

# Citation

for the Induction of Anne Primavesi  
into the Order of D.F.Strauss

*Westar Institute*

*Robert W. Funk*

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Anne Primavesi, you have pioneered the way in showing how ecology and feminism are prompting us to revise our way of interpreting the Bible and overhauling the fundamental tenets of orthodox Christianity. The results of your work are both staggering and reassuring.

In your first work on ecofeminism, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, you alert us to the possibility of an ecological apocalypse now, the roots of which you trace directly to the Genesis account of creation. Along the way, you chart many aspects of the disastrous fallout of Christian absolutisms. You developed a fresh profile of the historical Jesus quite independently from the Jesus Seminar. We are deeply in your debt for such unequivocal clarity and raw courage. Both of these traits identify you as a descendant of David Friedrich Strauss, in whose name we would like now to honor you.

Time does not permit me to chronicle all the startling insights in your first book. However, one or two examples will indicate why you belong in the company of D. F. Strauss, Jack Spong, Dominic Crossan, Don Cupitt, and

the Jesus Seminar. The sin and redemption channel of Christian theology you identify as one kind of blindness: Christian absolutism is anti-ecological because it closes our minds to everything except the redemption of human beings. Christian theology is a closed system. For that reason, classical Christian theologians “distinguish, in order to degrade, knowledge of God mediated through the natural world from knowledge of God mediated through Christian texts and teaching.” (Sacred Gaia, 34)

Consequently, Christian theology has sponsored a hierarchical structuring of reality: God is ‘up there’ and has to come down into an inferior world to save us for another, more real world to come. A third way in which Christian absolutism has crippled us is that theologians have limited revelation to verbal sources, principally the Bible. Consequently, Jesus came to save sinful humanity, circumscribed as those individuals who come to God through his death and resurrection. That turns out to be a paltry result in relation to the scope and magnitude of the whole creation.

In contrast to the Christian view, the green apocalypse does not require coded language about unfathomable mysteries. The talk is plain and upfront. The green apocalypse does not expect a new world to follow upon the destruction of the old world. An ecological apocalypse has no future. The green apocalypse does not look for God to intervene at the last minute and save creation from itself. The green apocalypse does not look for a savior to deliver us

from our own folly. Finally, it is humanity that is the hinge of the problem: human dominance of nature is the root of the problem, and in the end humanity must also be the resolution of the problem. But the Christian view of creation may block the prospect of resolution.

In concert with the Jesus Seminar but without our help, you recognized that the divinization of Jesus as the Christ had the result of the de-humanizing of Jesus the man. Like you, we have tried to recover his humanity. And among many other stunning insights, you ask, with regard to the canon, how can we expect to admit women into the Christian community when 2 Timothy is a part of the New Testament? You have rightly perceived that the canon is also an impediment to the end of hierarchy.

In your second book, *Sacred Gaia* (2000), you have introduced us to a new set of terms, *SelfScape*, *SocialScape*, *EarthScape*, and *PoeticScape*, which we will need to learn and learn well if we are to participate in the next phase of religious thinking and faith construction. When we consider the *EarthScape*, we learn that theology at bottom is an earth science. Let me quote you: “A major task for theology then as an earth science is to resist any process or tendency towards devaluation by stressing connectedness, diversity and sacredness of all beings. Gift events between organism and environment connect us personally, interpersonally, communally, individually and systemically.” (*Sacred Gaia*, 169)

We have learned anew the power of metaphor and paradox in your analysis of the *PoeticScape*. You write, “Though the generative power of linguistic couplings and recombinations, metaphor produces and reproduces possible realities, non-existent possibilities.” (Sacred Gaia 62) I found myself applauding as you drew example after example from traditional Christian rhetoric to show how our fossilized metaphors trap us and alienate us from fresh perceptions of our *SelfScape* and *SocialScape*. At the same time, new scientific and theological descriptions make us see things heretofore hidden from us. The old language created a “systemic theological apartheid,” to use your powerful phrase (Sacred Gaia, 170). A new language can open our eyes to the *EarthScape* as a single, unitary biosphere. There is much in your talk of metaphor and paradox that is reminiscent of the parables and aphorisms of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Fellows and Associates of the Jesus Seminar and the Westar Institute join me in welcoming you into the Order of D. F. Strauss. To honor you in this modest way is our immodest way of honoring ourselves. We are the benefactors of your willingness to be recognized as a Fellow of the Seminar. We trust you will wear the Strauss medallion with pride on occasions of state.