

TEILHARD RELIGION AND SCIENCE SOCIETY
A METANEXUS LOCAL SOCIETY AT LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Initial Report, 2006

This little book does no more than recapitulate the eternal lesson of the Church in the words of a man who, because he believes himself to feel deeply in tune with his own times, has sought to teach how to see God everywhere, to see him in all that is most hidden, most solid, and most ultimate in the world. These pages put forward no more than a practical attitude - or, more exactly perhaps, a way of teaching how to see.

-- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*

The rise of modern science in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century, based on principles of empirical testing coupled with inductive reasoning and its predictive powers, fueled the advances of individualism started in the Renaissance. At the same time, the fledgling Society of Jesus, with many of its members involved in the practice of this new science, was asked to help in the defense of the Catholic faith in the counter-reformation effort. These two forces met over the work of Galileo, a devout Catholic, yet a most capable advocate of this new approach to science.

At stake, many felt, was the path to truth. The new knowledge Galileo found by using his "spyglass" and its reporting in the *Starry Messenger* caused a radical shift in our worldview. Such a change in worldview was not easily reconciled with the teachings of the church. A tension developed, especially given the outcome of the Galileo affair. And

this tension would continue to grow in the minds of many as science gathered further knowledge through the works of such notables as Newton, Darwin, and Einstein, each causing us again to significantly revise our worldview.

The context within the Catholic Church vis a vis the scientific advances of the nineteenth and early twentieth century continued to be problematic with the publication of Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) and then Pope St. Pius X's condemnation of Modernism in *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907). The divide between Catholics and scientists seemed cemented in stone.

In the early twentieth century a Jesuit priest began to understand the Ignatian dictum to “see God in all things” as literally applicable to scientific inquiry. His theological understanding of evolution became a flashpoint—too theological for scientists, too embracing of science for those in the church. Yet for many, it became instead a bridge, an important moment of rapprochement. Teilhard's invitation was to understand reality through a new way of seeing.

We, as a society, take seriously Teilhard de Chardin's philosophical and theological premise of seeing God in all things. We believe by following this tenet, we will affirm the inter-religious and interdisciplinary types of scholarship that we intend to pursue in our dialogues and events. The science and religion discussion is dependent upon open scholarship that is free to pursue all forms of knowledge.

Certainly, our conversations will be influenced by the years of scholarship and insight provided by leaders in the Science and Religion dialogue such as Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, Paul Davies, Charles Townes, Robert Russell, William Stoeger, S. J., John Haught, Nancey Murphy, and Ted Peters to name a few. Hopefully, our discussions will build upon and extend their pioneering work. In addition, our discussions will reflect an inter-religious orientation. Current program ideas include interactions between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Islam, for example, offers a particularly strong legacy of science and religion scholarship. Muslim contributions to philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, mathematics and geography have been long established, and a conversation in the context of modern/post-modern science and religion would be a rich and informative enterprise. This would also provide an interesting counterpoint to other intended conversations around the history of Catholic Christianity and issues of science and religion.

Certainly, we also welcome representatives from other traditions interested in this discussion. Some of our conversation partners might be practitioners of New Thought religions, such as Religious Science and the Unity School of Christianity, who affirm a pantheistic, dynamic cosmology that is composed not of solid, dull matter, but responsive energy that reacts to the directives of our thought. Many New Thought followers are already eager to engage with quantum physicists on these ideas. Moreover, these ideas have found a niche within a small popular audience who are gaining various levels of understanding of quantum physics from Deepak Chopra and the film, *What the Bleep Do We Know?*

Our society will be able to provide a forum where lay people and scholars may interact on issues of science and religion not as scholar and student, but as individuals seeking to find meaning and purpose in their lives through a discussion of science and religion, through a process by which they find God in all things.

As a Society, we would like to explore a variety of issues in our first year. Advances in science and technology tend to change our worldview. This change is brought about partly by forcing us to reevaluate our answers to questions or to ask new questions in the theological and religious realm. This is especially true when considering their implications on our ethics and morals.

Advances in physics and chemistry in the fields of cosmology, quantum mechanics, chaos theory, complexity and emergent properties stretch us as a society to find the relatedness of the science being discovered to theological and religious questions—in what ways are the how questions related to the why questions of purpose and meaning? Questions concerning the nature of creation, *creatio ex nihilo* vs *creatio continua*, the eschatology of the Universe, determinism and free will, and reductionism will be considered. Here we will find a wealth of information from writings, including those of our society's namesake, Teilhard.

Neuroscience is another topic we want to explore. We propose to examine the state of research on brain functioning. We want to examine current research on the brain-mind

question. What does the research imply about questions of consciousness and what it means to be human? Is there a connection between the workings of the brain and religious practices? We would like to attend to the philosophical debates on what is implicit (part of our genetic inheritance) and explicit (learned) in the way the brain functions vis a vis religion. Related are questions of artificial intelligence and the nature of consciousness. Do humans have a special place in the Universe by virtue of the level of their ability to process and relate, or is this an issue of complexity threatened by the developments in artificial intelligence?

Another topic concerns “End of Life Issues.” As illustrated in the recent national discussion surrounding the Schiavo case, bioethicists and religious authorities have defined and redefined the concept of “extraordinary means” of sustaining life over the last 30 years. This presentation maps the contours of the shifting definitions and provides context for the current debate about when life ends. In addition, other bioethical questions, such as gene therapy in the medical field and genetic engineering in the field of biotechnology, are in the forefront as well. Also, we would like to explore ethical issues surrounding the use of animals (and plants) in science. We are happy to have the interest, support, and expertise of our Bioethics Institute faculty and staff here at LMU joining this society to discuss such issues current in biology and medicine.

Finally, many avenues are being explored with regard to the connection between mind and body, especially with regard to its potential toward healing. Our society would like

to examine such holistic approaches as the connections between Yoga and the health Sciences.

Finally, as the year progresses and the Society matures, we will discern whether our approach for the coming years will be to continue this broad based sampling of the interface of Science and Religion or to restrict our conversations to particular topics by year or by semester.