

TEILHARD PERSPECTIVE

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President's Corner John Grim, August 2018

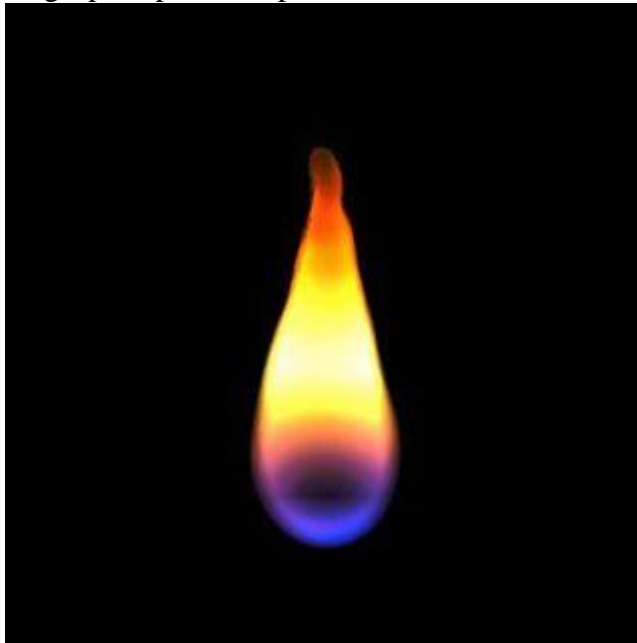
The audience at the 51st Annual Meeting of the American Teilhard Association at Union Theological Seminary on May 19 in New York City was studiously attentive to the talk by Professor Kathleen Duffy, SJ. We were especially eager to hear her remarks because of the sermon earlier that day by the presiding Episcopal Bishop of the United States, Michael Curry, at the royal marriage of Harry and Meghan in London. Bishop Curry celebrated the occasion by evoking Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's remarkable statement: "The day will come when after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire" (*Toward the Future*, 1974, 86-87)

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-currys-sermon-royal-wedding>.

Teilhard's insight into the human discovery of fire, provided a striking complement to Kathy Duffy's talk, "Drawn to Follow the Road to Fire: Teilhard and Struggle." Her

remarks focused on Teilhard's sobering realization that his own life path might be as challenging as the evolutionary road of fire and disruption. Teilhard's commitment, as Kathy reminded us, brought him into both profound insights regarding the tensions in spiritual evolution as well as vexing doubts that he experienced in articulating his vision. The audience that day was reflecting on this striking juxtaposition of intense celebration in which Teilhard's poetic vision was cited along with the daunting toil and struggle that he intuited and experienced during his life.

Just a few days after the Annual Meeting, a blog was posted on May 21 by a recent Notre Dame PhD, John Slattery, titled: "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's Legacy of Eugenics and Racism Can't Be Ignored" <http://religiondispatches.org/pierre-teilhard-de-chardins-legacy-of-eugenics-and-racism-cant-be-ignored/>. This sharp critique of Teilhard was somewhat jarring to read in relation to the celebratory sensibilities evoked at the Annual Meeting. Surely, the struggles that



Teilhard experienced, as a significant dimension of his thought and personality, warranted a more empathetic discussion. Moreover, the questions raised regarding racism and eugenics in the blog stand in contrast to Teilhard's larger vision of cosmogenesis and hominization, namely the unfolding universe and the human participation in that creative process. Since its presentation, Slattery's article has been critiqued for careless research and exaggerated claims to represent the large body of Teilhard's thought. The pointed remarks accusing Teilhard of callous racism have activated many responses.

This issue of the *Teilhard Perspective* offers an opportunity to read some of these responses from Teilhard scholars about the controversies raised. Interestingly, there is also a broader examination and acknowledgement of similar racial and eugenics perspectives occurring by others in the same period in which Teilhard lived. In particular, *National Geographic Magazine*, has taken up the topic of the history of racism in a recent issue. This entire spring issue acknowledges that racism needs to be explored in historical context and with dialogue rather than with blanket condemnations from the vantage point of contemporary inclusive understandings.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/04/from-the-editor-race-racism-history/>

Thus, the presentations here are not to explain away critiques of Teilhard's probings into problematic issues. Rather, it is important to acknowledge the historical and evolutionary context in which these explorations arose. It is also critical to raise questions regarding Teilhard's optimistic view of the human role in evolutionary progress. He advocated advancement as "building the Earth" through science and technology in relation to a larger vision of the future. He did not have a "limits to growth" perspective or the critique of contemporary environmentalists who worry about overshoot of Earth's carrying capacity.

In addition, he framed his progressive vision in largely Christian and Western terms that tended to override the cultural perspectives of other peoples and cultures. In this, he was part of his times. Indeed, the Catholic Church didn't recognize truth in other religions until Vatican

Council II in the early 1960s. In this milieu, Teilhard's life long struggle to break out of narrow religious and scientific perspectives within the Church was significant.

A related tension for Teilhard arises regarding a transcendent vision and the challenges of living with such a vision in an incarnational world in which we are embedded. This dichotomy arises in Teilhard's book, *The Divine Milieu*, where he muses: "How can the man who believes in heaven and the Cross continue to believe seriously in the value of worldly occupations?" (1965:51). His inquiry is still pertinent: How can we hold to a transformative vision even as we struggle with doubts and deficiencies in our day-to-day lives in the world?

Teilhard framed this in a particularly Christian framework by using the symbols of "heaven" and "the Cross." Yet, as a historian of religions, I sense that his question translates into the diversity of religious traditions, spiritual paths, and ethical dispositions available to us today. That is, those "thin-places," as some describe our felt experience of the sacred, can dispose us to experience the thick descriptions of our day-to-day narratives as wanting...or missing the mark. The thickness of life weighs us down; yet, examination of that thickness is necessary.

For Teilhard, the world was a divine milieu—a "thin place" to which he was committed. Whatever diminished attention to the thickness of the world, diminished experience of it as a "thin place." For myself, I wonder what enables us to realize this deep dependence within the world. How can we see our quotidian life-in-the-world as worthy or meaningful in ways that enhance the flourishing of the whole Earth community.

One form of this inquiry that occurs to me is: How long can humans grasp for endless accumulation that ignores the limits of Earth's productivity and still continue to believe seriously in themselves as moral agents? In other words: Can humans realize that their self-aggrandizing demands upon the Earth community diminish the whole dependent interaction?

I have brought us far from our initial quest regarding celebration and doubt, but they seem

related to me. They relate in that they pivot around our misplaced experience of ourselves as subjects and the world as objects to be used and manipulated. I feel that the critique of Teilhard as racist and pro-eugenics distorts his fuller legacy. The blog by Slattery presents a misleading view so contrary to Teilhard's comprehensive understanding of the unity of the universe. Moreover, such an impoverished view also short-circuits Teilhard's sense of the all-embracing energies of love.

Such problematic questions about racism or eugenics and their relation to evolutionary and social progress will probably never leave us completely. Regrettably, our politics today are filled with racism aimed at others outside a normative circle drawn by dominant white society. Furthermore, questions regarding the technical manipulation of life's genetic structure and artificial intelligence are currently being proposed as appropriate ways forward. But are they adequate in themselves?

How we openly dispose ourselves to recognize and explore these questions seems crucial. And love is the disposition most capable of holding open acknowledgement of mistakes, humility regarding partial knowledge, and hope for a truly inclusive and flourishing future. This is what Teilhard called for in his life work. He saw this especially in the possibility of the second discovery of fire. Thus, as animals energized by creative participation in evolution, we would awaken again to our interior fire of love and work toward renewing the face of the Earth.

Trashing Teilhard

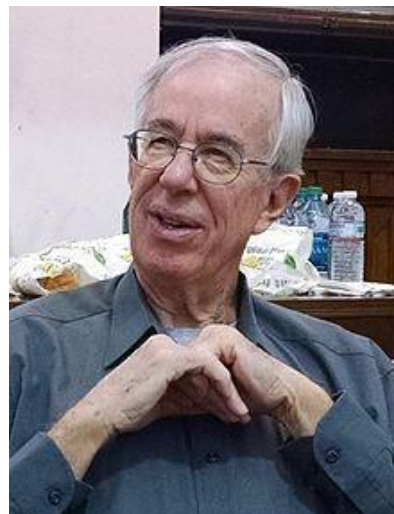
John F Haught

Georgetown University

Was the Jesuit scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin really a fascist, racist, genocidal opponent of human dignity? I had thought that, at least among educated Catholics, the question was almost dead. I was even guessing that holdout pockets of hostility might be vanishing for good after several recent Popes favorably cited

Teilhard's cosmic vision for its theological beauty and Eucharist power.

I guess my optimism was premature. In a recent article likely to gain momentum on social media, the tired old accusation of Teilhard's complicity in the spreading of evil has come roaring out of the gates again. This time



the impeachment is packaged succinctly in a couple of publications by a young Catholic theologian and recent graduate of Notre Dame's Department of Theology. Their author, Dr. John Slattery, claims that "from the 1920s until his death in 1955, Teilhard de Chardin unequivocally supported racist eugenic practices, praised the possibilities of the Nazi experiments, and looked down upon those who [sic] he deemed 'imperfect' humans." In his article "Dangerous Tendencies of Cosmic Theology: The Untold Legacy of Teilhard de Chardin," in *Philosophy and Theology* (December 2016), Slattery writes that a persistent attraction to racism, fascism, and genocidal ideas "explicitly lay the groundwork for Teilhard's famous cosmological theology." This, he highlights, "is a link which has been largely ignored in Teilhardian research until now."

A more recent article by the same critic in *Religion Dispatches* is entitled "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's Legacy of Eugenics and Racism Can't Be Ignored." I encourage readers to look at this shorter piece online: <http://religiondispatches.org/pierreteilhard-de-chardins-legacy-of-eugenics-and-racism-cant-be-ignored/>. They will see that Slattery hangs his claims on only eight stray citations from Teilhard's letters and other scattered writings. Most of these passing remarks were never developed for publication nor elaborated systematically. Their style is provocative and

interrogatory, and their meaning in every case is highly debatable. Slattery gives them to us, however, as undeniable evidence that Teilhard's true "legacy" is one of hostility to Catholic affirmation of human dignity, racial justice, and concern for the disadvantaged. More important, however, is the assertion that it was Teilhard's commitment to these evils that gave rise to his mature "cosmological theology." Nothing could be more preposterous and farther from the truth.

Slattery's thesis—offered without any real argumentation—will appeal to those on the Catholic and Evangelical right who have consistently repudiated Teilhard for trying to reconcile Christian faith with evolutionary biology. And it will draw no objections from the many scientific skeptics like Jacques Monod and atheistic philosophers like Daniel Dennett who have denounced Teilhard's thought for the same reason. Above all, however, it will win approval from readers who suspect that there just has to be something deeply perverse about Teilhard's rethinking of Christian faith for the age of science.

Instead of digging into Teilhard's mountainous body of work, with which he shows little familiarity, Slattery rests his summation of "Teilhard's legacy" on half a thimbleful of quotes taken out of context. Seasoned Teilhard scholars have known about these remarks for decades but have usually measured their significance in terms of what they take to be Teilhard's *true* legacy. This legacy consists of at least four cardinal principles completely ignored in Slattery's desperate debunking. Here they are:

First principle: *The universe is still coming into being.* Theologically, this means that creation is not yet "finished" and that humans, who are part of an unfinished universe, may contribute to the ongoing creation of the world. The opportunity to participate, even in the most excruciatingly monotonous ways, in "building the earth" is a cornerstone of human dignity. It is also a teaching of Vatican II. The fact that our creativity can sometimes lead to monstrous outcomes does not absolve us of the obligation to improve the world and ourselves. Taking advantage of this opportunity is also essential to sustaining hope

and a "zest for living." And nothing "clips the wings of hope" nor leads life into listlessness more deadeningly than the now obsolete theological idea that the universe has been finished once and for all and that all we can do religiously is hope for its restoration.

Yet Teilhard was also careful to point out that we participate in creation, and prove our fidelity to life in an unfinished universe, not only by our activities but also by our passivities. Far from being indifferent to the suffering of the disabled and the marginalized, as Slattery accuses Teilhard of being, the Jesuit priest consistently fostered a vision of life that gives dignity to the helpless and those in need. As he reflected with quiet empathy and unvanquished hope on the incessant suffering of an invalid sister, for example, he developed a beautiful Christian theology of suffering. Furthermore, in the quest for what contributes rightly to new creation and the zest for living, Teilhard set forth as morally permissible *only* those actions and creative projects that are in accordance with the following three principles.

Second principle: *To create means to unify (creare est unire).* Scientifically understood, the emerging cosmos becomes real and intelligible only by (gradually) bringing increasingly more complex forms of unity or coherence out of its primordial state of diffusion and subatomic dispersal. As the universe in the course of deep time becomes more intricately unified in its emergent instances of physical complexity, it also becomes more conscious. Theologically understood, the principle is realized in Christian hope as summed up in Jesus's prayer that "all may be one" and in the Pauline expectation that everything will be "brought to a head" in Christ "in whom all things consist." Teilhard's true "legacy" lies in his rich Christian sense of a universe converging on Christ and being brought into final union with and in God. Almost all the many distortions of Teilhard's intentions, none more agonizingly than Slattery's, stem from a failure to understand exactly what he means by *true* union.

Third principle: *True union differentiates.* True union does not mean uniformity or homogeneity but a rich, complex mode of being that is built up out of a diversity of components that are permitted to coexist in a relationship of complementarity. Theologically, the principle that “true union differentiates” is exemplified in a wondrous way in the doctrine of God as three in one. Scientifically speaking, it is both a good evolutionary and ecological principle as well as a criterion of survivable social organization. Ecologically, true unity maximizes diversity and acknowledges differences. So does the biblical theme of justice. Slattery should know, then, that when Teilhard acknowledges “inequalities” he is not supporting injustice, racism, classism, or elitism. He is following an ethical and ecological principle that maximizes diversity and differences in such a way as not to detract from individual value and overall unity.

True unity at the human level of cosmic emergence enhances personal freedom, maximizes otherness, and in that way respects personal dignity. So, when Teilhard expresses “interest” in the fascist experiments of the 20th century, far from approving them, as Slattery sneakily implies, he is simply observing that such movements feed parasitically on a twisted passion for union, an irrational instinct devoid of concern for differentiation. Anyone who has actually read Teilhard’s works widely and fairly will notice that he deemed fascist and communist experiments evil insofar as they fail to look beyond uniformity, homogeneity, and ideological conformism to the *true* unity that differentiates, liberates, and personalizes.

Finally, Teilhard presents the cosmic Christ as the paradigm of differentiating, personalizing, attracting, and liberating union. Christ is the Center around which humans and all of creation are called to gather in differentiated, dialogical—and hence intimate—communion (as expressed in the Eucharist).

Fourth principle: *The world rests on the future as its sole support.* As we survey cosmic history with the scientists, we discover a “law of recurrence” in which something new, more

complex, and (eventually) more conscious has always been taking shape up ahead. Scientifically speaking, we can now see that subatomic elements were organized around atomic nuclei; atoms were gathered into molecules, molecules into cells, and cells into complex organisms some of which have recently made the leap into thought. The most important kinds of emergence can occur, however, only if the elements allow themselves to be organized around a new and higher *center* that lifts them up to the state of more elaborately differentiated unity.

In our contemporary picture of an unfinished universe a Center of union and a fountain of “fuller being” is always awaiting the universe up ahead. Theologically, Teilhard identifies this future ultimately with what the Abrahamic traditions call God. What gives nature its consistency and unity, what holds it together in other words, is not the subatomic past—where everything falls apart into incoherence—but the always fresh future where everything is gathered into one. True Being, the Center of differentiating union, resides essentially in the future.

Yes, God is both Alpha and Omega, “but God is more Omega than Alpha.” To experience true union, true being, true goodness, and true beauty, therefore, we must allow ourselves—like Abraham, the prophets, and Jesus—to be grasped by the Future. Teilhard stated explicitly that his whole theology of nature was an attempt to implement the cosmic expectations of St Paul and the Fourth Evangelist. Not to notice this deeply Christian motif in his thought is to do him grave injustice.

It is only under the constraints of Christian hope that he says we must be ready to “try everything.” This requires a more adventurous sense of the moral life than what we find in classical religious patterns of piety. Teilhard was looking for a morality rooted in hope not only for humanity but for the whole universe. This cosmic turn can cause confusion to theologians who have not yet fully awakened to the fact of an unfinished universe and what the new cosmology means for our understanding of God, faith, and the sense of obligation.

Teilhard, contrary to his detractors, was humble enough to acknowledge that his own

thoughts on these topics were tentative and revisable. We should not be surprised if at times he made mistakes. Who hasn't? Still, since humans are part of nature, and nature remains far from finished, it is perfectly legitimate to wonder, as countless other thoughtful people are doing today, whether and to what extent humans can participate in their own and the world's future evolution. Is this genocidal? At least in the four principles sketched above (as well as others not discussed here) we have a morally rich framework within which to begin dealing with the hard questions that Teilhard was among the first to raise

*"Trashing Teilhard" Published in Commonweal
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In Support of Teilhard's Vision

*Ilia Delio,
Villanova University*

The great medievalist scholar Etienne Gilson once wrote of Bonaventure: "You can either see the general economy of his doctrine in its totality, or see none of it, nor would a historian be led by the understanding of one of the fragments to desire to understand the whole, for the fragments are quite literally meaningless by themselves, since each part reaches out into all the rest of the system and is affected by the ramifications leading to it from the synthesis as a whole" (*The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, 436).

What Gilson wrote of Bonaventure could also be said of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who saw himself in the lineage of the Greek Fathers of the early Church. Teilhard was such a broad, integrated thinker that you either see the economy of the whole of his thought or none of it. Like the early Greek Fathers, he developed a cosmic Christology based on natural philosophy (science), Scripture (especially the writings of St. Paul) and faith in Jesus Christ. His theological vision emerged out of a deep, prayerful reflection on the dynamic relationship of God and world with an understanding of evolution beyond Darwinian natural selection. According to

Teilhard, evolution and creation, cosmos and history of salvation are not contrasts but complementary aspects of the *one* process of reality.



Within his "Weltanschauung" three levels of perception may be distinguished: physics or phenomenology, metaphysics or hyperphysics, and mysticism. The *object* of perception, for Teilhard, is always the *entire* reality. He thought of the cosmic Christ like a tapestry of divine love incarnate unfolding across the vast dynamic expanse of evolution. To grasp his ideas one must follow the threads of his tapestry as they begin in the integrated union of faith and science.

There are some scholars today who maintain that Teilhard was a proponent of eugenics Nazism and human superiority. In their view Teilhard's radical anthropocentrism thwarts an ecological consciousness, since he holds the human person above all other aspects of biological life. This is so unfortunate because Teilhard thought completely otherwise. His brilliant insights were born out of an acute scientific mind and a deeply Ignatian spirit. He was first and foremost a scientist and he wrote about theological matters as a scientist not as a trained theologian. He wrote: "I never leave for an instant the realm of scientific observation." Profoundly misunderstood and labeled by critics as a charlatan, Teilhard realized that the real path to truth must begin with concrete reality. He wrote his opus, *The Phenomenon of Man*, not as a work of metaphysics, still less as a theological essay, but simply as a scientific treatise. Yet, anyone familiar with modern science would find his talk of an imperceptible psychic "within" of matter or spiritual energy or a teleologically directed evolution as scientifically suspect. Teilhard was well-aware of such suspicions and genuine perplexity as to his methods; he encountered them and wrestled with them all his

life long. Elizabeth Sewell, however, noted in her book, *The Human Metaphor*, that Teilhard's greatest contribution may be methodological. What Teilhard contributes is a renewed scientific methodology that connects science with *logos*, cosmos and *eros*, in a way that impacts the whole social order and thus the course of evolution.

Although Teilhard saw himself as a scientist, he clearly saw the need for a new philosophy and metaphysics that could support the integration of faith and evolution. He sought to develop a philosophy of love but did not follow a systematic approach to his endeavor. Yet one can follow his connections between love as a significant force of attraction and the primacy of the future which leads to his notion of hyper-physics (compared to the classical meta-physics). His philosophical insights are woven throughout his writings providing a metaphysical basis to his personalizing universe. It is precisely his philosophy and metaphysics that critics of Teilhard fail to adequately consider.

Further, while Teilhard was a trained paleontologist, he did not agree with Darwin's theory of evolution. In his view, Darwinian evolution did not adequately account for novelty and transcendence in nature. In his view the 'phenomenon of evolution' is "something very different from and more than a mere genesis of animal species" ("The Energy of Evolution," in *Activation of Energy*, 362). Does this mean he disregarded animals? Absolutely not. Rather he saw the emergence of different species within a larger flow of cosmic and biological life. He was inspired by the French philosopher Henri Bergson and his notion of creative evolution. Bergson posited an "elan vital" or a vital impulse in nature, which led Teilhard to develop his concept of Omega. Again, this is a departure from classical Darwinian evolution and to interpret Teilhard through a Darwinian lens is to do him a radical injustice.

The critics of Teilhard today are operating theologically out of a Thomistic philosophical paradigm and scientifically from a Darwinian framework, neither of which are relevant to Teilhard. His ideas instead are along the lines of process thought rather than Greek metaphysics,

giving rise to a dynamic understanding of God as the power of the future.

Quite honestly, I do not foresee the critics of Teilhard changing their minds any time soon. They are quite convinced of their methods and, if anything, they will strive to defend their positions. Teilhard lived with this same "wooden scholasticism" and it was precisely this scholastic inertia that propelled him to work tirelessly toward a new theological vision consonant with evolution. I suggest that we do the same.

The Legacy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: A Response to John Slattery

*Joshua Canzona,
Wake Forest University*

Having recently completed a dissertation on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, I read John Slattery's article on Teilhard's "legacy of eugenics and racism" with interest. I agree with some of the motivation

for his essay and in a paper delivered just last month I called for more work to be done "on the subject of elitist, ethnocentric, imperialist, and racist elements in



Teilhardian thought." Slattery provides a service by casting light on some of the most troubling passages in the Teilhardian corpus, but I strongly disagree with his method and conclusions. My first concern is with the tone of Slattery's essay. While I appreciate the appended claim that he did not write his essay "out of malice or spite," I found his choice of words off-putting and

potentially demeaning when he writes of Twitter users who “swooned over” a Teilhard quote.

There are surprising factual errors. Slattery gets the date of Teilhard’s death wrong.¹ He anachronistically references “Pontifical Councils.”² Slattery claims Teilhard wrote “dozens of books and hundreds of essays” when he only wrote two books. Teilhard’s theological essays were later collected to produce eleven more. One would need to include the published volumes of Teilhard’s personal correspondence, his journals, and his rarely-cited scientific writings to reach “dozens.” To ignore this fact is also to ignore that most of Teilhard’s essays were not revised for mass publication. Slattery does, however, acknowledge Teilhard’s work was censured by church authorities. It is important to note this censure deprived Teilhard of the contribution interlocutors and critique might have had on his ideas. Slattery also writes, “Bishop Curry’s use of Teilhard’s vision of ‘fire’ at the Royal Wedding comes largely from *The Mass on the World*, completed in 1923.” Fire imagery is central to Teilhard’s writing and Bishop Curry’s selection bears some affinity with “*The Mass on the World*,” but the sermon’s most direct citation is from an essay titled “*The Evolution of Chastity*” written in 1934.³ I find this omission strange, but it could stem from Slattery’s desire to separate Teilhard’s work into an acceptable early portion and an unacceptable latter portion. This is futile. There are elitist and colonialist passages in some of Teilhard’s earliest letters and insights of great beauty in his final essays.

As a final critique of approach, I do not believe Slattery’s citations support his conclusions. Taken out of context, some of the citations lose notes of ambiguity or ambivalence. Slattery quotes the awful passage, “More generally still, how should we judge the efforts

we lavish in all kinds of hospitals on saving what is so often no more than one of life’s rejects?” But he conveniently elides the next sentence, “Something profoundly true and beautiful (I mean faith in the irreplaceable value and unpredictable resources contained in each personal unit) is evidently concealed in persistent sacrifice to save a human existence.”⁴

This does not excuse Teilhard, but it complicates the portrait Slattery wants to paint. Slattery follows this citation with another example meant to show how Teilhard continued to “argue for forced eugenical practices” in a debate with Gabriel Marcel. But the given quote makes no mention of eugenics and instead focuses on Teilhard’s characteristic faith in the “inevitability of human progress” despite the horrors of Nazi Germany. Once again, this is obvious in the excised portion of the source text,

He [Teilhard] added as a corollary, since the human species was still so young and still prone to fall into the dark from which it came, the persistence of such evil was to be expected. But since, unlike the lower animals, man no longer acted purely out of instinct, he would presumably abandon every new experiment the moment he saw it did not lead him to greater personalization.⁵

Slattery misrepresents both Teilhard and the authors of the biography he is citing. Slattery is shaping evidence to meet his conclusions instead of revising his conclusions based on evidence.

Slattery asserts no scholars “have written at length on the depths of Teilhard’s commitments to eugenics, sterilization, and racial superiority.” Two replies are necessary. First, he overstates the enthusiasm for Teilhard studies. While Teilhard was extremely fashionable when his work first burst onto the scene in the 1960s,

1 Teilhard died on Easter Sunday, April 10, 1955 and not in 1953.

2 Pontifical Councils did not exist under this name during Teilhard’s lifetime. Slattery likely intended to refer to the “Holy Office,” i.e. what is now called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

3 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt, 2002), 86–87.

4 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy*, trans. J. M. Cohen (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 133.

5 Mary Lukas and Evelyn Lukas, *Teilhard* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 238.

there was a significant downturn afterward.⁶ Slattery asks why scholars have not written about Teilhard and racism. The most obvious answer is that too few scholars are writing about Teilhard in general.⁷ My dissertation is the first sustained comparison of Teilhard with a Muslim thinker. I could just as easily ask why this has not been done before. My second reply is that there is indeed prior scholarship on some of the issues raised by Slattery. In her excellent dissertation, “The Kingdom of God as a Unity of Persons,” Amy Limpitlaw argues that Teilhard “openly espouses a kind of racism” and provides an extended analysis.⁸

This brings us to Slattery’s thesis: “the mature formulations of some of Teilhard’s most famous ideas—e.g., the Noosphere, the Omega Point, the divinization of the species—rest upon philosophies infused with conceptions of eugenics, racial superiority, sterilization, and limitless science.” He is even bolder in a journal article where he argues that Teilhard’s entire mature cosmology “rests upon a wildly racist foundational philosophy.”⁹ I disagree.

From thousands of pages of Teilhard’s manuscripts, Slattery has picked out eight troubling passages. While there are certainly others he could have chosen, we are still looking at only the tiniest portion of Teilhard’s work. If eugenics and racism were as central as Slattery would have us believe, why do they so rarely come up? In response, I would remind that Teilhard envisions humanity brought together through center-to-center unions. In terms of mysticism, this means you cannot dissolve the self in union because the self, the center, is the

very substance of the union. And if every individual is the very substance of union, then over-emphasizing hierarchy or exclusion in Teilhardian thought is a mistake. Teilhard calls racism “collective egoism.”¹⁰ This egoism works against progress by walling off the unique contributions from whichever groups are designated inferior. This is self-defeating. Teilhard writes, “The way out for the world, the gates of the future, the entry into the superhuman, will not open ahead to some privileged few, or to a single people, elect among all peoples. They will yield only to the thrust of *all together*.”¹¹ This is the vision inspiring one of the hallmarks of antiracist literature, Flannery O’Connor’s *Everything That Rises Must Converge*.

Slattery suggests we disregard all of Teilhard’s writing after “The Mass on the World.” He reaches this conclusion through overemphasis on Teilhard the techno-futurist over Teilhard the priest whose most fully formed vision is of a future where God will be all in all.¹² The prescription for a more accurate reading is not to focus exclusively on a sliver of Teilhard’s mystical writings. The answer, instead, is to understand the strongest reading of Teilhard takes place through a mystical lens. In this way we might better understand Teilhard’s meaning when he writes, “The only subject ultimately capable of mystical transfiguration is the whole group of mankind forming a single body and a single soul in charity.”¹³ In this way we might produce powerful antiracist readings of Teilhard while acknowledging this is a project partially engaged with reading Teilhard against himself. This certainly seems to be the approach of Bishop Michael Curry who bracketed Teilhard’s invocation of love’s fiery power with similar sentiment from Martin Luther King.

6 Susan Sack, “Teilhard in America: The 1960s, The Counterculture, and Vatican II” (University of Dayton, 2014), 281.

7 Steve Fuller, “Whatever Happened to Teilhard de Chardin? A Case for Resurrection,” *Futures* 40 (2008): 893–926.

8 Amy Limpitlaw, “The Kingdom of God as a Unity of Persons: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s Organic Model and John Macmurray’s Form of the Personal” (The University of Chicago, 2000), 119.

9 John P. Slattery, “Dangerous Tendencies of Cosmic Theology: The Untold Legacy of Teilhard de Chardin,” *Philosophy & Theology* 29, no. 1 (2017): 81.

10 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, trans. Sarah Appleton-Weber (Chicago: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), 168.

11 *Ibid.*, 173.

12 1 Corinthians 15:28.

13 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001), 121.

It is important to highlight and discuss Teilhard's problematic passages, but John Slattery misreads, misrepresents, and overreaches. Anyone intrigued by Bishop Curry's sermon ought to read deeply in Teilhard's writings and judge for themselves. With Slattery, I recommend the early spiritual classics, "The Mass on the World" and *The Divine Milieu*. Among his later writings, "The Heart of Matter" provides an autobiographical explanation of his overall vision. Ursula King's *Spirit of Fire*, the most recent biography of Teilhard, offers another entry point for those interested in learning about the singular life experiences of a kind of theological Indiana Jones. Teilhard should be more read, more taught, and more talked about because the real legacy of Teilhard's thought is a message we sorely need: recognition of love's transformative power and our responsibility to build a more unified world.

My Story and Intro to Teilhard

Gary Shepherd

A 2017 NPR segment featured a revelatory interview between journalist Mark Betancourt and Gary Shepherd, a man incarcerated in Arizona for nearly 25 years under a "three strikes" law. The interview gained momentum as this self-taught, highly articulate prisoner shared that The Phenomenon of Man is one of the most important books he has ever read and that, after reading it, he turned his life and efforts toward using the convergence of spirituality and evolution to lift his own community.

Fascinated by the notion that the core of evolution does not center on survival of the fittest but, instead, genetic cooperation, Gary reached out to experts to explore this collective process more deeply. Infused with Teilhard's teachings on the power of love, Gary began to help himself and other inmates move forward despite incarceration. He has since developed B-Free, a program devoted to peaceful conflict resolution,

and he has introduced the prison to yoga and meditation practices.

The following letter underscores the power of Teilhard to lift hearts from darkness to enlightenment. Gary included his address in case you would like to send him words of encouragement.

You can learn more about Gary at kalw.org (or by searching Behind Bars Betancourt).

Jayne Ann McPartlin

Greetings to all of you keeping the memory and vision of Teilhard alive. My name is Gary Shepherd. I'm a prisoner in Arizona and have been serving a life sentence since 1991. I was sentenced under an old mandatory sentencing law that didn't require anyone to be injured. I was 20 years old when that happened and needless to say it had a life shattering impact on me.

That incident absolutely drove me to figure out what went wrong in my life and what was wrong with the system, if anything at all. From that point on I started studying many different subjects including a lot of soul searching in my quest for answers. Through my studies I came to believe that evolution was a fact, yet like other fields of knowledge and science, it was still just factual information. Then I came across an old worn out copy of *The Phenomenon of Man* by Teilhard in the prison library. After reading that book I was transformed by a whole new vision merging evolution and spirituality into a new emerging higher meaning in life. I understood and felt a complete spiritual connection to everything and everyone and realized I was part of the unfolding evolutionary process. I then began sharing my newfound understanding with other prisoners trying to teach community altruism as well as a whole new vision of life's meaning. I was able to also develop the Peer Mentorship Program that helped prisoners learn relapse prevention, disease prevention, release planning, etc. The other thing I created was a course called B-Free. It is a Universe Creation story that incorporates positive psychology and

Prosocial design principles that apply to the prisoners' personal circumstances.

I now have the excellent *Journey of the Universe* DVD that the prisoners can watch and consider. For that I am indebted to Jayne Ann for reaching out to me after hearing a radio interview I did on science and spirituality. The ideas expressed in that interview were a direct outgrowth from Teilhard, and mentioned him by name, as well as including input from biology and anthropology professor David Sloan Wilson. I was just told by journalist Mark Betancourt that worked with me on that story, that it was submitted for a journalist award on spirituality. So I'm glad to hear our work is having a positive impact. That includes all the excellent work being done to change the world by you at the Teilhard Association. If there is anyway I can contribute to your efforts, then please don't hesitate to ask. Thank you for your service and Good Luck to you all.

Gary Shepherd
#83752
East Unit/Box 5000
Florence, AZ 85132

Featured Excerpt from *Thomas Berry: Selected Writings on the Earth Community*

Taken from "The Role of the Human," Thomas Berry: Selected Writings on the Earth Community (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 163-4. Originally from "The Great Work" in The Great Work.

Perhaps the most valuable heritage we can provide for future generations is some sense of the Great Work that is before them of moving the human project from its devastating exploitation to a benign presence. We need to give them some indication of how the next generation can fulfill this work in an effective manner. For the success or failure of any historical age is the extent to which those living at that time have fulfilled the

special role that history has imposed upon them. No age lives completely unto itself. Each age has only what it receives from the prior generation. Just now we have abundant evidence that the various species of life, the mountains and rivers, and even the vast ocean itself, which once we thought beyond serious impact from humans, will survive only in their damaged integrity.

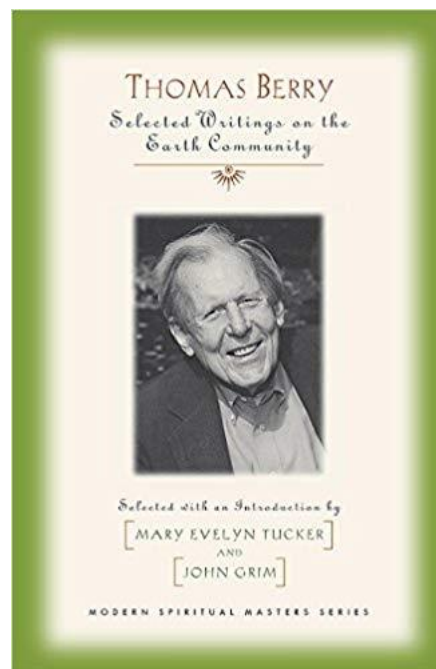
The Great Work before us, the task of moving modern industrial civilization from its present

devastating influence on Earth to a more benign mode of presence, is not a role that we have chosen. It is a role given to us, beyond any consultation with ourselves. We did not choose. We were chosen

by some power beyond ourselves for this historical task. We do not choose the moment of our birth, who our parents will be, our particular culture or the historical moment when we will be born. We do not choose the status of spiritual insight or political or economic conditions that will be the context of our lives. We are, as it were, thrown into existence with a challenge and a role that is beyond any personal choice. The nobility of our lives, however, depends upon the manner in which we come to understand and fulfill our assigned role.

Yet, we must believe that those powers that assign our role must in that same act bestow upon us the ability to fulfill this role. We must believe that we are cared for and guided by these same powers that bring us into being.

Our own special role, which we will hand on to our children, is that of managing the arduous transition from the terminal Cenozoic to



the emerging Ecozoic era, the period when humans will be present to the planet as participating members of the comprehensive Earth community.

We might observe here that the Great Work of a people is the work of all the people. No one is exempt. Each of us has our individual life pattern and responsibilities. Yet beyond these concerns, each person in and through their personal work assists in the Great Work. Personal work needs to be aligned with the Great Work. This can be seen in the medieval period as the basic patterns of personal life and craft skills were aligned within the larger work of the civilizational effort. While this alignment is more difficult in these times it must remain an ideal to be sought.

We cannot doubt that we too have been given the intellectual vision, the spiritual insight, and even the physical resources we need for carrying out the transition that is demanded of these times, transition from the period when humans were a disruptive force on the planet Earth to the period when humans become present to the planet in a manner that is mutually enhancing.

Foundation Teilhard de Chardin: Celebrating 25 Years

The association would like to bring attention to our Dutch counterpart, the Foundation Teilhard de Chardin, dedicated to promoting 'the Convergence of Science and Religion.' The Foundation is celebrating their 25th anniversary, and in honor of that anniversary the current issue of their magazine, GAMMADELTA, has been published in English and German, as well as Dutch. You can access the issue at their website: <https://www.teilharddechardin.nl> (please note that the magazine subscription/download is only accessible from the Dutch version of the site, not

the English version). Here is an excerpt from the current issue with information on the evolution of the association and their publication:

Our magazine's name refers to the point in the evolutionary process where we consider ourselves to be. According to Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary philosophy evolution is a process evolving toward its final stage that he called the Omega- point. In this final stage we will all be united with the creator in our individuality as persons. Teilhard's starting point is that all particles that came into being from the Alpha- point onward (i.e. at the Big Bang) have a more or less conscious 'within' (French: le dedans). From the first moment after the Big Bang the elementary particles that exploded started to attract other particles and bond with them, resulting in an increase in complexity and consciousness on the way to this final stage.

Until 1994 our magazine was called GAMMA. It is our hope that our foundation will soon have a new board, which, in 2019, will publish a magazine bearing the name DELTA, thereby symbolizing the next step on the way to the final stage. In this way, this next step will be made visible in the present developments in science, technology and our ability to achieve cooperation on a global scale and to effect rapprochement between ideologies and religions.

Merton and Me: A Living Trinity

Presented by Douglas Hertler a.k.a. Doug Lory

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2018
1:00-4:00 P.M., RECEPTION TO FOLLOW

Merton & Me—A Living Trinity, is an act of



MERTON AND ME
A LIVING TRINITY
A Solo Performance
WRITTEN & PRESENTED BY
DOUGLAS HERTLER & DOUG LORY

storytelling which explores the dynamics of the false self as seen through the eyes of an actor whose very vocation called him to become someone other than himself. Written and performed by Douglas Hertler

(known professionally as Doug Lory), it depicts his unexpected and life-changing encounter with the writings of Thomas Merton, most notably Merton's classic *No Man Is An Island*. While the conflicting personalities of Douglas Hertler and Doug Lory seek to learn the true nature of their identities, Thomas Merton appears and reappears, creating a synergy of spirit and psyche that serves as a mirror into the soul.

Doug holds a BA in Speech, Communication, Theater from Monmouth University. He is a professional actor and licensed NYC tour guide, as well as an actor/educator at Fordham University School of Law. Doug is a member of the International Thomas Merton Society (ITMS), the ITMS NYC Chapter, and the American Teilhard de Chardin Association (ATA).

Following Doug's performance there will be a short break followed by a moderated Q&A (including questions from the audience), and small group engagement surrounding the various themes raised in the show. A reception will conclude the afternoon.

Location: Corpus Christi Church, 529 West 121st Street just off Broadway, NYC ([directions](#))

Cost: Free for Members & Students; \$20 for Non-Members

Notable Books & Publications

Ursula King, *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* revised edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016.

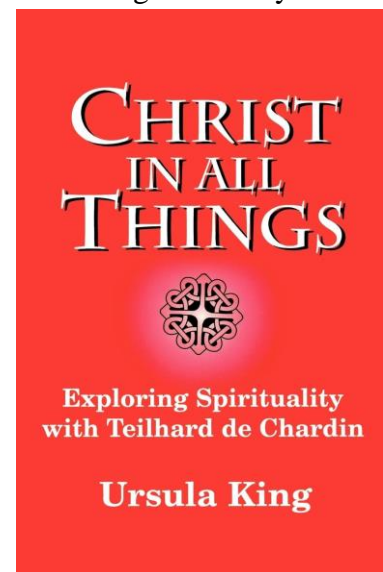
Review by Kathleen Duffy, SSJ,
Chestnut Hill College

For those interested in Teilhard's thought and spirituality, the recently revised edition of Ursula King's *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* is an invaluable resource. King's deep understanding of Teilhard's life and work, especially of his passionate spirit and profound spirituality, and her ability to communicate his vision with great clarity makes

this latest edition valuable for beginner and expert alike.

After an introduction to spirituality in general, King explores Teilhard's holistic and transformative mysticism, his spiritual development, his evolutionary framework, and his

understanding of Christ. Her aim is to help the reader to begin to see Christ in all things as Teilhard did. Besides sharing her insights on these topics, King sets Teilhard's work within the contemporary conversation about his spirituality, reviewing the contributions of many of the latest authors as well as others who continue to be relevant. Particularly helpful are the practical applications to issues pertinent in today's world, particularly interfaith dialogue, the environment, and lived Christian spirituality. King's scholarship in these areas, as well as in Christian feminism, greatly enhances her contributions.



For inspiration as well as deep insight into Teilhard's expansive vision, Ursula King's revised *Christ in all Things* is a "must read." Filled with Teilhard's poetry, prayer, and insights, it is a veritable treasure.

Louis M. Savary and Patricia H. Berne. *Teilhard de Chardin on Love: Evolving Human Relationships*. New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2017.

Review by Bede Benjamin Bidlack,
Saint Anselm College

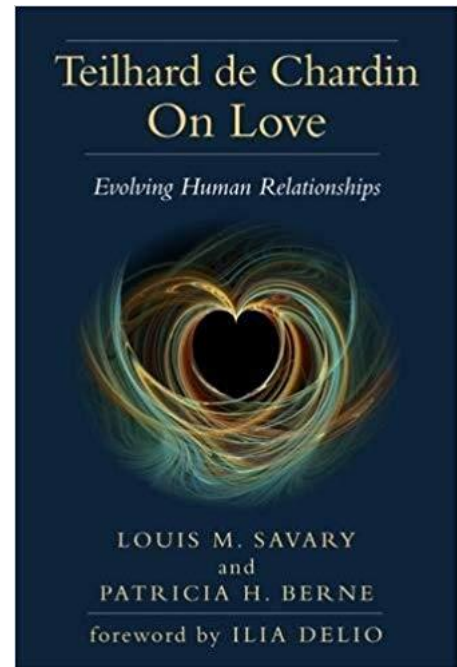
Teilhard de Chardin on Love presents the theology of love of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, famed Jesuit scientist and theologian, and then tests that theological vision against largely anecdotal accounts of human relationships. The first half of the book offers a study of Teilhard's theology, while the second ventures into the realm of practical theology by applying Teilhard's theology of love to the sphere of human relations.

Having published widely on Teilhard, theologian Louis M. Savary co-authors *Teilhard de Chardin on Love* with his wife and psychologist Patricia H. Berne. The joy of reading Teilhard is arguably his poetic style, but this has often rendered him obscure to some. Savary and Berne skillfully illuminate Teilhard in simple, clear language without losing any of the challenging aspects of his theology. In Part One, Savary and Berne present Teilhard's vision of God as love, and love as the essential energy of the evolving universe. They stress that Teilhard understood love not simply as a divine attribute or divine name, but as an energy that people experience in everyday life. Love is neither sentimental nor intangible, but energetic and capable of moving the entire universe toward its fulfillment. Moreover, the relationship that blooms from the love of partners or of a group is itself a type of being. In this respect, the authors present a relational ontology where the loving relationships produced by people can accomplish things that the individual members of the relationship cannot do on their own.

Part Two is where Savary and Berne make their contribution to practical theology by applying Teilhard's theology of love to common human relationships: committed partners, masculine-feminine, parent-child, friendships, and relationships within a team. The book concludes with an argument for a theology focused on love rather than sin, followed by a meditation on loving and the *Pleroma*, or "Omega Love" (179-97).

The book is Ignatian in that it has regular spiritual exercises throughout the text. This approach indicates that one can experience Teilhard's theology for oneself rather than simply giving or withholding intellectual assent to the arguments. For example, Savary and Berne help their reader to see love as energy when they ask: "Can you verify in your own life how love has propelled you or someone you know to perform an expression of human goodness that has made a difference in someone's life?" (25).

Today, Teilhard's theology of love is urgent and necessary when divisions run so deep that conversation and rational discourse fall into the fog of the impossible and when the Earth seems to be fighting against humanity with the fierce storms of climate change. Love hopes all things (1 Cor 13:7). Teilhard provides an argument for that love that is not Pollyannaish, but rooted in eschatological certainty. Savary and Berne expertly craft a book that invites readers to turn from the powerlessness of despondency and cynicism towards the power of love. Moreover, they stress that extending this power of love to



the world today is not restricted to the present, but stretches into the future. Perhaps because love is not primarily an exercise of the intellect, a practical theology is more appropriate than a historical or systematic treatment of Teilhard's thought.

Although the text is intended for a broad audience within and beyond the academy, it should not be lightly dismissed by the scholarly community. Studies on Teilhard tend to be either historical—clarifying what Teilhard thought—or systematic—developing his ideas in a way that he could not freely do himself because of his censors. Thus, *Teilhard de Chardin on Love* will be of interest even to those familiar with Teilhard, for it makes an original, practical contribution to the existing literature. Students of Ignatian Spirituality may find the spiritual exercises prescribed interesting applications of St. Ignatius's approach to life with God. As a work of scholarship, the text contains generous footnotes citing a variety of Teilhard's works. In these, Savary and Berne demonstrate their command of the Teilhard corpus. By accident or design, the works they cite are readily available in English, so readers can find Teilhard's own words on love.

The chapter that may appear out of place is entitled "Invisible Partners" (99–116) because it presents the archetypes of Carl G. Jung more than an explicit presentation of Teilhard. However, the authors see a congruence of Teilhard with Jung and acknowledge the work of Franklin E. Vilas in this regard (100n6). Teilhard provides a metaphysical foundation for the psychological theories of Jung, a point that deserves greater exploration. Similarly in the area of comparative religions, perennial philosophy has largely been dismissed, but perhaps the same foundation of love and Teilhard's insistence that "union differentiates" (53-70) gives reason to reconsider this once popular philosophy of religion.

Rather than turning to the related issue of non-Christian religions, Savary and Berne restrict the scope of the book to interpersonal love as it relates to cosmic evolution. When reflecting upon Teilhard and interpersonal love, those familiar with Teilhard's life may expect some presentation

of the deep love he shared with Lucile Swan. Swan does not appear in the book, and their correspondence is only mentioned in a footnote after other references to love and friendship (136n3). Instead, the authors explore the friendship between Pope Saint John Paul II and Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka as an example of intimate, chaste, heterosexual love (89–90). Other examples of love and friendship abound throughout the book. The reader will meet a cast of characters from Dorothy Day to Marie Skłodowska-Curie. Among the cast are Savary and Berne themselves as they reflexively draw upon their own experiences as a married couple. In addition to the many references provided by Savary and Berne to well-known works by Teilhard, such as *Human Energy* (London: William Collins Sons & Co, 1969) and *Toward the Future* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), readers may wish to explore Teilhard's vision of love between married couples in his wedding homilies, such as can be found in *On Love and Happiness* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

Teilhard de Chardin on Love will appeal to anyone interested in meeting the mind of Teilhard or in learning how to apply his theology to daily experiences. A lay audience will find the book quite accessible, and professional theologians will find a provocative theology of God. Savary and Berne provide a cogent argument for seeing God as love, attributing being to loving relationships, and observing God at work in people's everyday lives.

Teilhard Perspective

TEILHARD PERSPECTIVE is published by the American Teilhard Association, a non-profit organization whose goals are to explore philosophical, scientific, religious, social and environmental concerns in light of Teilhard's vision and to clarify the role of the human phenomenon in this emerging understanding of the cosmos.

We welcome suggestions of relevant ideas, books, news, events and contributions of articles for this newsletter. The editor is Tara Trapani. The *Teilhard Perspective* newsletter along with the biannual *Teilhard Studies* pamphlet and Annual Meeting notices are available through membership. Please contact us at: American Teilhard Association, c/o John Grim, 29 Spoke Drive, Woodbridge, CT 06525. Annual membership is \$35.

The Association President is Dr. John Grim, School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale University, 195 Prospect Street, New Haven CT 06520. Email john.grim@yale.edu. Vice Presidents are Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, maryevelyn.tucker@yale.edu, and Dr. Brian Thomas Swimme, California Institute for Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103. For Publications and other information, please email Tara Trapani at: tcmk@aya.yale.edu.

American Teilhard Association, Thomas Berry, and Journey of the Universe Websites

At the ATA site www.teilharddechardin.org can be found a Biography, List of Writings, Pictures and Quotes, Life Timeline, ATA Events, Teilhard Studies with first page, recent full Teilhard Perspectives, Membership info, Links, and a Brian Thomas Swimme interview on Teilhard.

The Thomas Berry site www.thomasberry.org offers a Biography by Mary Evelyn Tucker, a John Grim essay: "Time, History, Historians in Thomas Berry's Vision," Writings by Thomas Berry, comments on his *The Great Work*, Films about or inspired by, and a List of Books.

A new site www.journeyoftheuniverse.org introduces this Emmy award-winning film, book, and educational series by Brian Thomas Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, to carry forward the inspiration of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry.