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The cycle of the feminine spirit : women, the earth, and athe return of the goddess

Wendy Denton
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return of the Goddess**

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THE CYCLE OF THE FEMININE SPIRIT:
WOMEN, THE EARTH, AND THE RETURN OF THE GODDESS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Social Sciences
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Wendy Denton

August, 1990

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ABSTRACT

The Cycle of the Feminine Spirit:
Women, the Earth, and the Return
of the Goddess
by
Wendy Denton

The purpose of this work is to examine the characteristics of matristic (Goddess-based, Earth-based) spirituality through interviews with twenty-five leaders in contemporary feminist spiritual thought. Part I examines archaeological and historical evidence of societies which honored the divine in female form. It also examines some well-known goddesses and traces their thematic continuity with the goddesses of prehistory. Comparison with the major female figures of Christianity is also included.

In constructing a body of questions for the interviewees, the intent is to research seven subject areas which are felt to be pertinent to a comparison between a matristic model and our contemporary traditional Western society. The questions focus on the concept of wholeness, on the manner in which power is manifested within a dualistic framework, on the contemporary construct of boundaries, on the "maleness" of God, and on the contemporary revival of the Wiccan religion. Finally, interviewees are asked to name the problems in contemporary society which they feel make their work necessary.

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Introduction

The Son of Swords stands in a barren, arid landscape. He holds the white dove, symbol of Aphrodite, by the throat. His roving eye falls upon a treasure chest, causing him to forget his plans of only a moment earlier.

His gold helmet, sword, sheath and leg armor mark him as the archetypal "hero" of mythology, whose tasks generally included slaying the Goddess...In such a cut-off male, the ego is detached from the feminine. He has come to believe his own written mythology--that light is good and dark is bad; that male is right and female wrong...He represents the romantic male self-image, a dominance-submission script in which he is on top.¹

He would seem to be a fitting symbol of our time: intellect disconnected from feelings, action with disregard for the consequences, little murders of the heart and spirit.

In 1981 Vicki Noble and Karen Vogel published The Motherpeace Tarot Deck, of which the above Son of Swords is one card. Utilizing numerous cross-cultural comparisons of sacred symbols and blending them to form a whole contextual meaning, these round cards and their accompanying text presented powerful images of wholeness.

Six years later Riane Eisler published The Chalice and The Blade, an historical account of our journey away from

¹ Vicki Noble, Motherpeace: A Way to the Goddess Through Myth, Art, and Tarot (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers), 201-203.

the Goddess, and what Eisler calls Her "partnership model" of co-existence, and into our current "dominator"-based world view.

The works of Starhawk and Z. Budapest had already been out for seven or eight years, and had brought to light, or "out of the broom closet," as Starhawk likes to say, the contemporary revival of the Goddess-based Wiccan religion. Margot Adler's work, published contemporaneously with Starhawk and a revision appearing concurrently with Eisler, explained the Pagan roots of this tradition. Carol Christ placed the Craft firmly as a serious manifestation of the need for a non male-based spiritual practice. Goldenberg, Gadon, Igelhart, and others have examined the relevance of the Goddess for women, and Christ postulates that, in fact, women need the Goddess for their full spiritual and emotional development.

In his discussion of the sacred, Mircea Eliade differentiates clearly between that which is perceived as sacred and that which is perceived as the opposite of sacred, the profane. The overlap between the two would occur in the form of what he calls a hierophany, which he defines as "the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our profane

world."² In other words, special, sacred rocks or groves of trees remain rocks or groves of trees, even though they are imbued with qualities of the sacred. They become what Roszak would call "transparent windows of experience"³ to the sacred.

Linda Sexson agrees with Eliade, and asserts that the sacred can actually be an everyday object: dogwood berries need not be symbols of the sacred, or even vehicles to achieve the sacred experience; they actually become sacred and profane at the same time.⁴

What Bettina Aptheker calls the "dailiness of women's lives"⁵ lends itself in particular to manifestations of the sacred. The realness, groundedness, of women's lives, the compassion, the touch--all are the stuff of the sacred: the smooth sweetness of a baby's neck, the receptive welcoming of sexual joining, the nourishment of feeding and caring. All these are moments of recognition, are transparent

² Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1959), 11.

³ Theodore Roszak, Where the Wasteland Ends, qtd. in Margot Adler, Drawing Down the Moon (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 27.

⁴ See Lynda Sexson, Ordinarily Sacred (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1982), 3. "There are universal experiences which are common yet set apart, ordinary yet consummately extraordinary, mundane yet sacred."

⁵ Bettina Aptheker, Tapestries of Life (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 37-74.

windows, are acts of participation in the divine. They happen every day. And they are very ancient.

Sometimes referred to as the "eternal Feminine," or the Great Mother," or "She Who Bore Them All," these sacred moments are based on life-giving and life-sustaining properties. They are based on what Collard refers to as the reverence for life for its own sake. And they include all life, not just one's narrow personal circle. Indeed, the "circle always has room for one more."⁶

Grounded as it is in the sacredness of all life, the Feminine has an inherent immanence of deity; that is, divinity is contained within and is not placed somewhere outside, accessible only to a few. This quality of immanence brings with it a kind of personal authority and strength; the locus of self-esteem, knowledge, and power is internal. Dependency is not fostered, neither is ranking.

The perpetuation of life as the major social principle would create a dynamic of linking rather than separation. Self-in-relation-to-other would be the model: How do one's actions affect others (both people and the environment)? What long-term effects will a particular action have? Even when it really was "a jungle out there," recognition of the interconnection of all life would have predominated. There would have been respect for cycles of grain and animal

⁶ Matthew Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1987.

growth, understanding that what one does in one's nest stays there, and a belief that all of us--two-legged, four-legged, winged, or finned--have a sacred life space.

It has been suggested that these characteristics of caring, linking, and regard for the "web of life" are embodied in a particular worldview. A number of independent studies point to the theory that this worldview, which may be referred to as the Feminine, was once all-pervasive, was, in fact, the predominant way of life. At some point in history, according to the theory, those not participating in this worldview forcibly conquered those who did, and the Feminine became a set of qualities projected onto only one segment of the population: women. This worldview and those who embodied it were set apart and devalued. Everything associated with them was devalued; their symbols, their sacredness, their relational mode of living. The very environment itself came to be seen as an invitation for conquest. Violence and the threat of violence became an everyday tool for personal power. The web of life was pulled apart, and hierarchy was born. Ranking, not linking, was honored, and the natural world became natural resources to be used and exhausted by the dominator class. Life cycles were forgotten, and a morbid fear of death developed. In an effort to push the recognition of death to the periphery of experience, the notion developed that men, and

not women, were the real creators. A male god, wrathful and mean, replaced the sacredness within.

The internal road to the sacred was forced underground. However, adherents to the Feminine worldview were never annihilated. Forced into secrecy, they nevertheless prevailed. Century after century, at great personal risk, the web of life was honored. The Goddess was evoked. The sacredness of interconnection was kept alive.

It appears that we are now at a crossroads. For Eisler, "The logical conclusion of the dominator model is self-destruction."⁷ Some (Collard, Carson, Caldicott) feel that it is too late. Some (Noble, Moore) feel that we perhaps deserve it. Others feel that forces are converging at this crucial time to empower us to turn back from the edge, to regain a long-buried awareness of our interconnection.

It is the intent of this project to examine matristic (Goddess-based, earth-based) spirituality. Part I of this work begins with the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods in Old Europe and Anatolia, utilizing the works of Gimbutas, Mellaart, and Barstow to establish the probable widespread existence of cultures which honored the divine in female form. Various early forms of the Goddess as bird, snake, bear, doe, or bee link Her with natural cycles. Symbols

⁷ Riane Eisler, interview with author, 4 June 1989.

associated with Her, such as the dot within a lozenge, water marks, or bodily protuberances, will also be discussed.

The Goddess, while originating in prehistory, nevertheless maintained many of Her symbols and associations throughout the centuries. In some cases, Her symbols were reversed in meaning in an attempt to denigrate Her; i.e., the serpent, the tree of life, or sacred fruit. Sometimes Her symbols were transmuted in an attempt to assimilate the believers of the Goddess into the colonizer's culture; i.e., the bird goddess became the Christian angel;⁸ pagan sacred festivals became Christian holy days; and goddesses "married" gods and became wives. And there is reason to believe that as the status of the Goddess declined, so did that of human women.

Part I is not meant to be a comprehensive study of the history of the Goddess. Such studies have been done beautifully by Stone, Gadon, and others. It is intended, rather, to be an overview of some familiar goddesses and some significant aspects of matristic values. This section will conclude with the Goddess in modern society and Her re-emergence through the contemporary revival of the Wiccan

⁸ In a conversation with Karen Voss, she suggested a thematic connection between the Bird Goddess and the later images of winged Isis, enfolding skirts of Mary, and winged angels. All these images connote protection and nurture. The bird has long been a symbol of mediation, capable of flying between heaven and earth. So it is with angels, who act as messengers between the gods and humans.

religion.

Part II will utilize the work of numerous feminist theologians, philosophers, and activists, who bring their expertise to the problems of contemporary society, problems which they assert have resulted from the loss of matristic values. In addition to the examination of the works of these individuals, twenty-five leaders in contemporary feminist spiritual thought were interviewed for this project.

In constructing a body of questions for the interviewees, the intent was to research seven subject areas which were felt to be pertinent to a comparison between a matristic model and our contemporary traditional Western society. Essentially, the questions focused on the concept of wholeness, of interconnection with all life, which was so integral to a matristic modality and which is so absent today. The questions proposed to examine the ways in which matristic spirituality is being manifested in the works of twenty-five contemporary leaders in feminist spirituality. Are their work and spiritual lives interconnected, or do they compartmentalize these aspects of themselves in a manner consistent with a dualistic framework? How is power conceptualized? Does it manifest differently within dualistic and non-dualistic frameworks? What is "the Feminine," and does it have relevance for contemporary Western society? Keeping in mind a matristic concept of

interconnection, what does our contemporary construct of boundaries mean? How does the concept of boundaries affect our society? How do boundaries differ from barriers?

In light of an early concept of the sacred female, how important is the subsequent "maleness" of God? Has this gender specificity affected our society? Has it affected men and women in the same way? Is the contemporary revival of the Old Religion of the Goddess a reaction to this "maleness" of God? What can the Goddess provide today? What are members of the Wiccan religion seeking?

In an attempt to receive undiluted responses, interviewees were asked an open-ended question about the specific problems or aspects of contemporary society which they felt had inspired their work or had galvanized or catalyzed them to action. It was hoped that such responses would illuminate the problems and yield effective solutions.

Part I

"But the cycles never stop turning, and now we find the Goddess re-emerging from the forests and the mountains, bringing us hope for the future, returning us to our most ancient human roots."

- Marija Gimbutas,
The Language of the Goddess

"Exile her as they may, she will prevail. The Goddess will never withdraw herself from mankind."

- Marion Zimmer Bradley,
The Mists of Avalon

It was dawn when they found her. The hard, baked earth had preserved her remains, as had the skilled craftsmanship of her people. She was found lying on her side, with her legs drawn up tightly to her body, facing west, on the western edge of the settlement. Her body had been sprinkled with red ochre, and the shoulder blades of two woolly mammoths were placed on top of her. One had lines carved in it in irregular patterns. With her were buried her stone tools and an arctic fox's paw and tail. In her right hand she held the fox's teeth. She is 28,390 years old, an inhabitant of the Upper Paleolithic period of human pre-history. Thirteen years earlier they had found a small carved ivory head at this same site, Dolni Vestonice in

present-day Czechoslovakia. The head featured a woman's face, delicate and very much that of an individual: her brow and mouth twisted up to the left, and she had a small bump on her nose. The hair was pulled back into a bun at the nape of her neck. The skeleton described above and later found nearby exhibited a defect on the left side, a defect which could have resulted in a face twisted up to the left, a face much like the ivory carving.¹

Who, then, was this woman? Had she been a ruler of the small community of hunters and gatherers? Was her rank unusual? (The use of red ochre for burial was not unusual, but the mammoth bones were.) What did the markings on the mammoth bones mean? Was the meaning sacred in nature? What was her position, and the position of other women, in her community? What were the roles for men and women? What was her society like? How much can we tell from her remains and the details of her burial? Does knowing the workings of her life offer us information about the workings of our own?

Additional archaeological evidence from Dolni Vestonice gives us information about its inhabitants. One type of ivory figure found at this site is a mammoth tusk carving of a schematized female figure, a long, cylindrical body with

¹ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, A History of Their Own (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 3.

full breasts. These carvings are carefully marked with chevrons and parallel lines.

Another figure found at Dolni Vestonice is made from a paste of ground bone and clay and represents a female figure with large hips, belly and pendulous breasts. The eyes are mere slits, out of which streams flow down over the full breasts.²

What meanings did these exaggerated or inaccurate representations have to the people who made them? What can we learn about these people from the art they left behind?

The Paleolithic Period (ca. 35000 - 9000 B.C.E.) is important in any study of prehistory as it was during this period that our ancestors developed and firmly established symbolic behavior as a way of expressing their concept of and link to the sacred. According to Elinor Gadon,

The upper Paleolithic...was a "revolutionary" period in human evolution. There was a virtual explosion of symbolic behavior...The earliest human intuition of the sacred was that the earth was the source of all life and ground of being...Art and religion were born together from a fundamental human passion to express inner life."³

² Marija Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989) 31, 51.

³ Elinor W. Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 3.

The Proto-Neolithic Period (ca. 9000 - 7000 B.C.E.) and the Neolithic (ca. 7000 - 3000 B.C.E.) followed the Paleolithic and, according to Riane Eisler,

Provided extensive information about a long-missing piece of the puzzle of our past - the missing link between [the gathering and hunting lifestyle of] the Paleolithic Age and the later, more technologically advanced Chalcolithic, Copper, and Bronze Ages.⁴

Eisler feels, in fact, that the Neolithic is in many ways the basis of modern culture.

The Neolithic agrarian economy was the basis for the development of civilization leading over thousands of years into our own time. And almost universally, those places where the first great breakthroughs in material and social technology were made had one feature in common: the worship of the Goddess.⁵

The geographical areas considered here are predominantly Old Europe and Anatolia. It should be noted, however, that strong evidence of Goddess-based cultures during the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods also exists in Malta, Avebury, and Crete.⁶

⁴ Riane Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 8.

⁵ Eisler, 9.

⁶ See Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Pub., 1976), 2-3. According to Stone, evidence of the Goddess has been found in a wide range of geographic areas. "Most astonishing of all was the discovery of numerous accounts of the female Creators of all existence, divinities who were credited with bringing forth not only the first people but the entire earth and the heavens above. There were records of such Goddesses in Sumer, Babylon,

The artist in the Paleolithic and in the Neolithic, which followed, "did not exist in a purely physical reality, although she endows the concept with a physical form."⁷ Our prehistoric ancestors existed in an age of wonder. Nature was mysterious and held control over powerful forces; points of light appeared and disappeared in the sky, wind ruffled hair and kicked up dust storms, water fell from above. Women miraculously brought young beings out of their bodies. All animals miraculously brought forth young. New plants sprang up in inconceivable ways.

All that moved eventually died. Blood was sacred. Food was sacred. Water, the earth, plants, animals, the wind, and all that existed was infused with power.⁸

In an attempt to achieve a oneness with these powers, to understand, contact, and gain some control over them, the first humans developed a system of naming them, of giving them form.

These powers were given shape as masks, hybrid figures of animal and human form, of animals, and of creative human forms. The resulting art form was not physically accurate, but was rather symbolic and conceptual. The primary purpose was to

Egypt, Africa, Australia, and China."

⁷ Marija Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 38.

⁸ The Llewellyn Editorial Staff, The Truth About Witchcraft (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1987), 1.

transform and spiritualize the body and to surpass the mere physical.⁹

The early craftsperson was not unskilled or at the mercy of poor materials. Instead, the art objects and figurines coming out of these periods were the result of considerable skill and a mature tradition.

The task of sustaining life would have been a major focus of our early ancestors. Having noticed that life emerged from the body of a woman, they understandably connected women with the production of life. It is not surprising, therefore, that the dominating motif in the mythical imagery of Old Europe was regeneration. A goddess symbolizing earth fertility was a natural response.¹⁰

The art in the Upper Paleolithic launched a sacred tradition, the integral component of which was the associating with women the powers of birth, regeneration, and death.

In the Paleolithic burial site of Cro-Magnon in Les Eyzies, France, for example,

Around and on the corpses were carefully arranged cowrie shells. These shells, shaped in the form of what James discreetly calls "the portal through which a child enters the world," seem to have been associated with some kind of early worship of a female diety. As he writes, the cowrie was a life-giving agent. So also was red ochre, still in later

⁹ Gimbutas, 38.

¹⁰ Gimbutas, 201.

traditions the surrogate of the life-giving or menstrual blood of women.¹¹

There is much evidence to support the belief that the numerous representations of females were sacred in nature and not simply profane or mundane records of women in the community.

One reason is the sheer number of such figurines and other representations which, with rare exception, are almost exclusively female. Another reason is the nature of the representations themselves. Almost all of them exaggerate procreative symbols: vulvas alone may be depicted; breasts and pregnant bellies are often evident; often they are in some association with grain or animals--the "stuff" of life for our prehistoric relatives.

Breasts, vulvae, and buttocks are powerful and universal symbols capable of conveying more than one meaning, potent packages that evoke both physical presence and human significance. Breasts, for example, are symbols of nurture par excellence, as witness the widely worshipped iconic form of the Virgin nursing the Christ Child.¹²

In the Paleolithic Period figurines, there is evidence that breasts and buttocks are considered sacred parts. The sacredness of buttocks is not really surprising when one understands that protuberances in general are considered to

¹¹ Eisler, 2.

¹² Gadon, 8.

have generative powers. Heads and arms are often missing, and sometimes only the buttocks are represented. This art was conceptual by nature; it's the idea of sacred parts which was important. The abstracted image emphasizes the main function of the goddess--her manifestation of the generative powers of nature.

The same representation is found in the Neolithic period (approximately 6500-3500 B.C.E. in Old Europe and 6500-1500 B.C.E. in the Aegean area). Then, buttocks and breasts are emphasized and even outlined with concentric circles. In fact, all protuberances were considered sacred--breast, buttocks, belly, even the knees--and were outlined. This probably symbolized the intention to stimulate the generative powers of the goddess figure.

The buttocks are often associated with the egg and with the belly. Prehistoric humans would have noticed that eggs hatch and reveal life. They would have noticed, too, that bellies form before human and animal life is produced. Buttocks, egg, breast, and belly are all sacred protuberances, and are all germinating seeds of growth.

This 'Fertility Goddess' or 'Mother Goddess' is a more complex image than most people think. She was not only the Mother Goddess who commands fertility, or the Lady of the Beasts who governs the fecundity of animals and all wild nature, or the frightening Mother Terrible, but a composite

image with traits accumulated from both the pre-agricultural and agricultural eras.¹³

During the period of cultivated crops and a sedentary, matrilinear community, she became a Goddess of Regeneration, and was often associated with the moon which, like plants, grew, became ripe, and then declined to be "born" again. The Goddess of Regeneration, sometimes called the Moon Goddess, was the giver, promoter, and sustainer of life, while at the same time she held control over all the destructive powers of nature. The feminine nature, in all its phases, like the moon, is light as well as dark.

One of the main regenerative aspects of the Goddess is her appearance as the Goddess of Birth. Here the Goddess is portrayed in a birth- or child-bearing posture, with legs raised, or with an emphasized or swollen vulva. Often just the vulva is portrayed and is engraved on rocks. The earliest known depiction occurred in the Paleolithic in Yugoslavia and France. It's important to note that these images are in no way pornographic, intended to arouse sexuality. Instead, they are philosophical and sacred in nature: the vulva often appeared in conjunction with branches or flowers, all signs of regeneration or growth.

The visual language established in the Paleolithic for the sacred female is the key to understanding the prehistoric Goddess. The omnipresent sexual symbolism was not

¹³ Gimbutas, 154.

erotic in our modern sense of the term, that is, intended to arouse sexual desire, for it indicated not only human reproduction but also the life force, an energy that emanated from the earth...the ubiquitous vulva takes many forms and shapes. One, the flower, is universally associated with the Goddess.

In Paleolithic times, mothers giving birth were associated with animals. The bear often appeared as the goddess in her aspect as mother and nurse.

A strange animal-headed figurine with two turban-shaped ears, female breasts, and its single unbroken arm resting across the abdomen was found at the Starcevo settlement of Porodin. In Vinca sites a number of bear-headed figurines were found, representing either epiphanies of the goddess in animal form or her worshippers. Some are seated on a throne.¹⁴

The doe is another important animal double of the Goddess of Regeneration. The cycle of regeneration and growth of antlers greatly impressed the Neolithic inhabitants. Although the role of the deer's antlers is important, as indicated by reliefs of stags with enormous antlers found on vases of the Starcevo complex, the deer as symbol dates to the pre-agricultural Paleolithic, where the doe is a powerful symbol.

The northern people in the hunting stage still believe in the mother of the universe as a doe-elk or wild reindeer-doe. Myths speak of pregnant women who rule the world and who look like deer covered with hair and with branching deer's horns on their heads.

¹⁴ Gimbutas, 190.

In the Upper Paleolithic era, similar images probably existed all over Europe....Cult vases in the shape of a doe [are found in] Muldava in central Bulgaria... The body of the doe of Muldava is decorated with crescents in a negative design; hence the animal is shown to be closely related to the moon symbolism.

In the pictorial representations on Late Cucuteni bowls the schematically portrayed body of a deer is transformed into a crescent. Like snakes or tails of comets, two deers whirl in opposite directions over the spherical surface of the bowl. Heads like crescent moons and small crescents repeated on abstract bodies emphasize the lunar characteristics....

In some portrayals deer antlers and crescent moons merge together as they spin around a cross with knobbed extremities showing the four cardinal points of the world...Geometricized to a shape beyond recognition, two deer, like water snakes or rain clouds, spin within egg-shaped containers. Through association with the egg and water their role as instruments of the Goddess of Regeneration is clear.¹⁵

This image of the doe and its association with the lunar crescent appear later in ancient Greece as symbols of the goddess Diana.

The goddess as life-giver also assumed the shape of a toad.

A hybrid of woman and toad carved out of greenstone or marble or made of clay is found in Central and East Balkan civilizations, the Proto- Sesklo, Starcevo, Vinca, Karanovo and Gumelnita complexes. In schematized versions her outspread legs and pubic triangle are

¹⁵ Gimbutas, 171-172.

accentuated while her head is just a cone or is entirely neglected.

That these toads or frogs represent the Great Goddess is suggested by their formal similarity to a group of peculiar female figurines from Hacilar. These combine a toadlike trunk with a woman's chest, head and coif. Like the standing virgins they hold their hands on their breasts.

The foetus was a toad which crawled into the womb (the real cause of conception was not known in prehistory). Neolithic or even Upper Paleolithic man [sic] must have seen the human embryo at the age of one or two months: it is about 3.5 cm. in length, has a big head, two dark points for eyes, black holes for a nose, two depressions for ears, a long opening for the mouth and stumps for arms and legs. Such a creature can easily be taken for a toad! And this is what apparently happened far back in time, probably more than ten thousand years ago, and the belief has still not completely died out. The idea that a toad causes pregnancy may have originated before the Neolithic period since representations of toads (or lizards) engraved on bone artifacts are known from the Mesolithic Maglemose culture.¹⁶

The goddess appears frequently as the bee or butterfly symbolizing her powers of Regeneration and Transformation. It's important to mention here the ancient belief that bees (or butterflies) are born from bulls. Later, in 250 B.C.E., Antigones of Karystos explains the belief which existed back into prehistory:

In Egypt if you bury the ox in certain places, so that only his horns project above the ground and then saw them off, they say

¹⁶ Gimbutas, 170-179.

that bees fly out; for the ox putrefies and is resolved into bees.

The image of the Great Goddess in the shape of a bee appears on the head of a bull carved out of bone from the Late Cucuteni site of Bilcze Złote in the western Ukraine. Her upraised and bifurcated arms are definitely those of a bee. Her head is a dot and the conical lower body (without indication of legs) is clearly an imitation of a bee's body....The famous painted Boeotian amphora dating from ca. 700 BC [sic] portrays the 'Lady of the Wild Things', or the 'Mistress of Animals', as she is usually called, flanked by two lions, a (decapitated) bull's head, a bottle-shaped object (a uterus?), birds and swastikas. It is significant that she has the arms of an insect. Zigzagging hair and a serrated line around the lower part of the body suggest the hairy body of a bee.

Why was the bee chosen for the symbol of regeneration? We may ask the same question where the Egyptian beetle or scarab is concerned; it too symbolizes the moon and eternal renewal. The reason probably is because both have antennae like bull horns and wings in the form of a lunar crescent. The periodic swarming and buzzing of bees, when a new generation is born, and the creative activity associated with the production of honey must have greatly impressed our forefathers [sic] who regarded it as the food of the gods.¹⁷

The horns out of which bees or butterflies emerge are considered, along with crescents and caterpillars, to be one of the symbols of "becoming." They do not depict the end result of wholeness, but rather the continuous striving towards it, the active process of creation.

¹⁷ Gimbutas, 181-183.

Replete with a mysterious power of growth, the horns have become a lunar symbol, which is presumed to have come into being in the Upper Paleolithic Aurignacian when reliefs of naked women holding a horn begin to appear (cf. the relief from the cave of Laussel in southern France.)¹⁸

Dorothy Cameron, in her writings about the bull's skulls and horns adorning alters in Catal Huyuk, suggests that they represent the uterus with fallopian tubes. (Thus offering an interpretation that Ernest Hemmingway would find outrageous!)

In the Neolithic, with new-found knowledge of cultivation, the seed must must have been recognized as the cause of germination and growth, and the pregnant belly of a woman must have been assimilated to field fertility in the infancy of agriculture.¹⁹ This connection of the seed in the earth growing into a life-sustaining plant and the growing seed of life within a pregnant woman's belly gave rise to the image of a pregnant goddess endowed with the ability to influence and regulate fertility. According to Marija Gimbutas, this belief that a woman's fertility or sterility influences farming is a frequent, recurring theme in European folklore. Barren women are regarded as dangerous; a peasant woman has magical influence on grain

¹⁸ Gimbutas, 93.

¹⁹ Gimbutas, 201.

because like her, the grain becomes pregnant; "it germinates and grows."²⁰

The pregnant goddess can be depicted either by a physically natural figure or a pregnant female with hands above or resting on the belly, or by a symbol or ideogram of sorts. This ideogram is a dot inside a lozenge, or a lozenge within a lozenge, often scratched or painted on the belly, thighs, neck or arms of a Goddess figure. "She is related to the square, the perennial symbol or earthbound matter."²¹

The earlier pregnant figures, from around the seventh and sixth millenia, are nude while figures of later periods, around the fifth and fourth millenia, are depicted as clothed rather elaborately, except for the abdomen, which is uncovered and on which lies a sacred snake. In this series the figures are highly stylized, with the abdominal area emphasized and the rest of the body modified. Some of the figures take the form of bottle-shaped amulets or rattles and don't represent the goddess directly. Instead, they are the symbols or tools which are a necessary part of the magical rituals and proceedings carried out to obtain fertility. The dot, representing the seed, and the lozenge,

²⁰ Gimbutas, 201.

²¹ Gimbutas, 201.

representing the sown field, appear on numerous sculptures of enthroned goddesses. A lozenge with a dot or dash in it or in the four corners must have been a symbol to invoke fertility. Less abstract are the early Cucuteni figures from the western Ukraine, where the entire body of the goddess, and especially the abdomen and buttocks, were decorated with real grain. In later phases the idea of pregnancy was obtained by inserting clay balls into the belly of a fat figure.

The lozenge is often the most prominent feature, while the rest of the body becomes less exact. The idea of pregnancy as opposed to sterility is expressed by a dot in the center of the lozenge or in each of the quarters of the lozenge. This ideogram was found in the Catal Huyuk ruins, and seems to have appeared on a stamp-seal. One or two snakes wind about the belly with its incised lozenge or surround sacred protuberances, especially the buttocks.²² The repetition of lozenges and snakes was meant to increase the power of the figure to invoke fertility.

An especially fine example of the pregnant Goddess is the Lady of Pazardzik from central Bulgaria. She is decorated with flowing incised lines, interspersed with lozenges. On each buttock are incised two large lozenges,

²² Gimbutas, 205.

placed there not as a decoration, but to stress the earth-fertility function of the goddess, who is responsible for the germination, sprouting, growing, and ripening of plants. Her center of gravity in the abdomen draws her downward to the earth of which she is a part. Her ample proportions, the essence of this sculpture, are symbolic of the earth. She wears a round mask, with prominent nose, and six holes for the lower lip. Her hands rest royally on her abdomen.²³

Pregnant vegetation goddesses found in Catal Huyuk in central Anatolia were never found indoors but always outside near bread ovens.

In the Neolithic, in general, this goddess is associated with the growth of cultivated plants. She began, however, in the Paleolithic where she is depicted with a huge, pregnant belly and a huge pubic triangle.

Throughout Old Europe, and during all periods, the pig was associated with the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess. It's possible that early agriculturists were impressed by the fast-growing body of the pig; its fattening may have been linked to the growth of corn in its rapid growing and ripening cycle. Perhaps the soft fats of the pig became associated with the earth itself, making this animal sacred to the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess.

²³ Gimbutas, 208.

An early Vinca Pregnant Vegetation Goddess wears a pig mask. The sacredness of the pig as a fertility symbol is indicated by the Cucuteni pig sculptures which have traces of grain imprinted on them. Grain was impressed into the bodies of pig sculptures just as it was into the body of the Vegetation Goddess figures.

Beautiful sculptures of entire pigs were found in the mound of Nea Makri in central Greece. A true masterpiece of the fifth-fourth century B.C.E. is a lamp in the shape of a pig which was found in the cemetery of Camarino in Sicily.²⁴

Cows also make an appearance as sacred representations of the Goddess. Their association with milk and nourishment is clear, as well as the association between large, abundant udders and full breasts.

In their understanding of the fertile creativity of the earth to grow plants, early humans also knew that growing things required water. To ensure a plentiful supply of nourishing moisture, they invoked the powers of the Snake Goddess and the Bird Goddess.

Snake and Bird Goddess

The Snake and Bird Goddesses or, more usually, a hybrid of the two, was the most predominant image in the pantheon of Old Europe. The presence of the Bird and Snake Goddess

²⁴ Gimbutas, 214.

is felt everywhere--on the earth, in the skies, and beyond the clouds, where primordial waters lie. Her abode is beyond the upper waters, beyond meandrous labyrinths.²⁵ She rules over the life-giving force of water, and her image is often associated with water containers. On Cucuteni vases, the goddess's eyes, or her eyes and beak, appear above representations of water or falling rain. (This is reminiscent of the Dolni Vestonice figure mentioned earlier, a figure whose eyes are mere slits, out of which streams of water flow.) The eyes of the Bird or Snake Goddess even stare from the very center of the world--a sphere with a mythical water stream in the center. Her cosmic character is emphasized by a series of abstract compositions painted on Cucuteni vases.

The Bird Goddess and Snake Goddess appear as separate figures or together as a single divinity. Their functions are so intimately related that it's almost impossible to talk about them separately; they have to be described together. She is one, and She is two, sometimes snake, sometimes bird. She is the goddess of waters and air, assuming the shape of a snake, a crane, a goose, a duck, a diving bird. As Bird Goddess, she is usually depicted with

²⁵ Gimbutas, 112.

a bird's head, ample breasts, and wings. Symbols associated with her are "V" signs, zigzags, and water-related symbols.

As a Snake Goddess she is believed to embody the energy of life. Today in Lithuania and Ireland, the reappearance of snakes in Spring is greeted by an important ritual, a celebration of the reappearance of the symbol of life. In many cultures, snakes inside the house are considered to represent the spirit of a departed ancestor.

The images of the Snake Goddess vary widely. Some sculptures are actual snakes; others appear in symbolic form. In 6000 B.C.E. in western Anatolia, the legs were painted as snakes, and the head and arms were snake-like as well. In Crete and Knossis there were many depictions of the Snake Goddess as a human woman, breasts bared, who held snakes and wore them as decorations.

The Bird and Snake Goddess is a very maternal image. She is a divinity who nurtures the world with moisture, giving rain, the divine food which metaphorically was also understood as mother's milk. In this connection, she naturally became also a figure of nurse or mother. Countless terra-cotta figures of an anthropomorphic snake or bird holding a baby are found from various periods and in many regions of Old Europe. As Bird Goddess she is also the great protectress, enfolding babies or young in her wings. The maternal essence of the Bird and Snake Goddess will

appear later as the wings of the Goddess Isis and as Mary's all-protecting skirts.

It is important that the Bird Goddess and the Snake Goddess were always worshipped inside of temples or homes, and are never found outside. Both were protectoresses of the family and of the lives of family members.

The great Bird and Snake Goddess, with her huge eyes and triangular beak, has important cosmological representation which shows that she was a Mistress of life-generating cosmic forces. We will see later how this Goddess or the memory of her original image continued into the Iron Age.

The Goddess in her many aspects became a repository for early questions about life itself. She represented all aspects of life and in her multiplicity represented the growing consciousness of prehistoric humans.

The image of the Great Goddess of Life, Death and Regeneration in anthropomorphic form with a projection of her powers through insects and animals--bee, butterfly, deer, bear, hare, toad, turtle, hedgehog and dog--was the outward symbol of a community concerned with the problems of the life and death cycle.²⁶

Death Aspect of the Goddess

In her death aspect, the Goddess is associated with bone. From the fifth century B.C.E. in eastern France are

²⁶ Gimbutas, 195.

found figures of smooth, white bone with eyes, indicating that while this is a symbol of death, it also contains the "regenerative eyes of the owl," probably a variation on the Bird Goddess.

Death images are usually produced out of materials white in color: marble, alabaster, light-colored clay, or stones.

The image of the goddess with arms folded became increasingly stereotyped during the fifth and fourth millennia BC. [sic] She is portrayed standing or seated, arms tightly pressed to the body, breasts barely indicated and legs schematized and usually narrow at the end. The masked head has supernatural features. East Balkan sculptures have flattened oval masked heads with large semicircular eyes, a nose, and from two to ten impressions or holes below the mouth. Holes on either side of the head support ear-rings of copper or gold. Cypriote clay figurines with large pubic triangles from the third millennium also have enormous ears with holes for ear-rings. Marble seems to have been especially cherished in Bulgaria as a material for fashioning Great Goddesses, and some marble figurines are over 30 cm. high. Sheet gold was also used for figurines and a fine example comes from Ruse in northern Bulgaria. Regardless of the material used, clay, bone, marble, or gold, the Great Goddess always appeared in a rigid pose, the pose of a chrysalis.²⁷

Double figurines, in which a baby stands on top of a normal-sized sculpture, may be connected to the idea of rebirth.

²⁷ Gimbutas, 157.

The large size of many figurines (in the Cyclades some are nearly 150 cm high) suggests that they are portrayals of a goddess. The supernatural triangle and the nudity do not reveal her sexuality. Breasts and belly are not stressed. Through the act of engraving an enormous triangle in the centre [sic] of the sculpture the artist perhaps visualized the universal womb, the inexhaustible source of life, to which the dead man returns in order to be born again. In this sense the Great Goddess is the magician-mother.²⁸

It is typical of dead buried in cemeteries in Old Europe that the arms are folded and pressed in a manner similar to the foetus. Babies and children were squeezed into an egg-shaped burial pithoi and had arms tightly pressed into the body. A pithos seemed to have represented the womb as did the grave pit from which the child or adult could be born again.

Over time, the aspect of the Goddess which represented death became demonized and turned into the witch. As we shall see later, she was feared as darkness, night, and winter. But from the darkness of her womb emerged the power of new life and new energy in many forms.

In prehistory, death was not ignored; life was celebrated; and questions of mortality were vital. Cycles of the moon and the female body were sacred. Sacred

²⁸ Gimbutas, 159.

symbols, animals, and symbolic shapes were more real than daily events.

Life was Religion, and Religion was Life. And the Goddess was the bringer, giver, and sustainer of it all ...

Invasion

The sacred partnership of humans and nature was destined to come to an end. According to Mellaart the matrifocal, peaceful, agricultural societies of the Near East were invaded.

During the fifth millennium B.C.[E.] invasions of culturally inferior northern neighbors extinguished the painted pottery cultures of Southern Analolia.²⁹

The matristic culture of Old Europe seems to have suffered the same fate.

Its growth was interrupted and eventually stopped by destructive forces from the East: the steadily increasing infiltration of the semi-nomadic, horse-riding ("Kurgan") pastoralists [whose artistic technique] is quite primitive and seems to focus on only one symbol, the sun...They carried shining daggers, swords, and shields...and exulted in the making of wapons, not pottery or sculpture.³⁰

As a result, according to Carol Christ,

In both the Near East and Old Europe, the Goddess Creatrix was deposed, slain, or made

²⁹ James Mellaart, Earliest Civilizations of the Near East (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), 134.

³⁰ Marija Gimbutas, "Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe," Charlene Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1982), 29-31.

wife, daughter, or mother to the male
divinities of the warriors.³¹

The Great Goddess did not disappear, however. She has, in her many forms, survived--sometimes intact, and sometimes in symbol.

The Goddess in Ancient Greece

In ancient Greece the goddesses of the Neolithic and Paleolithic can be seen in attributes and aspects of both Pre-Hellenic and Olympian goddesses. The Pre-Hellenic goddesses, however, seem to embody truer representation of the goddess spirit, while the Olympian goddesses have been stained with the wash of patriarchal control.

Marija Gimbutas cites several aspects of the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess, the Bird and Snake Goddess, and goddess symbols which survive the nomadic invasions and appear in the Greek pantheon.

Charlene Spretnak brilliantly uses information and clues about several Pre-Hellenic goddesses to reconstruct the spiritual identity of these goddesses, many of whom lose much of their essential character when assimilated into the Olympian hierarchy.

One such goddess is Hera.

³¹ Carol P. Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 171.

Stately, regal, and beautiful Hera, whom the Romans later called Juno, was essentially the goddess of women and fecundity. In her rituals, she is worshipped with three names and in three locations. "In the spring, she was Hera Parthenos (Hera the Maiden, or Hera the Virgin). She was celebrated as Hera Teleia in the summer and autumn (Hera the Perfected One, or Hera the Fulfilled One), and she became Hera Chera (Hera the Widow) in the winter.³² These three aspects of Hera correspond roughly to the three phases of a woman's life (maiden, fertile woman, and elder).³³

These stages of a woman's life were enacted through symbolic ritual. "In the spring, an image representing Hera was immersed in a bath, symbolically restoring her virginity. In summer, she achieved perfection in a ritual wedding. In winter, another ritual emphasized a dispute with and separation from Zeus, which ushered in the phase of Hera the Widow.³⁴ "In addition, she was connected to the three stages of the moon; such was the harmony with nature in earlier times that women's periodicity followed the

³² Jean Shinoda Bolen, Goddesses in Everywoman (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 141

³³ Charlene Spretnak, Lost Goddesses of Early Greece (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 87.

³⁴ Bolen, 142.

moon's phases closely, and their menstruation began at the new moon, which was often summoned by their choruses."³⁵

Hera also presides over the hieros gamos or sacred marriage of the lunar cow and solar bull, which was a celebration of renewal and fertility in nature, especially that of the soil.³⁶ This clearly links her with the earlier goddess of vegetation and earth-fertility. Her link to the natural world of animal symbolism is enhanced by her reputation from Greek poets as "cow-eyed Hera" because of her large and beautiful eyes. Some of her symbols were the cow, the Milky Way, the lily, and the peacock's iridescent tailfeather "eyes" that symbolized Hera's watchfulness. Fertile eyes are a recurring symbol in the Neolithic, as are birds and flowers in general. Milk, cows, and breasts are long-standing Neolithic fertility and nourishment symbols, and Hera's association with the Milky Way

reflects the belief, predating the Olympic deities, that the Milky Way (our galaxy) came from the breasts of the Great Goddess...This then became part of Hera's mythology: when milk spurted from her breasts, the Milky Way was formed. The drops that fell to the ground became lilies, flowers symbolizing another pre-Hellenic belief in the self-fertilizing power of the female genitals.³⁷

³⁵ Spretnak, 87.

³⁶ Spretnak, 87.

³⁷ Bolen, 139.

The sanctuaries dedicated to Hera were built in valleys at the estuaries of rivers, near the sea, and surrounded by pastureland. She was considered the guardian of sea-voyagers, and was the ruler over pastureland. "The votive offerings in her sanctuaries include terra cotta snakes, horned animal figurines, calves, and anthropomorphic idols with large eyes and decorated with spirals and meanders."³⁸

Her hair curls like snakes in many of her portrayals, and a snake winds or zigzags vertically in the middle of her skirt...or else her anthropomorphic image with curly hair, eyebrows in the shape of horns, and upraised hands is flanked by a snake.... Archaic features to be found in portrayals of Hera betray much that links her with the Old European Snake Goddess.³⁹

In patriarchal mythology Hera becomes the wife of Zeus, the thunderbolt god. Their union is a stormy and tempestuous one, prompting some scholars to speculate on the possibility of this myth's relating the actual struggle between the original goddess religion and the new patriarchal order. Hera submits, but is never fully dominated. "In sanctuaries and pictorial representations, Hera is shown in the central position; she occupies the

³⁸ Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 149.

³⁹ Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 150.

throne, not Zeus who stands at her side."⁴⁰ This enthroned Hera is reminiscent of the enthroned Vegetation Goddess of the Neolithic, a connection we will see again in ancient Egypt, as Queen Isis, "the Throne," is accompanied by her husband Osiris.

Charlene Spretnak, in her poem "The Myth of Hera," takes us back to the time of sacred nature, of sacred feminine spirit.

On the morning of the new moon,
The women of Argos left their homes
And walked together
To the Stream of the Freeing Water.
They bathed and then gathered branches
From the nearby lygos bushes,
Which they laid in a circular bower.
On this ring they sat throughout the day,
Each seated with the women of her mother's clan.

With the blessing of the Goddess,
The lygos encouraged the flow
Of their sacred blood
That would complete the cleansing
They had begun in the stream.

Although the women fasted,
Their mood was not somber.
They talked of their crops,
Their herds,
Their children,
And listened to stories told by their elders.

As twilight approached,
They began chants and songs
That summoned Hera,
In her manifestation of the New Moon.
When Hera appeared as a pale sliver
Climbing above the horizon,
The women responded by lighting a fire
In the center of the circle

⁴⁰ Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 149.

And continued the songs.

Gradually Hera drew forth
The blood of purification and renewed fertility.
Those who received Her gift
Were honored.
All rose,
Giving praise to the Goddess,
And returned in a torchlit procession
To their homes.⁴¹

Another goddess in ancient Greece closely linked to her Neolithic sisters is Athena, known in later Roman times as Minerva. Although her form has been altered, in Athena we see remnants of the Bird Goddess. Athena is often depicted as winged, "and the bird is her attribute. She sometimes appears in the semblance of a sea eagle, a gull, a swallow, a vulture, or a dove..."⁴²

"Athena was often depicted with an owl, a bird associated with wisdom and prominent eyes--two of her traits. Intertwined snakes were shown as a design on her shield or on the hem of her robe."⁴³

"Athena was originally a Cretan Goddess who watched over the home and town. Attributes of fertility and renewal are expressed in her association with the tree (or pillar) and bird, and snake symbolism, respectively."⁴⁴ She is the

⁴¹ Spretnak, 91.

⁴² Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 147.

⁴³ Bolen, 75.

⁴⁴ Spretnak, 97.

patron of wisdom, arts, and skills, especially those of the weaver, potter, sculptor, architect, and spinner. Her association with spinning may have particular origination in the Neolithic, as the owl was sometimes associated "with the craft of spinning and hence with the sheep. A series of terracotta plaques show an owl with human arms spinning wool."⁴⁵

"Portrayals of Athena on black- or red-figure vases of ancient Greece reveal her intimacy not only with birds but also with snakes."⁴⁶ And the following poem by Spretnak suggests a link between snakes and the arts and crafts.

Long before there were places,
The Goddess had appeared
To a group of women
Gathering plants in the field.
She broke open the stems
Of blue-flowered flax
And showed them how the thread-like fibers
Could be spun and then woven.
The woof and warp
Danced in her fingers
Until a length of cloth
Was born before them.
She told them which plants and roots
Would color the cloth,
And then she led the mortals from the field
To a pit of clay.

There they watched Athena
Form a long serpent
And coil it,
Much like the serpents coiled
Around her arms.
She formed a vessel

⁴⁵ Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 148.

⁴⁶ Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 148.

And smoothed the sides,
Then deftly applied a paste
Made from another clay and water.

When it was baked
In a hollow in the earth,
A spiral pattern emerged clearly,
The image of circles
That repeat
And repeat
Yet move forward
Was kept by the women
For centuries ...⁴⁷

Demeter is the Grain-Mother, the giver of crops. Every autumn the women of Greece observed the Thesmophoria, a three-day agricultural fertility ritual, in honor of Demeter. The three days were called the Kathodos and Anodos (Down-Going and Uprising), the Nesteia (Fasting), and the Kalligeneia (Fair-Born or Fair Birth).⁴⁸ Her daughter Persephone symbolizes the new crop.

The mysteries of Demeter are very similar to those of the Egyptian Goddess Isis. As we shall see later, there is much which links the two, including vegetative growth and access to the Underworld. The connection goes back even further in time. "The beautifully draped Demeter with bare breasts, the queen of corn, the bread-giver, and the queen of the dead (manifested as her daughter Persephone) can be

⁴⁷ Spretnak, 99.

⁴⁸ Spretnak, 105.

connected with her predecessor, the prehistoric Vegetation Goddess."⁴⁹

The symbol of the pig further unites the two goddesses. Suckling pigs played a very prominent part in the worship of Persephone and Demeter, and Persephone was even known by the Athenians as Pherrephata or "killer of suckling pigs."⁵⁰ It seems the sacred festival, the Thesmophoria, may also have had its beginnings in prehistory, as the combined symbols of pig and grain are so prominent.

At threshing time, another festival, the Skirophoria, took place in ancient Greece. At night, young girls dressed in pure white were gathered and presented with sacred objects called skira. "These were figurines of suckling pigs and cakes made in the shape of serpents. After the festival they were deposited at the sanctuary of Demeter."⁵¹

In her wonderful poem about the myth of Demeter and Persephone, Charlene Spretnak writes of the relationship between the goddess and her human charges.

The Goddess Demeter watched fondly
As the mortals learned more and more
About her plants.
Seeing that their lives were difficult
And their food supply sporadic,
She was moved to give them
The gift of wheat.

⁴⁹ Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 214.

⁵⁰ Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 214.

⁵¹ Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods, 215.

She showed them how
To plant the seed,
Cultivate,
And finally harvest the wheat,
And grind it.

Always the mortals entrusted the essential process
Of planting food
To the women,
In the hope that their fecundity of womb
Might be transferred
To the fields they touched.⁵²

Demeter, fertility and creative goddess and mother par excellence, was often depicted seated on a throne, wearing sky-blue robes, and holding wheat or similar forms of vegetation. An image quite similar to this will appear later as the Christian image of the Virgin Mary.

Isis: the Bringer, Giver, and Sustainer of Life

Isis was one of the major deities and was a primary figure in Egyptian life. She is the subject of much pictorial representation, is known by many names, and appears in many different forms, all of which are associated with life-bringing, -sustaining, and -giving properties.⁵³ She is also known as Oldest of the Old, the Goddess from whom all being arose. Isis and her husband/brother Osiris were created together in the womb of the Mother Goddess.

⁵² Spretnak, 109.

⁵³ See a comparison of mythic images of Isis and Mary, Karen Voss, an unpublished paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Western Region, Stanford, May, 1982.

This will be later compared to the manner in which the Christian Eve was created.

Isis was the great and beneficent goddess and mother. Her influence and love pervaded heaven, earth, and the abode of the dead. She was the personification of the female creative power that conceived and brought forth every living creature and thing. She used her power not only in creating new things, but in restoring what was dead. She was also the noblest example of a faithful and loving wife and mother, and it was in that role that she was most highly honored by the Egyptians.⁵⁴

There are many incidents of Isis' role as a loving, protective mother. Many depictions of Isis show her holding her son Horus on her lap, suckling him or shielding him with her wings. The wings of Isis are an important symbol of her powers. She often transforms herself into a bird, linking her to Athena and to the Old European Bird Goddess.

It is important to note here that one of the meanings of the name Isis is "throne, and to underscore this meaning, she is usually seen wearing the ast, a symbol of the throne itself. One of the meanings of Osiris is "he who mounts the throne." There was a clear understanding in their relationship that he received his power from her, by virtue of his relationship to her.⁵⁵ In fact, Pharaohs were often

⁵⁴ Anthony S. Merchante, Who's Who in Egyptian Mythology (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1978), 73.

⁵⁵ Beverly Zabriski, lecture at C.G. Jung Institute, San Francisco, 1984.

pictured sitting on the lap of the Goddess and protected by her wings.

Another aspect of Isis which is important to her identity is her sexuality. While still in her mother's womb with Osiris, she was sexually active with him. Her sexuality/creative power is further celebrated when she creates a phallus for him after his death, is impregnated by it, and transforms herself into a bird. Several of the symbols associated with Isis have to do with sexuality and female genitalia. Isis is usually depicted wearing a headdress with a crescent moon, called the Horns of Hathor, with a solar or lunar disk. The Egyptian words for horn and cervix have the same root. The image of the sun or moon appearing through the crescent shape of horns represents the image of a baby's head appearing at the cervical opening.⁵⁶ This symbol connotes female birth-giving, creative power. Another symbol linked to sexuality and birth is the thet, a buckle or girdle known also as the knot of Isis, which "may have been a conventional representation of the uterus, with its ligatures, and the vagina."⁵⁷ Isis is also frequently depicted carrying an ankh, a symbol of life, "sexual union,

⁵⁶ Zabriski, 1984.

⁵⁷ Merchante, 189.

and the immortality of the gods, granted by the Goddess's divine blood."⁵⁸

These symbols, Horn of Hathor, thet, and ankh, translate quite well to the vulvar depictions representing the Neolithic Birth Goddess. The horns, with their crescent shape, and the solar or lunar disk further link this Goddess with her Old European sisters.

In her capacity of fully sexual female deity, Isis is also associated with Ta-urt, a patron deity of childbirth and maternity, whose sign, sa, means life-giving uterine blood.⁵⁹ These Goddesses, Isis and Ta-urt, were called upon by human mothers during difficult childbirth and labor. Here, Isis is again identified with the earlier Birth Goddess, and also with the ancient Greek goddess Hera. In addition to the above cluster of symbols around her sexual and female energy, Isis has three other main symbols linking her to divinity. One is the serpent. Isis was almost always depicted with a stylized sign of the ureaus (sacred serpent) on her forehead--the symbol of female power and transformation, as well as of divine origin. According to Merlin Stone, "the picture of the cobra was the hieroglyphic

⁵⁸ Barbara G. Walker, The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 82.

⁵⁹ Walker, 378.

sign for the word Goddess.⁶⁰ Barbara Walker suggests that the serpent was one of the oldest symbols of female power. Women and serpent together were considered holy, since both seemed to embody the power of life.⁶¹ The uraeus seems also to be associated with enlightenment and wisdom. The association here with the ancient Snake Goddess is obvious.

Another symbol associated with Isis is the Eye, a symbol for mystic insight and wisdom. "The Eye is the commonest symbol in Egyptian thought...Crawford has recently shown that the fertility goddesses of the Neolithic world, both in Asia and Europe, were represented by an eye--or eyes.⁶² It appears that the Eye represents a spirit of truth and laws, that there exist "All-Seeing Eyes from which no crime could be hidden."⁶³ It is indicated further that "the Egyptian Eye was always a symbol for the Great Goddess."⁶⁴ Beverly Zabriski contends that it is this quality of all-seeingness, of having the ability to see evil

⁶⁰ Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1976), 201.

⁶¹ Walker, 397.

⁶² R.T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959), 218.

⁶³ Walker, 201.

⁶⁴ Clark, 218.

as well as good, which most strongly links this symbol to any image of divine female power.⁶⁵

The third symbol linking Isis to divinity is her association with the fig tree. Known throughout history under three different names (sycamore, fig, or mulberry), this tree is actually the Near Eastern figus sicomorus, the sycamore fig, sometimes denoted as the black mulberry.⁶⁶ References to this sacred tree are found throughout Egyptian writings and appear frequently in murals and other depictions. "The Goddess Hathor of Egypt [Isis and Hathor are often used interchangeably] revered both as the Eye of Wisdom and the Serpent Lady, was also known by another title--the Lady of the Sycamore."⁶⁷ This tree was apparently known as the Living Body of Hathor on Earth. To eat of the fruit of the tree was to enter into a communion with the Goddess, to eat, in a sense, of the flesh and fluid of the Goddess Herself. Some murals depict the Goddess living within the tree, becoming the tree, or the tree becoming one with the Goddess, and passing out its sacred fruit to the dead as the food of eternity and immortality.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Zabriski, 1984.

⁶⁶ Stone, 214.

⁶⁷ Stone, 215.

⁶⁸ In a conversation with Karen Voss we discussed a comparison between the Eucharist and the Tree of Life. See also Carolyn Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast

Some explanation for the sacredness of this tree to Isis may be found in the account of the death of Osiris, brother/husband of Isis. Merlin Stone relates that according to Egyptian records, "Osiris was first buried in a mulberry coffin. The coffin was then placed inside a living sycamore tree, symbolic of Isis-Hathor as his mother-wife. In this way She was to provide him with the food of eternity."⁶⁹

The final characteristic important to Isis is her possession of skills in the healing arts and magic. In one account of her healing abilities, her young son has been bitten by a poisonous snake and, after much pain and torment, has died. Isis then called upon her healing powers and "uttered the magic words, and the poison flowed from her son's body, and as air entered his lungs, his sense and feeling returned, and the boy was restored to life."⁷⁰ Another account tells of Isis bringing about the quick delivery of a child, thus sparing the mother a prolonged and

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 60-62. See also Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1976), 215 and her discussion of the Sacred Tree depicted on several Egyptian murals. "This tree was known as the Living Body of Hathor on Earth. To eat of its fruit was to eat of the flesh and fluid of the Goddess."

⁶⁹ Stone, 214.

⁷⁰ Merchante, 74.

painful labor. And in her later years, during her widowhood, Isis performs many acts of healing, and is revered for her many kindnesses in bringing healing knowledge to humans.⁷¹

Eve

With the introduction of the Christian Eve we have another story.

Second only to the nomadic invasions of the fourth century B.C.E. in its attempt to eradicate goddess religion, the Christian Bible has, in fact, two creation stories. The first story (Gen. 1:26, 27, 28) indicates "the simultaneous creation of man and woman, and their equal importance in the development of the race. All those theories based on the assumption that man was prior in creation, have no foundation in Scripture."⁷² This is not the version, however, which has endured. It's the second version (Gen. 2:21-25) which has been accepted by the popular culture.

In this version, Eve is the first human woman, although in spite of being called Life, Mother of All the Living, she is not a deity. She is also not created first, but rather second, after the human male is created by the male Father

⁷¹ Diodorus Siculus, Diodorus on Egypt, trans. Edwin Murphy (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 1965), 31.

⁷² Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Women's Bible (Seattle: Coalition on Women and Religion, 1974), 15.

God. It also seems that she was presented as a kind of gift to the man, as his companion and helper, and perhaps as his property.

After their creation, Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden and warned not to eat any of the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, the tree being the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They couldn't touch the tree, said God, or they would die. There appeared in the garden a serpent who debated with Eve about the virtues of eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, saying that death would not be the result of eating this fruit. Eve decided to try it, liked it, and shared some of the fruit with her husband, thus initiating a new consciousness. "And the eyes of them both were opened." (Gen. 3:7) The Father God, upon finding out about the transgression, severely punished the woman, saying, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shalt be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." (Gen. 3:16)

There are several points of comparison between this Mother of All the Living (Eve) and the Old European Goddesses of All Life. First is the matter of their creation. Paleolithic and Neolithic goddesses are associated with birth imagery. Even Isis is born of the womb of the Earth Mother. With Eve, not only is all

association with the female birth process ignored, she is also created as a..."mere afterthought. The world is in good running order without her. The only reason for her advent being the solitude of man."⁷³ Originating from Adam's rib, Eve receives her life from him, and maybe even her reason for being. Compare this to Isis, "the Throne," from whom Osiris received his power and life force.

Eve's relationship to Adam is one of crucial importance. As if her secondary position were not already clear, she is condemned to desire her husband and be ruled by him, thus informing women and men alike that "male ownership and control of submissively obedient women was to be regarded as the divine and natural state of the human species."⁷⁴

The sexuality of The Mother of All the Living is an important consideration. As we described earlier with Isis, sexuality was cause for celebration; female genitalia were honored; childbirth was holy creation. This imagery clearly descended from the goddesses of Old Europe: swollen vulvas, birth postures, seed, and pregnant belly--all were revered as sacred.

⁷³ Stanton, 20.

⁷⁴ Stone, 218.

Such was not the case for Eve. Upon eating the fruit, Adam and Eve became aware of the sexual nature of their own bodies, "and they knew that they were naked." (Gen. 3:4) Their first response was one of shame and fear, and they needed to cover and protect themselves, "and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." (Gen. 3:7) Eve's procreative powers were also dismissed: real creation was done by male gods (and, by extension, human males); mere childbirth was to be the result of her desire and was to be accomplished in multiplied sorrow and pain. After all, she ate the fruit first, then gave some to Adam, a point which was not missed by later Church fathers. Even Adam blamed her, saying, "The woman who thou gavest to be with men, she gave me of the tree ... " (Gen. 3:12) Merlin Stone asserts, "We are told that, by eating the fruit first, woman possessed sexual consciousness before man and in turn tempted man to partake of the forbidden fruit, that is, to join her sinfully in sexual pleasures."⁷⁵ This image of Eve as sexually tempting and seductive is one which will follow women through the centuries. Sexuality itself has undergone a kind of symbolic reversal: the sacred has become despised.

As with Isis, Athena, Hera, and even more ancient goddesses, Eve is associated with a number of ancient

⁷⁵ Stone, 221.

symbols, most notably the serpent, the fig tree, and the eye or eyes.

With Isis and her ancient Greek sisters, the serpent, or ureaus, had a sacred context, was a symbol of female power, divinity, and wisdom, and was a link to the Snake Goddess of Old Europe. For Eve, the serpent becomes by symbolic reversal, the very personification of evil and treachery. The serpent persuades Eve to ignore the divine prohibition against eating of the tree of knowledge, and then Eve, in a kind of continuation of this symbolic reversal, assumes the role of the serpent and convinces her husband to eat, as well. Eve and the serpent become closely linked in their criminality and, in the minds of many subsequent authorities, interchangeable.

Eyes and knowledge or wisdom are a powerful combination of symbols for both Isis and Eve. In Egypt, the Eye symbolized wisdom, fertility, and the Goddess. In Eden, these meanings, while somewhat blurred and almost reversed, have remained intact. In the beginning of the tale, Adam and Eve are, in a sense, blind, unaware, undiscerning. They are expressly forbidden from going near, from learning from the tree of knowledge, from discovering the difference between good and evil. When an intense thirst for knowledge is aroused in Eve, she does what she needs to do to get it, and then shares it with her husband. "And when the woman

saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit ... " (Gen. 3:6) Eve then shared the fruit with her husband, "and the eyes of them both were opened." (Gen. 3:7) Erich Fromm considers this the moment of the beginnings of human consciousness, human history, and human civilization.⁷⁶ The eyes are open; the humans are conscious; self-determination has begun. The eyes as a symbol of creativity are much more in keeping with their ancient association with fertility.

The third symbol which is addressed here is Eve's association with the fig tree, or tree of life.⁷⁷ Another symbolic reversal, this tree is no longer an opportunity for sacred communion with the Goddess. Instead, it represents a terrible knowledge of good and evil, in effect, the cause of the fall of man (gender intentional). "The tree in Eden is at the middle of the Garden, a dead giveaway that it is the World Axis/Tree common to earlier mythologies."⁷⁸ The tree

⁷⁶ Erich Fromm, You Shall Be As Gods, qtd. in John A. Phillips, Eve: The History of an Idea (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 91.

⁷⁷ There is much evidence to support that the celebrated apple was probably a fig. Not only did apples not grow in that region, but the pair are reported to have covered themselves with aprons of fig leaves. See Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 214-216.

⁷⁸ Richard Roberts, From Eden to Eros (San Anselmo: Vernal Equinox Press, 1985), 4.

of life is most commonly associated with immortality,⁷⁹ with the food of eternity. So it is that God in the Eden tale defends with "cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree" (Gen. 3:24) "lest he [Adam] put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." (Gen. 3:22) This dreaded tree would lead to self-determination, fertility, and creativity. Eating of it would allow humans to "be as gods," and know the power to create life. The association of the Tree of Life with the power to create life obviously mirrors the association of the germination of a seed and the full belly of the Pregnant Goddess.

In many ways, Isis became one with her symbols (Isis was the Throne; Isis was the sacred tree); the Old Goddess was Life, was Protection, was Nurturance. Hera was the power of the moon to bring forth the sacred blood of renewed fertility.

So too, has Eve become identified with some of her symbols. In countless writings through the centuries, Eve has become synonymous with the serpent, which is synonymous with evil. Eve and evil become interchangeable. It is therefore the role all good Church men to protect society

⁷⁹ See explanation of his concept of the axis mundi in Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1959), 36-37.

against the dangers of women. "First of all, she must be subdued, guarded, and maintained in such a way that she can do no further harm."⁸⁰ Over the centuries, subduing, guarding, and maintaining have taken many forms.

One of the first manifestations was woman's loss of control over her own body.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.⁸¹

The insidious danger of this concept has dominated Western culture up until the present time. One area which lends itself to easy documentation is the legal and criminal justice system. It has really only been in the past ten years or so that marital rape has received much attention or has even been considered possible. The same is true for domestic violence. What a man did in his own home was considered a family, not a criminal, matter. He had a right to his "castle," and women had little protection.

Another power lost to women was that of matrilineal descent, or mother-kin. With the institutionalization of patrilineal descent came the corollary of marital rape:

⁸⁰ Phillips, 118.

⁸¹ Eph. 5:22-24

pre-marital virginity. To ensure the male line of inheritance, paternity needed to be secure, thus strictly limiting the sexual behavior of women. "And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father and shall be burnt with fire." (Lev. 21:9) Strict were the confines of acceptable behavior for women.⁸² Even when the woman was a victim of rape, her value to the man who owned her, whether that be father or husband, was clearly diminished. "If a betrothed woman or married woman was sexually violated, she and the man were both stoned to death." (Deut. 22:23-25)

In marriage, a woman had to obey her husband in all things. The husband, however, could leave his wife whenever he chose. "When a man hath taken a wife and it comes to pass that she find no favor in his eyes because he hath found some uncleanness in her; then let him write her a bill of divorcement and give it in her hand and send her out of his house." (Deut. 24:1) She also usually lost her children, they being considered the property of the

⁸² See Carol P. Christ, "Virgin Goddesses," in Encyclopedia of Religion, ed., Mircea Eliade, [New York: McMillan, 1987], 276. "In a patriarchal and patrilineal society, it becomes critical to control the sexuality of women so that a man can be certain that his children are his. (In earlier, matrilineal societies, all children were legitimate offspring of the mother.)"

father.⁸³ It has only been in recent years in this country that the courts have enacted a policy of giving preference to keeping mother and children together in a custody case. It is not certain if the recent advent of joint custody is a sign of equal sharing of child rearing, or a sign of patriarchal backlash.

As women's economic power base of matrilineal descent was lost, the role of women in society began to shrink as well, giving rise to gender-specificity in occupation, wage-earning, and social custom. Convention led to belief, which led to the alleged absolute truth that woman has always had "the fulfillment of her being, her respectability in the community, in belonging to the man, and in motherhood."⁸⁴ Even today, deviation from this norm is seen by many to be unnatural. As put forth by such "experts" as Maribel Morgan, Phyllis Schlafly, and George Bush, a real woman is supposed to be married, have children, and find fulfillment in the home. This attitude can have a most

⁸³ In fact, there was an attempt to deny women their very experience of motherhood, as illustrated by the homunculus theory: "In intercourse the male deposits in the female a homunculus, or 'little person,' complete with soul, which is simply housed in the womb for nine months, without acquiring any attributes from the mother. The homunculus is not really safe, however, until it reaches male hands again, when a priest baptises it, ensuring the salvation of its immortal soul." [Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, Witches, Midwives, and Nurses (New York: The Feminist Press, 1973), 10.]

⁸⁴ Phillips, 115.

deleterious effect on professional women and other women in the workforce. It is often assumed that a woman is not as serious about her career as is a man, or that she is just waiting until she has children, or that her income is an extra luxury. With the fastest growing segment of this nation's poor and working poor being comprised of women and children, this attitude can ruin lives.

Another loss of power for women is found in her supposed inferiority of intellectual and mental capacity. She did, after all, listen to the serpent and was gullible enough to believe him, something, the belief goes, Adam never would have done.

Because Satan see [sic] that Adam is more excellent, he does not dare to assail him; for he fears that his attempt may turn out to be useless. And I, too, believe that if he had tempted Adam first, the victory would have been Adam's. He would have crushed the serpent with his foot and would have said: "Shut up! The Lord's command was different!"⁸⁵

This attitude is prevalent in so many subtle ways in our society: girl athlete, woman-driver, lady doctor. These are terms and phrases which belie our underlying acceptance of women as less capable, as less competent, than men.

Subservience and submission have become the lot for women, those daughters of Eve. "In the new religion, not

⁸⁵ Phillips, 58.

only the priests, but all men, were considered as direct messengers of the Lord, not merely in Church but in the privacy of a woman's kitchen or even in her bed.⁸⁶ This leads us to the subject of female sexuality. The legacy of the Eve mythology has had the effect of denying the sacredness of female sexuality, with its creative, as well as procreative, aspects.

From the first century C.E. we have Tertullian, influential early Christian writer and father of the church:

And do you not know that you are Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age; the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway ...the first deserter of the divine law...⁸⁷

From the fourth century A.D. we have John Chrysostom, another church father who gleefully exclaims:

What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil nature, painted with fair colors?⁸⁸

In the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas proclaimed that every girl baby was a defective male,

⁸⁶ Stone, 225.

⁸⁷ Tertullian, qtd. in Barbara G. Walker, The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984),, 290.

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, qtd. in Phillips, 22.

conceived only because her father was ill, weak, or in a state of sin at the time.⁸⁹

In the fifteenth century, the publication Malleus Maleficarum, or The Hammer of Witches, appeared. In this book, the Dominicans Kramer and Sprenger laid the groundwork for the persecution and murder of over eight million women as witches, causing a reign of terror which was to last well into the eighteenth century. In the Malleus, they state:

All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable. Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort with devils, it is sufficiently clear that it is no matter for wonder that there are more women than men found infected with the heresy of witchcraft. And blessed be the Highest Who has so far preserved the male sex from so great a crime.⁹⁰

The Malleus also states that "No one does more harm to the Catholic Church than midwives."⁹¹ It was claimed that midwives harmed the faith by easing women's pain in childbirth, against the will of God who imposed it on women as punishment for Eve's original sin. Not only midwives were burned for helping a woman have a painless delivery, but even the women who appealed to them for help in a difficult labor could be condemned as well. (Compare this

⁸⁹ Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, (N.p: n.p., n.d.)

⁹⁰ Malleus Malaeficarum, qtd. in Ehrenreich and English, 12.

⁹¹ Ehrenreich and English, 13.

to Isis, healer and promoter of painless childbirth, to Hera promoter of childbirth, and to the Birth Goddesses of Old Europe.)

And in our own times, when we think attitudes have changed and the position of women has advanced, we need only look at some current rock music lyrics to see that for some people misogyny still thrives. The Eve in this song is deceitful, makes him do wicked things against his will, and destroys him.

Well, I met her in the garden
Underneath that old apple tree,
Sitting with a handful of flowers,
Looking as cool as can be.

We talked away a couple of hours,
Then she laid her hand on my lap.
I thought I got to be dreaming,
Didn't know I fell into her trap.

Then she made me say
Things I didn't want to say.
Then she made me play games
I didn't want to play.

She was a Soul Stripper.

She took my heart, Soul Stripper,
And tore me apart.
She started moving nice and easy,
Slowly getting into my spine,
Killing off this nice little feeling,
Every one she could find.

And when she had me hollow and naked,
That's when she put me down.
Pulled out a knife and flashed it before me,
Stuck it in and turned it around.

Soul Stripper...⁹²

While the above song could perhaps represent the death aspect of the Goddess of Regeneration, it unfortunately finds no balancing counterpart, no sacred text of female sexual creativity and expression. This attitude seems unfortunately to have become the norm.

Mary: the Good Girl of Christianity

In Christianity the New Testament, for the most part, carries on the tradition set by the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament, regarding the treatment of women. There is an attempt to view Mary as the second Eve, who has come to set right Eve's disobedience and the resulting curse on women.

As a feminine figure she is much revered and honored in popular piety. Elaine Pagels is quick to point out, however, that "while Catholics revere Mary as the mother of Jesus, they never identify her as divine in her own right:⁹³ if she is 'Mother of God,' she is not 'God the Mother' on an equal footing with God the Father."⁹⁴

⁹² Perry Cooper and Bob Kaus, AC/DC Anthology (New York: Amsco Publications 1985), 33.

⁹³ Henry Bettenson, ed., Documents of the Christian Church, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 65-66.

⁹⁴ Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 57.

Mary does, however, satisfy what seems to be a deep-seated need to experience creation as feminine. In that regard she continues in the ancient goddess tradition, and she carries with her clusters of the same symbols.⁹⁵

The Virgin Mary in the Catholic Church represents motherhood at its finest. Yet Mary as mother does not experience that which is ordinarily associated with having children: intercourse, labor, and other physical manifestations of giving birth. "One natural biological function, however, was permitted the Virgin in Christian cult--suckling."⁹⁶ From her earliest images to the present, Mary as mother is frequently represented nursing her child. These symbols of breast, milk, and nursing baby are very consistent with all the goddesses who have gone before her, from the Paleolithic on.

The humanity of Mary and the divinity of Jesus have caused considerable discussion over the years due to the implication that Jesus owed his life to the nourishing capabilities of a mere human woman. Mary's milk not only

⁹⁵ See Buffie Johnson, Lady of the Beasts (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 86. "From the Paleolithic onward, people's demand for a protective and nourishing mother figure, as deity, to provide reassurance is evident. To promote male dominance, the Church of Rome denied the divinity of Mary but incorporated her images of Virgin and Mother, the two aspects of the Goddess that were least threatening."

⁹⁶ Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 192.

symbolized the humanity of Jesus, it also was an extremely powerful metaphor of the gift of life itself. Without it, a child had almost no chance for survival. The amazing appearance of milk must have seemed as astounding as the birth itself. The milk of the Mother of God became even more strongly tied to the symbol of life, "for the life of life's own source depended on it. When the medieval mystic meditated on the Incarnation, he saw not only a mother nursing her baby--an event in historical time--but an eternal mystery whereby the Christian soul is perpetually nourished and sustained by grace, of which Mary's milk is a sublime epiphany."⁹⁷ The Church, through its association with Mary, becomes a mother as well, as in this passage from Isaiah: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream; then ye shall suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandied upon her knees."(Isaiah 66:12)

In the Gnostic writing of the early Christians, milk symbolizes a cluster of ideas uniting knowledge, new life, and paradise. In the Odes of Solomon, milk becomes the way by which Logos is conceived. Mary describes the virgin birth not as a physical exchange, but rather an exchange of wisdom and power: "A cup of milk was offered to me; and I

⁹⁷ Warner, 194.

drank it in the sweetness of the delight of the Lord. The son is the cup, and He who is milked is the Father, and the Holy Spirit milked him, because his breasts were full, and it was necessary for him that his milk should be sufficiently released.⁹⁸

The spiritual significance of milk harkens back to the prehistoric goddesses with their exaggerated breasts. It is also reminiscent of the Egyptian Goddess Isis, nourishing her son Horus and, by extension, providing the life force to all of Egypt.

The Romans and, earlier, the Greeks, also connected milk with the eternity of the heavens. Just as drops of milk from the breasts of Hera created the Milky Way, so, too, Mary, "whose blessed breasts, filled with a gift from on high, fed for all the lands the unique glory of earth and heaven..."⁹⁹

Thus the highest life was expressed by "the milk of a mother--white, gleaming, and moist, a pure equivalent of astral light."¹⁰⁰

Milk is often combined with honey as twin images of the promised land, of wisdom, and of new life. We are

⁹⁸ Warner, 195.

⁹⁹ Warner, 196.

¹⁰⁰ Warner, 196.

reminded of earlier images of the bee goddesses of antiquity, as well as the regenerative qualities attributed to honey and bees in ancient Greece.

Another bodily function allowed to Mary was that of crying, and her tears almost certainly link her to the Egyptian Goddess Isis. In fact, the pieta, the image of Mary holding her dying son in her arms, very closely resembles Isis, holding the dead Osiris in her arms.

In her aspect as Mater Dolorosa Mary has a very strong resemblance to the ancient fertility goddess. She receives the battered and broken body of her son in her arms and gazes intently upon his face, her tears falling in unending sorrow. She mourns her loss bitterly, but at the same time knows that he will arise from the dead; and she knows that she, too, is a part of the cycle of sterility and death, and rebirth.

He is the blood offering, she the principle of the abiding earth. The tears she sheds are charged with the magic of her precious, incorruptible, undying body and have the power to give life and make whole.¹⁰¹

Mary's tears are also symbolic of the magical powers of water, reminding us of the prehistoric sacredness of water and water life. The Christian Church uses water as a symbol of life and purification. Baptismal waters, symbolizing

¹⁰¹ Warner, 221.

rebirth, purify and offer hope of new beginnings. In August, 1953, in Syracuse, Sicily, an ordinary, mass-produced, plaster statue of Mary began to weep. Soon crowds were flocking to the tiny house owned by the laborer and his wife. Miracles were recorded, and scientists examined the tears and declared they were human. The Archbishop of Syracuse rejoiced when the small statue wept because he understood the ancient symbolism, that these tears were a blessing:

Mary has wept! Mary has wept!...Weeping is fecund. There has never been a sterile tear. As the rain that falls from on high irrigates the countryside and prepares it to receive, in all fertility, the crops and seed and fruit that will in time come to ripeness, so it happens in the realm of the spirit. A woman who weeps always becomes, in the very act, a mother. And if Mary weeps beside the Cross of Jesus--I can tell you that her weeping was fertile and has made her a mother.¹⁰²

Water, tears, milk...potent symbols of Mary's fertility. These symbols are also reflected in the white, bathing light of the moon. In fact, many people connected the nutrient properties of both milk and the moon. Images were made of Mary nursing while seated within a pale, silver sickle moon, or of Mary nursing on the ground, with a concert of astral symbols behind her.

¹⁰² Warner, 223.

"Dew was 'moonwater' to the Greeks; it imparted life. The moon also coincided with, and appeared to control, the menstrual cycle of women, which was widely considered the prime matter of human life."¹⁰³

And a fourteenth century chant goes:

Ave Regina, pure and loving
Most noble; Ave maris stella,
Ave, dear Maid,
Moon where God took hiding.
But for the Virgin Mary
The world had been lost.¹⁰⁴

As a symbol of fertility, protection, and regeneration, the moon sails through time, connecting us to our prehistory. In Mary we also see the continuation of some, perhaps not as obvious, but no less potent, symbols of life and power.

We meet once again our old friend the serpent. While an important symbol in Mariology, the serpent still suffers a symbolic reversal and is not regarded as a representation of transformation, wisdom, or female divinity. As with Eve, the serpent remains the very embodiment of evil. Mary is seen in countless artists' renderings as slaying or trampling the serpent under her feet. In one illustration, she even instructs her small son to crush the snake, guiding his little foot onto the snake's head.

¹⁰³ Warner, 260.

¹⁰⁴ Warner, 258.

In what may at first seem to be an unlikely association, the snake and egg are closely linked in symbology. Egg, breast, buttocks, are closely associated with the Snake Goddess in prehistory. In Egypt, as in many cultures, the world began with a cosmic egg. During the first decades of Christianity, the Orphic mystery cult was widely popular. Replete with lunar and astral symbolism, this religion had the following creation belief:

The world was created when the Great Goddess, in the shape of a snake, coupled with the sacred serpent Ophion, who, his tail in his mouth, encircles the world in an image of abiding eternity. At the vernal equinox--which coincides with the Christian Annunciation--the light of the growing sun began to warm the egg the Goddess had laid after their union. When it later hatched, the world came into being. Easter, which celebrates the rebirth of the world in the person of the resurrected Christ, is also observed after the vernal equinox, when the sun is gaining over darkness. The Easter egg, which Europeans, Russians, and Americans give each other at this time, is the same Orphic symbol of the birth of the new world.¹⁰⁵

During the late fourth century C.E. teachings about Mary spread very rapidly. Huge numbers of people entered the Church and brought with them memories of their own mother goddesses. The image of the seated or enthroned Mary with the baby on her lap was widespread and probably originates from the image of Isis on her throne, with her

¹⁰⁵ Warner, 269.

son Horus on her lap. This image, in turn, is so reminiscent of either the enthroned Pregnant Vegetation Goddess or of the Birth Goddess of the Neolithic.

Symbols of Mary's fertility were also combined with symbols of agricultural fertility, and Mary became a patron of vegetation and growing things. Rosemary Radford Ruether notes that from the fifth century on, feasts of Mary duplicated the high points of the traditional cycles of the year:

The feasts of sowing, harvesting, and vintage in mid-May (the Feast of Mary's Queenship); mid-August (the Feast of the Assumption); and originally for some December (the Feast of the Annunciation). Christ's birthday, fixed on December 25, was on the feast day of the winter solstice, the birth of the invincible sun...¹⁰⁶

Mary's link to the old Earth goddesses is still clear in the minds of many of her followers, for whom she remains a helping power in times of natural crisis.

Like the goddesses of old, she assures the coming of the new rains, the new grain, the new lamb. She is the maternal image of the divine who understands the daily needs of ordinary people and who renews the processes of nature upon which they depend for life.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 58.

¹⁰⁷ Ruether, 59.

Matthew Fox, in his discussion of Hildegard von Bingen, thirteenth century mystic, says, that Hildegard considers that

Mary...is celebrated for being viridissima virga, the greenest of the green branches, the most fruitful of us all. She is a branch "full of the greening power of springtime," and in such a thought, there resound deep overtones of the goddess tradition in religion. In one of her songs to Mary she says

"You glowing, most green, verdant sprout ...
You bring lush greenness once more [to the]
Shrivelled and wilted [of the world]." ¹⁰⁸

Mary's fertility powers extend not only to the earth, but to humans as well. Her sash or girdle was thought to possess powers to hasten childbirth and to ease its pain. Its depiction in art begins with regularity in the first half of the fourteenth century, and for centuries ever since, Christians have prayed over various relics of Mary's girdle that the curse of infertility be lifted from them.

The girdle or sash of the Virgin has clear beginnings in Isis, with her cluster of fertility and childbirth symbols: the thet, the ankh, and her Horns of Hathor. In ancient Greece, Hera was known to borrow Aphrodite's girdle to stimulate sexuality and conception. ¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Matthew Fox, Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen (Santa Fe: Bear and Company, Inc., 1985), 32.

¹⁰⁹ See Marvin W. Meyer, ed., "Homeric Hymn to Demeter," in The Ancient Mysteries, A Sourcebook: Sacred Texts of the Mystery Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World (San

The multiplicity of Mary's attributes of fertility is indicated by her many names: "Seat of Wisdom," "Queen of Peace," "Virgin of Guadalupe," "Mirror of Justice," "Comforter of the Afflicted," "Mother of the Church,"¹¹⁰ and so on. This is reminiscent of the long list of the many names by which Isis was known, which, in turn, reminds us of the many forms in which the ancient goddess appeared. It would seem that in her various symbols as life-bringer and life-sustainer, Mary became synonymous with the life force itself. In an early Gnostic text called the Secret Book, she is described as "the image of the invisible, perfect spirit...She became the Mother of everything, for she existed before them all, the mother-father."¹¹¹

In her poem "Apocalypse," Carolyn M. Grassi melds this image of Mary with other women and with other goddesses who have gone before her, linking us all together:

if you want me
 I'm underground in labyrinths wells crypts
 I rise like the lotus from murky waters
 crimson petals in a blue green sky
 over the plain at Chartres a jewel set on the city's
 hill

Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 25-27. References are made to "fair-belted Metaneira," to "[Demeter's] fair-belted daughter," and to "[Demeter's] fragrant lap." Karen Voss feels that as characteristics, these terms were at that time a literary convention and suggested fecundity.

¹¹⁰ Carol Frances Jegen, ed., Mary According to Women (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1985), 29.

¹¹¹ Pagels, 62.

through my portal a welcoming song
at my tableside make yourself at home
visit me at altars near blond candles vased flowers
find my hands as vessels of understanding
believing everything's possible

know my contours shape forgotten names
Blance Anne Eleanor Irene Antonia Florence Therese
I suggest everywoman's beauty
clothes with twelve stars
a crescent moon a snake under my feet¹¹²

Naomi Goldenberg, in noting Mary's connection to all the great goddesses of the ancient world, suggests that modern women keep that connection foremost in their minds and not succumb to the limitations of dogma.

As if in answer to her call, a revival in women's spirituality is taking place today, a revival of the Old Religion of the Goddess in the form of Wiccan religion. The revival of the Old Religion brings with it a revival of immanence, or a revival of a state of power-from-within as opposed to power-over. And it brings back the Goddess, because the ancient images, symbols, and stories of the Goddess are as birth-giver, weaver, Earth and growing plants, wind and water, clay, egg, moon, and milk. All of which speak of the powers of connectedness, sustenance, healing and creating.

¹¹² Carolyn M. and Joseph A. Grassi, Mary Magdalene and the Women in Jesus' Life (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 154.

For women, the symbol of the Goddess is profoundly liberating, restoring a sense of authority and power to the female body and all the life processes: birth, growth, lovemaking, aging, and death. The imagery of the immanent Goddess imparts to both women and to Nature the highest order.

The goddess is my constant companion
She appears to me everywhere.
In my shimmering robes
I am her priestess,
Spinning the golden autumn air.¹¹³

¹¹³ Anne Creely, ritual song, prod. Wendy Denton, "In the Public Interst," KBAY/KEEN radio, 30 October 1988.

PART II
Introduction

The purpose of Part II of this work is to examine the characteristics of matristic (Goddess-based, Earth-based) spirituality through interviews with twenty-five leaders in contemporary feminist spiritual thought. Part I examined archaeological and historical evidence of societies which honored the divine in female form. It also chose some well-known goddesses and traced their thematic continuity with the goddesses of prehistory. Comparison with the major female figures of Christianity has also been included.

The feminist theologians, philosophers, and activists interviewed in Part II bring their expertise to the problems of contemporary society. The seven interview questions listed below were constructed with the intent of comparing the values of a matristic model (introduced in Part I) to the values which predominate in our contemporary, traditional Western society.

1. Is there a spiritual component to your work?
2. One of the aspects of spirituality which I am researching is what is called the Feminine, which I am defining as that which embodies the qualities of immanence, connectedness, healing, creating, continuity, interrelatedness, nurturing, and regeneration. Does your work embody the Feminine as I have described it?
3. Does your work empower others?

4. Does your work have an effect on the boundaries between people, and between people and other living things?
5. What are the problems in contemporary society which make your work necessary?
6. Has the traditional Western concept of God as male influenced our society?
7. There seems to be a revival of the Old Religion of the Goddess. Why do you think that is?

Introduction to Interviewees

The individuals chosen to be interviewed for this work were of varied backgrounds and varied professional lives. They did, however, have in common an urgency about the plight of our environment, a dissatisfaction with the oppressions of patriarchy, and a willingness to speak out about their concerns.

Following is a listing of the interviewees and a short identifying summary of each.

Rachel Bagby is the director of the Martin Luther King Papers Project at Stanford University. She is an attorney, an entertainer, and has done important work on ecofeminism and racism.

Zsuzsanna Budapest has been a leader in feminist spirituality for over twenty years. She teaches women how to empower themselves and utilizes ritual and political activism. She is the author of The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries and The Grandmother of Time, among others.

Pam Cooper-White is formerly the director of the Midpeninsula Support Network for Battered Women and is also an ordained minister and an outspoken feminist. She is now at the Graduate Theological Union and is the director of a program which teaches ministers how to sensitively and appropriately deal with domestic violence in their communities.

Ann Creely is a Bay Area witch, a ritualist, and a song writer. She feels that the Goddess speaks through and inspires her work.

Mary Daly is perhaps the most often quoted feminist theologian in the Western world. Her statement, "When God is male, the male is god," literally started a revolution of thought in feminist spirituality. She is the author of Beyond God the Father, Gyn/Ecology, Pure Lust, and others.

Riane Eisler's The Chalice and the Blade has been called "the most important book since The Origin of the Species" by Ashley Montague. Eisler's work talks about a 5,000 year "dominator detour" in human development, a time (which includes the present) when the blade was the ruling principle. Her book points toward a future based on a partnership model of social structure.

Fr. Matthew Fox is a Dominican priest and is the director of the Center for Creation Spirituality. Having irritated certain Church officials, he was officially

silenced for one year for his liberal views on feminism, gay rights, and his concept of God as a child, among other things. He is the author of, among others, Original Blessing, and The Coming of the Cosmic Christ.

Elinor Gadon is an art historian whose book The Once and Future Goddess analyzes the images and symbols of the Goddess from prehistory to the present. She carefully examines the work of contemporary feminist artists who are expressing their spirituality through their art.

Marija Gimbutas has provided a significant portion of the archaeological documentation which strongly suggests the existence of matristic, peace-loving societies in prehistory. Her work centers in Old Europe and overwhelmingly supports the theory that Goddess-based societies were overrun by nomadic, warrior societies with a male sky god. She is the author of, among others, Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe and The Language of the Goddess.

Leslie Gray is a Native American shaman employing ancient healing ritual in a contemporary urban environment.

Susan Griffin is a feminist poet and philosopher. She has the brilliant ability to synthesize seemingly disparate data in a way which clarifies the relationships. She is the author of numerous books of poetry as well as the books Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her and Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature. She is currently

working on a book on nuclear disarmament.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D. is the co-founder and co-director of WATER (Women's Alliance for Theology, Education, and Ritual). She is the author of From Woman Pain to Woman Vision and is a proponent of forming mutually supportive communities of accountability.

Hallie Austen Igelhart has been a pioneer in the women's spirituality movement. She has published extensively and leads Womanspirit groups and workshops. She has been concerned with the ways in which established, patriarchal religions have not addressed the needs of women, and teaches both women and men how they can access their inner spirituality and inner guides to effect change. She is the author of Womanspirit: A Guide to Women's Wisdom, as well as numerous articles.

Mark Knipper is committed to changing the perpetration of domestic violence in our culture by working with the perpetrator to help him see alternatives to violent behavior. He cites patriarchal society's role models for men as being at the crux of the violence epidemic. Knipper leads a spiritually-based men's group for batterers or men who feel they could become batterers. He is also a peer counselor with Alternatives to Violence.

Fr. Charles Moore is an attorney and a man who became a priest late in life. He has extensive knowledge of Goddess

history and lore, especially of the Goddess as She appeared in Ireland, which is his heritage. He is a strong proponent of working to change the Church from the inside. His own services are non-hierarchical and non-patriarchal in nature. He feels that we must be ever vigilant in incorporating the feminine perspective in all that we do.

Vicki Noble is one of the best known pioneers in the women's spirituality movement. Her widely acclaimed Motherpeace tarot cards merged an extensive blend of cross-cultural Goddess images and myths with a grounding in feminist politics. She is a feminist shaman and teacher. She is the author of Motherpeace: A Way to the Goddess Through Myth and Tarot and is the creator/publisher/editor of the new publication Snake Power: A Journal of Contemporary Female Shamanism.

Mayumi Oda is an internationally-known artist whose larger than life images of the Goddess are alive with female sensuality. Her goddesses are huge, ample-breasted, and bursting with life and power. In her work she examines many of the dualities of Western religion. Comments on her recent exhibit "Visions of Yin" have noted both the "earthy appeal" and the "otherworldliness" of her goddesses; in other words, they combine rather than separate body and spirit.

Pat Reif, IHM, Ph.D. is the Chair of the Masters

Program in Feminist Spirituality at the Immaculate Heart College Center in Los Angeles. She is working through the vehicle of education to empower women in their spirituality and enable them to see the ways in which patriarchal religions have contributed to the "isms" which so desperately plague our society. She is committed to involving all women in her program, assuring that there is an equitable racial/ethnic representation in both materials and staff.

Charlene Spretkak is a strong voice in the feminist spirituality and ecology movements. She is the editor of The Politics of Women's Spirituality which she wrote to dispel the myth that women's spirituality was only a sidelight to the "real" work of politics. In her book Lost Goddesses of Early Greece she explored the prehistoric roots of familiar Greek goddesses and showed many of the ways in which patriarchal religions co-opted these goddesses and the power they represented. She is also the author of The Spiritual Dimensions of Green Politics, in which she examines the very natural connection between feminism and environmental concerns.

Starhawk is perhaps one of the best known witches. Her book The Spiral Dance has been attributed with being responsible for starting hundreds of covens. Her book was one of the first to outline the history of the Wiccan

religion, explain the roots of Paganism, and suggest the Goddess as a viable alternative to patriarchal religion. Believing in the power of ritual to put us in touch with both the divine and nature and to increase our power, Starhawk has led numerous public rituals for such causes as nuclear disarmament and healing the earth. She is also the author of Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery.

Merlin Stone is perhaps the Godmother of the Goddess movement. Her book When God Was a Woman launched a veritable revolution of awareness for women of their sacred history. Having been told for so long that they are not in the image of the divine, women joyously celebrated the historical information uncovered by Stone that the divine had first been conceived of as female and that for millennia the sacred godhead was deeply feminine. She is also the author of Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood and regularly publishes a newsletter which connects on a national level those individuals interested in Goddess information, events, and products.

Vivienne Verdon-Roe has a deep commitment to peace and to women. Her Academy Award-winning film "Women for America - For the World" is a moving series of personal responses on the part of women toward the nuclear madness of today's "leaders." Verdon-Roe funded her project by holding

"parties" in living rooms across the country and produced this fine work with the support of individual contributions.

Veronica Weeks-Basham is a healer and body-worker trained in Native American spirituality. She believes that the western duality between body and spirit has been felt as a physical pain in the body, a pain which we have all too often tried to alleviate with substances or unhealthy behaviors. Part of her job, she feels, is to empower people to access that pain, to listen to what their bodies are trying to tell them, and to heal themselves by bringing their bodies and spirits together.

Patrice Wynne is the co-founder and co-owner of Gaia Bookstore, which provides books, tapes, materials, and art relating to the Goddess and feminist spirituality. She works in partnership with a man who shared her vision. She is also the author of The Womanspirit Sourcebook.

QUESTION 1

Is there a spiritual component to your work?

More than a critique of patriarchal reality, feminism is spiritual transition, a politics of being in which a change of consciousness is integrated with modes of living. New values and priorities emerge from this process.¹

The interviewees selected for this project were, for the most part, feminists, though not all labeled themselves so. All were, however, involved in suggesting alternative ways of being in a traditional, Western, patriarchal society.

In asking about the spiritual component as participating in their work lives, the purpose was to see if people who were attempting an alternative world view, might be more holistic in combining, rather than separating, major areas of their lives. Also to be examined was whether the more traditional components of Western religion held up to a feminist approach.

The responses indicated an awareness of spirituality and work existing in combination rather than separation. It would seem, in fact, that the spiritual component gave meaning or shape to the work arena. The response range was narrow in the sense of broad differences. All interviewees responded in the affirmative; it was the manner of

¹ Baba Copper, "The Voice of Women's Spirituality in Futurism," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1982), 502.

combination of spirituality and work which differed, and there, not by much.

When asked this question, Pat Reif, said:

Absolutely. Of course. The thing about the word spiritual, or spirituality, for me is that I see spirituality as permeating everything we do. I think when we talk about it we tend to think of it as something other than, different from, the body, the physical. And for me, I don't want to reinforce an age-long dualism between spirit and body. So, for me, all the choices I make about what I eat, what kinds of recreation I choose to engage in, what kinds of friends I choose to make, all of those to me are part of my spirituality.²

"I wouldn't even say 'spiritual component,'" says Susan Griffin, feminist poet and philosopher, "Because it's so mixed-in; I don't know what's spirit and what isn't. The work itself is a path to me."³ "It's all of it," says Native American shaman Leslie Gray. "From a Native American point of view, there isn't any such thing as a spiritual component. And I also don't make any distinction between the spiritual and the material."⁴

In the sense of "material" meaning "physical," Veronica Weeks-Basham, body worker and healer, says,

I work with the body, and the neutrality. You know, volcanoes happen partly, if not wholly, because we pollute and get things out of balance. One of the things that a volcano does is it replenishes the ozone, so

² Pat Reif, interview with author, 14 July 1989.

³ Susan Griffin, interview with author, 17 July 1989.

⁴ Leslie Gray, interview with interview, 31 July 1989.

that when you understand that we've almost completely annihilated the ozone, then you understand that we have created the kind of situation here--there have to be volcanoes...And I see that as very neutral but fierce. And I see the Dark Goddess as functioning through us in that way for transformation. Bringing a kin aspect is relevant and becomes demonstrative of how I approach people, and my responses. Native Americans, a lot of them, are going back to their spirituality and back to the old ways because they know that what they've been doing has not been working. Our traditional ways were not separated from the spiritual and actual living. It was our everyday life: the way we thought, the way we talked, everything was related...the way we garnished our food, the way we ate our food, the way we lived with each other, the way we interacted with each other, had its ceremony.⁵

Some of the interviewees felt that their spirituality embodied a life view consistent with feminism, that, in fact, feminism and spirituality are historically and in practical terms intertwined. Known sometimes as the mother of the Goddess movement, Zsuzsanna Budapest says of her work and spiritual lives:

My entire life is spirituality. What I have done for the last 20 years is to convince the Americans that they cannot have women's liberation without spiritual liberation.⁶

Budapest's work often consists of teaching women ways in which they can integrate Wiccan spirituality into their daily lives.

⁵ Jenny McLeod, interview with author, 11 August 1989.

⁶ Z. Budapest, interview with author, 2 May 1989.

Vicki Noble, teacher, healer, shaman, would seem to live the integration Budapest suggests:

All of my work is coming from the spirit, a really deep spiritual base. I call my feminism my spiritual path, or I call my spiritual path feminism.⁷

Many of the interviewees seemed to feel that living one's spirituality and considering one's work to be an extension of one's spirituality would, of necessity, lead to political action based on that spirituality. Many of these individuals are activists, as well as healers, teachers, artists, or writers. All have a keen awareness of issues concerning human rights, the environment, animal rights, pornography, and peace. They also seem to express more or less cautious feelings of hope, of a belief in the possibility of making a difference. And all expressed a commitment to improving life's conditions for other living beings, as well as for themselves.

It seems that this spiritual/feminist voice is expressing an attitude which is rather new. The attitude of combining spiritual beliefs and daily living is not in itself a new one. Neither is, particularly, combining spiritual/political beliefs into political action; patriarchal religions and their representatives have done that since their inception. What does seem to be new in the

⁷ Vicki Noble, interview with author, 22 August 1989.

feminist/spiritual approach is the attitude about what could be thought of as suffering.

Of traditional religions, Clifford Geertz, in the The Interpretation of Cultures, says

As a religious problem, the problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering but how to suffer, how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable--something, as we say, sufferable.⁹

This is reflected in the predominating attitude of Judeo-Christian tradition which promotes the properness, saintliness even, of putting up with, or enduring in silence, of martyrdom.¹⁰ Contemporary feminist spiritual leaders seem to dismiss this way of being in the world, of being in their spirituality. Political activism is embraced as embodying their spirituality. They are not willing to accept conditions of suffering and adjust themselves to them; instead they are actively pursuing--in a spiritual context--the changing of those conditions. There seems to be a rejection here of what Mary Daly, with her wonderful way with words, calls "sadospiritual" religion.¹¹

⁹ Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books 1973), 104

¹⁰ The Christian attitude toward suffering encompasses many facets, as evidenced by the work of Carolyn Walker Bynum and others. Here, however, the aspect being discussed relates to the valorization and glorification of suffering; that is, suffering for its own sake or as a virtue.

¹¹ Mary Daly, Pure Lust (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 36.

Instead, there appears to be a celebration of life and a recognition of the need for healing and wholeness. For Hallie Austen Igelhart:

Spirituality is the union of all the parts. It is not a separate part from the rest of life. It's when all parts are united, when we recognize that we're all part of the whole, that we're all part of Spider Woman's web, we're all children of the Goddess...I have tried to approach my work that way, where it's infused with the spirit of that.

The purpose of my work is to try to help bring all the fragmented and shattered pieces of our lives together to infuse our everyday lives with a sense of meaning and ritual and just the life force--bring the recognition of the life force back into our lives. By the life force I mean the cycles, I mean birth, death, rebirth...An essential part of earth religions, Goddess religions, is recognizing those cycles.¹²

Conclusion

It would seem, then, that the kind of work under discussion here is work accomplished and carried on within a context of wholeness. A sense of interconnectedness predominates, a sense that one cannot help but express one's level of spiritual awareness in everything one does. In other words, one's life choices are one's spirituality. The goal is, of course, to make choices consciously and to live, work, play, and love within a context of a chosen framework.

¹² Hallie Austen Igelhart, interview with author, 3 July 1989.

Mary Hunt, co-founder of WATER [Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual], defined spirituality as:

Attention to the quality of life choices that we make. It's what I call spirituality for creative survival, and it encompasses attention to body, friends, relationships, work, and modes of reflection.¹³

Imagine a society where conscious attention were directed on the wholeness of life's activities, a society where choices were made with the entire spectrum of human needs in mind. Imagine what it would be like to have integration as the model for success, and not pride in one's ability to "compartmentalize" and seal off for hours, months, or even years entire parts of one's self. And imagine honoring one's spirituality through one's body, and not seeing the body as something to be conquered or regimented.

Our lives would take on very different dimensions if we could honor all parts of ourselves. If body and spirit, work and play, male and female, could sit together in a circle, each with an equal place, our self expression as humans would not only encompass a fullness most of us can probably not even imagine, but would also encompass the fullness of other human lives. Exploitation and domination would recede as ways of life and would be replaced by the comingling and co-creation so frequently cited in ancient

¹³ Mary E. Hunt, interview with author, 18 November 1989.

myth. Perhaps it is time to relinquish our attachment to our divisions, both internal and external, and to recognize that wholeness is the true basis of life.

QUESTION 2

One of the aspects of spirituality which I am researching is what is called "the feminine," which I am defining as that which embodies the qualities of immanence, connectedness, healing, creating, continuity, interrelatedness, nurturing, and regeneration.

Does your work embody "the feminine," as I have described it?

Much contemporary feminist scholarship focuses on the reemergence of Goddess-based religion or concept of the divine. Much has been said about the intrinsically holistic nature of the Goddess, her embodiment of wholeness, her wisdom of the primary life forces. As we increase our awareness of the potentially annihilating force of our modern technology, and as we regard our patterns of history with dominance and violence as primary motif, we yearn for a "kinder, gentler" approach to human experience.¹ It is perhaps with more hope than clarity that some feminist scholars and theologians have labelled a collection of essentially life-oriented and life-saving traits as "the feminine."

In questioning interviewees about their thinking regarding "the feminine" terminology, there was some

¹ This is in no way meant to give President George Bush credit for actually meaning it when he said he intended to make America a "kinder, gentler" nation. See Mary E. Hunt, "Doing Theology in a "Kinder-Gentler Nation": A Feminist Response to Right-Wing Backlash," paper delivered at the American Academy of Religion, Anaheim, 18 November 1989. "If Ronald Reagan was kind and gentle; if George Bush is kinder and gentler; then I hate to see what kindest and gentlest is going to be!"

expectation of finding agreement with and defense of the term. Instead, what agreement there was, was for the notion that the term "the feminine" is too limiting, or panders to the patriarchal mindset, or marginalizes the characteristics it represents.

Charlene Spretnak rejects the use of the term altogether:

I don't use the label "the feminine." I have a lot of trouble with the fact that it came out of Jung, really, in terms of current usage. And in his system, the feminine is passive and the receptive, and the masculine is the active...I went to hear Joseph Campbell; he was very Jungian even though he insisted he was totally eclectic and not using any school. But I remember once he showed a big painting of a woman on horseback. I think she was naked and flying out of her bed through the window, and he said that this was her animus, this was her masculine side, and now she's going out into the world to have an effect on the world.

I made the point in the Introduction to The Politics of Women's Spirituality that if you examine the most fierce, physical, potentially destructive action that a female of the species would engage in, it would be the defense of her babies. And the only way that could fit into that masculine/feminine thing would be to say that her behavior at that point was being formed by her animus, her masculine nature inside her. But it's so connected with her motherhood, is so deeply female, I don't think it can hold up.²

In her criticism of Jung's masculine/feminine archetypal model, Naomi Goldenberg says,

² Charlene Spretnak, interview with author, 3 September 1989.

Jung is often considered to be an ally of the women's movement because of the high value he placed on 'the feminine.' It is certainly true that he thought women who exhibited the feminine deserved more respect in Western culture. However, as soon as a woman began to behave in a way that deviated from Jung's feminine archetypes, she was heavily censured.³

History is full of accounts of women who were "heavily censored" for their "masculine" behavior. Even today, a real woman is supposed to want babies, hearth and home, and meets rejection, or at least criticism, when she strays too far from the mold. Attend any PTA meeting and you will hear, "yes, she's a doctor [or lawyer or manager or professor], but her poor children...It's no wonder they do drugs [or are sexually active or don't get "good" grades, etc.]. Women continue to be punished in a variety of subtle, and sometimes not so subtle (as in cases of child custody) ways when they exhibit what Jung would call an overabundance of Logos. Again, Goldenberg:

Jung believed that women's consciousness was characterized by 'Eros'--the ability to make connections. On the other hand, the consciousness of men exhibited 'Logos' characteristics--a fact which made men more capable of analytic thought. 'In men,' Jung said, 'Eros, the function of relationships, is usually less developed than Logos. In women, on the other hand, Eros is an expression of their true nature, while their

³ Naomi Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 56.

Logos is often only a regrettable accident.'
[emphasis mine]⁴

It would seem, then, that an over-reliance on the term "the feminine" could lead to exactly the kinds of limitations that feminist theologians and scholars want to avoid.

For theologian Mary Daly, "the feminine" "is a male-enclosed, male-imposed, definition which can be dragged out at any time to keep women classified and oppressed."⁵

Using the term "the feminine" may also promote a separation which works counter to the qualities of connectedness which it attempts to support. For Naomi Goldenberg, "Acceptance of the anima/animus theory does not support integration of the sexes, but rather leads to more separatism."⁶

Hallie Austen Igelhart agrees with Goldenberg and suggests an alternative to the term:

I prefer to use the word "sacred feminine." It may be changing, but the feminine has all of these Jungian associations which mean: this is feminine, and this is masculine, which is really a duality that we need to get beyond. Somehow the term "sacred feminine" changes it...[It] brings in that added dimension, that larger dimension of not just psychology, but of spirituality...An aspect of the "sacred feminine" is extremely active; it's not just

⁴ Goldenberg, 57.

⁵ Mary Daly, telephone interview with author, 7 November 1989.

⁶ Goldenberg, 59.

receptive. I mean, we give birth, right?
What could be more active? It's the ultimate
act of creation manifestation.⁷

All of the responses to this question either outright rejected the term or, at the very least, qualified its usage. In addressing this active, creative aspect of the feminine, Jenny McLeod, Tribal Chief of the Salinian Nation, felt that it is important to make the distinction that "feminine" does not mean that which is found only in women. She also feels that humanness means a blending of our feminine and masculine aspects. While this may seem to come close to a Jungian model, McLeod differs from it in a significant way. She does not view these aspects as being in opposition to one another, or as residing in a gender-specific way in an individual.

Just because you and I have that sexuality, woman's sexuality, doesn't mean that we're woman or man. We have both those things. We have both a female and a maleness in us. The maleness connects us to the world around us. The femaleness is the nurturing, the dreaming, the understanding, the caring, all of these things. When you care about something, you don't just sit and care. You do something about it. You go in that way to make things right. And yes, the maleness is there, too, to ground us to the other aspects that impact us so that we can act in a way that is complete.⁸

⁷ Hallie Austen Igelhart, interview with author, 3 July 1989.

⁸ Jenny McLeod, interview with author, 11 August 1989.

McLeod also discusses behaviors which are considered non-traditional, in a gender-related sense, by our culture:

Now you take the male, just because he shows his feminine side, his caring, comes home and takes care of the baby, and he diapers and he coos, and does all these things, doesn't make him less of a man. The only thing is: he's in a man's body. His spirit has no gender. [emphasis mine]⁹

Compare McLeod's comments to Jung's, as quoted by Goldenberg

No one can get around the fact that by taking up a masculine profession, studying and working like a man, woman is doing something not wholly in accord with, if not directly injurious to, her feminine nature. [By moving into a cross-gender role,] she is doing something that would be scarcely possible for a man to do, unless he were a Chinese. [Note the racism.]¹⁰ Could he, for instance, be a nursemaid or run a kindergarten? When I am speaking of injury, I do not mean merely physiological injury, but above all psychic injury.¹¹

I would maintain here that psychic and spiritual have rather similar connotations. Compared to McLeod's statement of spirit having no gender, Jung seems to be implying that it does, and, in fact, any departure from these strict gender-specific guidelines leads to spiritual or psychic injury. In fact, Goldenberg says, "The archetype becomes

⁹ McLeod, interview.

¹⁰ This is Goldenberg's bracket.

¹¹ Goldenberg, 56.

the functional equivalent of 'God's will,' which [it] is quite hopeless and downright immoral to fight."¹²

Calling my list of characteristics (connectedness, regeneration, nurturing, etc.) "essential to our survival as a species and to thriving and living in harmony with all of creation," Rachel Bagby also cautions against "calling that feminine and not masculine."

When they have the label of feminine, I have found that men who have those qualities ...get shuttled off, or there's not the encouragement to develop them. And women who perceive those qualities as being the cause of their oppression sometimes also devalue them.¹³

Bagby also feels that while "there is something that is woman that includes those definitions, it includes other things, too."

There's a fierceness of woman that I feel that fiercely protects life, FIERCELY! FIERCE! Fiercer than any...force that I've seen that has just been violent. I'm not talking about violence. I'm talking about a fierce strength that comes from woman.¹⁴

Calling this strength the "raw potency [of] the Dark Goddess," Vicki Noble says

[It] is what we need and is what I believe is awakening now on the planet. And she's awakening with this kind of, like a volcano, with that kind of ferocity but neutrality. You know, volcanoes happen partly, if not wholly, because we pollute and get things

¹² Goldenberg, 61.

¹³ Rachel Bagby, interview with author, 28 July 1989.

¹⁴ Bagby, interview.

out of balance. One of the things that a volcano does is it replenishes the ozone, so that when you understand that we've almost completely annihilated the ozone, then you understand that we have created the kind of situation here--there have to be volcanoes...And I see that as very neutral but fierce. And I see the Dark Goddess as functioning through us in that way for transformation. Bringing a kind of fierceness but not a cruelty.¹⁵

It is important to emphasize the neutrality of this fierceness. It is not to be confused with a thunderbolt God, whose judgments on human moral transgressions can be severe. Instead, the fierceness of the Dark Goddess is life-affirming. Noble explains:

We live in a sadistic, cruel culture, and it's not about the Dark Goddess, you know. But the arising of this force in a person, in a woman, or any person, that would make her say "No!" to whatever is criminal, and cruel, and horrible, that force--that fierce passion--, I think, belongs to the Dark Goddess. So, I feel that is just where we are; that is just what is needed; and that is just what is coming up.

The sweetest women who don't even have any feminist identity on a conscious level are beginning to bring the Dark Goddess through their relationships with men...It's just starting to happen. And really nice women who boycott and who say, 'No, you're not going to dump nuclear waste in my backyard. I'm not going to allow that.' That kind of thing. That's the Dark Goddess.¹⁶

Strength of character. Passion of conviction. These are not the usual attributes associated with what Spretnak

¹⁵ Vicki Noble, interview with author, 22 August 1989.

¹⁶ Nobel, interview.

refers to as "'the eternal fluffy feminine' a la Freud and Jung."¹⁷ Instead, on the subject of current use of the term "the feminine," Starhawk says:

I tend to stay away from the term 'feminine' because I'm not sure that we actually know what that means...If you look back at the images of the ancient goddesses, you'll find a lot of them were wild, aggressive, active, connected with culture, with rationality, with law-giving, with all of those things we sort of identify as masculine, just as much as you can find images that are nurturing. And you can find images of male gods that are nurturing.

So, for me, how I would define the Goddess, who is not just feminine, is more with the idea of the immanence of spirituality. That the Universe itself is a living body that we're all a part of, and when we talk about the Goddess, we're talking about cycles of birth, growth, death, and regeneration that are embodied in all living things.¹⁸

Literally embodying the actuality of cycles in her work is Veronica Weeks-Basham, healer and body-worker. She feels that involution is a process which is sometimes closely aligned with regeneration and healing.

Involution happens when, after you have a baby and you bleed for several weeks as that part of the uterus is being absorbed, as it gets smaller, and you're discarding any of the material that's not needed anymore to support or grow a baby. So that the term involution means a breaking down. And so sometimes part of healing is a breaking down. And it's probably one of the more scary parts of healing. And one of the more

¹⁷ Charlene Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1982), 560.

¹⁸ Starhawk, interview with author, 4 May 1989.

scary parts of the feminine. A lot of images that different cultures have of that breaking-down side of the feminine are pretty scary images: the third face of the Triple Goddess is scary; Hekate is very scary. In the tarot deck one of the images that comes up frequently for the female energy is that from the day you're born she gives you birth, but carried in that are the seeds of your death.

For centuries people have tried to divide those two. Somehow take the domain of death out of the feminine, or contribute it so totally to the feminine, that they have to fight her as well as fight their own death.

I used to do a lot of terminal care, and for a long time I was in a place of fighting this enemy, until I started to realize that for some people, at a certain place in their life, it was a very healing thing to die, and that the very act of dying was a healing experience for them.¹⁹

Conclusion

The term "the Feminine" has proved to be woefully inadequate to describe what is essentially a life view enumerated in the characteristics of immanence, connectedness, healing, creating, continuity, interrelatedness, nurturing, and regeneration. Many attempts have been made to find a term which will clearly relay the essence of this life view. Some suggestions have included "the sacred feminine" or "eco-feminism"; others have attempted to avoid gender completely, such as "ecological" or "earth-based."

¹⁹ Veronica Weeks-Basham, interview with author, 27 September 1989.

Finding the right term is appropriate, as naming so often confers destiny. The theologians, writers, and philosophers interviewed here all talked about a paradigm shift where competitive dualism would not be the norm. All look forward to building a world view based on the recognition of inter-connectedness and the affirmation of life-promoting processes. "In the beginning was the word," is a recognition of the power of language to shape that which the word describes. And so it is that as a new consciousness or world view is created, a new word must be found.

QUESTION 3

Does your work empower others?

Personal power is anything but a simplistic concept. In a society based upon the dynamics between dominants and subordinates, power takes on several shades of meaning, and means different things depending upon one's position in the hierarchy.

In order to effectively analyze the meanings of personal power, it is useful to examine the components of power. Many of the interviewees seemed to suggest that the concept of empowerment is predicated on the notion of agency, or self-determination. Others suggested knowledge. Most emphasized their belief that being empowered included a sense of interconnectedness and felt that the manner in which one views the sacred is important; an immanent view, where the sacred resides within one's self, was felt to be more empowering, in contrast to a transcendent view of the sacred which places power outside of oneself. This latter view is, of course, the basis of the traditional western religious tradition.

Carol Christ contends that women's experience is "a source of insight about the divine."¹ Linda Sexson feels that "The sacred quality of our lives is fabricated from the metaphors we make," allowing us to recognize "...the divine

¹ Carol P. Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), ix.

in the ordinary."² It follows, then, that we must create new metaphors to match our experience and "find another way to understanding ourselves and our relation to the cosmos."³

Consistent with this idea, Matt Fox describes an image which he prefers:

One image I play with...is moving from the image of climbing Jacob's ladder to dancing Sarah's circle. And I think that's a very deep image. Climbing Jacob's ladder is not only in religion, it's in our capitalist, patriarchal society: that we climb ladders to get places. And what's implied in that image? You know, first of all, on a ladder only a few can survive. Not many make it up a ladder; and if there are too many up near the top, the whole thing would fall. And there're all kinds of implications. But you contrast that to dancing in Sarah's circle: the idea of being on the earth and dancing a circle dance; there's always room for another...And there's room for the handicapped; there's room for the young, for the old...You know, it's a tremendous shift in symbolism. And I think it applies to all culture, not just religious institutions.⁴

This agency aspect of empowerment may look quite different from the "power-over" kind of power most of us have grown accustomed to calling "power." According to Native American shaman Leslie Gray

It's about personal empowerment, as opposed to dominance over other people, which I think everybody, female or not, is really

² Lynda Sexson, Ordinarilly Sacred (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 3.

³ Elinor W. Gadon, interview with author, 26 October 1989.

⁴ Fr. Matthew Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

aiming at. And I think people just make a terrible mistake or they're poorly educated when what they're looking for is power over other people. That always backfires.⁵

In the words of artist Mayumi Oda:

People are really interested in empowering, but people don't know what empowering means. Sometimes it's being very, very receptive. It's so receptive that it's the most powerful place...I like to show the spirit of unfoldment...the oneness, sometimes centeredness. Sometimes strength. You know, like that Kuan Yin with the word⁶... that strength is what we need [in order] to see our egohood, how dualistic we are, how ego is in the way. It needs that kind of power to cut through our ego.⁷

In referring to self-empowerment, Mary Hunt uses the term religious agency, which she defines as spiritual integrity. She feels that in this regard, agency has three components;

One is naming experience on its own terms, which is something that women are just not invited to do. A second piece of it is to make decisions on the basis of that naming...The third would be to develop communities of accountability in which those decisions, on the basis of experience, are lived out in a critical and supportive way.⁸

Naming and making decisions on the basis of that naming can be seen as a part of gaining knowledge. Reclaiming our

⁵ Leslie Gray, telephone interview with author, 31 July 1989.

⁶ Oda is referring to her painting by the same name.

⁷ Mayumi Oda, interview with author, 23 August 1989.

⁸ Mary E. Hunt, interview with author, 18 November 1989.

heritage and our history as women can be a very powerful way of naming our experiences. Historically, women (and other non-white, non-monied or propertied men) have been denied knowledge of their heritage. Today, we are witness to a time of ever-increasing re-evaluation of history, literature, art, to re-examination of archaeological data, to a new, growing revaluing of female experience. For Hallie Austen Igelhart,

Empowerment is...about learning that we as women, that being feminine, being female has very powerful and wonderful and positive aspects to it. And that the very qualities which have been denigrated in this culture are our sources of power and are valued, have been valued in other cultures. That's why the cross-cultural studies are really affirming and reassuring, and looking at these images of the goddesses is such an affirming reminder of it.

When I started working with these images, even when I had them just in a slide show, I noticed whenever I had to work on a slide show, no matter how I'd feel, I always felt so good afterwards. I felt empowered.⁹

Seeing images of strong, vital women, who were unknown to us for so long, can be a profoundly liberating experience. In commenting on her Oscar Award-winning film, Vivienne Verdon-Roe says:

I think that's why 'Women for America--For the World' had so much success. I think people see it and say, 'I am now more in touch with my sense of power than I was before I saw this.' And really they're in touch with it not because I did anything else

⁹ Hallie Austen Igelhart, interview with author, 3 July 1989.

other than allow some other women to speak who had some very universal themes and emotions about our life together. And it opened peoples' hearts up. People allowed themselves to open up their hearts. Because it was safe. You know. It was safe. These women were saying things which moved them, and which they themselves feel. And then they opened up their hearts and they go, 'Wow! I can do my bit here. I can talk like these women...to my husband, to my neighbors, to my friends. I can do something.'¹⁰

Connectedness, the third component mentioned in defining empowerment, reflects a sense of the oneness of all life, of relatedness and interconnection. This sense of connectedness is admittedly difficult to achieve in a patriarchy, itself the very soul of separateness. Starhawk, who calls this separateness "the Consciousness of Estrangement," says:

We are taught to look at these realities as separate, taught that rape is a separate issue from nuclear war, that women's struggle for equal pay is not related to a Black teenager's struggle to find a job, or to the struggle to prevent the export of a nuclear reactor to a site on a web of earthquake faults near active volcanoes in the Philippines.¹¹

This propensity to see the world in fragments, rather than whole, has been especially true of our relationship with the natural world and the environment. Biblical

¹⁰ Vivienne Verdon-Roe, interview with author, 13 July 1989.

¹¹ Starhawk, "Consciousness, Politics, and Magic," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1982), 173.

injunctions which call for dominion over the natural world have ignored the delicate interplay between our environment and ourselves. Recapturing that awareness of relationship is one way, Starhawk feels, we can recreate our personal power, a power which comes from within.

I think when we understand the cycles, when we feel our links with those cycles and with the broader, natural world all around us, we're better able to understand ourselves, to feel at home and at peace with our own cycles, and to find our own real ability, which, you know, is the root meaning of the word 'power.' To go through those cycles, to grow, to change, to do whatever it is we need to do.¹²

Growing up, as most of us have, in a culture that places power outside of people, external, and ranked according to a hierarchical structure has the effect of emphasizing the outer, as opposed to the inner, life. Not only does it still any inner voice or wisdom, it teaches us to disbelieve in such a voice altogether. This inner voice, also called the soul, or merging of the conscious and unconscious mind, or One Mind, or holistic thought, is an expression of "union, simultaneous union between one's physical and mental selves and between one's self and the

¹² Starhawk, interview with author, 4 May 1989.

life forces around us. This sense of union with the larger powers of life is tremendously empowering."¹³

This view of life which considers "the sacred as existing within all life" is known as immanence, and it offers a very different view of our world and our reality than the concept of transcendence, the belief that a deity is not part of us, is above us in heaven, and is, most assuredly, off this planet. This is the predominant world view of most religions today. According to Merlin Stone:

The image of a transcendent deity appears to be closely connected to societies that developed structured systems of hierarchy, accepting the idea of an invisible, omnipotent potentate who moves everything and everyone else around like pawns on a chess board. The concept of immanence reveals an entirely different view of the world. Regarding both genders, other races, other species, plant life, even rivers and oceans as sacred creates quite different attitudes and feelings about life. When spiritual beliefs lead us to the perception of all life on earth as sacred, pollution of the environment is viewed not only as anti-social or illegal, but as blasphemy.¹⁴

This idea that the sacred resides within all living things is reminiscent of prehistoric human times when the Goddess was the predominant motif of regeneration and

¹³ Hallie Austen Igelhart, "Expanding Personal Power Through Meditation," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1982), 294.

¹⁴ Merlin Stone, When God Was A Woman (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1976), 10.

connectedness.

One of my favorite expressions of holistic art from the Upper Paleolithic period is the large number of what are called 'vulva images'...circular images slashed by a line. These were incised in rock as reliefs, either by themselves or as part of the anatomy of a female figure, the pubic triangle. These pieces are holistic on many levels at once. The slashed circle is not only a continuous motif that implies infinity and encompasses everything; it also refers to woman, her vulva, and her womb.¹⁵

For women, the empowering potential of vulva as hierophany,¹⁶ is staggering.

This awareness of the interconnection of life and an honoring of life processes may, for a while, remain rather fragile for women. It would be useful, therefore, to implement Hunt's suggestion of developing "communities of accountability" to support this awareness and thereby nurture the growth of personal empowerment.

Another aspect of power which bears discussion is the act of empowering another person, whether this involves the role of teacher or the role of creating a space in which the empowerment of another is nurtured.

¹⁵ Hallie Austen Igelhart, "Expanding Personal Power Through Meditation," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1982), 295.

¹⁶ From Gr., hieros, meaning sacred and phanes, meaning to shine. Mircea Eliade defines hierophany as "the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world." Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 11.

The individuals interviewed here felt that their role as teacher had nothing to do with the "power-over" hierarchy we often associate with a teacher/student relationship.

Patrice Wynne feels that instruction is "an empowerment process...in which we allow people to be fully human."¹⁷

Fr. Charles Moore feels that in his role as priest, he is

a person who is a catalyst of the divine reactions. And the divine reaction, of course, is an empowering phenomenon in the subject. The catalyst takes no part in it, but having catalyzed it, goes away to let it be. And that I would consider to be directly empowerment.¹⁸

Z. Budapest feels that as a society we must begin

Empowering the women who are the female principle of the universe, the living expressions of the feminine. Women: teaching them to give permission to themselves, to empower themselves. Teaching them about their past, to take power from knowing that there were brave and outstanding women in history who have fought for them even though they never knew it...You know, there comes a point when we just yakety-yak enough, and it's time to look around and be alternative realities.¹⁹

Conclusion

It appears that empowerment is something like a pebble thrown into a pool of water. The point of impact is the knowledge of the sacred within; this widens to include a naming and reclaiming of experience; wider yet, it touches

¹⁷ Patrice Wynne, interview with author, 13 July 1989.

¹⁸ Fr. Charles Moore, interview with author, 1 July 1989.

¹⁹ Zsuzsanna Budapest, interview with author, 2 May 1989.

the sacredness of all life forms; and it culminates in the formation of community, of a oneness which surrounds and shapes the whole. Seen this way, empowerment must not involve the dominance of power-over. Instead, it requires conscious choices in each one of us to live lives of spiritual integrity.

QUESTION 4

Does your work have an effect on the boundaries between people, and between people and other living things?

This question is an attempt to explore in a contemporary setting the earlier matristic awareness of and appreciation for the interconnection of all living beings on Earth. It is also an attempt to explore the artificial boundaries created by hierarchical structures within patriarchal systems, and it includes a discussion of some of the ways in which patriarchal systems invade the boundaries and integrity of other existing systems.

As illustrated in Section I, recent archaeological examination suggests that many earlier societies were based on a more egalitarian model than most later societies, our own included. In her analysis of the Catal Huyuk site, for example, Anne Barstow says, "Mellaart suggests a mode of community control in which women and men lived more independently, with more sharing of power, than we know of later in societies."¹ Women and men, it appears, lived in mutual interdependence, as whole beings, neither dominant nor subservient to the other for reasons of gender. In comparing our modern, industrialized society with small farming village life, Ester Boserup says of farming regions:

¹ Anne Barstow, "The Uses of Archaeology for Women's History: James Mellaart's Work on the Neolithic Goddess at Catal Huyuk," in Feminist Studies Vol. 4, Issue 3 (College Park: University of Maryland Women's Studies Program, 1978), 7-18.

In the home industry differences in skills are related to age rather than to sex...The supervisor is simply a worker who is proficient through long experience, while the helper is usually a younger person or one who works only intermittently at a given job and is therefore less experienced.²

The religious/spiritual concepts of our early ancestors seem also to embody a sense of wholeness and connectedness with all forms of life. Sacred animals, plants, or locations symbolized a rich regard for the cycles of life. In Catal Huyuk, there predominated "a religion devoted to the conservation of life in all forms, devoted to the mysteries of birth and nourishment and life after death."³

The all-pervading symbol of life was that of the Goddess, the Great Mother, the giver, bringer, and sustainer of life, from whose body life emerges, and into whose body the dead symbolically return, to be reborn again. Such were the cycles of vegetation, of animals, and of humans.

It does not appear that the association of woman with Earth and with nature had a deleterious effect on the status of women in early human community. Instead, according to Barstow, there exists "no evidence that Neolithic people shared the mind/body dualism of later Western thought and therefore no reason to believe that they denigrated woman

² Ester Boserup, Women's Role in Economic Development (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 141.

³ Barstow, 123.

when they associated her with fertility."⁴ Therefore, the exaggerated breasts and buttocks of the Goddess imagery provide occasions to honor the regenerative powers of the feminine. This does not imply, however, that the feminine was revered at the expense of the masculine. In fact, it is interesting to note that some of the Goddess images incorporated male imagery into their shapes. Marija Gimbutas notes that in the seventh and sixth millennia B.C.E. in Old Europe, Goddess figurines had long, cylindrical necks reminiscent of a phallus. Phallic representations also occurred as stands with human, animal, or amorphous facial characteristics. Some even had human facial features and female breasts.

The world of myth [in Old Europe] was not polarized into male and female as it was among the Indo-Europeans and many other nomadic and pastoral peoples of the steppes. Both principles were manifest side by side. The male divinity in the shape of a young man or male animal appears to affirm and strengthen the forces of the creative and active female. Neither is subordinate to the other; by complementing one another, their power is doubled.⁵

It appears that the life force was honored in all its many forms. Often this honoring took the form of drawing parallels between human generative behaviors and other life systems. According to Mircea Eliade:

⁴ Barstow, 121.

⁵ Marija Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 237.

We are here dealing therefore with a general conception of cosmic reality seen as Life and consequently endowed with sex; sexuality being a particular sign of all living reality...the entire world--the world of nature as well as the world of things and tools made by man [sic]--is presented as endowed with sex.⁶

Eliade lists various cultures which have conceived of ores, precious stones, and other substances as having gender. It is through the "marriage" of the "sexes" which brings about a union, a fusion, a "birth" of a new substance. In the case of ores, Eliade says, "It was the total union of reality which mattered, for it justified the rite, namely the 'marriage of metals,' and this last made possible a birth."⁷

Some early cultures have even ascribed a sense of romantic love as part of the sexuality of all life. "Romantic love is not peculiar to the human species but permeates all things, heavenly, elemental, vegetable, and mineral."⁸ This notion of romantic love completed the animation of metals already endowed with marriage and sexuality. And it gave rise to beliefs such as fire being the result of a sexual union, of caves being the wombs of Mother Earth, where ores were "born," and of rivers being

⁶ Mircea Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 36

⁷ Eliade, 36.

⁸ Eliade, 38.

considered the vaginas of the earth. Eliade concludes that "all these sexual terms convey a cosmological conception with a hierogamos⁹ base. It is from the 'centre' (navel) that the creation of the world starts."¹⁰ The all-pervasive, early form of human community, then, seems to have been one of union of equals, of two vitally important principles coming together in creation. "Clearly," concludes Riane Eisler,

While the feminine principle as the primary symbol of the miracle of life permeated Neolithic art and ideology, the male principle also played an important role. The fusion of these two principles through the myths and rituals of the Sacred Marriage was still in fact celebrated in the ancient world well into patriarchal times.¹¹

Sacred human sexual union is seen as a reflection (and, simultaneously in some cultures, as a cause) of corresponding union and regeneration in other natural spheres. In "The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi," the genitals of the human lovers serve as metaphor for the procreative origins of earthly abundance. That these lovers come together in romantic union mirrors the attraction and union of other life forms.

⁹ From Gr. hieros meaning sacred and gamos meaning joining, otherwise known as sacred marriage.

¹⁰ Eliade, 39.

¹¹ Riane Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 26.

Dumuzi sang:

O lady, your breast is your field.
Inanna, your breast is your field.
Your broad field pours out plants.
Your broad field pours out grain.

Water flows from on high for your servants.
Bread flows from on high for your servants.
Pour it out for me, Inanna.
I will drink all you offer.

Inanna spoke:

My vulva, the horn,
The Board of Heaven,
Is full of eagerness, like the young moon.
My untilled land lies fallow.

As for me, Inanna,
Who will plow my vulva?
Who will plow my high field?
Who will plow my wet ground?

Dumuzi replied:

Great Lady, the king will plow your vulva.
I, Dumuzi the King, will plow your vulva.

Inanna:

Then plow my vulva, man of my heart!
Plow my vulva!

At the king's lap stood the rising cedar.
Plants grew high by their side.
Grains grew high by their side.
Gardens flourished luxuriantly.¹²

Inanna and Dumuzi unite with one another in partnership and community. They are equally honored for the life force they each bring to the union. Both vulvas and "rising cedars" contribute to the richness and abundance of the

¹² Diana Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 37.

creative process. Out of the center of their joining, new life emerges. What importance does this imagery have for a discussion of boundaries? Riane Eisler answers, "The way a society structures the relations between the two halves of humanity has profound, and highly predictable, systems implications."¹³ When the cultural model for creation is one of birthing, of sacred joining, it may follow that the societal norm for relationships is one of equality, partnership, and respect for individual variation. Where life comes together in creation, an awareness of life's interconnectedness would be the very definition of life itself.

Artificial, gender-or species-based boundaries, limitations, or ranking, would not be the norm. If we are all connected, one group's actions having a direct effect on another's, or in the case of Inanna and Dumuzi acting as metaphor for the actions of another, then there is no encroachment, no objectification, no colonization by one group of another. There is no violent domination or hostile take-over.

In our contemporary society, where every fifteen seconds a woman is the victim of violent crime, this connectedness has clearly been lost. For Pam Cooper-White,

¹³ Eisler, 148.

domestic violence occurs at precisely that moment of interaction when the perpetrator objectifies the victim:

There is in each repetition of the cycle [of violence], a moment of decision, when the man consciously crosses the line and hits (or kicks, or chokes, or whatever he does in that moment). And in that moment, he calls her a name. 'You...'

He makes a critical shift in perspective, in which he exchanges his version of the woman as a human being, equally precious as himself, for an object.¹⁴ The epithet he hurls at her becomes the key which opens passage for him into a violence which in his mind at that moment is justifiable. He has distanced himself from the personal nature of his act. He has transformed her in his own eyes...into an It.¹⁵

The FBI estimates that 1 out of 4 women in the United States is battered. The California Attorney General says 1 out of 2.

How did this happen? How did we arrive to this world view, where half of us are using violence or the threat of violence to subdue the other half?

This subjugation of women and, by extension, the natural world, seems to be a result of the shift from the ancient matristic spirituality to the pastoral and patriarchal warrior gods, "who either supplanted or

¹⁴ See Karen Voss, "Body as Hierophany," Aries (Association pour la recherche et l'information sur l'estoisme) (Paris: La Table d'Emeraude Editeur, forthcoming), 3-6.

¹⁵ Pam Cooper-White, interview with author, 29 June 1989.

assimilated the matristic pantheon of goddesses and gods."¹⁶
This period of history, actually an intermediary stage before Christianity, did not honor the wonders of this world but, rather, spread "the philosophical rejection" of it. "A prejudice against this worldliness developed and with it the rejection of the Goddess and all she stood for."¹⁷

And power-over became a way of life, a natural consequence. According to Fr. Charles Moore:

Maculine concepts tend to breed dominance...and the masculine dominance leads to exploitation. And exploitation is use without regard to consequences.¹⁸

This disregard for consequences is a breaking of the connection, a denial of the interconnectedness of all life. That the results may have a boomerang effect has been noted by almost all of the interviewees.

Says Native American shaman Leslie Gray:

It's ridiculous to even think of having power, for example, separate from the rain forest. Can't be done. And we're finding that out really, really the hard way. What difference does it make if you're an incredibly powerful person and you own a lot of things and you control a lot of people but, let's say, you don't regard the rain forest as a breathing thing, as the lungs of

¹⁶ Marija Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 321.

¹⁷ Gimbutas, Language of the Goddess, 321.

¹⁸ Fr. Charles Moore, interview with author, 1 July 1989.

the earth. You know, you and future generations will pay heavily for it.¹⁹

This same disregard for consequences also applies to our treatment of other countries or peoples. Cooper-White's model of objectification preceding violence can be seen in Rachel Bagby's work with racism:

I'm thinking now of women in the Pacific, where a lot of the nuclear testing goes on. And these women who are having jellyfish babies born and other birth defects. These are a people of the Pacific on the various islands, who are seeing their populations die off. They're seeing the relationship between the testing of nuclear weapons and the ecology; they're seeing how islands die. These are brown people, and when the [United States]...federal officials have been challenged about it, Henry Kissinger in particular, made a statement about it not really mattering so much that we were testing in the Pacific Islands since there were hardly any people there. [emphasis mine]²⁰

It would seem, in relationship to boundaries, that a patriarchal system breeds a two-fold phenomenon: at the same time that pre-existing boundaries of integrity and definition are violated or assimilated, other completely artificial boundaries are constructed.

In using the example of a battering relationship to explain the model of objectification, Cooper-White includes the concept of boundary violation when she explains:

In a battering relationship the boundaries are very messed up. For one thing...If you

¹⁹ Leslie Gray, telephone interview with author, 31 July 1989.

²⁰ Rachel Bagby, interview with author, 28 July 1989.

thought of his boundary as one circle, in his mind-set her boundary circle is entirely inside of his. And that's exactly where he wants it to be: under his control and within him. And he expects total unanimity from her at all times, however irrational that may be, to the point that he expects her to read his mind about his needs and everything else.²¹

And how do the women respond to this amoeba-like swallowing up of their territory? Again, Cooper-White:

There's a kind of systematic brain-washing that goes on, a combination of physical torture and mental brain-washing. After a while, women subjected to these relationships can also believe that their boundary is within his boundary and are very, very frightened about what it would feel like to be on their own. And feel that they are totally worthless people. So, a kind of merger happens for them too, which is really unhealthy.²²

What is needed to heal this encroachment, say many experts, is to teach women to somehow claim back their boundaries. Vicki Noble, a feminist shaman who works to empower women, feels that it is important to help women to regain an awareness of the integrity of their own definition as a person, while at the same time maintaining an awareness of the separate identities of others.

One of the first things I try to do with most of the women who come in is to teach them the kind of boundary that you need in order to be able to sit in a circle and be part of a group, that is, to be actually committed to the group, as a group. And, at the same time, to begin to perceive yourself

²¹ Pam Cooper-White, interview with author, 29 June 1989.

²² Pam Cooper-White, interview with author, 29 June 1989.

as an individual in that group and not get swept up into the group ambiance.²³

This recognition of the self as separate and complete or whole has not been encouraged by patriarchal religion. In commenting on the studies done by Carol Gilligan,²⁴ Pat Reif says of women:

We're over-related. We're always caring for everybody but ourselves...The important thing is to become separate. And she [Gilligan] thinks that the whole tradition of Western theology has reflected the fact that it has been done by males because it's always talking about the need for more relatedness. And this is exactly what women don't need; we're so over-related, we don't care for ourselves.²⁵

Part of women learning to care for themselves, to heal themselves into wholeness, is, according to Veronica Weeks-Basham, healer and body-worker, "the sacredness of the word 'No.' And that it is very important to use that powerful word to create sacred space."²⁶ Sacred space is space which is set apart from the ordinary (although it may occur within

²³ Vicki Noble, interview with author, 22 August 1989.

²⁴ See Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1. and her discussion of "the recurrent problems in interpreting women's development and...connect[ing] these problems to the repeated exclusion of women from the critical theory-building studies of psychological research."

²⁵ Pat Reif, interview with author, 14 July 1989.

²⁶ Veronica Weeks-Basham, interview with author, 27 September 1989.

the ordinary)²⁷ and allows us to do things in a different way. Saying "no" automatically removes some choices or distractions and allows us to focus on what we want.

"No" can be an expression of ethics, of wisdom, outlining boundaries or values. This is what I believe in, this is what I don't believe in. This is where I take my stand. This is how far I will go from my center...Also the body is a boundary. The body contains and separates you from other people, and it is very important. Especially for, say, people who have been abused or been in co-dependent relationships to understand about boundaries, and the body can be a very good teacher for that. In my work the awareness that I give people of their boundaries on the physical level is very supportive of them becoming more alert to the lack of boundaries in the different co-dependent relationships.

It can also help them understand that they can let go of the boundaries at times, too, and what that is. If they've never felt [such boundaries before]. There are a lot of spiritual positions that say give up your ego. It's not much to give up, if you've never really had one. And a lot of women in particular are not encouraged to develop an ego, so even just developing a body sense of yourself as separate and have those boundaries as you would an ego, and defending them the way people defend their egos, is a very important beginning.²⁸

The notion of boundary as integrity is one part of the dynamic; the notion of boundary as barrier, is another. All

²⁷ See Lynda Sexson, Ordinarily Sacred (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 3. "There are universal experiences which are common yet set apart, ordinary yet consummately extraordinary, mundane yet sacred."

²⁸ Veronica Weeks-Basham, interview with author, 27 September 1989.

of the interviewees lamented the existence of barrier-boundaries: race, class, sex in the human-to-human sphere, and exploitation and destruction in the species-to-species sphere. Man's (gender intentional) elective divorce from nature has erased from modern memories the identification with the cycles of all life forms.

One way to remember, says Starhawk, is through ritual.

When you do ritual, you're constantly indentifying yourself with other living things, with the processes in the natural world, with seasons and cycles; and so your boundaries...you let them go...for the time of the ritual. You become the processor in those changes. You end up with a different definition of yourself; it's not so exclusive anymore, so fragmented. You realize yourself that it really does include the world around you, that it supports you, that the elements of life surround you.²⁹

Another way to honor this sense of interconnection is outlined by Jenny McLeod, Tribal Chief of the Salinian Nation:

We say "all my relations" when we pray, when we talk. When we say that, we mean literally everything that is living and breathing. That includes the creepy crawlers, the things that fly, the two-legged and the four-legged, the grass on the ground, the weeds that people pull up, everything, the ocean, the earth itself. Even the rocks. The rocks speak if you're in tune with them. Why do people have healing stones; why do people go to crystals? Why do people go to these other things? They say they don't have life. Oh, yes they do. You just have to know how to listen. And you have to come into balance, live in balance...We are concerned about our earth which we live

²⁹ Starhawk, interview with author, 4 May 1989.

on...And we want to keep it for our children,
our grandchildren, and our great
grandchildren.³⁰

This necessity for balance is echoed by Vivienne
Verdon-Roe, as she talks about her film "Women for America-
For the World."

I think what the women in the work are
really saying is: let's open up to each
other. Not just open up in a vacuum; let's
open up to each other. Perhaps to each other
first and then to what's around us, in terms
of what beauty we've been given. This earth
is our HOME, our HOME. We keep forgetting it
is our HOME. Would you do things that you do
to the earth in your own home? Of course,
you wouldn't! I think other animals, other
creatures, plants...I think the more you open
up, the more you understand. Of course, of
course, we're all living things on this
planet, and we should all have respect.³¹

And gratitude, Fr. Matthew Fox would add, gratitude to
the flowers and other organisms which prepared the way for
human existence.

Gratitude should be the basic spiritual
stance of the two-legged ones toward all--the
entire 20 billion years which preceeded our
coming--because without all this preparation,
there's no way we would be here. And if we
could just get that message of gratitude, our
lives would change, our lifestyles and our
cultures.³²

Conclusion

³⁰ Jenny McLeod, interview with author, 11 August 1989.

³¹ Vivienne Verdon-Roe, interview with author, 13 July
1989.

³² Fr, Matthew Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

It seems that our prehistoric ancestors did not indulge in the same system of dualistic gender- or species-based boundaries as our contemporary society. Instead, they held a sense of being interconnected, of one group's actions having an effect on all other groups. Even their mythology contained metaphors for partnership, for acceptance of diversity, and for recognition that all aspects are necessary to create the whole. Hence, eager-to-be-plowed vulvas exist along side rising cedars as symbols for the interconnection and interaction of varying aspects of the living world.

As male domination became the norm, the subordination of women and of nature became the new paradigm. Artificial barriers were created, and natural boundary definitions were erased. Power-over became a way of life. And the need to heal was born, as was the need to reclaim original boundaries. Women who are existing within violent relationships, for example, need to reassert their boundary identities and regain a sense of their own integrity.

The recognition of the self as separate, complete, and whole has not been encouraged for women. Women need to learn to create sacred space for themselves, and one way to do that is to honor the use of the word "No."

At the same time that women, especially, need to reclaim their personal boundaries, we as a society need to break down the hierarchical barriers that separate us from

other life systems. Our failure to recognize that we are connected to each other as people has given rise to racism, ageism, sexism, and prejudice against other people for reasons of sexual preference, ethnic heritage, religion, politics, or country of residence. We have also alienated ourselves from other life forms and engage in wholesale destruction of other species and other ecosystems.

We need to understand that the popular dictum "what goes around, comes around" has a sound ecological basis. We will learn that we are not immune to our own actions.

QUESTION 5

What are the problems in contemporary society which make your work necessary ?

The purpose in asking this question was to receive from each interviewee a distilled response, a nugget, or focus on what each interviewee felt to be the leading cause or causes for the problems of contemporary society. Since each interviewee is a social critic or commentator, or in some way has departed from the norm of tradition in contemporary American society, it is useful to hear from each of them a jumping-off point or reason for their dissent. Perhaps in hearing of their paths, their reasoning, their conclusions, we, too, could find our way should we wish to depart from the path most travelled.

The responses varied, of course, although the essence of the varying analyses painted a unified picture, underscoring Levi-Strauss' model of clusters or bundles of meanings forming a related whole.

These individual answers to my question about problems in contemporary society included the following:

"Issues of ecology and the way we've treated Mother earth" (Fox)

"Taking care of our elderly" (McLeod)

"All the isms...sexism, racism, classism, ageism, militarism" (Rief)

"Devaluation of the feminine" (Wynne)

"Viewing other people and other beings as resources to be used and exploited"
(Igelhart)

"Dysfunctional families and dysfunctional
societal institutions...denial"

(Verdon-Roe)

"Anti-life forces in this society" (Noble)

"Separation" (Oda)

"The way we educate each other, our children,
ourselves, the values we hold and the way we
pass those values on...Not to value life
itself" (Bagby)

"People [who] are really very dead"

(Griffin)

"Denial...as the only way to survive in a
dominator society" (Eisler)

"We live in a sick society...ruled by
psychopaths" (Gimbutas)

"Society is insane" (Moore)

"Alienation from the self" (Gray)

"Patriarchal culture as built on the
obsession with separateness, [and a] reaction
away from nature and away from the female"
(Spretnak)

"Lack of respect...for women...for
limitations in any area...for children...for
the future... for the body" (Weeks-Basham)

"Addictive thinking" (Cooper-White)

The above individual responses, when viewed through the lens of Levi-Strauss' model, form a coherent, interrelated picture of what these interviewees are saying is the core problem in contemporary society: lack of wholeness. Whether their observations concern nature or the physical body or care for the elderly or children or addictive thinking or alienation from the self, all are expressing a lack of

integration, a lack of wholeness in both the individual and in society. And all respondents expressed a yearning for wholeness, a belief in wholeness as the only road to planetary survival.

Much has been written about the human desire to achieve wholeness. Philosophers, theologians, scholars have recognized this deep-level desire and have called it by a number of different names. Whether it is a "return to the sacred" or "nostalgia for Paradise" (Eliade), a "peak-experience" (Maslow), or the "I-Thou-We" configuration (Buber), humans seem to yearn for a return to a state of interrelatedness or oneness. According to Mircea Eliade,

There is something in the human condition which we have called the nostalgia for Paradise. By this we mean the desire to find oneself always and without effort in the Center of the world, at the heart of reality; and by a short cut and in a natural manner to transcend the human condition, and to recover the divine condition.¹

Eliade even goes so far as to suggest that humans can tolerate only living in sacred spaces, or at the Center, and so great is the yearning to achieve this, that literally every culture has a vast mythology around the quest for this sacred oneness.

¹ Mircea Eliade, "Nostalgia for Paradise: Symbolism of the Center and the Ritual Approach to Immortality," in Images and Symbols, trans. by Philip Mairet (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 15.

In his discussion of communitas (community), Victor Turner emphasizes the aspect of pure potentiality of communitas. Here all creation is possible. It is similar to Eliade's image of the Earth Mother pregnant with every kind of embryo. Such is the nature of sacred joining, the fruit of which is unlimited. Inanna and Dumuzi ensure the unlimited abundance of nature. Reaching the Center ensures the unlimited manifestation of abundance and potential.

Starhawk, feminist priestess and witch, also holds the Center as the place of unlimited potential. "The center of the circle is the point of transformation. It corresponds to pure essence, to timelessness, to transparent light, to the power to go, to move, change, transform."²

For Martin Buber, the concept of Center is closely tied to wholeness or community:

The true community does not arise through people having feelings for one another (though indeed not without it), but through, first, their taking their stand in living mutual relation with a living Center, and, second, their being in living mutual relation with one another. The second has its source in the first, but is not given when the first alone is given. Living mutual relations includes feelings, but does not originate with them. The community is built up out of living mutual relations, but the builder is the living effective Center.³

² Starhawk, The Spiral Dance (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 67.

³ Martin Buber, I and Thou (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 45.

For Buber, community is essentially a mode of relationship between total, whole, and concrete persons, between what he calls the "I" and the "Thou."

Spirit is not in the I, but between I and Thou. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air you breathe. Man [sic] lives in the spirit, if he is able to respond to his Thou. He is able to, if he enters into relation with his whole being. Only in virtue of his power to enter into relation is he able to live in the spirit.⁴

This concept of our relationship with wholeness, in ourselves and in other living things, as leading to our spiritual center is echoed by Maslow in his research on the peak-experience. "It is quite characteristic in peak experiences that the whole universe is perceived as an integrated and unified whole."⁵ He reports that people having such peak-experiences feel a sense of transcendence to a god-like state, while remaining aware of their humanness. They experience the world as hierophany, and dichotomies and polarities disappear. In explaining this self-actualizing and creative process, Maslow suggests that these individuals, rather than becoming more selfish or self-centered, move instead to a different reality: the peak-experience consciousness of our "essential

⁴ Buber, 39.

⁵ Abraham Maslow, Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 39.

interconnectedness with all of humanity." And, one could add, to all of life and all living beings.

Which brings us to our interviewees. How is it that it is part of the human condition to yearn for and strive for wholeness, while, according to the respondents, our contemporary society is nothing if not the very antithesis of wholeness?

According to Father Charles Moore, "Our society is insane. If it were an individual, we would lock it up...If any individual did what society does, surely they would be declared the victim of schizophrenia and dangerously insane."⁶ In explaining the unhealthy effect societal values and actions have on us, Father Moore continues:

Society comes to us--explicitly but mostly implicitly--and says: This is the standard of behavior. Morality means the custom of the tribe; this is the standard of behavior that is expected of you. And implicitly the promise is: If you behave like this, you will be well, sane, and accepted. The trouble is, that standard will make you crazy, wild and insane. So therefore we are in a peculiar position. If we conform to society, it will drive us crazy, and if we don't conform to society, we will be condemned. So what shall we do? The result of that is that all of us feel like we're on the outside looking in...⁷

It would seem that those feelings of separation and alienation are considered normal in a society where

⁶ Fr. Charles Moore, interview with author, 1 July 1989.

⁷ Fr. Charles Moore, interview with author, 1 July 1989.

dysfunction itself is the norm. According to Vivienne

Verdon-Roe:

Ninety percent of us (that's what I read recently) come from pretty dysfunctional families, where the stuffing is knocked out of us. Where it becomes safer not to feel. Not to tell the truth.

It's become so bad in the Western world that we have now got dysfunctional institutions. The family dysfunction has literally become institutionalized in our society. So we have a president now who thinks it's fine to avoid questions which are about difficult political problems which we absolutely have to solve if we want this country to continue, if we want the human race to continue. And we have a media who does not pinpoint the fact that our president tells lies or avoids the truth and feels that's okay.

That's where I see most of our problems coming from. Whether you're talking about violence in the cities, or what we're doing to our land and air and sea, the continued militarization of our society, the corruption in business, the neglect of people, I think most of those ills, most of those problems, are coming from a highly dysfunctional family.

And in that dysfunctional family, in an alcoholic home or a home that is troubled by any compulsive, repetitious behaviors like alcoholism, the first things you find in those families...is denial. We are in mass denial in this society.⁸

Agreeing with Verdon-Roe, Rianne Eisler says:

In the dominator system, denial is the only way to survive, actually, because life is so painful. And I think because today we're in a period of very strong movement towards a partnership model of society with tremendous dominator resistance, of course

⁸ Vivienne Verdon-Roe, interview with author, 13 July 1989.

...the pain is being faced by more and more people. That's why you have millions and millions of people suddenly discovering that they came from dysfunctional families. Of course, the dominator family is the dysfunctional family, where control is the issue.⁹

In addition to creating the mental, emotional, or psychological effects mentioned above, the dysfunctions of patriarchal society invade the body as well. In her practice, body-worker and healer Veronica Weeks-Basham has noted that we have forgotten how to be

awake in the body rather than just in the mind. We spend a lot of time, just like little computers, playing with our own thoughts instead of interacting with all the stuff that's going on out here. So much so that the body actually becomes desensitized. You get desensitized to the beauty as well as the ugliness that is in the world. The work I do is sort of like a wake-up call.

One of the biggest problems that I see people bringing into the office is, of course, stress. Stress in the sense of trying to make a living body fit into a computer-generated world. It doesn't live off that. It doesn't live on silicon and electricity. It lives on food and feelings and all those things that a computer-generated bank of memories and behaviors doesn't live on. It hurts to try, physically painful to try, to fit themselves into that...little box, the way their lives are set up a lot of the time. And sometimes people aren't even aware of what it is that hurts. [emphasis mine]¹⁰

⁹ Riane Eisler, interview with author, 4 June 1989.

¹⁰ Veronica Weeks-Basham, interview with author, 27 September 1989.

Pain seems to often be a part of the patriarchal mind-set, and not knowing "what it is that hurts" sets up a dynamic of separateness which is extremely difficult to overcome. For Native American shaman Leslie Gray,

I think at the root is the incredible amount of alienation this society produces. Alienation from the Self above all. The split off of the individual from him or herself and alienation from others and alienation from the world community. I think most of the things that people are suffering with, and therefore come to me to work with, are inextricably intertwined with the alienation of contemporary life.¹¹

Charlene Spretnak seems to agree with Gray, but focuses on specific areas of alienation.

I say patriarchal culture is built on the obsession with separateness, on a reaction away from nature and away from the female. That kind of reactive energy is very pathological. To hold the female at arms length and to dominate nature leads not only to psychosis. As Stephanie Mills would say: Nature bats last. So we're not going to dominate nature anyway. Nature is going to be here long after we've committed ecocide and species suicide out of this idiocy.¹²

Spretnak considers it symptomatic of patriarchy that change regarding attitudes towards nature and our own survival as a species is so slow in coming as to be almost non-existent.

It's a kind of crazy-making time when there's a general awareness of how late it is, that it's the eleventh hour, and yet the

¹¹ Leslie Gray, interview with author, 31 July 1989.

¹² Charlene Spretnak, interview with author, 2 September 1989.

dominant culture keeps rolling along as if it were a hundred years ago, and everything were just fine. We want bigger markets; we want a bigger GNP; we want to use more natural resources next year than we did last year. There's still this open-ended growth economics, even when everything is on its last legs.¹³

Starhawk not only agrees with Spretnak; she implies that the dominant patriarchal culture is engaged in a purposeful, intentional course of action:

The major problem is that we're systematically destroying the life support systems of the planet, which calls all of our survival into question. And, to me, that's also linked to the ways in which we destroy human culture, human life, human potential, through systems of injustice and exploitation. All of those seem very much linked to the consciousness that allows that, that says things are separate, and some are better than others, that some are worth more than others.¹⁴

Viewing other systems, other living beings, other cultures as less than, leads, according to Hallie Austen Igelhart, to "the viewing of other people and other beings as resources to be used and exploited...Our whole culture is built so much on business, and the whole culture of business is to make money on other people...[and on] many other beings as well."¹⁵

¹³ Charlene Spretnak, interview with author, 2 September 1989.

¹⁴ Starhawk, interview with author, 4 May 1989.

¹⁵ Hallie Austen Igelhart, interview with author, 3 Jul 6 1989.

For Pam Cooper-White, director of a domestic violence program in a major urban area:

I think it comes down to a whole social system that is founded on the idea that to be successful, you have to hold power over somebody else. And that the most successful people are people who hold power over the most people.¹⁶

Cooper-White feels that violence is a natural outcome of this power-over thinking. She cites many examples of ways in which our patriarchal society reinforces this violence through images of exploitation. In order to sensitize her staff to these issues, Cooper-White shows them a training film which shows the kinds of images that reinforce the concept of men and women as objects and especially women as objects to hold power over, to possess:

[The film] depicts a batterer who's about to go home, but he's having a drink with a couple of his buddies from the office at this bar before he goes home late. And the battering incident is going to be around the fact that she asks him where he was. They get into an argument because she's upset that he was late and didn't call and didn't tell her. And that's what escalates, and he batters her. But it's very clear that he's ready to get violent with her even before; it wouldn't have mattered what she did or what she said.

The last thing he does in the bar scene is: his friends leave; they go home, and he's still there. And he goes over to a pinball machine. The pinball machine shows a woman with her legs spread as the last goal. When he shoots the ball between her legs, it all lights up and flashes. And he has this look on his face like that's how I get my power;

¹⁶ Pam Cooper-White, interview with author, 29 June 1989.

it's against, it's violence against women.
And he goes home...¹⁷

The domination, power-over model does harm not only to women but to a multitude of other groups, as a result of "all the isms," according to Pat Rief.

The one I think of first, of course, is sexism. The discrimination against women because of gender. But to me, it is interconnected with racism, with classism, the oppression because of economic strata, with militarism, with imperialism...A woman who is of color and poor has triple jeopardy: she is oppressed as a woman; she's oppressed as a person of color; and she's oppressed because she is poor.¹⁸

The ramifications of power-over thinking, of the domination and denigration of nature and the female, of viewing life systems as resources to be ferreted out and used up, are many and far-reaching. Effecting change to a system so locked inside a box of its own creation would require what Cooper-White calls "a conversion of the heart."

Conclusion

In defining the problems in contemporary western society which make her or his work necessary, each interviewee provided us with a personal point of observation, her or his own particular perspective. Taken together, these perspectives provide a composite view of the larger problem which encompasses each individual concern.

¹⁷ Pam Cooper-White, interview with author, 29 June 1989.

¹⁸ Pat Reif, interview with author, 14 July 1989.

It is important that we do not, like the parable of the three blind men and the elephant, mistake any one perspective for the whole.

It is essential that we keep in mind Levi-Strauss' model and recognize that these perspectives need to be bundled together to produce a coherent cluster of meaning. It is not enough to only address environmental concerns, for example, or to only combat sexism or racism, or to only recognize the institutionalization of addictive dysfunction. Instead, we must recognize the all-prevailing lack of wholeness which permeates the very core of our society. And we must address it head-on and with clarity.

We must be willing to examine our own racism, sexism, ageism, speciesism, and the like. We just look at the ways in which our dysfunctional thinking has caused suffering to others. We must be willing to feel the pain. And open ourselves up to our own quest for the sacred.

QUESTION 6

Has the traditional western concept of God as male influenced our society?

Western society strongly incorporates religious symbolism into secular as well as religious life. The rightness of nation is closely aligned to divine sanction. The defense of said nation is closely aligned to God. From "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" to business meetings which open with prayer, to "In God We Trust" on the very currency our nation uses, the presence or protection of God is invoked.

Religious symbols, according to Clifford Geertz,

Dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt to somehow sum up...what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it.¹

If we assume that Geertz is correct, that religious symbols describe the way the world is and prescribe the way people should act, then it is instructive to examine two predominant religious symbols of the Western Judeo-Christian tradition:

1. The sacred triumvirate of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
2. Male creation and Virgin birth.

In view of earlier Neolithic religious world views which regarded the Earth as mother and the feminine as

¹ Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 129.

sacred, what is most notable about the sacred triumvirate of Father-Son-Holy Ghost is the complete lack of feminine influence. We do not have Father-Son-Mother, which, after all, would seem a more natural configuration. This exclusion of women (albeit symbolically) from participation in the divine has had far-reaching effects.

It has been over eighteen years since Mary Daly made her then (and still) shocking statement that "When God is male; the male is god." Since then, a number of scholars have examined the effects of a religious system which overwhelmingly associates the male gender with the divine. In this religious system's view, the mechanism put in place to represent the divine to the human is also exclusively male, as is the language used to express sacred concepts. Women, where they appear, are secondary and often are characterized in one of two ways: as helpers or as embodiments of evil. Never are they the prime agents of sacred action.

In January 1977, Pope Paul VI declared in a statement outlining the Vatican's prohibition against allowing women to enter the priesthood that because Christ was a man, and because he chose only male disciples (an assumption under heated debate from some historians), women can never serve as high officials in the Catholic church. In analyzing the church's position, Naomi Goldenberg concludes, "If women play at being priests, they would play at being God; and

Christianity [according to Pope Paul] can only afford to have men in that role."²

In comparing Pope Paul's statement with Jewish tradition, Goldenberg finds essential similarities.

Although Jewish leaders do not argue against female equality in the same terms that Pope Paul did, they must respect Jewish law and tradition...and the role and image of females in Jewish law is very different from that of males...

Men perform the most important acts of religious duty and women are seen as people who prepare food and attend home and children so that men may be free to worship and study Torah. In orthodox synagogues, women sit apart from men so as not to distract them. In synagogues in which this physical separation is not enforced women are separated from men by the words of Talmud and Torah, which instruct females to be content with their subordinate roles in the Jewish community. The nature of the religion lies in interplay between a father-god and His sons. In such a religion, women will always be on the periphery.³

In asking the interviewees about the influence on our society the concept of God as male might have had, the intent was to elicit clarification of present-day societal dynamics. In answering this question, Elinor Gadon went to the heart of the matter.

I think this is the model for human relations in our society. First of all, not only male, but authoritative, judgmental, perfect, absolute--these have become models for how we are supposed to be. Secondly,

² Naomi R. Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 7

³ Goldenberg, 7.

they provide the models for male authority in our culture.⁴

For Mary Hunt,

The concept of God as Father, Lord, Ruler, King, Creator [represent] masculine power language about God. It is not just masculine; it is a power language."⁵

Agreeing with the authority, power-over essence of God-as-male consciousness, Z. Budapest says,

"It is a colonizing tool, it's a psychic colonizing tool. If you internalize a god that has a specific sex, then that sex will have power over you in real life as well. If you have a male on the throne as the supreme god, you are going to have a male in the presidency; you are going to have a male as your boss...and in your bedroom.

The male god says, "You have no freedom. Here are ten points I want you to follow down the line. If you step out of line, I will do something bad to you.

When you really look at it, what you really get with that male god set-up is a feudal society projected in the heavens. You have a feudal lord; you have the serfs. And this is the system which is projected and made glorified."⁶

Susan Griffin agrees, adding,

"This idea of god fits very well with the idea of empire. And racist and sexist ideas. So that it's all one system, and it's all sewed up. There are no windows open or doors

⁴ Elinor W. Gadon, interview with author, 19 October 1989.

⁵ Mary E. Hunt, interview with author, 18 November 1989.

⁶ Zsuzsanna Budapest, interview with author, 2 May 1989.

through which you can walk and see the rest of reality."⁷

Griffin and Budapest are both commenting on the concept of "the Other," which is in many ways the cornerstone of patriarchy. Since the definitions of the roles of patriarchy are along the lines of exaggerated gender stereotypes, the power position is held by someone of consistent hyper-masculinity. This implies aggressiveness, supposed objectivity, the worship of rational rather than emotional thought, attitudes of domination and manipulation towards other people and the environment, and the tendency to create boundaries between the self (and those identified with the self) and those identified as "the Other."⁸ This latter category could include people of color, people of different sexual preferences, people with AIDS, the poor, immigrants, and, of course, women. The tendency to project fears and negative thought processes on to "the Other" is well-documented.

An important aspect of interaction with a person who inhabits the category of "the Other" is the depersonalization involved. The "Other" automatically has less value than the self.

⁷ Susan Griffin, interview with author, 17 July 1989.

⁸ See Karen Voss, "Body as Hierophany," Aries (Association pour la recherche et l'information sur l'esoterisme) (Paris: La Table d'Emeraude Editeur, forthcoming), 3-6.

In discussing the impact the concept of God-as-male has had on women's value in this culture, Rachel Bagby says,

Men have suffered under the notion of God as He. And God has been used as a justification for subjugating women and all that has been deemed feminine or passive. To just take from the earth what's there. To just dig in the ground and take it out. I just had the idea in thinking about that just now, if there was ever an impulse [regarding women], I mean, Caesareans, when did they become so popular?⁹

What Bagby seems to be reacting to is the colonizing approach to women's bodies alluded to by Z. Budapest. Women's bodies, like the "body" of nature, become "available" as "resources" to be used and/or used up. It is no accident that the earth's ecological balances are in a state of emergency.¹⁰

Many scholars have theorized about the beginnings of patriarchal overtones in religious tradition. Rather than a spontaneous expression of the divine, the concept of God as male may be no more than a replication of dominant societal structures.

"If you go back to the ancient Greeks, to the philosopher Zenophonies," suggests Mary Hunt

He talked about the fact that if dogs and cats and cows and pigs had gods and goddesses, they would look like dogs and cats and cows and pigs. So you have a certain problem built into the notion of God language

⁹ Rachel Bagby, interview with author, 28 July 1989.

¹⁰ Zsuzsanna Budapest, interview with author, 2 May 1989.

problem built into the notion of God language or the language about transcendence or the divine, that its closest reference will be that which articulates it.¹¹

Agreeing with Hunt, Merlin Stone elaborates:

I believe, knowing the incredible diversity of images, religious images, that we do to a tremendous extent, project what we know in our own idea of reality onto our religious imagery.

Such as in Hawaii with the goddess Pele. Pele is the volcanoes. That's because the Hawaiians are living around volcanoes that are erupting all the time. Or the goddess Donu of the river Danube, that if you lived around a river, obviously you have certain images of what's sacred or spiritual.

And I believe that we projected an image of this omnipotent male diety. It seems obvious that in societies where there were pharoahs or kings who were omnipotent, that such a system was just projected into a religious image.¹²

For the past 5000 years considerable reinforcement has been required to maintain the structure of this system. Language, image, ritual, and law have combined to create an almost unassailable package. Questions must not be asked; the "truth" must simply be accepted.

For Pam Cooper-White:

Whenever anything is axiomatic and can't be questioned, the question doesn't even get thought of. Something like, "So, how come God is male?" is so far removed from the way "it is" that you don't even think to frame the question.

¹¹ Mary E. Hunt, interview with author, 18 November 1989.

¹² Merlin Stone, interview with author, 11 November 1989.

And as a little girl, you grow up thinking that God is a white male, like Santa Claus. And you are one step removed from the image of God, and men are not. Or if you are a little girl of color, then you are two steps from the image of God; white men are not. That does deep psychological damage to one's self esteem to think "I am less in the image of God than my brother."

And if that's reinforced by all-male clergy, who are the representatives of God, that really gives the message that the important stuff gets done by men.¹³

Not only does the "important stuff" get done by men but, it would seem, the business of creation as well. In biblical creation mythology, the Father God created the world on an agendized time plan. He then created the first human, also a male, out of whose body He created the first female. Apart from the fact that this male creation process is in direct opposition to what is known about reproduction, this mythology serves another, more important, purpose.

According to Mircea Eliade,

Every construction or fabrication has the cosmogony as paradigmatic model. The creation of the world becomes the archetype of every creative human gesture, whatever its plane of reference may be.¹⁴

Hallie Austen Igelhart considers the male creator mythology to have a profound effect on our culture.

The dominance of man as the creation maker is a relatively recent phenomenon, yet today

¹³ Pam Cooper-White, interview with author, 29 June 1989.

¹⁴ Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 45.

we have been raised in a culture created almost exclusively by men, a culture which recognizes a male god as the creator of all physical life.¹⁵ And now some of man's creations, in particular his technology, offer him the role as the destruction maker, as we face the possibility of nuclear annihilation of the planet. We also face the possible destruction of our souls; for competitiveness and separation of mind from body, and human from nature, have caused an alienation of the psyche greater than any previously known.¹⁶

In commenting upon this alienation. Susan Griffin particularly mentions the separation of mind from body.

All these doctors who are suddenly discovering [the effect of the mind on the body] as if it's a big deal. When how did they ever think [mind and body were] split in the first place? It is similar to: How did they ever come up with [the idea] that God was a man? How did they ever come up with that? It's so bizarre.

When you think about such a bizarre notion as God having just one gender in a world which probably has many; I mean if you think about gender, there are probably countless genders. Man and woman represent just two positions on a very wide range of possibilities and polarities. So, to picture God as this sort of Zeus-like, super-masculine, macho, white male, totally off the zone in the masculine direction...Give me a break! How could this be God, as opposed to the whole complexity of the universe?¹⁷

¹⁵ See ftn. No.74, Part I for description of homunculus theory.

¹⁶ Hallie Austen Igelhart, interview with author, 3 July 1989.

¹⁷ Susan Griffin, interview with author, 17 July 1989.

Marija Gimbutas sees the acceptance of a male creative diety from an historical perspective and considers it indicative of revolution, rather than of evolution.

When you only have a male god, a male who creates, and not a female who creates, it leads to the oppression of women. The transition to Indo-European society and patriarchy from matristic or matrilinear society took place approximately between 4000 and 2500 B.C.E. Because the goddess was still very much a part of daily life, the dominant culture had to kill her.¹⁸

One of the ways to kill the goddess has been to deny her relationship to a physical body, thus rendering her unavailable to real human women. While men have a male diety with whom to identify and through whom they can justify their emotional and physical lives, women do not. The closest representation of female/divine that Christian women have is Mary, alleged Mother of God. It is important to look more closely at Mary's symbols or symbolic functions. Those treated here are her obedience and her virginity.

For Naomi Goldenberg,

Mary is certainly the good girl of Christianity. Absolutely obedient to the male God, she derives all her status from her son. Because of her absolute purity and obedience, she is the only pinup girl who has been permitted in monks' cells throughout the ages.¹⁹

¹⁸ Marija Gimbutas, interview with author, 28 July 1989.

¹⁹ Goldenberg, 75.

Mary's obedience in general and her obedience to a male god in particular, has become a model for the behavior of human women. Expected to accept a subordinate position in society, women have even been encouraged to find spiritual meaning in such submission. Their greatest gift, say countless marriage manuals or advice books, is to be the quiet strength of the family, cheerfully obeying their husbands and putting their needs (or desires or questions) in the background. Deviation from the norm often led to scorn or pity.

According to Clifford Geertz,

Individuals who ignore the moral-aesthetic norms [that religious] symbols formulate, who follow a discordant style of life, are regarded not so much as evil as stupid, insensitive, unlearned, or in the case of extreme dereliction, mad."²⁰

One only needs to look at the numbers of women addicted to tranquilizers during the last few decades to understand how the medical establishment has dealt with women who have strayed from or even questioned, the norm.

Mary's purity is another attribute which serves to separate human women from her. Purity translates to non-physicalness, and Mary is seen as transcending bodily existence as it is known by human women. She most especially transcends physical sexuality. According to Naomi Goldenberg,

²⁰ Geertz, 129.

Obsession with purifying Mary of any taint of womanhood has occupied Christian scholars for centuries. Treatises on the Holy Mother's hymen abound in every Catholic research library. Theologians have insisted that Mary remained "intact" before, during (!) and after the birth of Jesus. Traditions also speak of how Mary's body never decayed and never gave off odors. Instead, her physical body remained perfect even after death.²¹

There are few more certain ways to rob a woman of personal power than to convince her of the inappropriateness of her even having a body. Add to that a religiously imposed disgust for those bodily functions which are uniquely female: menstruation, sexual penetration, pregnancy, and birth. It is interesting to note that even though nursing was a divine function of Mary, until recently in the United States women who were nursing infants and were in a public place had to locate themselves in a rest room, lest someone should see them do it.

The effect of this scorn of the female body has been internalized by women in our culture. The woman who loathes her body, regardless of its appearance, is the norm. Entire industries support this. One only has to open any magazine or watch television for one half-hour to realize the relentless assault on women's self-esteem.

²¹ Goldenberg, 75.

Conclusion

In examining the ramifications of the concept of God as male as expressed in Western religious tradition, it has been necessary to consider the process of creation postulated by this system.

One religiously sanctioned concept of creation centers around a de-sexualized, obedient female figure who gave "birth" to the son of God. The other concept of creation is that of a male god as ultimate creator. Taken together, they have had the effect of making women's experiences peripheral to the "real" (i.e. male) world and of instilling in women a deep-seated mistrust of themselves and other women.

De-legitimizing female bodily process has further served to weaken women's self-esteem and personal power. Thus handicapped, women will presumably mirror the abject obedience of Mary. They will (again presumably) want to at all cost avoid the example of the disobedient Eve.

God as a somewhat quixotic, vengeful male, without any corresponding deification of the female, had served as a political tool, often backed by force and violence, to keep huge populations in their "rightful place" in the hierarchy. Women have especially suffered, since their place as subordinate is assured and often compounded by additional subordinating circumstances of race, economic status, or health.

Women also experience an unusual twist in their circumstances: at the same time that they are oppressed by a ruling male class, they are involved in close, intimate relations with individual men. Tied to these men through love and/or dependency, women face a unique challenge in unravelling the fabric of their illusions about the true nature of their relationships.

The concept of God as male only has severely restricted the development of women. Unable to identify themselves as sacred and being required to approach the divine through men has created in women a mass inferiority complex. Relegating women to subordinate status has, over the centuries, created a belief that women are "naturally" subordinate. Male-dominated psychotherapy and medicine have supported the view that "real" women are those who "naturally" exhibit subordinate behaviors like dependency, lack of initiative, low self-esteem. Women who have not readily adapted to this model have been medicated or given a variety of therapies in the hope of being "cured" of their independent and aberrant ways.

It would seem that, according to recent archeological and anthropological theories, our prehistoric ancestors did not originate current models of dominant/subordinate behaviors. Instead, there appears to have been a balance-- not just between men and women, but between humans and other

life systems. The predominating symbol for that balance was the Great Mother.

The Great Mother or Goddess may or may not be an appropriate symbol for our times. But what is certain is that a symbol of female divinity is needed to bring to women and to men a sense of restored balance. Not only women will benefit; men, too, have been the victims of a tight hierarchical system designed to keep everyone in his or her place. In an age of rich cultural diversity the old wrathful, male-only God must go. He is no longer welcome.

QUESTION 7

There seems to be a revival of the old religion of the Goddess. Why do you think that is?

A great loneliness has descended upon us. We no longer buy into the old fear-induced religions. The wrathful gods have lost their power over us, and we let them rave and rant until we click off our TV sets. But deep within us there is a space that now more than ever is painfully empty, as if we had a hollow above our hearts where the old revels used to live, yearning to be filled. We must be careful about what we feed our spiritual hunger -- it cannot be junk food anymore.¹

We live in an age of technological omnipresence, of "unlimited" scientific possibility, of unlimited potential for technological destruction. A time of flights to distant planets, or fetal surgery, of contaminated air, land, and water. We in the United States and western Europe also live in a time of unprecedented prosperity and material wealth. And yet we are searching. Some have embraced fundamentalist doctrines in an attempt to find safety in authority and mass identity. And some have turned to ancient traditions, to earth-based, holistic religions which spring from and reflect the all-encompassing power of the natural world. It is these latter attempts at spiritual wellness, often referred to as Neo-Paganism, which will be addressed here.

¹ Zsuzsanna Budapest, interview with author, 2 May 1989.

Neo-Paganism is greatly concerned with the aliveness or vitality of all life forms. That life is sacred is also understood, and there exists an acceptance of the interconnectedness of all life. Neo-Pagan groups are rather anarchical in nature and lack gurus or hierarchies. They tend to consider humanity's theologically-based separation from nature to be at the root of modern day alienation. Ritual is often seen as the key to unlock our alienation and return us to ourselves and to nature.

Neo-Paganism is extremely diverse in its manifestation. According to Margot Adler, these groups

All differ in regard to tradition, scope, structure, organization, ritual, and names for their deities, they do [however] regard one another as part of the same religious and philosophical movement.²

One aspect of Neo-Paganism which Adler suggests may be the fastest growing segment is known as the Wiccan religion, or Witchcraft, or simply, the Craft. As it is true of Neo-Paganism in general, Witchcraft is also extremely diverse and free of any one dogma or system of rules. The following Covenant of the Goddess, ratified in California in 1975, gives a sense of the autonomous, "gently anarchical"³ spirit of modern day witches. The preamble reads:

We establish this Covenant to bring us closer together and to help us serve the

² Margot Adler, Drawing Down the Moon (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 3.

³ Adler, 106.

Craft and the Pagan community.

We define ourselves: (1) We all worship the Goddess, and many others honor other deities. (2) We are bound by Craft law, not necessarily identical in all traditions. (3) We recognize each other as being in the Craft.

We are not the only Witches. Witches who do not choose to join us are nonetheless Witches.

Each coven is autonomous. Any authority given to covenant is by the choice of each coven, and can be withdrawn.⁴

There is a sense among members of the Craft that the Goddess takes as many forms as there are forms to take.

Witches do not worship the Goddess; they connect with Her

through the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth. through trees, animals, through other human beings, through ourselves. She is here. she is within us all. She is the full circle: earth, air, fire, water, and essence -- body, mind, spirit, emotions, change.⁵

To understand this sense of connection, it is necessary to recognize the animism which underscores it. Animism implies a worldview which views all reality as having life, of being animated by a life force. Rocks, trees, pigs, dreams, people, birds -- all have a spirit, a vitality; there is no separation between that which is "animate" and that which is "inanimate." According to Adler,

Neo-Pagan religions allow their participants to

⁴ Adler, 104.

⁵ Starhawk, The Spiral Dance (San Francisco: Harper 7 Row, Publishers, 1979), 78.

reenter the primeval world view, to participate in nature in a way that is not possible for most Westerners after childhood. The Pagan revival seems to be a survival response to the common urban and suburban experience of our culture as "impersonal", "neutral", or "dead."⁶

Many Pagans would also say that pantheism and polytheism are also essential to their reality. Pantheism is similar to animism and maintains that "divinity is inseparable from nature and that deity is immanent in nature."⁷ Also according to Adler,

The idea of polytheism is grounded in the view that reality (divine or otherwise) is multiple and diverse. And if one is pantheistic-polytheistic, as are many Neo-Pagans, one might say that all nature is divinity and manifests itself in myriad forms and delightful complexities.⁸

Carol Christ, although she has not called herself a Pagan, certainly echoes Pagan tradition when she says,

I have known since I was very young that the earth is holy. I continue to intuit the connections of my spirit to the spirit of all living things. Though it is harder to feel a part of what we call "nature" in an urban setting than it was when people lived closer to the land in rhythm with the seasons, it is possible and essential...For me, spirituality is experiencing connectedness to the live force within all living things.⁹

⁶ Adler, 25.

⁷ Adler, 25.

⁸ Adler, 25.

⁹ Carol Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite (San Francisco: Harper 7 Row, Publishers, 1987), ix.

In her discussion of Neo-Paganism and modern Wicca, Margot Adler lists what she feels are the essentials or basic beliefs. While she emphasizes the diversity of Pagan groups, she nonetheless feels that the following fairly accurately sums up the core belief system:

The world is holy. Nature is holy. The body is holy. Sexuality is holy. The mind is holy. The imagination is holy. You are holy. A spiritual path that is not stagnant ultimately leads one to the understanding of one's own divine nature. Thou art Goddess. Thou art God. Divinity is imminent in all Nature. It is a much within you as without.

In our culture which has for so long denied and denigrated the feminine as negative, evil, or, at best, small and unimportant, women (and men, too) will never understand their own creative strength and divine nature until they embrace the creative feminine, the source of inspiration, the Goddess within.

While one can at times be cut off from experiencing the deep and ever-present connection between oneself and the universe, there is no such thing as sin (unless it is simply defined as that estrangement) and guilt is never very useful.

The energy you put into the world comes back.¹⁰

The followers of Wicca feel inspired by the traditions of Pre-Christian Europe. Considering themselves priestesses and priests of an ancient shamanistic tradition,

They come together to celebrate the mysteries of the Triple Goddess of birth, love, and death, and of her Consort, the Hunter, who is Lord of the Dance of Life.¹¹

¹⁰ Adler, ix.

¹¹ Starhawk, 3.

Celebrating the Triple Goddess, by emphasizing a trinity and not a duality, does not honor the traditional Western divisions of dark/light, good/evil, male/female, etc., and the separation they imply.

The Trinity multiplies into three times three, as in the Nine Muses, and from then on explodes into the diversity of nature,¹² accepting the different as a religious concept.

Gone is the need to create "the Other"¹³ as a vehicle to embody societal projections of fear. women have often been the targets of the projections of fear. Women have often been the targets of this projection since they, according to Jean Baker Miller, "have been made the embodiment of the dominant cultures's unsolved problems."¹⁴

Witches

The word Witch generally refers to the followers of the

¹² Zsuzsanna Budapest, The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries (Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1989), xxv.

¹³ In her discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's naming of the concept of "the Other," Hazel E. Barnes says, "Beauvoir agrees that women, viewed by men as a hybrid, midway between the human which man is and the natural world which he is not, becomes essentially the Other -- the Other which man loves, hates, needs, resists, despises. The myth of Woman, Beauvoir shows, flexibly accommodates her as angel, demon, evil, flesh, redemptive spirit, life force, and mortal death -- man's other half but the half which in some mysterious way he himself is not. Women have internalized this myth, trying to model themselves after whatever particular version of it males in their immediate society demand." Hazel E. Barnes, "Simone de Beauvoir and Later Feminism," Simone de Beauvoir Studies 4, (1987), 10, qtd. in Nel Noddings, Women and Evil (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 224.

¹⁴ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 58.

Craft. The root of the word Witchcraft comes from the words wicca and wicca, each referring to male or female practitioners, respectively. Some witches say that the root word meant wit or wisdom. Others feel that the word derives from the Indo-European roots wic and weik, which mean to bend or to turn.

According to this view, a Witch could be a woman (or man) skilled in the craft of shaping, bending, and changing reality...Although this definition emphasizes the flexible and non-authoritarian nature of modern Wicca, most dictionaries say something quite different.¹⁵

Our historical heritage reminds us of the Burning Times, the times of hideous persecution, the times during which, according to some historians, most intelligent women were murdered by witch hunters. Today's dictionaries define a witch as

A woman regarded as having supernatural or magical power and knowledge usually through contact with the devil or a minor evil spirit: a hag, a crone: a fascinating woman.¹⁶

Webster's Intermediate Dictionary, intended primarily for school use, defines a witch as

1: a person believed to have magic powers 2: an ugly old woman: HAG 3: a charming girl or woman.¹⁷

It is hard to miss the fear behind even such modern-day

¹⁵ Adler, 11.

¹⁶ "Witch," Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, New Edition, 1983.

¹⁷ "Witch," Webster's Intermediate Dictionary, Teacher's Annotated Edition, 1972.

definitions, where old women and young girls are equally suspect, where, in fact, any woman runs the risk of being considered a witch. These definitions bear no resemblance to the definition of "witch" given by Witches themselves. "Participants in Witchcraft revival generally use Witch to mean simply an initiate of the religion Wicca."¹⁸

Followers of Wicca give a variety of reasons for their participation. For some, worship of the Goddess is a logical extension of feminism. Patria Wynne feels that

The revival has to do with the natural curiosity that the feminist has created in many men and women. Why [did patriarchy take over]? And how? And how dare they!

And I think that for oppressed groups of people there's a tremendous urge to know the truth. And most of what we've been given, in terms of the writing of history, is a lie, or disinformation, or only partially true. So this understanding of the early Goddess in ourselves has a lot to do with uncovering what's really true, what's real. And a compelling desire to rewrite the story.¹⁹

Leslie Gray would seem to agree with Wynne in her recognition of the esteem function of the Goddess.

I think that when you've been trampled on for a very long time, it's really pleasing to hear some adulation of one's self...To go from women meaning less than nothing in this society to being actual goddesses, godheads.²⁰

¹⁸ Adler, 10.

¹⁹ Patrice Wynne, interview with author, 13 July 1989.

²⁰ Leslie Gray, telephone interview, 31 July 1989

Carol Christ would go so far as to maintain that women actually require the Goddess for their growth and development. In her essay, "Why Women Need the Goddess," she points out three capacities in which the Goddess serves women. The first is:

The simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of the Goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power.²¹

The key aspects of the power under discussion here are beneficent and independent. In patriarchal culture, women's power is a kind of oxymoron. Many dictionary definitions illustrate the complexity of this concept; even while indicating the negativity of a woman having power, they deny her the right to generate it: she must be in contact with the devil or some minor spirit; i.e., she must rely on a male. Nevertheless, the only power women can have would undermine the male-dominant system. Such power could of course only be conceived of as negative, or destructive, if not downright evil. And it is clear that all women are capable of eluding societal control, be they old and no longer considered "attractive," or be they young and "charming," or be they, for whatever reason, "irresistible." A new recognition, through the Goddess, that women's power can be good, kind, gentle, or promote the well-being of others, is truly a shift in our culturally-imposed beliefs

²¹ Christ, 121.

about women.

That women's power could be independent, especially from men, is another major shift. deep mistrust and outright hatred of women's independent, intellectual capacity has followed women throughout the centuries. The fourteenth century dictum, "When a woman thinketh alone, she thinketh evil,"²² translates in spirit to contemporary thought which still denigrates women's capacity for intellectual achievement. It can also be seen in popular thinking about any woman who is alone and is especially acerbic about the woman who chooses to be alone. At the very least, such a woman is assumed to either harbor some gross defect of character or to be a lesbian. In fact, it would seem that in some important ways, the word "dyke" has become the modern equivalent of "witch" as a tool for keeping women in line.²³

In Christ's discussion of women's power, the legitimacy of that power is also recognized as a key component. Having been disenfranchised for so long, women are seeking a movement toward getting their power back.

²² Malleus Malleficarum, qtd. in Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, Witches, Midwives, and Nurses (New York: The Feminist Press, 1973), 11.

²³ Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman," in Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, eds., Radical Feminism (N.p., n.p., 1973), 243.

Veronica Weeks-Basham feels that women started asserting their right to recover their power approximately twenty years ago when the second wave of the women's movement started.

Women started taking back all the power they'd had on loan [emphasis mine]. And people who'd had it for so long (and particularly men who had had it so long) had written their names all over it and forgot that it didn't belong to them. And so they thought they were getting ripped off, and they weren't. They were just having to give back what had been given to them all along.²⁴

Weeks-Basham's theme of women's power having been temporarily available to men and now being reclaimed, echoes the Old Babylonian myth "Inanna and Dumutzi," as explained by Vicki Noble:

Inanna descended (into the underworld) and had a death and rebirth experience. It's like having her period; it's here menstruation time, which they celebrated in her culture. And then she came back up into the upper world, and her consort Dumuzi was sitting on the throne, lording it over everyone, taking her power, usurping her power. And she said, Okay, it's your turn (to go into the Underworld).

And I see that as identical with what the feminist movement is doing right now. There's really an incredible awakening. Women have been in the underworld for 5,000 years, or the Feminine has, the real feminine, in the deep sense. And now it's coming back up and taking its proper place.²⁵

The sense of their own power that women receive from Goddess imagery is felt by many women to be much more than a

²⁴ Veronica Weeks-Basham, interview, 21 Sept. 1989.

²⁵ Vicki Noble, interview with author, 22 Aug. 1989.

heightened sense of self-esteem alone, although that certainly may be part of it. They also have a profound sense of the sacredness of what they are doing. Rachel Bagby felt the weight of her thoughts when she said,

What I see as women..I see us as women claiming ourselves, claiming the allness of us...And I see us saying, "And this is divine." And I see us then calling that entity that we sense coming through our female selves, that we have access to, as the Goddess. And that's where I see the root of that. And I'm wondering why I was so afraid.

Someone came to me here... and said, "Oh, Rachel, I hear you're into the Goddess. Well, I have other friends who are into the Goddess and they're into Wicca," and it was like, no, no, it's not like I'm into chewing gum or something like that. It's not "into something". You know? It really is recognizing us, our power; it's us recognizing our power. And recognizing that power goes beyond our lives and our individual selves. And calling that power Goddess. [Emphasis mine]²⁶

Power going "beyond our lives and our individual selves" acknowledges an important distinction regarding women's potential for independent power. Women have, culturally speaking, been expected to use their power for the comfort and nurturing of others. Female Stereotypes center around women's sacrifices for family and loved ones. That is not the kind of dynamic implied in Bagby's statement. Instead, it is a sense of interconnectedness with all life which brings women's power into the realm of the sacred, which places it within the rhythm of the life

²⁶ Rachel Bagby, interview, 28 July 1989.

force, a rhythm which has many aspects. The following meditation written by Starhawk honors the early stage of that rhythm: the waxing moon, the Maiden.

Visualize a silver crescent moon, curving to the right. She is the power of beginning, of growth and generation. She is wild and untamed, like ideas and plans before they are tempered by reality. She is the blank page, the unplowed field. Feel your own hidden possibilities and latent potentials; your power to begin and grow. See her as a silver-haired girl running freely through the forest under the slim moon. She is Virgin, eternally unpenetrated, belonging to no one but herself. Call her name "Nimue!" and feel her power within you.[Emphasis mine]²⁷

Christ's second function of the Goddess for women concerns female body imaging.

A second important implication of the Goddess symbol for women is the affirmation of the female body and the life cycle expressed in it.²⁸

Women's biology has historically been used to define them. Men, on the other hand, have somehow transcended such physical definition; often considered the "makers" of culture, they have viewed themselves (and women have viewed them) as apart from and superior to women. In discussing women's place in this "man-made" system, Rosaldo says:

Women are more involved than men in the "grubby" and dangerous stuff of social existence, giving birth and mourning death, feeding, cooking, disposing of feces, and the like. Accordingly, in cultural systems we find a recurring opposition: between man, in the last analysis stands for "culture", and woman, who (defined through symbols

²⁷ Starhawk, 78-79.

²⁸ Christ, 123.

that stress her biological and sexual functions) stands for "nature", and often for disorder.²⁹

The notion of woman as polluter has been is a strong one throughout history. First, her menstrual blood has been considered to hold magical powers and, depending on the culture, to render men impotent, to make their weapons miss their mark, etc. Segregating menstruating women (or women still bleeding after giving birth) from the rest of society has been a common practice in many cultures. We see vestiges of this today in women who are horrified if any of their menstrual blood should be visible to anyone else. This perceived necessity of somewhat shamefully hiding the process and paraphernalia of menstruation has not been lost on the advertising industry in their marketing of "sanitary" products that let women feel "fresh," "confident," and "odor-protected." And the awareness of someone needing to be segregated has not been lost on young women who would be humiliated if the young men knew they were having their periods.

The promotion by church fathers of the notion that Eve was cursed by God for her treachery and punished by being made to have female bodily functions can still be seen today in the modern term "the curse" for a woman's menstrual

²⁹ Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., Woman, Culture, and Society (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 31.

periods.

Secondly, women have often been seen as polluters in terms of their sexuality. Eve as temptress and responsible for the "Fall of Man" is a myth which, over the centuries, has been hardened into belief, if not fact. During the fourteenth century, The Malleus Mallificarum said of women, "All witchcraft stems from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable."³⁰ Even modern films such as "Fatal Attraction" portray women as embodying an evil sexuality capable of threatening a man's very existence.

In an effort to counteract the outrageous misogyny symbolized in Eve, Mary was created. Mary, however, does nothing to alleviate the conditions imposed on women's lives by the suppositions and superstitions created by the Eve myth.

Mariology provided some degree of comfort for downtrodden women, although it could not assuage their pain more than just a little, since churchmen declared Mary exempt from the supposed crimes and disadvantages of mortal women. Mary was sexless, sinless, and absorbed in the relational role of mother to the exclusion of all other roles. And God...had impregnated her without pleasure...
[Emphasis mine]³¹

This denial of female bodily process -- menstruation, sexuality, pregnancy, birthing, suckling -- has led to a

³⁰ Malleus Maleficarum, qtd. in Ehrenreich and English, 12.

³¹ Barbara G. Walker, The Skeptical Feminist (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 6.

denial of all that is essentially female. Women, as a part of this culture, have, of course, internalized the message of their unacceptability, of their being of lesser value in a culture of male pride and dominance. Ann Creely feels that it is this that the Goddess can heal.

The way that I use the Goddess religion is as tool for myself. A symbolic tool that enables me to feel incredible pride in being a woman, that enable me to hook up the processes in my body and my life, symbolically, with the processes that are going on the earth -- the earth as a body.³²

This notion of the earth as female, as mirroring female processes, is one which has appeared frequently throughout history. What is interesting is that it would reappear and flourish during what is the most scientifically-based and technologically-dependent period of human history.

Interesting, but perhaps inevitable. For Charlene Spretnak, we are witness to "a moment of spiritual renewal at this time all over the planet."³³ Spretnak agrees with Stone, Igelhart, and others that the Goddess revival is a natural outcome of feminism, but adds that

It has a lot to do with this larger ecological consciousness that's growing up, because that is so central to the (Goddess) religion. You know, we wouldn't have been so interested in Yahweh with a skirt, but the idea that Gaia had been conceived as putting forth bounty on her surface, and then receiving the dead back into her womb...that the earth was like a female process writ large..that

³² Ann Creely, interview, 6 June 1989.

³³ Charlene Spretnak, interview with author, 3 Sept. 1989.

had a great immediacy...³⁴

As women began to realize that, according to Deena Metzger, "Women had been treated like the earth, and the earth had been treated like women,"³⁵ a recognition developed that both had been denigrated, and that it is time that both be celebrated.

For Fr. Matt Fox, this celebration centers around birth imagery. In commenting on archaeological discoveries of Goddess figures he says,

Tens of thousands of figurines of pregnant women are...an acknowledgment of the birth process. But it was a celebration of birthing...and so the marvelous work of the feminist archaeologists who showed us that for thousands of years we were not condemned to war gods, but that creativity itself was celebrated in the name of goddesses.³⁶

Fox suggests that this human creative potential "teaches the immanence of divinity in all things [and] our interrelationship and our need for reverence toward all creatures."³⁷ This concept, which Fox calls "the Cosmic Christ," is actually "a euphemism for the Goddess."³⁸

In addition to the powers of creation and creativity, the body images of the Goddess express pride in the life

³⁴ Spretnak, interview.

³⁵ Deena Metzger, "Personal Disarmament," Pacifica Radio, Berkeley, 5 June 1990.

³⁶ Matt Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

³⁷ Fox, interview.

³⁸ Fox, interview.

force of sustaining, as well as producing, life.

Many statues of the Goddess show Her with proudly exposed breasts. In matriarchal society there was no shame about exposing the female breasts, because the Goddess as Female was revered as women were revered. The exposed breasts of the Goddess-images were not erotic symbols, but wholly indicative of Her femaleness; the Force that gives Life and Nurturance.³⁹

Today the taboo against exposing the female breast (to the extent that nursing mothers must seek out a public rest room to feed their children) is an indication of the life-negating, anti-growth aspect of our culture.

A society in which women have to hide and cover their breasts is a society in which nurturance is neglected or despised; a society more in touch with suffering and death than mothering. The naked female breasts, as symbol of women's power, deeply frighten men. Breasts are covered for that reason alone, not because they arouse sexual passion.⁴⁰

Goddess figurines, in addition to depicting pride in creation and/or nurturance, include a feature of particular significance during this time in this culture: these goddesses are of substantial size, are fleshy, are resplendent in their earthy proportions. Their breasts, hips, thighs, buttocks, vulvas are large, often emphasized or even exaggerated, and are very present. And they are probably sacred. In a society where girls as young as five are on diets, and where literally no woman is happy with her

³⁹ Budapest, Holy Book of Women's Mysteries, 287.

⁴⁰ Budapest, Holy Book of Women's Mysteries, 288.

body, the celebrated physicalness of the Goddess is like a healing balm on the very personal wounds women have suffered for so many years.

The third way in which the Goddess symbol is important for women, according to Carol Christ, is

The positive valuation of will in Goddess-centered ritual, especially in Goddess-centered ritual magic and spell casting in womanspirit and feminist witchcraft circles.⁴¹

In ritual the purpose is to create and enhance power for a positive goal. A cone of energy is raised, and the Goddess is the symbol through which that energy is transmuted. This is not haphazard; it relies on the focused intention of will or willpower. Performed in a group of like-minded, like-focused intention, the intensity is multiplied.

For women, ritual action based on the power of their collective wills is an important concept, since women have been told so long that their wills were either wrong or ineffectual. Western religious tradition has given women two models: Eve, from whose willful action we get the word "evil," (and who caused all the problems plaguing humanity today) and Mary, who had no will (who allowed herself to be passively impregnated, without pleasure or sex, and then allowed, just as passively, her child to be cruelly tortured and murdered).

⁴¹ Christ, 126.

Casting a spell or participating in a ritual is an act of affirmation for women. It asserts the primacy of their wills. It is a joyous recognition of self. Z Budapest suggests to women,

The day we experience the profound knowledge that we are, in fact, our own saviors, is the day we begin to priestess our own souls.⁴²

She feels that the valuation of the will for women brings about a renewed sense of self as powerful and potent and, through ritual, can be achieved through such experiences as:

The working of our first successful spell; the first time we physically heal a sister or hex an enemy; our first accurate vision of the future; the first time we sense the truth of our past.⁴³

The assertion of will is sometimes frightening to women who have been so long used to subordinating their will to others. For women who are afraid of being thought "selfish," Z Budapest explains:

Casting a spell, in self-defense or self-interest, is not selfish but positive, life-affirming. You have been given powers, the very same powers society devalues. Your right-brain activity, your hunches, come in hand in this activity. Now is the time to use this very oppression, like Aikido, in your favor. All your life as a woman you have been encouraged to be intuitive, sensitive, nurturing, and inventive. In spell-casting, that is all that you need.⁴⁴

⁴² Budapest, interview.

⁴³ Budapest, interview.

⁴⁴ Budapest, Holy Book of Women's Mysteries, 17.

Ritual, while sometimes used for global purposes such as world peace or the release of political prisoners, can also be used for personal empowerment. The following ritual was used to give new strength to a woman who was in great fear about losing her job.

After the women breathed and chanted together, a woman began to chant the woman's name, let us say "C": they chanted, "strong woman, C strong woman". Other women joined in, adding new verses created spontaneously: "Like a redwood, strong; like a she-bear, strong; mountain, strong; strong woman". ...we spent a good half hour singing and praising C, calling out images of strength and sending her energy through our clasped hands. The woman in question said she felt much more self-confident, and she kept her job.⁴⁵

Sometimes women use ritual to focus and direct their wills to protect one another or to bring about a positive resolution, as illustrated by the following ritual for a custody case:

The father hired a very expensive lawyer and the trial date was only three days away. The mother gathered us in a circle and raised energy around a sassafras tree, performed spontaneous prayers, chanted the names of the Goddess, and offered a small libation of milk to the Earth. three days later, this woman called to say her husband and his lawyer set out for court and never arrived! She won by default. (We still don't know where they went instead.)⁴⁶

Rituals to bring about justice, sometimes in the form of a "hex," can also be performed. The important element here is justice, as Craft law prohibits harming any innocent

⁴⁵ Adler, 219-220.

⁴⁶ Budapest, Holy Book of Women's Mysteries, 17.

persons. The following ritual is an example of the kinds of purposes to which a hex may be applied:

A young woman in Venice, California, came to us after her rape. She knew the man and wanted him prosecuted. We shared a hex with her to bring this man to justice so he could not weasel out from punishment. She performed the hex, with our help, and buried the remnants in a nearby cemetery. The rapist was caught while eating in a greasy spoon restaurant after raping someone else. The police put him away for his crimes. He is still in jail.⁴⁷

The recognition of the personal power gained from the exercise of personal and collective will is often a joyous moment for women. To move from "Thy will be done" to "My will be done" is liberating indeed. The Goddess as personification of the will serves as mediator between a woman's inner and outer realities. She releases women from their internal subordination and quips them to more effectively combat external oppression.

The fourth and final reason why Christ finds the Goddess important to women is:

The significance of the Goddess for a reevaluation of women's bonds and heritage.⁴⁸

In our male-dominated culture women have become what the Radicalesbians call "male-identified."⁴⁹ That is, women have internalized male culture's definition of them. That

⁴⁷ Budapest, Holy Book of Women's Mysteries, 18.

⁴⁸ Christ, 129.

⁴⁹ Radicalesbians, in Koedt, Levine, and Rapone, 244.

definition limits women to family and sexual functions and "excludes us from defining and shaping the terms of our lives."⁵⁰ Women in our culture are defined (and see themselves as being defined) by our relationships to men. Sexual and familial functions are, of necessity, performed within the context of a relationship to a man. Selfhood or personal functions are not part of the definition. Subordination to and dependence on a male have become an essential part of the definition of being a "real woman," of being truly feminine.

Being acceptable to men has become a prime life's mission for many women. As a survival mechanism, many women have rejected important aspects of who they are. Often, they even reject other women who do not "fit the mold" of patriarchal definition of femininity. Many mothers, in the interest of assisting their daughters in developing the kinds of traits appropriate to success in the patriarchy, have discouraged their daughters from being too independent, too strong-willed, too assertive. In China it is the mother who binds her daughter's feet. In Muslim societies it is the mother who provides or performs her daughter's clitoridectomy. In the United states it is the mother who tells her daughter to act like a lady and "be nice."

⁵⁰ Radicalesbians, in Koedt, Levine, and Rapone, 244.

In her analysis of the psychologies of dominants and subordinates, Jean Baker Miller explains that:

Within each subordinate group, there are tendencies for some members to imitate the dominants. This imitation can take various forms. Some may try to treat their fellow subordinates as destructively as the dominants treat them. A few may develop enough of the qualities valued by the dominants to be partially accepted into their fellowship. Usually they are not wholly accepted, and even then only if they are willing to forsake their own identification with fellow subordinates.⁵¹

In her study of femininity, Susan Brownmiller cites the work of zoologist Thelma Rowell, who studied the relationships of dominance and subordination in monkeys and baboons. Rowell suggests that it is often the subordinates who carefully observe the hierarchical structure, and not necessarily the dominants. The dominant animal would simply do as he pleased, walk down a path or sit in a particular location, without paying any attention to the subordinate, who, on the other hand, would duck or scurry away. "Cringing, fleeing, and fear-grinning," Rowell wrote, "are extremely potent stimuli eliciting attack behavior in primates, and this has rarely been taken into account in discussing hierarchical relationships."⁵²

Without suggesting too close a correlation between primate behavior which elicits aggression and women's

⁵¹ Miller, 11.

⁵² Susan Brownmiller, Femininity (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984), 197.

behavior which caters to men, it is, nonetheless, interesting to speculate on the extent to which "feminine" mannerisms and behaviors participate in the perpetuation of sexism. The male-identified woman must be ever-vigilant to the vagaries of male mood swings and expectations. Her very survival may depend on it.

Anyone in a subordinate position must learn to be attuned to the vicissitudes of mood, pleasure, and displeasure of the dominant group...subordinate groups can use these developed abilities as one of the few weapons available in the struggle with dominants, and women have often done so.⁵³

In assisting women in their struggle against the dominants and in their quest for selfhood and autonomy, the Goddess can provide a powerful vehicle. She can provide women with a symbol of recognition of the bonds between women and their common experience as women. She can help them understand that they have sometimes used identification with the dominants (men) as a survival tool, rather than identification with other women. And she can let them know that the path is always open to women (and men) who seek identification with a deeper part of themselves, with the life-affirming, growth-seeking part. The Goddess provides symbols of positive identity with womanhood and allows women to value and cherish "womanist"⁵⁴ characteristics in each other. Shared experience can be a source of strength, and

⁵³ Miller, 39.

⁵⁴ A term coined by Alice Walker.

through Goddess-based ritual women can release their male identification and come together to heal and, some say, to be reborn.

I am a woman giving birth to myself.
We are women giving birth to ourselves.⁵⁵
(contemporary chant)

Conclusion

The Goddess is returning in the minds and hearts of women today. She helps women to reclaim their co-opted energies in a patriarchal society. She assists women to recognize and honor the rightness and legitimacy of their power, both as individuals and collectively. She helps them see the strength in aligning themselves with other women and womanist values. She provides forum (ritual) in which women can exercise and value their own personal wills. And she comforts women who have been rubbed raw by their own self body-loathing, and she tells them to love and honor their physical woman-selves, to realize that they literally embody the life-giving and life-affirming properties that this society so desperately needs. The Goddess can indeed be sister-mother-healer-friend to all women who have accepted the masculinized view of themselves. The Goddess can be the glue that holds us together.

⁵⁵ Hallie Austen Igelhart, Womanspirit (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), xiii.

PART III
Conclusion

The earth, the planet, is a living entity. Now, it's a living entity. I sometimes have strong visual images of, it's always like of this chocolate, blobby sort of being that looks somewhat like a woman in the shape of this blobby sort of being in the galaxy, and it's eating chocolates or whatever, and it notices this little pain right here and it's looking down and it just kind of pulls it out and plucks it away. And I get the image of that being the planet.¹

The Goddess has many forms. She is bird, snake, toad, cow, or dog. She is responsible for healing, for the maturing of plants and animals, for our well-being as we progress through birth, maturation, and death. And, many feel, She is responsible for our regeneration. As the One Who Bore Them All, She guides us in our journey of human adventure.

The system of the Goddess is based on wholeness, on life being interrelated with other life, on what Riane Eisler refers to as a "partnership model." In comparing this model, which is the Goddess, with what Eisler refers to as the "dominator model" of the male God, Z Budapest says,

What you really get in that male god set-up is a feudal society projected in the heavens. You have a feudal lord; you have the serfs. And this is the system that is projected and made glorified. But the Goddess, what you project is a family situation. A mother and the children situation, projected up and glorified. Not a

¹ Rachel Bagby, interview with author, 28 July 1989.

lord and serfs, but a Mother who hugs, who suckles, who gives birth, who is there for you ...It's a fundamentally different set-up. And it creates a functional society where adulthood is allowed; the other one does not want you to grow up.²

Many images of the Goddess depict her as a nurturing presence or in relationship to children: Isis, Demeter, Mary, or the Bird and Snake Goddess of the Neolithic. Many images emphasize her physical femaleness, and many of her myths honor her sexuality. Inanna eagerly awaits Dumuzi and asks, "Who will plow my vulva?"

Organismic World View

The Goddess lives in concert with all living beings and is Mother Nature Herself. All living beings are infused with a sacredness of their own, an immanence of divinity. All life is interconnected.

This relationship of interconnectedness with the natural world predominated in Western thought well into the 15th century. In his work De Rerum Natura (on the Nature of Things), Lucretius (99 - 55 B.C.E.) says, of cyclicity,

The earth causes plant and animal life to grow, but on their passing away, what remains is restored to the earth as dust in proportion to what the earth has given...It is like a parent and like a tomb.³

² Zsuzsanna Budapest, interview with author, 2 May 1989.

³ Clarence J. Glacken, Traces on the Rhodian Shore (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 71.

This comment closely parallels the prehistoric concept of the earth as All-Bountiful Mother, from whose body all life emerges and into whose body the dead return. It reflects what is essentially an organismic world view, based on the belief in the interconnectedness of life in all its many forms,

[a belief] that all parts of the cosmos were connected and interrelated in a living unity. From the "affinity of nature" resulted the bonding together of all things through mutual attraction or love. All parts of nature were mutually interdependent and each reflected changes in the rest of the cosmos.⁴

So tightly knitted was this connection of all the parts that the notion of shared experience arose; what one part experienced, all parts experienced. "What one part suffers, the rest also suffer with it,"⁵ maintained Giambattista della Porta (1535-1615). He went on to say:

The whole world is knit and bound within itself: for the world is a living creature, everywhere both male and female, and the parts of it do couple together...by reason of their mutual love.⁶

Plato envisioned the world as having a female soul which energized matter and motion. Medieval theory stressed the whole, which "emphasized the inherent value of each

⁴ Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 131.

⁵ Merchant, 104.

⁶ Merchant, 71.

particular part."⁷ And Neoplatonic magic, though its symbols closely resemble prehistoric regenerative symbols, "portrays the magician as nature's assistant in the cultivation of crops and the breeding of animals, nature being the operator, the magician preparing the way."⁸

Great were cultural constraints regarding environmental exploitation. Nature, conceived of as alive, sensitive, and responsive to human action, required of humans careful and respectful treatment, not for the sake of the Earth alone, but also for their connection to it.

Every part of this Earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memory of the red man.

All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons of the earth...If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves...man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.⁹

Mechanistic World View

The organismic world view was finally to give way completely to a mechanistic concept of life as being

⁷ Merchant, 71.

⁸ Merchant, 109.

⁹ Andree Collard, Rape of the Wild, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 23.

comprised of a series of parts, each autonomous and independent from the others. The magician, once the helpmate of nature, became the scientist who could now manipulate and exploit for the sake of either knowledge or production. In a world no longer viewed as alive and sentient, environmental constraints were relaxed.

The passivity of matter, the externality of motion, and the elimination of a female world soul altered the character of cosmology and its associated normative constraints.¹⁰

Gone was the sacred sense of interconnection. In its place was hierarchical fragmentation, with human males at the top and all other life forms in varying levels underneath. "Science" (often a companion of patriarchal theology) was brought in to justify this hierarchical structure, as biology became destiny.

Regarding the attitudes towards animals, some earlier thinkers had actually sown the seeds which were to come to full bloom with the widespread adoption of the scientific model.

Thomas Aquinas announced emphatically that animals are intended for man's use in the natural order. Hence it is not wrong for man to make use of them, either by killing them or in any other way whatever. Descartes held that animals are merely machines. As late as 1901, a moral theologian named Joseph Rickaby...declared, "Brute beasts, not having

¹⁰ Merchant, 111.

understanding and therefore not being persons, cannot have any rights.¹¹

Although a number of authors cite the Scientific Revolution as the primary point at which the shift from organismic to mechanistic thinking occurred, others feel that these ideas go back far before Aquinas and Descartes. Collard feels that the notion of scientific objectivity

is in reality the consummate expression of the power relationships and devaluation of nature inherent in Sanskrit. "Perfect, refine, and improve upon nature" was the dictum under which baroque art flourished. In other fields of endeavour, "improvement" and "invention" contributed technological "advances" which in turn were predicated on man's faith in his God-given right to use nature as he saw fit.¹²

The Old Babylonian myth "Enuma elis" illustrates the principle of nature existing for the use of man. It also includes an important illustration of the ways in which the dominion-over theme applies to women. Both nature and women are promoted as existing "for the use and convenience of men."¹³

The myth begins with what is clearly an organismic consciousness:

¹¹ David Quammen, Natural Acts, (New York: Nick Lyon Books, 1985), 136.

¹² Collard, 18.

¹³ H. Patricia Hynes, The Recurring Silent Spring, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989), 7.

Firm ground had not been called by name,
Naught but primordial Apsu, their begetter,
(And) Mummu Tiamat, she who bore them all,
Their waters comingling as a single body...
Then it was that the gods were formed within
them.

Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name
they were called. [Emphasis mine]¹⁴

The creation model here is that of the Mother Earth
comingling her waters with Apsu and giving birth to the gods
Lahmu and Lahamu. This is a very different kind of image
from that of the male God Yahweh creating Adam, and from
him, Eve. The difference is essentially between female
birth creation (an organismic perception) and male creation
(more of a mechanistic concept).

A shift occurs in the myth not long after this point.
(Some scholars have speculated that this shift in the myth
coincides with the advent of patriarchy and a violent
takeover of a previously matristic society.) The offspring
Lahmu and Lahamu become boisterous; they "disturbed
Tiamat...

They troubled the mood of Tiamat
By their hilarity in the Abode of Heaven.
Apsu could not lessen their clamor
And Tiamat was speechless at their (ways).
Their doings were loathsome...
Unsavory were their ways; they were
overbearing.¹⁵

¹⁴ E.A. Speiser, "The Creation Epic," in James Pritchard, ed.,
Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 61.

¹⁵ Speiser, 63.

Apsu then went to Tiamat, suggesting that they restore the order by destroying their offspring. Tiamat, in her nurturing, holistic role as the "one who bore them all," was outraged at the suggestion.

She cried out aggrieved, as she raged alone,
Injecting woe into her mood:
"What? Should we destroy that which we have
built?
Their ways are indeed most troublesome, but
let us attend kindly!"¹⁶

It is interesting to compare this commitment to preserving life with Yahweh's decision to eradicate life on earth with his flood. We also see a tolerance on the part of Tiamat for chaos, for a change in the established order. Yahweh, on the other hand, will destroy that which has displeased him, except for Noah, who has upheld Yahweh's "order."

As the myth continues, Marduk appears on the scene. Destined to become the conquering king, his father calls him, "My son, the Sun! Sun of the Heavens!" This naming of Marduk is a clear precursor to the future sky god/earth mother duality. Eventually, Marduk and Tiamat line up for battle. What is interesting are the kinds of weapons that are attributed to each.

¹⁶ Speiser, 64.

Marduk, "Son of Heaven," or, one could suggest, man of culture, was refined and resplendent in both ability and endowment:

Perfect were his members beyond comprehension,
 Unsuted for understanding, difficult to perceive.
 Four were his eyes, four were his ears;
 When he moved his lips, fire blazed forth.
 Large were all four hearing organs,
 And the eyes, in like number, scanned all things.
 He was the loftiest of the gods, surpassing was
 his stature;
 His members were enormous, he was
 exceedingly tall.¹⁷

Tiamat, on the other hand, being inferior in stature, required help. And it is important to note that in order to get that help she aligned herself with nature in its most hideous and chaotic forms.

[She] bore monster serpents,
 Sharp of tooth, unsparing of fang.
 (With venom) for blood she has filled their bodies
 Roaring dragons she had clothed with terror,
 Has crowned them with haloes, making them like
 gods,
 So that he who beholds them shall perish
 abjectly...
 She set up the Viper, the Dragon,
 the Sphinx,
 The Great-Lion, the Mad-Dog, and the Scorpion-
 Man,
 Mighty lion-demons, the Dragon-Fly, the
 Centaur...¹⁸

¹⁷ Speiser, 67.

¹⁸ Speiser, 69.

Not only did Tiamat align herself with nature's monstrosities, she also used sorcery and trickery to make them look like gods.

Upon hearing that he has a rival who is preparing for battle against him, Marduk asks about the man who is to oppose him. His father answers:

What male is it who has pressed his fight
against thee?
(It is but) Tiamat, a woman, that opposes thee
with weapons!
O my father-creator, be glad and rejoice;
The neck of Tiamat thou shalt soon tread upon!¹⁹

Eventually the mighty battle takes place, and Tiamat is defeated. Her defeat, however, is not marked by courage or honor, as is often the case between warriors. Instead Marduk

Turned back to Tiamat whom he had bound.
The lord trod on the legs of Tiamat,
With his unsparing mace he crushed her skull.
When the arteries of her blood he had severed,
The North Wind bore it to places undisclosed.
On seeing this, his fathers were joyous and
jubilant,
They brought gifts of homage, they to him.
Then the lord paused to look at her dead body,
That he might divide the monster and do artful
works.
He split her like a shellfish into two parts:
Half of her he set up and ceiled the sky,
Pulled down the bar and posted guards.
He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.
[Emphasis mine]²⁰

¹⁹ Speiser, 69.

²⁰ Speiser, 70.

Tiamat has been dehumanized like so much raw material with which Marduk can do "artful works." He is now the creator, using the stuff that was Tiamat to fund his creations. He even admonishes the guards to protect the natural resources that were once Tiamat's body: they must "allow not her waters (the original commingling waters of creation) to escape." Tiamat, once "She who bore them all," has become spare parts.

Dualism and Disowning the Self

The fragmentation that is a part of patriarchal theology has resulted in a dualistic framework of antithetical opposites, with one of each pair vastly superior to the other. Thus light is "better" than dark, up "better" than down, male "better" than female, spirit "better" than body, and culture "better" than nature. Many of the interviewees felt that it is this dualism which has created so much despair.

Susan Griffin stresses the anti-life component of this fragmentation when she says,

I feel that we're in a culture that is really suicidal; and it's not entirely conscious. In fact, most of it isn't conscious. There's no awareness that our alienation from nature is really self-hatred. You know, if you hate the planet, it you hate animals...Well, we are animals. I mean, I am that tree; I am breathing in that tree right now; that tree's creating my oxygen. There's no difference [between me and that tree]. There's a lot of oxygen running around inside my body. There's no place you can point to

where my skin lets off and the air begins.
Those boundaries really don't exist in the
physical universe.

The alienation that men experience from
women, that white people experience from
people of color, that this culture
experiences with nature, is all a self-hatred
really. It's all a disowned part of the
self. And I think that that's what we have
to begin to reconcile: we have to shift our
whole cosmology.²¹

Concern about the manifestations of self-hatred is
expressed by Matthew Fox as well.

As long as we're stifled, though, and, as
you say, only a few are making decisions for
us, then all kinds of trouble, including
self-hatred...And, of course, persecuted
groups--women and others--in our society...
black people, red people, gay people...It's
scary when very little in society has built
up your sense of your own self-worth; and,
again, that's why I talk about "original
blessing" as being prior, or more important,
than original sin because I think most people
believe in original sin; that is, they
believe that they're incapable, kind of
deeply wounded. 'Cause this is what we're
taught.

A sadistic culture creates masochists.
And I think we live in a profoundly sado-
masochistic culture, and that's another way
of naming the up-down relationship. Whereas,
your circular relationship heals that; it's
not about power over, it's power with,
passion with; and it's about celebrating
individual gifts where we're different but
equal. And, you know, I think that's
empowerment, and the heart of it is our

²¹ Susan Griffin, interview with author, 17 July 1989.

creativity, a listening creativity from everybody.²²

All the interviewees listed the "isms" of society as profoundly contributing to our problems today. The consensus of opinion seemed to be that these "isms" provide the structure that keeps fragmentation alive.

There's a woman at Union Seminary who has just written her doctoral dissertation; her name is Lois Kirkwood and she talks about the concept of structural enemyhood. And society is set up in such a way that there are literally structures that keep people apart. There are structures that prevent us from developing relationships or from sharing resources or not blowing each other up. And racism would be one, sexism would be another, heterosexism would be another, ageism, imperialism, a sort of laundry list of isms. But what's useful is that she's pushing the structural nature of those things and really pushing toward structural changes.²³

An important by-product of the structures of sexism and imperialism which was mentioned by a number of interviewees is violence against women, particularly sexualized violence. And images of negative sexuality, where sexual organs become weapons. And the structures which produce sexualized violence are very similar to the structures of speciesism and imperialism which produce violence against nature and the environments of plants and animals. As poet Deena

²² Matthew Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

²³ Mary E. Hunt, interview with author, 18 Nov. 1989.

Metzger so eloquently noticed, "Women and the environment have been treated the same way."²⁴

Violence Against Women and Nature

It seems a customary aspect of dominator power to reduce the disempowered to a collection of parts, to render partial that which was whole. And so it is with women and nature.

It is a given in the advertising industry to use parts of models to represent the whole: A woman's hand to advertise hand cream, a women's eyes to extol the virtues of a particular make-up, strategically photographed shots of a woman's body in the shower to advertise soaps and shampoos. But on a deeper level we really do not read this symbolically. Instead, we have come to see ourselves as a collection of parts and do not emphasize our wholeness.

Billions of dollars are spent each year by (predominantly) women who really believe that by increasing/decreasing/reducing/enlarging/lengthening/shortening/removing/adding to their breasts/eyes/chins/lips/noses/hair, they will qualitatively improve their lives.

This reductionist philosophy also applies to the realm of nature. Systematic species elimination, without regard for the larger systemic implications, has all too often been

²⁴ Deena Metzger, "Personal Disarmament," Pacifica Radio, 5 June 1990.

the norm for "progress." Almost thirty years ago, Rachel Carson warned about the overuse of certain pesticides. Silent Spring is almost here as North America is now experiencing a 60% reduction in the songbird population. Ninety-five percent of North American old forests have been cut, not only affecting birds, but countless additional species, as the Endangered Species list passes the 350 mark.

The concept of "the Other" has been projected onto the environment. Wherever it has stood in the way of progress convenience or speculation (ie., condominium complex, shopping mall, parking lot, resort, oil drilling operation, or high tech business "park"), nature has been subdued and/or eradicated. While it is true that a few trees or plants may be put back by "landscape architects" to "enhance the natural beauty of the surroundings," this only echoes the claims of cosmetic surgery, which purports to "restore you to the woman you were meant to be."

And so it is that the natural functions of nature have been subsumed by the "experts" who plan natural parks and who are architects of the landscape. We begin to find as normal such little bits of "natural" environment, where ducks eat hot dogs and no weeds grow.

And women, by their close association with nature, are targeted for the same usurpation of their natural powers, the same colonization of their natural selves: their

bodies. In pornography, advertising principles have been perfected, as full labial display replaces hands, eyes, and strategically showered parts. And the same gushing compliance with which models previously displayed products from hand cream to cleansers, is now shown for male genitalia.

It seems that in spite of the perception that pornography exists on the margin of society, it actually strongly upholds the status quo. In addition to its obviously sexually exploitative aspects, it upholds many of the same negative cultural beliefs about women which have been perpetrated throughout the centuries by a male-dominated theology: women are more sexual and therefore less spiritual; they are gullible, but deceitful; and unlike men, do not feel pain, or do not mind it if they do. This latter "trait" allows for the relaxation of constraints on culturally prevalent misogyny. (Many of these alleged characteristics have been noted by Susan Griffin to apply to other races, other ethnic groups, etc.)

Excusing their actions with the ludicrous assumption that women do not mind it, or even want it, or signed a contract to do it, or agreed to it earlier, etc., perpetrators can numb their awareness to the point that they may actually believe that real women want to be hurt. The

implications for said "real" women are enormous, to which crime reports in this country attest.

This attitude, or, rather, this numbing of consciousness, also translates to other species. It is estimated that millions of animals are tortured each year for the sake of "proving" the safety of a variety of unnecessary household and personal care products. Proof of psychological numbing can be seen in the wording of animal experimentation reports.

In referring to his dogs as "animated instruments," Pavlov, a household name in scientific dedication, talks about the psychology of a particularly bad and vicious dog, Jackson, who finally was subdued and made a "social and amiable fellow" after rounds of brutal and unfeeling treatment. The ruining of the dog's spirit was applauded as effective socialization.²⁵

The negative cultural beliefs which pornography upholds also apply to the natural world. Nature, too, is uncontrollable. It cannot be trusted. And in the realm of the animal experimenter, animal pain is not an issue. It is either outright denied or is considered to be necessary to the well-being of humans.

²⁵ Collard, 87.

The culturally sanctioned denigration of both women and nature is seen quite clearly in the attitudes regarding pain. For science, "It is clear that animal pain and the researcher's drive for power are at the core of experimentation." And for the pornographer,

Just as the pornographic hero relishes the subservience of his victim, so does he also glory in his own control.²⁶

Belief in the non-being of woman is at the core of the pornographic mind. The pornographic heroine is prevented from speaking; her silence is strictly enforced through threat and force. This is not unlike the scientist of today, who, when working on a large, unanesthetized dog, orders it to be "prepared by laboratory attendants who strap it to a table and remove its vocal chords. No noise. No pain."²⁷

Mechanistic Mythology: The Hero's Journey

Joseph Campbell has said that "myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation."²⁸

²⁶ Susan Griffin, Pornography and Silence, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1981), 64.

²⁷ Collard, 61.

²⁸ Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 3.

This is very much like Roszak's "transparent windows of experience" mentioned earlier. While myth, ritual, and symbol can all act as vehicles to another consciousness, they seem to, at the same time, uphold cultural expectations and express the prevailing cultural attitudes.

The best-known myths of Western tradition focus on a male hero who participates in some version of a rite of passage, a pattern of separation, initiation, and return or reunion.

In other words, the hero ventures forth from his ordinary, daily life into a region of fabulous, supernatural powers, where a decisive victory is won. He often marries a maiden, or his mother, and slays a dragon or serpent in the process. He then returns home from a mysterious adventure to bring some good or fortune or bounty back to his fellow men. This pattern seems innocuous enough until the important role of women is realized:

The mystical marriage with the queen goddess of the world represents the hero's total mastery of life; for the woman is life, the hero is knower and master. [emphasis mine] And the testings of the hero, which were preliminary to his ultimate experience and deed, were symbolical of those crises of realization by means of which his consciousness came to be amplified and made capable of enduring the full possession of the mother-destroyer, his inevitable bride.

With that he knows that he and the father are one: he is in his father's place.²⁹

The hero's journey seems to be simply another manifestation of the domination and denigration of women,³⁰ with ultimate solidarity with male power. The effect of this, says Elinor Gadon, is alienation.

The hero's journey glorified a Western tradition, extolled by mythographer Joseph Campbell as the human path, is a journey away from the mother. The quest in search of the father is one of exile from his female source and has led to alienation and estrangement between men and women.³¹

Certainly an aspect of this estrangement is our unwillingness to exist in harmony with each other or with our environment. At this moment we sit on the brink of destruction, if not at the hands of global war, then at the hands of global ecocide.

Toward The Future, If There is to Be One

²⁹ Campbell, 120.

³⁰ Campbell cites numerous stories where the repudiation of women by men is rewarded by God. See Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 123. "When Saint Peter observed that his daughter, Petronilla, was too beautiful, he obtained from God the favor that she should fall sick with fever..." See Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 124. "As a child Saint Bernard of Clairvaux suffered from headaches. A young woman came to visit him one day, to soothe his sufferings with her songs. But the indignant child drove her from the room. And God rewarded him for his zeal; for he got up from his bed immediately, and was cured."

³¹ Elinor W. Gadon, The Once and Future Goddess, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 372.

Toward The Future, If There is to Be One

The problems present in contemporary society have created massive alienation and isolation. Institutionalized structures such as sexism, racism, imperialism, speciesism, and the like divide and separate us, resulting in a dysfunctional, numbed human experience. However, though all of the interviewees offered insightful lists of urgent contemporary problems, they also offered reasons for hope and suggestions for solutions.

In examining the responses of those interviewed for this work, four main issues emerge as being key to turning our society from alienation and imminent destruction to the affirmation of life: the resacralization of the body, the reshuffling of economic/political structures, the retirement of god the father, and the adoption of spiritual ecofeminism as the philosophical bedrock of society.

Resacralizing the Body

A particularly overwhelming aspect of our dualistic heritage concerns the notion of the body as being separate from spirit. Like Tiamat we have been divided into many parts. Some are called "spirit," some "mind," some "body." None are connected. Spirit is "above" mind, and both are "above" body. Rather than be connected to the natural world, we are expected to want to escape from it. From the asceticism of the saints to the out-of-body experiences of

assumption seems to be that anything not of the body must be superior.

Sexuality has certainly suffered from this dualism, as the "fringed hole and probe" have become the fragmented symbols of our sexual selves. Though these symbols may bear physical resemblance to the sacred vulva and triangle of the goddess, their intent could not be less similar. The roads of sacred and pornographic have no intersection. Elinor Gadon feels that

The female body is the expressive vehicle of the creative life force, the energy that activates our being...Where women deny all those parts of themselves said to be like nature - the relational, the carnal, the body processes and rhythms they are denying their bodily, sensate selves.³²

She believes that it is important for us to understand the true meaning of erotic and how it works in our lives.

The word erotic comes from the Greek eros, the personification of love and creative power in all aspects. The erotic arises from our deepest instincts and is the guiding light toward understanding self and the world, as well as interpersonal communication. ...The erotic is the power that comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person - be it physical, emotional, psychological, or intellectual - forming a bond between sharers and is the source of our joy.³³

³² Gadon, 290.

³³ Gadon, 291.

Poet Deena Metzger feels it is every woman's challenge to resacralize her sexuality. She feels that the sexual revolution was a male construct and had nothing whatsoever to do with expressing our erotic power.

It is not sex we are after at all, but something far deeper. The task is to accept the body as spiritual and sexuality and erotic love as spiritual disciplines.³⁴ It is eros which will transfer our culture.

She feels that we need an "internal revolution,"

...new spiritual order...[requiring us to] engage in two heresies. The first more difficult task is to return to the early, neolithic, pagan, matriarchal, perception of the sacred universe itself. The second is to re-sanctify the body. The second follows inevitably from the first. But to overthrow secular thought may be the heretical act of the century.³⁵

For Gadon,

The goddess is the means by which we know the universe is sacred; through which we have the experience of the sacred. We have to live our lives so that they come into harmony with the sacred. The invocation of her image is the cry to consciousness.³⁶

Hallie Austen Igelhart feels that using ritual to overcome culturally-imposed body loathing is a useful place to begin. Even though it may at first feel untrue or

³⁴ Deena Metzger, qtd., in Gadon, Once and Future Goddess, 298.

³⁵ Metzger, qtd. in Gadon, 300.

³⁶ Gadon, 300.

awkward, the following ritual can speak to a deep place in each of us and awaken the knowledge of our true erotic selves.

To begin this meditation, touch different parts of your body, recognizing that the images of goddesses are made in your image. Name each part, saying such invocations as, "These are the breasts of the goddess, which are sensuous to touch and which nourish myself and the world;" "These are the legs of the goddess, which help me to run and dance"; "These are the eyes of the goddess, with which-I see clearly all that happens." Make up your own words, sensing how you feel about yourself as the goddess. If you are with other women, take turns touching a part of the woman to your left and describe it as you would your own: "This is the hair of the goddess, which billows out, reflecting the waves of the ocean.

When you are ready to leave say:

I call on the goddesses whose bodies I see and feel reflected in my own body. I call on the goddesses whose blood, like my blood, flows with the cycles of the universe. I call on the goddesses whose circle is never broken, whose circle I am a part of wherever I go."³⁷

A third aspect of resacralizing the body is to honor female biological processes.

Part of honoring female bodily processes involves a reimagining, a reclaiming of those processes. In his discussion of his concept of birthing divinity, Fr. Matthew Fox quotes Meister Eckhart, who said, "Every person is a

³⁷ Hallie Austen Igelhart, Womanspirit, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 98-99.

mother of god, called to be a mother..." And he quotes Hildegard of Bingen (12th century mystic), who said,

Drying up is a basic sin. So she says you have to stay wet and green and moist and juicy. Isn't that a birthing? A very fertile image there.

And then she says--She plays on that image all the time--and she says that injustice comes from being dried up. Things get brittle and lose their sap; and people lose their oil of compassion, she said. And so they can't... They don't feel they're empowered to do anything about it. And, you know, that's to me exactly what Joannua Macy's saying in her work on nuclear despair and all that today. That we're calling apathy is a cover-up for despair, and what's despair? It's feeling disempowered. Thomas Aquinas said people who are in despair are cut off from their own divinity, the sense of their own divinity. So, it's that same theme of empowerment, of -- as you say -- our wetness, our ability to be resilient and fresh and imaginative.³⁸

To equate that uniquely female process -- birthing -- with social justice, with fecundity of imagination, with wetness, is profoundly healing.

Reshuffling Economic/Political Structures

Economics as we know it must change. The motivation of profit must shift as questions about whose profit are asked. Our very definition of work must be transformed.

Fr. Matt Fox feels that our anthropocentric view of the world must shift: it must incorporate other living beings

³⁸ Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

and other ecosystems. Our mutual survival depends on it. We must shift our economic policies from those based on profit to ones based on a holistic approach to the quality of life.

Our economics don't include the health of the ocean or the waters or the soil or the air, you know; we just look at the bottom dollar sign, which is really ridiculous. The real wealth that we've inherited is the health of our planet, and But Chernobyl and this Valdez business and all this ... and the rain forests disappearing ... I mean, people are beginning to get the message, and ... I think one reason we've resisted getting the message is the implications are so vast: everything has to change.³⁹

In agreement with Fox that "everything has to change," Charlene Spretnak feels that individual commitment is the key to fighting "the large forces that are tearing up the earth." These, she feels, are the transnational corporations which seems to be immune to to the controls of even national governments.

I keep seeing all these quotes in the paper by, for example, a Motorola official who said, "We don't care about America; we can put our plants anywhere. We're a global company." So it's interesting to see a couple of pages earlier that the Secretary of Defense says that you know we have this huge debt, we have this huge arms build up to protect the national interests, and, as Weinberger said (very badly I might add), and to protect our access to resources and markets around the world. Well, why are we spending all these billions to get to the markets and resources for Motorola, if

³⁹ Fox, interview.

Motorola now doesn't give a fig about the United States? It's a new ruling class that now supercedes the nation states.⁴⁰

Spretnak feels that most people just are not aware of the power and control these transnationals exert in the marketplace and in the world. She feels that the sole point of their existence is economic growth, using more and more of the resources and finding more and more markets.

Which is the exact opposite of what the planet needs. So it's very difficult. Looking at it that way, you can't just recycle your garbage and call it quits at that. You have to also try to be part of the grassroots outcry against this using up the planet as if it was a disposable napkin or something.⁴¹

The theme of a grassroots outcry against using up the planet is shared by Starhawk who feels that radical change is clearly necessary. In echoing Fox's belief that everything would have to change, Starhawk says,

Well, we would have to really, seriously change our priorities, you know, the things that we do right now that are harmful to the earth, we couldn't do. If...burning oil to drive cars meant that we're going to spill it all over the Alaska coastline periodically, you know, then we would need to find some other way to get about. It would mean that the profit could no longer be the measure of value, whether anything's worth doing, and you have to have other measurements. And it would mean that the resources, the riches of the earth, could no longer be hoarded or no longer exploited by a small group at the

⁴⁰ Charlene Spretnak, interview with author, 2 Sept. 1989.

⁴¹ Spretnak, interview with author, 2 Sept. 1989.

expense of other people. So, it would really mean reconstructing our economic system in some kind of a new form in a new way, something that I don't think corresponds to any of the classic economic theories. You know, it's not socialism, it's not capitalism; it's not Marxism because it means putting the earth sense first, using that as the measure of value.⁴²

In commenting on the tremendous undertaking that would be required to put the earth sense first, Fox says,

On the other hand, what a moment for creativity and growth and thinking as a planet, as a species, finally, and not in terms of nationalism, which is so passe, and in terms of historic, individual interest... you know--if your air isn't decent for your kids and so forth, it doesn't matter if you're Republican or Democrat; it moves you beyond all this. Or north or south; so-called first world, so-called third world. It's our shared pain that will bring us together.⁴³

Z Budapest feels that some of the answers must be sought in the workplace itself, that a humanization must take place.

And by that I mean time-share--job time-share for vice presidents, for presidents--and if they want babies, they have to take 50 percent of the upbringing. The upbringing of babies is a humanizing experience. Cleaning up vomit, up chucking, and smelling the baby shit shared by both sexes--experienced by the child as shared by both sexes -- would create a society where life would be valued a lot more and not be an abstract thing. Like "acceptable casuasalties," for example, is an

⁴² Starhawk, interview with author, 4 May 1989.

⁴³ Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

abstract line. And men do it because they did not bring up one single soldier.⁴⁴

Agreeing with the need to humanize work, Fox feels that we need to overcome the patriarchal definition of work.

Some people don't work, they are worked over by their work. Here's this wonderfully developed mysticism of work, spirituality of work, that says: our work must come from inside out; it must come from our center People are feeling called today; and I'm saying, especially with what you'd call lay people, the call is not so much to something like an institutional church or formal organization so much, as to a call from Mother Earth to do something. And the jobs aren't quite formed there; I encourage our students to create work. If [we had been putting the earth first] the healthy jobs would be there; but [since we haven't] that means we have to start recreating work now. The heart of healthy work would be what Eckhardt [German Mystic 1260-1328 C.E.] calls "enchantment"--I love that. Enchantment. It has to be part of our work 'Cause it has to be part of our existence I think it's a part of spirituality. It may be the first steps; I call it via positivo--finding the light in the world, in our being here. And that certainly means for adults--in our work.⁴⁵

The Retirement of God the Father

An integral aspect of the God-As-Male theology is the transcendence of God: sacredness is not something in which we can all participate; it is saved for just a few "special" celibate males. This aspect glorifies the transcendent

⁴⁴ Budapest, interview with author, 2 May 1989.

⁴⁵ Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

nature of a God who is neither here with us nor within us. "He" is separate from us, above us, and has total control and power over us. His priestly "servants" are all male and in order to avoid becoming "tainted" by the female, live a life of celibacy. Many of those interviewed here have faulted Judeo-Christian theology, with its basis in separatism, dualism, and rigidly-maintained gender-related hierarchy with many of today's problems. Rachel Bagby says,

I see the war machines, I see the disrespect of the environment, I see the conflict with the different races of people, I see the abuse and oppression of animals, or other animals by our species, I see all of those as coming from a lack of respect for life itself. A manifestation of that is thinking about the notion of God as something that's outside here and up there.⁴⁶

Mark Knipper, who is doing important work in helping men to unlearn patterns of violence, feels that much of our culture's impulse toward violence stems from our Western theological tradition.

[Our tradition is] male oriented, dominating, controlling, conquering, that type of mentality. We're going to dominate the earth, we're going to control the earth, we're going to put it in a bridle and ride it. Well, we're beginning to find out that we cannot do that and that it was a fallacy to begin with. And I think a lot of that, the manifest destiny idea, God is on our

⁴⁶ Bagby, interview with author, 28 July 1989.

side, all of those things have perpetrated a lot of inconsistencies between what people really are and what we've become. And I think part of that has been the influence of Western religion. It has been influenced by the maleness of that.⁴⁷

Time and time again the interviewees remarked upon the inappropriateness of the masculine, dominating, controlling image of God for our times. We can no longer indulge in the luxury of power-over thinking: our air quality is worsening; the water is polluted; the rain is acid; and our weapons production is putting us in danger of nuclear holocaust.

Our private lives are often a source of despair as men and women have become enemies, and children are abused and abandoned in unprecedented numbers. For the sake of survival we must shift our theology to the affirmation and preservation of life. Goldenberg believes that we must "leave Christ and the Bible behind" and "stop denying the sexism that lies at the root of the Jewish and Christian religions."⁴⁸ Theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, in a recent open letter to each North American Roman Catholic bishop, said,

Your pastoral reaffirms every aspect of the patriarchal system that is the basis of

⁴⁷ Mark Knipper, interview with author, 14 Aug. 1989.

⁴⁸ Naomi Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 22.

sexism. Dear bishops, you embarrass us. You insult our intelligence.

You profess yourselves concerned about the feminization of poverty and pledge to help poor women abandoned with children ... [yet you continue to define] women as essentially mothers while making fatherhood a marginal and voluntary role for men ... [promoting] the very conditions of the impoverished female-headed household you claim to deplore.

You profess to be against abortion and to stand for life, especially for the life that women gestate in their wombs. But your energies are weak in defense of life after birth. You find many excuses for men to stockpile the weapons that could bring all life on the planet to an end. Instead, you crusade against contraception in health clinics, in schools and colleges.

By projecting maleness onto the heavens, as the essence of divine-creative hierarchy, you assure that men will continue to understand that they represent Godlike dominance and sovereignty, and women represent creaturely submission ... For you, the cosmic hierarchy of God over human must remain essentially one of male over female.

Let me say clearly to you, dear bishops, we will not raise one cent for your patriarchal church. We will not lift one finger to rescue your patriarchal system. We will not bend one knee to worship the patriarchal idol that you blasphemously insist on calling "God." We are not fooled.⁴⁹

And we will no longer allow a theology which diminishes us, which divides us from one another, and which sets us on a course of self-inflicted pain. It is time to retire the

⁴⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Open letter to the American Bishops," "Catholic Women's Network," July/Aug. 1990, 3.

Father God and in his place adopt "images of divinity as intrinsic to earth and to living things, and to delight, and to play." Fr. Matthew Fox uses the image of God as a child.

[This image] creates...reverence and it creates gratitude--the awe and the wonderful that is the basis of any real spiritual journey. And it's the child inside, too, that is capable of awe and wonder. So, it gives permission for adults to be children.

And it's interesting to me, that one of the complaints from the Vatican about my work is that I call God "child." Very interesting 'cause you have this negative context, this tired ol' institution, not wanting anyone being reminded that divinity is young.⁵⁰

The institution of patriarchal theology also seems not to want to be reminded that divinity is diverse, as well. In her discussion of non-male sacred imagery, Z Budapest says,

Every culture has their own race reflected in the Goddess. The Goddess is black; the Goddess is yellow; the Goddess is red, white. The Goddess has never pinned to one image. And her Oneness is much more encompassing than the god, the One God. The One God simply says, "The other gods are bad, only me, I'm the good one. The Goddess says, "I am everything in everybody; and, you know, you kiss a dandelion, you've just kissed me."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

⁵¹ Budapest, interview with author, 2 May 1989.

Or hugged me, as Hildegard would say, "Hugged by the arms of the mystery of God."⁵² A wonderful, loving, maternal image of divinity, one which finally bids God the Father a long overdue farewell.

The Adoption of Spiritual Ecofeminism as the Philosophical Bedrock of Society

The term Ecofeminism is a blend of two concepts: ecology and feminism. A relatively new term, it derives from what amounts to crises in both arenas. Since women and nature have been devalued and exploited in much the same way, it seems fitting that any attempt to heal one would inevitably involve the other.

The term ecofeminism is not without its potential constraints. While most people, at least passively, understand the need to clean up the environment, many do not understand the term feminism and feel afraid of it or excluded by it. It is important to make clear that feminism is not a female version of patriarchy. Feminism, in fact, seeks to overcome the hierarchical nature and inequalities of all oppression. By the same token, the Goddess is not the female version of overlord. It is important that any discussion of feminist theology make clear that the point of

⁵² Fox, interview with author, 31 May 1989.

any spiritually-based, feminist concern for the environment is not role-reversal; it is planetary survival.

Winona La Duke, a Native American woman battling environmental issues, speaks eloquently for the spirit of ecofeminism when she says,

...we view ourselves as an integral part, almost a representation, of the Earth. The Earth is our mother--a woman. As women are exploited, so is our mother. And we must fight both battles simultaneously.⁵³

Many have made the connection between the persecution of Native Americans by the U.S. Government and the persecution of pagans and followers of the Old Religion in Europe. "Indeed," says Judith Todd, "the main difference between Native American spirituality and Europe's Old Religion is the amount of time it took for the patriarchy to nearly destroy it."⁵⁴ Both Pagans and Native American believe in the sacredness of the Earth and the interconnectedness of all life. Leslie Gray, a Native American shaman in Northern California, feels that a sense of alignment with her spiritual heritage is important to the

⁵³ Judith Todd, "On Common Ground: Native American and Feminist Spirituality Approaches in the Struggle to Save Mother Earth," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1982), 438.

⁵⁴ Judith Todd, "On Common Ground: Native American and Feminist Spirituality Approaches in the Struggle to Save Mother Earth," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality [Garden City: Anchor Press, 1982], 435.

efficacy of her work. This deep connection to the ancient ways is sometimes misunderstood by those who uphold the patriarchal structure, or at least do not question it.

I gave a talk somewhere and I gave a description of a shamanic healing that I did, and this psychologist held up her hand, and she said, "Don't your clients find this kind of strange? Don't they find it difficult to relate to some of these strange things that you're doing? As compared to traditional American psychology?" And what I said to her was, Excuse me, but what I am doing is the traditional American psychology. This is the psychology that has been here for thousands of years. It's native to this land. And yours, in fact, has been around for about a hundred years, and it may well be a flash in the pan.⁵⁵

Political Activism

In adopting spiritual ecofeminism as the philosophical bedrock of society, it is required of us that we learn to live in integrity and become politically active.

Spirituality without political follow through is almost worthless. Hallie Austen Igelhart feels that it is fine to "Ohm the Pentagon," but that it must be done within a context of active involvement.⁵⁶

Part of active involvement manifests as what Todd refers to as positive re-visioning. She feels that there is no limit to the outrages we could cite, to the destructive

⁵⁵ Leslie Gray, telephone interview, 31 July 1989.

⁵⁶ Hallie Austen Igelhart, interview with author, 3 July 1989.

practices and attitudes we could combat--and these are truly valid--but that in conjunction with making clear what is wrong we must offer images of what "being right" would look like.⁵⁷

Starhawk, mentioned by many as a brilliant ritualist, took part in such an effort to re-vision a future of nuclear-free, environmentally-healing peace. In a Three-Mile Island Memorial Parade held in March 1989, Starhawk, the Coven Raving, and many members of the Bay Area Pagan community took to the streets of San Francisco.

The march was a moving ritual/street theater pageant, divided into two sections: images of devastation past and future victims of the nuclear industry, and the grim future in store if we continue on the nuclear path--then, joyful, positive images of a nuclear-free future, including contingents dressed as the four elements (earth, air, fire, and water) with floats representing sources of renewable power. Information was presented on banners, placards, and in a pamphlet that was handed out en route, rather than in boring speeches. Over five thousand people turned out, including survivors of Hiroshima, Native Americans, and veterans of the atomic tests during the Fifties and Sixties. The march culminated in Golden Gate Park in a simple ritual in which an effigy of a nuclear tower was destroyed in a tug of war, releasing a flight of balloons and paper

⁵⁷ Judith Todd, "On Common Ground: Native American and Feminist Spirituality Approaches in the Struggle to Save Mother Earth," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., Politics of Women's Spirituality, (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1982), 441.

doves. The day ended with community picnicking and networking in the park.⁵⁸

Earlier in this work, Hunt, Nobel, Fox, and others have talked of the importance of taking spiritually-based action within a context of politics and social justice.

Pat Reif feels that peace, justice, and social cooperation are issues which encompass both politics and feminist theology.

One of the things I'm working hardest on in this program with the students is to broaden the concerns and make them see feminism as concerned with the issues of race and class and militarism and ageism and gay bashing, and all those isms. I personally see isms as sins. Compulsory heterosexism to me is sinful. And ageism is sinful. That is a very basic point of my theology.⁵⁹

Seeing the interconnections between the "isms" is a very important point in one's spiritual awakening and usually results in what Deena Metzger calls desire for "right action,"⁶⁰ the desire to manifest internal realizations in the external world.

⁵⁸ Judith Todd, "On Common Ground: Native American and Feminist Spirituality Approaches in the Struggle to Save Mother Earth," in Charlene Spretnak, ed., Politics of Women's Spirituality (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1982), 441.

⁵⁹ Pat Reif, interview with author, 14 July 1989.

⁶⁰ Deena Metzger, "Personal Disarmament," Pacifica Radio, 5 June 1990.

A crucial aspect of creating a society based on a spiritual ecofeminist world view would involve a commitment to right action, to social cooperation, to an involvement with the well-being of all of life. Jenny McLeod expresses her Native American heritage (which is also a Pagan belief) when she says that what we do today affects tomorrow. "The circle is there, you can see the circle, it comes around."⁶¹ She feels that our commitment to right action must supersede our individual, sometimes petty, concerns:

We have to work as a unit, as a whole. Getting together, putting aside our differences, our personalities, our political BS, and lets get on with the issues. What is our highest priority? And deal with that. We've got to set aside whatever it is that's bugging us about our next door neighbor and what he's done to our lawn with his dog, and all this other baloney...We're not an island.⁶²

ReValuing the Feminine

Humanity has been held to a limited and distorted view of itself--from its interpretation of the most intimate of personal emotions to its grandest vision of human possibilities--precisely by virtue of its subordination of women.

Until recently, "mankind's" understandings have been the only understandings generally available to us. As other perceptions arise--precisely those perceptions that men, because of their dominant position, could not

⁶¹ Jenny McLeod, interview with author, 11 Aug. 1989.

⁶² Jenny McLeod, interview with author, 11 Aug. 1989.

perceive--the total vision of human possibilities enlarges and is transformed.⁶³

In an earlier chapter it was made clear that any discussion using the term "feminine" brings with it some concern about the term itself, whether it is accurate, whether it connotes archetypal constraints, whether it is exclusive. Mary Hunt feels that the qualities associated with the feminine should not be relegated to only women and should not "be seen as qualities of individuals and privatized to individual examples, some of whom then become exceptions."⁶⁴ She feels that it is very important that we understand the larger context.

What I'm suggesting is that those become characteristics of society, or structures of society so there's not the experience of them being privatized, because that's where I think they're most unhelpful...but to develop a society or a community in which nurture takes place or to develop a group in which connectedness is the bottom line.⁶⁵

Jean Baker Miller would agree with Hunt that the positive qualities of nurturance and connectedness should be adopted as the societal norm for behavior. She says, however, that women are precisely the ones who can begin to make that happen.

⁶³ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 1.

⁶⁴ Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D. interview with author, 18 Nov. 1989.

⁶⁵ Hunt, interview with author, 18 Nov. 1989.

Due to their long history of patriarchal oppression, women have developed certain ways of coping, a certain psychology, in their roles as those individuals whom society has designated as caregivers. While it is part of the oppression that those characteristics have been devalued, they are, nonetheless, exactly those characteristics which our society now needs to survive: the ability to cooperate, the ability to be creative under adverse conditions, the ability to see relationships, and the ability to nurture and to foster the growth and development of others.

Recognizing the difficulty of fostering cooperation in a highly competitive society, Miller feels that

Women have assumed the greater responsibility for providing it. Although they may not label it in large letters, women in families are constantly trying to work out some sort of cooperative system that attends to each person's needs. Their task is greatly impeded by the unequal premise on which our families are based, but it has been women who have practiced trying. [emphasis mine].⁶⁶

Miller also feels that women are the ones most actively grappling with the need to change. Realizing that to uphold the dominant male culture's status quo may mean self-destruction, women are looking inward.

Women are the people struggling to create for themselves a new concept of personhood; they are attempting to restructure the

⁶⁶ Miller, 41.

central tenets of their lives. This effort extends to the deepest inner reaches.⁶⁷

Hallie Austen Igelhart feels that it is this turning to the inner voice of wisdom, to the inner values of the sacred feminine, that will heal us--and our planet. She, and many others, believe that what we all need is

To always be coming back into balance and remembering who we are, remembering that we are part of the whole, remembering that as part of our daily lives. And to ask for guidance, not from somebody out there; it's from our deepest selves, but it's our deepest selves connected with all that is.⁶⁸

For Fr. Charles Moore that remembering must involve the sacred feminine. We must actively commit ourselves to the values of the Goddess in every phase of our existence.

Because of the prejudicial nature of our patriarchal training, it is necessary to think of the feminine aspect of everything before you speak. Because it won't occur to you without thinking. And the only way we'll ever achieve the kind of balance we need to find truth is to put an extraordinary amount of effort into finding, discovering, and validating the feminine aspect of each reality as we go.⁶⁹

The cycle of the Feminine Spirit has come full round.

The Goddess has reappeared at a time in history when a new spiritual consciousness is growing and gaining ground, a

⁶⁷ Miller, 44.

⁶⁸ Hallie Austen Igelhart, interview with author, 3 July 1989.

⁶⁹ Fr. Charles Moore, interview with author, 1 July 1989.

consciousness which sees all life--human and nature and cosmos--as being intertwined, as being part of an interconnecting web. There is a growing acceptance of the indwellingness of the sacred, and of the sacredness of all life.

This new consciousness honors the Earth, and it honors the body. It makes sacred our sexuality and acknowledges our sacred sexual space. It understands the need to reclaim interconnections within oneself as well as in our world and allows us to dissolve our dualities, and the "isms" they create.

Women are awakening to a renewed sense of self-worth. They are learning to revalue their abilities to foster growth in others, to be relational, cooperative, creative. Both women and men are learning that God the Father was a dysfunctional parent and are looking for alternative models for wholeness.

Many women, men, and even children are combining their spirituality with right action and are calling political activism their spiritual path. Issues of social and ecological justice are transforming the way we think about ourselves and about our world. In learning to honor the sacredness and aliveness all around us, it is just possible

that we will soon join Rachel Bagby in singing, "Life...Life
is my lover."⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Rachel Bagby, interview with author, 28 July 1989.

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