



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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SR. DIANNE BERGANT

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S ENCYCLICAL LETTER "LAUDATO SI!"

SS. SIMON & JUDE

WESTLAND, MI

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Introduction

Bishop Tom Gumbleton

Good afternoon. I am Tom Gumbleton, and I have the honor of introducing our speaker this afternoon. I have known Sr. Dianne through her writings over quite a number of years, especially her reflections on Scripture lessons I found very helpful. But recently, I came across something that she had written, that I presume, was for a vocational promotion program for her community; and when I read this, I thought,



"Here is a person we really have to get to speak to the Elephants." Her story, as she tell it in this promotional piece, is about why she went to a religious community. Like any of us, I suppose, who have been asked "What are you going to be when you grow up?" "Well," she says, "she had three answers." "First of all," she says, "I was going to be a marine." (Laughter) This is an 8 year old or 9 year old girl. "And I am going to be like my uncle, who is my hero, who is a marine. But then, secondly, I am going to play center field for the New York Yankees." (Laughter) She says, "Somewhere along the line I had read a book about Lou Gehrig. Then, thirdly," she says, "I was going to be a sister." Well, it turns out, her uncle died; and so she gave up the idea of being a Marine. She realized that probably she wasn't going to make the big leagues in baseball, so she gave up that idea. And then she became a sister. And the community of St. Agnes, where she has been a professed sister forever, honors the whole Church; and for that we are blest, because she is not a marine, she is not a New York Yankee, but she is a sister of St. Agnes.

She has been well prepared to speak about the topic we have today, *Laudato Si*, not the encyclical itself, but a scriptural reflection on. She received her Master of Science degree in adult education from Marion College, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. But then she went on to obtain a Master of Arts degree and a PhD in Scripture Studies in Biblical Language and Literature from St. Louis University. Over the years she has been very distinguished as a scripture scholar. She was a member, and then later, President of the board of the Catholic Biblical Association of America - a member of that group for over 25 years and President for one term. She is also an active member of Catholic-Jewish Scholars Dialogue in Chicago for 20 years. She's a member of the editorial board of *The Bible Today* and has been in that role for 25 years. Five of those years she served as an editor of that magazine. And until her recent retirement from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, she was the Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Studies, a particular position that was named for Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller, a Passionist priest who was one of our most distinguished Old Testament scripture scholars, a periti at Vatican II. And Sister Dianne had that role until her retirement as a teacher.

She has written many books; and the material that was sent out shows the list. Her most recent book is called: *Genesis: In the Beginning*, published by the Liturgical Press in 2013. But she also has two books that are reflections that she developed for the Sunday readings for the years 2008, 2009, 2010; and also for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001. Those are materials that I would recommend highly. She has an almost genius ability to draw out the Sunday readings.

And so, because of all of this, she is obviously very qualified to speak to us today on *Laudato Si*, especially as it reflects the scripture passage on *The Earth is the Lord's*. So I ask you to welcome Sr. Dianne Bergant to the Elephants. (Applause)

On Care for Our Common Home

Sr. Dianne Bergant

Thank you very much. Let me say first that I am a little uncomfortable talking with people who have my back; but I'm not going to be turning around like that; so you will have to just make that adjustment. Let me say at the outset that when I was invited to give this talk, I'm the one that decided on this particular topic, because I had been working on it for a long time. And this was significantly before the Pope's encyclical came out; and I'm happy to say that he agrees with me. (Laughter) What I would like to do, however, I would like to develop a couple of themes that he says in the paper. And I just want to point these out. He does not develop them; and that is not a criticism; that is simply an observation. But I just want to point out a couple of themes that he talks about. Let me first read a paragraph and then I will point out the themes. This paragraph puts my thinking in a particular context.

Throughout the history of human enlightenment significant revolutionary scientific discoveries have forged new cosmological renderings and theological revisions have followed this reshaping. In other words, new scientific insights force us to rethink our theology and this has never been easy. The Pythagorean insistence is that the earth is a sphere and not a flat surface challenged literal belief that God is enthroned in the heaven's above. Copernicus' heliocentric model of the universe further threatened well established concepts of divinely determined human dominance in the universe. It does not revolve around us. Darwin's insight into evolutionary processes disputes the notion of direct creation of humankind that continues to be a conflictual struggle in many areas today. Astounding scientific facts have continued to be uncovered, and corresponding theological reinterpretation repeatedly required.

Now that's what I want to talk about. I'm not going to talk about climate change. That is a very important issue; but it's not deep enough. I'm not going to talk about environmentalism. That is a very important issue; but it's not deep enough. I want to talk about what is undergirding all of that and that's a complete change of thinking and understanding of ourselves and our place in the universe. That's what I want to talk about; and I want to tell you at the outset the Pope agrees with me. (Laughter) But, as I say, I just want to highlight a couple of things that he says.

Interconnectedness and Interdependence

In the document there are two chapters I'm particularly interested in. And that is Chapter Two, where he talks about the biblical foundation of what he is saying; and Chapter Six, where he talks about a new way of thinking. So he does say that we have to think differently.

And Chapter Two begins - this is paragraph 64: "If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part." That is very important. We talk about our environment as if it is outside of us. And it's not. It's not outside of us only; it's inside of us as well. We are a part of it; and it is a part of us. This is going to cause some very interesting shifts in our thinking. Another place - and this is the basis for what I want to say: "Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned of other creatures." And I really want to talk about anthropocentrism. It's a big sophisticated word, coming from two Greek words: *Anthropos*, meaning human, and *centric*, meaning center. The presumption is that we are the center of the universe. You and I leaned that. We learned that in science, and we learned that in catechism, that we are the center of the universe. And the pope is saying we have to stop thinking that way. And example that I always give is: scientists today tell us we should not even talk about universe; we should talk about multiverse, because there are probably thousands of universes; and to think that one universe is the only one of significance, which we happen to think; or even within that one universe made up of thousands of galaxies, to think that only the Milky Way is important because it is ours; and even in the Milky Way, to think of all of the possible solar systems, only ours is important; and even in the solar system, only our earth is the only planet that is important; and on that planet we are the center is a little arrogant. (Laughter)

He also says this, which again is the theme I want to talk about, "Ancient stories full of symbolism bear witness to a conviction which we today share; and this is: everything is interconnected." Very important! "Everything is interconnected." There is another statement that he makes, "Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled; whereas, creation can only be understood as a



gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all; and, as such, is a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion." Now that is a packed sentence. But the point I want to underscore is: universal communion. Again it touches on the idea of connectedness.

He says in another place, "All creatures are moving forward with us, and through us, toward a common point of arrival, which is God." Sounds like Teilhard de Chardin with the Omega Point. But also it sounds very much like what we find in the New Testament. Something else it sounds like, "All creatures are moving forward with us." The whole idea that we do not live in a static universe, we live in an emerging universe - an emerging universe. So it is constantly moving; but it is moving toward a common point. Here he quotes the catechism. The catechism teaches us: "God wills the interdependence of creatures." Interconnectedness and interdependence, those are two themes I want to develop. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other. So all of these themes he touches on.

And one last one. All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family. That's not just poetry; that's science; that's good science. Alright, so it's a very nice, though a long document.

Anthropocentrism

Let's talk first about anthropocentrism. As I said, we learned that we are the center of the universe; and science is telling us, "No, we are not." Now I am not a deep ecologist. Many deep ecologists believe that the worst thing that has happened to the natural world is the appearance of humankind; because no other creature destroys its environment. It has learned how to live symbiotically within the environment, the great gifts that we have of refined psychic powers. Now we are not the only animals who have psychic powers. As we all know, animals have memories. If animals did not have memories, Lassie would never have come home. (Laughter) We would never be able to train animals. So there are psychic powers. Beavers can build dams; but they don't write poetry. So we have psychic powers that finely (and when I mean finely it's *finely*, not *at last*) refine powers that enable us to transcend that part of us in the natural world that is material. And I don't want to say exclusively material, because, again, many scientists believe that all of material creation has psychic potential. That one does not need an external force which, of course, would be God, to implant psychic powers. And I don't want to get into the question of the human soul at this particular point. I just want to say that we are part of; we don't just live in. Our language betrays us sometimes. We don't just live in like fish live in a fish bowl; we are part of the natural world. Again scientists tell us, "We are creation." We are natural creation reflecting on itself. We are the psychic powers of earth. We are earth! Earth is not simply the planet on which we live. Earth is not simply the dirt in the field. We are earth! We are what come from a magnificent evolutionary process. Again, scientists tell us, "We are made of stardust." That's not just poetry. We are made of the stuff of the big bang. You and I are recycled cosmic junk. (Laughter) But everything is recycled. That is very different from saying we are separate from.

We learned to talk about being separate from, from the Enlightenment, which is wonderful. It has enabled us to separate ourselves so we can analyze. But the Enlightenment did not tell us how to return in our thinking to that with which we are connected. So we have the interconnectedness and the interdependence. We are dependent on elements within the natural world. The natural world is not dependent on us. And again, my language betrays me. I was going to say natural creation as if we are not part of it because that is the way I have been trained. So I've got to get out of that kind of thinking. The rest of the natural world can do quite well without us. Give it enough time - now time might mean millions of years - but give it enough time and it will re-cleanse the water. Give it enough time and maybe it will return to a kind of pristine kind of existence. Scientists tell us is what we need is a lot of time. It's taken a lot of time to come to this. It has taken a lot of time to come to the rest of the natural world of which we are a part. We are a part of it. We all know we cannot live without it. We eat it; we breathe it; and our spirits are allured and seduced by the beauty of the rest of the natural world. We're seduced not only by each other, but if we are seduced by each other, it's obviously the same kind of seduction. We stand in awe of trees and sunset. We are thrilled, you know, by the warmth of the sun or the coolness of a breeze. Why? Why? Have you ever thought about that? Why do we like the sun so much? It is not simply the flowers that are heliotropic that turn to the sun, a lot of us do; in fact all of us do to a certain extent, until we have been taught not to. That's foolish. That's for children. Why are we like that except that there is something within us that connects with that which is natural? There is a physicist by the name of Brian Swimme, he is out in California. He wrote a delightful little book years ago and the title of the book is *The Universe is a Green Dragon*; and he talks about allurement. He identifies gravity as an example of allurement. Now who ever thought of gravity as allurement? You think of Brad Pitt as allurement

(laughter) not gravity. And yet what is it that attracts us to anything? There is something within us that we are attracted to other manifestations of the natural world, because it is us. It is us. We are part of it.

So that when we talk about anthropocentrism' we have to realize we're part of something bigger; and everything does not revolve around us. The only thing that revolves around us is our thinking - our thinking revolves around us. Now there is absolutely no way it cannot. The only way we can judge anything is from a human point of view. I have no idea what horses think, or how horses judge what is good or bad. We can't think like horses because of human limitation. To think anthropocentrically is not wrong; it is simply a human limitation. But again the adjective that the Holy Father uses is a radical anthropocentrism.

Please realize as wonderful as a human point of view is. It's still a limitation, because there is no such thing as "a human point of view." It's human points of view, which changes with gender, changes with age, changes with ethnic background, changes with economic background or point of view. So there are many human points of view; but there is something common about it: and that is the importance of saving ourselves. And again, there is nothing wrong with that, any more than there is anything wrong with an egocentric point of view. I mean the only way I can understand anything is through my point of view, which was shaped by my experience. And no way do I know what it is like to be African American. I may be the granddaughter of an immigrant, but I am not an immigrant. So I don't know what it is like. I don't know what it is like to be a mother. I don't know what it is like to be a father. And so as wonderful as my point of view might be, and as valid as my point of view is, it is narrow, because it is a human point of view; same thing with human point of view generally: anthropocentrism. It's a narrow point of view. But the error of it is to think everything revolves around us; and again I want to tell you we were taught that.

I remember in science and in catechism the pyramid. And on the bottom of the pyramid are inanimate objects: stones, no life at all. And the next step above it was vegetation. And the next step above that were the animals. And the next step above that was human life. And there was even a hierarchy there, which we won't get into, because that's a different workshop, the whole question of gender bias. But you have that pyramid. And I also remember learning - now having been a teacher or being a teacher, I know that everything the student learns is not what the teacher taught. (Laughter) I know that. Just like everything the teacher teaches the student doesn't learn; but we learn things the teacher never said, because we put things together in our own mind - but I remember learning that the higher you get on that ladder, or in that pyramid, everything underneath serves the purpose of the higher being. That is anthropocentrism. That is anthropocentrism.

Intrinsic Value

This brings us to a second issue I want to talk a little bit about and that is intrinsic value. How do we value things? Now just think about it yourself. What is valuable to you? Usually things are valuable if they are useful; and if they are not useful they are not valuable; and we throw away what is not useful. And sometimes we throw people away as well because they are not useful. How do you understand your



value? Unfortunately, many of us understand our value by our productivity; and that becomes very clear when we are diminishing either because of age, or physical disability, or that we were born somewhat diminished. And we all know people who have been born somewhat diminished, physically, mentally, emotionally, whatever; and their value is determined on their usefulness, not on the fact that they are here. People and things are valuable because they are here; because the reason they are here is that they have been brought into existence by God. And people have made banners and slogans: "God does not make junk." And yet, believe it or not, we may not use those words, because they are a little harsh; but we do identify value in terms of usefulness. Sometimes we even identify ourselves in terms of what we do, or what we've done. That's usefulness. OK? What we have got to learn, really learn, is that things have intrinsic value, whether they are useful or not.

Here is another example of anthropocentrism in terms of usefulness: what's bad weather? Now just think about it, what is bad weather? I think bad weather is weather that inconveniences us. Is rain bad weather? Ask the farmers. I don't particularly like cyclones, but that's nature readjusting itself. Several years ago I spent the month of December in South Africa. I'm smart enough to realize that

when you are going to go to South Africa you don't go in July you go in December if you're leaving Chicago. I came back, this was several years ago and the temperature in Chicago was 56 degrees below 0 wind chill factor. That was cold. The first thing that I recall from the news, a man came out and tried to start his car; and the car wouldn't start. It's 56 degrees below 0 wind chill factor. A car has a right not to start. (Laughter) So what did the man do? He went into the house; he got a revolver; and he shot the radiator twice. (Laughter) Now there is an example of somebody who does not understand he's not the center of the universe. Now that's an extreme case, but how many times have you either wanted to get a bus, or be at an airport, and the weather changes the schedule; and we get angry if the plane is late, if it doesn't take off on time; or if you are waiting for a bus, and the bus does not fly over the snow, we get angry. Why? because it is bad weather, because it has inconvenienced us. That's an example of anthropocentrism. Who said the weather has to adjust to our schedule? And I don't care if you pray that it doesn't rain on the church picnic. Now, I don't understand how that works up there, but the presumption is, and again it may sound trivial, but look at how often you and I judge in terms of my desires and my schedule. That is anthropocentrism. So if it is raining it is raining. It's earth adjusting itself.

I happen to have been in India, up in the north, when the Tsunami hit in the south, and the tragedy of course. And the question always asked, "Why did all those people die?" Now the answer of course is: because they were there. But that is not the question people are asking when they ask that question. What they are asking is, "Why didn't God step in and act against the laws of nature in order to protect the people there?" That is what we are asking; and I don't know the answer to that. I don't believe God steps in, in that way. I think God acts through the laws of nature usually; and I am not denying the possibilities of miracles. I don't understand a lot of that; but I think what we are saying is we should be beyond the laws of nature; and I would like it if we were. I would like it. I don't like the idea that people I love die of cancer. I'm not crazy about diminishment; I think there has to be a better way of doing it, had I been asked. But of course who was asked? So I wish we were not subject to all the laws of nature; but even that wish suggests that it should make its adjustments to my plans, to my agenda. And do we really want that? I don't know. I don't know; but that kind of thinking does come from a kind of anthropocentrism. Now that's what has to change. We've got to stop thinking that all of the natural world has got to conform to our schedule, to our likes and dislikes. Everything has value in terms of its usefulness to me. It's those kinds of attitudes that have caused the ecological devastation that we are experiencing today. So simply recycling is not going to do it.

I got something in the mail this week. I don't know if this is going around in Michigan, but it is certainly going around in Chicago. ComEd! ComEd simply delivers electricity. There is some other organization that produces it. Well, there is an energy renewable source that I can shift to that energy renewable source. It will cost a little more money; but it will make a significant difference on the carbon footprint. Now it is interesting they put in there that it will cost a little bit more money. Well so do hybrid cars; so do installing solar panels. The question again becomes: what is the value? What is our value? And is it not funny, we who are the richest nation in the world, quibble over whether or not this energy producing is: what is it? point 7 something cents more. And yet, one wonders, do I want to pay more for this? Do I want to pay more for that? Do I want to pay more for this? Which again says something about the values that operate in our lives.

Cosmocentrism and Ecocentrism

So we talk about anthropocentrism, which, I think, is the foundation of our problems. Well, what's the alternative? Of course the alternative would be a kind of cosmocentrism, or ecocentrism, meaning an ecology. We are part of an ecological system. You and I are part of a system. And, as I say that, something comes to memory. This happened several years ago; it was in the news. There was a barge in New York, a barge filled with garbage; and it went up and down the Hudson River, 'cause no one would take it. We don't know what to do with our garbage. And frequently, what we do with our garbage? We sell it to the Native Americans, 'cause they are desperate for money; and they've got room. And we sell it to them. We take advantage of the vulnerable, those who do not have the same kind of economic power or political power that we have. Talk about anthropocentrism! Or talk about ethnocentrism!

And as unselfish as we like to think of ourselves, every single one of us, you and I, if we are going to follow the admonition that we find in this document, particularly in the last chapter of that document, where Francis calls for a radical integral ecology. He's calling for a metanoia, a change of mind. A change of mind does not come overnight, does not come overnight I've been thinking these things for several decades; and no way would I say that I have gone through - I am going through - a change of mind. Sometimes I think, I don't know, I think it might be easier to have a change of heart. But some of these attitudes are so ingrained in us, and continue to be ingrained in us. Recently on television, I don't remember which car dealer, or which car maker, and I've got to be careful in Detroit to say this, (Laughter)

but one of the ads said, "Get the car that you deserve." Oh, deserve! That ought to be put on our American flag: deserve! We are so deserving. Entitlement! We think we are entitled. We think we are entitled. So, in a certain sense, almost subliminally, it is reinforced in us. We are taught that; and then it is reinforced in ads. Entitlement! We are entitled to everything and nothing. We are entitled to nothing. It is all gift. It's all gift from God.

But being gift from God, it is ours. But it is a gift from God. This brings us - again I talked about anthropocentrism, intrinsic value - it brings us to Genesis 1, Creation Narrative, which is very, very interesting, very rich, very rich, symbolic story: that's Genesis 1, Creation, where the man and the woman - and it's the man and woman, five verbs are used - increase, multiply, fill the earth, subdue and have dominion. All right? All five verbs are plural, which means the man and the woman both were told to increase, multiply, fill the earth. Well, you'd have to have a man and a woman to have that happen. But subdue and have dominion goes to both of them, not simply to the men - you know, one could develop a real nice feminist push on that.

But what does subdue and have dominion mean? What does subdue and have dominion mean? Many people have real problems with those two words if they are read and understood literally. But if you look at the Genesis 1 Creation Narrative; and you know a little bit about the history of the imagery, subdue and have dominion, leaders do that. And in the ancient world that means the royalty. So in a very real sense, the man and the woman in Genesis 1, though they are not called king and queen, that is the presumption. And the idea of them being made in the image of God has nothing to do with soul. Soul is a Greek word. And in Genesis 1 the ancient Hebrews had no concept of soul. That is not to say that they thought we were only material, of course not; but they didn't call that mysterious other dimension of humankind soul. They may have called it spirit. Sometimes they called it *nephesh chayah*, you know, a living spirit; but they didn't use the word soul. So in that story, I realize over the centuries it has been reinterpreted. But in the original meaning of the story, it is not a soul.

So what does it mean to be made in the image of God? In the ancient world people set up images of their kings and their gods. And in the ancient world they believed that their kings were gods. So they would set up an image, not an idol, an image, some kind of symbolic representation. The Canaanites thought that one of their gods was a very virile man, virile warrior; and so the image of a bull was the image of this virile warrior. So in the Genesis Creation Narrative, the man and the woman are made in the image of God. But image meant, not that the bull or the image was a god; it represented the jurisdiction and power of the god. An analogy would be a national flag. A national flag is the symbol of the jurisdiction of that nation. And there are all kinds of laws against violating the dignity of a national flag, which is simply cloth; but it is a symbol of something. It represents the jurisdiction of that nation. So the symbol or image of God represents the jurisdiction of God, which means on earth that man and woman, king and queen, were to function on earth in the same way as God functioned in the heavens; and in no way does that mean exploitation. It means: having jurisdiction over. Now the verbs may be harsh: subdue and have dominion; but that's what it means: have jurisdiction over, but as representative, not as autonomous rulers. They are an image of God; they are not God.

Then we go into Genesis 3; and what is the sin? It's not eating an apple, nor is it eating a pomegranate. People say there were no apples; it had to be a pomegranate. And the sin is not simply disobedience. Look at Genesis 3 carefully. They wanted to be like God knowing good from evil; but they wanted to be like God. You know, we have this expression sometimes, "Who died and made you God?" I mean, who doesn't want to be like God. I just described I am not happy with some things that I am going to have to go through; and had I been invited to give counsel, I would have given different counsel, which means I want to be like God. But it's wanting to be like God the wrong way, having total control, running the show our way. That was their sin. Which means they were not satisfied being a symbolic representation of God and the working of God in the world. They wanted to be God. Now radical anthropocentrism is an indication we are not willing to represent the jurisdiction of God. Today, we use the word stewardship. We're not willing to be the stewards; we want to be in control. So, in a certain sense, our sin is the sin of the garden. We are not willing really to be image of God, we want to be God. And that is what we find in the Genesis 1 and a little bit in the Genesis 3 Creation Narrative as well.

I spoke about intrinsic value, and how frequently we think that things are valuable if they are useful. Going to the book of Job: now a lot of people understand the story of Job as a righteous man who suffers; he clung to his righteousness; and in the end God blessed him. The book of Job is 42 chapters. Job is patient in the first two chapters and the last 10 verses of Chapter 42. So, anybody who knows the story of Job as I just described only knows two chapters and 10 verses of a 42 chapter book. Beginning with chapter 3 up to 38 Job is a man who shakes his fist at heaven. Job is a man who is angry, not only at the

people who visit him - many people call those people his friends. I always think, "Who needs friends like that?" Job's visitors: he is angry with them; but he's also angry with God. He accuses God of unjustly punishing him. Now the reader knows Job is right. The reader knows that. Job's suffering does not come from his sinfulness. Job's suffering comes directly from God. Job doesn't know that, but the reader knows that; so we watch Job struggling. And in chapter 38 God finally speaks. Now Job's struggle is with what we call innocent suffering. Job's struggle is with justice. God never says a word about innocent suffering. God never says a word about justice. What does God say? God says two sets of questions. God says, "Where were you when I created the universe? Do you know how it works? Can you control it? Do you know how to hold back the chaotic waters?" One set of questions has to do with the cosmos. The kinds of questions that Job, if he were to answer would have to say, "I don't know; I can't understand it; and I can't control it." The second set of questions deals with animals, which at the time of the writing human beings had no control over. They were undomesticated; and they were not under human control; and they are all the same kind of questions again. "Do you understand how it works? and can you control it?" Now the very fact that the writer chooses those animals that are totally useless to human beings at that time; and yet, these are the animals that are used to show Job, "You don't know everything; and you cannot control everything. You have human limitations." And yet, as the storyteller tells the story, these are animals that are brought into existence by God, that are cared for by God, and reproduce and continue, even though they are useless to human beings at that time. So that tells us that the ancient biblical writer, speaking in God's voice, of course, would suggest there is an awful lot that you can't control; that doesn't mean it is useless. You don't understand; that doesn't mean it's useless.

We talk about God as Creator all the time. The prayer we use: God is Creator. God has created things that are beyond our comprehension. Even what we know, we don't know why it works that way. We may understand how gravity works, but we don't know why it works that way. Scientists will tell you that. We may discover certain laws, but we don't know why they work that way; and will we ever? Now, again, there is the mentality, certainly in the West, "Give us enough time and money, and we will crack the secrets of the universe." Even Stephen Hawking thinks: The Grand Universal Theory: there were four major powers in the universe; and they have been able to figure out how three of them work together. They can't figure out how gravity fits into that because it's mysterious. We know so much about it, but we don't know how it fits into electromagnetism, and the strong nuclear power, and the big one. We don't know how it works together; so there is an attempt to figure out how it works together. And then, maybe, we will understand everything. I don't know if we ever will understand everything. How could we understand everything? Again, remember what I said, we are just one little species on one planet which has millions of species; and one planet, among many planets, in a galaxy among many galaxies, and bigger and bigger and bigger. How can we understand all of that? We don't even know what all of that means.

Scientists tell us that the universe of which we are a part is at least ten dimensions - ten! We are wired for four of them - length, width, breadth and time. How can we possibly think that we are masters of the universe when we're not even wired for 50% of it? There are six other dimensions in this room they tell us. I always think, "What's going on in those other dimensions?" (Laughter) Or another way of saying that is, "Who else is in this room?" Now we speak lightly of it; but science tells us, you know, there are people who may have some kind of power: mystic power. I don't know about these people who talk to the dead. I don't understand that. Every once in a while, I think, "If I only had a chance." I mean, I would like to talk to people that I loved who have died. I would love to. And with my luck, with my question, I would probably get struck with something. And yet, I have to learn to be satisfied with the limitation of four dimensions. And it is faith that tells me, as faith tells us in the Scriptures, we are only separated by a thin veil, which we don't even see the veil. I wonder at the moment of death, what is it like? I'm not eager for it. I know it is going to come; but what is it like? Do they move? Are they gone? Some people have mystic powers. We have contemplative moments. We all have mystic moments. I think we are all born mystic. We are not always reared to be mystics, because sometimes the mystic dimension: "Be quiet; don't tell anybody. Be normal; we don't want anybody who's not normal." And so frequently, people who have these insights are made to feel odd. And yet again, I think, if we thrill with a sunset, those are magnificent moments. So, in a very real sense, we are part of this magnificent reality that we call natural creation. We are part of it. It's really out of our hands. We didn't build the building; all we really do is rearrange the furniture. But we're part of it; and what a glorious opportunity to be part of it.

And yet we have learned, you and I, that we're in charge; and, therefore, we can make decisions to make things better. And haven't we made them better? Look at the wreckage! We are dying from air pollution. I mean, how much cancer - and I am not a scientist, I'm not in medicine - how much cancer is environmentally caused? We have polluted water; we have polluted air; we have polluted, contaminated food; and we bring it all in ourselves; and we wonder why we die from cancer, or from other illnesses

caused by environmental issues. We're killing ourselves in a certain sense. So, in a very real sense, it is more than simply changing the way we act; we've got to change the way we think; and then, that will change the way we act. Now, I'm not saying one comes before the other; because, sometimes, changing the way we act forces us to change our thinking. What I'm saying is: it is not enough to be an environmentalist. We have to recognize what we call integrity of creation, and eco spirituality, eco theology, ego sensitivity, eco justice, which means the ecology, the whole system of which we are a part. And that then again touches on the idea of interconnectedness and interdependence. We have a difficulty recognizing we are dependent on each other; and yet, we have had some experiences recently in recognizing our interconnectedness with each other. We can live off of each other's blood. We can survive off of each other's organs; not just thoughts, but actual physical makeup, transplants off of each other's organs. That says something about interconnectedness; but we are also interconnected with the rest of the natural world as well; and that will take a while for us to learn. I don't know if our generation will capture it. This next generation coming up, it's got to be taught in schools. Much is being taught in schools that was not taught when I was teaching grade school, to say nothing about when I was in grade school. But we must begin to think differently. That's the interconnectedness and the interdependence.

Being a Part of a Whole

And the last theme that I want to talk about is articulated when the pope does mention something about being part of a whole. There is a concept referred to as Dynamic Cosmic Design - the Dynamic Cosmic Design. I love that expression. The Dynamic Cosmic Design, again, acknowledges that there is a designer. It's a way of acknowledging the idea of a creator. Cosmic! It's bigger than Detroit. It's bigger than the United States. It's cosmic! This is what Chardin was talking about. This is what Tom Berry, a Passionist, was talking about. This is what Francis is talking about. This is what cosmologists are talking about today - both cosmologists that are involved only in cosmology, but also cosmologists who are also involved in taking new science and reinterpreting our theology: theological cosmologists. There is a Franciscan sister, Ilia Delio, is one of those. John Haught in Georgetown. Theologians. And there are spiritual writers who deal with this as well, taking new science and reinterpreting our theology. So it is cosmic. We are part of the cosmos.

Remember Carl Sagan? People use to laugh at Carl Sagan when he would say, "Millions and millions of years, and we are all part of the cosmos." And wasn't that clever? It's true. We are part of the cosmos, not just something small; we're part of something big. But it's a design - it's a design - and it all works as a piece. And, again, I go back to something Francis said; but, really, it just goes right into what Chardin was always saying, "We are all moving toward something together." We find that in the New Testament: a new heaven and a new earth. That does not mean the old heaven and the old earth have been discarded; it means it has been transformed - it has been transformed. I like the image that Paul used all the time, and Jesus used it as well: "The seed must die. But if the seed dies, something new comes out of it." The seed, even though it corrupts and dies, the essence of life is not gone, because if the essence of life was gone, there would be no fruit.

So, the essence of life is transformed. So, there is a connection between this world, of which you and I are a part, and the new earth, which will be somehow transformed. You and I are material beings. We will never be fulfilled if the material dimension of us is not part of that fulfillment. How it happens? I have no idea, because I don't know what resurrection of the body is. I can explain resurrection of the body; I have no problem explaining it. I have no idea of what it means. Resurrection of the body is a Jewish concept. Jews would never think of immortal soul that lives on after the body dies. That's a kind of dualism. That's not Jewish thinking. If there is to be any kind of resurrection, from a Jewish point of view, I'm talking about ancient Hebrew, from that point of view; it's got to be the person is raised from the dead. And all of the resurrection stories are examples of this; and we have no idea what those stories really mean but we can understand the story. How could these people, who knew Him so well, not recognize Him and then all of a sudden they recognized Him? which means: He was there; and it was Him; but He was different; but it was Him, whether that be the people walking to Emmaus, you'd think they would catch on by His voice. I would recognize the voice of my best friend. They didn't recognize His voice. They didn't recognize Him. And then, all of a sudden, something happened; and they recognized Him for a moment.

So you have got to re-read the resurrection stories. Happens every time! First, they don't recognize Him; and then they do, which means that, somehow or other, it was really Him, the Him that they knew. They didn't know His soul. They knew Him, the man that was made up of body, and spirit, and soul, and psyche. And we never see spirit, soul, or psyche; we see the material. We see the effects of spirit, soul and psyche, but we see the body. It was Him, but He was different. And that's what will happen to us if we are risen and transformed. It'll be us, not something different; but how it is going to happen? I have

no idea. I haven't been there yet; and nobody has come back to tell us what it is like. Those that come back, maybe, never really left. And if they come back, somehow, it's them, but it's different. So in a very real sense, you know, the Bible is not anti-earth, anti-material. If your spirituality or my spirituality is anyway anti-material or anti-body, we're dualist, body and soul. I learned that when I was a novice. I learned that what you deprive from your body will enrich your soul. That was the kind of spirituality that was alive and that was not 100 years ago. (Laughter) That's the kind of spirituality, and you must understand, for its time in history.

Thank God that now we recognize the body is part of us. That's how we communicate with each other; that's how we love each other. And it will not be lost; it will be transformed. And all of this is good ecology. And the world will be transformed; the earth will be transformed. What that means, nobody really knows. I mean, that's where the issue of faith comes in. And then we mend that; and that's what changes the world. We mend believing that the material dimension of which we are a part is good - it's good - and we must cherish it. That's what ecology is all about, and realizing that we are a part of it.

It's not out there any more than my hand is away from my body. We talk about having a relationship with the natural world as if we are not natural world. We never talk about having a relationship with our ear or with our hand, because we realize it's part of us. And yet, we talk about establishing a positive relationship with the natural world out there, which separates us; and again, that's what I meant when earlier I said that frequently our language betrays us. And we are all, regardless of how our thinking is, we slip into that, because that's the way we have been raised. And that's the way society, and sometimes Church documents, continue to reinforce that.

So, we've got to change our thinking. We are going through a significant transformation. You and I are at a moment in the Church's history, not just society's, but certainly the Church's history.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we are earthlings - as was Jesus - made of earth, dependent on earth. It is more than our home, it is our mother; it is our self. Pope Francis reminds us of this, and calls us to be converted to a realization of this, and an appreciation of it. He insists that we much live out our lives with openness and gentleness and gratitude, knowing that together we are all part of a wondrous, cosmic adventure called life. We are part of each other; we are part of the Earth; we are part of the universe. And this is something to behold. Thank you.

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