

Foreword

This book is a gift to all of us who are concerned about global warming, climate change, poisonous living environments, and the growing disparity between the 1 percent and the 99 percent. Completed when Hurricane Sandy had wreaked havoc on the Northeast seaboard of the United States, this book is a timely wake-up call to all of us.

With clarity and rigor, Anne Primavesi traces the root causes of human beings' alienation from the earth and offers a new image of Earthiness as Oneness, defining it as "a material, shared global state of being alive; with all life being supported by planetary resources held in common."

Primavesi takes us on a journey through the desacralization of the land, the disdain of the earth, and the adoption of a utilitarian attitude toward nature and its resources in the West. She analyzes the dualism in the philosophical ideas of Plato and Descartes, the statements about property and ownership in Locke's works on government, and the ascendancy of technical rationality since the Enlightenment. She challenges the domination of mind over body, human beings over nature, and reason over all other faculties. The result of this domination is a downward spiral in which the resourceful earth has become something to be exploited, colonized, and conquered for profits and human greed.

The global Occupy Movement in 2011 has shown that there is a limit to runaway capitalism and corporate greed. Protesters in North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, North America, and in other parts of the world have stood up to demand the end of corrupted government, the bailouts of large banks, the concentration of wealth, and dysfunctional economic and political systems. More than ever, there is a collective awareness that the ways we have conducted our lives are not sustainable. Occupy Wall Street declared: "2011 will be remembered as a year of revolution, the beginning of the end for an unsustainable global system based on poverty, oppression, and violence."

Primavesi points out that fundamental institutional changes will not come about until we have changed our habits of thinking. Any changes will only be skin deep unless we complete the Copernican revolution of not giving superiority to human beings by placing them at the center of the universe. This requires us to recover the ancient wisdom found in many traditions: that we are earthly beings—part of Earthiness.

She concludes the book with an elaboration of the gift of Gaian identity, based on James Lovelock's Gaia theory. Instead of tracing our identity through familial, national, and political, or religious genealogies, Lovelock asks us to broaden our awareness and to ground it firmly within the evolutionary lineages of the whole Earth community. We are inescapably related to all things. With such a wholistic and planetary perspective, we can renew our covenant to each other and to the earth and embark on a new journey.

As a Chinese theologian, I find that Primavesi's ideas resonate with many of those I have inherited from Chinese philosophy and poetry. The neo-Confucian scholar Zhang Zai (1020–1077 CE) had a famous saying that echoes the themes she presents in this book:

Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small being as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore, that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I regard as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.

Classical Chinese poetry is full of images of nature. The Chinese sense of beauty and harmony, influenced by Daoism and Buddhism, is defined so much by nature and the agricultural cycles.

As I have worked on the themes of postcolonialism and theology, this book provides me with much food for thought. I value Primavesi's challenge to Constantinian Christianity, with its divine right of kings, and the social and ecclesiastical hierarchies human beings have created. What she asks for is nothing less than fresh and revolutionary thinking about Christianity and with that, the reversal of many commonly accepted concepts about God, the church, and human beings that we are culturally accustomed to, whether or not we are Christians.

I once invited Primavesi to speak to my class. She challenged the students to see that hierarchical systems—when viewed as a triangular form in which power is concentrated at the top—can be found in all areas of our lives. Its power dynamics remain the status quo unless we are committed to changing it and offering alternatives to it. She tore up a piece of paper to make a

Möbius strip and used it as an image that shows we are one, continuous, and interrelated.

Twenty years ago, Primavesi and I attended the conference organized by the World Council Churches during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development meeting in Rio de Janeiro. During the conference, many ecologically conscious theologians, from North and South, spoke and articulated the visions of a new heaven and a new earth. We were grateful to the non-governmental organizations for producing *The Earth Charter*, much of which continues to be valid today. In commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Rio meeting and the *Charter*, I am glad that Primavesi offers her new insights by starting with the *Charter's* opening words: "We are the Earth." We need these insights now more than ever.

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