

The Ecological Spirituality of Teilhard

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The present paper is intended to show how the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin provide an important context for the emergence of new forms of spirituality linked with the dynamics of the evolutionary process. It was originally delivered on November 3, 1984, as part of the Teilhard Lecture Series at the Riverdale Center for Religious Research and thus retains a personal and conversational tone.

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I would like to begin by recalling my own passage to Teilhard which began some years ago. I first encountered Teilhard in high school and was immediately fascinated by his language, sense of poetry, and fervor. His writings seemed possessed of an inner fire and while I could not absorb all of their complexities, their sheer intensity and scope captured my imagination. College intervened in the politically volatile times of the late sixties leaving Teilhard far behind. The turmoil of those years saw more of an existential *Angst* among my peers than a groping toward spiritual answers. It was not until the decline of the political whirlwind in the mid-seventies that the deeper seeds of youthful discontent and frustration began to emerge. Many turned to Eastern religions to assuage the tides of a growing wave of alienation. There, in rituals and meditative disciplines, they sought paths of interiority which were perceived as absent or as fossilized in our Western heritage. For some a passage to traditions such as Buddhism or Hinduism resulted in a rigid adherence to that teaching, while for many more it became simply a return to secularism. Others came to appreciate the effectiveness of certain rituals or meditation previously rejected as archaic or ineffectual which allowed them to reenter and repossess their Western tradition.

My own wanderings followed more of the latter pattern, although not always smoothly. After college I went to Japan to teach for a year and a half. I was fascinated with the different cultural and religious environment in which I found myself. This led to a particular interest in Zen Buddhism, in its meditative practices, and in the arts it had encouraged. My immersion in