Dr. John Haught, PhD
An Anticipatory Theology for an Unfinished Universe

*The **American Teilhard Association** podcast features conversations and interviews which explore the life, thought, and vision of mystic scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. We express our gratitude to Dalesford Abbey in Paoli, Pennsylvania, for allowing us to use their space and equipment in making this episode possible. Dr. John Haught, Ph.D. holds the title of distinguished research professor from Georgetown University in Washington DC. where he taught in the theology department from 1970 through 2005. His area of specialization is Systematic Theology with a particular interest in issues pertaining to science, cosmology, evolution, ecology, and religion. He is one of today's foremost scholars of Teilhard science and religion and has authored over 20 books on these topics.*

Link to the podcast: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8EYtOz0djM&list=PLzKxyDc-uZ32iA6GM7mLuZ6QFgZ1ii7vY&index=14

Andrew Del Rossi - Welcome everyone to the American Teilhard Association podcast. We are grateful to have with us today, Dr. John Haught. Thank you so much for joining us today.

John F. Haught - Happy to be here Andrew!

A - Yeah, it's great to reconnect with you again. We were together in person with Sister Kathy and so many other members of the American Teilhard Association and friends back in Pennsylvania here in October. So, it was great to be with you then and great to reconnect with you now.

J - Yeah, thanks. Absolutely.

A - So, Dr. Haught is one of the foremost scholars on Teilhard and Teilhardian thought. We'd like to explore today, John, kind of your journey with theology and finding Teilhard, and where that has led you in life. What, initially, drew you to study theology?

J - Well, it's not so much that anything drew me as I was sort of pushed into it because I was too young to resist. Anyway, my local pastor in Virginia (I grew up on a farm there) came out to my parents' farm one night and took me aside and said, "How would you like to go to the seminary?" At the time, I was only 13 years old and I didn't know what a seminary was. I hardly knew anything about anything, but it sounded like it might beat working on the farm. So, at the age of 13, I entered a minor seminary in Catonsville, Maryland. And it was there for the first time that I was initiated into what I like to call the medieval world view. I had come from the farm which was kind of neolithic in a way, and suddenly I found myself in the medieval world of Thomas Aquinus and the scholastics, and I didn't get to that thought explicitly until I was in college. But I joined the seminary which had a kind of medieval aestheticism about it and that's why I say I was launched into the Middle Ages as it were because the kind of piety and spirituality and theology that shaped that world was still that of the Middle Ages and that's the spirituality, that's the climate which shaped my spirituality and my thought for almost 10 years that followed because not much changed in those 10 years except my own feelings and my own eventual realization that I was not cut out to be a priest, that I didn't have that kind of a vocation. But by the time I left the seminary, the Second Vatican Council had taken place and my mind and my heart and everything else was suddenly launched into the modern world.

I was in college, I think, when the Second Vatican Council took place and it had a great impact upon me, which we can talk about later on, but that's how I came to like theology. As I look back, I think what made me

eventually enter into theology as a professional as a worldview and as a lifestyle was things that happened in the Second Vatican Council which, as I look back now, were initiated very much in the mind and heart and spirituality of Pierre Teilhard. So after I left the seminary, I had already been hooked by his love of the earth which I had felt uncomfortable with from the beginning. I grew up on a farm and I loved the land and I loved the earth. And so, when I went into the seminary as a 13-year-old, I didn't know it at the time, but I was being asked to detach myself from all that had nurtured me and given me a zest for a living before I entered the seminary. And so, when I finally came across the writings of Teilhard when I was in first and second year of theology in the major seminary, I found somebody who expressed feelings that I had suppressed for many many years. And as you might know, Teilhard himself was beset by a similar type of dilemma. When he was in a seminary, he was torn between whether he should spend time digging up bones and rocks, which appealed to him for many reasons, or should he adopt the kind of spirituality descended from Aquinas and others in the Middle Ages, which would have been enticing, and I felt the same thing.

I was enraptured by the medieval world view. It was in many ways an adventure that I'd never anticipated and it had a beauty about it, you know kind of a static vertical hierarchical pre-scientific beauty about it, a sacramental quality to it, that appealed to something deep in in my heart too. So, what Teilhard did was give expression to what I was feeling. And once he taught me, or when I picked up this through his writings and other sources, the fact that you can love the earth without feeling that you have to turn your back on God, you can love God without detaching yourself so severely from time and matter, and that you can love matter and time without feeling that you have to turn your back on God… that was a revolution in my own thinking and my own spiritual life to which I am, to this day, still deeply indebted.

A - Oh, that's wonderful. Thank you for sharing that journey. And I'm just thinking of being a 13-year-old boy. You're just so much in your body at that point, right? You have all this energy. Your hormones are starting to kick in. Body's starting to change a little bit. I just think of my sons who are younger than 13, but it's natural for them to be outside and be like muddy and in the earth in that way. And then here you're going from being raised on a farm as a 13-year-old boy to kind of like this world of the head and the mind where it's this medieval world.

J - Yes. And what a jump.

A - So, did you take kind of naturally to that or was it a sharp transition for you?

J - What drew me to the seminary? I was already a pretty good basketball player. I'm 6'4 and I had to play outside in the county of Culpeper, Virginia, because there weren't many gyms and we didn't have one at the farm. But they promised that there were two basketball courts, indoor basketball courts and immediately my heart started racing. I can live with that. Maybe that will keep me inside my body for a while. And so, that was very important in my life in the seminary. I developed very very close friendships which I still have with other 6'4 guys that I would play around basketball with. And so, that really did help me from a human point of view.

A - Yeah. put up with a lot of the discipline that 13- and 14-year-olds rankle against.

J - So, I eventually made peace with that and with that spirituality and I carried that all the way through high school and all the way through college and two years after college when the Second Vatican Council was taking place and that came to my aid and gave me an excitement and a spiritual atmosphere or discipline that I could live with.

A - Yeah, absolutely. Like you said, it humanizes it and embodies it. So, at what point on your journey did you encounter Teilhard and how did you encounter him?

J - Well, he sort of snuck up on me and grabbed hold of me while I wasn't looking. Because when I was in first year of theology, I was about 22 years old. I became familiar with what was going on in Vatican 2 or the kind of conversations and books and articles being written that shaped Vatican 2. And I realized later on, not at the time, that Gaudium and Spes, the pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world, was peppered throughout with Teilhardian motifs. So much so that the great Jesuit theologian André de Lubac said after the

Council that the Council or that document accomplished precisely what Teilhard was looking for. Wow. So that that gave me a sense of authenticity because I was not deviating from church teaching as many people still think I am when I talk about Teilhard as you know. That gave me a sense that I've carried through all my life that I did not have to move at all beyond the boundaries of Catholic orthodoxy, Catholic teaching, in order to spend my life understanding and developing and spreading the ideas of Teilhard. And there are certain lines within that document that are still with me. One of them was we have to realize, I'm paraphrasing here, that we now live in an evolutionary worldview, that the modern worldview has switched from medieval to a modern scientific sense of things evolving, things moving. And it went on to say that theology's role must be to develop and interpret this sense of a new world view and let its doctrine and its teaching take into account the fact that we are living in a completely different perspective from that of the Middle Ages. Right? And it also said that hope for life everlasting should not diminish our commitment to the earth but it should intensify our commitment to the earth, understanding of course that the earth which was Teilhard's metonymy for universe, that was his entrance into the universe, that the universe itself is still coming into being and that's the great insight that Teilhard had. So much so that he said that the understanding that science has now given us of a universe that's still coming into being, that is a story rather than a state, should change everything in our thinking about God, the sacraments, Christian life and especially about our moral duties, and that's how I have interpreted it. And I'm still trying to adhere to that program, that suggestion, imperative really, that Christians, the Catholic theology has to update itself in terms of this new worldview. And so, it was through the Council and its influence on it, not really heavy influence but slight influence on the theology that I was studying in the seminary back in 1965. The Council ended in '65 and it's that sort of atmosphere that I found when I went from the seminary to Catholic University. Now it might sound ironic because Catholic University today is very conservative in its theological elements for the most part. There always exceptions of course, but at the time I entered in fall of '66 it was a very wide-open atmosphere.

I didn't enter the department of seminary theology but a department of religion and religious studies that had been shaped by Gerald Sloan and it set up a separate PhD program for people who were going to teach theology but were not necessarily going to be priests or ministers. And so I entered that department and it's there that for the first time I was encouraged by several of my teachers to steep myself in Teilhard. One of them had recently written a thesis on Teilhard's theology of God in the world and I had him as a teacher and I was also reading Jurgen Moltmann in about the same time and what happened was the two of them coalesced in my mind to turn me toward the future in my thinking about God and the orientation that a Christian life can have in the world. So, from then on, I started dabbling more and more in Teilhard.

A - Yeah, I think that's such an important point that you make as a theologian. Your work is so important in terms of focusing on an evolutionary theology because although our modern world for the most part exists within that scientific mindset, our spirituality and our theology is way back in the Middle Ages for so many people.

J - In my current role as the director of the retreat center at Dalesford Abbey here in Pennsylvania, you know, I encounter a lot of different people with a lot of different spiritualities. I mean the Norbertine Community here has its own assemblage of spiritualities within it that make up a whole and it's just really interesting to encounter people where they are, which is our pastoral call in that way to meet people where they are in the way that Jesus did. But sometimes you get that sense of how people are spiritually living a few hundred years ago as opposed to being more congruent spiritually with their worldview. And I'm talking about some people that I know are very bright. They're scientists. They're engineers. Yet that spirituality is at a time that's pre-chemistry even.

A - Very insightful. It's very true.

J - And it's because of that issue of how our spirituality seems to have diverged from our lived experience intellectually and in the world that Teilhard himself felt, and what attracted me to him was that he expressed the problem in words that I didn't have available to me at the time. He called it the problem of the two faiths.

Faith in God up above, or faith in the future of the world, and how to combine those into a holistic and consistent theology. And what allowed him to do it was the miraculous discovery of evolution.

A - Yes.

J - Even the fact that not only life evolves but that the whole cosmos was in process of becoming something different, and the age of what deep time can do to a universe in terms of transformation.

A - That's right.

J - And what happened Teilhard didn't eventually feel, that we have to feel in ourselves since we're part of this self-transforming universe. We have to feel that process of transformation in order to be faithful to the earth. But at the same time if we come to the conclusion, as many of his scientific colleagues did, that nature is all there is, scientific naturalism, he felt that that was very unsatisfying too, because ultimately it implies that nothing really matters if the universe is condemned to absolute death as it seems to many scientists. Even if it takes trillions and trillions of years, he felt that if, at the end, nothing of my work, nothing of my life, nothing of the great tribulations and struggles of humankind and the animal world, nothing of evolution remains, if it all goes down the abyss of nothingness, as it seems to be condemned to by the laws of thermodynamics. And then he said "If I really believed that I couldn't have the incentive to do the slightest work, why would I get up tomorrow?" And I had the same feeling, and I still do.

A - Yeah, if at the end of everything absolute death awaits the universe, then what are the implications of that for my moral life, for my activity?

J - And so he thought that as a postulate of vigorous moral activity, we have to posit an Omega, an end point of convergence of everything that sums up the whole universe and that sustains it everlastingly. Unless there's something like that that acts in that providential caring way toward what happens in the universe, then it raises severe questions about the worthwhile and about the truth of faith.

So, he thought, I think, that the greatest truths are not things that are found by empirical investigation or by mathematical conclusions. The greatest truths are postulates, not things that can be proven. So, there's a wager involved at the very beginning of his thought and it's one that I now see more clearly than ever, especially given the spread of cosmic pessimism in intellectual culture. That's the default position of so much intellectual elitism today. If you read the New York Times science section or if you read books that are coming hot off the press by scientifically informed writers, they're almost inevitably, although there are some exceptions, pessimistic in their view of the universe. So what Teilhard did that buoyed me when I was a kid almost, when I was in my early 20s, and which I still cling to with great love is the sense that the universe is headed towards something important, that something really good alongside all the evil and struggle and suffering is going on, that the universe itself gives us every reason to be hopeful. Because look at the history of the universe. It awakened into life 10 billion years ago, and then it eventually very recently awakened into thought. So, what we have here, what we are born into, is a universe that's already awakening. And yes, that awakening took time, but that awakening gives value to all the billions of years that have gone into the making of minds, to the bringing about of thought. So, if people ask you "Why do you trust in the universe?" it's a very interesting, trustworthy universe. Look, without our human complicity at all, it awakened. My question then, and this was my main question in theology now, awakened to what? It didn't just awaken to us because we ourselves are part of that awakening, right? And so, everything that goes on in human consciousness from sentience to thought is something very splendid and very beautiful. And so, our vocation has to be to continue that awakening of the universe. And that's not one that's taught to our students in universities. Teilhard is almost alone in thinking thoughts like this, but it seems to me that they are so right, and that we neglect them only because of irrationality. That I could talk about, but it's that sense of an awakening universe that gave me cause and hope to continue that process and I think education and, in fact, all human culture can have a meaning if we see it as continuing that awakening.

A - Yeah.

J - You see it as awakening to the infinite goodness, truth, meaning, beauty, then that gives the universe a purpose that was there before we came along. And that we can have the purpose in our own lives of sustaining that beautiful process of awakening. And if you want proof that it's awakening, look at your own mind right now as I'm talking. You're trying to wonder, or listeners are trying to wonder whether what I'm talking about is complete nonsense or whether it makes sense. Well, the very fact of asking that question means that those minds are awakening. They're thirsting for not just understanding but right understanding. They could probably understand what I'm saying here. But if they then ask the question "Is that right?" that shows that truth has already grasped hold of you.

A - Yeah. You are already a disciple, as it were, of the coming of infinite being, truth, goodness and beauty toward us from the future.

J - So, what Teilhard allowed me to do theologically was to switch from thinking of God primarily as a designer or a cosmic engineer or as a first cause, which is the way so much Christian theology is still carried on, to the question of where is it going? What is attracting it? Why didn't it just stay still? Why didn't the hydrogen atoms and helium atoms at the beginning just say, "We're just fine here. We can last forever." But they didn't last forever in that solitude. Something stirred the process up. Not something in the area of efficient or material cause, but in the area of more like final cause or purpose that doesn't compel, but persuades. And that's the fundamental vision Teilhard had. God does not operate a retro, that is from behind pushing the universe into being, but operates the way love does : not coercively but persuasively, luring the cosmos and allowing the cosmos an indeterminacy which allows it to go down blind alleys. He doesn't make the universe a design, like the intelligent design anti-darwinians would like to think, but He does allow the universe to be a drama of awakening, and that's where we should for God. Not pushing things like an engineer, but opening up the space, as it were, for the universe to become something other, something autonomous in a way, something self-creative, and that was the great shift in theology that grabbed hold of me when I was even in the seminary and not really very fully acquainted with Teilhard. But I started reading books about him and somebody as a departing gift from St. Mary Seminary, when I decided to leave after two theology, a great friend of mine, Richard Lawrence, who was a pastor in Baltimore for many years, a wonderful man, gave me as a departing gift a copy of Teilhard's book, *The Future of Man*, and so I started reading it that summer. Okay. And I said: this is what I want and so I decided to go to graduate school in theology at Catholic.

A - Thank you. I love how you asked that question of what did the universe awaken to and how do we continue that awakening because that resonates on so many levels and it's a very integral questioning right line of questioning. It's not specific, like theology or a spiritual worldview or a scientific worldview, psychological worldview. It keeps going on, right? It's very inclusive and integral in the way that calls us to think. And you mentioned how it's not being taught in the universities and the colleges, but I'm even thinking too: how it's not being preached from the pulpit. So much of, at least in my experience, you know, the Catholic mass and what priests have to speak about during their homily is really about, how do you serve your neighbor, how do you save your soul, and not about how do we serve the larger world, or in Teilhard's inference, the universe, and how do we save the world for that much?

J - That's a very good point and Teilhard was aware of that too and he came to the conclusion fairly early in his life that we're really not going to have a robust moral life, that we're not going to be committed to action to save our world, to help our neighbor, until we realize that we have to, first of all, have a zest for living. He thought that Catholic moral teaching has lost its sense of being connected with life. So, life became for him a metaphor for what is happening in the universe. And life means simply becoming more. Unless you're striving for something more you fall back into lethargy and passivity there. So, in order to have a zest for living in our lives, the universe has to be such that something more and fuller is constantly coming in to that universe. And it's only our sense that something more lies up ahead that can fully energize our zest for living without which we can't have a serious moral life as well. So, that's the way in which his thought developed. You can't just

expect by teaching commandments that people are going to behave themselves. They have to have something to live for.

A - Yeah. But the culture, the intellectual culture that we live in today and which contemporary theology has still not done anything to dispel, is that the universe is not going anywhere, that the universe is doomed to death, to put it bluntly. And that means, therefore, that if one adopts an analytical, materialist stance, the brain is, in essence, nothing more than matter without mind. Common sense, however, invites us to question that. This is why scientists and neuroscientists have long sought to explain how something like the brain can give rise to a conscious phenomenon, the human mind.

J - Yeah. And we've interpreted science, in especially the laws of thermodynamics, in such a way as to make that death inevitable. The notion of entropy which Darwin was fully aware of but which he didn't develop sufficiently in his own thought. It implies that there is an irreversible loss of energy available to do work, such as bringing about chemical complexity, biological complexity. All that takes great energy. But one of the laws of physics, and I have to adhere to this too, is that the amount of energy available to do work is on the decline. Whereas entropy, which is the measure of the amount of energy no longer available to do work, is on the rise. And so, scientists and philosophers look at that loss of available energy and interpret it to mean that sooner or later everything is going to come to nothingness, that there won't be enough energy even to have a thought. A fellow named Dennis Overbye, a good writer for The New York Times, wrote an article several years back in which he maintained that eventually, if you think about all this, thought will disappear from the universe and what a sad thing that would be. But he says that's what we have to expect and we have to live with that. But that kind of thinking, that cosmic pessimism, does nothing to give us a zest for living or for giving us a reason to act, or at least a good reason to act. And so, we have to realize that entropy somehow does not mean purposelessness. He didn't develop this but I've developed it in my own thoughts about Teilhard that what entropy does is something absolutely indispensable for an awakening universe. It provides the element of irreversibility that gives the universe the element of irreversible time. Yes, energy is depleting but that depletion is actually essential for irreversibility, temporal irreversibility. And the thing about time and its irreversibility is that it makes possible stories. Stories, any story such as the one I'm telling about my life, could not happen unless time were irreversible.

A - Yeah.

J - And so that's what he tells his fellow scientists and they haven't listened. And what he tells theologians also, and they haven't listened either, is that the most important discovery of modern science is that the universe is a story. And the thing about a story is it can carry meaning. This is how humans get a sense of meaning, of a look back through history, and all the big questions were addressed by stories about origins, how this and that happened, and what we have to do to remain true to reality. Now, the big story is the universe. Yes, we each have our own story, but we would not have it were it not for the fact that the universe which gave birth to us is already a story. And stories can carry meaning. But this story, the universe story is still being told. It's still undergoing transformation. The universe is, and so what we need to keep asking now, which we didn't ask in the Middle Ages.

A - You convinced me. This is right, the big question theologically is what is going on in the universe, to what is this universe awakening, and this is where theology needs to put its focus. Instead, most theology of creation has focused on the beginning, and speculated about what the beginning was like.

J - But Teilhard said you'll never get hold of beginnings. That's something human minds can't do. But what you can do is ask where things are going. And what my life is contributing to. So, the source of morality, the source of moral obligation is not divine commandments planted in our hearts as some say, but the fact that we are born as part of a stream. It's been flowing for a long long time. And to understand that stream, we should not look at the delta, at the tributaries that came into the fashioning of big rivers like the Nile or Mississippi, but look up ahead toward the end. I think I'm using the wrong word delta, but look toward where it's all going and

we can't see that. We can see where it came from, the tributaries to some degree, and we can keep investigating that, and science is very good at taking us back toward beginnings. That's what scientists are looking for. And the assumption behind that is that if you know how things began, you will understand them. Teilhard says no, it's not that way at all. You can look back toward the beginning to get some useful information. You get a sense of patterns of physical activity, how physical activity originated. But the real question is where is it going? And that's a question that science is, for the most part, not interested in and theology, for the most part, is not interested in. What theology does to try to keep people's attention is to point them out of time into eternity. It invites us to detach ourselves from the world, which means detach yourself from time. And this is the result of the platonizing of theology and Christianity which started long long ago. We have to realize that there are other ways of reading the universe, other than the materialist way which looks to the past or to what I call the analogical way, that the meaning of nature, as simply pointing as imperfect analogies to the perfect world outside of time, which invites a spirituality which asks us to detach ourselves from time. Instead, we should be asking as the basis of our spiritual lives "Where is it all going?" And realizing that the universe is, for all we know, 13.8 billion years old. We know that. But that could end up being the dawn, just the dawn of the story.

A – Yeah.

J - And there are scientists who are beginning to realize that and are asking questions about the long-range future of things. But if Teilhard were here and I were to ask him "Where is it going?" he would say, abstractly speaking "I call it Omega." But the problem with Omega is it's not yet. And we can't put our minds firmly on what is not yet. But we can turn our hearts in that direction and then have hope that something new is going to meet us from up ahead.

A - Well, yeah, it's we're continuing kind of this theme throughout our conversation here of the challenge today in our modern age, postmodern age of these different worldviews, and how there is a call within this awakening for some sort of synthesis. So, talking real quick about beginnings, when you were first getting started at Georgetown, and I know you commented on your experience at Catholic as a student, but when you were first getting started as a professor at Georgetown, what was the collective reception of Teilhard's thought and evolution like? I mean, were other people thinking this way or did you find yourself kind of on an island?

J - No. very few people were thinking this way and even fewer are today, I'm afraid to say, but back then there were two main forces of opposition to Teilhard's cosmic optimism and one of them,, the most forceful one in the intellectual world, was that of scientific materialism, and the belief on atomism, the belief that to understand anything you have to analyze it, you have to take it apart. So, you take a human mind and you point out how the brain is necessary, and physical movements in the brain are accompanying your every thought. And then you analyze that brain. You find it's made up of nerves, cells, and molecules. And then you start analyzing those molecules and cells and you find they're reducible to chemical elements. And that means therefore that, if you're analytically and materialistically inclined**, your brain is essentially mindless stuff.** And common sense would seem to want to raise a question about that. And so, what scientists, neuroscientists, and others have been doing is to try to explain how something mindless and lifeless can bring about something alive and thoughtful like the human brain, as it were. But you see again, they're starting from the past, right? And assuming that the answer lies back there in the invisible laws of nature plus elements which somehow were there in the beginning. But that's incoherent. What you're doing is taking something that can do marvelous things like comprehend and understand and love and so forth, and you're saying it's nothing but lifeless and mindless stuff. That's not coherent. That's incoherence. What you're taking is something coherent like the mind, and reducing it to lifeless mindless plurality of atoms or subatomic particles. So, you're not finding coherence, you're finding incoherence when you go back that way. So, what Teilhard suggests is again: if you want to understand mind, turn around 180 degrees after you've gotten back to the beginning and start marching forward in time up till now, and what you'll see is things coming together into more and more

coherent entities, eventually to the human brain, coherent but also almost infinitely complex. But it's only something that's attracting the elements that can explain why they eventually become a mind that can think, that can be oriented toward goodness, truth, beauty, meaning. Look toward the future. And well you reply "But the future's not here." Teilhard would say "That's right. It's not yet" in some way or another. And it's in that direction of what is not yet that we need to rethink theology, our ideas of God. In some sense, it's because God is not yet that the world evolves and that we need theology to account for what's happening. So that was one opposition, and the materialist opposition was expressed classically in a book that I had my students read, by Jacques Monod, called *Chance and Necessity*. Monod was a Frenchman also like Teilhard was, but he came down very very hard on Teilhard because Teilhard was not willing to explain mind materialistically. So, he appealed to most scientific and philosophical thinkers at the time. His book *Chance and Necessity* became a bestseller and in it he has a whole chapter or at least a steady number of remarks about Teilhard and he considered Teilhard to be a loser, intellectually. And so did Daniel Dennett, the American version of Bertrand Russell you might say, he was that important, he died recently. But he also called Teilhard a loser. And so, that was the dominant intellectual setting into which Teilhard's ideas had come.

There were earlier generations of materialists who convicted him of not being sufficiently lucid in his explanation of life and mind. That was one faction of resistance. The other faction, which still remains, is the one that's rooted in theistic thought and or some other version of medieval thought. Most theologians in our seminaries today, the majority of them I would say, are still trying to promote that medieval worldview. And chief among them, I think, is bishop Barron, who founded an institute called Word on Fire, and that's still considered by the conservative theologians to be the only way of making sense of science the optimistic way. But the optimistic way as pointed out and proved to me many years ago is simply incapable by itself of articulating the meaning of nature of what's really going on in nature. And so that's why I've clung to Teilhard and I associate his worldview with the Abrahamic motif, that in which God is pictured as someone who comes out of the future and calls Abraham, and later the people of Israel, and later the early Christians, calls them into a new future, and which formulates the appropriate Christian prayer "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!" So, the real Jesus is not necessarily one that historians analyze, take apart.

A - That's very interesting and very important!

J - But the real Jesus is the Jesus of the Eucharist of the banquet of the anticipation of the final banquet. So, our liturgy has motifs of anticipation and Abrahamic theology and, if you accept the idea that *lex credendi, lex orandi,* that the law of understanding things is set by how we pray, then Teilhard's vision is aptly justified by each mass that people go to, where we ask God for the coming of Jesus from the future into the present. So, I don't think what I'm doing is theologically aimless or a mistake. But unfortunately, very few Catholics' minds and spiritualities are shaped by an anticipatory worldview and the intellectual world is still stuck in the reductionist materialist way of thinking. And whereas the religious world is still allured, I call it an addiction, to eternity, that an addiction to finding our way out of time into eternity, it doesn't give time a chance. Whereas Teilhard does.

A - Yeah. Yeah.

J - Things happen slowly but there was never anything worthwhile that came about without our waiting for it. So, waiting has become, in my theology of nature, a fundamental theme, and it's also a very biblical theme because you read in the psalms and the prophets, constantly, little prayers to the effect that, or observations that, only those who wait will not be put to shame.

A - You know, Jack, that resonates with me so much because I'm thinking of the words of one of my doctoral mentors, Father Frank Berna, who talked about how, especially in his experience at La Salle University which in the only section of Philadelphia is not in the best area of the city and there's a lot of surrounding poverty and struggle, and he made this point, it was simple but poignant, that the poor know how to wait and, you know, anyone of any sort of the slightest affluence, and saying, "God, we hate to stand in the grocery line or

whatever, and we're the most important person and we should be taken first, and God forbid we should have to wait for public transportation or something." It just says so much about the mindset that we're called to as Christians or just as human people in terms of solidarity. I'm even hearing themes of, like the severance of nature within that. Like nature is a sometimes very long and arduous process to accomplish whatever it seeks to accomplish for a seed to grow to a flower, right? It has to endure a lot. And how so much of our faith is for a lot of people escapism and Jesus and that focus is not on that Christ of the Eucharist like you said and that Jesus of the Eucharist, and that just really resonated with me when you brought that up. So, you've spoken a lot about Teilhard's influence, especially when you were a younger man and kind of coming into your own as a theologian. So, I mean, who beyond Teilhard's intercession who continues to inspire you now or what themes inspire you? You mentioned this theme of an anticipatory theology. Would you mind saying a little bit more about that or maybe people that influence you now?

J - Yeah, I think one of the most important influences on my life as a theologian began to occur when I was still a student at Catholic University. And that was just about the time that Jurgen Moltmann's book *The Theology of Hope* had just been translated into English. And I read that as part of a doctrinal seminar that I had at Catholic University. And what he was saying is that authentic Christian faith is always willing to wait. Not passively but by realizing that our contemporary wishes and desires may not be implemented. Thank goodness, because there's something larger that awaits us. And so, he thought that Christian theology is primarily hope. He didn't even use the word faith. Christianity is hope. And at the same time, I had been reading Teilhard who had the idea that the world, as he put it, rests on the future as its sole support. And things like that transformed my whole understanding of faith to include hope for the universe to become something. That's where things, really important things, are happening in the universe. After all, look, it was the universe that created you and me, that created your mind and so forth. It's been doing some marvelous things without our involvement. It's been doing something really really beautiful and good but it hasn't been forced. It hasn't been coerced. So that idea that the universe is not forced and coerced was solidified in my mind shortly afterwards by my reading of Alfred North Whitehead. Okay. So, his thought and especially his book *Science and the Modern World* which I started using very early in my stay at Georgetown. I taught a course almost every semester on science and religion and it was his book, as much as any other, even perhaps, intellectually speaking, even more, that allowed me to realize that the universe is still coming into being, and that we had to anticipate in order to make our minds proportionate to this process, that the world is process and relationality became the important motif in Whitehead's thought. It ran parallel to my orientation from earlier on towards anticipatory vision. So, I linked Moltmann, Teilhard and Whitehead together into what I now call an anticipatory theology. Among them, I would say, that provided personally the most inspiration, when people would ask you "Moltmann doesn't anticipate the future, take away from subtract, from the value of the present, and aren't we losing our existence, our grounding in the present, if we're constantly hoping for something in the future?" He had a very interesting answer which, I think, Teilhard at least would approve of, and that is that the happiness you're looking for, the happiness of the present is anticipation. The present can't absorb the fullness of the future. There has to be a distance. If the present were filled with the presence of God completely, everything would be brought to an end, almost to a kind of lethargy, to death as it were. There would be no future. So, having a sense of the future is the happiness of the present. That's the only thing we can really hope for. If we asked for God to fulfill up the present moment, there would be no future.

A - Yeah.

J - Everything would be pushed into the past and present. And humans cannot live except with a zest for life. And that zest is hope, hope for the future. I guess we could go on and on about that, but that was the main resistance or one of the main questions that came up. "How can you be happy in the present?"

A - So yeah, and Teilhard's life is a testament to that, considering how much struggle he endured from his time in the war to everything he had to go through after that with his own religious order and Rome regarding his thought and being stifled, and being able to share that and how he still struggled to share it despite anything

that was trying to stifle that. So, there is a profound message in there when we see how central hope and anticipation are within his thought and you just speak to that with such authority and such clarity too. So, what would you say is something from Teilhard's thought that is most challenging for you in this time in your life?

J - I think that what's challenging to me is the question of how or whether Catholicism can exist into the future. What has to happen to it to keep our church alive, to give it vitality? And apparently, even though Teilhard's ideas have been around for a while, people have not taken to them or they haven't understood them. So my question to him is how can you make your thought more digestible by the uneducated lay people, who are not theologically educated? What can we do? And I think the answer that he would give would be a very abstract one. And I would ask him "Could you make this a little more concrete? How should a priest give a sermon on Sunday that somehow now prepares those minds for this great vision of Christ that you've given us, and also Christology?" I love Teilhard's cosmic Christology where Christ is identified as the Omega of the Universe. "How can you express that in ways that our teachers in seminaries would be burning on fire with that vision? That hasn't happened yet. We need your help to make that real, as it were." Only a few theologians have really studied the implications of Teilhard's vision and they don't talk about it in seminaries. "So, give us some advice on how we can make your message heard from the bottom up and not sound like another top-down type." I think he would also have to agree that you can't really get into his vision unless you have at least some scientific education. And we live in a culture, as you know, and the present regime is an example of it, of resistance to evolutionary ideas. And where intelligent design seems more in touch with the minds of the voters for our present time, and the prejudices we have about time as just small smithereens of eternity is not going to work.

So, I guess I have these pedagogical questions more than theological ones. So, what I try to do in my own writing is something I picked up from Whitehead too, and that's to seek simplicity when you're teaching or when you're writing a book, but then show that that's not good enough. Seek simplicity and then mistrust it. Mistrust simplifications in our religious education as well, as our science education. We've sought simplicity, but we haven't allowed the mistrust that opens up the future, that's necessary for opening up the future. So, but I would not question Teilhard's fundamental vision. I think he's right on.

A - Well, thank you, John. That's very insightful regarding your personal journey with Teilhard, the relevance of his thought today, and really, I think a beautiful testament to how you have, I think, used the word earlier, but have really interiorized his life and thought in a way that rightfully so makes you one of the foremost scholars of his work. But I think that, at least for me, you resonate not just on the level of the head but also the heart too, in terms of just sharing your journey and where you came from in terms of being initiated into a deeper spirituality, in terms of more expansive spirituality within Teilhard, and now how you've been such an important person and thinker, and taking up this torch too, like you said. It's our work now going forward and it's more than the theologian's work, it's the common people who also, in some sense, have a resonance with Teilhard, that can speak to what it is to embody such cosmic love, such cosmic hope and anticipation, because that's where I've found as of late, and studying Teilhard for the last like, I don't know, 10 or 15 years or so, whatever it is. As of late like the past few years I've just been finding such tangible examples within people's lived experience and how they either share that, I mean maybe we're doing a book study, talking about future man or whatever, but then they just share something from their life that puts meat on the bones so much more than not to discredit Teilhard in his writing, but just for me, at least, it fleshes it out. Or, you know, just witnessing life, right? Witnessing the life of my children and our young family as we grow with my wife, witnessing life around me in terms of people, in terms of nature. They have just really put the rubber to the road in terms of my cognitive study of Teilhard. So, I'm just so grateful for people like yourself that have such a gift of your mind but also your heart too, and how you really share that in a very holistic way. So, thank you so much for that. Well, it's people like you who give me confidence and hope. So very beautifully put. Thank you. Well, we're all in this together, right? That's another theme from Teilhard to some degree that

we're all in this together. So, we help each other, we serve each other. So, take care of yourself. Thank you, John.

J - Thank you as well.

A - And just before we part here today with our audience, as I said in your introduction before the podcast started, you are a very accomplished author. Your most recent book that you would want to draw people to is *God after Einstein*. Is that correct?

J - Yes. My last two books were on two scientists: Albert Einstein and Teilhard, and to give myself hope, I am now in the process of beginning another book in which I'm going to put Teilhard and Einstein in conversation with each other so as to initiate something like what I think Teilhard was hoping to do to integrate science into faith and faith into science.

A - So, well, that sounds excellent and it certainly gives us all something to look forward to. So, John, again, thank you so much. We're very grateful for your support of the American Teilhard Association and for joining me today for this conversation and we pray that it just has a ripple effect for all that might listen to it or watch it.

J - Thank you, Andrew. I appreciate it. Good luck to you!

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