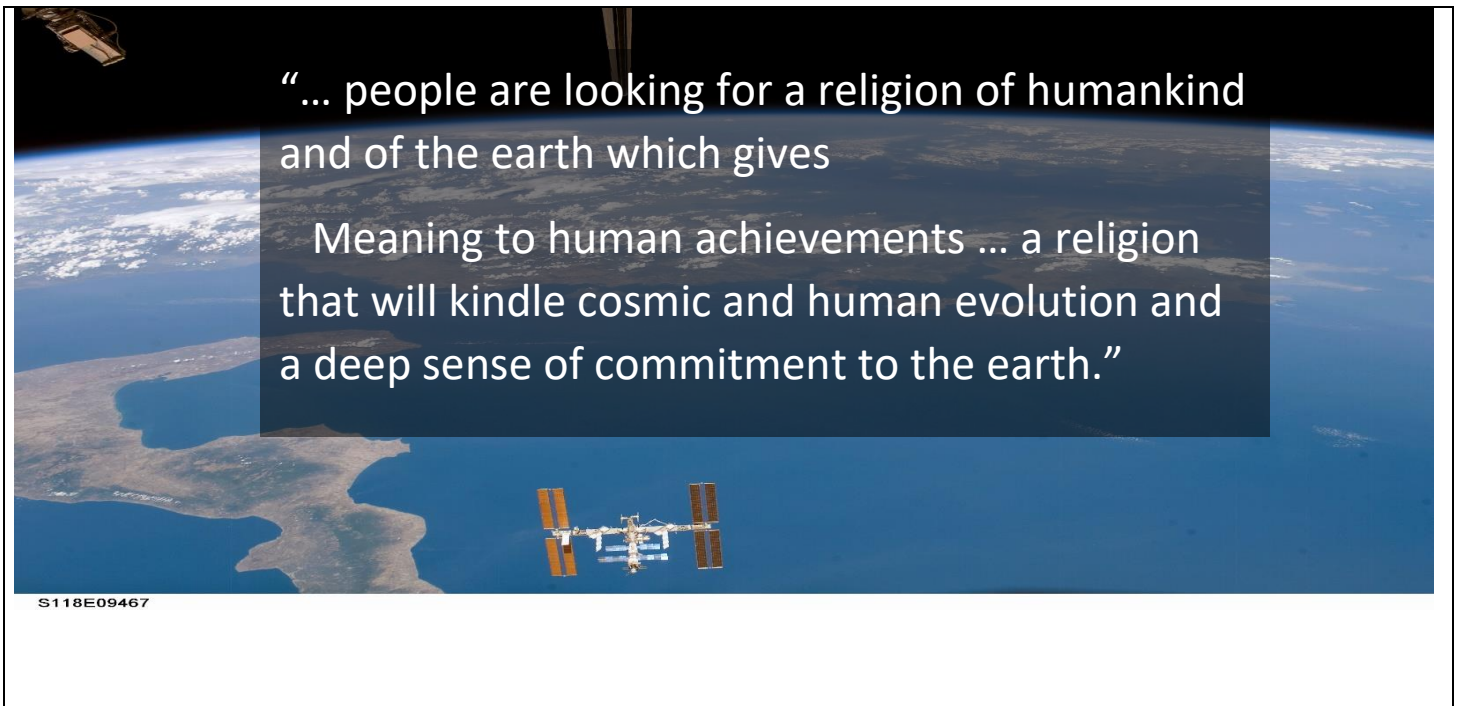


Religion and The Future

Value of religion is to nourish

- **Faith in the world**
- **Faith in God**
- **Faith in the future**
- **Faith in one another**

What Teilhard is saying, and I have reflected on this for some time, what we lack in our own age is the depth dimension of life. We've done very well at building things. We've built great structures, institutional structures, industrialization of things, computers, but we don't have the depth dimension. And that depth dimension—how do we know it's lacking? A—we lack faith in the world. We don't trust the world. It's a world of strict competition, but it's a red and truth and claw world. The strong wind, the weak lose. The powerful will inherit the future; the weak will fade away. So we don't have faith in the world as a world where God is becoming something with us. Faith in God is to have faith in something that is more powerful than ourselves, a power that sustains us, a power that is our future. Therefore, if we have faith in the future and faith in God, then we should have faith in one another. The thing we lack today is faith in one another. We have profound distrust of one another. We think the other is out to get us, to ruin us. We think the other is just to undermine us. So we have all conflicts on every level—politically, institutionally, and within churches. This kind of world without religion does not have much of a future.



So Teilhard says we're looking: "people are looking for a religion of humankind to the earth, a religion that will give meaning to our achievements, a religion that will kindle cosmic and human evolution and a deep sense of commitment to the earth."

Absolutely! Actually, in fact, to be committed to God is to be committed to the earth. You can't separate these things, if you definitely hold to the Incarnation.

There is nothing that cannot be a sacrament. Even the Covid-19 virus, given it's own ecological niche, is sacramental. Taken out of that niche, it can be deadly. What a sacramental life does for us is it causes us to notice and to attend to things in their own beingness, without manipulating them, violating them, controlling them. Liturgy is meant for us to sum up for us the sacred depth of everything. Going to mass was never meant to be the end all to be all. It was meant for a stimulus to see a sacramental world.

The 'Sacramental Principle'