

Schweitzer, Teilhard and the Human Future

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It may seem somewhat odd at first glance to discuss Albert Schweitzer and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in the same paper, under the same title.¹ One, a world-famous missionary doctor as well as a theologian, philosopher, musician, and educator with several books to his credit and a Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his work; the other, a Jesuit priest and paleontologist who spent much of his life studying the earliest origins of life, whose cosmological treatises lay unpublished at his death—banned by the church he loved; yet, whose thought would open Christian theology to evolution and lay the foundation for a striking vision of material reality as simultaneously spiritual.

There are, however, interesting convergences, to use a Teilhardian term, between these two figures. The thinking of both, although ordained clergymen, went well beyond what was typical of their respective churches, for which each suffered misunderstanding, even controversy; both were committed to reflective thought, to reason and science, whether in application or research; each spent much of his life and work far from the Europe of his formative years, the one by choice in equatorial Africa, the other more or less in exile in China and the United States. Most importantly for present purposes, each was profoundly disturbed by the state of European civilization and the future of humankind. Each became a prophetic voice crying out the need for radical change in human consciousness—for Schweitzer, if civilization was to be "restored;"² for Teilhard, if we were to "build the earth," the only alternative to our perishing.³

¹ See, for example, Christiane Roederer, "Teilhard and Schweitzer: Deux prophetes des temps nouveaux," in Christiane Roederer, ed., *Le Reenchantement du Monde* (Paris: Editions PubliSud, 1994). It seems that those working with the thought of either Teilhard or Schweitzer rarely visit the thought of the other. This chapter and a brief note by Roederer in the journal of the French association of the friends of Schweitzer on the role of a close confidante are the only articles linking them that I have found.

² Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*, trans. Antje Bultmann Lemke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 147.

³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Building the Earth*, trans. Noel Lindsay (Wilkes-Barre, Pa.: Dimension Books, 1965), 54.