

God has not finished creating; life is ahead of us

Nga mihi atawhai – greetings to all in Mercy! Expected here later this month, for lectures in Auckland and Christchurch, is US Franciscan Sister Ilia Delio. Hosted by the Sisters of Mercy in this country, she will address the topic of ‘Theology and Science’, with a subtext of ‘Christ, evolution and emergent wholeness.’

Sr Ilia holds a doctorate in pharmacology and another in historical theology. She is currently the director of Catholic Studies at Georgetown University, and is the author of more than a dozen books. The latest two are titled *The Emergent Christ (EC)* and *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being (UWB)*. The latter’s subtitle – *God, Evolution and the Power of Love* – gives a clue to the author’s interest.

Our talk about God and religion must take account of what modern science tells us about our world. A theology which developed while people still thought that the sun revolved around the world and which saw God as immutable and unchanging can no longer nourish the faith of believers. ‘Evolution is the new wine of our time,’ says Ilia Delio. ‘The old is not bad; it simply cannot contain the new wine.’ Conversion is key to Catholic life in the 21st century, she says, ‘because conversion is turning in grace toward new life – to participate in whole-making and the emergence of Christ.’ (EC, pp. 9-10)

For Ilia Delio, God is at the heart of the evolutionary process; and a God who is love is a God who changes. She quotes contemporary writer John Haught, ‘Evolution occurs because God is more interested in adventure than in preserving the status quo.’ Is God a noun or a verb, asks a heading in one of her chapters. Thinking of God as a verb, shifting from Godhead to God ahead, helps us to see God as ‘ever newness in love, eternally becoming God in love unto love.’ (EC, p. 43)

God is love, writes Sr Ilia in her latest book, ‘and love is the core of evolution... Through billions of years, with billions of violent events, divine love has persevered without perishing, because divine love can never be extinguished. Love pushes through what appears to be dead and breathes into it new life... God will not save us, indeed cannot save us, if we are without love... We must therefore return to ourselves – this self with its evolutionary history and its power to love – because only this self can love. This return to self is the core of the gospel, underscoring the law

Making whole, as Jesus did

E te Atua, te pūtaketanga o te ao katoa,
God, wellspring from which all life emerges,
be the still point of our turning world.
Call us forward as life evolves;
may our lives bring your love to birth.
May we be whole-makers as Jesus was,
going out to all we find waiting to be gathered in.

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Imaging Mercy Today



SR Ilia
Delio,..
God is not
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of love by which every person can be made whole in love. From the depth of inner love, Christ, the cosmic Person, will be born.’ (UWB, p. 135)

For Ilia Delio, theology is not empty theory but a path to committed, faith-filled action. ‘The good news of Jesus Christ is not so much what happens to us as what must be done by us. The choices we make for the future will create the future. We must reinvent ourselves in love.... We must choose to be whole, to be attentive to God’s ongoing work in our lives. God will not create a new future for us, but God invites us to become more whole within ourselves, so that we may become more whole among ourselves. Evolution toward greater wholeness is evolution toward more life and love.’ (UWB, pp.202-03)

A glimpse of where faith-based action may lead came in Ilia Delio’s keynote address to the annual assembly of leaders of religious women’s congregations in the US in August. She told sisters that they should live with an ‘evolutionary spirit’ and an understanding of the age and complexity of the universe. Evolution, she said, describes not a biological function, but rather ‘a continuing process of unfolding, involving the hands of God.’ In that process, she said, religious sisters have an awesome vocation.

‘We are about drawing in the poor, the lonely, the marginalised, all those seeking to be part of a whole. This is nothing more and nothing less than the most awesome vocation, and that is to give birth to God.’

Sr Ilia invited her audience to consider Jesus as ‘a whole-maker’ – someone who brings together what is fragmented and divided. ‘For too long, we have had a sense of Catholic as sameness. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth there is a new spirit – a spirit of gathering. Jesus is constantly going out and gathering in.

‘To live in the risen Christ is to see the world in new eyes, to be gatherers, to live from a new centre of love,’ she said. ‘What happens in Jesus is to continue in our lives as well, if Christ is the fullness of what our lives are intended to be.’

- Dennis Horton