



The Circle

Women's Centre for Spirituality, Activism and the Earth

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at Brescia University College - London, Ontario, Canada

Standing on the Ground of Citizenship

Turning the Earth—The Circle Theme 2012-2013

We love the Earth. Some of our most satisfying moments are with nature. From gardening to cooking to meditative walking, the Earth is central to our values. As a Circle community of women, we ritualize our commitment to the Earth through Open Circles, our labyrinth, our Red Tent series and Brigid Festivals and beyond. With endless ways to connect, we are seeking how to think like the Earth. But as our understanding of the interconnectedness of life deepens, so does our grief.

Looking at our collective environmental future, many concerns well up. In fact, over the past year, on our Canadian patch of the planet, much has gone awry. Dangerous shifts have been cloaked in the inaccessible or ambiguous language of national and international policy and as such, have escaped sufficient community resistance. Canada, to the shock of the global community, backed out of the only international plan ever developed over the last two decades for weathering erratic climate, the Kyoto Protocol. In an unprecedented fashion, the 2012 federal budget dropped funding for environmental laws that were created over decades by committed scientists, dedicated politicians, and engaged citizens, while approximately half of the budget's business focused on cutting a wide range of environmental safeties from coast to coast. Enacted through the government's omnibus bill, it halted protection for water bodies (unless marked for commercial purposes), stopped the monitoring of hazardous waste use by industry, and closed some of our best environmental research centres that track species at risk, acid rain, and climate change.

Economic policy can appear boring, complicated, secular and almost inconsequential compared to the "kissy-joy" and fierce love we feel for our Earth Mama and her creatures. Policy certainly doesn't scream "spiritual." But as time marches forward, we are learning of the impact economic policy has on everyone's well-being. Recent decisions will have great bearing on our descendants, as well as a high impact on our quality of life today. This is because every economic transaction takes from the Earth. At the nuts and bolts level, economics is the buying and selling of goods, and all goods are made by earth materials- even the fake stuff comes from natural sources, such as plastic sourced from oil. Thus, collective rules about economics (i.e. economic policy), have an intimate relationship with the Earth. We can trace this connection through etymology. Ecology and economy share the same Latin root: *ecos* meaning home. When we participate in economic transactions, we take resources from our home - the body of the Earth. Therefore, we must do so thoughtfully with a high level of cognizance. One of our most important challenges today is one of consciousness - to reveal the penetrating fallacy that economics and earth are mutually exclusive.

The global drive today for almost every economy, and thus the goal of political leaders who set the frameworks by which we live, is growth. This is expressed through a very specific measure: the GDP, or Gross Domestic Product. Corporations, nations, continents, most of the planet's inhabitants, whether we like it or not,



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**“You can’t solve a problem
with the same mind that
created it”
-Albert Einstein**

are competing in a mass buy and sell game measured through the GDP. The countries with the highest GDP are seen as the richest and most stable. Ever-more growth through the GDP for nations and business is irrational and life-threatening because the Earth is a finite system. It is this growth ethos that is causing the mass emptying of the Earth, in species, soil, and drinkable waters. The GDP itself is further flawed as a measure because even negative events that cause a need for purchasing/consuming, such as the billions of dollars spent on cancer, natural disasters, oil spill clean ups and war, increase GDP. This is a system gone terribly wrong. Are these really measures we want included in or dictating our nation’s perception of successful growth?

So what does loving the earth mean today? It means to engage with these paradoxical times of destruction and hope. Acknowledge the craziness and the grief, and then, move forward. Loving the Earth can mean to engage in community action to treat her better. We can be inspired by the ecological love demonstrated by our Aboriginal people that is bringing many Canadians together over these policy attacks. Loving the Earth can simply mean to notice what is happening and act. It is time to be idle no more. Women of faith and spirit across the globe have great capacity for this because we can walk through the storm and hold onto our hope and solidarity.

It is necessary that we place a new concept at the centre of our group decision making – something other than growth through buying, selling, and plundering the earth. What about focusing a nation’s success on how to benefit future generations, or on how to create greater happiness? This is what the people of Bhutan have been doing for many decades. They have dropped the GDP index for a well-researched measure of well-being called the Happiness Index.

For us women at the ground level, we must continue to learn to think like the Earth and to speak on her behalf using our own voices in the ways that are natural to us - in poetry, in music, in essay, at the dinner table, at the coffee-shop, at work. We can nudge people toward their commitment by sharing our love and passion for this beautiful and fragile planet we all share.

It may seem odd to think of politics and policy as matters of spirit. But what is politics if it is not the decisions that most deeply impact the happiness and well-being of the greatest number of people? Politics are the plans that decide the quality of life for our selves, our children, grandchildren and beyond. Economic policy is like a giant visioning board for a nation; it decides things like whose mouths are to be fed and who gets shelter, who can afford education and who gets left behind, which business sectors get subsidized and which ones are on their own. It even shapes the vitality of human expression through the arts. And, as was sadly witnessed in Canada last year, economic policy decides which forests stand, and if water will be protected for future generations.

We have eyes that see, ears that hear, and hearts that feel. Many women’s communities around the world are making it our business to collect the wisdom of the ages. Who better to take a seat at the policy table? We can’t know all the next steps, but that is part of the curious mystery of these times. It’s about calling forth new aspects in our selves through reflection and wo-manifestation: to become rooted, confident and empowered in the knowledge that we are all we need to be. We have become used to being consumers and exercising our right to vote. Now we are being called to engaged citizenship. We stand on the Earth, and we stand on the threshold of our children’s future and the future of humanity and all living things. This is a powerful moment in the long thread of time, and the political-economic-ecological crisis demands that we stand strong on the Earth. We must weave our ecology and our economy. To have sustainable economic policy is to have respect and reverence for our home and each other; it is a way to make our spiritual principles manifest in one of the most effective ways possible. It is to act with intention to stay. Let’s stand our ground together!
Remember you are an earth citizen. Re-mind others.



**Thank-you to the
women of our
working Circles and
to all volunteers that
make The Circle
thrive and flourish!**

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Noteworthy - Thank-you!

♪ For those of you who missed our online announcement, we wanted to share our deep gratitude for a generous \$75 000.00 donation given to Brescia and The Circle by Brescia's Coordinator of the Council of Trustees, **Liz Hewitt**. In honour of her parents, Liz designated \$60 000 to the establishment of The Howard and Lois Hewitt Scholarship. As a part of Liz's own legacy, she has **donated \$15 000 to The Circle**, designating \$1000 per year, for 10 years, **to help support The Sophia Series**, a lecture and event series that seeks to inform students, women and men of the depth and richness of women's wisdom in its many forms.

In addition, **\$5000 has been designated as seed money for a large international conference focusing on women's/feminist spirituality and creating a culture of peace, set to be hosted in May 2015**. This conference has been birthed from our annual Brigid Festival that we have hosted for the past 7 years. We are so exceptionally grateful for Liz's incredible generosity and commitment to our centre and its programming.

♪ **THANK-YOU** to everyone who came and supported The Circle's annual **More Than a Book Sale** this past November. Through this event, The Circle was able to raise **\$6063.11** to help cover some of our financial needs related to Circle events, library resources, office supplies and our newsletter publication. This makes 2012 our most successful fundraiser yet!



On Our Shelves...

Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil by Tom Mueller
W. W. Norton and Company, 2011

Reviewed by Miriam Valhoff

Extra Virginity is a book that tells you everything that you ever wanted to know about olive oil, and also a lot that you will probably be shocked to learn. Most of us, unless we are food connoisseurs, go to the market and buy an relatively inexpensive olive oil which is almost always labeled "extra virgin". We use it as a healthy option for cooking or when making salad dressings, likely with our thinking about it pretty much ending there. For the most part, we trust that if it is for sale in the super market, it is of (if not superb) at least a decent quality. This book reveals how wrong this type of thinking is. It teaches us not only about what constitutes good olive oil, but about food fraud, particularly in association with the olive oil industry.

For many centuries, when one thought about "the fruits of the Earth", what often came to mind would be the olive, and the marvelous oil that was produced from it. It was a main staple in the Mediterranean, and its consumption was considered the mark of civilization. It was also used to make perfume, soap, medicine, lamp oil, and skin lotions. Olive oil, until the last couple of hundred years, was the main commodity of western society; much like crude oil is today. Because it was used so widely, money could always be made off of the sale of olive oil, and the selling of contaminated or fake oil brought even more profit to those willing to take advantage of the public.

Of course, up until the 1800's most people either grew or bought all of their food, including oil, locally. They knew the people who made their olive oil, and they could see the fruit ripening and being picked. People knew that it a pure fruit juice and should be consumed as soon as possible after it was made. Now much, if not all food is

anonymous. We usually do not really know where it came from, or how it was grown or made. Virtually all of our olive oil is imported, and we trust that it is fresh and of high quality, especially if we see on the label that it was made in Italy.

These assumptions are challenged as this book recounts a tale of how rotten olives are deodorized with heat and solvents, and the oil made from them is tipped off with additives or coloring and sold as extra virgin, which is supposed to indicate the best oil. It reveals how olive oil can also be mixed with less expensive nut or seed oils and then sold under false labels. Additionally, it documents the practice of selling poor quality oils, that have been excessively refined, to supermarkets to be sold in bulk. These olive oils have little, if any, flavor or health benefits. Because consumers have been desensitized to how good oils taste, they think what they are buying is a quality product, when in fact, they are not. In reading this book the film *The Godfather* came to mind as I remembered that the Corlione's were in the olive oil business. Reputable dealers are still hanging on though, and the author recounts the tales of many growers and processors, who are struggling to stay in business because cheap, poor quality oils are flooding the market.

Thankfully, the author doesn't leave us with no other option than to buy, what we discover after reading the book, may be a very poor product indeed. He goes on to tell us how and where to buy good olive oil. *Extra Virginity* is an inside glimpse into the mysterious world of a commodity that we largely take for granted. Who knew that olive oil could be so fascinating?

Learn more at www.truthinoliveoil.com

Upcoming Events at The Circle...



Open Circle

...ritual, spirituality, activism & the mystical experience of women gathered to reflect on the sacred in our lives. Last Wednesday of the month, Merici Lounge, Brescia, 7:30 p.m. Members: free, Non-members: \$2. **All Women Welcome!**

The upcoming Open Circles are being facilitated in a collaboration between The Circle Women's Centre & WomanEarth: Ecological Being. Facilitators: Loreнна Bousquet-Kacera, Sheila Horrell, Francis Abley

27 March - Honoring Our Pain for the World... Explore how developing our inner resources and outer community strengthens our capacity to face personal and global challenges and respond with unexpected resilience.

24 April - A Wider Sense of Self: Restoring and Re-storying Connectedness Join us for a joyful evening of exploration and sharing that widens and deepens the sense of who we are and the unique contribution that each of us brings to the creation of a vital Earth Community.

29 May - Eartheart: Sisters Seeding Change, Catching an Inspired Vision ... Join us for an experiential process as we reclaim our imaginations for the purpose of rebuilding a future that protects and honors all Life.

Red Tent Series - Maiden

Sunday 14 April 2013, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Merici Lounge, Brescia
Free Parking, By Donation

As the Maiden emerges into this world she must know her worth. She must know all that creates her own life force, her essence and the holy ground upon which she stands. Come—no matter what your chronological age may be—the Maiden in all of us beckons.

Jeanne Adamson Memorial Event of The Sophia Series

Heroines of the Sexual Gothic

A performance you will never forget.

Thursday 2 May 2013, 8:00 pm

Brescia Auditorium, Free Parking

Tickets: \$15 - Circle members; \$20 - Non-members

Reception with the artists to follow.

Starring Canadian Author Susan Swan & the all-woman opera noir quartet, The Billie Hollies.
Produced by Louise Fagan

For full details visit www.thecircle.ca

Also connect with us on **Facebook,**
Twitter & Pinterest!



...and beyond

Every Wednesday - **Sacred Circle Dancing**, 7:30 to 9:00 pm, Christ Anglican Church, 138 Wellington St. at Hill St., \$5. No previous dance experience necessary. Info: Caroll at 519-433-7792, redshawlwoman@rogers.com

26 March - Awakening to Our True Nature. 12 week training series exploring *The Powers of the Universe* dvd series by cosmologist Brian Swimme. 6:30 - 9:30pm, \$275, The Living Centre. Info: thelivingcentre.com

Feminist Mothering Speakers Circle

**Maternal Activism as Matri-centric Feminism:
The 21st Century Motherhood Movement**
featuring Dr. Andrea O'Reilly, York University

Wednesday 22 May, 7:00 pm

Merici Lounge, By Donation, Free Parking

Red Tent - The Great Gathering Celebrating Maiden, Mother & Crone

Sunday 2 June 2013, 1:00 pm

Gather in the Brescia Auditorium;
Free Will Donation; Free Parking.

RSVP to 519-432-8353 x28288 or circle@uwo.ca

The story of the Red Tent stands as a powerful symbol of women gathering in community to hold and celebrate the sacred feminine. Come into the tent with us and re-member. This event will include ritual, sharing and a labyrinth walk.

WomanEarth: Ecological Being and The Circle present

WomanEarth: Living in Connection

21 - 23 June 2013, More info soon! Stay tuned!

This unique weekend event will be held on the beautiful grounds of the Living Centre, just outside of Lambeth.
(www.thelivingcentre.com)

Thurs. 11 April- **Justice Becomes a Matter of Taste** - exploring the many facets of the "just" coffee bean. Speaker: Matt Thompson from Fire Roasted Coffee Co. 7-9 pm, Grosvenor Lodge, All Welcome. Hosted by Greening Sacred Space London & TREA. Info & RSVP: info@trea.ca or 519-645-2845.

28 April - **Interfaith Tree Planting**, 2-5 pm, McCormick Park (39 Connaught Ave near Oxford & Highbury). Register to participate by 30 March. www.reforestlondon.ca