

The Shared Perspectives of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berryⁱ

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Paleontologist and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and geologist and Passionist monk Thomas Berry have been leading us forward on a deeply spiritual journey. The works they have left behind project into the future the wisdom they have garnered from our evolutionary past. We stand on their shoulders. However, the image of standing on the shoulders of heroes, which suggests how much we depend and build upon the work of these individuals, is an individualistic image. This image fails to credit the many participants on the journey who provide continuity, support, and ongoing development for a vision that would otherwise fade into the background. While Teilhard and Thomas have been exemplary leaders for our spiritual quest, without the participation of so many others who, in a dynamic flow of thought and action, continue to project their visions forward and live them out, their visions would not survive.

Many modern day commentators continue to promote the larger concerns that Teilhard and Thomas had for our world today. Such an insightful environmental leader has been Gus Speth, one of the founders of the Natural Resources Defense Council, a former Director of the United Nations Development Programme, and former Dean of Yale Forestry and Environmental Studies. At one point in his lengthy and distinguished career, Gus wrote:

I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address those problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation.ⁱⁱ

Teilhard and Berry carried on lifelong searches for cultural and spiritual transformation.

ⁱ On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the American Teilhard Association and the 30th year of my presidency.

ⁱⁱ James Gustave Speth said something similar to this in 2007 at a gathering of scientists and evangelicals who were uniting to protect creation: <https://www-tc.pbs.org/now/shows/343/letter.pdf>. Rev. Ken Wilson, pastor of Vineyard Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan, quoted Gus to the *Miami Herald* in an article entitled “Religion rejuvenates environmentalism,” published February 18, 2010, http://fore.yale.edu/files/2010_UNEP_emails.pdf, 44. This same quote appears in “Let’s Talk Faith and Climate: Communication Guidance for Faith Leaders,” *EcoAmerica* 2016. <https://ecoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ea-lets-talk-faith-and-climate-web-2.pdf>.