



Dear friends,

As mentioned in our Autumn 2020 newsletter, that was our last one for the time being. We will instead be sending out occasional eLetters (printed and circulated to those with no email). Welcome to our first one, we hope you enjoy it. Do give us feedback (email address at end) and any suggestions for future topics.

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At CANA, we believe in a God that is bigger and yet more intimate than is normally understood, one all-present consciousness that imbues and undergirds everything, including us. Our roots are in Christianity where that God has been hidden. The God of the Bible is usually portrayed with masculine attributes and ignores the divine feminine. God is always called He, whether Father, Son or Holy Spirit. This has been used throughout history to support a toxic patriarchy. I believe it is important to see how we could redress this and recognise the importance of the divine feminine, especially if we are part of a church or use the Bible. This article shows some of the biblical and archaeological background, and how we might respond.

IF GOD WAS SHE
Jane Upchurch



There is a Rosh Hashanah blessing for the Jewish New Year in September that I like to use with my family and any group I am with. You give each person a slice of apple dipped in honey and say 'May it be the Lord's will to renew for you a year that is good and sweet'. I told my eleven year old granddaughter that we would be doing this as a blessing from God. She said 'male or female?' Interesting question. I said 'both or neither'.

We know God is not exclusively male or female, and not man or woman. We only have three 3rd person singular pronouns in English, he, she and it, and we believe God to be personal so 'it' wouldn't do. In the bible there are male warrior allusions to God and female mothering allusions, but the biblical God is always called 'He'. What effect does it have to read the bible and sing Christian hymns which portray God as male?

We have been part of a patriarchal system for so long that it is difficult to imagine anything different, or to recognise what part the bible has played in promoting this. If our interpretation of the bible is in any way shoring up a toxic patriarchy, can we re-imagine it now and let loose the healing that it describes?

My understanding of prehistoric archaeology is that for thousands of years, up until the iron age when warrior bands became dominant (about 800BC in the UK), human society was matriarchal and they honoured the divine as goddess. Their lives were intricately connected to the earth and its seasons and they were very aware that life came from mothers and from the earth so earth too was Mother, the great provider and protector. Honouring the Mother was honouring the sacredness of all life.

A male god was introduced by the patriarchal warrior tribes such as the Hebrews. Initially it was often a consort to the female goddess before eventually supplanting and then reviling her. There is biblical and archaeological evidence that before the return from exile in the 6th century BCE, Asherah continued to be worshipped in ancient Israel as the mother of heaven and the consort of Yahweh. Goddess worship was part of state religion and Asherah poles were placed in the temple next to the altar. Inscriptions from the 8th/ 9th century BCE read 'I have blessed you by YHWH and his Asherah'. Later biblical writers and editors introduced the extreme reaction against Asherah worship that we read in parts of the Old Testament today.

The given name of God in the bible, Yahweh, is a combination of both female and male grammatical endings, "Yah," is feminine, and "weh," is masculine so Yahweh embodies both. Yahweh means 'the one who is' or 'I am', not 'Lord' as so often translated following the Jewish tradition that the name of God is too sacred to be spoken. Of the many other names for God in the Old testament, El Shaddai is interesting as 'shad' means female breast (or mountain) so El Shaddai is the God who nourishes and provides.

For female images of God, there is Zeph.3.17 'The Lord will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.' Or Isa.49.15 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has born? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.' Or Isa.66.13 'As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you, says the Lord.' And Jesus in Mat.23.37 said 'How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.' Also note Gen.1.27 'So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.'

Let us also look at the bible's view of women because a patriarchal view of God called He can feed an imbalance in the way we view both God and women. Eve has had a bad press as the first one who sinned and who doomed women to their present state. But she is the equal of Adam and his helper. Gen.2.20-22 says 'For Adam no suitable helper was found...so God made a woman'. The word for helper is always used for God or for an equal in the bible, and suitable means comparable or corresponding so this does not refer to a subordinate. In 'the fall' both Adam and Eve disobeyed and ate the fruit, but Adam blamed Eve which rather ruined their relationship (Gen 3.16b) and the consequence for both of them was the same – hard toil (etzev) whether in tilling the ground or in childbirth (incorrectly translated 'pain'). Israel was a patriarchal society but there are instances of women in positions of authority such as Miriam who together with Moses and Aaron led the Israelites out of Egypt, and Deborah who was a judge.

Jesus' story starts with a visit of the magi (there would have been a group of them not just three) who were Zoroastrian priests and at this time included women. By the time of Jesus women in Israel were treated as inferior to men but Jesus always went against this custom. He touched women, included women in his stories, valued women, taught them and they were among his disciples. But they can be invisible to us.

Mary sitting at Jesus' feet (Luke 10.39) was a rabbinical term for a disciple. Simon Peter is known and praised for recognising that Jesus was the Christ (the Messiah), yet Martha also said this (John 11.27), and the only person Jesus told he was the Christ was a woman and a Samaritan at that (John 4.26). It was a woman who recognised Jesus would die and who anointed him for his burial (Mat.26.6-13). It was a woman he appeared to first after his resurrection, Mary Magdalene, and who was told to be the bearer of this news, an apostolic task (Mat.28.10). The 72 Jesus sent out to preach and heal the sick were likely to include women as they were part of the group who followed him (Luke 10.1 and see Mark 15.40-41). The Passover meal (the last supper) was likely to include women as it is a family occasion. And it is likely that the couple on the road to Emmaus who met the risen Jesus were man and wife as they lived together (Luke 24.29).

Jesus' twelve main disciples were all men as a reference to the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel so linking Jesus' ministry with the foundations of Judaism, but Jesus was establishing a new order (Luke 5.37 No-one pours new wine into old wineskins). Paul too linked Christianity with its Jewish roots but showed it was wider and more inclusive. His sayings that seem to treat women as inferior are usually addressing cultural issues. He ministered with women (two thirds of those he greets in Romans 16 are women), he addressed husbands and wives separately and equally (1 Cor.7), and in the oft quoted verse

about submission, the husbands as well as the wives are included in the sentence in Greek, Eph.5.21-22 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives to your husbands as to the Lord'. (See link to paper at the end, Woman in the Bible, for more detail.)

What do we lose if we lose the divine feminine? We can lose the more intuitive, inner aspects of faith, the importance of stillness, silence and listening. We can lose an emphasis on collaboration and flexibility, on empathy and community, on patience and gentleness, on inspiration and creativity. The divine feminine represents a sacred link with the earth and with our own bodies, with sensuality in its best sense. It is a healing, nurturing energy and is for all, for men as well as women.

How can we address all this in our use of language? We could omit references to God as 'he' and repeat the name of God instead. However this is clumsy and it would not undo a history of thousands of years of viewing God as male. Or we could alternate God with Goddess. It is interesting how many Christians think using the term Goddess is heresy, whereas it is no more incorrect than only using God as a male term. There is a resurgence of interest and engagement with the divine as Goddess at the moment, bringing a much needed balance. But as actresses are now called actors, and ordained women are priests, we could still use the word God but include female pronouns, alternating he and she. For example Gen.2.2 'By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day she rested from all her work.' And 'Dear Father Mother God'. If this feels strange or wrong, it shows how masculine our notion of God is.

Our understanding of the bible, of God and of ourselves is always evolving. Some Christian doctrines are quite new. Christians used to think God supported slavery. They used to think the bible had to be read in Latin. If we read the bible wrong we can't know the fullness of the God contained within. And if we read the bible wrong we can so easily fall into the trap of demeaning women. If we do either or both of these then we not only dishonour God and women, we dishonour ourselves.

For a more in-depth exploration of Woman in the Bible [click here](#)



For a short article on Mary Magdalene [click here](#)



March thoughts by Kate Porteus



Light and Dark, Black and White (and all the shades of grey in between) are keynotes this month.

Michael and I are using a Rowan Williams book about the Pandemic for Lent this year called 'Candles in the Dark' - implying points of Light in overall darkness.

It is also the Spring Equinox this month, the point of equal light and dark before we in the Northern Hemisphere tip once again towards the light.

We speak with enthusiasm about the days getting longer, implying we want more light and less dark. We reach towards it, as do most growing things.

And perhaps this year more than most we look for 'light at the end of the tunnel'.

BUT - too much light and not enough dark has its dangers too. Anyone who has lived in the north of Scotland or beyond knows the exhaustion of late June days when it barely goes dark at all - and most plant life keeps its roots safely nourished in the darkness underground. In parallel, there are levels of human beings that live more in the darkness - our Subconscious, our Unconscious, our dream life. And we need these to cross fertilise with our bright waking awareness to give us deeper creativity and meaning. It's all about balance and the interaction of the two.

The lovely Yin/Yang circle, half black, half white, with the seed of the opposite planted like an eye in the heart of its partner, gives us one good image of a balanced whole.

Or, to change the metaphor - Caroline Myss talks about 'the Metronome of duality on this planet' - we Tick/Tock from Up to Down, Day to Night, Light to Dark.

Two sides of the same coin, we say.

But what about what's between the two sides?

And what holds the whole coin together?

I like the image of a U.K. £1 coin here because it's fat enough to have some stuffing - the shades of grey between. And there's plenty of grey when we go exploring our inner worlds. There can be a spectrum between the two edges of the metronome, or the two sides of the coin. We no longer speak of people being either Male or Female - we are all a mix of both, and that mix is not necessarily static.

Equally, we are all on a spectrum of mental health. None of us are 100% healthy, or the reverse. We need to learn to live with, and explore, these shifting balances within us.

And then, What holds the Coin together as a whole ?

Easy in a physical context to say, it's all made of one component.

But when we go into the inner worlds? Or look for something to make sense of the extreme dualities with which we live?

Those of a religious way of thought might answer 'God'.

Those looking for a different terminology with less 'baggage' might use a phrase like 'non dual consciousness'.

Those of a scientific bent might go for phrases that Einstein or other quantum physicists might use - David Bohm's 'Wholeness and the Implicate Order' for example.

And poets and mystics know that we're feeling into an awareness for which there is no adequate language, and so they use metaphor and simile.

So, your Question for the month – 'What holds your Coin together???'

Good luck with that!

Man hovers
between
Light and Darkness
Woman between
Darkness and Light.
When the Twain meet
Time stands still
In suspended
Space
And the stars gasp
In Silence.

Fulan

The Way begets One,
One begets Two,
Two begets Three,
Three begets the ten thousand things.

The ten thousand things carry shade
And embrace sunlight.
Shade and sunlight, yin and yang,
Breath blending into harmony.

Lao Tzu

UPCOMING EVENTS



CANA CONSCIOUS CONVERSATIONS (CCC)

This is an opportunity to meet together online in small groups and share our thoughts and feelings during this pandemic. We meet in total for 2 hours with a short break in the middle. Last year we had three very successful meetings.

April CCC Saturday 24th 10.30 – 12.30 Our Life and our Death as Two Great Adventures

Janice Dolley, a co-founder of Cana, will share her experience of ongoing communication following the death of a close friend. She will explore how a shift in our perception of the continuity of consciousness through death and beyond brings us an expanded understanding of the new reality of which Jesus spoke and which we are beginning to experience now in our present life adventure. She will refer to her book, published last April: ["Awakening to a New Reality: Conscious Conversations across the Horizon of Death"](#).

This will be followed by an opportunity to explore in small groups how our own understandings are also expanding and enabling us to gain deeper insights into the nature of death, both our own and that of our loved ones.

February CCC - We have a recording of an interview with Brian Holley about his book ["The God I Left Behind" - A Journey from Fundamentalism to Faith](#),

If you would like to join us in April, or receive a copy of the recording from February, then please email admin@cana.org.uk

OTHER EVENTS



MYSTICS & SCIENTISTS EXTRA 2021
ONE MIND, ONE PLANET, ONE HEALTH

THE SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL NETWORK
THE HAGUE CENTER
AND
WHOLEWORLD-VIEW
PRESENT

**EVOLUTIONARY VISIONS
OF THE FUTURE**

HOW CAN WE CO-CREATE A FLOURISHING FUTURE?

- A DONATION BASED-EVENT -



Jude Currivan · Chloe Goodchild · Janice Dolley · Anne-Marie Voorhoeve · David Lorimer

SATURDAY, 20 MARCH • 4:00-6:30 PM (GMT)
WWW.MYSTICSANDSCIENTISTS.ORG

Click on the link to see full details and sign up for this event:

<https://mysticsandscientists.org/index.php/evolutionary-visions-of-the-future/>

CONTACT US

GROUP MEDITATION If you would like to join with us at the full moon when our focus is birthing a universal spirituality, or at the new moon with a focus on praying for the planet, then please email us.

CANA operates on a gift economy so if you would like to contribute and do not already then email us and we will send details.

We would appreciate any help with the eLetter if you have possible articles to include or technical expertise.

If you would like to reply to any of this or have questions or suggestions, please email info@cana.org.uk or ring Jane or Bill on 01895 639476.

May love and light fill your life and our world bringing healing and wholeness

CANA is a network of people responding to the new impulse of Spirit at this time. Many of us recognise its resonance with the teachings of Jesus as a way of transformation. Our hope is to rediscover and re- imagine a path leading towards a more universal spirituality that can operate with respect for all living creatures and all faiths, a path of love and service for the betterment of all. This is not just about the transformation of the individual, but the global shift of humanity to a higher way of being and of love that Jesus termed 'the realm of God'.

www.cana.org.uk