

Teilhard in the Ecological Age

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This is a complex and turbulent century, with amazing scientific discoveries, technological inventions, industrial and commercial expansion, population increase, social transformations, new systems of transportation and communication, vast educational and research establishments, ventures into space: a brilliant century no doubt, a century that makes the human achievement of this century radiate over the past as among the most exalted achievements in human history.

But there is another aspect of this century, its destructive aspect; mountains are ripped apart for the underlying coal and ore deposits, rivers are polluted with human and industrial waste, the air is saturated with toxic substances, the rain is turned to acid, the soil is sterile with chemicals, the higher forms of life are endangered, the great sea mammals have been killed off to populations that are having difficulty surviving, the tropical forests are being ruined, many coral reefs are damaged beyond repair.

The structure of the planet and its living forms have been altered on a geological and a biological scale. Change on such an order of magnitude makes of this century something more than another historical period or another cultural change. This is destruction, beyond recovery, of forms that took hundreds of millions, even billions of years to bring about. The entire structure of the biosphere is affected. Some hundreds of thousands of present living species could be extinguished by the end of the year 2000. There will likely be a third more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than was there in the preindustrial period. Here in the United States we are losing perhaps four billion tons of topsoil every year.

The glory of the human has become the desolation of the earth. This I would consider an appropriate way to summarize the twentieth century. A further statement that might be made is that the desolation of the earth is becoming the destiny of the human. Indeed the total fabric of living beings is so closely woven that none of its components can be damaged without harming the others.

An even further statement might suggest that one way of evaluating persons, programs, professions, institutions, and activities would be the extent to which they foster or obstruct the creative