

The Ecological Spirituality of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

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Abstract. For Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) the sense of the earth and its evolution was a source of inspiration in both his scientific work and his theological reflections. Thus in writing about the ecological spirituality of Teilhard it can be noted that Teilhard was continually meditating on the nature and formation of the universe. This was a primary source of revelation for him. The book of nature is where he encountered the divine. At the same time the sense of the scale of the global ecological crisis that we are now facing was not evident in his lifetime. Thus in articulating Teilhard's ecological spirituality we are observing that there are rich resources here for our own period. Indeed, Teilhard's ideas are both timely and timeless. As we experience the growing extinction of species and the devastation of ecosystems we are in need of a large-scale cosmological framework to understand and interpret our loss. Teilhard's comprehensive vision of the earth and its interconnected life processes evolving over time is a well spring of hope for the critical work ahead to create a sustainable future.

A Journey into Teilhard's Thought

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 forms of Hinduism and Buddhism 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 religious heritage. For some a passage to traditions such as Buddhism or Hinduism resulted in a rigid adherence to that

Editor's Note: An earlier version of this essay appeared in 1985 as Teilhard Studies #13. The timeliness of its message persuaded us to offer it in a revised form to our members old and new.