

The Once and Future Earth: The Millenarian Programmatic in Bacon and Teilhard

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Sir Francis Bacon and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin were perhaps the first modern ecological pragmatists to advocate a comprehensive programmatic connecting the redemption of Nature with that of humanity under a religious and moral agenda.

By “ecological pragmatists” we may understand an attitude that sees the natural world as a necessary condition for the redemption of humanity. This is more explicit in Bacon, while in Teilhard it is obscured by his prose and the perspective we assume in relation to the reading of his work. Theologians will read Teilhard with a careful eye toward theological points, while philosophers and scientists read him with the critical eye of their respective disciplines. Our contention will be to approach Teilhard from the perspective of his scientific and speculative humanistic work. For example, the prose of Teilhard’s experiences after the battle of Verdun paint not only a picture of wanton human destruction, but understood from his scientific perspective, they paint a vivid portrait of the dangers of technology when used unwisely. Looking down upon Verdun, he could “see” the shape of things to come. Whatever science’s role in the future, it could not proceed blindly, nor could it erase Nature and humanity in the process, for the clues to human salvation lay in what he termed *materia matrix*, i.e., Nature. Thus, to eliminate Nature would be tantamount to burning our bridges before us. Contrary to popular opinion, Teilhard did have something to say about the conservation of Nature. We term this perspective, in both men, “ecological pragmatism.” Add the religiosity of Bacon and that of Teilhard to their ecological pragmatism and we have what the then prevailing scientific paradigms lacked— a moral foresight capable of guiding science towards a viable future for humanity and Nature.

Both men were driven by a millennial urgency which supplied the moral grounds upon which science could wisely and expeditiously create the necessary conditions for the arrival of the “Millennium.” We shall follow Norman Cohn’s definition of the millennium as a Christian escha-