The Goddess and the Church – A New Age Deity

Feminism has invaded the realm of theology, elevating the concept of The Goddess, or Great Mother, as a pantheistic and occultic paradigm for religion acceptable to feminists, who find traditional religions unacceptable because of their "male Gods."

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

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 more prevalent in our day. The goddess is embraced by witchcraft, 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 "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 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)

As interest in the occult continues to rise and gain popularity in our culture, the goddess becomes more popular as a deity. The modern woman is at a crossroads in her spiritual quest. It is imperative that she realize her inherent deity, her god nature, for she is to be the salvation of humanity.

According to those who hold a belief in the Great Goddess, Europe was once ruled by a matriarchal egalitarian religion. Their belief dictates that Old Europe was a culture that worshiped a matrifocal (mother-focused), sedentary, peaceful, art-loving, goddess between 5,000 and 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 (father-focused), mobile, warlike, and indifferent to art.(3) The ease with which the peaceful goddess worshipers were subdued confirmed to the war-like Indo-European invaders their feelings of natural superiority. The matriarchal religion of these early settlers was eventually assimilated into the more dominant 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 appeared for the first time in their history. The serpent was a symbol of the goddess worshipers. As the assimilation of cultures continued, the Great Mother Goddess became 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 worshiped as the feminine life force deeply connected to nature and fertility, responsible both for creating life and for destroying life.(7)

She also proclaims, "The Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, and omnipotent" prior to the coming of Christianity. For witchcraft, 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. In the New Age worldview, environmentalism and the ecological movement play an important part in restoring the goddess. In her best-selling book, *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk says

> 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)

Witches think of Gaia, or Mother Earth, as a biosystem. They attribute consciousness to earth and believe it to be spiritual as well. In other words, Gaia is a living and evolving being that has a spiritual destiny. Those who practice witchcraft take responsibility for Mother Earth's evolutionary development.

The environmental movement of our day is greatly influenced by those who practice witchcraft or hold neopagan beliefs. Witchcraft is an attempt to reintroduce the sacred aspect of the earth that was, according to their belief, destroyed by the Christian world. The goddess is, therefore, a direct

affront against the male- dominated religion of the Hebrew God.

Christianity taught that God was transcendent, apart from nature, and was a masculine deity. 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 and 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 over stressed. 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. She was a keynote speaker for the International Conference on Women's Spirituality in Austin, Texas, and addressed the conference on the return of the goddess. According to Flowers,

> 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 expression of worship. A growing number within the feminist movement have bought into witchcraft as the central focus of their allegiance. Those who have become a part of 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)

In a Wall Street Journal article, Sonia L. Nazario stated, "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 fully understand 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."

Radical feminists believe that the traditional church must be dismantled. For example, in her book *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*, Naomi Goldenburg announced,

> 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)

Many feminists are obviously moving away from an understanding of deity as an external "male" God who stands apart from Creation to a conception of deity as a goddess that is realized within one's inner self and is one with nature.

Some extreme feminists in the goddess movement "pray for the time when science will make men unnecessary for procreation."(14) The radical feminist see the goddess movement as a spiritual outlet for their long-held beliefs. According to Mark Muesse, an assistant professor of religious studies at Rhodes College,

> 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, in her essay "Feminism and the New Paradigm," proclaims that the world-wide 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 feminism envisions 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 individuality and it reflects a paradigm-shift involving nothing less than the reordering of man's understanding of God. A shift from thinking of God as male to seeing and experiencing God as a goddess: the Mother of Life.

The Goddess and the Occult

In the world of the occult, popularly 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,

> 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….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, when asked the question, What ails our society?, put it this way: "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 been 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 which focuses on the Divine as being female. Therefore, considerable emphasis is placed initially on feminine attributes, but ultimately the focus is 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 patriarchal foundation of Christianity. This new feminist 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 maintains,

> 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. This 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 (2 Tim. 4:3).

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 some of our seminaries. In a growing number of seminaries the student population is becoming increasingly female, and many of these women have a feminist outlook on life. 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.”(22) The primary focus of the “Christian” feminist is to bring an end to what they perceive as male-dominated religion by “castrating” the male influence from religion. Daly continued by saying,

> I am suggesting that the idea of salvation uniquely by a male savior perpetuates the problem of patriarchal oppression.(23)

Reverend 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 the masculine deity with the feminine deity Sophia. Another example of how goddess “thealogy” (note feminist spelling for theology) is making its way into the liberal church is through seminars held on seminary campuses.

One such seminar was held at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. “Wisdomweaving: Woman Embodied in Faiths” was held at the school in February of 1990. If one looks at the schedule of the seminar, it is obvious that the

emphasis was not on orthodoxy. Linda Finnell, a follower of Wicca 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, 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 onto their staffs individuals who hold to a metaphysical worldview.

Along with the deception that is subtly gaining influence in the liberal church, there are a growing number of churches affiliated with the New Age. These churches, without apology, teach the Luciferian gospel. They are the seed-bed of the occult.

It is amazing that while the liberal church will not accept or believe in Satan, they are willing to embrace Lucifer as an angel of light. It is interesting to note that the New Age Church represents itself as the Church of Light.

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. In actuality, this so-called "truth" or "wisdom" embodies the oldest lie in the Book, the lie of self- deification: "Ye shall become as Gods." As Christians we must learn to discern every spirit lest we too become deceived.

Notes

1. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row,

Publishers, 1989), 23.

2. Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once & Future Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), xiv.

3. Ibid., xii-xiii. See also Lynnie 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 Women's Mysteries* (Oakland, Calif.: Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, 1986), 12.

5. See also Gadon, *The Once & 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 March 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, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1979), 4, 25.

14. Nazario, "Goddess Worship."

15. Deirdre Donahue, "Dawn of The Goddesses,'" *USA Today*, 26 September 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 & 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," *Magical Blend*, 62.

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

23. Ibid., 138.

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