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## Issue 48, Ostara 10,010th year of the Goddess (Spring 2010)

*The Beltane Papers exists to provide women with a safe place within which to explore and express the sacred in their lives, to educate, empower, encourage and entertain, to inspire, support and reinforce their perception of reality. Published 3 times annually. All rights revert. ISSN # 1074-3634.*

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*Guiding Goddess: Artemis, Goddess of Courage and Protection, hear our calls. Bless us with the courage to face our challenges, the strength to help those in need and the self-respect we need to overcome victimhood in our own lives. Let your arrows strike those who are unjust, who hurt us, our children, our animals, our Earth. Protect our wilderness and forgive us our encroachment into it. Help us to become better stewards of the Earth and all living creature upon Her. Blessed be*

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# The Beltane Papers

## A Journal of Women's Mysteries

Ostara (Spring) 10,010th (2010) year of the Goddess Issue 48 - \$3.50



"Artemis" by Maria William



## About the Cover Artist

Maria J. William is an award-winning artist and illustrator specializing in fantasy, science-fiction, romantic and figurative art. She had been working as a freelance artist since 1995. Her artwork has appeared on the covers of books, in galleries, and in private collections, as well as a number of printed and online art compilations. She is also a regular exhibitor at genre art shows and conventions throughout the country. She has published two art books, and is currently working on her first novel.

Maria describes her work as fantasy portraiture, with heavy influences from Asian cultures, modern fantasy art, mythology, Art Nouveau and Pre-Raphaelites. She works primarily in traditional mediums, such as pencils and watercolors, but is equally comfortable with digital mediums. Maria resides in New York City with her husband of fifteen years, their two young children, and two feline sidekicks.

"I believe in letting everything that comes your way in, and not being afraid to face your dark side. I'm fascinated by the weird, the beautiful and the fantastic, and try to bring all that out in my art."

~ Maria William

## About this issue...

This has been a hard turn of the year for all of us. Our economy is still struggling; many of us are having bigger doubts that we can make it, we watch our friends lose jobs, houses; maybe even one of us has found ourselves in difficulties we would have never thought would befall us a few years ago. I have had yet more losses in my personal life in the form of death, two of my favorite co-workers passed away within days of each other in January. As a community we have lost another legendary leader of the women's movement and women's spirituality, Mary Daly.

It seems that even Mother Earth Herself is rumbling with dis-

comfort, having earthquakes all over the world. Since our last issue there have been 10 earthquakes over 6.0 taking more than 350,000 lives and devastating millions more, the most recent one in Chile being a 'mega-earthquake', the fifth largest earthquake in the past 100 years. Our world, literally and metaphorically, is changing at a faster rate than ever.

It takes courage to face these changes and challenges. Courage of the heroic proportions found in our mythologies. Many of us need the courage to face our losses and the circumstances that we find ourselves in; we must have the courage to face our fears, anxieties; we must be brave and take action for positive change, both personally and globally.

Spring has arrived and brings with Her the hope of renewal and growth, new beginnings, new paths, fresh starts, and the proverbial 'spring cleaning'. Our back issue sale has been a great success. It has allowed us to move up to 24 pages with this issue. We have been contacting past subscribers and several have already subscribed. This is the kind of growth TBP needs.

TBP is also changing Her organizational structure. Due to the loss of status of incorporation, TBP cannot operate as a traditional business. We are redefining ourselves as a group, a society or club that has membership fees. This model will relieve us of collecting sales tax and filing taxes. The wording will change to a membership fee rather than a subscription. All subscriptions and sample issues will now be memberships instead.

With the increased page count, the cost per 4 month membership (was sample issue) is \$3.50. There are added mailing costs for issues mailed in envelopes (US 1st Class) and to Canada, \$4.25. For international, the added mailing costs make it \$5.00. The 'new annual membership fee' is now \$10.50 for US members with additional postage fees for US 1st Class and Canadian - \$12.75. International postal rates bring up the annual international membership fee to \$15.00.

As always, thank you for your continued support of TBP.

Lisé Quinn

## OUTRAGEOUS ORACLE

For Mary Daly (October 16, 1928 – January 3, 2010)

*The icy wind bears the mournful message:  
a mighty Amazon has relinquished  
her earthly bones;  
the cloudy sky dons a somber shroud  
to grieve the indomitable,  
outrageous Oracle  
who has breathed her final breath.  
Mary Daly has returned to the arms of the Great Mother  
to consult with Nemesis, un-silence the  
silent tongues  
of countless women poisoned by patriarchy  
and its malignant misogyny.*

*Heretic. Visionary. High Priestess.  
Mary, the wailing Maenad, still sounds her dire warning,  
Mary, the fierce Fury, oozes outrage from every pore,  
Mary the Inviolable Word-Weaver, exposes the illusions and the lies  
Mary the Spiraling Spark, whirls and twirls, spins and stings  
demanding justice, transformation, an end to gynocide.  
In Mary's name, remember everything they want you to forget,  
renounce every falsehood you are forced to swallow,  
use your wit, your will, your wisdom to rail and wail and howl,  
become a revolting, revolving, evolving revolutionary,  
go overboard, remake the wide, round wounded world  
into a wondrous realm beyond our wildest imaginations.*

by Mary Saracino

Mary Saracino is a novelist, poet and memoir-writer who lives in Lafayette, CO. Her most recent novel, *The Singing of Swans* (Pearlson Press 2006) was a 2007 Lambda Literary Awards Finalist. Her short story, "Vicky's Secret" earned the 2007 Glass Woman Prize.

# MARY DALY 1928-2010

Feminist, scholar, theologian, controversial writer, and more, words fail us when trying to describe Mary Daly. Mary challenged patriarchy in our society on a daily basis. She was a leader of American feminist thinking. She was an early feminist writer; her work was groundbreaking and 'church-shaking.' She attended St. Mary's College at Notre Dame University in 1953, where she pursued her doctorate in English. Because Notre Dame would not allow her to study Theology and Philosophy, she went to Switzerland and received two more doctorates in those subjects in 1963 and 1965 from the University of Fribourg.

In 1966 she joined the theology department of Boston College as a professor. She challenged the Church by documenting the history of misogyny and exploring the limitations placed on women's development in the Catholic Church in her first book *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968).

This almost cost Mary her job at Boston College. She was finally granted tenure only after months of student protests and widespread media publicity.

Mary challenged the whole structure of patriarchal religions in her next book, *Beyond God the Father* (1973), in which she argued that its myths and theological constructs promoted male superiority and displaced evil onto the female. She believed that this not only oppressed half the human race but also led to social structures that supported and promoted racism, genocide, and war. She rejected not only the gender identification of God but also the concept of God as a static noun, a Supreme Being, rather than active verb of Be-ing.

In her later works, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), and *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (1984) she goes on to challenge our use of language, symbolism, and myth to perpetuate patriarchy and the status quo. However, she didn't just challenge the status quo, she called for new words, a new structure and a redefining of women outside of the context of being 'in relation' to men — woman defined on her own terms.

It was in this context that her classes on feminist theology and ethics were 'women only'.\* I believe her intent was not to exclude men, but to create a place for women to find and redefine themselves within the context of woman, without man as a reference point. I believe that with the rising success of the women's movement, some men felt and still do feel threatened. A young man challenged her policy,

and even though she was willing to teach him individually, he filed a suit against the college. He had no interest in the content of the class, only the policy of it being 'women only'. Ultimately, Mary resigned from Boston College in 2001 rather than compromise her personal integrity. She wrote several more books; see the bibliography at the end of this article. Mary Daly's influence will be with us for a very long time, she challenged us to think, to examine ourselves; everything that surrounds us, our beliefs, societal structures, even the very words we use to describe reality. And she never let us forget that there is still work to be done! Thank you Mary Daly for making me think!

Donations in memory of Mary Daly may be made to the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, where her papers are collected and will be made available for research, and to The Nature Conservancy, which protects the natural world she loved.

*\*Editor's Note: I struggled with the 'women only' concept. Marione and I would have profound, lengthy conversations on it. Sometimes I felt it was very unfair to exclude anyone. It was through these conversations, that I came to realize that indeed women do need a place to explore who they are in their own right, on their own terms. It is in this context that The Beltane Papers' policy of accepting work from only women.*

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# OVERCOMING THE MYTH

by Sandra Walston

*Man enjoys the great advantage of having a god endorse the code he writes; and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women it is especially fortunate that this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being . . . the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female.*

– Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949

## THE COURAGEOUS GODDESS

The stories that are told about women influence our understanding about ourselves and provide us either with boundaries or inspiration for achieving great feats. Early history was passed on through the oral tradition. The stories about men and women were told around the fires at night or were imparted to the young during rites of initiation. However, as history began to be written, men were the ones who wrote down the important events of the community because women were not taught how to read or write. These scribes preserved history from their perspective and determined which events should be remembered. Those scribes – both ancient and modern – have placed the events of history in a context that has shaped the destiny of generations of women. As we understand the changing context of history, we can begin to rewrite our own stories and emphasize the history of women who are courageous in extraordinary and ordinary times.

In the days when history was recounted around the family fires, people worshiped a supreme female creator. Beginning with the Neolithic period around 7000 BCE, women, revered as wise, valiant, powerful, just, and immortal, were honored. They were called by many names, including the Great Goddess, Divine Ancestress, Mother Goddess, Creatress of Life, Mistress of Heaven, Our Lady, and High Priestess. The female's ability to produce a child made her the object of the male's worship; women were the magical birth-givers and breast-feeders who nurtured the young.

About the time agricultural communities began to develop (women were the food gatherers and generally accepted as being responsible for the development of agriculture), the male role in conception was recognized as a biological one. Childbirth was no longer seen as magical. This awareness decreased female worship.

As men moved forward, women stepped back into the shadows. Men, bolstered by their superior strength



and their misunderstanding of biology, grew to believe that it was the man – the father – who was solely responsible for conceiving a child. The mother was now a mere vessel who accepted the man's seed and carried the child to term.

Simplistically speaking, the notion that men were solely responsible for conception formed the core belief that justified patriarchy. Women were considered the husband's "property." Over time, the idea that men were destined to be in charge was accepted as the way things are and always have been. Not until the scientific advances of the nineteenth century, when biologists demonstrated that both male and female shared equally in conceiving a child, was the concept of parity between men and women seriously considered. Women began, in baby steps, the move toward equality.

But women have always held places of honor in ancient history (or herstory, as you might call it). Ancient legends describe the Goddess as a powerful, courageous leader in battle, and an intelligent, wise counselor. The classical Greeks worshiped Athena, a bold and beautiful warrior, and the huntress Artemis lived in fierce purity without men. The Greeks also believed in the existence of Amazons, a band of savage females who fought valiantly on the battlefield. And because goddesses were honored for their skills at battle and in counsel, women of those times yearned to be like them.

Merlin Stone states in her book *When God Was a Woman* that the female divinity was "revered as warrior



or hunter, courageous soldier, or agile markswoman who was sometimes described as possessing the most ‘curiously masculine’ attributes, the implication being that her strength and valor made her something of a freak or physiological abnormality” as compared to male warriors. Some myths state that the Amazons had a physiological abnormality – they cut off one breast to be better archers.

## THE REVERED WOMAN

What was life like for women in a society that worshipped a brave and wise female deity? They emulated her. Women held positions of respect and status. Intuitive and in touch with both their intellect and their emotions, they counseled others at shrines. Women owned businesses. Laws allowed possessions and real estate to be passed to daughters. Some laws allowed women to have two husbands and other laws permitted a man to be executed if he raped a woman.

However, as communities embraced monotheism, matriarchies declined. Women’s rights and their shrines became less sacred. The Great Goddess became the subservient consort of the invaders’ male gods, who usurped her power. Patriarchy – along with worshipping a supreme male deity – gradually suppressed and destroyed the ancient Goddess religions and women’s status. As a result, laws concerning women changed and a woman’s right to engage in economic activities diminished. New laws dictated what women could inherit and what could be passed on to children. These laws also strictly governed abortion, rape, virginity, and infidelity. Eventually, women were completely devalued.

Over the centuries, it became the norm for property to pass only through the father’s line of succession. Patriarchal systems of religion and law led to misogyny, the hatred of women and all that women represented. Indeed, as Merlin Stone so cleverly observes, “We may find ourselves wondering to what degree the suppression of women’s rites has actually been the suppression of women’s rights.”

## OH, WHERE DID ALL THE GODDESSES GO?

What caused the disappearance of goddesses from the ancient Western world? In a word, patriarchy. But the loss of the concept of goddess symbolized greater losses.

In *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image*, Leonard Shlain, M.D., states, “I was struck by the thought that the demise of the Goddess, the plunge in women’s status, and the advent of

harsh patriarchy and misogyny occurred around the time that people were learning how to read and write.”

While the death of the Goddess diminished the status of all mortal women, “more critical was the destruction of those symbolic, political, familial, and religious sources of power traditionally associated with women,” writes Mary Condren in *The Serpent and the Goddess*. “This would be the precondition for the new society to take root, a society where women would take it upon themselves to give birth; where women would be firmly under control; and where kings, warriors, and priests would develop elite forms of power, effectively abolishing or superseding the power structure of the clan systems.” The last temple celebrating the Goddess was destroyed around 500 A.D.

## LET’S BLAME EVE

Since the fall of women from divine worship, most religions have taught that God is male. In the Western world, the Torah and the Bible feature few stories that favorably depict women. In fact, the Bible begins with the story of Adam betrayed by the temptress Eve. This myth, perpetuated through the ages, blames woman for the “fall of man,” and offers it as a convenient excuse for the ills of mankind. Even today, people keep women in subservient roles via a subtle belief system that female sin led – and leads – men astray. Such a position is further justified by the Bible, which quotes the obvious punishment – the pain of childbirth. Genesis 3:16 reads, “in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.”

This myth, Stone reminds us, was propagated to provide divine sanction for male superiority. She offered personal examples from her own childhood to show how parents and religious authorities misuse scripture. “Instead of receiving compassion and sympathy or admiring respect of courage,” Stone writes, “I was to experience this pain as guilt, the sin of my wrongdoing laid heavily upon me as punishment for simply being a woman, a daughter of Eve.”

The male’s divine right to dominate his wife also has survived for centuries. According to Stone, “Once the economic security of women became undermined by male-dominated power in society, women were forced to accept one stable male provider as the one who ruled the roost.”

Many myths continue to hold enormous power by focusing on earlier restrictions. Riane Eisler writes in *Sacred Pleasure*, “We will certainly be amazed that our most famous story of human origins, the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, has absolutely nothing good to say about sex, love, or pleasure, that it presents the human

quest for higher consciousness as a curse rather than a blessing, and that it does not even touch on the awe and wonder we humans experience when we behold or touch someone we love.”

## TODAY'S HEROINES WEAR LEATHER BRASSIERES

Myths offer ideas that guide us when we are young and easily influenced. In 1998, *Xena: Warrior Princess* was television's highest-rated first-run drama. Xena appealed to millions of viewers as a “don't-mess-with-me,” brains-and-beauty warrior dressed in leather. She is good, and she is strong, albeit shadowed by a questionable past in which she made mistakes she cannot change. Lucy Lawless, the New Zealand actress who starred as Xena, noted that this courageous warrior princess is portrayed as “a woman with the devil on her shoulder, constantly fighting the darker side of her own nature.” With her sidekick Gabrielle representing the tender side of a warrior, they “kick butt” as role models for young girls today.

Ironically, this strong woman concept reflects the limits of progress for women in the twenty-first century. Rather than seeing strength and courage as part of the gentle fabric and soul of any woman, such images depict courage as unusual and atypical, and usually with a masculine bravado. Though Xena exemplifies the tenet that, despite the past, women can find their courage and fight for their dreams, the “kick butt” attitude fails to teach young women how to build strength of character and inner resources to overcome adversity in everyday life and to do it in a way that is more complimentary to their feminine natures. Indeed, we will know that we have achieved equality when women are noted and praised for their unique brand of steadfast courage. Only then will we, as a society, mend the frayed fabric of modern life.

## CULTURAL SANDS DO SHIFT

Women who exhibit the traditional characteristics, i.e., masculine characteristics of courage, are seen as aggressive, overbearing, and unladylike – traits heavily discouraged. Even today, certain cultural and religious beliefs forbid women from displaying this type of courage. In some societies, women must worry about their very presence causing discord among peers, family members, or religious leaders. The prohibitions against speaking up are so strong that some feel uncomfortable when speaking out woman-to-woman against injustice.

Given the common understanding that men are more inclined to be courageous and women are more likely to be docile, many women remain reluctant to expose their own potent individual courage. The courageous acts of women like Joan of Arc, who was burned at the stake in the fifteenth

century for her beliefs and her zeal, seem extraordinary. Every culture subtly teaches women to make choices consistent with the norms of the day, and most contemporary cultures extol silence and passivity as feminine virtues. As for Joan of Arc, the lesson her story teaches, if we do not dive below the surface, is that strong women get burned.

Challenging the long-held myths of the past is the first step to shifting cultural norms. To courageously question such myths is to crack the silence that has kept women in denial of their finest strengths. Women everywhere are rising up as they see these myths for what they are. In time, society will recognize women's collective courageous acts and banish the unwritten rules that keep women from realizing their personal courage. But changes in myths and realities go hand in hand with behavioral changes in our lives. That is why it is so important to refashion our own scripts and the images that clutter our minds. By doing that, we can courageously reclaim the female creative power.

The challenges of today do not require a metal shield like the one used by Xena, Warrior Princess. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, we have always had our own courage. Nurtured within, that personal strength becomes an invisible shield for the heart and spirit of every woman.

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# Wild Maiden Goddess Artemis

by Patricia Monaghan, excerpted from  
The Goddess Path: Myths, Invocations, and Rituals  
artwork by Nicole Cadet

*Maiden Goddess, holy one,  
protector of the hills and forests,  
protectors of mother's in labor,  
protector of the buds of infancy,  
triple Goddess, I invoke you:*

*Bless the trees around my home,  
the ones that shade me,  
the ones that screen the wind,  
the ones that perfume the air.  
May they protect me as you do.*

*How will I thank you?  
When I eat meat, I will thank you.  
When I eat fruit, I will thank you.  
When I drink clear water, I will thank you.*

*Your trees will never lack for offerings,  
as long as I live and breathe,  
maiden Goddess, triple one,  
my protector,  
as long as I live and breathe.*



by Nicole Cadet

## Myth and Meaning of Artemis

The wild maiden Artemis was worshiped throughout the ancient world for untold centuries, as these two invocations show; one is from the Homeric Hymn to Artemis, while the other was written nearly a thousand years later by the Roman poet Horace. One of the most beloved of Greek goddesses, Artemis was honored in art and song, in invocation and in ritual, for generation after generation.

Artemis was born, it was said, to Leto – mistress of king-ly Zeus in Greek times, but originally a pre-Greek mother goddess whose name is thought to mean “Our Lady” and who had no known consort. As the myth was told by the Greeks, a curse was placed on Leto that she could not give birth anywhere that the sun shone. To make matters worse, the expectant mother was pursued by a snaky monster who kept her from pausing long enough to bear her children in caves or other darkened spaces. Leto would have wandered the world, miserable and perpetually in labor, had her sister Asteria not come to her aid by transforming herself into an island. That magical place, Ortygia, floated on pillars under the ocean’s water, just out of reach of the sun’s rays and therefore exempt from the curse.

The beleaguered Leto was thus able to give birth to Artemis, who immediately became her mother’s midwife and safely delivered her twin brother Apollo. The magical island, renamed Delos (“brilliant”), was then declared sacred and taboo; no person was ever again allowed to be born or to die on the island. After giving birth to Artemis, Leto disappears from her daughter’s myth, except for a single incident: angered by the queen Niobe, who bragged that her many offspring were better than Leto’s few, Leto called on her archer daughter for vengeance. Artemis used her arrows to destroy her mother’s rival, killing all her children, and Niobe was turned into a block of stone from which a weeping fountain endlessly poured.

This was not the only case in myth where Artemis employed her arrows – or other handy weapons – for revenge against those guilty of moral or ethical violations. She killed the serpent Python, as well as the giant Tityus, both tormenters of her mother. She executed the spying Acheteon, a hunter who ogled her at her bath, by changing him to a stag and setting his own dogs upon him. When Teuthras murdered one of her sacred pigs, she gave him leprosy so that he would die slowly and miserably.

Dozens of others are named in Greek myth as victims of the archer goddess. So why was she so popular among the Greeks? Because she was not seen as needlessly cruel, but rather as sustaining life, especially the life of the wilderness where she made her home. Artemis was a sort of cosmic game warden keeping the wilderness safe from predatory hunters who might kill for sport rather than for need; such hunters could expect to meet a fearful fate at Artemis’s hands. She also hunted down those who attempt-

ed to kill pregnant animals and thus interfere with nature’s replenishment. She herself hunted, it is true, but only as a way of culling from her wild herds those animals not vital enough to reproduce strong offspring.

She was, similarly, the goddess who protected women. As heaven’s midwife, she kept pregnant and laboring women healthy and safe. As goddess of the woodland nymphs, she kept their virginity safe as well as protecting them from peeping hunters. And as goddess of girlhood, she was the guardian of young women, who danced before her wearing yellow robes in one of the most famous of her rituals. Although virginal herself – she never had children – she is thus appropriately pictured as a mother bear, fiercely defending those she loves.

Artemis had little to do with men. In her myths, men who encounter her usually meet a harsh fate, often a hideously painful death. Although she is called the twin sister of Apollo, in fact they never spent time together; in later legends she is connected to the moon while he is associated with the sun, so they did not even accompany each other on their sky journeys. Artemis is, of all Greek goddesses, the one most closely associated with women. Her myths suggest that men can only encounter her by paying close attention to her boundaries and limits, and by similarly respecting women’s needs for privacy and seclusion.

## Symbols of Artemis

The moon is usually considered the preeminent symbol of Artemis although her connection with earth’s changeful satellite came later in her historical worship. Despite its being a late addition to her symbology, it is a vital and stirring one. The moon, moving from slender crescent through round fullness and back to invisibility, has in many cultures been seen as a natural image of our own lives’ progress from youth through vigor and into old age. As goddess of nature’s cycles, Artemis is appropriately symbolized by the many-phased moon.

Some depictions of Artemis make a visual pun by combining the lunar crescent with the archer’s bow, showing the goddess bending the moon into a sickle shape and aiming an arrow through it. The bow, arrow, and quiver are among Artemis’s most important symbols. Many beautiful Greek and Roman sculptures show her wearing only a brief garment (called a chiton, it was like a mini-dress tied at the waist), often with one youthful breast bare. Over one shoulder the goddess has tossed a quiver filled with arrows; she carries her bow strongly, though casually. As her myths show, these arrows were especially used to dispatch those who broke the sacred rules of the goddess: that animals should not be killed wantonly or indiscriminately, and that women’s bodies should be respected.

Animals too, are often associated with Artemis as her



symbols or familiars. Although she was the one who protected all animals, two are especially important to her: the bear and the dog. The bear, known as one of the world's fiercest mothers, seems an especially apt symbol for this protective goddess. She seems to have been especially charged with protecting girls before they reached menarche. In her honor, at the city of Brauronia, a ritual was held for prepubescent girls each year. Dressed in yellow robes, they danced in a lumbering way before the statue of the goddess, apparently imitating Artemis as the bear mother and therefore bringing her power within themselves.

Dogs, too, were depicted as her sacred animals. As she hunted with her band of merry nymphs through the wild forest, Artemis was accompanied by packs of hounds. They served not only to assist with the hunt, running down deer and other animals, but to protect the women as well. In return, Artemis took care of them. The herb *Artemisia* is named for the goddess, and is commonly called wormwood because she was reputed to use it to relieve her hounds of intestinal parasites. Sometimes, as in the story of Acheteon, the hounds act as doubles of Artemis's main weapon, the arrow, killing those guilty of sacrilege or insult to the goddess.

### Feasts of Artemis

In Athens, in April, one of the great festivals of Artemis was celebrated. Called the *Mounichion*, it featured a procession of celebrants bearing amphiphontes – cakes decked with a circle of lighted candles. The festival's date was determined by the goddess herself as it was celebrated on the night of springtime's first full moon. Another festival, at the full moon in August, invoked Artemis for protection against the storms that might destroy the harvest. At the Agrotera a month later, goats were sacrificed to Artemis as huntress, and a great moonlit feast was held.

Artemis was traditionally honored in rituals on the nights of the full moon. There is some indication in ancient literature that one of the reasons for the popularity of this goddess is that her rituals were rather ecstatic affairs, taking place in the moonlit woodlands, involving lots of dancing and leading in some cases to sexual explorations.

Anyone who has ever been in the wilderness when the moon is full has witnessed the effect of Artemis's beaming light on animal life. (Bartenders and entertainment workers in cities claim to notice the same effect.) As the moon rises above the horizon, shedding her light on the forests she rules, the animals make wildly excited noises. Wolves and coyotes howl, owls call out, ravens scream. Throughout the bright-lit night, animals hunt and sing and run. Daylight patterns do not hold during these monthly revels. Humans are animals too, so why should we believe that these lunar effects are not felt within our bodies as well? Artemisian revels on nights of the full moon may well have had the

same exploratory and somewhat raucous energy that animal activity under the full moon's face still does.

A goddess similar to Artemis was Bendis, a spear-bearing Thracian divinity who was honored on May 24 with an all-night torch race. Similarly, the Roman goddess Diana was associated by ancient people with Artemis; she was honored on August 15 in the Nemoralia, when torch-bearing women brought their leashed dogs to the grove of the goddess for blessing, then returned to the city to wash their hair ritually while praying for ease in childbirth. Originally an August full moon festival, the Nemoralia became fixed at a solar date that later converted to a Christian feast of Mary.

### Suggestions for Invoking Artemis

In her myths, we see Artemis as a protector goddess, one who defends women and (especially) girls, as well as any pregnant or laboring animal. By extension, too, she is guardian of the forests and wild spaces of the world. Thus Artemis is appropriately invoked when protection is sought for self or for the earth. Such a ritual could be seen as drawing up the Artemisian force from within as well as drawing it from a transcendent goddess energy.

A question that needs to be addressed with Artemis, as with no other goddess, is the role of men in rituals of women's spirituality. For Artemis is mythically depicted as occupying woman-only space; no men are permitted to join her woodland band, nor to observe the nymphs at the hunt or at play. Following this sacred trail, women who worship only with other women often call themselves Dianic, after the Roman woodland goddess assimilated to powerful Artemis. Dianics argue that women are sufficiently wounded by society that woman-only spaces are necessary for emotional and spiritual healing. In addition, some find that men are generally more adjusted to hierarchic structures and thus do not function well in the organized anarchy of women's circles, claiming more space and time than they should. Finally, some Dianic circles are lesbian and find no compelling reason for men's presence.

Goddess-honoring groups that admit men to rituals usually do not define themselves as women's spirituality groups; rather, they are inclined to call themselves pagan or neopagan, or say that they practice an earth religion. Those for whom incorporating men into goddess rituals is important will argue that change does not come by excluding those most in need of it. By giving up the power of an exclusive male godhead and honoring a feminine divinity, individual men can thus be encouraged to become aware of – and correct – other relationships in their lives.

In honoring Artemis, the question of who should be involved in her rituals is especially significant, for she is preeminently the goddess of women. There is a great opportunity for healing and growth when men approach this



goddess, but her fierceness will demand much from them. She will challenge them to determine where and how they have participated in the wounding of women and of the earth. Honesty facing her challenge can be significant and moving for male worshippers.

In most cases, however, rituals to Artemis will be based on the Dianic model: women, celebrating together, calling on the bear mother to protect them. There are several historical Artemis rituals on which contemporary celebrations could be based. The Amazons – those women warriors – were said to worship Artemis by holding circle dances in her honor, celebrated by shield-bearing women who clashed their weapons together like cymbals. At Brauronia, yellow-robed girls imitated bears in an apparent women's initiation rite. And there were, too, those woodland dances under the full moon, about which we have no specific historical ritual information.

Such a ritual would most effectively be held out-of-doors, under a full moon if at all possible. Groves of trees that grow naturally in a rough circle are especially delightful spaces for such rituals. If held indoors, some attempt to bring nature inside should be made. But because Artemis abhors injury to any creature, avoid cutting down tree branches or similar decorating strategies. Rely instead on light, air, scent, and living creatures. A picture window that faces the full moon, open doors, massed potted plants, some companionable dogs – these are more to the goddess's liking than darkness and dead air and dying boughs.

Tambourines, bells, cymbals, and other sharp-toned, hand-held percussion instruments are easier to handle than swords and shields, so prepare yourself or your group with such implements. Gather in a circle, invoking the goddess with one or both of the above prayers. Then, clanging the instruments, dance around the circle. Call out the goddess's name, drawing out the syllables so that it makes a sort of chant, ending in a long hiss. As you do so, imagine yourself as the protective goddess; draw on the Amazon energy within you. Make gestures as though striking an enemy, drawing a bow and shooting, or protecting yourself with a shield.

If anyone in the circle has suffered an injury against her womanly spirit – especially rape or violence – the group can circle around her and, turning their backs to her, form a protective shield as she calls out for Artemis to give her the strength to fight back against her violator. Those invoking Artemis alone can similarly envision her wrapping her strong arms protectively around her daughter or warding off attackers with her sharp arrows.

For young girls coming into their womanhood, an Artemisian celebration is an excellent rite of passage. Echoing the girls of Brauronia, these celebrants should wear yellow garments (tee shirts are fine!). Their dance will be different from that of the full-grown Amazons. Lumbering about and throwing their shoulders forward as they walk, they em-

body and invoke the great bear mother. Their silent prayers should be to her as their guide and protector.

After dancing into the energy of the goddess, center again in silence and envision the world as a young woman being pursued by an attacker bent on violence. For that is, indeed, the situation of wild spaces today. No matter how vast and magnificent they may seem, ecological systems are fragile, easy to destroy. Imagine the goddess reaching into her quiver, drawing an arrow, and placing it carefully in her bow. Imagine her drawing back on the taut bowstring and aiming.

Then stop to examine what part of your life Artemis might target in this way. For while it is easy to blame corporations for the degradation of the rainforest, there would be no profit in such exploitation if we were not such willing customers. Notice what parts of your life most damage the wild spaces where Artemis lives, and make a solemn pledge to the goddess that you will correct your deficiencies. Imagine her slowly releasing her grip on the bowstring, staring into your eyes as she does so, and letting you go to correct your deficiencies. Articulate that promise verbally to the group, calling on them to witness your intention to make the world a safer place for the goddess of wilderness. Then, when the ritual is over, keep your pledge – for Artemis is not a goddess you wish to find angry at you.

*Patricia Monaghan's classic work has just been reissued in an entirely new, two-volume edition by Greenwood Press as "The Encyclopedia of Goddesses and Heroines" is to be followed this year by a three-volume set with 80 contributors from around the world, called "Goddesses in World Culture" (Praeger), which explores individual goddess images ranging from the familiar (Helen of Troy, Lakshmi, Oshun) to the less known (Korea's Sölmundae Halmang, Haitian Gran Brijit, Annishenabeg Mindemoya).*

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**"Why indeed must "God" be a noun? Why not a verb - the most active and dynamic of all."**

**~Mary Daly**

# WOMEN OF COURAGE!

## The United States Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Awards

International Women's Day (8 March) is celebrated by women's groups around the world. It is also commemorated at the United Nations and is a national holiday in many countries. When women on all continents come together to celebrate their day, they can look back to a tradition that represents at least nine decades of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice established the annual International Women of Courage Award in March of 2007 to recognize women around the globe who have shown exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for women's rights and advancement. This is the only Department of State award that pays tribute to emerging women leaders worldwide, and offers a unique opportunity to recognize those who work in the field of international women's issues.

On March 10, 2010 Secretary Clinton and First Lady Michelle Obama hosted the annual International Women of Courage Awards at the Department of State

Clinton: "Now today once again, we are honoring women from around the world who have endured isolation and intimidation, violence and imprisonment. Many have even risked their lives to advance justice, freedom, and equal rights for everyone. Their stories remind us of how much work there is left to do before the rights and dignity of all people – no matter who you are or where you live – are respected and protected by the world's governments. But these women prove that change is possible. They are brave and they are making a difference, and they are up against powerful interests determined to bring them down. By honoring them today, the United States and the Obama Administration sends a very clear message that though they may work in lonely circumstances, they are not alone. We are standing with you."

### Shukria Asil, Afghanistan

Ms. Asil serves as one of four female members of the Baghlan Provincial Council. Her work advocates for increased accountability and responsiveness of the government to women's needs. Ms. Asil has chosen a public and dangerous role in her dedication to



fighting injustice. In one particular case last year, Ms. Asil intervened in a case in which a girl had been gang-raped and rejected by her family, managing to eventually reconcile and reunite the family, despite being directly discouraged by the provincial governor from doing so. Ms. Asil has forged ahead with her exceptional work despite threats of kidnapping and death. Even in the face of urging from the police and security forces to cease her work for her own safety, she continues to risk her life to work for what she believes in.

### Colonel Shafiqra Quraishi, Afghanistan



Colonel Shafiqra Quraishi is the Director of Gender, Human, and Child Rights within the Ministry of the Interior. She began her career in the Afghan National Police. She created and led a working group on Afghan National Gender Recruitment Strategy, with the goal of increasing the number of women working in the Ministry of the Interior to 5,000 and of improving the quality of the Ministry's service to the women and of Afghanistan. Colonel Shafiqra has succeeded in securing promotions for women working in the Afghan National Police who had been unfairly passed over for advancement for years. She works in close partnership with those responsible for training the police force, and works to raise public awareness of gender rights and the important role that women can hold as police officers.

### Androula Henriques, Cyprus

Androula Henriques has fought for years against the buying and selling of women, pushing for long-term institutional change by lobbying government officials at the highest lev-



els to take action. She has created her own anti-trafficking network, made up of people in the media, NGOs, the diplomatic corps, and others, who also raise money for trafficking victims and rescue women from the hands of traffickers. Beyond advocating for institutional change, Ms. Henriques has generously used her personal resources to help trafficked women who choose to testify against their traffickers. She has opened the doors of her own home to women preparing to testify in court against the cabaret owners who reportedly held them captive as sex slaves.

### **Sonia Pierre, Dominican Republic**

Sonia Pierre became an activist at the age of 13, when she was arrested for being the spokesperson of a group of Haitian sugar-cane cutters in her migrant labor village who were protesting for better wages and living conditions. Since that time, she has dedicated her life to fighting anti-Haitian discrimination in the Dominican Republic as well as the broader issue of statelessness. Ms. Pierre is the founder and leader of MUDHA (Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women). The organization works to address the problems that Haitians and their children born in the Dominican Republic face, and tries to reform the problems in documenting people in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic that give rise to a class of people unable to reap the benefits and protections of nationality and citizenship.



### **Shadi Sadr, Iran**

Ms. Sadr is a lawyer, journalist, and expert on women's legal rights and has written extensively about the status of women in Iran. Until it was closed down by the Iranian government, she was the director of Raahi, a legal advice center for women. She founded Zanan-e Iran (Women of Iran), the first website dedicated to the work of Iranian women's rights activists. She has represented activists and journalists, including several women sentenced to execution, whose convictions were subsequently overturned. Sadr is also involved in Women's Field, a group of women's rights activists who have launched several campaigns, including the "Stop Stoning Forever" Campaign.



### **Ann Njogu, Kenya**

In 2008, Ms. Njogu was co-convener of the Civil Society Congress, which worked to avert total political collapse in the aftermath of the violence that tore Kenyan society apart after the December 2007 elections. Her organization, the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), documented sexual and gender based violence during the post election period, providing essential data for national and international investigations of possible criminal conduct by Kenyan leaders. Ms. Njogu was also instrumental in passage of Kenya's Sexual Offences Act, as a co-drafter and lobbyist. In 2007, Ms Njogu was physically assaulted and arrested by state security for demanding that Members of Parliament review their hefty salaries in light of the generally poor state of the country. In 2008, with six others, Ms. Njogu was arrested, beaten and sexually molested by police when the group raised the issue of possible corruption in the sale of the Grand Regency Hotel. The matter is still pending in court, but it is just another example of her dedication to exposing corruption and fighting for reforms in Kenya.



### **Dr. Lee Ae-ran, Republic of Korea**

Dr. Lee Ae-ran's experience with tyranny began at age 11, when she and her family were designated "bad elements" by the North Korean government and sent to a labor camp following her Christian grandparents' defection to South Korea. Dr. Lee spent eight years as prisoner, enduring abuse, horrific living conditions, and starvation as punishment for her grandparents' "crime." Upon her release, she graduated from college and worked at a government science and technology committee. In 1997, after a family relative in the United States published a memoir implicating her father in anti-regime activities, Dr. Lee fled to South Korea rather than be imprisoned again. She was able to take her 4-month old infant son with her, but was forced to leave her husband and other family members behind. To help others in the refugee community, she's spearheaded a variety of initiatives. In 2005, she founded the Global Leadership Scholarship Program, which has provided more than a thousand North Korean students with scholarships to study English. In January 2009, she founded the Hana Defector Women's Organization, an NGO with more than 200 members that provides North Korean women in the Republic of Korea with job





training, child care, educational support, and human rights training.

### **Jansila Majeed, Sri Lanka**

Ms. Majeed is the Managing Trustee of Community Trust Fund in Puttalam province. The Trust oversees a number of programs on minority and women's issues, including women's rights, peace building, relief work, working with young people, and mine-risk education in the North and East. Ms. Majeed's own particular focus is on uniting the Muslim and Tamil communities in her province. Having lived as an internally displaced person (IDP) for almost 20 years, Ms. Majeed has become an energetic activist for services for displaced Muslim and Tamil civilians, focusing particularly on grassroots programs on life skills, health, and women's empowerment. Her activism began in 1992 with a working group of five people. She overcame both the general neglect of the problem of IDPs in the Muslim minority as well as her own community's strictures against women activists to build a broad-based organization that works on minority and women's issues in a highly sensitive and politicized environment.



### **Sister Marie Claude Naddaf, Syria**

When Marie Claude Naddaf assumed the role of Mother Superior at the Good Shepherd Convent in Damascus in 1994, Syria did not offer social services for women suffering domestic violence, homelessness, or trafficking. Women trafficked into prostitution were imprisoned for months on end, held in jail with criminals until they could be deported. Sister Marie Claude set out to create a range of services for women through her Damascus Convent, and, in so doing, gradually created a partnership with the Syrian government on tackling violence against women. In 1996, Sister Marie Claude and the convent opened Syria's first facility, the "Oasis Shelter," for victims of trafficking and domestic violence.



Sister Marie Claude launched Syria's first women's telephone hotline, which is attached to a new emergency shelter where women can get counseling, legal advice, and temporary shelter 24 hours a day. She won the right to have women in police custody released to a shelter if it was determined that the women were victims of trafficking. In 2009, this agreement resulted in more than 20 South Asian women trafficked

into Syria for domestic work being released into the custody of a shelter – a visible symbol of the government's transformation from thinking of trafficking survivors as criminals in need of punishment to victims in need of services.

### **Jestina Mukoko, Zimbabwe**

Ms. Mukoko is the Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), an NGO that monitors human rights abuses throughout the country. ZPP's reports provide the international community with accurate assessments of human rights abuses, including violence against women and politically-biased distribution of food, and were particularly crucial during the violent 2008 election period. On December 3, 2008, Ms. Mukoko was abducted from her home by state security agents. She was beaten, tortured, forced to confess to an alleged plot to mount a terrorist incursion from neighboring Botswana, and subsequently imprisoned. A court granted her bail on February 27, 2009. After Ms. Mukoko appealed her arrest through the courts, the Zimbabwean Supreme Court finally ruled on September 28 that state security forces had violated her human rights to such an extent as to warrant a permanent stay of prosecution in the case against her. Ms. Mukoko's abduction and subsequent court case brought the subject of politically-motivated violence – particularly violence against women – and human rights abuses home to all Zimbabweans. Across the country, people in villages discussed "what happened to Jestina." In a country in which regime-sponsored violence and intimidation has often silenced opponents, Ms. Mukoko's ongoing legal case is an important statement against violence and oppression. Her bravery in calling to account those responsible for her abduction and torture, as well as her insistence on continuing her role as head of ZPP, has only reinforced her position as a leading human rights defender in one of the most oppressive countries in the world.



*\*Editor's Note: All images and text paraphrased from content at [www.state.gov/s/gwi/iwoc/2010/index.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/gwi/iwoc/2010/index.htm)*

"There are and will be those who think I have gone overboard. Let them rest assured that this assessment is correct, probably beyond their wildest imagination, and that I will continue to do so."

~ Mary Daly

# Why Are Women Attracted to Goddess Feminism?

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by Giselle Vincett

artwork by Anna Pizelo

Despite large-scale moves away from institutionalized religion in Europe and North America, certain forms of religion are maintaining or increasing their popularity. Some sociologists of religion, formerly convinced that religion was dying or dead in the West, now speak of a possible (re)sacralization (for example, Berger 1999). A country or region is more or less religious/spiritual for complex reasons. One of those reasons, only recently receiving much attention, is the role of women in both secularization and (re)sacralization.

Why are women deserting traditional Christianity at a faster rate than men? Why are women the majority of adherents in both traditional Christianity and most alternative spiritualities?<sup>1</sup> Along with a couple of colleagues, I edited a book (2008) which sought to answer some of these questions. In this article, I'll take a look at some theories about women's religious and spiritual engagement in the West and I'll put forward a modest theory of my own about why women are attracted to Goddess Feminism in particular.

## Women and Religion

Linda Woodhead (2007 and 2008) and Penny Marler (2008) have argued that "religious change in the West... is strongly influenced by long-term and largely unexamined changes in women's lives" (Marler 2008, 23). Callum Brown (2001) argues that women's abandonment of traditional forms of religion is key to understanding larger patterns of religiosity, secularization, and socialization. Along with Woodhead and Marler, Brown argues that social patterns changed as women moved into employment outside the home, demanded more egalitarian relationships between men and women, and fought for the right to make choices about their lives.

These changes altered the expectation that women be-

longed in the private realm, while men belonged primarily in the public realm. In the West, religion has been perceived

mainly as part of one's private life, thus associated with the feminine. When women entered the public realm, the stability of religion changed.

While Brown, importantly, took women's religiosity seriously, Linda Woodhead has gone further in suggesting a theory to explain why the huge changes in women's lives over the last 40 years have had such an impact on their religiosity or spirituality. However, before I can present Woodhead's theory, I must introduce the work of two others.

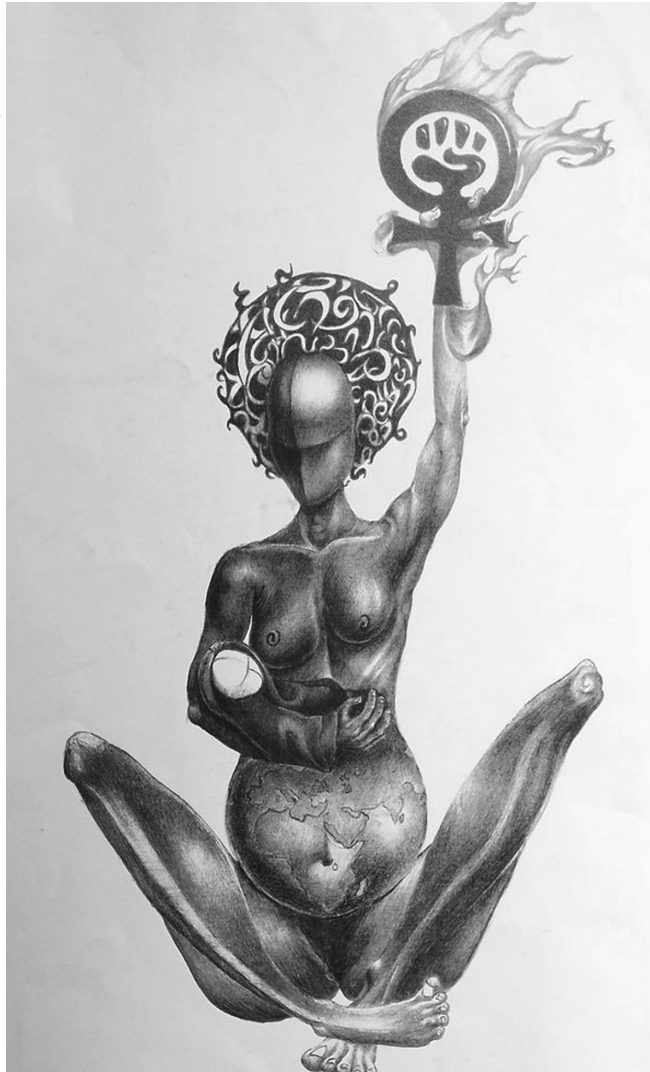
## Carol Christ, Johanna Stuckey, Linda Woodhead

Early on, Carol Christ tried to map feminist women's differing approaches to religion in the West, especially Christianity, Judaism, and Goddess Feminism. Christ and Judith Plaskow argued in their introduction to *Womanspirit Rising* (1979) that there were two broad categories for feminist women's approach toward religion: reformist and revolutionary (10). In a later

essay (1983), Christ developed these categories, arguing that there are three main approaches that feminist women take in negotiation with traditional religion:

- Reinterpretation
- "Repudiation" of the sexist in traditional religion whilst continuing to work with the non-sexist "revelation"
- Rejection of traditional religion as "essentially sexist" (238)

These categories offended some women, who felt Christ was implying that only the "revolutionaries" or "rejection-



by Anna Pizelo

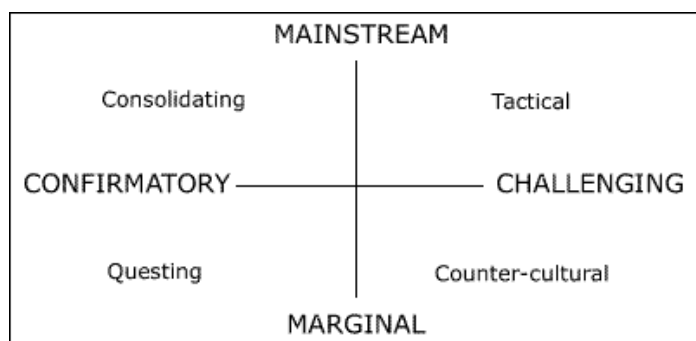
ists” adequately resolve the problems of male hierarchy and male-gendered deity, language, and symbolism.

Johanna Stuckey (1998), whom readers will be familiar with for her work on ancient Goddesses of the Mediterranean, has developed Christ’s work and offers four categories of engagement:

- Revisionist: “Correct interpretation will reveal the liberating message at the core of a tradition.”
- Renovationist: Women (and others) “must expose, and refuse to accept, the parts of a tradition that are sexist.”
- Revolutionary: Those who advocate this approach push “a tradition to its limits.” Some “suggest importing language and imagery from other traditions or from outside tradition.”
- Rejectionist: Those who take this approach “have judged a tradition to be irremediably sexist and usually have left it and set about creating new spiritual traditions” (17).

However, the rejectionist approach presupposes that Goddess Feminists (for example) have left Christianity (or some other traditional religion). In reality, many Goddess Feminists previously had only loose affiliations with Christianity, and even more claim never to have felt entirely comfortable in that tradition. Thus, the rejectionist label applies only because Goddess Feminists define themselves against the dominant Western religious form (i.e., Christianity). Christ and Stuckey’s theories go a long way toward explaining women’s different approaches to religious engagement. They also imply that religion or spirituality can be not just positive, but liberating for women.

Linda Woodhead (2007) has developed a typology to highlight the strategies regarding gender relations and other power issues that women (not just feminist women) may take in relation to religion. Woodhead plots her typology on two axes:



(after Woodhead 2007, 570)

Using this typology, religious feminists tend to be on the Challenging side of the horizontal axis, with Goddess Feminists firmly at the Marginal end. This positioning implies that most Christian feminists have a “tactical”

approach to dealing with the churches, accepting “prevailing patterns of meaning and power-distribution” and, while working within the existing systems, attempting to maximize any advantages for women (Woodhead 2007, 537). I argue that this approach is not radical enough for many Christian feminists, who are closer to the counter-culturalists in actively opposing and working to change “the existing gender order” in the churches. However, what I think important about Woodhead’s typology is how it highlights the marginality of women who are counter-cultural in their religiosity or spirituality.

### Rhoda K. Unger and “Marginality”

Marginal identities can lead to stigmatization, which can have considerable impact on one’s sense of self. If this is so, how can some people redefine their marginal position positively and, in the process, reinforce and shape their sense of self? Unger has identified some factors that are likely to make such a redefinition easier or more difficult. For example, “a marginal position can be a risky one” (witness the position of feminist ministers in many Christian churches). “Those who already possess some degree of social power” (2000: 168) (for example, white middle-class women as opposed to women of color or working-class women) will find it less risky to embrace a marginal religious identity and easier to redefine marginality as positive.

Similarly, Unger argues that a marginal identity may be easier if one is part of an identifiable group (175). That is, there is power in naming oneself as part of a group: It provides a group identity, a group history and, in the case of Goddess Feminists, a body of literature on which to hang one’s beliefs and a language to express them. In the same way, the ability to choose one’s marginality is likely to make it easier to redefine as positive. For example, one may often choose whether or not to reveal one’s religious affiliation depending on context. Also, marginality can sometimes allow a sense of freedom from normative social expectations and practices since, in one’s marginality, one “is already free from some aspects of societal control” (167).

### Positive Marginality and Goddess Feminists

In my own research, I have found that the majority of Goddess Feminists are non-traditional in some significant way: first of all in their feminism, but also through career, sexuality, or family positioning. This finding is confirmed by others’ work. For example, Winter, Lummis and Stokes (1995) find that lesbian women are less likely to be members of local churches than heterosexual women (appendix, table 4).

Cynthia Eller (1993) concludes that women are attracted to Goddess Feminism because it compensates them for “power deprivation” (211) in other aspects of their lives. I am not convinced that Goddess Feminists in general want the sort of power of which they are deprived. In my work, they repeatedly critiqued “power over.” That aside, I do not



think that deprivation or compensation theory can adequately explain women's attraction to Goddess Feminism. To me, such theories smell a little patronizing and, I suspect, do not take religious power seriously in an individual's re-valuation of marginality and identity. Religious power affects not just an individual's sense of self, but also her struggle in society as a feminist. To me, also, deprivation theory takes away from the genuine devotion to and experience of the divine that are fundamental to the participants in my research.

Goddess Feminism also offers women a way to make positive their marginality.

I argue that Goddess Feminism does indeed enable practitioners to revalue a marginal identity and to cope with the "deprivations" of being a woman in a male-centered society. However, while most Goddess Feminists are marginal in their non-traditional identities, and while Goddess Feminism is itself a marginal identity, Goddess Feminism also offers women a way to make positive their marginality. Positive marginality is not simply "compensation;" rather, it is a stance toward difference that is "affirmatory, even celebratory" (Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 265). Goddess Feminism thus helps women to cope not just with power deprivation, but also with the particular stresses of women's lives in the 21st century (juggling home and work, for example). So while Eller assumes that the relationship between Goddess Feminism and marginality is one-way, I suggest that for Goddess Feminists "positive marginality can be both a cause and effect of self-construction" (Unger 2000:177). That is, while Goddess Feminism may initially help to compensate for a marginal identity, it also re-evaluates and confirms that identity.

I have suggested in previous issues of *MatriFocus* that Goddess Feminism provides liberating models of femaleness (through goddesses) and enables transgressive ways of being female. To return to Woodhead's typology, counter-cultural religion (such as Goddess Feminism) "is not only marginal to the existing gender order, but actively opposes it and strives to change it and/or forge alternatives" (2007, 576). In other words, Goddess Feminists go beyond individualized compensation for power deprivation in their own lives. After all, as Unger suggests, "If one can construct oneself, why not the world?"

#### Notes

1. For young people, the evidence now seems to indicate that the gender gap in terms of religious affiliation has narrowed (Brierley 2006, 130-131).

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- Typology, sketch © 2009, Sage Starwalker. After Woodhead 2007, 570.

*Giselle Vincett is a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Edinburgh in the UK. She edits scholarly material for MatriFocus and contributes some of her own work. A sociologist of religion, she is very interested in contemporary trends in religion, particularly in the West. Currently, she's doing research on the spirituality of young people in the UK, but her Ph.D. work focused on the spiritualities of feminist women (Goddess Feminists, Christian feminists, and those who fell somewhere between the two).*

*Her thesis is available through the British Library (Vincett, Giselle, 2007. Feminism and Religion: A Study of Christian Feminists and Goddess Feminists in the UK. Lancaster, UK: Lancaster University). Though her Ph.D. work was limited to the UK, she is originally from Canada and thus is also interested in religious trends in North America.*

"If God is male, then male is God. The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination."  
~ Mary Daly

# *The Maiden:*

## *Planting Seeds of Healthy Pagan Community*

*artwork and article by Shauna Aura*

As a teenager in rural Wisconsin, I discovered my spirituality when I talked to the Moon and she talked back. The world felt magical and alive, yet I had an empty place inside me. I dreamed of being a priestess, but had no group; I prayed to find something larger to belong to, a community of like-minded people with whom to do ritual.

It's been 20 years since I was that girl, and I am now a Pagan community builder in Chicago. I hear of more and more women approaching middle age who become dissatisfied with Pagan communities. For many reasons, some of our most mature and well-educated community members pull away from Pagan communities. I wonder what our communities will hold for our young women – will there be a healthy, sustainable community to serve their needs, or will they leave too?

I hold hope that it's possible for those who've grown disenchanted with Pagan communities to re-join them, to see those groups from the fresh-eyed perspective of the Maiden and reconnect to the magic and mystery that drew us to community in the first place. And I believe that those who are part of groups can seek the Maiden's blessings to plant the seeds to grow healthy Pagan community.

### **Why People Pull Away**

What describes your experience of Pagan groups, events, and rituals? Are you involved with a group? Do you avoid public events? What disconnects you from community? When you think about public rituals are you in-

spired; do you think about the great group energy; or are ridiculous rituals, silly outfits, badly rhymed chants and rituals you can't connect to what come to mind?

Some pull away because of drama, gossip, infighting, and egotism; others withdraw because of uninspiring or ridiculous rituals, or lack of access to deeper spiritual and philosophical work.

The first public ritual I went to kept me from joining Pagan community for years. It was Beltane and I remember a long, confusing ritual. People seemed to already know each other, and I was too shy to approach anyone. I was nervous, embarrassed, and didn't feel any of the divine communion I'd felt when talking to the Moon Goddess. It was years before I attended another ritual, and overall it took me 12 years to find a group that I wanted to be a part of.

I had wonderful experiences at Gaia's Womb, which led me to the Chicago Reclaiming community, and Diana's Grove Mystery School. I met amazing friends, experienced trans-

formative ritual, and fell in love with that community. I discovered that even in that beautiful community there were group dynamics. At Diana's Grove, I also learned tools and processes to work through disagreements. And I discovered that many Pagan groups didn't have tools to deal with the drama and power struggles that drove people away.

### **What Impact Does this Have?**

After graduating from Diana's Grove's leadership and ritual arts program, I began teaching workshops on community-building tools. As I began working with more local Pagan communities, I noticed that I was working with fewer



people who were mature, motivated, and devoted to self-development. There was a definite difference between local groups and the kinds of community that form at retreats like Gaia's Womb, Diana's Grove, or even at shamanic retreats. When I began hearing from Pagans on blogs and email lists, and talking to friends who spoke of pulling back from "the Pagan community," I wondered what it meant for Paganism.

In local Pagan communities I hear, "Pagans here don't have money; they won't pay for that." Yet I've encountered Pagans who pay to travel to and attend multiple intensives. "Pagans in this city don't have good jobs." Yet I've encountered Pagans with master's and doctorate degrees, Pagans who are lawyers, doctors, chemists, professors, directors of not-for-profits, and hospital administrators.

A higher percentage of the professional, well-educated Pagans I've met are at places like Diana's Grove, are solitaries, or are not generally involved with their local communities. And many of the people who attend retreats and festivals do not engage with their local community.

When I offer classes and rituals in a local community, I'm more likely to be working with Pagans with lower incomes and less formal education, those who are younger and new to their path. I'm less likely to work with people who are motivated and positive, and who self-direct their personal growth work. An exception would be leaders of local groups.

I've asked some Pagan friends who attend weekend Pagan retreats if they have a local community. Some said they are involved with their local Buddhist community because there isn't group drama, and they can have mature conversations.

I believe that many Pagan communities face a future without Crones, without the maturity and wisdom of elders to bring our communities into a future with a rich spiritual tradition. As people become dissatisfied with Paganism and the traditions under that umbrella, I find myself concerned that there is less ability to move forward from "Pagan 101" into deeper spiritual work. And some of those who call themselves elders in local communities perpetuate the cycles of witch wars, infighting, drama, groups that fall apart, and the egotism underlying this.

### **Planting the Seeds**

What do you want out of a Pagan community? Are there communities you've been involved with that worked? What did you like about them? What is your dream community like? I seek groups with mutual respect and maturity, people to connect and do deep work with through mystical experiences, communities where we can deal with our issues maturely, groups that feel safe.

If you're able to, getting advanced leadership training will help a great deal. That can be anything from a leadership class in your workplace to a master's in transformative leadership or a certificate in nonprofit leadership. Pagan-specific options include Cherry Hill Seminary, Diana's Grove, Circle Sanctuary, Ardantane, and the Pagan Leadership Conference on the East Coast.

Grassroots communities, regardless of spirituality, are often founded by people who step in because of need, not necessarily because they have leadership experience. Below are some tools for growing safe, healthy communities. Many of these come from training I experienced at Diana's Grove, or that I've adapted through my work in local Pagan communities.

### **Communication**

One of the single most transformational tools I've seen work in communities is teaching people how to communicate. When groups learn tools of compassionate communication, doors open up and drama often dissolves completely. I recommend reading Marshall Rosenberg's book, *Nonviolent Communication*, or finding access to an NVC facilitator.

The root of compassionate communication addresses your unmet needs and helps others express theirs, in a way that doesn't tell someone else how they think or feel. "You're horrible and you hate me, and I never want to see you again," could become, "I'm hurt and angry when you tease me in front of people; please don't do that anymore."

### **Personal Development**

Beneath difficulties in communication is baggage from emotional issues. If I have a poor sense of self esteem, but I'm very proud of my Pagan group and someone says something negative about the group, that may sting my old wounds. In my case, I was rejected by my peers, and my poor self esteem led me to be defensive and lash out at times. In a women's circle I came to terms with some of my rejection and body-image issues and saw how they held me back. Knowing myself helped me become a healthier leader.

For deep personal work, there are thousands of self help books. I also highly recommend working with a licensed therapist. Personal and spiritual growth work can be done in circles, ritual work, or even with a book club, as long as it is clear this work does not replace work with a psychological professional if you, or a participant, needs more help than the group can offer. Potential books for discussion are Angeles Arrien's *The Four-Fold Way*, and T. Thorn Coyle's *Kissing the Limitless*. Both offer personal work beyond "Pagan 101" and may challenge you.



## Group Dynamics and Power Issues

Power struggles, romantic relationships, and breakups all happen. There is no community without romantic entanglements where friendships last forever. Learning how group dynamics work and what happens will help you structure communities that can handle the dynamics and power issues that come up. A “witch war” is simply an interpersonal argument that escalates to draw the larger Pagan community into taking sides. Many power struggles are actually people acting out of unmet needs – needs for physical safety, information, love, resources. A good resource for group dynamics and power is Starhawk’s *Dreaming the Dark*.

## Group Agreements

What behavior is appropriate? What’s the mission of the group? When you begin a group or revisit group structure, I find it helpful to have a set list of what behavior is suitable within the context of your group. Agreements can be brainstormed by the whole group, and final agreements should be written down. They can include values, such as mutual respect and reaching for excellence and inclusivity. Agreements might include nonviolent communication, timeliness, or direct communication. Agreements for feedback ensure less gossiping and complaining behind people’s backs. When feedback is given directly, it can be acted upon. Agreements can include conduct that isn’t tolerated, such as spreading rumors, or physical aggression.

When group members are in conflict, having a process for dispute resolution is helpful. For disagreements or friendship ruptures, the agreements and processes help ensure that issues will actually be dealt with rather than escalating to drama with people enlisting others to their “side.” Agreements often benefit from the inclusion of mediation – a further agreement that if a personal or professional conflict occurs that impacts the group, the participants must agree to mediation if they cannot solve the problem on their own. In some cases, if the parties do not agree to mediation, they might be asked to leave the group.

## Dealing with Difficult People

I’ve seen three separate groups break apart because of one person who was “annoying.” No one in the group talked to that person to tell her that she was disruptive. An annoying person may have Asperger’s, or might not be good at reading another person’s signals. A “creepy” person may not realize that their body language and word choices frighten the women in your group. If you have agreements for behavior, then you can talk one on one. “In ABC ritual, your XYZ behavior was out of line with our agreements and had 123 impact.” Many will have no idea and will be willing

to shift, and you’ll be doing them a service by giving them clear feedback based in physical reality. Sometimes they’ll be belligerent. It’s important to uphold the agreements, offer feedback, and sometimes it’s appropriate to ask someone to leave the group to ensure the safety of the whole.

## Future Generations

I have many days when I’m frustrated, when I can’t remember how it felt to look up and find the night sky full of magic and mystery. Often I get angry hearing about community drama, and I think, “How could anyone be this mean to another human being?”

Then I think about the daughters growing up now. I think about a girl drumming for the first time, and the girls who are praying to the Goddess for a place where they will belong. I know that the work I’m signing on for isn’t for one year, or five, but that it may bear fruit in ten or twenty years in the form of sustainable, healthy communities, and that, should I have my own daughter, I will know that I helped to build a community that could offer her a place to belong as she becomes a Maiden.

I believe that, as a community, we have much to reach for, much to achieve, and we can do it together, if we can remember the magic inside of us.

### Shauna Aura

*Shauna has taught throughout the Midwest and is an Earth-centered spirituality community leader in Chicago. Her organization, Ringing Anvil, offers an intensive educational program in the transformative arts of community leadership, ritual, and spiritual growth.*

*With 12 years experience as an artist, writer, designer, and marketing strategist, she has organized conferences, themed events, and created rituals, shrines, and art installations. She is a graduate of the Diana’s Grove leadership and ritual arts program and the Chicago C3 leadership program in environmental sustainability. Shauna is inspired by mythic imagination, awakening the vision of the impossible, the pulse of ecstatic drumming, and the song of a healthy, sustainable com-*



Courage is like -- it’s a habitus, a habit, a virtue: you get it by courageous acts. It’s like you learn to swim by swimming. You learn courage by couraging.

~ Mary Daly

# The Courage of Spring

*originally in Between The Worlds, Spring 2009*  
*by River Roberts*

As I write this, the snow is piled up several inches deep outside my apartment here in Chicago. We've been battling bitterly cold temperatures for several weeks, and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. We're past the winter solstice, so the days are beginning to grow longer—but the process is gradual. Darkness still has a firm hold on us.

*This is when I begin to dream of spring*

I haven't seen anything green outside for months. The barren trees look dead against the white winter sky. It is too cold to spend any significant time outdoors. Warmth is a distant memory for us here in the Midwest. True, I sit in my heated apartment, eating food that I bought from a grocery store. My day-to-day life is not governed by the cycle of the seasons. But when the frigid weather seems endless, I get an almost visceral sense of what this time of year must have been like for those whose lives were so governed. My modern self may not remember, but my bones do.

*This is when I begin to dream of spring.*

Can you imagine it? Better yet—can you remember it? It is summertime. The leaves are thick on the trees and the air is heavy with the scent of flowers and fruit. The sun is high in the sky, and a soft breeze cools your skin as it touches beads of sweat born of the heady heat. Food grows thick on the vine. There is enough to eat and drink—enough to take for granted that food will always be this abundant. We have short memories in the summer. Perhaps that is why the shock, the sense of sadness, when the first chill creeps into our consciousness.

It is said that he calls to her in the whisper of leaves. It is said that he beckons to her through the pattern the vines make as they twine up and down the trees. His seduction begins as the light of the sun starts to wane. When we notice the air turn crisp and cool, we remember. And when we remember, we prepare.

Can you remember bringing in the harvest? Stocking

the stores with enough to survive the chill winter? We do so because we remember the first winter. We remember when her mother's grief encompassed the four corners of the earth, and blanketed the world in ice and snow. We remember crying out to the goddess to bring back the food... the warmth... we are starving... we are cold...

So much sorrow! Demeter has lost her daughter! And to lose this daughter is to lose the joy of life itself. Kore was the scent of flowers. Kore was the green and growing. Kore was the one who brought vitality to her mother's garden. And when the first chill met the summer air—we knew that we had lost her once again.

The girl must awaken to the woman within. Kore journeyed far beyond her mother's garden, and into the arms of her lover. Lord of the Underworld, god of the dead, ruler of the darkness beneath the earth... Hades... Pluto. He called to Kore and she answered. And she became Persephone, Queen of the Underworld and Healer of Souls. Light met Darkness. Life met Death. And Demeter, not knowing where her daughter had gone, grieved for the loss of innocence. The world froze.

*This is when we begin to dream of spring.*

The story repeats itself year after year. Cycle after cycle. We huddle around our fires, rationing our food, praying that life will return. Do you remember? The story continues. Demeter discovers the truth about her daughter's whereabouts and demands her return. Persephone, queen in her own right, chooses both worlds. She eats six seeds of the pomegranate, the food of the dead, choosing to remain for six months in Death and six months in Life. She loves both realms equally. And we pray that she makes that vow to return each year.

*This is when we begin to dream of spring.*

I look out my window in 21st-century Chicago at the endless snow and ice. Intellectually, I know that the earth



will continue to turn around the sun, the days will grow longer and warmer and, eventually, the snow will melt. But there is a part of me that still prays. For I look outside, and warmth seems so impossibly far away.

I used to have a prejudice against spring. I pictured an innocent little girl traipsing through fields of flowers. Pretty, but not my idea of a powerful goddess figure. Call me biased, but I've always preferred my gods and archetypes to have a bit more substance to them. But when I truly thought about it, I realized that spring is far from young and fragile. It takes great courage to crack through the ice and be that first crocus that peeks through the mounds of snow. It takes strength to be the season that promises life after death. When Persephone returns to the world of the living, it is not just the return of warmth and abundance that we celebrate—it is the courage and power it takes to make that journey back.

She returns at the Spring Equinox. Equal day and equal night—she returns to the light and does not look back at the darkness, for she trusts that it is there, waiting for her. He is there, waiting for her. He will remember, and he will call to her when it is time to return. But for now, she belongs to us, and we to her. We marvel at the small shoots peeking up through the soil as the snow melts away. We laugh as we breathe in the first scents of spring flowers.

It takes great courage to crack the ice and dare to grow in seemingly impossible places. Where do I dare to grow? Where do I have the courage to crack through the ice? Do I have the will to embrace my own vitality, even when the chill and darkness of winter is still so present? My answer is her answer. Together, we will say yes to the ever-growing light.

*This is when I begin to dream of spring.*

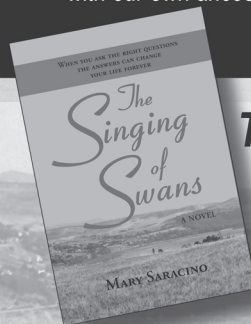
*River Roberts has been involved in earth-based spirituality for nearly twenty years, and has been involved with Mystery School*



*since 2000. She has dedicated her life's work to the exploration of ecstatic ritual arts, authentic risk-taking, and connecting to Spirit with body and voice. An accomplished drummer and vocalist, River is often involved in making music of all kinds, much of which she facilitates as part of the Mystery School experience. As a teacher in the Reclaiming tradition, River has traveled all over North America and Europe teaching everything from ritual creation to tarot. At the Grove she teaches and coaches ritual arts and co-*

*mentors the Initiatory Priestess Program along with Jason Frey. River lives in Chicago, IL with her roommate (another Mystery) and a very ornery tabby cat named after a Greek hero.*

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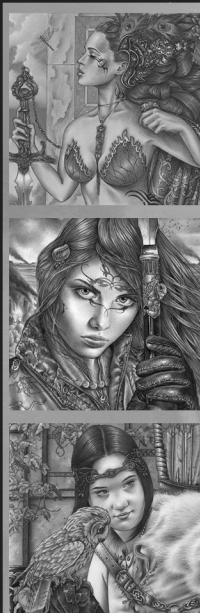


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~ Mary Daly





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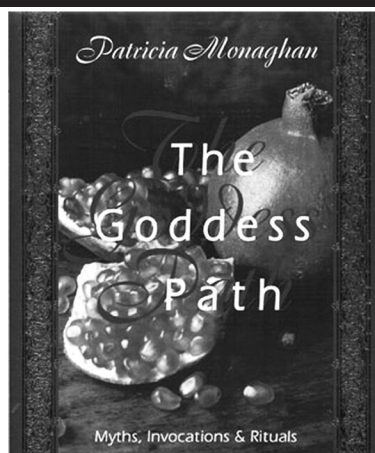
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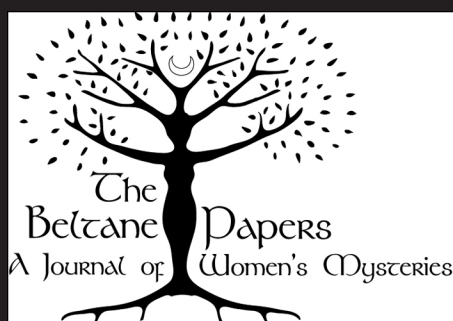
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