

Interconnections: Seeing the

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“**F**or our age, to have become conscious of evolution means something very different from and much more than having discovered one further fact It means (as happens with a child when he acquires the sense of perspective) that we have become alive to a new dimension.”¹ Those words of Teilhard de Chardin caught me up short: *alive* to a new dimension? The universe as we know it now requires that we connect 13.7 billion years of development since its origin in the Big Bang, with the evolution of life on planet Earth. The story of the cosmos and our human story is one single narrative, for our planet and its life-forms have emerged out of eons of cosmic development.² And yet, for how many of us is evolution anything more than a fact, or a scientific hypothesis? Have we really considered what difference it makes to our sense of who we are? Has our perspective really changed, and if it has, *how has it changed us?*

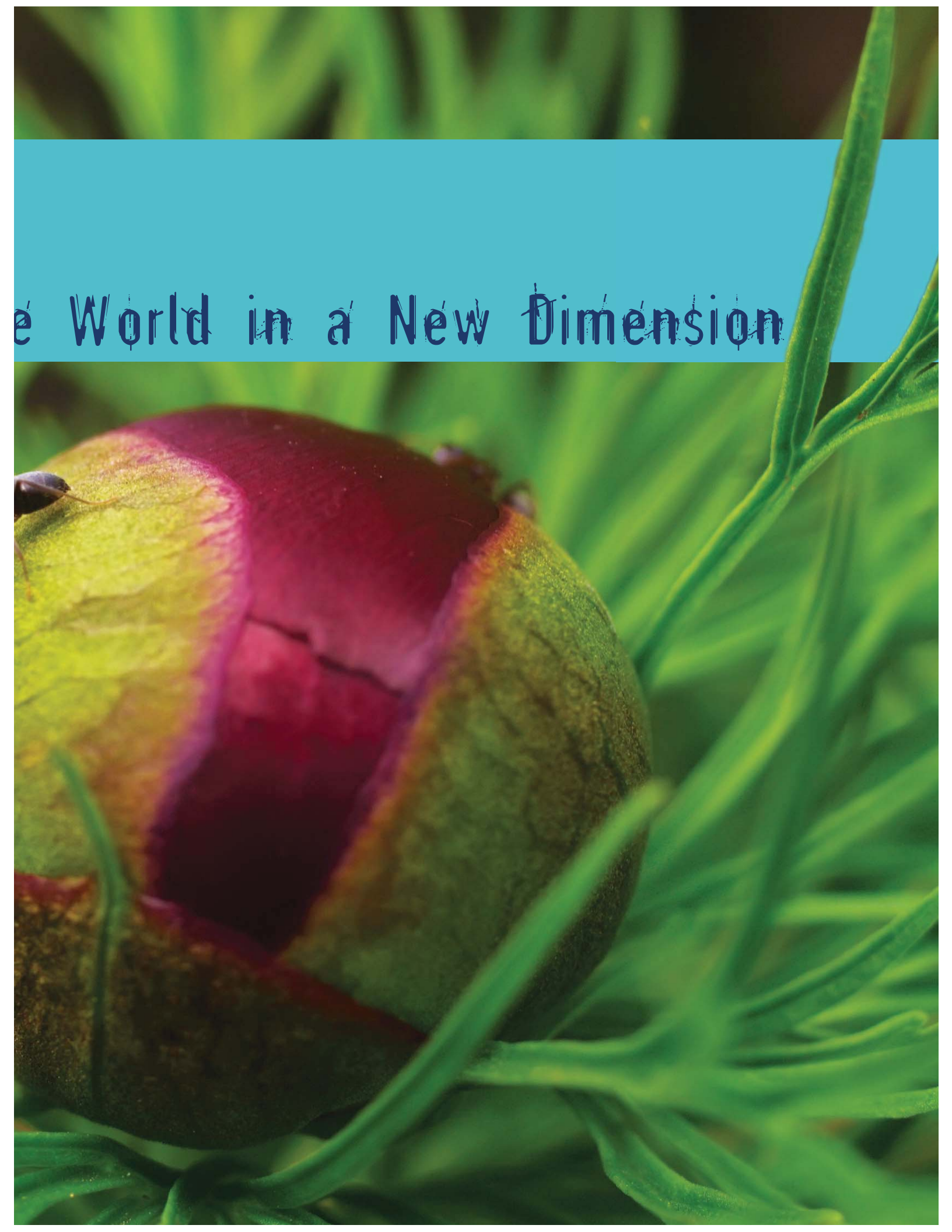
Half-a-moment ago (in cosmic time) scientists were persecuted for proposing that Earth was not the center of the universe. Now we take for granted that Earth is one very small planet in one galaxy among billions, whirling around a star which we call the sun. Scientists speculate that we humans know only 4-6% of the extent of the universe; black holes have as yet defied human exploration. Half-a-blink ago (in cosmic time) we wouldn't have guessed that there is a connection between stars and water and fish and a human! We didn't know how to connect the dots. But now we are making all these observations with Earth-instruments, interpreted by our Earth-formed eyes and ears, brains and imaginations. This is how the universe looks *to us*.

Historical consciousness is inescapable. We humans are in the process of shifting our perception from a worldview in which everything is solid, fixed and permanent. We are adjusting our vision to a universe in constant change, always expanding and always in the process of evolving. Seen through this new lens, the world looks very different. Things we perceived as large may now seem very small; things that mattered very much no longer seem so important. New issues, new relationships come center stage.

We may feel disoriented, for when the frame changes, everything changes. It is not only our cosmic-Earth-human story that changes, but our faith changes as well. We recognize that the Creator has been creating from the very beginning, both as the Source of this continually emerging marvel, and throughout the whole process of its development. Creation is now present tense: God didn't just create “in the beginning,” but is creating now! Just as there is no “out there” to throw our trash, there is no “heaven out there” where God can dwell in solitary splendor to punish or reward us. The universe is a single, continuous event happening even as we live and move.



the World in a New Dimension



INEXTRICABLE CONNECTIONS

Sciences are redefining the human. We are no longer the separate, autonomous beings we once thought we were. Physics identifies us as dense configurations of energy with no distance between us, energy fields which are continually affecting and being affected by the larger world. Biologists image single cells joining into multi-cellular organisms, continually mutating, moving forward, organisms nested within organisms to create novel, complex, increasingly conscious communities of life. We humans are composed of trillions of cells which form innumerable communities—our livers, our hearts, our lungs—and each is a community of life, each connecting with a myriad of other organisms in continual exchange. Each of us is a community within a community.³

We are just beginning to recognize ourselves connected as one human family, and all species that have preceded us on the planet—and beyond—as our ancestors. This composite of organisms that we call humanity is sending out and receiving messages from all that surrounds us—the air, the sun, the moon, the ocean tides—modifying our temperature, our metabolism, our feelings, our thinking. Oceans, mountains, flatlands, deserts, atmospheres—innumerable more connections than we can imagine and whose workings we cannot begin to fathom. And every single individual cell has its own contribution to make in connection with all others. All are intended to serve the well-being, life-enhancement of the whole. Imagine an organism named humanity, drawn together with all the rest of creation in a kind of coherence, a synergy. It is the image of the Body of Christ, in a new, immensely larger frame: “All things have been created through him and for him. . . . And in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17).

Technology—satellites, television, the internet, Blackberries—has given birth to a “global brain,” forcing into our awareness the inextricable connections between and among Earth’s communities of life. Think, for instance, of the emerging awareness of climate change, of the “green” movement, as well as connections between political movements like “Occupy” and the voice of non-violence. We have to realize that we are only beginning to live into this new worldview as our hope of survival. The organism “humanity” is drawn together in networks that span the globe. And yet, though technology may *connect* us, it cannot *unite* us. “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.”⁴ This is where the task lies. How will we be joined by what is deepest in ourselves? How can we help each other develop that kind of sensitivity?

THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS

Sometimes great gifts come in simple packages. When I found some peonies coming to bud in front of my house, I was horrified to see ants swarming over the tightly closed surfaces. I imagined that the ants were going to eat up the flowers before they had a chance to bloom. When I shared my anxiety with friends, they were, predictably, amused. Ants, they explained,

are essential to the blossoming of peonies, eating off the sticky substance covering the bud so that the flower can open. Far from being destructive, the ants were playing a crucial role in the life cycle of the peonies. For me, making that connection represented a milestone.

I was witnessing a very fundamental pattern of cooperation in nature, but I had immediately interpreted what I saw through the filter of competition—our U.S. cultural lens. Connections are essential for survival! I read about—and began to notice—how Earth’s creatures live in generally harmonious relationship with their environmental companions, each one in its niche, contributing its own gift, relying on the contribution of the others. How quickly carrion birds appear for a meal from road carnage. How quickly cow droppings attract dung beetles to work on their decomposition—getting a good meal for themselves, and preparing the offal to enrich the soil. The more I set myself to notice, the more I realized that I was finding cooperation everywhere. There is violence, struggle, and death as well, but nature seems to fine tune each creature so that it can cooperate in life-giving ways with other species in its own habitat. The ants on those peonies shifted my worldview.

It seems that humans are the only species that has not found its niche, its way of living in harmonious relationship with the rest of creation. We humans have become entranced (literally) with seeing reality through the lenses of individualism, domination and competition. We carelessly disrupt natural patterns of cooperation. But seen within the big picture, each of us is one very small participant in an enormous planetary process of mutual life-sharing. Every member of the “food chain” is the gift of a living species. We are one single, interconnected and interdependent creation, all-of-a-piece, one community of life. We do not “own” our lives; life is a shared project in which every one must inevitably be participant. *Nothing* can exist without sharing its life.

We simply do not see aright. Or maybe more accurately, we see through deceptive filters of independence, domination and competition—the age-old survival instinct—while our humanity has evolved capacities like reason, imagination and compassion that can transcend that instinct. But we have missed connecting two indispensable dots: we have not recognized and hallowed the obvious connection between the Passover of Jesus—his death and resurrection—and the continual cycle of dying/giving birth to new life that characterizes the whole creation—even the stars. The rest of creation is continually participating in my life process, keeping me alive and healthy, but do I willingly and consciously participate in the death/birth that sustains and enhances ongoing life? The central mystery of Christianity—the death and resurrection of Jesus—is the key: if we are not willing to “lose ourselves,” to relate to Life humbly and sensitively with the rest of creation, we cannot survive. How do I learn to see with broader vision, with new eyes? What might we learn from the ants?

ENCOURAGING A HEART-SPACE FOR GOD

At this juncture of history, we encounter what I believe is the most serious problem for Christianity today, and one which

counselors and spiritual directors must face squarely. For many, the words “God” or God’s “presence,” may carry useless and misleading baggage. Even “Our Father, who art in heaven,” will no longer speak to persons who understand creation—and our own human being—in context of an ever-expanding, evolving universe.⁵ The traditional frame of reference is far too confining; ancient dogmatic formulae are at risk of turning stagnant. Many people are confused, feeling literally dis-illusioned, as if they have lost their moorings. Church rituals and liturgy seem distant and lack a sense of reality. People may “leave the church,” but long for a worshipping community. They want to pray, but wonder to whom they are praying. “Religion” seems to belong to a world that no longer exists. And yet an obscure and mysterious sense of the divine seems to nudge them. The mystery and magnificence of the universe evoke a deep sense of awe. People seek something they cannot name.

We Christians hold—or say we do—incarnation as central to our faith. In Jesus Christ, God is revealed in human form. Though we learned as children to say that “God is everywhere,” we had little sense of what that might mean. For us the light is still dawning: perhaps we may begin to see incarnation in a new way, with broader extension. Emmanuel, God-with-us, has *always* been present, actively engaged in the process of creating at every moment, everywhere. Newly differentiated forms emerge as struggle and death yield to new life. Do we need to connect some dots here?

The role of spiritual companion or director becomes critical in helping persons find new ways of approaching the Divine, ways to honor the divine transcendence, while yet pointing to the experience of God’s immanence in the universe, creating everything here and now. The way is open for a new encompassing awareness that we actually do live in God, and God in us, as Jesus taught (John 14:20; 17:21ff.).

We ourselves must be very attentive, aware of our own language, learning to open our own senses to the presence of Holy Mystery right here in our midst. And equally, we must listen very carefully as we hear others trying to name their experience, groping for words to express something which is known at a very deep inner level, but without the words to name what it is. No image can contain this God; an apophatic approach will be inevitable. We need meditation forms that honor the experience of silence and “not-knowing” in the face of Holy Mystery. At the same time, the utter beauty, the intricacy, the immensity of the universe require expression, and need prayer forms that joyfully celebrate the Divine Presence immersed in creation. And always, we need to point each other toward generous, self-giving participation in the paschal mystery as it comes to expression in “all creatures great and small.”

Maybe we are learning. Science presents a universe that is more mysterious, immense and elegant than we could ever have imagined; it is also inseparably woven together. There is invitation to overwhelming awe at every moment. But we cannot stand gaping, waiting for God to “hear the cry of the poor.” We ourselves, God-in-us, must embody that responsibility. God waits to work in and through us, through our evolved capacities of imagination, compassion, action. We know by heart the list of tragic, crying needs of our species and our planet. We feel deeply the pain of both human and other-than-human creatures whose habitats and livelihoods, whose water and food supply are now polluted with toxic waste. Our hearts and minds are challenged to become what only we can be. We are the conscious, healing and unifying agents that Life’s cosmic process has developed to serve the Earth.

Now we know the lines to connect these dots. We have to internalize the fact that our lives are not our own. Each life is participating in a far larger “project” than we had imagined—the





project of the Larger Life's continuing evolution on the planet. Our Christian response to Jesus' call to witness with our lives to "the reign of God" now moves into a larger context. Our species is itself imperiled, but even more, the continuing development of life is at risk. Our participation in the in-coming reign of God must embrace not only humans, but all species, the planet, perhaps even the cosmos. Our hearts must expand in tandem with the broadening vision. The "reign of God" must be—will be—our evolutionary future.

We have an immense task ahead of us: to help each other move into a much larger, more encompassing frame of awareness, and to find the language to express our new awareness of God's creating presence pervading the whole universe. Traditionally, the Holy Spirit is the one who has a penchant for connecting. And all across the globe, Holy Wisdom is in fact nudging in amazing ways, prying open doors to bring us all into the deep communion of Love that is the pinnacle of our human capacities. That nudging is being felt as humans begin to experience a new vision of the oneness of this creation. In the end, the whole is held together only by uniting in the One Great Love. We all *belong* together.

As we begin to really sense that connection in our bones and our pores, we have a new hope. We can become a new creation—a creation where love and caring and compassion for the whole creation are real bonds that hold us together. We've begun to connect the dots. Everything—our minds and hearts and way of living—needs to change. It is a wonderful thing the Holy Spirit is doing, bringing us new vision, new hope, prodding us into the unity of a new creation.

ENDNOTES

1. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*, trans. Rene Hague (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 193.
2. In a recently released film, *Journey of the Universe*, Brian Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim have captured in awesome imagery the deep mystery that underlies the expansion and evolution of the cosmos and of life on Earth. See www.JourneyoftheUniverse.org.
3. Bruce H. Lipton and Steve Bhaerman, *Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future and How to Get There from Here* (New York: Hay House, Inc.), 2009.
4. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper Torchbook, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1959), 265.
5. "The danger here is that the deity may then come to seem smaller than the universe itself. The 'size' of God becomes too middling to command the response of genuine worship." John Haught, *Deeper than Darwin* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), p. 33.



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