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## **Science and Religion: The Bible Anticipates Wonders Its Authors Cannot Have Imagined**

**By The Rev. Sam Sheridan**

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, French Jesuit Catholic priest, paleontologist, geologist, and philosopher said at the turn of the 20th century that Christianity must always turn back toward, and identify ever more intensely, with the Cross.

Born in 1881, this scientist-priest had a front row seat to the most radical change in the way our species understands itself in human history. He and other scientists of his time discovered, proved, and pondered that the universe itself **began**.

Until the idea that we call the *big bang* theory existed, virtually every culture in ten thousand years of recorded human history saw the Earth – or by the 1600's our sun – as the center of the universe. Learning we are not at, or near, the center of anything is arguably among the most dramatic paradigm shifts in human knowledge.

Teilhard de Chardin, regarded by many as one of the most important Catholic theologians of the last century, was among the first people of the modern world to really know what science has to teach us about existence. He saw God's work in scientific research as clearly, as readily, and as unmistakably as in scripture itself.

When I was growing up people told me that science and religion offered opposing views. You could believe in one or the other. People have been burned at the stake for believing in the science of their day.

My 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher said he could not believe in evolution or that the Earth was more than six thousand years old because he is a Christian.

My parents didn't teach that, but children learn a lot more than what their parents teach. My church didn't teach us to dispute science either, but if you spend an hour or two at church each week, there are 166 other hours for others to be telling you *what Christians believe* – radio, TV, Internet, pamphlets, pop songs, people on street corners. Taken together, you hear the message loud and clear that you must choose between the world you know, the world you live in, and the world of the Bible.

But Father Teilhard de Chardin did not see that conflict *at all*. Even though he was ridiculed and denounced by the church, even though he was criticized, reprimanded, censured, disparaged, and mistreated by his own religious peers, he simply refused to concede that any new discovery cast any sort of shadow on the world of God. New scientific discoveries, rather, cast greater light on all God's wonders.

As a scientist, he wrote of the laws of attraction that dictate how and why matter coalesces to form solids, and liquids, and gasses; stars, and planets, and oceans; tiny microscopic organisms, and sprawling forests, and even human bodies.

Teilhard de Chardin said *everything that rises must converge*. Every molecule, substance, and star does not gather together by happenstance – but desires to converge. Every material is attracted to other materials. Each thing yearns and seeks to be part of something greater. He called this principle "Love."

To be clear, he did not use the word “love,” and you and I can draw a thin line between something he said and something we say.

Teilhard de Chardin said that God is love, and love is what knits the whole fabric of our reality together.

He taught what is written in scripture is written also in the movement of the smallest particles we can observe, and it is written large in the intermingling of galaxies in the vast expanse of interstellar space.

He taught that God is love. You do not need to abandon the Bible to marvel at the cosmos, for the Bible anticipates wonders its authors cannot imagine.

Likewise, scripture also says that God is love, and that love is what knits the whole fabric of our universe together.

Take Exodus, where Moses encounters a bush in the wilderness that, though it burns, it is not consumed. God speaks to Moses there and sends him to God’s people back in Egypt. Moses says, “If they ask, ‘who is this God?’ what shall I say to them?” God says to Moses, “*I am who I am.*”

Hebrew doesn’t have tenses as English does. The Old Testament never ascribes to God anything like a past, present, or future. The present tense is annotation on the part of the translators. Knowing that, let’s reimagine it more as the ancients wrote it:

Moses said, “If they ask ‘who is this God?’ what shall I say to them?” In only three words God says to Moses: “*I am. I am who I am. I was what I was. I will be what I will be.*”

*Being* itself is the personal name God chooses in Exodus. Science does not threaten or assail this most basic witness of scripture. All being, all existence, all things, are knit together with God’s love. Faithful scientists have known that for centuries; faithful theologians have known it for millennia.

The Bible isn’t folklore, fairytale, or story time clinging to the edifice of an unenlightened past. We don’t need to deny the Bible to live in the world,

even as the world we understand changes. For the Bible knows the world will change and invites us to see God there.

Everything science measures and discovers reaffirms our faith and witness. Every molecule, every substance, every star; a still small voice undergirding everything, is saying, "*God loves us, and God is with us; Immanuel.*"