



THE
RECOVERY
OF *love*

PART TWO:
VOICES OF WOMEN

PAPER FOUR

The Divine Feminine

A Series of Discussion Papers by

DAVID CADMAN



As an elderly man looking back over my life, I now realise – although I did not know it before – that I have spent my life seeking the Divine Feminine, the Goddess and the Great Mother. It is as if I have always known she was missing, and now understand how much she is needed. She has always been there whenever I have unknowingly turned towards her, often there in friends and colleagues and in my closest companions. I thought it was personal, but now, I realise that it was not, that I have been and am drawn to the deepest yearning of the Cosmos, the widespread longing for something lost. And now, as patriarchy begins to degenerate and fall apart – for that’s what is happening – we are seeing all around us once more the re-emergence of the feminine seeking a rightful presence with the masculine. Coming to be, coming to be, ceasing to be, ceasing to be.¹ I think that is why I came eventually to live by the sea and by a tidal river, for the Goddess has always been associated with water and with sea.

I knew this when I was writing *Love and the Divine Feminine*. And now I have come to see that it has always been the Goddess who we have turned to when we have needed to feel the touch of the Divine, especially the Mother Goddess who is grounded and immanent. The Father God, in many forms, has always been presented as more remote and at a distance. I feel this deeply. In moments of intimacy, which can be both nurturing or scary, we have needed the Goddess – as we do now, for now we need the qualities that she brings, a strange mixture of fierceness and compassion.

As I have already said, in *Love and the Divine Feminine* I asked the question of how it is that we have come to be who we are. I have asked this question many times before, and now I ask it again. Within the context of the dilemmas of this twenty-first century – faced with a climate emergency, in the midst of a global pandemic, and with the presence of hatred and division in political life – how is it that we have seemingly turned a blind eye to manifest harm and injustice? As I suggested in the Introduction, it seems to me that this has happened because of two losses: the loss of Love and the loss of the Divine Feminine. And more and more, I now see that these two are inextricably intertwined.

We have, so far, spoken of Love, but what can we say of the

Goddess.

As *Love and the Divine Feminine* records,² over the last 4,000 to 5,000 years, the realm of the Goddess has been rejected, abandoned and suppressed by an all-conquering and often demonising patriarchy, replacing a culture of integration and immanence with one of domination and separation, eventually with a single male God dwelling not amongst us but above us in the sky, our only way of reaching him being through accepting our innate sinfulness and seeking redemption through the institution of an all-male Church. This damaging Christian doctrine of original sin, when matched by the demonisation of the feminine in the story of Eve, and then in the life of the institutional Church in its exclusion of women, has brought us to where we are. Whilst the true Christian church, the church of the saints and the mystics, those who followed the Wisdom teachings and the teachings of Proverbs and the Song of Songs, may have remained in the realm of Love, those who took charge of the Church, those who sought power, those who governed, most certainly did not. They turned to inquisition and violence in the face of what they took as heresy, and came to justify war and slaughter in the name of God. Regrettably, since their voice has been the loudest and the most strident, it has brought us here, all but broken and in great danger.

If, then, we must find another place, another way of being, we must restore Love, and to do this we must restore the Divine Feminine. Without this, we will not be able to heal our wounds, we will not be able to bring ourselves back into alignment with the Cosmos, with that Nature of which we are a part. And for this, for Love to flow, we must bring back, and reintegrate, the Divine Feminine, we must enable her voice to be heard, and attend to what she says.

But what is this voice?

The story of the goddesses is wonderfully set out in one of the books most quoted in *Love and the Divine Feminine*, Anne Baring's and Jules Cashford's *The Myth of the Goddess*,³ and in its Preface, the late Sir Laurens Van Der Post talks of those parts of our history which remain hidden. He says:

There is no dimension of history of which this is more true

than the way the feminine half of the human spirit has been dealt with by masculine-dominated societies, and inadequately acknowledged and evolved in our cultures and civilizations.”⁴

I am very much taken with this, and I observe it in all that has happened and still happens around me, most especially in the way that women have been, or rather have not been, valued and heard. But this is not the limit of my concern, for, as an elderly man, I feel the loss in my own being, too. The loss of the Divine Feminine is important to me as a man, for the feminine is beyond sexual identity. With her loss, some part of who I am as a man is denied. I acknowledge that the evident prejudice and mistreatment suffered by women is much more important than what has happened to me, but with the loss of the Divine Feminine we share this loss – men and women alike – we share in this loss, and it has made all of us who we are.

There is a pattern that we see all about us in Nature: the cycle of birth, life, death and renewal. It seems to be a necessary part of all that is, not least ourselves. And then there is the cycle of the seasons and the cycles of Moon⁵ with her waxing and waning and her period of darkness. Here in coastal Suffolk, living as I do beside the North Sea, I see this in the turning of the waves on the shingle as the waters move up the beach; I see it in the tides, flooding and ebbing in the river Alde, and that point at the turn of the tide when, for a brief moment, everything seems to stand still. Darkness gives way to light, winter gives way to spring, and then come summer and autumn before the darkness returns. It was these patterns and these cycles, that must have caused our ancestors to feel such a sense of awe, wonder – and, perhaps, fear – that they worshipped whatever it was or whoever it was that they believed made all this happen. They called her Goddess, and one of the earliest images that we have found, the Goddess of Laussel, in the Dordogne area of France, shows a female form with wide belly and hips, and full breasts, holding what seems to be a crescent moon. This Is the Palaeolithic Mother goddess of some 20,000 BCE. According to Anne Baring and Jules Cashford:

Long ago, some 20,000 years ago and more, the images of a

goddess appeared across a vast expanse of land stretching from the Pyrenees to Lake Baikal in Siberia. Statues in stone, bone and ivory, tiny figures with long bodies and falling breasts, rounded motherly figures pregnant with birth, figures with signs scratched upon them – lines, triangles, zigzags, circles, nets, leaves, spirals, holes – graceful figures rising out of rock and painted with red ochre – all these have survived through the unrecorded generations of human beings who compose the history of the race.⁶

But in time, and much later, we come to goddesses who have qualities that go well beyond their fertility, goddesses such as the Egyptian goddess, Ma'at, who was the goddess of balance and order; or Metis, the Greek goddess, who was worshipped for her wisdom, her healing power and her cunning; or the clear-sighted Hecate who ruled over earth, sea and sky and helped give direction. And, again in time, many of the goddesses had a consort, as if to integrate the feminine with the masculine, the hunter with the mother – in Sumeria Ki and An, and then Dumuzid and Inanna; and, later, Isis and Osiris in Egypt.

But then, by the time we come to the last millennium BCE, when Zeus and the Olympians rule, the older goddesses are already on the wane. They have been diminished and replaced by, or are now ruled by, gods. Thus, Metis is swallowed by Zeus, who then gives birth to Athena as a father's daughter, assertive, a goddess not only of wisdom but of warfare. Hestia the goddess of the hearth and fire is eventually replaced with the god Dionysus. The essential nature of the goddess as being wise and bringing order and balance is lost. I regret this. I am not really drawn to the strident Athena, nor to the young Aphrodite, although Botticelli's 'Primavera' and his 'Birth of Venus' are both of exceptional beauty. And I wonder if these figures are not misrepresentations of the older and the more subtle and mysterious qualities of the goddess. I like the wisdom and cunning of Metis, the balance of Maat and the clear sightedness of Hecate, but it is Hestia, the older sister of Zeus, that I hold in my heart. It is she who gives me comfort. Can I be forgiven for that? It's just that I am finding that comfort becomes more appealing as I get older.

By the time we come to the stories set out in the Bible, goddesses are publicly banished and profane. In a world that would one day shape mine, the Judeo-Christian world into which I would be born, there was now to be One God, Yahweh, and he was male and without a consort. And yet, it was not quite as straightforward as that. For the goddesses persisted, sometimes hidden and then emerging. It was not as if my forbears, and perhaps yours, went to sleep one night worshipping goddesses and gods and woke up the next morning worshipping only Yahweh. The change, though dramatic, at first came about slowly, especially amongst the common people who were reluctant to give up the divine world they had inherited from their parents and grandparents.

Significant was the goddess Asherah,⁷ who was the consort of Anu or, in another form, of El, the god who preceded Yahweh, the God who is spoken of in the story of the Garden of Eden. Asherah was the queen consort and her son was Baal. She was a mother goddess, a goddess of the sea. And the poles by which she was worshipped are referred to in the Old Testament.⁸ It seems clear that, despite the command to love only One God, the jealous God, Yahweh, she continued to be worshipped, much to the anger of the Hebrew priests and prophets who condemned her and wished to destroy her. Nevertheless, it is possible that for some people she remained as the wife of Yahweh, being more accessible, and worshipped at harvest times.⁹ It is even possible that Solomon made burnt sacrifices to her.¹⁰ And once he had gone, his son Rehoboam again supported the worship of Asherah, his favourite wife, Maacah, being devoted to the goddess.¹¹ Indeed, Asherah's pole stood at the altar of Yahweh in the Temple in Jerusalem, until it was removed and burnt by Asa, a later king of Judah.

And even then, although the texts are contradictory, it is possible that the people continued to worship Asherah's poles.¹² Certainly, Jezebel, the much-reviled wife of King Ahab, is supposed to have returned to the worship of both Asherah and her son Baal. And, it would seem that later, after being once more abandoned, she returned again, because the common people would not let her go. Indeed, it would seem that they persisted until the most 'reforming' priests of all, the Deuteronomists, finally prevented her being worshipped. But even then, there remained

lingering shadows of the goddess in the feminine qualities of Wisdom represented in Christian gnosticism by Sophia,¹³ and in the Shekinah of the Jewish Kabbalah.¹⁴

And then of course, in the New Testament, the feminine presence of the divine appears in Mary, the Mother of Yeshua.¹⁵ She takes little part in the story between the annunciation, the nativity and the crucifixion, and yet, within five hundred years of her own death, images of her as a goddess began to appear. Indeed, in some parts of the Great Church, midst dispute, she was referred to her as 'God-bearer'.¹⁶ In the fifteenth century, in what might well have been regarded as a heretical image, the carved and painted French Vierge Ouvrante triptych, now in the Paris Musée du Louvre, Mary was declared to be the Great Mother Goddess. When the doors of the triptych are opened:

Mary is the declared Great Mother Goddess in whose body lives God, the Father, as her son, holding the cross of destiny for Christ, his son.¹⁷

When the triptych is closed, Mary returns to her more familiar posture of the human mother:

...with the divine child who is to redeem the sin of the world-apple of Eve, which Mary, as the second Eve, holds in her hand.¹⁸

Doctrinally, this would be heresy, but such images of Mary are brought to life in ancient imagery:

Here she is drawn as the Great Mother of Life and Death, Queen of Heaven, Earth and Underworld, Goddess of the Animals and Plants, and Goddess of the Wisdom of the Soul.¹⁹

She stands in the tradition of the great goddesses before her, virgin and mother, giving birth to a divine child who dies and is reborn.²⁰ And, in her emergence within the Christian church, it is as if the people would not be denied their goddess. Sometime

between AD 400 and 500, the Temple of Isis in Soissons in France, was dedicated to 'the Blessed Virgin Mary'.²¹ But it was in the twelfth century that the cult of Mary reached its height. With many churches and cathedrals being built in her honour, it would seem that there was a widespread sense that something was missing from the representation of the Divine; and this pressure continued into the twentieth century when in various papal declarations the all-but divine nature of Mary was accepted. She was the people's goddess. As Anne Baring and Jules Cashford say:

How else to make sense of the constant debate over Mary lasting hundreds and hundreds of years, gathering to a crescendo in the last 150 years, which is essentially a debate on how human, or divine, she was and is? Why would it matter whether Mary was a goddess or not unless there was an overwhelming need to include an image of the feminine in the conception of the divine?²²

And then, there is another aspect of this which brings together the matter of Love and the Divine Feminine. The teachings of Yeshua as they are described in both the Bible and in later gnostic texts such as *The Gospel of Thomas* and *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* are teachings of Love that embrace and include both women and men – although, of course, they would in time be contorted into the grim doctrine of sin and redemption brought about by a cruel crucifixion and a miraculous resurrection: He died to save us all. Yeshua would have wept at this distortion, unless, of course, it is to be read metaphorically as the victory of Love.

One victim of this male domination was the very person who had been his beloved disciple, Mary Magdalene, for hundreds of years wickedly portrayed by the Great Church as a repentant prostitute. And in her own lifetime, Mary had to flee from Palestine, carrying with her the teachings of Love. But the damage had been done, and it is only now, two thousand years later, that she is being rediscovered in a wide spectrum of texts, some fantastical and some scholarly. But, as I said in *Love and the Divine Feminine*,²³ the interesting question is not which of these is or is not true, but why they are arising? There is no reason why I should have the answer to that question, but can it be that in our troubled

times, faced with the degradation and destruction of Nature, we are, once more, seeking a divine figure that dwells not far from us in the sky, but right here in and around us, a Goddess of the Earth, a Mother Goddess of birth, love and compassion, bringing the possibility of healing and divine collaboration? I think that this is so and that we shall now discover in the teachings of Love the full wisdom of the Divine Feminine.

Endnotes

1. These are the words spoken by the Buddha when he awoke from his deep meditation beneath the Bodhi tree.
2. Op cit, David Cadman, 2020, 18-43..
3. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, Viking Arcana, 1991.
4. Ibid. ix
5. I have deliberately dropped the use of the article 'the' here and have used a capital 'M' to denote the intimate and personal relation we have with Moon.
6. Ibid. 3.
7. Lauri Martin-Gardner, *The Hidden Goddess*, Moon Books, 2020, 10 et seq.
8. Judges 6:25
9. Lauri Martin-Gardner, *The Hidden Goddess*, Moon Books, 2020, 10 et seq.
10. Ibid. 13.
11. Ibid. 15.
12. Ibid. 15-16. See 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles.
13. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, Viking Arcana, 1991, 470-8

14. Ibid. 638-43.
15. Ibid. 547-608.
16. Ibid. 550.
17. Ibid. 547.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid. 548.
21. Ibid. 551.
22. Ibid. 554.
23. Op cit, David Cadman, 2020, 58.