

# Ursula King

## “Evolutionary Spirituality and the Power of Love”

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**Michael Dowd (host):** Welcome to Episode 35 of “[The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity: Conversations at the Leading Edge of Faith](#).” I’m [Michael Dowd](#), and I’m your host for this series, which can be accessed via [EvolutionaryChristianity.com](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com), where you too can add your voice to the conversation.

Today [Ursula King](#) is our featured guest. [Ursula](#) is [Professor Emerita of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Bristol](#), a vice-president of the [World Congress of Faiths](#), and a noted evolutionary and feminist theologian. Her books include [Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin](#); [Religion and Gender](#); and her most recent, [The Search for Spirituality: Our Global Quest for a Spiritual Life](#). Here, Ursula and I spiral around the subject “Evolutionary Spirituality and the Power of Love.”

**Host:** Hello Ursula King, and welcome to this conversation on Evolutionary Christianity.

**Ursula:** Hello, Michael. I'm pleased to talk with you.

**Michael:** I am pleased to talk with you, too. It has been a treat to learn more and more about your work, and to realize how many connections that we have, and shared passions and interests. Ursula, I'd like to begin by asking you to please share how you came to where you are now—intellectually, heartfully, and professionally. Tell us your story: how you got to this place, how you were raised, and the mileposts that got you to the place where you are now.

**Ursula:** My background is probably a little bit unusual in that I was born before [the Second World War](#) in 1938, and I lived through the ravages of the Second World War. In fact, my father was killed and I experienced the firebombing of [Cologne](#), my native city. That affected me very deeply, in terms of suffering, in terms of the wars that are going on in the world right now, and in terms of the need for peace, reconciliation, and the closer coming together of humankind. So I was brought up in really quite some poverty, at the margin of society, and I had a great desire to learn and get a high school education—which I eventually got with some Christian sisters until the age of fifteen, and then it gets quite complicated.

I was educated in economics and the social sciences but I had this desire to study theology. I developed this deep interest in theological and philosophical questions—largely stimulated, I think, by our religious education teacher in high school who was a [Dominican](#) monk. So I had this desire to study theology, and everybody thought I was quite mad—“What would she do as a *girl*, being a Catholic girl, with theology?” I really did manage to get scholarships to universities. I had a wonderful time studying in Germany, in [Bonn](#), and [Munich](#). Then I won a scholarship to go to France, and I finished eventually my studies in [Paris](#): philosophy and theology. I first worked on early Christian origins. But in the meantime, I’d been to England; I met my future husband and decided to get married to an Englishman. So I came to England, and I very soon was a lecturer in divinity at the Catholic College of Education that trains teachers. I went on to do a PhD eventually, but that’s much later.

My husband and I went, very soon after our marriage, to India. We spent five years in India where I became very much involved with the early post Vatican II dialogues among people of different faiths. So I learned a tremendous amount in India. I studied Indian philosophy and religions, and that is what I came to teach at the university. Also, I must say, in Paris I had a wonderfully inspiring [Jesuit](#) professor of theology who introduced me to the ideas of the French religious thinker and paleontologist, [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](#). This was in 1960; he had just been dead for five years, and his works had hardly begun to be published. So I really was very interested in this. I came to read him first when I was holidaying with my firstborn child in the Himalayas whilst my husband was on a university trip to England. I was back still in India and I started reading Teilhard de Chardin, very much from a perspective of Eastern religions, and that is what I worked on.

So all this led eventually to my university career—being a professor of religious studies. I moved much more from the theological work I did early on, when I worked on Christian origins. I worked more towards the comparative study of religions—world religions—and I worked particularly on modern Hinduism. Then I became very interested in women’s questions. Very early on I met women who had been in the suffragette movement at the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These were quite elderly by the time I got to know them. And I became very interested in women’s questions even before the beginning of modern feminism. Then I later moved into [feminist theology](#). I became very interested in questions of spirituality and the different spiritualities of the different world faiths, and how these are developed through interfaith encounters and dialogue.

And my family is very important for me; I have four daughters. Now I have five, very soon I’ll have six, grandchildren. So all this keeps me fairly busy.

**Host:** Ursula, I’m sitting here thinking, imagining, the breadth and depth and the wealth of your experience. For example, I can hardly even imagine being exposed to, and really getting into, Teilhard de Chardin’s work while you have your firstborn child in the Himalayan Mountains. It’s like: it doesn’t get any better! It sounds wonderful. *[laughter]*

Well, Ursula you suggested as a title for our conversation, “Evolutionary Spirituality and the Power of Love.” I’m wondering if you could please speak to that.

**Ursula:** Yes. It is really in the context of the theme of evolutionary Christianity that my recent work on spirituality, and the [different approaches to spirituality](#), has made me really see that the evolution of

spirituality—its further development in quite new ways that connect with the old, but that also bring in something new—is very, very important. The most central element for me in that is the transformation of the human species through the power of love, and through the further development of the core responsibility and core consciousness of our common destiny, and of our common history through the whole epic of evolution. So this is really how I came to formulate that title.

**Host:** This speaks to my own heart, my passion for communicating that there's nothing more important at this time in history than for humans to [expand our compassion, our empathy, our care](#), and our commitment to, not just other humans, but also to the larger body of life—and that [that trajectory](#) is part of what evolution has been doing for a long, long time.

**Ursula:** Yes, I feel really that we see ourselves and understand ourselves very, very differently if we get away from our individualistic kind of centering on ourselves and see how we are part of this immense 'stream of becoming'—of this whole grand story of the evolution of life. The question is how has this evolution of life gained in interiority, gained in complexity, gained in self-reflexivity? And at what important junction are we now—today, this century, the next century—in the history of the evolution of life? What responsibility do we have for evolving further our consciousness, our action together with others, and our power to learn in a different way to connect with people and all that is living?

**Host:** I want to invite you to go a little deeper into what you just spoke about in terms of, [How has evolution produced greater complexity, greater interiority over time](#)—and what do you see as our moment now?

**Ursula:** Well, I'm very much influenced in my understanding here by Teilhard's so-called [Law of Complexity/Consciousness](#). The whole process of becoming, from the Big Bang onward, from the first moment, is a coming together of different elements that combine into something bigger than themselves. So there's always this movement towards union or unification, which complexifies matter, complexifies life. Through this complexification you have this concentration, so that something interior happens, as well as exterior and material.

How do we account for interiority, for our inwardness, which is more than our flesh and bones, more than our sensitivity at the skin level and more deeply than our skin level? What is it that makes us think, that makes us conscious? And can we develop a greater core consciousness? Is there a greater concentration of, what some people might call, a psychic quality or a consciousness that moves toward a super-consciousness? In a way, we don't actually have the language to capture the complexity and the subtlety of these processes that we are part of and that are shaping us. That's the way I feel.

**Host:** That's great! Ursula, could you speak a little to the evolution, the transformation of consciousness and culture now happening at the global level? You speak about (and [Thomas Berry](#)

spoke often) about how the diversity, the pluralism, is held within a context of unity, of wholeness—and those two are not polar opposites; they're actually both necessary, and especially necessary for moving into a healthy future. Could you speak a little to that?

**Ursula:** Realities and experiences move on a large spectrum—continuum, so to speak—rather than in polar opposition. That's true of the material and spiritual that are so often very dualistically opposed—of body and soul, mind and matter, of everything. They are mutually embedded.

Consciousness moves forward through reflexivity and articulation, which is animated and pushed forward or pulled forward by the process of education, by the process of communication. Sometimes people use this very old expression, “unity in diversity.” I very much like the way Japanese speak—not about unity in diversity, but “*harmony* in diversity.” There is this great diversity at every level—and diversity is part of the superabundance of life.

Diversity is an absolute necessity for something to emerge and come into being. This diversity can be constructed as negative, as opposed to each other. Think of warring nations, a very concrete example, or the diversity of faith. But it can also be seen (and this is our way of appropriating it constructively) as resources that relate to each other and can enhance each other or can critically shift each other, and can combine to produce something more developed: something that integrates the different elements, but at the same time produces something new that goes forward to a different level. So I feel we as a human community—as a species—have to learn to deal with these differences among us and between us.

**Host:** I couldn't agree more. In fact, I've been languaging myself that the big shift, for me at least, before I had an evolutionary understanding and afterwards, is that prior to thinking in evolutionary terms, how I related to differences was as a problem to be solved. With the sacred understanding of evolution I now see our differences as at least a potential solution to our problems—in the same way that the diversity of an ecosystem is essential.

The same is true in consciousness. Many people find the analogy of “the body of life” useful—that we have been one large body. The entire life community is like one body, and humans have a unique role in that body. It's the recognition that we are part of one larger body and that we need to cooperate in service of the larger body. Each of us needs to find our role in that process. You don't want the different parts of your body and the different organs of your body to all be doing and thinking the same thing. The diversity of thinking and doing within a body is actually a healthy thing. We need to come to that also, in terms of our different cultural practices and political systems and that sort of thing.

**Ursula:** Right. I think that's very, very important. My understanding of the world and myself has changed very much through looking at these processes from an evolutionary perspective. This is why I think the *evolutionary* understanding of consciousness is so important—not in terms of the history of human consciousness but in terms of how we understand our own consciousness and how we try to evolve as human beings by consciously taking responsibility for the connections we ourselves can make, and the response that we have to the diversity of people and existence.

I love the definition of an [Indian Jesuit theologian](#) who speaks about spirituality as “responsibility” —not responsibility in the ordinary sense, but the ability to respond. The larger the abilities to respond and the wider I can open my arms and enlarge my vision, the more I can respond and really connect with the whole world. This is why I think this whole evolutionary paradigm is so absolutely essential at this junction in history.

We have to make a turn—I use almost an analogy from the railway system—we have to switch tracks. We have to switch tracks to get to a different direction—to really go elsewhere than where humanity is going at that moment, in terms of its disasters (whether they are ecological disasters which we have created that are on the horizon, or our own kind of poor management of human resources on the globe). So I feel really that we need to aim for, what some people call, a greater solidarization of humanity—humanity as a species, not just our little coteries, our little families, tribes, clans, or nations, but the whole humanity as one species.

**Host:** I agree. You’re speaking my heart so deeply. Thomas Berry often pointed out a very similar thing: that until we recognize our oneness—not just at the metaphysical or spiritual level but in terms of biological reality, that we actually share the same atoms and molecules and that everything is recycling, that *there’s ultimately one water system on Planet Earth and it flows through, not just the oceans and rivers, but also through the bodies of all sentient creatures*—until we recognize that physical oneness and a reality-based sense of interrelatedness we’re going to not adequately respond to the immensity of issues before us.

**Ursula:** This is what the story of evolution—our scientific knowledge that we have today, and that is no doubt is going to be further enlarged—teaches us. When you look at it biologically or cosmologically, there is this vision of a biological Oneness of Life. This is the most fundamental oneness that is the root of us all. I find the absolutely fantastic icon of this is the photograph that the astronauts took of the Planet Earth in space. There is this wonderful photo called [Earthrise](#). This is coming into our consciousness: the consciousness of the planetary oneness. We are all on the same Earth, from the same planet. We all belong to the same life story, to the same epic of evolution, which then leads to our interpretation of how humanity has a cultural and ultimately spiritual oneness.

The religions always teach from the other way around: they see the spiritual oneness, and then look at the other things. But I think from the scientific point of view, now we can really see, Where is this biological oneness going? What is its meaning? How can we actually interpret it? How can we understand it? How can we deepen our relationship to it?

**Host:** Amen! . . . Ursula one of the things I wanted to ask you, in this vein, is that you speak (and I hold also) that this transformation of consciousness, this evolution of both culture and our inner spirit —how we think, how we feel, how we act—it’s not going to happen just by itself. We have to *choose* to evolve. We have to make certain choices to further our own evolution. So if you could say a little more about that.

**Ursula:** This is where, I think, what Teilhard de Chardin called the “[evolutionary role of religion](#)” comes in: to see that the religions, the traditional faiths, how they have evolved, how they have developed in the past. They can’t give us all the answers for the present and the future; how that has to develop further—and that’s why some people speak of evolutionary spirituality. They need a much deeper kind of 'spiritual taking responsibility' for our own self-evolution, because the further evolution is our task. We are called to that, and that is an enormous task. We can only do it together, if we do it at all. So it’s a question of bringing together, integrating—not in a minimalist sense—but to relate what we know of science and religion, and to bring together the two great streams of knowledge and experience in the history of humankind.

What can we do with [science and religion] to really develop further, to find the right ideas, the right actions? I love Teilhard's reflection on “where are the engineers?” There are thousands of engineers that look at our energy resources in a material sense, but where are the “engineers of the spirit”? Where are our spiritual energy resources that will feed and nurture the zest for life, the love of life, the acceptance and support of life, the trust in life?—and really bringing together all the necessary ingredients to ensure the flourishing of all people and the planet. That is such a huge, gigantic task, so we have to draw on all the resources we could possibly find.

That really revolves around making people conscious about this. I think we need the media, we need the churches, we need the religious institutions, and we need the educational institutions. Like Thomas Berry said: we need to do the “[Great Work](#)” (also [here](#)) to have the transformation that is necessary in the human community to really guarantee or make possible a viable human and planetary future. That’s a tremendous task, and I think that more people are becoming aware of this, particularly through the power of communication that we have now been given through [the Internet](#): communicating so efficiently, effectively, and quickly with each other in mobilizing people's thinking and in getting people’s reaction. We are in a new mode of life!

Teilhard calls this the “[emergence of the noosphere](#).” He didn’t know about the Internet; he would have loved it. But he saw that out of the flowering of the biosphere (the biosphere that covers the entire planet) now comes the flowering of consciousness—and not in an abstract, cerebral way but the consciousness that animates the human mind, body, and heart. That is a layer that covers the entire globe. Every human being can be part of this layer of acting, thinking, loving, connecting. I feel that's really a hugely evolutionary task linked to the education of all people—but particularly to the education of the young in school. The task is to develop, what I call, a new spiritual literacy: to develop beyond the literacy of learning to read and write and communicate, but to learn how to read the science of the spirit. That’s a deeply religious and spiritual task: to really transform our actions, make us account to ourselves and others what we are doing and what we are taking responsibility for.

**Host:** Yes. I think some people find the words *spirit* or *spirituality* to be either confusing or a stumbling block. Personally, I love it. But I've found that a lot of my friends and colleagues that are either nonreligious or atheist or secular, or they’ve been wounded by religion, for them the word *spirituality* often connotes something that is otherworldly. Teilhard, of course, was speaking about spirituality in a much more pragmatic, practical, this-world way.

The same thing with the word *consciousness*: some people think of consciousness in sort of nebulous, otherworldly way. Yet when Teilhard spoke of the *noosphere*, it was really an understanding of this realm of human thinking. You've got the sphere of water (hydrosphere), the sphere of rock (lithosphere), the sphere of life, (biosphere), and the sphere of human thinking and behaving (noosphere) that's only possible because of our communication, our language, our symbolic words, our interactions, and that sort of thing.

**Ursula:** Yes, and you see, *that* has always happened in groups. Evolution occurs at a large level of quantitatively large units. The human species has developed at the level of the species together in groups. Thought, language, human activity, skills; it's not one being that has suddenly found the solution to things. You may affect a person as a leader, but it's always been a group dynamic. In the same way, I think, today it's a group dynamic and a group consciousness that has to evolve.

Yes, *spirituality* is a word that is very loaded for some people. It comes out of the Christian tradition. It had a very specific meaning. It now has become a kind of universal code word, which is used in the interpretation of *all* faiths—not just Christian spirituality but Muslim and Jewish and Buddhist and [secular spirituality](#). I've even found a book on Marxism and Spirituality. It's extraordinary!

People don't want to know about religions, but they are sometimes quite comfortable with *spirituality*, like in some of the new religious movements. Or, you have people who feel *spirituality* is something connected to aesthetics: to the arts, to painting, to music. But I feel that, really, whatever word we use, the word might not be the most satisfactory because it has been traditionally associated with the contrast to the body, and the contrast to the material, and the contrast to the economic. So that, traditionally, spiritualities have been far too ascetic—far too world-rejecting, body-rejecting—particularly when you've had male ascetic spirituality rejecting women and their bodies, and so on.

There is a lot of space, though there is a great deal of 'bad baggage' that we have in the past there, and that is difficult. But nonetheless, I do feel that one might call *spirituality* something to do with our attitudes and relationships, not only to ourselves. Very often it is only seen in terms of the individual and God—and that is too isolationist. It has to be related not only to the personal and the individual but also to the social, and I would say to the planetary, to the global. It has to be related—and it *is* related—to all areas of life. This is why I like the expression—“spiritualities of life,” “spiritualities *for* life.”

Every human experience has potentially a spiritual dimension and *lining*, if you like, because everything is related to a measure of *interiority*, positively or negatively. So we can go down that path and search, and put the searchlight on the deeper meaning of what we do. And by doing so, we come to a *spiritual* dimension—whether it's in politics or economics or in prayer and adoration. I feel really that all these levels are interconnected. For example, when you look at modern science and the wonderful worldview that we have in terms of the cosmos, the galaxy, the great movements of evolution, the extraordinary developments—I mean, there is a world *out there*. You stand in wonder and awe. Modern science can give us the infinitely small, the infinitely large, the infinitely complex. We can stand there in awe of our own findings and knowledge. But we haven't *created* this; we are only a part of it.

What does all this mean? I think there is a great spiritual land of wonder and awe out there, which is marvelous. I said this in a debate with [Richard Dawkins](#) here at the University of Bristol. He doesn't want to take this, of course. But when he praises all the wonders of science—that's almost a spiritual statement. He doesn't acknowledge that *that* is connected to it. But for me, in my understanding, it is connected—deeply interconnected.

**Host:** Thomas Berry speaks of science—[modern science—as, “the yoga of the West.”](#) I've always loved that phrase. Your statement, “the spirituality *of* life, the spirituality *for* life”: that resonates so deeply with me. I've come to see [evolutionary spirituality](#)—that is, I've now defined it for myself—as [growing in right relationship to reality and supporting others in doing the same.](#)

**Ursula:** Right. That sums it up, because it relates to all of our relationships: to ourselves, to our neighbors, to others, to nature, to God, to social life, to personal life. I feel it really is all encompassing.

**Host:** I want to go back to something that you shared before that I thought was very provocative, and it also reminded me again of something that Thomas Berry shared, which is the idea that our ethnic diversities, our religious diversities, our spiritual diversities can be an enormous resource for coming together—rather than tearing us apart. And I remember a [quote from Thomas Berry](#), one of my favorite quotes, he said, “*Humanity will not come into a mutually enhancing relationship with the natural world on the resources of the existing religious traditions—and we can't get there without them.*”

**Ursula:** *[laughter]* That's a very good contradictory statement. I would wholly and utterly agree. It expresses in a nutshell that the religious traditions preserve something very, very precious that we cannot do without. But at the same time, they're encrusted in such superfluous customs, traditions, and backwaters that we must get rid of a great deal of all the frills and the extras. That would be what [Teilhard de Chardin](#) used to call “the fossilized part of religions.” The religions as traditions are still stuck in the Neolithic—evolutionarily speaking. *[laughter]*

Religious people very often have the conviction that religion has the answer to all the problems—and that is not true. Religions can provide some very, very helpful and guiding insights *for* solving our problems. Thomas Berry probably also said this, that “religions are part of the problems, and they have to be part of the solutions—but they can't do it on their own.” They haven't done it for the last 5,000 years, and they're not going to do it for the next 5,000 years—*on their own.*

We *have* to have the religious, yes. But we also need the other parts of the “[fourfold wisdoms](#)” (also [here](#)) that Thomas Berry mentioned. Thus we need the wisdom not only of the classical religious and philosophical traditions but also the wisdom of the indigenous people, the wisdom of women, and the wisdom of modern science—which he described as the “yoga of the West,” producing a deep, very deep insight and knowledge of nature and of the world around us that no other society in human history ever knew before. I mean, we *are* in a new moment of time; there is no doubt about it.



**Host:** Yes. In fact, could you say a little bit more about this notion, this vision that Thomas Berry had of “[the four-fold wisdoms](#)”?

**Ursula:** In order to tackle and achieve the profound transformation that we need in our own attitudes and social organizations, we need to draw on the sources of wisdom that the human community has amidst itself. These fourfold sources of wisdom, I think, Thomas Berry characterized very well. The first source is *the Wisdom of the Indigenous People*, which is only becoming more recognized now. Similarly, *the Wisdom of Women*: the deep wisdom of life and experience of women throughout the ages and in the different traditions is something that is also becoming much more recognized and acknowledged now, and we can't do without it. Then we have the much more widely, and usually exclusively acknowledged, *Wisdom of the Traditional Religious and Philosophical Traditions*: the great philosophical insights—whether from India or Africa or East Asia—from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, so many different ones; then the classical philosophical traditions of the East and the West. We have all those wisdom traditions—and we have in addition the very new, the very recent *Wisdom of the Resources of our Scientific Knowledge and Insight*: the mind boggling discoveries the human community has made over the last 200, 300 years which really transform our own self-understanding and the understanding of the world around us. Now, much has gone wrong in this process, and we are suffering from many of these wrongdoings. We have to acknowledge that we have to mend our ways and change the human community to make a better world, where the planet and people can truly be flourishing and not destroy each other.

**Host:** One of my missions in life, what I think is part of my great work where I can make a difference, is to help religious people see that what we've discovered in the last 200 years, 300 years, as you say, through the entire scientific enterprise, that *that* can be legitimately seen as divine revelation. For us religious people and for our religious traditions, we need to see that divine revelation, divine communication, divine guidance happens through these four wisdom traditions—and is happening through science. If we don't recognize that, then where we're going to be going to, what we're going to think of—in terms of divine guidance, and divine communication, and divine revelation—are ancient documents, ancient books, ancient theologians, and ancient thinkers, rather than what's currently being revealed. So I want to invite you to say a little bit more in terms of [the spiritual resources of science](#), as you say. I know you've written on that in your book spirituality, but could you say a little bit more on science as a spiritual resource?

**Ursula:** I want to first comment briefly, if I may, on what you began to say about what are the signs of divine revelation in our time, now, or in the past few hundred years. These Fourfold Wisdom traditions that Thomas Berry outlines are very, very helpful. I would also like to highlight the development among women: [the women's Movement, feminist insight](#). This I see also as a sign of the spirit, in the same way that you see the development of science as a sign of the spirit. Our modern development, since the abolition of slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the search for pacifism in the world, the search for nonviolence: all these are extraordinary turnarounds in the human community that bring a new

consciousness into life where I really think the energy of the spirit is present and actively engaged. This is what we need to respond to; for me that's very, very important.

Now, in terms of the resources of science, the spiritual resources, I think looking at science we have to look at nature. Science developed in the study of nature, and nature includes the study of ourselves, of the human being. In terms of the history of science, this is how it started. And how does science relate to spirituality? What are the spiritual resources of science? See, this has a lot to do with our attitudes' approach to nature. This comes back to us today in the whole ecological movement and in what some people call the development of an [ecological spirituality](#) (also [here](#) and [here](#)).

Thomas Berry has written very beautifully about this, that *nature is a revelation of the mystery of the divine*, and it is something that you can really see as a home of the spirit for us. I think a lot of religious people don't see it like this, because we have approached nature as a resource that you just make use of and can do anything with as you like, and thereby destroy it. And that is this kind of mechanistic, lifeless attitude to nature—which is very different from an engaged, respectful attitude to nature. In that sense, I think the spiritual resources of science can be visible in a more deeply, reverential attitude to nature, where we study nature in order to understand it more deeply, to see the interconnections, to see the living relationships, the 'organicity' of nature, the life pulsating through nature that is such a tremendous kind of mystery for us.

I love also, [Ursula Goodenough](#)'s expression, "[the sacred depths of nature](#)," which is the title of one of her books where she speaks as a scientist, as an evolutionary biologist, about the "covenant with mystery." She speaks about the "covenant with mystery" because, however much we are analyzing, dissecting, studying in the lab, or wherever, we are still always coming up against a deeper mystery. I know there are very, very ambitious American scientists who want to find the Unified Theory that explains everything. But I don't think that's possible, and some scientists also say this is not possible. Whereas some very arrogant scientists think they *can* do this. But I do really think that to look at nature in a Teilhardian sense, he speaks about nature as a "[Divine Milieu](#)." Nature is animated, energized, brought to life through the presence of God. It's the Divine, it's the elements, for him; it's the Christic elements even, the Cosmic Christ. Everything is related to the Divine. Everything can be a fusion-point with the Divine for the human experience—if we but develop our sensibility and if we prepare to be silent, to listen, to contemplate, to think about these matters. For that we need inner space, we need recollection, we need an attitude of humility and reverence.

I really feel that science is such a vast and great enterprise, and it's such an enterprise of combined human efforts. Science is not the achievement of any one individual—not even of one community of scientists. It consists of so many different aspects, so many different scientific traditions and paths, that really to be associated with science you have to be associated with the great collectivity of people and of efforts and of research.

Teilhard de Chardin said the same applies to religion and to religious evolution—the further development of religion. You can't just have a religion of your own, in your own personal kind of little chapel, if you like. Religion requires the religious efforts of the whole of the human community, which we can see today in a much more global and historic sense. This is why I am very passionate about the study of the history of religions and to see what humanity collectively has experienced—what the greatest seers and saints and 'apostles of love,' as they're sometimes called, have seen, have

communicated, and have lived. I mean, there is a Book of Life there that can give us the greatest sources of energy and strength. And in that sense, I think, both the sources of science and the sources of religion complement each other in terms of spiritual resources for animating the lives of humanity.

**Host:** Wow! I am so with you, Ursula. You are speaking at a depth of soul connection from the intellectual yumminess—I don't know how to say it. *[laughter]*

**Ursula:** I really feel very inspired about this. I feel very passionately about this. And I feel, if only one could convey this to others. Teilhard de Chardin: he speaks about *seeing*. What is important is to have this inner *seeing*, to have the vision of integration, to bring everything together and to see the connections. I mean, seeing, prophesy, religion, poetry: everything comes together in *one*. It's really this sense of oneness—how we can all be along together, if only we can see it. And I think the great thinkers and the great activists can see it. They follow a vision that inspires them and that *fires* them. It's about *fire*; it's not just about inspiration.

**Host:** Yes, yes. I think that's what Teilhard has provided, that's what Thomas Berry has provided. It's a way of seeing that, for me, opened everything up. It absolutely opened everything up. And it helped me see just *who I am* and *where I am*, and *who we are* and *where we are*, in time and space—in a reality-based way. If we keep coming back to: that [the primary task before us is to come into ever more intimate relationship to Reality](#). And if we understand that religions have always been doing that: all over the world religions have helped people come into right relationship to reality. They've used different language, they've mythologized reality, [they've personified reality in different ways](#) (also [here](#) and [here](#)), and they have different practices for how to come into right relationship to reality. But if we keep reminding ourselves that *that* is our task today, and then we come back to this whole notion of, What do these fourfold sources of wisdom have to offer? What does Indigenous Wisdom have to offer, in terms of coming into right relationship to reality? What does it have to offer us *today*? What does Women's Wisdom have to offer us in terms of a species: for humanity to come into right relationship to reality *today*? What do the Classical Religious Traditions that typically get all the press (when people think of “wisdom traditions” this what they're usually thinking of)—what do those religious traditions have to offer us *today*?

**Ursula:** It's a wonderful model to show that you always have to draw on more than one resource—that no one resource is exclusively, by itself, going to provide all the help and the solutions we need. You have to really interrelate them, and correlate them, and bring them together. For me, that comes back to this second part of my title, “the Power to Love,” and how love is really, absolutely central—certainly at the human level, in terms of bringing together, connecting, helping each other, and nurturing each other. It is an energy resource that really can make everything different, and change it, and create new circles of community in the human species, which has existed in small measures, in small groups, for a long, long time—but which we need now to expand to the whole globe.

I think this is what [Teilhard de Chardin](#) also speaks about. How extraordinarily parallel to Teilhard's thought: the same thoughts were developed by the Russian-American sociologist, [Pitirim Sorokin](#), who was the founding father of sociology at Harvard University. He wrote about the ways and power of love in the extraordinary sense, where he calls upon the human community to study the sources and energies and ways of love to transform the human community, to bring about help to all the problems we have, in terms of whether they are mental health problems or problems of self-understanding or problems of violence and war. It is in that sense that I like Teilhard de Chardin's quotation, "*Love is the free and imaginative outpouring of the Spirit over all unexplored paths.*" We have to explore new paths, we have to embrace and we have to invent them, we have to create them in order to forge our way forward into a more global, more balanced, more ecologically sane human and Earth community.

**Host:** Well, in this context of speaking of the transformative and redeeming (to use religious language) power of love, you've spoken of 'pneumatophores'. Could you say a little about that?

**Ursula:** Pneumatophores, yes. This is a word which came to me, strangely enough, on a walk around a mangrove in Australia, when a biologist showed us these mangroves and said, "These air roots are called [pneumatophores](#). The way it's pronounced leads some people to think it's about "new metaphors." It's about '*pneuma*'—the spirit—that is carried by these roots to feed the life of these plants, of these groves. And I thought, that's a marvelous analogy for what we need in the human community now—pneumatophores—Carriers of Spirit: Carriers of Spirit that traditionally were carried in the vessels of traditional religious institutions in their teachings, their doctrines, their disciplines.

But many of these institutions are not accessible to many people around the globe, or there are so many different institutions that do not always understand each other very well, or see things very differently. I think we need these pneumatophores, these ideas that carry spirit, in order to fire our imagination, in order to harness our energies. Teilhard speaks, "After having harnessed the energies" of gravity, of ether, of whatever, the human community will one day, "harness the energies of love for God, and then humankind will have *discovered fire for the second time.*"

We have to harness the energies of love because, as both Teilhard and Sorokin point out very clearly, we know a lot about material energy, we know much more about the energies of electricity and all the other different sources of energy, than we have ever studied the energies of love. How can we produce, preserve, distribute, and really make more widely shared the energies of love that the human community has as its deepest resources? I think that's an absolutely central question.

**Host:** I completely agree. In fact, you have given name to what in many ways I see as my own calling. *I'm trying to ignite people's passion for life, their love for life, [their love for integrity](#), for living in right relationship to reality*, and to recognize that it's not about responsibility in terms of "Oh, we must save the planet, we must work for a better world." It's just that when you realize who you really are and that you're the product of [14 billion years of unfolding grace and creativity](#)—and that your sense of self doesn't stop with your skin, and that the Earth is your larger body, that the Universe is your larger body

—then you are about the work of helping to ensure a healthy future for all of us, *not* from the place of responsibility, but from a place of love, from a place of passionate desire to make a difference in a positive way. And it comes out of pure joy.

**Ursula:** That is absolutely what I want to say. When your heart sings and leaps with joy: it's this kind of elemental passion for life and a passion for communicating life, and a passion for celebrating life. And that is very, very deeply spiritual and religious. That is also at the core of the deepest spiritual experiences in many of the religious traditions.

I mean, we have to recognize this: if we don't *love* this life like that, what is it worth living for? Consumerism, materialism—ever so many more of this, that, and the other—it doesn't give us this joy.

**Host:** Yes. Well, you've given me an entirely new way of thinking about what I'm doing in the world, and that is “an engineer of love.” As you pointed out that Teilhard was saying, “Where's the engineers?”

**Ursula:** Yes, Teilhard said, in a talk in the 1950s given to an interfaith group which he belonged to, a private little group in Paris, he talked there about the taste, the love, the zest for life. He said that the biggest danger today is to have the loss of the love of life—to be, in other words, *bored*: to drop out, to say, “I don't care. What is there for me?” That is the greatest danger for the human community. If we don't want to act anymore, don't want to think anymore, don't want to love anymore, the world will stop; love will come to an end. But I think life is stronger than us. The Spirit of Life will well up in the most unexpected ways. I think there *is* this very strong need to seek the zest for life, particularly in young people, to give them the passion, the dedication, the commitment that really their life is worthwhile and that they can *contribute to* life. That's very, very important at the human level—and that's ultimately a spiritual task.

**Host:** Oh, gosh yes! ... Well, Ursula King, thank you so much for giving me and our listeners new life, and for igniting this zest for life, this passion for life, in this conversation here on the leading edge of faith.

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