



Perhaps the first thing we can say is that the Goddess is not passive. When images and symbols of Her persist through the ages, it is not by accident, but because She is flooding our unconscious with memories of Her and Her acts, stimulating our appreciation of symbols and guiding the hands of our artists. She is present and active within us, and increasingly so as we open ourselves to Her.

It would be too much to expect that we could directly apprehend the nature of the Divine in this life. Our knowledge of the Goddess is shaped by the limitations of our understanding, and it is precisely because of these limitations that we must trust to Her revelations, rather than to any 'rational' theorising. Each soul must seek to develop her own relationship with and understanding of the Goddess by every means in her power, and in this world the Goddess has revealed Herself to us most fully in myth.

It is sometimes asked "Can't we get at the truth behind the mythology directly? Must we have it in 'story' form?" I think of this question, or rather of the whole complex of attitudes leading up to it, as an appetite suppressant. It has been asserted that all our nourishment could be taken in the form of a few small pills. One of these pills would, of course, have to be an appetite suppressant. It is quite easy to imagine a person so bored by these pills, or finding them so hard to swallow that she only bothered to take the one which stopped her feeling uncomfortable — the suppressant. She would, of course, starve to death. It is quite possible to extract a dry theology from the myths. * Like the pills, it is hard to swallow and not particularly interesting. So most people take only the appetite suppressant, which is readily to hand, and become, for all practical purposes, atheists. We are not so 'advanced' as we like to suppose: like our ancestors, we must eat.

The myths refer to Ultimate Reality, or the Absolute as "The Mistress of All Things." The further back in time we go, the more frequently we find the Goddess at the centre of the myths and as the subject of all religious art. ** And this was in the highly sophisticated civilisations of the remote past as well as the less civilised societies introduced by early patriarchy. It is evident that the male god first made an appearance as the political tool of patriarchy, and he has been used as political tool ever since. Yet the original image of the divine still reigned in the popular imagination. The frequent emergence of the Goddess as the central religious image in the face of prevailing political ideologies is a striking testimony to the strength of the Divinely inspired archetype in the human soul.

Our image of the Absolute as Goddess has two main aspects: the Personhood of Divinity and the perception of that Personhood as female. We can describe these aspects as symbolic or metaphorical, just as in addressing the Goddess as "Rose of the World" or "Great Dove of the Waters" we are using symbols or metaphors. But we must also say that the symbol of the Absolute as Goddess is absolutely central to our understanding of Her. It is the best way that we are capable of perceiving Her, and thus it is the way in which She presents Herself to us.

* Though in practice this would not be an 'adequate diet.' The myths are the perfect expression of religious Truth for creatures at our stage of spiritual development. Abstract theological structures are only an aid to understanding the myth. To have the theology without the myth is like having the binoculars without the scene.

** The male god rarely figures prominently in religious art. Extreme masculist religions (e.g. Islam and extreme Protestantism) tend towards iconoclasm, one suspects for this very reason. Almost all the religious art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance centred on the Virgin Mary, the Christian 'goddess' figure.

The Femaleness of God

We see Her in human terms because the highest thing we encounter in this world is the human personality. We can only speak of things outside our experience in terms of our experience. Try to think of a six-dimensional universe, or existence outside time. Some people describe the absolute as a 'power' or a 'force', thinking that they are getting 'behind' the myths; but of course, they too are using a physical metaphor — comparing Deity to a wind or magnetism or electricity. But these things are great only in a quantitative sense -- they are bigger or stronger than human beings, but not morally or spiritually superior. Any abstract thing, having no personality, is less than a person. The Goddess is more than a person. She does not lack any of the attributes of personality, but rather has them to an absolute degree which we can hardly appreciate. Her Personhood is infinitely more sublime, more intense and more complete than ours.

We have seen that the femaleness of the Divine Person is not a human invention but a Divinely inspired image. The meaning of that image can be difficult for those brought up in a masculinist environment to understand. Some may be unable to see any essential difference between the Goddess and the male god they have been driven to reject; others may want a 'balance' of femininity and masculinity in the Divine as a result of sensing a severe imbalance in the male god. I can sympathise with such difficulties; the issues worried me for a long time until I realised that my problem was simply a misunderstanding.

I first began to see light when I realised that principles, not people, were involved; the female and the masculine principles, not maids and men. Maids and men are not very different from each other, but the ideas of masculinity and femininity have always been seen as very different. That is because they are the archetypal symbols of two principles which operate at every level of fallen creation. Both principles operate in both maids and men (though the balance differs in each individual, and will tend to fall more heavily on the feminine side in maids). The whole subject has been obscured by the frequent use of the phrase "God is a woman." God is not a woman; She is God. In this context, God can be described as the embodiment of the feminine principle.

The feminine and masculine principles have been explained more fully elsewhere, * and I shall just cover the main points. The ancient symbols are strikingly appropriate. The female symbol (♀) shows the dominance of spirit (the circle) over matter (the cross); the male symbol (♂) shows matter (the cross or arrow) partially dominant over spirit. (This is the standard interpretation of the components of planetary symbols -- see, for example, Teach Yourself Astrology, pages 29 and 31.) The feminine principle represents the dominance of spirit over matter, quality over quantity, while the masculine principle represents the reverse. Furthermore, the masculine or material principle is dependent on the beyond-matter, the feminine or spiritual principle, for its very existence is temporal and insecure -- the cross/arrow cannot dominate the circle. On the other hand the feminine principle is absolute and self-sufficient. Now the Divine is defined as Absolute, spiritual, qualitative and Self-existent -- and therefore quintessentially feminine. The "male god" is a contradiction in terms. It is this forcing together of opposite and opposing ideas -- masculinity and the Divine -- which gives the image of the male god its fatal imbalance. The answer is not to add a feminine "aspect" to the masculine, but to eliminate the intrusive masculine and leave the naturally feminine God.

* In "The Feminine Principle" by Camilla in The Coming Age, 2.

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As to whether the Goddess is in essence different from the male god, if anyone is still in doubt -- well, one has only to experience Her to know that She is. Various lukewarm Christians and others have tried to persuade themselves that there is no significant difference, but, in the words of one of the most intelligent and clear-sighted of modern Christian apologists:-

"Without drawing on religion, we know from our poetical experience that image and apprehension cleave much closer here than common sense is prepared to admit; that a child who has been taught to pray to a Mother in Heaven will have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child." *

Having known only the parody, when faced with the original, we may say: "This is just like the other thing! Look at this bit, and this!" Our Lady is waiting for us to stop counting Her fingers and start looking into Her eyes.

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* C.S. Lewis, Undeceptions, London 1972, page 194.