

Religious Biography, Religious Experience, and American History

Divine Immanence:
A Psychodynamic Study in Women's Experience of Goddess

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Abstract: Contemporary women's spiritual memoirs document a paradigmatic shift towards the Sacred Feminine with vast theological, psychological, social, and religious implications. These memoirs serve as a *locus theologicus* for heterodoxical theological reflection on religious experience. Drawn from the pages of the memoirs in this study this paper shall briefly examine the methodology required to understand these collective spiritual experiences and how the experience of an immanent Sacred Feminine lies at the heart of this Western paradigmatic shift towards the Feminine Divine.

Keywords: Divine Immanence, Sacred Feminine, Carol P. Christ, Carl Jung, Theology

Our spiritual and religious stories have tremendous power. When these stories centre upon our personal relationship with the Divine (known to be ineffable, yet commonly referred to as God, the Godhead or the Numinous) they can help us, as individuals, understand our sense of self, our place in the world, and give our lives meaning by building and/or sustaining our paradigmatic vision of it. A complex genre, spiritual memoirs are a form of "fictive" literature—a term used to indicate the author's selective use of events and experiences, perhaps with embellishment, to tell traditionally non-fictional stories of personal pilgrimage or Divine revelation. Consequently, these stories have enormous power and are capable of maintaining, altering or shifting existing faith traditions and beliefs. Religious, or spiritual,

memoirs have served, over the centuries, as an important literary method to chronicle personal experiences with the Divine. In the past few decades, this non-fictional genre has seen a dramatic increase in both publication and interest in the West.

In great numbers, women (mainly but not exclusively from the United States) are writing and publishing their spiritual memoirs -- chronicling journeys in search of the Divine. What is perhaps far more vital to the theological significance of this genre is that these women are detailing experiences with an immanent Feminine Divine – an internal God with a feminine face and voice. By experience I am referring to the direct personal contact with, awareness of or knowledge of the Divine recorded in the works in my study.

Literature is the *locus theologicus* as my doctoral dissertation examines the spiritual memoirs of five writers: Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D. (*Crossing to Avalon: A Woman's Midlife Pilgrimage*, 1994), Sue Monk Kidd (*Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine*, 1996), Phyllis Curott (*Book of Shadows: A Modern Woman's Journey into the Wisdom of Witchcraft and the Magic of the Goddess*, 1998), Margaret Starbird (*The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine*, also published in 1998) and Christine Downing (*The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*, which was originally published in 1981, but only recently rose in popular acclaim with its 2007 reprint). As each text chronicles the authors' individual experiences in coming to know and embrace the Divine Feminine in any one of her forms, they also, collectively, speak of similar experiences, journeys, and transformations—often turning away from their original

religious or spiritual traditions, if they had one, and moving toward one of the various forms of “Goddess Spirituality” which now openly exist in Western society. For the purposes of this essay I would like to focus on the central spiritual experience of the immanent Feminine Divine recounted in these memoirs.

Comparing and contrasting the memoirs reveals an intriguing and significant trend -- these independent works bring to light fundamental collective experiential similarities and raise some intriguing theological questions: How might these collective similarities be explained? And how do we, as scholars, come to understand this praxis of faith from the perspective of the adherents? Traditional theological enquiry is an unsuitable lens with which to examine the untraditional, heterodoxical, numinous territory found in the spiritual memoirs; it differs considerably from the established monotheistic belief systems. Dominant rationalist and monotheistic paradigms that are predominant in Western culture might have problems accommodating a Feminine Divine. Rationalism could deny the plausibility of this model, and fundamental monotheism might rebuff this possibility based on the fact that the Divine presents itself as feminine – disrupting traditional images of a masculine God. Existing lenses are often singular (or monocular) in view and perception. Oftentimes they stand in opposition to the ‘Other’ through religious creed, culture, gender, etc.—creating a schism and point of conflict instead of uniting and integrating in wholeness and balance. Therefore, a plural (compound) lens is needed. Moreover, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Wayne Proudfoot would remind scholars that when studying religious experience, the academic must approach the experience from the perspective of the adherent. Proudfoot writes: “a religious

experience, belief, or practice must be identified under the description employed by the subject.”¹

As a result, the plural lens required to understand these experiences is drawn from two significant, albeit highly-controversial, perspectives: Carol P. Christ’s theology and women’s spiritual quest, and Carl Jung’s analytical psychology. These lenses were selected because both of these models and/or their proponents are mentioned by name in the memoirs in this study and help to form the authors’ basis of understanding of their religious experiences.

Carol P. Christ’s foundational work on the feminist theology, theological importance of women’s religious experiences, women’s story, and the feminine spiritual quest provides my theological model and lens. The origin of the term *theology* is open to debate. According to my research the term *Theology* or *Theologian* was first used in publications by both Isaac Bonewits (“The Druid Chronicles – Evolved”) and Valerie Saiving (“Androcentrism in Religious Studies”) in 1976. Naomi Goldenberg continued this new thread by using the term in *The Changing of the Gods*.² Since then, many have attempted to define “theology”. Carol Christ, a self-professed Theologian, first used the term in her *Laughter of Aphrodite* in 1987, and years later succinctly defined it as “the reflection on the meaning of the Goddess.”³ Rita Nakashima Brock illustrates her understanding of the term theology in her 1989 article “On Mirrors, Mists, and Murmurs: Toward an Asian American

¹ Wayne Proudfoot. *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 199

² Naomi R. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods*, 96

³ Christ, Carol P. A Feminist theology as post-traditional theology, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, Susan Frank Parsons (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 79

Thealogy”: “I use the word thealogy to describe the work of women reflecting on their experiences of and beliefs about divine reality”⁴

Strictly adhering to the definition, the word breaks down into two parts: *Thea* (Goddess) and *logos* (word, discourse, reason). Its counterpart, Theology, is broadly defined by various schools of thought but most often understood primarily as the study of the nature of God; it can also denote a specific system or school of opinions concerning God and religious questions such as systematic theology or natural theology; in addition to being a course of specialized religious study usually at a college or seminary. While seemingly inclusive in scope, theology often has a focal handicap—it is monotheistic in its thinking, examining God from a narrow and monocular lens often concretised by its own dogma, and often exclusivist and hampered by truth claims. Thealogy, on the other hand, is pluralistic, syncretistic and inclusive. It is fluid and comprehensive, able to contain many different belief systems and ways of being. Thealogy does not stand in opposition to, but as a complement to, Theology as a branch of religious study.

Thealogy also complements analytical psychology in the memoirs because there is an important unconscious psychic process happening to these women as well; therefore my psychological model, or lens, is based on concepts first posed by Carl Gustav Jung, including his models of the Archetypes, the Collective Unconscious, Dreams, the Anima/Animus relationship and the path of Individuation. It seems

⁴ Rita Nakashima Brock. “On Mirrors, Mists, and Murmurs: Toward an Asian American Thealogy” *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (eds.) (New York: Harper, 1989), 236

that both these models⁵ are coexisting within this genre of women's writing instead of being in conflict with each other. Therefore, I shall present both a theological and psychological understanding of these experiences creating a dialogue between these two methodologies and, hopefully, progress toward a form of inter-relational cohesion between the disciplines of literature, theology, and analytical psychology.

There are three aspects of Carol P. Christ's foundational work that pertain to the study at hand – those are 1) the theological importance of studying women's religious experience, 2) the need for women's stories, and 3) the four stages of the feminine spiritual quest as she perceives them. The early work of Carol P. Christ was considered groundbreaking in the 1970's as she was one of a group of female scholars from the second wave of Western feminism who challenged the academic exclusion of women from religious contemplation. She first espoused the importance of using women's experience as an untapped source for significant theological reflection in 1979⁶ and continued to speak of its importance throughout her career. Nearly twenty years later, even one of Christ's strongest critics, Annalies van Heijst, considers women's experience a "*locus theologicus*" or "a location for

⁵ These two models were later joined with the Depth Theology of Abraham J. Heschel to create a new compound methodology: *Depth Theology*. Located as a specific school of thought and specialized religious study within the broader field of Theology, Depth Theology is phenomenological, heterodoxical and psychodynamic. In broad terms, Depth Theology is the psychodynamic phenomenological study of the conscious and unconscious factors affecting religious behavior; it is rooted in religious experience. Its current field of vision is limited by the necessities of my doctoral dissertation to those faith traditions that are Goddess-centered or based on the union of the Divine Pair. At the time of this conference presentation, the model was incomplete. The entire compound model will be included in the pending doctoral dissertation, "Depth Theology: A Psychodynamic Study in Women's Spiritual Memoirs."

⁶ Carol P. Christ, "Spiritual Quest and Women's Experience," *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds.) (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 193

theology.”⁷ Many feminist theologians and theologians recognise Christ’s insights. According to Ruth Mantin, “The central role of women’s experience in feminist spiritualities is one of the most distinctive features of Christ’s contribution to the development of feminist theo/alogy.”⁸

But to Christ these experiences were lost if they were neither recorded nor shared. Christ’s text *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* is first and foremost a treatise on the importance of women’s experience of the Divine and carries with it a call to record such journeys. In her Preface to the second edition, Christ writes: “the telling of women’s stories and the naming of women’s spiritual quest has the power to transform our lives and our relation to the world in which we live.”⁹ She goes on further in the text to explain why:

“Women’s stories have not been told. And without stories there is no articulation of experience...Without stories she is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and the world that has been called spiritual or religious.”¹⁰

Christ’s work help to lay the theological foundation for scholars to follow in later years; as she combined women’s experience with women’s story as a place for theological reflection. Heather Walton deems Christ’s “pioneering work...[which] decisively influenced the approach of religious feminists to women’s writing” as her

⁷ Annalies van Heijst, *Longing for the Fall* (Kampen, NL: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995), 255

⁸ Ruth Mantin, “Can Goddesses Travel with Nomads and Cyborgs? Feminist Theologies in a Postmodern Context,” from *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology No. 26, January 2001* Lisa Isherwood, et al (eds.) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 22

⁹ Carol P. Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on a Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995[1980]), xxiii

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 1

greatest contribution.¹¹ This relationship between theology and literature is especially important to Walton. In her essay, "Women Writing the Divine," Walton acknowledges her own interest in the often tense relationship between literature and theology and credits Christ's significant contribution to this burgeoning interdisciplinary field: "Literature was the vital resource which women could use to generate a new religious consciousness."¹²

There are limitations in Christ's approach, and these limitations have been discussed at length by other feminist theologians. Specific to this discussion, her critics find difficulty in the terminology Christ uses. Mantin explains:

"For a growing number of feminists the term "women's experience" has become problematic for a series of reasons: because of its apparent assumption of an essentialist, absolutist and universal phenomenon which denies difference."¹³

Accordingly, a proper analysis would include examining the similarities that exist in both the individual and collective experiences of these five authors. I neither intend nor imply an essentialist or reductive perspective that can be applied to all women or all women's experience. For purpose of clarity: the five women in my study are all white, well-educated, Western women whose individual experiences reveal a commonality and collective nature.

Despite the criticisms, even her critics agree that Christ's work has made a tremendous impact to feminist theology. Kathleen Sands, who takes critical issue

¹¹ Heather Walton, *Literature, theology and feminism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), 40

¹² Heather Walton, "Women Writing the Divine," in Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverley Clack's (eds.) *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings* (London: Routledge, 2004), 126

¹³ Mantin, "Can Goddess Travel," 22

with several of Christ's approaches to women's experience, firmly believes that "Christ has established women's literature as 'a theological source' that while still largely ignored by androcentric religious studies has become vital to most religious feminists."¹⁴ Walton echoes this assertion: "Christ's use of women's literature to confirm the authority of 'women's experience' enabled a decisive leap forward to take place in feminist scholarship."¹⁵

However, Christ's feminist scholarship on women's experience goes further. Christ observed specific similarities in women's experience, but these similarities were conscious actions that each woman underwent as she progressed along her sacred journey towards the Divine. Reminiscent of the phases of the hero's quest as outlined by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*,¹⁶ Carol Christ defines her "interpretive model" (Mantin) for understanding the process of woman's spiritual quest. Christ asserts that women's spiritual quests are dissimilar from the "quest" experiences of men on the basis of gender and a patriarchally-imposed silence. Therefore, she defines a *women's* quest in four stages although not necessarily occurring in a linear or sequential order; Christ explains:

"It begins with an *experience of nothingness*. Women experience emptiness in their own lives...Experiencing nothingness, women reject conventional solutions and question the meaning of their lives, thus opening themselves to the revelation of deeper sources of power and value. The experience of nothingness often precedes an *awakening*, similar to a conversion experience, in which the powers of being are revealed...Awakening often occurs through *mystical identification* [insight]...Awakening is followed by

¹⁴ Kathleen M. Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 132

¹⁵ Heather Walton, *Literature, Theology and Feminism*, 47

¹⁶ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: MJF Books, 1949)

new naming of self and reality that articulates the new orientation to self and world.”¹⁷

According to Mantin, this model is also open to criticism “for its linear and teleological assumptions and its failure to acknowledge the multiple, fluctuating nature of subjectivity.”¹⁸

A thorough examination of the five texts in this study reveals a common pattern: indeed, all five women describe encountering the four stages of their journey as delineated by Christ. Sue Monk Kidd describes her feeling of “nothingness” in terms of Christ’s model:

“Feminist Theologian Carol P. Christ states that a woman’s awakening begins with an experience of nothingness...An experience of nothingness was what I encountered at the monastery. In tasting what it meant to be female in my culture and faith, I felt, for the first time, a hidden despair lodged inside.”¹⁹

Jean Shinoda Bolen interpreted her “awakening” in response to the publication of one of her books:

“It was as if I had opened up a gateway into a parallel world where divinity had a feminine face, where the body and the earth were sacred, and where ordinary events became enhanced by spontaneous rituals, and I was among the first to go through the gateway...It felt like a call to my soul and a Grail Quest.”²⁰

Phyllis Currott, once a Humanist with no real spiritual leanings, began her quest for knowledge after she finally heeded the call from a repetitive dream, and her “insight” led to new naming:

¹⁷ Christ, *Diving Deep*, 13

¹⁸ Mantin, “Can Goddess Travel.” 41

¹⁹ Kidd, *Dance*, 28

²⁰ Bolen, Jean Shinoda, *Crossing to Avalon: A Woman’s Midlife Pilgrimage* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 19

“My studies led me to realize that Witchcraft, as the Old Religion is often called, and its modern renaissance, are rooted in the ancient Goddess religions from which Western culture was originally born. I didn’t believe in a Goddess, but I was beginning to sense the vast shift in consciousness that accompanies a conception of the sacred that is feminine.”²¹

This is just a small sampling of the textual evidence to support Christ’s theological model surrounding women’s experience with an Immanent Divine. However, one very important element is missing from the theological model. These memoirs reveal that each woman’s journey was inspired by her dreams. In fact, every account was initiated by a dream or series of dreams that “called” each woman to her quest. Contrary to the theological model, dreams are the foundational basis of the analytical work of Carl Gustav Jung.

Each woman has an experience that is personal and individual to her, yet collectively a vast majority of these experiences are shared as common traits by all the women in this study. The experiential similarities are irrefutable beginning with their dreams. Kidd first experienced the Feminine Divine in a singular, momentous dream that shook her entire foundation:

“I was standing in front of my Baptist church when suddenly she appeared at my side...The old woman has shining white hair and a face that hangs in folds and furrows down to her shoulders. Her lips are apple red, and she carries a walking stick with a snake wound around it...She points to the church steeple. As she does, it changes from a steeple to a rocket ship aimed at the sky. The old woman shakes her head and says, “You think this will take you where you need to go. Think again.”²²

²¹ Phyllis Currott. *Book of Shadows: A Modern Woman’s Journey into the Wisdom of Witchcraft and the Magic of the Goddess* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 16

²² Kidd, *Dance*, 76

Currott, on the other hand, experienced a series of dreams that continued to summon her until she heeded their call.

“Each time it began, I was alone in a great hall. Music like rippling water filled the rooms, and a woman sat before me. Her face was pensive and serene; a book lay open in her lap. A shining light crowned her head and a necklace with a six-pointed star hung at her throat. The power that radiated from her crown and her throat became so bright I was momentarily blinded. I blinked and she was gone.”²³

All of the women I am examining in this study have attributed the beginning of their journeys to their dreams. This makes the fundamental experience of dreams a significant part of both their spiritual memoirs and personal journeys. This invariably leads to several questions: Are these women having dreams from their own subconscious? Are these dreams from Jung’s collective unconscious? Or are they, in fact, experiencing a Divine revelation?

A number of Jung’s foundational ideas, including the significance of dreams, archetypes, and the collective unconscious, are presented as reoccurring experiences prominently depicted in these women’s spiritual memoirs, and it is obvious that they find a correlation between Jung’s theories and their own experiences. At the centre of Jung’s theories is the model of the *archetype*. Jung describes the archetype as existing alongside the history of humankind. He states: “the archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, nothing but *a faculas praeformandi*, a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*.”²⁴ He defines the archetype during a lecture in 1922 as:

²³ Currott, *Book of Shadows*, 6

²⁴ Carl Gustav Jung. *Aspects of the Feminine*. RFC Hull (trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX, 1982), 107

“The primordial image, or archetype, is a figure – be it a daemon, a human being, or a process – that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed. Essentially, therefore, it is a mythological figure. When we examine these images more closely, we find that they give form to countless typical experiences of our ancestors. They are, so to speak, the psychic residual of innumerable experiences of the same type.”²⁵

Jung expressed the unexpected and precarious nature of the archetype during an on-camera interview. He perceives the archetype as capable of independent action, and Jung is visibly excited by and passionate about this unexpected nature as he explains; “The archetype is a force; it has autonomy. It can certainly seize you. It is like a seizure!”²⁶ The implication then being that an archetype can suddenly and unexpectedly “seize” one and one’s psyche perhaps stopping all other psychic functions and forcing immediate, conscious attention and action. As such, the archetypes are not only the contents of the collective unconscious; they are also the driving force behind the collective unconscious, and by extension, the force behind the paradigmatic shift towards an immanent Feminine Divine

The majority of the women in my study use Jungian terms to identify and classify their religious or divine experiences, and this is particularly true in how they interpret their dreams. Analytical psychology would argue that these women are tapping into the archetypes from the collective unconscious and that this journey that Carol Christ refers to as a feminine spiritual quest is, in Jungian terms,

²⁵ Carl Gustav Jung. “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry,” A lecture delivered to the Society for German Language and Literature, Zurich, May 1922 from *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*. RFC Hull (trans.) (London: Routledge Classics, 2003), 94

²⁶ Mark Whitney. (Dir.) “Matter of Heart: The Extraordinary Journey of C.G. Jung into the Soul of Man.” Conceived and Written by Suzanne Wagner. Video. (The CG Jung Institute of Los Angeles, 1983), 30:29

the path to Individuation. Therefore, from the perspective of this psychological model the theology they are collectively espousing in their texts is derived from an aspect of their psyche of which the Goddess is already an inherent part. Kidd explains this internal connection from a Jungian model of archetypes:

“In dreams the wise old woman often symbolizes the Feminine Self or the voice of the feminine soul, and her coming can mark a turning point for women. This dream was my turning point.”²⁷

However, these dreams are also functioning as revelatory experiences that initiate action. Are these dreams, then, a source of Divine intervention? Or are they the product of the collective psyche? I suggest that there is a combination of functions happening here: it appears that these dreams are functioning as a psycho-religious calling – one irreducible from the other.

Naomi Goldenberg discusses the important psychoanalytic connection between dreams and religion and their inherent significance: Jung “...viewed dreams as the “Voice of God” [...] a means of attuning a patient to her or his own religious processes.”²⁸ However, the use appropriation of Jung’s theories and terminology is an area of enormous concern for feminist theo/theologians. Melissa Raphael also discusses the significance of Jung’s psychoanalytic theories from a feminist perspective. In her text, however, she limits her criticisms to a lengthy footnote in her Preface:

²⁷ Kidd, *Dance*, 76

²⁸ Naomi R. Goldenberg, “Dreams and Fantasies as Sources of Revelation: Feminist Appropriation of Jung,” *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds.) (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 223

“His respect for “the feminine” does not make him a feminist...But much of the material in spiritual feminist texts is more loosely Jungian in the sense that imagination, dreams, and visions, rather than creeds or texts, are revelatory and produce an open, therapeutic self-directed religious experience...Psychotherapy has strongly influenced the feminist spirituality movement and visionary material is properly included in its academic texts—both radical and reformist.”²⁹

Naomi Goldenberg, herself a Jungian Feminist, recognizes both the criticisms and benefits of Jung’s work: “Jung’s position on the religious nature of fantasy and dream is more important for feminists than his views on ‘the feminine’.”³⁰ While Jung’s theories on the immanent Feminine Divine, the collective unconscious, and the Great Mother archetype may have serious flaws for feminist theologians, the adherents of the various forms of Goddess spirituality and traditions (many of whom consider themselves “feminists”) are utilizing Jung’s theories and terminology. This leads to the question: Why Jung? Is there something in Jung’s theories that validates the experiences that are often discarded by traditional religious doctrine? Or is it that they have no other terminology to refer to when describing these experiences? Cynthia Eller observed the feminist spirituality movement in America for 10 years, and states that Jungianism is another “resource” that “emerged early in the history of the movement...Through the theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious, women could conceive of goddess images as something more than merely modern inventions.”³¹ At the heart of it, Jung firmly believes in an immanent Divine – and for Jung that Divine is inherently

²⁹ Melissa Raphael, *Thealogy and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 12

³⁰ Goldenberg, “Dreams and Fantasies,” 224

³¹ Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995 [1993]), 66

feminine. This could explain why Jung's work has such an integral role in these spiritual memoirs and the understanding of these religious experiences.

The memoirs speak of the immanent and transcendent nature of the Divine; however it is the concept of an immanent Feminine Divine that holds the focus of the discussion on the nature of the Divine. The memoirs all echo the sentiment described by Phyllis Currott: "The divine dwells within, in ever-changing outward form, its inner presence eternal. The journey is its discovery."³² The memoirs in this study all document this journey of religious experience and discovery. Sue Monk Kidd writes of her encounter of the immanent Feminine Divine; she writes:

"Little by little, I began to contact a feminine source within...a deep, ancient-feeling place inside me, a place I hadn't known existed. This surprised me because it made me realize that what I sought was not outside myself. It was within me, already there, waiting. Awakening was really the act of remembering myself, remembering this deep Feminine Source."³³

It was this initial contact with the immanent Feminine Divine that eventually led Kidd away from a Christian faith tradition that embraced only masculine images of God the Father and Christ the son towards a "Goddess Spirituality" – a belief system that embraces the Divine Feminine as the Great Mother and Supreme Being. In this pluralistic theological setting, Kidd comes to expand her understanding of the immanent Feminine Divine through further research:

"I began to discover that for many thousands of years before the rise of the Hebrew religion, in virtually every culture of the world, people worshipped the Supreme Being in the form of a female deity—the Great Goddess...she was known as the creator and sustainer of the universe who ruled over the rhythms and forces of nature. That she was all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful,

³² Currott, *Book of Shadows*, 276

³³ Kidd, *Dance*, 75

bringing both birth and death, light and dark. I explained that she was immanent, compassionate, ever-nourishing, associated with earth, fertility, and sexuality, but also a transcendent being who bestowed order, justice and truth.”³⁴

In these memoirs, Divine transcendence is understood as existing in partnership with Divine immanence. Starbird explains:

“Whereas God the Father/Creator is honored as the transcendent principle--enthroned in glory somewhere “out there” and unforgettably painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, the Holy Spirit is the immanent “feminine” aspect of the Divine, ever guiding us from within. She is both weaver and teacher—Holy Wisdom herself.”³⁵

Therefore embracing the immanent Divine will lead to a union with the transcendent Divine. It is this harmonious union of immanence and transcendence (and by extension the masculine and feminine images of the Divine) that is the ultimate goal of the spiritual quest for these women. Stepping beyond the boundaries of Western binary dualism and the gendered oppositional schism between God the Father and Goddess the Mother, these memoirs document a union of immanence and transcendence that leads to the ultimate religious experience—the union of the individual and the ineffable Divine. Jean Shinoda Bolen, a Jungian analyst and author in this study, describes this Divine union as she experienced it standing upon the remains of the High Altar at Glastonbury Cathedral:

“I entered a deeply receptive state of consciousness...I once again felt my Christian spirituality: Christ, Holy Spirit, God the Father were with me once more. And I felt the presence of a Mother God, the Goddess, as well. Standing on the High Altar, listening to a contemporary priestess, I could feel energy

³⁴ Kidd, *Dance*, 134

³⁵ Margaret Starbird. *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine* (Rochester, VT: Bear & Co., 1998), xii

from Mother Earth coming up through my feet into my body, while the Spirit descended from above through my head. Both came together and met in my heart...This coming together of God and Goddess healed a split in me...I realized I was enacting the *vesica piscis* in myself. The two spheres, Christian and Goddess, Father and Mother God, archetypal and ordinary, intersected in me. As I stood there, I was in that moment “the rod” that connected the two worlds as well. Surrounded by the greenness of the setting, I was the recipient of grace, which made me feel whole. This all came together in my heart, in a profound inner spiritual sacramental moment.”³⁶

The theological significance of these memoirs is encapsulated in possibilities held by first embracing the Feminine Divine. Kidd explains how this acceptance is ultimately heterodoxical and exists outside of traditional orthodox theological constructs: “Divine feminine imagery opens up the notion that the earth is the body of the Divine, and when that happens, the Divine cannot be contained solely in a book, church, dogma, liturgy, theological system, or transcendent spirituality.”³⁷ What is required is a new theology, a new means of understanding the Divine in ways that move beyond the oppositional nature of binary dualisms; these memoirs reveal a new theology and a new way of understanding one’s experiences of and relationship to that which we call God.

Analytical psychology would argue that dreams, the feminine face of the Divine, and the experiences of Christ’s “nothingness”, “awakening”, “insight”, and “new naming” are all necessary psychic components required in each of us—not just Christ’s exclusive path for women—for attaining true psychic balance. This path, defined by Jung as Individuation, is inclusive; it is a path we must all make—men and women alike—to connect to the unconscious, which Jung calls the feminine, in

³⁶ Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon*, 121-22, 124

³⁷ Kidd, *Dance*, 162

whatever form She takes. For Jung, the question is not of God's existence but the image of God created by the psyche—the Immanent Divine.

Analyzing a variety of models (such as theological and analytical) that legitimize these experiences is crucial. Both the theological and the psychological models are instrumental in deepening our understanding of the rising consciousness of Western women to an Immanent Feminine Divine. Moreover, through the models created by Carl Jung, we gain psycho-religious understanding in an ungendered psychic need for this connection with our dreams, archetypes, and the collective unconscious – through which we become whole human beings. The Jungian model applies to all of humanity and seeks a balance of dualisms. The textual evidence itself indicates a fluid, plurality of models of understanding based on the theories of both Christ and Jung moving beyond a singular fixed model or lens. While sturdy and foundational, a fixed model can invariably lead to disappointment when it is outgrown. More importantly though, fixed models, such as the one found in monotheistic Christianity, can appear irrefutable and provide the often contentious and restrictive landscape that these women are intentionally leaving behind.

Ultimately, one is left with the question: why study women's experience with an Immanent Divine? As scholars, this work is significant because it marks an important paradigmatic shift away from the monolithic patriarchal Father God towards the Divine Feminine – a shift away from organized religion towards a personal religion. As a society, the Feminine Divine, often embodied in Mother Earth, reminds us, in the West, that as individuals and as a society, we have lost our

intimate connection we once had with our natural world, each other and our understanding of God. We have lost our psychic and spiritual balance in the process. In both the theological and the psychological models, the experiences within these texts are sacred and compulsory psycho-religious needs largely denied by Western rationalism and fundamental monotheism. These memoirs speak of a path to wholeness: a well-defined sense of self, a sense of purpose or destiny, connection to the world around us, and a personal relationship with the Divine.

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