

Eco-apocalypse and the Unfinished Universe: Teilhard's Evolutionary Hope

CATHERINE KELLER

INTRODUCTION

“Oh, the beauty of spirit as it rises up adorned
with all the riches of the earth!”¹

What does our species now more urgently need than to recognize that spirit—and to embrace its terrestrial gorgeousness? I was fortunate to get a glimpse of Teilhard’s vision at a very young age. Later, more formally, I plunged into a long-term study of the other major philosopher of evolution, Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). I am grateful for this opportunity to reflect on a conjunction of their very different spiritualities of the universe. I sense that bringing their cosmological visions into closer relation has a very earthy importance but doing this requires attention to a frequent misreading of Teilhard’s conceptualization of the future: his Omega point. I am not interested in correcting Teilhard from a Whiteheadian perspective, but rather, for the sake of those “riches of the earth,” addressing the operative misunderstanding. I am convinced that bringing these thinkers and their followers into closer alignment has great current importance: indeed, earth-shaking and earth-embracing importance. It is what increasingly preoccupies my work: the matter—really the *matter!*— of ecological degradation. The understanding of the matter that makes up all of us earthlings is at stake: the matter of the earth itself, of the earth *ourselves*, the *mattering* of it! For both Whitehead and Teilhard, rethinking materiality grounded their thinking: the matter that energetically materializes at every moment in everything we are or do or say, a truly living, pulsing reality.

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “The Spiritual Power of Matter,” in *Hymn of the Universe* (Harper and Row, 1965), 65.