

# Goddess Worship – A Christian View

*Pagan, Wiccan, and practitioners of New Age religion are turning to belief in a Goddess to express their God-created desire to worship. Russ Wise examines goddess worship from a Christian perspective.*

“The goddess, or Great Mother, has existed since the beginning of time . . . it is out of the primordial depths of her womb that the Universe and all life is born.” –Morwyn, *Secrets of a Witch's Coven*

Reverence for the goddess is becoming prevalent in our day. The goddess is embraced by witchcraft, radical feminism, the occult, and the liberal church. The New Age that is about to dawn upon us will be, according to the occult world, a feminine age. Likewise, those who hold this view believe that this current, masculine age has been an age of destruction and broken relationships among humanity. The New Age with its feminine energies will bring balance to the destructive aspects of the Piscean Age.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her book *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*, states that

It is to the women that we look for salvation in the healing and restorative waters of Aquarius. It is to such a New Age that we look now with hope as the present age of masculism succeeds in destroying itself.

According to Starhawk, a feminist and a practicing witch,

The symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The goddess does not rule the world; She is the world.(1)

In order for this feminine age to come into full fruition, a shift in consciousness must take place in the world. This shift in thinking and perception of reality will bring forth the goddess.(2)

According to those who believe in the Great Goddess, Europe was once inhabited by a matriarchal, egalitarian society. Europeans, they claim, worshipped a matrifocal, sedentary, peaceful, art-loving goddess 5,000 to 25,000 years before the rise of the first male-oriented religion. They maintain that this egalitarian culture was overrun and destroyed by a semi-nomadic, horse-riding, Indo-European group of invaders who were patrifocal, mobile, warlike, and indifferent to art.(3)

These Indo-European invaders considered themselves to be superior to the peaceful and art-loving goddess worshippers because of their superior military ability. The matriarchal religion of these early settlers was eventually assimilated into the patriarchal religion of the invaders. As these invaders imposed their patriarchal culture on the conquered peoples, rapes(4) and myths about male warriors killing serpents (symbols of the goddess worshippers) appeared for the first time. As the assimilation of cultures continued, the Great Goddess fragmented into many lesser goddesses.

According to Merlin Stone, author of *When God Was a Woman*, the disenthronement of the Great Goddess, begun by the Indo-European invaders, was finally accomplished by the Hebrew, Christian, and Moslem religions that arose later.(5) The male deity took the prominent place. The female goddesses faded into the background, and women in society followed suit.(6)

## **The Goddess and Witchcraft**

In the world of witchcraft the goddess is the giver of life. Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., in her book *Goddesses in Everywoman*, has this to say about the goddess:

The Great Goddess was worshipped as the feminine life force deeply connected to nature and fertility, responsible both for creating life and for destroying life.(7)

Bolen goes on to say that "the Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, and omnipotent" prior to the coming of Christianity. For witches, the goddess is the earth itself. Mother Earth, or Gaia, as the goddess is known in occult circles, is an evolving being, as is all of nature. Starhawk, in her best-selling book *The Spiral Dance*, says that "the model of the Goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive."(8)

The witch views Gaia, or Mother Earth, as a biosystem. She attributes consciousness to the earth and believes it to be spiritual as well. In other words, Gaia is a living and evolving being that has a spiritual destiny.

The environmental movement of our day is greatly influenced by those who practice witchcraft or hold neo-pagan beliefs. Witchcraft is an attempt to reintroduce the sacred aspect of the earth that was, according to its practitioners, destroyed by the Christian world. The goddess is, therefore, a direct affront against the male-dominated religion of the Hebrew God.

Christianity teaches that God is transcendent, is separate from nature, and is represented to humankind through masculine imagery. Witchcraft holds a pantheistic view of God. God is nature, therefore God is in all things and all things are a part of God. However, this God is in actuality a goddess.

A fundamental belief in witchcraft is the idea that the goddess predates the male God. The goddess is the giver of all life and is found in all of creation. "The importance of the Goddess symbol for women cannot be overstressed. The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our

bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our aggression as healthy, and our anger as purifying. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions.”(9)

For Betty Sue Flowers, a University of Texas English professor, the women’s spirituality movement is the answer to the male-oriented religion of Christianity. At the International Conference on Women’s Spirituality in Austin, Texas, Flowers stated that

The goddess is a metaphor that reminds us of the female side of spirituality. Metaphors are important. You can’t know God directly. You can only know images of God, and each image or metaphor is a door. Some doors are open and others are closed. A door that is only male is only half open.(10)

## **The Goddess and Feminism**

For many in the feminist world, the goddess is an object of worship. Those in the women’s spirituality movement “reject what they call the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition, deploring sexist language, predominantly masculine imagery and largely male leadership.”(11)

According to a *Wall Street Journal* article by Sonia L. Nazario, “women first wanted to apply feminism to political and economic realms, then to their families. Now, they want it in their spiritual lives.”(12)

To understand fully the implications of the women’s spirituality movement, one only needs to read the current literature on the subject. The editors of the book *Radical Feminism* state that “political institutions such as religion, because they are based on philosophies of hierarchical orders and reinforce male oppression of females, must be destroyed.”

The radical feminist believes that the traditional church must be dismantled. Naomi Goldenberg, in her book *Changing of the*

*Gods*, states that “the feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh. . . . It is likely that as we watch Christ and Yahweh tumble to the ground, we will completely outgrow the need for an external God.”(13) The deity that many in the feminist camp are searching for takes on the form of a goddess. Some in the goddess movement, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article, “pray for the time when science will make men unnecessary for procreation.”(14) The radical feminist sees the goddess movement as a spiritual outlet for her long-held beliefs. Mark Muesse, an assistant professor of religious studies at Rhodes College, agrees that “some feminist Christians push for changes ranging from the ordination of women and the generic, non-sexual terms for God and humanity to overhauling the very theology.”(15)

Perhaps the most descriptive word for the feminist movement is “transformation.” Catherine Keller, associate professor of theology at Xavier University says in her essay “Feminism and the New Paradigm” that “the global feminist movement is bringing about the end of patriarchy, the eclipse of the politics of separation, and the beginning of a new era modeled on the dynamic, holistic paradigm. Radical feminists envision that era, and the long process leading toward it, as a comprehensive transformation.”

Another aspect of this transformation is the blending of the sexes. The feminist movement seeks a common mold for all of humanity. Jungian psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that we must find our individuality by discovering androgyny. He states, “To reach a new consensus, we have to avoid falling back into stereotypes, and that requires truly developing our individuality. It is an ongoing work of self-realization and self-actualization. For men it means growing into their native maleness and balancing it with their femaleness. For women, it’s the same—growing into their full womanhood, and that includes their masculine side.”(16)

This process sounds more like androgyny or sameness than it does individuality.

This paradigm-shift is nothing less than the reordering of man's understanding of God, a shift in thinking of God through predominantly masculine imagery to seeing and experiencing God as a goddess, the mother of life.

## **The Goddess and the Occult**

In the world of the occult, also known as the New Age, the goddess is believed to be resident within the individual and simply needs to be awakened. In other words, the individual is inherently divine. Starhawk, a witch who works with the Catholic priest Matthew Fox at his Institute of Creation Spirituality, says that an individual can awaken the goddess by invoking or inviting her presence. Starhawk tells us that "to invoke the Goddess is to awaken the Goddess within, to become . . . that aspect we invoke. An invocation channels power through a visualized image of Divinity."

Starhawk continues, "We are already one with the Goddess—she has been with us from the beginning, so fulfillment becomes . . . a matter of self-awareness. For women, the Goddess is the symbol of the inmost self. She awakens the mind and spirit and emotions."(17)

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a Jungian analyst and clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, answered the question, What ails our society? by saying, "we suffer from the absence of one half of our spiritual potential—the Goddess."(18) Individuals who follow New Age teaching believe that the male-dominated religion of this present age has done an injustice to humanity and the ecosystem. Therefore there must be a balancing of energies. The male energies must diminish and the feminine energies must increase in order for the goddess to empower the individual.

The New Age of occultism promises to be an age of peace, harmony, and tranquility, whereas the present dark age of brokenness and separation continues to bring war, conflict, and disharmony. So it is the goddess with her feminine aspects of unity, love, and peace that will offer a solution for mankind and circumvent his destruction. For many in our society, this appears to be the answer to man's dilemma. However, an occult solution that denies Christ's atonement for sin cannot fully meet a Holy God's requirement for wholeness.

For the pagan, the goddess represents life and all it has to offer. "The Goddess religion is a conscious attempt to reshape culture." (19) This reshaping is nothing less than viewing man and his understanding of reality from a female-centered perspective, the focus of which is on the Divine as female. Therefore considerable emphasis is placed on feminine attributes, ultimately focusing on eroticism and sexuality. "Women are clearly the catalyst for the formation of the new spirituality. It is women above all who are in the process of reversing Genesis . . . by validating and freeing their sexuality." (20)

A major part of this transformative process is the empowerment of women. The rise of the goddess is a direct assault on the foundation of Christianity. This new spirituality affirms bisexuality, lesbianism, homosexuality, and androgyny through the expression of transvestitism.

As this revival of the goddess continues, a growing lack of distinction between male and female will become the norm. Jungian psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that "both current psychology and ancient history point to an emerging transformation in our sense of both society and self, a transformation that includes redefining the notion of what it means to be men and women." (21)

The Bible clearly indicates that men and women were created as distinctive beings, male and female. The rising occult

influence in our society seeks to undermine the biblical absolute that gives our culture stability. Once again the Bible rings true as it states, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."(22)

## **The Goddess and the Liberal Church**

The message of the goddess has gained a hearing in the church as well. The philosophy of the goddess is currently being taught in the classrooms of many seminaries. Mary Daly, who considers herself to be a Christian feminist, says this about traditional Christianity: "To put it bluntly, I propose that Christianity itself should be castrated."(23) The primary aim of this kind of "Christian" feminist is to bring an end to what she perceives as male-dominated religion by castrating the male influence from the religion.

Daly continues by saying, "I am suggesting that the idea of salvation uniquely by a male savior perpetuates the problem of patriarchal oppression."(24)

Rev. Susan Cady, co-author of *Sophia: the Future of Feminist Spirituality* and pastor of Emmanuel United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, is one example of the direction that Daly and others are taking the church. The authors of *Sophia* state that "Sophia is a female, goddess-like figure appearing clearly in the Scriptures of the Hebrew tradition." *Wisdom Feast*, the authors' latest book, clearly identifies Jesus with Sophia. Sophialogy presents Sophia as a separate goddess and Jesus as her prophet. The book takes liberty with Jesus by replacing Him with the feminine deity Sophia.

Another example of how goddess theology (feminist spelling for theology) is making its way into the liberal church is through seminars held on seminary campuses. One such seminar,



"Wisdomweaving: Woman Embodied in Faiths," was held at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in February of 1990. Linda Finnell, a wiccan and one of the speakers, spoke on the subject of "Returning to the Goddess Through Dianic Witchcraft." Two of the keynote speakers were of a New Age persuasion. In fact, one speaker, Sr. Jose Hobday, works with Matthew Fox and Starhawk at the Institute for Creation Spirituality.

A growing number of churches in the United States and around the world are embracing the New Age lie. Many churches have introduced A Course in Miracles, Yoga, Silva Mind Control, Unity teachings, and metaphysics into their teaching material. Some churches have taken a further step into the New Age by hiring individuals who hold a metaphysical world view.

Whether the individual seeks the goddess through witchcraft, the feminist movement, the New Age, or the liberal church, he or she is beginning a quest to understand and discover the "higher self." The higher self, often referred to as the "god self," is believed to be pure truth, deep wisdom. This truth or wisdom embodies the basic lie of deification. As Christians we must learn to discern every spirit lest we become deceived.

## Notes

1. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (New York: Harper & Row 1989), 23.
2. Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), xiv.
3. Ibid., xii-xiii. See also Linnie Levy, *Of a Like Mind* (Madison, Wis.: OALM, 1991), vol. viii, no. 3, pp. 2-3.
4. See also Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest, *The Holy Book of Womwn's Mysteries* (Oakland, Calif.: Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, 1986), 12.

5. See also Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, xiii.
6. Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 21.
7. Ibid., 20.
8. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 25.
9. Ibid., 24.
10. Carlos Vidal Greth, "The Spirit of Women," *The Austin-American Statesman*, 5 Mar. 1991, sec. D.
11. Ibid.
12. Sonia L. Nazario, "Is Goddess Worship Finally Going to Put Men in Their Place?" *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 June 1990, sec. A.
13. Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 4, 25.
14. Nazario, "Goddess Worship."
15. Deirdre Donahue, "Dawn of the Goddesses," *USA Today*, 26 Sept. 1990, sec. D.
16. John Weir Perry, "Myth, Ritual, and the Decline of Patriarchy," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992): 103.
17. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 99.
18. Jean Shinoda Bolen, "The Women's Movement in Transition: The Goddess and the Grail," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992): 8.
19. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 11.
20. Donna Steichen, "The Goddess Goes to Washington," *Fidelity Magazine* (December 1986): 42.

21. Perry, *Decline of Patriarchy*, 62.

22. 2 Tim. 4:3.

23. Alice Hageman, *Theology after the Demise of God the Father: a Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion* (New York: Association Press, 1974), 132.

24. Hageman, *Theology*, 138.