

A Study of Gender, Part 1: Gender at the Human and Higher Levels

John F. Nash



**Michelangelo:
"Moses" (c.1514)**



**Nicholas Roerich:
"Mother of the World" (1937)**

Summary

This two-part article examines the esoteric aspects of gender. Part I is a “cross-sectional” study of gender, examining the nature of gender at the present time, along with contributing factors. It explores the meaning and significance of gender in the human context and the legitimacy of applying the term to higher levels of reality, including the divine.

The main conclusions are: Some form of gender—or “horizontal” polarity with mutually attractive, creative potential—exists at all levels, short of the unmanifest Godhead. Gender polarities at the personality level are best considered as archetypes enshrined in the Ageless Wisdom. These polarities correlate strongly with distinctions between the odd- and even-numbered rays, pointing to a way to identify gender at higher levels, including those where the human soul and the Planetary Hierarchy reside.

Part II will present a “longitudinal” study of gender, including its evolution in the human

race. Emphasis will be placed on what seems to be an accelerating fluidity in gender. Tentative predictions will be made as to where this development may take humanity as it continues on its upward path.

Introduction

God, we learn from *Genesis*, created us male and female. Ever since, humanity has been divided into the two groups. Categorization ostensibly was biological, but it carried with it a host of spoken and unspoken psychological, social, legal and religious implications.

About the Author

John F. Nash, Ph.D., is a long-time esoteric student, author, and teacher. Two of his books, *Quest for the Soul* and *The Soul and Its Destiny*, were reviewed in the Winter 2005 issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly*. *Christianity: The One, the Many*, was reviewed in the Fall 2008 issue. His latest book: *The Sacramental Church* was published in 2011. For further information see the advertisements in this issue and the website <http://www.uriel.com>.

Over the last several decades, academic scientists and healthcare professionals have adopted the term “gender,” with categories of *masculinity* and *femininity*, to capture the psychological, social, legal and religious attributes in their own right. Opinions differ on whether gender encompasses sex or is distinct from it. This article treats gender as a higher correspondence of sex. In the human context, sex is associated with the physical plane, dense and etheric; and gender with the emotional, mental and higher planes.

Both sex and gender are complex concepts. Notions of binary sex break down because some people do not fit into either category even at birth, and further ambiguity or fluidity can become apparent later in life. Gender is such an amorphous quality that its very definition is controversial, and rigid categorization is almost impossible. Furthermore, gender does not necessarily correlate with sex. Individuals typically exhibit a blend of gender characteristics that may or may not align with those culturally associated with their biological sex.

This article seeks to stimulate discussion on a number of issues. Part I raises the questions: What are sex and gender? and Does gender have meaning at levels of reality above the human personality? Part II will raise the questions: What evidence do we have of evolution in human sex and gender? How rapid is this evolution? What is its significance for the human race? and Is it in conformity with Hierarchical Purpose?

The strategy in Part I is to define sex and gender at the personality level; to examine projections of gender onto levels of reality traditionally considered divine; and finally to inquire whether gender exists in any meaningful sense at levels that include the human soul and the Planetary Hierarchy.

Many esotericists assert that gender is purely a personality-level phenomenon. At higher levels androgyny is the norm; the only polarities are “vertical” ones, like the relationship between soul and monad, or between Christ and the Planetary Logos. The present article suggests that this doctrine may need to be revisited. If gender exists at both the divine and the

personality levels, identifying it in between should be relatively straightforward.

Gender can be viewed as a set of “horizontal” polarities, or pairs of opposites at approximately the same level of reality, interacting creatively with the potential to manifest new forms. Rudimentary horizontal polarities exist in the mineral kingdom in the bonds between subatomic particles, in the valences between atoms that create chemical compounds, and in magnetic and electric fields. More complex polarities are found in the fertilization processes of the vegetable kingdom—processes in which the mineral and animal kingdoms often participate—and the mating, reproductive and parenting behaviors of the animal kingdom. The human kingdom inherited sex from the animal kingdom, but overlaid it with gender, expressed in all its creative potential at least up to the mental level.

Perhaps the progression stops there. But more likely, horizontal polarities express themselves in ever-more impressive ways as we move into the higher kingdoms. The present article seeks to show that this is indeed the case. Polarities, which can meaningfully be termed “gender,” seem to exist at all levels below the unmanifest Godhead, whose only “attribute”—if we could use that word—is self-existence.

The article is written primarily from a western, Judeo-Christian perspective. Occasionally it draws upon concepts from other religions and philosophies, but the article does not comment on the gender norms of other cultures. Authors with more extensive knowledge are encouraged to explore those important issues and to share their insights with the esoteric community.

Shortly after the original version of this article was submitted to *The Esoteric Quarterly*, the September 2017 issue of *Scientific American* was published. It was devoted almost entirely to topics of sex and gender, and reported the most recent research findings in relevant disciplines. These findings provided broad confirmation of the article’s assertions concerning sex and gender at the personality level, and some citations have been incorporated in the final version of the article. Not unexpectedly,

Scientific American stopped short of addressing matters above the personality level.

Sex and Gender at the Personality Level

Sex and gender, as understood in the health sciences, are discussed here as a prelude to, what is for us, the more important exploration of the esoteric aspects of gender. The discussion is brief, simplified—perhaps oversimplified—and uses an intentionally limited vocabulary. Readers seeking an in-depth study of exoteric sex and gender issues are urged to turn to the vast literature of physiology, neuroscience, sexology, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, and related disciplines.

The discussion of sex and gender at the personality level is presented without moral judgment. Issues of morality—understood in relation to the evolution of human consciousness—are deferred to Part II.

Biological Sex

Babies are deemed to be male if they have external genitalia and female if they have internal genitalia. At a deeper level, the individual's chromosomes determine sex.¹ A male normally receives an X chromosome from his mother and a Y chromosome from his father. In the approach to adulthood, relatively large secretions of the male hormone, testosterone, enable men to produce sperm, grow beards, and develop low-pitched voices. Their chromosomes and hormonal secretions predispose them to male-pattern baldness; expose them to male-specific pathologies like testicular cancer; and condemn them to a shorter life expectancy.

A female normally receives an X chromosome from her mother and an X chromosome from her father.² In puberty, relatively large secretions of the female hormones, estrogen and progesterone, cause women to develop breasts, narrow waists, and wide hips; to retain high-pitched voices; to begin menstruating; and potentially to bear children. Their chromosomes and secretions expose them to pathologies like breast or ovarian cancer, as well as to the issues of menopause. On average women are shorter in stature and have proportionately

smaller brains, though neuroscientists now reject theories of corresponding reduction in cognitive ability.

Again on average, women have less physical strength than men, and sports are segregated by sex, each with its own performance standards. Sports authorities have instituted their own tests, not always satisfactory, to distinguish between men and women; and, if the latter, to determine whether competitors have taken testosterone supplements to gain unfair advantage.

Sex traditionally was determined at, or soon after, birth. It had enormous social, legal and other implications. Men enjoyed asymmetric privileges, like access to positions of leadership in government, the professions, and religious institutions; property and inheritance rights; minimal censure for premarital or extramarital sex; and protection from prosecution for marital rape.

Women were exempt from military service and in most societies were not expected to do heavy manual work. But their participation in society, right to own property, and access to legal remedies were severely limited. Unless she took religious vows, a woman's primary life-function was to bear children—and in the upper classes to provide a male heir to inherit her husband's property and title. Unless she was a widow, a woman was expected to be a virgin when she married and to be faithful to her husband thereafter. She was required to obey her husband and to serve his erotic and other needs, whatever those needs might be.

We now know that not everyone fits into the neat binary categories. One percent of human beings have a body that differs in some way from the standard male/female model.³ Differences range from chromosome anomalies (like X or XXY), to genital ambiguity, failure to develop secondary anatomical features, and limitations on sexual potency. In place of the binary model, science now recognizes “a much more ambiguous reality of genetic and chemical factors that unfold over time,” adding that “the more we learn about sex and gender the more those attributes appear to exist on a spectrum.”⁴

One or two infants in every 1,000 undergo(es) surgery to reduce or eliminate sexual abnormalities.⁵ Most of the remaining infants with sexual anomalies are registered as male or female according to the judgment of medical professionals, though a few countries and jurisdictions permit infants (and adults) to be recognized as “intersex,” “nonbinary,” “indeterminate,” or “hermaphrodite.” They include India, Malta, New Zealand, the State of Oregon, and the District of Columbia.

Even among individuals who fit into one of the binary sex categories at birth, variations in hormone levels can affect development in puberty or later. Although males typically produce testosterone, they also produce some proportion of estrogen and progesterone; correspondingly, females produce a proportion of testosterone. What those proportions are varies from one individual to another, potentially affecting physical appearance, stature and strength; interest in, and ability to participate in, reproductive activity; and exposure to pathologies more typical of the opposite sex.

Unambiguous categorization at birth does not guarantee that an individual will be attracted romantically to persons of the opposite sex or be capable of participating in what our culture considers “normal” sexual activity. The individual may be aroused erotically by members of his or her own sex, both sexes, or neither. Homoerotic activity has been recorded throughout history,⁶ and the Bible documents a famous case pointing to bisexuality.⁷ But issues of homosexuality, bisexuality and asexuality have attained greater visibility in recent decades, since the health sciences rejected notions that sexual orientation is a “choice” or “pathology”; as patterns of legal and other repression have receded; and as society has become more open to diversity.⁸

Another issue to gain visibility is sexual identity, or self-concept. The sexual assignment made at birth may or may not coordinate with what an individual believes him- or herself to be at the most fundamental level. *Sexual dysphoria* is a sense of inappropriate assignment. A familiar comment among dysphoric adults is: “I feel like a woman (man) trapped in a man’s (woman’s) body.”

Recent studies in neuroscience suggest that our brains contain both male and female features, varying in extent from person to person.⁹ Moreover, at least one brain metric appears to lie on a spectrum, with non-dysphoric males at one end, non-dysphoric females at the other end, and persons with sexual dysphoria in between.¹⁰ The relevant brain feature emerges during the latter stages of gestation, after emergence of the sex organs. Although the evidence is not conclusive, this may suggest that persons are born with sexual dysphoria.¹¹ In any event, dysphoria may be recognized before puberty or may be delayed well into middle age.

People with sexual dysphoria may have a strong desire to embrace a new sexual identity and live their lives accordingly. Physical appearance and voice pitch are likely to be problematic; sexual attraction and functionality pose other problems. Crossdressing may provide an option in cases of mild dysphoria.¹² The more radical solution is hormone therapy and/or surgery to bring the body and its functions into closer congruence with sexual self-concept. In recent years sex reassignment surgery has become safer and more reliable.

Some authorities use “transsexual” to refer to individuals who undergo reassignment surgery, and “transgender” to individuals who simply identify with the other sex psychologically and socially. This is the convention followed in this article. It reflects the recognition that surgery seeks to alter the physical body, not just the individual’s self-concept and social interactions. Other authorities use “transgender” exclusively—perhaps suggesting a belief that self-concept is more important than the means taken to attain it.

What is Gender?

The word *gender* comes to us, via Old French, from the Latin *genus* (“a broad class or type”), though the closely related verb *generare* meant, “to engender, beget, produce.” Traditionally the term was used in a grammatical context, with limited sexual connotation.

Some languages, such as Hebrew, Gaelic and French, divide all nouns and pronouns into

masculine and feminine genders, while others, including Latin, German and Russian, admit a third gender: neuter. A distinctive suffix or other structural form may or may not identify the gender of a noun or pronoun.

Men typically are referred to by masculine nouns or pronouns, and women by feminine ones. But exceptions occur; and “neuter,” where it is used, does not necessarily imply an inanimate object. Grammatical gender assignments may simply be matters of convention. For example, the French word *bateau* (“boat”) is masculine, while the German *Mädchen* (“girl”) is neuter. Of possible significance to our later discussion, “soul” is feminine in multiple languages, for instance: Hebrew נפש (*nephesh*), Greek ψυχή (*psyche*), Latin *anima*, French *âme*, Spanish *alma*, German *Seele*, and Russian душа (*dusha*).

English has the neuter “it,” referring to something below the human level—or sometimes even a baby. By contrast, some inanimate objects, like a ship, are referred to as “she.” No structural forms identify the gender of English nouns, though we have the distinctive pronouns: “he/she,” “him/her,” “his/hers.”

Over the last half-century, academic psychologists, sociologists and others have co-opted “gender” as a binary categorization applicable to activities, behaviors, roles, personas, expectations, and other attributes that may be interwoven with but transcend physical sex. Gender categories are “masculine” and “feminine.”

As already noted, psychologists and others disagree on whether gender encompasses biological sex or is a distinct attribute.¹³ They also disagree on how far it transcends sex; transpersonal psychologists might claim a larger domain than do colleagues in other branches of the discipline. Another area of controversy focuses on what gives rise to gender: chromosomes, hormones, genetic differences in brain/mind structure or activity, or socio-cultural programming.

Gender correlates to a substantial degree, with biological sex. A majority of men and women see themselves, are seen by others, behave, accept roles, and have expectations that accord with what the prevailing culture assigns to

their sex.¹⁴ Yet the correlation falls significantly short of 100 percent. Most men have some feminine characteristics, and most women have some masculine characteristics, regardless of sexual orientation.

From ancient times some men and women have played roles culturally assigned to the opposite sex. Queen Boudicca and Joan of Arc were just two of history’s female warriors. Conversely, some men were unsuited to military service and sought sanctuary in the religious life, or where circumstances permitted became scholars, poets or musicians. In the courtly love of the Middle Ages, men, in particular, began to express romantic interest in terms that transcended the physical. They seemed to glimpse distinctions between sex and gender that would be made explicit centuries later.

The correlation between gender and sex is continually shrinking. Following the feminist revolution of the 1970s and ’80s, large numbers of women now demand the same “rights” and opportunities as men. The result has been the erosion of legal support for traditional gender-role distinctions. In the developed countries, most business, professional and governmental positions nominally are open to both men and women, though activists claim that a “glass ceiling” still exists. Some Christian denominations and Reform Judaism ordain female clergy, though the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, and virtually the whole of Orthodox Judaism and Islam, maintain a male-only policy.¹⁵ Most countries permit women to serve in the armed forces, even in combat roles, and some require them to undergo military training.

While modern women are demanding access, or are drawn, to traditionally masculine roles, smaller numbers of men are drawn to traditionally feminine roles. They feel comfortable playing the role of “mother” in the family or choosing a profession like nursing. Men generally are taking a closer interest in child-rearing and are taking on more parental responsibilities.¹⁶

Role crossover has afforded new freedoms in the way people express themselves and live their lives. But it has not come without cost,

either to individuals or to society. People who, in times past, would have accepted their roles as god-given may now ask questions that penetrate to the depths of their being. Additional questions arise concerning the future evolution of society, and even of the human race. These questions will be addressed in Part II.

Esoteric Perspectives on Sex and Gender

Several prominent esoteric teachers, to whom we customarily turn for reference, addressed issues of sex and gender. Importantly, however, most of them lacked the perspectives gained by academic studies of gender over the last fifty years. Accordingly, we must read their work with an appreciation of (a) the limited vocabulary available to them, and (b) the psychological, social, religious and legal views of sex and gender that pertained to the era in which they wrote—views which may differ in important ways from those of today. We can affirm the “truth” of the teachings while acknowledging that they were conditioned by the prevailing paradigms.

The sexual function is associated primarily with the second, “sacral,” chakra.¹⁷ It usually extends to the third chakra, where it begins to merge into gender, and under favorable conditions the creative impulse extends to the heart and throat chakras.¹⁸ Esoteric teacher Alice Bailey also saw “the physical sex organs [as] a lower correspondence of the . . . relation existing in the brain between the two head centers and the pituitary and pineal glands.”¹⁹

Esotericists in both the western and eastern esoteric traditions typically spoke of sex as an example of *polarity*. Sex divides men from women but also provides the strong attraction that brings them together in the procreative act. Bailey commented: “Sex is, in reality, the instinct towards unity.”²⁰ Similar polarities exist in the vertical direction. The personality is separated by levels of consciousness from higher elements of the human constitution and from higher beings. Yet mutual attraction seeks cohesion and eventually evokes a response in the personality for creative union with what lies above.

Polarities are categorized as positive and negative. The positive polarity is deemed to be

strong, outgoing, aggressive and phallic, the negative polarity inward-looking, passive, receptive and yonic. Spirit is masculine and positive, while matter is feminine and negative. The positive/negative categorization is usually accompanied by the caveats that “we are speaking only of polarities”; and “negative” does not imply inferiority. Yet there is an unfortunate undertone, a value judgment that echoes a patriarchal mindset.²¹

With regard to levels above the personality, esoteric teachers have focused almost exclusively on vertical polarities. The possibility of horizontal polarities, which could be described in gender terms, has attracted little attention. Yet important exceptions can be found in the esoteric literature.

One esotericist who displayed an unusual appreciation of gender was German Theosophist Franz Hartman. In the early twentieth century he wrote: “In women usually the female [or what we would prefer to call ‘feminine’] elements predominate, and in men the male [‘masculine’] ones are usually most active, although we meet women of a masculine character, and with men who are of a womanish nature.”²² Hartman added, somewhat condescendingly: “In a perfect human being the male and female elements are nearly equally strong, with a slight preponderance of the male element, which represents the productive power in nature, while the female element represents the formative principle.”²³

Contemporaneous with Hartman’s work, authors who identified themselves as “Three Initiates” published *The Kybalion*, a text claiming to present a summary of ancient Hermetic teachings. The text identifies seven “principles,” or axioms, of Hermeticism. The seventh principle is *Gender*, carefully distinguished from *Polarity* (the fourth). “Gender is manifested in everything,” the authors declared. “[T]he Masculine and Feminine Principles are ever present and active in all phases of phenomena, on each and every plane of life.”²⁴

Entities at all levels, the authors continued, have both masculine and feminine aspects. The burden of creation falls primarily on the feminine: “The part of the Masculine Principle

seems to be that of directing a certain inherent energy toward the Feminine principle, and thus starting into activity the creative processes. But the Feminine principle is the one always doing the active creative work—and this is so on all planes.” Furthermore, the “Feminine Principle has a much more varied field of operation that has the Masculine principle.”²⁵

The authors of *The Kybalion* make a good point that “passive” and “active” may be poor terms to describe the respective roles of the masculine and the feminine. Certainly at the physical level, the “burden of creation” falls primarily on the latter. The woman’s investment of energy in procreation is enormously greater than the man’s, and asymmetry usually continues throughout the years of parenting.

At the mental level, according to *The Kybalion*, the “Feminine Principle conducts the work of generating new thoughts, concepts, ideas, including the work of the imagination. The Masculine Principle contents itself with the work of the ‘Will’ . . . energizing the creative portion of the mind.” In the majority of people the masculine principle is weak, and their mental images “are the result of impressions received from outside.”²⁶ “The strong men and women of the world invariably manifest the Masculine Principle of Will,” whereupon they obtain “the kind of mental images desired, and moreover dominate the minds of others.”²⁷ In strong people the masculine and feminine principles “act harmoniously and in conjunction with each other . . . in accordance with the universal laws of nature.”²⁸

Theosophist Geoffrey Hodson, writing in 1941, seemed to sense not only the emerging understanding of gender but also its antecedent in courtly love; he mused on the qualities of femininity in language that could have graced the poetry of troubadours:

What are the essential qualities of the archetypal woman? They are sacrifice, tenderness, graciousness, divine radiance, heavenly fragrance, beauty, and grace. They are wisdom, fathomness as a still dark pool of infinite depth, profound compassion and intimate concern for all living things, ministrations, healing love. They are joyous radiant girlhood, graceful womanhood, cre-

ative, preserving, and transforming motherhood. Within the Heavenly Woman is an ascetic refinement of utter purity.²⁹

Pure undifferentiated Spirit, by definition, is presexual or pregender. But all manifestations of Spirit involve *form*. Form, of course, is a relative term; what might appear to us as formless—for example, the monad or the Planetary Logos—is a form when viewed from above. All seven systemic planes comprise the “physical,” or lowest, plane of the Cosmos.³⁰

Form involves division; indeed, the very word *exist* means “to stand aside from.” Gender finds its meaning in the process of division and subsequent impulse to become reunited. The Kabbalists recognized that Kether, the first manifestation of the Ain Soph, subsequently divides into Chokmah (viewed in the Kabbalah as masculine) and the feminine Binah.³¹ In turn the creative tension between Chokmah and Binah gives birth to the lower sephiroth—and the world we know.

Masculinity and Femininity

Defining masculinity and femininity is difficult and contentious. We all have a rough idea of what the terms mean, and the insights shared in John Gray’s bestselling book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992) have a ring of truth.³² Yet attempts to compile definitive lists of the respective characteristics can provoke heated arguments.

A major problem is confusion between gender and sex. For example, women may claim certain masculine characteristics as their own, and want to distance themselves from feminine characteristics that a patriarchal culture equated with inferiority. Conversely, men may fear that to display feminine characteristics labels them as unmanly or gay.³³ Both sexes seem to favor masculinity over femininity, perhaps because humanity as a whole is still at the stage of rugged individualism.³⁴ Femininity may be perceived in more favorable terms when group consciousness takes hold in the Aquarian Age.

The most useful approach may be to view masculinity and femininity as *archetypes* rather than as descriptions of individual men and women—or even the great majority of men and women. From that perspective, contrasting

gender characteristics are proposed in Table 1. They are expressed as pairs of polar opposites, but the understanding is that each pair brackets a continuum of possibilities. To create a list

agreeable to everyone would be impossible, but Table 1 should represent a broad consensus of how masculinity and femininity have been understood throughout history.

Table 1. Archetypal Masculine and Feminine Characteristics

Masculine	Feminine
<p>Adjectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active Paternal Stern/judgmental Dominant Assertive Aggressive Confrontational Competitive Ambitious Risk-taking Rational Linear-thinking 	<p>Adjectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passive Maternal Compassionate Submissive Receptive Protective Caring/empathetic Cooperative Nurturing Cautious Intuitive Spatial-thinking
<p>Nouns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength Courage Leadership Individualism Provider Hunter Warrior Adventurer Challenger Extrovert Reluctance to express emotion 	<p>Nouns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beauty Gentleness/sensitivity Humility/obedience Group-orientation Recipient Gatherer Peacemaker/nurse Homemaker Helper Introvert Willingness to express emotion

Gender archetypes, like all others, are enshrined in the racial unconscious or, to use esoteric terms, in the Ageless Wisdom. This latter is believed to have informed human civilization from prehistoric times to the present. Just

as sex is procreative in nature, gender is a creative force, producing rich cultures, evolving civilizations, and expanding individual and collective consciousness.

Gender at the Divine Level

The verse from *Genesis*, cited earlier, reads in full: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”³⁵ The statement clearly has implications not just for humanity but also for the Creator. God must be male and female—or “masculine” and “feminine.” Masculine aspects of Deity have dominated Western theology and are familiar to everyone. Almost invariably, masculine pronouns are used when referring to God. In order to make the case that gender exists at the divine level, this section focuses on the less-familiar feminine aspects. And here, it will be necessary to inquire into what led up to the present understanding of the Divine Feminine.

Gods and Goddesses of Antiquity

The feminist movement of the 1970s and '80s popularized belief that, in prehistory, the Great Goddess reigned supreme in a peaceful, matriarchal society. The Goddess was identified both with the Earth and with motherhood. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor declared that goddess worship emerged naturally from the child–mother relationship. “The first love-object for both women and men,” they noted, “is the mother.” Sjöö and Mor added: “In matriarchal society . . . there is a close identification with the collective group of mothers, with Mother Earth, and with the Cosmic Mother.”³⁶ The goddess religion focused on the seasons of the year, and on the lunar cycle, with its associations with the menstrual cycle.³⁷ Lithuanian-American archaeologist Marija Gimbutas asserted that the goddess culture ended when invading Indo-European tribes from Central Asia imposed a warlike patriarchy.³⁸

The accuracy of that scenario is now questioned, but over the centuries male warrior gods, like Indra, Yahweh, Ares, Mars and Odin, certainly gained ascendancy. They represented the physical strength and prowess in battle to which men aspired—and on which their own, their family’s, and their tribe’s survival depended.

Gender is such an amorphous quality that by its very definition is controversial, and rigid categorization is almost impossible. Furthermore, gender does not necessarily correlate with sex. Individuals typically exhibit a blend of gender characteristics that may or may not align with those culturally associated with their biological sex.

If the god-centered patriarchy did emerge from an earlier goddess-centered matriarchy, that development may have run parallel with an evolving understanding of human reproduction. Women’s procreative role was immediately obvious, but over time men became aware that they too played a role. Awe for the womb gave way to awe for the phallus;

the cave was replaced by the menhir as the favored sacred symbol. From being the creators of new life, women became merely the vessels in which seed was planted and grew into sons. Misogyny was born from a focus on men’s superior physical strength and a diminution of women’s role in procreation.

Even as pantheons became increasingly male-dominated, some powerful goddesses held their own. A few reigned alone, like the Hindu Ushas, goddess of the dawn; the Sumerian Inanna; the Assyrian Ishtar; the Greek Athena; and the Roman Cybele, known as *Magna Mater* (“Great Mother”).

Some goddesses, like the Celtic Danu and the Aztec Coatlicue, became the mothers of male gods. Others became their consorts. All three persons of the Hindu *trimurti* had consorts: Brahma’s consort was Vidya, or Saraswati; Vishnu’s was Lakshmi; and Shiva’s took various forms, including Kali and Shakti. In Egypt Osiris and Isis were not only husband and wife but also siblings. Isis, whose Egyptian name may have been Aset or Auset, was revered as a

mother goddess, and depictions of her holding her son Horus provided the prototype for the Christian Madonna and Child.

Gaia, the Greek Earth goddess, was both consort and mother of the sky god Uranus. Hera was Zeus' principal consort, though he was also linked with Dione and Maia and had many extramarital affairs. Amphitrite was Poseidon's consort. The Celtic Dagda had several consorts, including the Morrigan and Boann.

A question of considerable importance is: how do we know that these individualities *were* goddesses? How did the people of antiquity decide whether a deity was male or female? The answer is that their cultures projected procreative roles onto them—or, in the case of virgin goddesses, what was considered commendable abstinence from that role. In general, gods were expected to copulate with goddesses, begetting new gods, or sometimes god-men. Sky gods inseminated Earth goddesses through precipitation, lightning and thunder, assuring the fertility of crops, livestock and people. “Physical” sex was the discriminant, rather than gender, as we now understand it.³⁹ Artistic depictions clearly differentiated the deities sexually.

The sexual categorization of deities is understandable, given the level of knowledge available at the time. If it comes across as distasteful or shocking, we should recognize that ancient people had different attitudes towards the Divine—and perhaps toward the sexual function—than we do.

Although ancient gods and goddesses were distinguished sexually, they too exhibited masculine and/or feminine gender characteristics that did not always correlate with the sex projected onto them. Some gods, like the Egyptian Ptah, the Greek Apollo and Pan, and the Welsh Gwydion, exhibited feminine characteristics, while some goddesses exhibited strong, masculine characteristics. A few were goddesses of war, like the Egyptian Sekhmet and the Norse Freyja. Qamaitis was a goddess of war and natural disasters for the indigenous Nuxalk of Canada. Morrigan may have been the Dagda's consort, but she was more warlike than him. Interestingly, a number of war goddesses, including Ishtar, were also goddesses of sexuali-

ty. Athena, in part a war goddess, earned the title *Parthenos* (“the Virgin”), though she was not necessarily *virgo intacta*.⁴⁰

Gods and goddesses played complementary roles in their cultures. Conspicuously absent was any universally accepted rule that goddesses were inferior, or subordinate, to gods. In the ways these cultures created their deities—or the deities revealed themselves—goddesses might or might not be subordinate to the gods with whom they were associated. Gender was recognized, but it was not defined politically; it did not carry a superior/inferior connotation. Gender was essentially a horizontal polarity.

Western Religion

Judaism, Christianity and Islam stand out in the political power assigned to their masculine concepts of Deity. Even there, however, we see an unquenchable yearning for the Divine Feminine, along with interesting responses to that yearning.

Judaism proudly proclaimed its patriarchal monotheism. Yahweh was the tribal warrior god of the Jewish people, and eventually the universal God, ruling over Jews and Gentiles alike. Yet the Elohim, translated as “God” in the first verse of *Genesis* and elsewhere in the early books of the Bible, was a plural word of ambiguous grammatical gender. Also, אֵל (El), or אֵל שַׁדַּי (El Shaddai, “the High God”) whom Abraham brought with him from Mesopotamia, originally had a consort, אַשְׁרָה (Asherah). She was a goddess of forest groves who sometimes exerted her independence.⁴¹ The “Queen of Heaven,” mentioned in *Jeremiah*, may have been Asherah.⁴²

In the Hebrew Bible we find the grammatically feminine רוח (*ruach*, “spirit”) and even הַקֹּדֶשׁ הַרוּחַ (*ruach ha-kodesh*, “the holy spirit/breath/wind”).⁴³ In *Proverbs* and elsewhere חכמה (Chokmah, “Wisdom”) became personified as a divine feminine individuality; in Greek Chokmah became Σοφία (Sophia). In the Rabbinic period, following destruction of the temple, we find the feminine שְׁכִינָה (*shekinah*), the indwelling glory of God, contrasting with but also complementing כְּבוֹד (*kavod*), the masculine transcendent glory.

Christianity embraced the patriarchal monotheism of Judaism. Its focus was on God the Father, identified with the Hebrew Yahweh; Jesus Christ, believed to be the Son of God; and twelve male disciples.⁴⁴ But Christianity absorbed less-monotheistic themes from Greece, and thence came the doctrine of the Trinity. The nascent institutional church readily identified the first two *hypostases* (Greek singular: ὑποστάσις, *hypostasis*, or “person”) of the Trinity as the Father and the Son but struggled to identify the third.⁴⁵ Theophilus, bishop of Antioch (d.183), and his successor, Paul of Samosata (200–275), suggested Sophia.⁴⁶ Sophia also received support among the Gnostics. A feminine Third Person of the Trinity could have served as God the Mother, who, together with the Father, gave birth to the Son.

Instead, the church chose the Judaic Holy Spirit, despite the challenge of personifying what had been no more than a divine force or presence. That choice might have provided gender balance, because the Hebrew Ruach ha-Kodesh was grammatically feminine. Unfortunately, upon translation into Greek it became the neuter Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα (Hagio Pneuma), and in Latin the masculine Spiritus Sanctus. The end result, after four centuries of debate, was a Trinity without any trace of femininity, grammatical or otherwise. Later, God the Father assumed the role of Godhead, reinforcing notions of masculine sovereignty, as well as violating the apophatic principle that the Godhead should transcend all attributes.⁴⁷

As an Abrahamic religion, Islam may have inherited a dim memory of Asherah. It rejected any notion of the Trinity, with or without a female/feminine hypostasis. Yet Islam has never been reticent in projecting feminine characteristics onto its monotheistic God. We find, among the Ninety-Nine Names of Allah: “The Most Merciful,” “The All Forgiving,” “The Bountiful, the Generous,” and “The Giver of Life.”⁴⁸

Sophia

Chokmah/Sophia was acknowledged as a personage several times in scripture. In *Proverbs* 9:5 she enacted a proto-Eucharist. And in a later chapter of the same book she boldly declared:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. . . . Then I was by him, as *one brought up with him* [Hebrew: אמן, *aman*]: and I was daily his delight [רִירִי, *riri*] rejoicing always before him.”⁴⁹

Some translations render *aman* as “master worker” or “architect,” while others suggest “trusted confidante,” even “darling.” *Riri* generally means, “object of delight, desire or pleasure.” The fact that Chokmah/Sophia was the Lord’s delight and pleasure—perhaps his darling—possessed by him from the beginning, leaves little doubt that she was Yahweh’s consort. In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the Lord declared: “I loved her, and sought her out from my youth, I desired to make her my spouse, and I was a lover of her beauty.”⁵⁰ In Michelangelo’s famous painting, “The Creation of Adam” (c.1508–1512), God the Father has his arm around a young woman. Who could this be but Sophia? Psychologist Carl Jung saw Sophia as an archetypal goddess, one who softened Yahweh and helped him develop compassion.⁵¹

Sophia played prominent roles in Gnosticism. In some texts she was paired with the Logos—that is, Christ—in a masculine–feminine duality. The Gnostic epic narrative *Pistis Sophia* alleged that Sophia fell from grace, eventually to be saved by Christ. Parts of the narrative suggest a strong connection between Sophia and Mary Magdalene,⁵² and it is no accident that the Magdalene was often portrayed as a sinner saved by Christ’s grace.

Sophia may have played a role in Islam. Some scholars see Allah’s “hidden treasure” as a reference to Sophia: “God’s experience of Creation, passing down through all levels of life as messenger and mediatrix of compassion.”⁵³

By the Middle Ages Sophia had disappeared from mainstream western Christianity. But she survived in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, particularly in the Russian Orthodox Church. Sometimes she served as a symbol of the church, or lost her gender and became identified with Christ. Most often she was revered as “St. Sophia,” patroness of numerous Russian

churches and the subject of numerous icons. The Russian Orthodox liturgy urges the faithful: “Let us behold the miraculous icon of the Wisdom of God . . . I dare to sing in praise of the Patroness of the World, the most innocent Bride and Virgin . . . Sophia, the Wisdom of God.”⁵⁴

Russian émigré Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) described three visions of Sophia, the first when he was only nine years old. He recalled his impressions many years later in a poem: “Blue all around. Blue within my soul. / Blue pierced with shafts of gold. / In your hand a flower from other realms. / You stood with radiant smile, / Nodded to me and hid in the mist.”⁵⁵

During the same period discussion arose concerning Sophia’s precise status and identity. Russian Orthodox priest Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944) saw a close association between Sophia and the Glory of God, linking her with the shekinah and kavod. Sophia, he declared, “is the glory of God and either expression could be used indiscriminately of divine revelation within the Godhead, for they both refer to the same divine essence.”⁵⁶ Commenting on the passage in *Proverbs* quoted earlier, Bulgakov identified Sophia as the “prototype of creation.”⁵⁷

Church doctrine placed constraints on how high Sophia could be exalted. But Bulgakov, and Russian theologian and scientist Pavel Florensky (1882–1937), tested those limits by suggesting that Sophia was either a “fourth person” of the Trinity, or in some way was associated with the Trinity as a whole.⁵⁸ Their suggestions received no encouragement from ecclesiastical authorities.

Sophia was almost entirely an archetypal figure; no suggestion has been made that she ever took physical incarnation. Yet writers from Theophilus of Antioch to Bulgakov had no doubts that she was female. Sophia was rarely described as a virgin; but neither was any reproductive role projected onto her. Modern feminist theologians have seen Sophia as the closest approximation to a Christian goddess, and a substantial literature has emerged in her support. Official reinstatement into the Trinity

seems unlikely, though some mainstream Christian authorities now refer to the Holy Spirit as “she.”

Mary

Mary the mother of Christ also featured prominently in Christianity’s quest for a goddess. A cult of Mary began as early as the second century CE⁵⁹ and gained momentum after the Council of Ephesus (431 CE) declared her, “in the true sense of the word,” to be Θεοτοκος (Greek: *Theotokos*, “God bearer,” or “Mother of God”). The church fathers did not acknowledge that Mary was divine, but many people have questioned how else she could be the mother of God.⁶⁰

Mary won strong veneration in nascent Islam. The *Qur’an* recorded the words of the Annunciation as: “O Mary, God has chosen you, made you pure and chosen you above all the women of the world.”⁶¹ The “angels” [sic] prophesied that Mary should bear a son whose “name is the Christ Jesus son of Mary, greatly honored in this world and the next, and among those drawn nearest to God.”⁶²

In Christianity, Marian devotion reached a peak in the late Middle Ages, by which time she had acquired a status rivaling Christ’s. She inherited titles, like “Queen of Heaven” and “Star of the Sea,” previously held by Isis, and possibly by Asherah. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) associated Mary with the “woman clothed with the sun,” referred to in *Revelation*.⁶³

The Protestant Reformers reacted strongly against the Marian cult. Mary was demoted to a mere instrument in the Incarnation of Christ. In its purge of “Romishness,” a prospective goddess was one of many things that Protestantism sacrificed, to its detriment. Devotion to Mary recovered to some degree in the Anglican and Lutheran churches. Anglican churchman Mark Frank (1612–1665) assigned Mary the greatest glory, short, he hastened to add, of what belonged to Christ.⁶⁴

Devotion to Mary continued to develop in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The Church of Rome declared as infallible doctrine

the Immaculate Conception of Mary⁶⁵ and her Assumption, “body and soul,” into heaven. In 1954 Pope Pius XII proclaimed that Christ crowned his mother Queen of Heaven.⁶⁶ His successor, John Paul II (r.1978–2005), assigned her multiple honors: “In the mystery of Christ she [Mary] is present even before the creation of the world, as the one whom the Father has chosen as Mother of his Son in the Incarnation. And . . . together with the Father, the Son has [entrusted] her eternally to the Spirit of holiness.”⁶⁷ The possibility of proclaiming Mary “Mediatrice of all Graces” was considered prior to the Second Vatican Council.

Eastern Orthodoxy took no action on the issue of the Immaculate Conception and, in place of the Assumption, proclaimed the doctrine of the *Dormition*: that Mary was raised to heaven after “falling asleep.” In the Orthodox churches Mary Theotokos is regarded as the supreme example of cooperation between God and humanity. She shares with Sophia the accolades of holy protectress of Russia and “Mother of the World.”⁶⁸

Renaissance physician and alchemist Paracelsus (c.1493–1541) came to the conclusion that Mary had a “higher prototype,” a female aspect of Deity—*ein Göttin*, or “goddess”—who, with God the Father begot the Son.⁶⁹ Paracelsus’ Göttin would seem to be a feminine Third Person of the Trinity, though he did not make that claim. Significantly, the Apostles’ Creed affirms that Christ “was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.”⁷⁰

Strong devotion to Mary developed among certain esotericists. Consciously or unconsciously they followed Paracelsus’ lead in perceiving Mary to be the incarnation of a cosmic feminine entity. Annie Besant identified her with the goddess *Virgo*, and Rudolf Steiner with the virgin *Sophia*.⁷¹

After her Assumption/Dormition, Mary allegedly made the rare transition to the deva evolution, becoming in a very real sense “Queen of the Angels.” Theosophist Charles Leadbeater explained that: “finding the seven paths open before her, she chose to enter the glorious Deva evolution and was received into it with

great honor and distinction.”⁷² Rosicrucian writer Corinne Heline commented: “Upon the completion of her earth mission, the holy Virgin was lifted out of the human stream and translated into the angelic evolution.”⁷³ Yet Mary did not abandon her human charges: “Although the Blessed Virgin now makes her home in the heaven world with the Angels, she spends much of her time on the earth plane working with humanity. Many have testified to seeing her.”⁷⁴

Throughout Christian history, highly favored saints have had visions of Mary. But the frequency of apparitions has increased dramatically over the last 200 years, and a broader range of people has witnessed them. Bernadette Soubirous reported a sequence of eighteen visions at Lourdes, France, in 1858. During the twentieth century 386 significant Marian apparitions were reported. The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the official Roman Catholic investigative body, judged that eight of the apparitions “could not be attributed to natural phenomena, delusion or fraud”; they included the ones at Fátima, Portugal (1917) and Zeitoun, Egypt (1968–1971). A further eleven were deemed “worthy of faith” by local bishops.⁷⁵

The gender of the ancient goddesses, as we have seen, was usually established through projections of sex and procreation onto them. Mary had borne the Savior, but she was a virgin: the Blessed Virgin. Even the *Qur’an* defended Mary’s virginity; when people questioned the circumstances of his birth, the baby Jesus spoke from the cradle: “I am a servant of God He charged me . . . to be dutiful to my mother,” adding, “Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am resurrected.”⁷⁶ By decree of the Second Council of Constantinople (553–554), Christianity affirmed that Mary was “ever virgin,” where that condition was understood in a gynecological sense.

Mary most likely was a real person as well as an archetypal figure. Her devotees assigned her distinctly feminine qualities: compassion, humility and submission. She was the woman who responded to the Angel Gabriel: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me ac-

ording to thy word”⁷⁷ On the other hand, male personages were also given feminine qualities. Charles Wesley, co-founder of Methodism, wrote the hymn “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild” (1742).⁷⁸ Mary’s femininity may stand out in stark contrast to Yahweh’s masculinity; but contrasts with the male divine figures of Christianity and Islam are less clear.

The World Mother

We have seen that Mary—sometimes along with Sophia—has long been revered in Eastern Orthodox Christianity as “Mother of the World.” In the West, Pope John Paul II referred to Mary in 1990 as “You who serve as Mother of the whole family of the children of God.”⁷⁹ For esotericists, these notions of Mary as Mother—not only of Jesus, but in some way also of humanity—resonated with and reinforced traditional concepts of the World Mother from the religions of South Asia.⁸⁰

Geoffrey Hodson, Theosophist and priest in the Liberal Catholic Church, wrote: “The Blessed Lady Mary, incarnation of the Maternal Spirit of the Godhead, moved by purest compassion and love, holds the whole of humanity in Her arms and at Her breast, nourishing it with spiritualizing life for the purpose of quickening the evolution of all sentient beings.”⁸¹ He also depicted her as “*the highest possible imaginable spiritualized Queen.*”⁸²

Leadbeater described the World Mother as “a mighty Angel, having under Her a vast host of subordinate Angels whom She keeps perpetually employed in the work which is especially committed to Her.”⁸³ Hodson viewed the World Mother as an office held by a succession of exalted entities: “That Official is the World Mother for a planet and a period. . . . Mary the mother of Jesus now holds that Office, as Isis held it in earlier days.”⁸⁴ Moreover:

The planetary World Mother is conceived . . . as a highly-evolved Archangel Representative and Embodiment on earth of the Feminine Aspect of the Deity. She is also thought of as an Adept Official in the Inner Government of the World, in whom all the highest qualities of womanhood and moth-

erhood shine forth in their fullest perfection.⁸⁵

Perhaps Mary’s translation to the deva evolution was a necessary step for her to assume the office of World Mother.

Alice Bailey considered Eve, Isis and Mary to be the three “mothers” of Christ:

Eve has no child in her arms; the germ of the Christ life is as yet too small to make its presence felt; the involutory process is yet too close; but in Isis the midway point is reached; the quickening of that which is desired (the Desire of all nations, as it is called in the Bible) has taken place and Isis consequently stands in the ancient zodiacs for fertility, for motherhood and as the guardian of the child. Mary carries the process down to the plane or place of incarnation, the physical plane, and there gives birth to the Christ child.⁸⁶

Bailey also saw in the three mothers an expression of the constellation Virgo—and the great Life that lies behind it:

In these three Virgins and these three Mothers of the Christ, you have the history of the formation and the function of the three aspects of the personality through which the Christ must find expression. The sign of Virgo itself stands for a synthesis of these three feminine aspects. . . . She [Virgo] is the Virgin Mother, providing that which is needed for the mental, emotional and physical expression of the hidden but ever present divinity.”⁸⁷

Interestingly, Bailey included Eve in the list of Virgin Mothers, despite the usual assumption that she and Adam had sexual relations. Conversely, she omitted Athena and other virgin goddesses from the list of individualities whom she saw as expressions of Virgo’s procreative power. In her view their creative activities evidently lay in directions other than motherhood.

Bailey agreed that the World Mother is the “feminine aspect in manifestation, symbolized for us in many of the world religions as a virgin mother and in the Christian religion as the Virgin Mary.” But she stopped short of assert-

ing, as Hodson did, that Mary held the office of World Mother. Rather, Bailey viewed Mary's role as no more than symbolic: "The concentration of the feminine force in nature in some individual in female form . . . has never existed in our particular planetary life, though the avatars of a previous solar system, expressing itself through planetary life, always took this form."⁸⁸ Bailey did acknowledge, however, that a matriarchy once existed "which had a religion that recalled the ancient ways of the earlier system and in which period of time Lilith symbolized the World Mother, until Eve took her place."⁸⁹

Corrine Helene expanded the number of personages associated with Virgo to "Isis of Egypt, Ishtar of Babylon, Minerva of Greece, Maya of India, and Mary of Bethlehem."⁹⁰ And she took a somewhat different perspective on her relationship with the World Mother. "That divine Being," she declared, "whom we know as the World Mother is the prototype for the Madonna of all great religions; she is the teacher of these high feminine Initiates at certain stages of their development."⁹¹ Of these madonnas and feminine initiates Mary took precedence: "To Palestine came the exalted of them all, Mary of Bethlehem, mother of the Lord Jesus."⁹²

Having embraced Buddhism, Helena Roerich, amanuensis for the Agni Yoga teachings, rarely addressed issues of Judeo-Christian concern. Yet she weighed in boldly on the composition of the Trinity, suggesting that the World Mother is a divine hypostasis: "[T]he Mother of the Universe, or of the manifested Cosmos, can be accepted as one of the figures of the Holy Trinity."⁹³ Roerich criticized institutional Christianity for its omission of a feminine as-

pect of Deity, implying that Sophia would have been the better choice than Ruach ha-Kodesh:

Indeed, there is no religion, except later ecclesiastical Christianity, in which the Feminine Element is not included among the Primates of Be-ness. Thus, the Gnostics also considered the Holy Ghost as a Feminine Element. In the most ancient Teachings, the

manifested Trinity of Father, Mother, and Son was considered as an emanation of the highest, eternally hidden Cause; and the latter, in turn, as that of the Causeless Cause.⁹⁴

Bede Griffiths (1906–1993), Benedictine monk and Swami, tapped into notions of the World Mother in the religions of South Asia, and sought to explain them in a Christian context. He identified the World Mother with the Holy Spirit and

linked both with Mary and the Hindu Shakti:

It is in the Holy Spirit that the feminine aspect of the Godhead can be most clearly seen. She is the Shakti, the power, immanent in all creation, the receptive power of the Godhead. . . . But it is the Spirit who conceives these "ideas" in her maternal womb and brings them forth in creation. She is the Great Mother (the *Devī*), who nourishes the seeds of all beings and makes them grow. Still more, she is the mothering Spirit in humankind, who receives the Word, the Wisdom of God, in her heart, of whom in the Christian tradition Mary is the figure, receiving the Word of God in her heart and bringing him forth in his earthly manifestation.⁹⁵

The World Mother featured in South-Asian religions long before any suggestion was made

... some form of gender—or "horizontal" polarity with mutually attractive, creative potential—exists at all levels, short of the unmanifest Godhead. Gender polarities at the personality level are best considered as archetypes enshrined in the Ageless Wisdom. These polarities correlate strongly with distinction between the odd- and even-numbered rays, pointing to a way to identify gender, at higher levels, including those where the human soul and the Planetary Hierarchy reside.

that she might be associated with Mary or Sophia. In the Vedantic tradition, from which the trans-Himalayan teachings drew much of their inspiration, only the Brahman surpasses the World Mother in status. The Brahman—or to give added emphasis, the “Supreme Brahman,” or Parabrahm—is the utterly transcendent and formless Godhead. The Brahman is unmanifest and therefore above gender, but the first manifestation is believed to be feminine. Vedantic scholar and early Theosophist, Tallapragada Subba Row, called this first manifestation the “Cosmic Virgin,” adding that she is the mother of the Logos.⁹⁶ Helena Blavatsky, who acquired much of her knowledge of Vedantism from Subba Row, noted:

[I]t is impossible to define Parabrahm, yet once that we speak of that first something which *can* be conceived, it has to be treated of as a feminine principle. In all cosmogonies the first differentiation was considered feminine. . . . The first emanation becomes the immaculate Mother from whom proceed all the gods, or the anthropomorphized creative forces.⁹⁷

From this perspective the World Mother may be hierarchical in nature. At her highest level, she is the first form to emerge from the Formless; she serves as Procreatrix, giving birth to all lower levels of reality, including some we call “divine.” At a still lower level she may have incarnated as Mary.⁹⁸ On the other hand, the designation of Mary as Theotokos, or “Mother of God,” suggests an attempt, by western theologians, to capture the notion of a feminine first manifestation from the transcendent Godhead.

The World Mother was established as a goddess by her procreative—but not sexual—role. Roerich anointed her with unmistakably feminine qualities: “The play of the Mother of the World is in joy. She enfolds the enlightened ones in Her veil of joy. Rejoice amidst flowers; and in the midst of snow—equally redolent—also rejoice!”⁹⁹ And: “How beautiful is the Image of the Mother of the World! So much beauty, self-renunciation and tragedy is in this majestic Image! Aspire in your heart to the Highest, and joy and exultation will enter your soul.”¹⁰⁰

Writing in the 1880s, Anna Kingsford—feminist, Hermeticist, and briefly head of the London lodge of the Theosophical Society—described the dual nature of the Divine.

God is twain. He is the Life, and She is the Substance. And to speak of Her, is to speak of Woman in her supreme mode. She is not “Nature”; Nature is the manifestation of the qualities and properties with which, under the suffusion of the Life and Spirits of God, Substance is endowed. She is not “Matter”; but is the potential essence of Matter. She is not Space; but is the within of space . . . She is Daughter, Mother, and Spouse of God.¹⁰¹

Kingsford continued: “She is mystically styled the Blessed Virgin Mother As Venus [she is] the brightest of the mystic seven who represent the Elohim of God She is portrayed as Aphrodite, the Sea-Queen, and Mary the Star of the Sea.”¹⁰²

Roerich’s husband Nicholas created the painting “Mother of the World,” shown at the beginning of this article. It resonates strongly with traditional depictions of Mary, with Pamela Coleman Smith’s “High Priestess” in the Waite–Smith Tarot deck, with Solovyov’s Sophia, and with Kingsford’s Divine Feminine. All these images are distinctively feminine, at least as we understand the term. We are using anthropomorphic language, but that is the only language we have.

Isis, Mary, Sophia, the World Mother, Subba Row’s Cosmic Mother, and the Holy Spirit represent—in whatever order and with whatever overlaps among them—a feminine channel, extending up to the Godhead. It runs parallel to the more familiar masculine channel extending from Jesus to the Christ, to God the Son, and to the Father.

Gender at Intermediate Levels

We have examined gender at the human and divine levels. It remains to address the possibility that gender exists in a meaningful way at intermediate levels, including the higher components of the human constitution and the Planetary Hierarchy.

The Human Soul and Monad

As noted earlier, “soul” is grammatically feminine in many languages. Greco-Roman culture went farther to assert that the soul (Greek: *ψυχη*, “psyche”; Latin: *anima*) really is feminine. Creative tension between it and the masculine body—the philosophers were all male—provided the key to perfectibility. In Islam the soul is also viewed as feminine, and in the Shia traditions, the feminine is associated with the Angel of the Soul—or what Christians would call the Guardian Angel, and esotericists the Solar Angel.¹⁰³

The theory of “twin souls” has a long history, probably a dim memory of pre-sexual reproduction in Lemurian times. Plato’s *Symposium* records that Zeus devised a way to control ambitious men who threatened his sovereignty: “I will slice each of them down the middle,” producing two half-beings, one male and one female. Each had its own soul, and each desperately needed the other to restore unity; sexual attraction between them took precedence over all other instincts.¹⁰⁴

According to Kabbalistic teachings, the newly created Adam was androgynous. When the first man’s rib was taken to create “an help meet,”¹⁰⁵ their souls were separated—Adam with a male soul and Eve with a female soul—whereupon the separated twins embarked on an eternal quest for reunification. The legend was interpreted on multiple levels. At the cosmic level it provided a metaphor for the division of the Unmanifest into masculine and feminine aspects of Deity. At the human level, it symbolized marriage, in which husband and wife become “one.”¹⁰⁶ Notions of twin souls and soul-mates gained popular appeal during the New Age movement of the late twentieth century.

Alice Bailey dismissed the theory of twin souls.¹⁰⁷ And few esotericists take it seriously in its literal sense; rather, they emphasize the existence of soul groups that tend to incarnate together for karmic and other reasons.

Nevertheless the notion of masculine and feminine souls deserves consideration. Some insight can be gleaned from trans-Himalayan teachings on the seven rays. All souls exist on one of the seven rays—or perhaps on one of the seven sub-rays of the monadic ray.¹⁰⁸ If certain rays can be identified as masculine and others as feminine, a basis would exist for dividing souls into gender categories.

Numerology provides an important hint; from the time of Pythagoras onward numerologists have claimed that odd numbers are masculine, always thrusting forward into new territory, while feminine even numbers respond to restore harmony. Harriette and Homer Curtis commented: “Number 2 is sacred to all female deities, such as Rhea, Isis, . . . the Virgin Mary . . . as it represents the Mother-force separated from the Father and ever seeking reunion.”¹⁰⁹ It will be instructive to inquire whether the odd-numbered rays are distinctively masculine in character, and the even-numbered rays are feminine.

Table 2 shows the “special virtues” and “virtues to be acquired” for each of the seven rays, as presented by Bailey.¹¹⁰ The correlation between the masculine characteristics, listed earlier in the article (Table 1), and the “special virtues” of the odd-numbered rays {Table 2(a)} is striking; and the correlation between the feminine characteristics and the “special virtues” of the even-numbered rays {2(b)} is equally striking.¹¹¹

In some cases the “virtues to be acquired” reinforce the characteristics of their rays, while in other cases they provide balance. For example: “Tenderness, humility, sympathy, tolerance, patience” help soften the harshness of Ray I. “Reverence, devotion, sympathy, love, wide-mindedness” soften the cold intellect of Ray V. Intentionally, the “vices” of each ray are not shown. We assume that they would have been overcome before the soul begins to play an active role in a disciple’s life.

Table 2. Virtues of the Seven Rays
(a) Odd-Numbered, “Masculine” Rays

Ray		Special Virtues	Virtues to be Acquired
I	Will or Power	Strength, courage, steadfastness, truthfulness arising from absolute fearlessness, power of ruling, capacity to grasp great questions in a large-minded way, and of handling men and measures.	Tenderness, humility, sympathy, tolerance, patience.
III	Active Intelligence	Wide views on all abstract questions, sincerity of purpose, clear intellect, capacity for concentration on philosophic studies, patience, caution, absence of the tendency to worry himself or others over trifles.	Sympathy, tolerance, devotion, accuracy, energy and common-sense.
V	Concrete Science	Strictly accurate statements, justice (without mercy), perseverance, common-sense, uprightness, independence, keen intellect.	Reverence, devotion, sympathy, love, wide-mindedness.
VII	Ceremonial Order	Strength, perseverance, courage, courtesy, extreme care in details, self-reliance.	Realization of unity, wide-mindedness, tolerance, humility, gentleness and love.

(b) Even-Numbered, “Feminine” Rays

Ray		Special Virtues	Virtues to be Acquired
II	Love–Wisdom	Calm, strength, patience and endurance, love of truth, faithfulness, intuition, clear intelligence, and serene temper.	Love, compassion, unselfishness, energy.
IV	Harmony through Conflict	Strong affections, sympathy, physical courage, generosity, devotion, quickness of intellect and perception.	Serenity, confidence, self-control, purity, unselfishness, accuracy, mental and moral balance.
VI	Devotion and Idealism	Devotion, single-mindedness, love, tenderness, intuition, loyalty, reverence.	Strength, self-sacrifice, purity, truth, tolerance, serenity, balance and common sense.

Souls normally incarnate only when their ray is in cyclic manifestation on the planet. Five of the rays are currently in manifestation; Rays I and IV are not. We can conclude that the only

souls currently in incarnation lie on Rays II, III, V, VI and VII. Bailey declared that “A pure first ray ego in incarnation at this time would be a disaster.”¹¹²

Ray VI is “passing rapidly out of manifestation,”¹¹³ and the number of sixth-ray souls is dwindling, though Bailey explained that “it will be about two hundred years [from the 1930s, when that was written] before all the sixth ray egos pass out of incarnation.” On the other hand, Ray IV will come into manifestation in 2025,¹¹⁴ and many fourth-ray souls are expected to incarnate over the next several centuries. Replacement of Ray VI by Ray IV—both even-numbered rays—will not affect the overall gender balance. The comment is often made that Ray VII—a masculine ray—is now coming into manifestation, but Bailey stated that this began in 1675.¹¹⁵ Presumably, large numbers of seventh-ray souls are already in physical embodiment, explaining, among much else, rapid developments in technology and the healing arts.

The soul ray and personality ray are normally different, providing vertical tension that aids the individual’s growth in consciousness. When personality–soul integration has reached a significant level, the soul ray may override the personality ray in its effect on the lower vehicles. The result may be to weaken the correlation, or even create dissonance, between gender and biological sex. For example, a Ray III soul might override a Ray II personality, creating strong masculine gender, even if the individual has a female body.

An individual remains on the same soul ray for many lifetimes, gaining the experience of its gender and serving in its unique way. But some souls eventually will transition to a new ray. “All egos found upon the fourth, the fifth, the sixth and the seventh rays,” we are told, “must after the third initiation, blend with the three major rays, or monadic rays.”¹¹⁶ The “major rays” are the Rays of Aspect: Rays I, II and III.

Until the fourth initiation the human soul is under the guidance of its solar angel. Subba Row described the solar angel as “a little girl”—though he conceded that “the girl may be a pretty big lady!”¹¹⁷ He added: “This girl will ultimately have to be married to the man’s own Logos [the monad].” The marriage metaphor is apt because the deva evolution, to which the solar angels belong, is feminine in

polarity, relative to the human kingdom, which is masculine.¹¹⁸

Bailey dismissed notions of gender at the monadic level, insisting that “there is no identity apart from universality” and affirming “the union in one of the pairs of opposites, negative and positive, male and female.”¹¹⁹ Notwithstanding that universality, Bailey taught that monads are differentiated by ray.

Human monads lie only on the Rays of Aspect. Reportedly, there are sixty billion human monads: five billion on Ray I, thirty-five billion on the Ray II, and twenty billion on the Ray III.¹²⁰ If Rays I and III are masculine, and Ray II is feminine, then the gender balance of the human lifestream tips seven-to-five in favor of female monads—despite humanity’s alleged masculinity relative to the devas.¹²¹ Human monads of the two genders no doubt collaborate in creative activities on their level of consciousness, or “identification,” as other components of the human entity do on their own levels.

If gender at the soul and monadic levels is understood in terms of ray influence, an inevitable question is whether the same might be true at the personality level. The personality can lie on any of the seven rays, but restrictions apply to the rays that govern its vehicles: the (lower) mental, emotional and physical bodies. Senior disciples and initiates “are liable to build vehicles of any type of force to meet the emergency, the need or the service of a particular life.”¹²² For the rest of us, the mental body can lie only on Rays I, IV or V, two masculine and one feminine; the emotional body only on Rays II and VI, both feminine; and the physical body on Rays III and VII, both masculine.¹²³

Eighty-four (7 x 3 x 2 x 2) possible ray combinations govern the personality and its three vehicles, while four (2 x 2 x 1 x 1) gender profiles are possible: MMFM, MFFM, FMFM, or FFFM.¹²⁴ Any of these four would be interwoven with our biological sex; hormone balance; and socio-cultural, environmental and astrological factors. From this perspective, as from others, considerable gender complexity can exist even at the personality level.

The Planetary Hierarchy

All who have attained the fifth initiation are known as *adepts*. The subset of human adepts who remain on Earth to serve humanity—and can be considered part of the Planetary Hierarchy—are known in the trans-Himalayan teachings as *masters*.¹²⁵ All adepts have renounced the lower self, and their consciousness is focused in the spiritual triad; likewise, their souls are absorbed into the triad. The *atmic*, *buddhic* and (higher) *manasic* bodies comprise the vehicles of the monad.¹²⁶

We are told that adepts and even *chohans*—who have attained the sixth initiation—are found on all seven rays. Since monads can lie only on the Rays of Aspect, the rays attributed to the adepts and chohans may be their triadic or soul rays; or they may be subrays of the entities' monadic rays.

The ray characteristics in Table 2 were described in terms relevant to, and understandable by, disciples in a certain range of consciousness. Even the conventional names attached to them betray an anthropocentric perspective. Caution must be exercised in extrapolating those characteristics to much higher levels of consciousness. Similar caution must be exercised with regard to gender. As in the case of deities, we can do no more than project human concepts of gender onto entities whose level of consciousness is remote from our own.

The rays can be divided into two categories that seem to form a horizontal polarity. Through their ray associations, each of the masters, as well as their ashrams, can be identified with one category or the other. We are told, for example, that the Master Djwhal Khul heads a second-ray (even-numbered) ashram, while the Master Hilarion heads the fifth-ray (odd-numbered) ashram.¹²⁷ Hence the former presumably has a feminine quality, and the latter a masculine quality.

What those qualities might be, and what kind of creative tension exists between them, are matters on which we can only speculate. Until new teachings are revealed, more detailed discussion is inappropriate. What we can affirm is that, just as the seven rays shine with more

brilliance at the Hierarchical level than they do in the “three worlds,” so too will the gender qualities that emerge from them.

Two Issues

Issues of concern among esotericists relate to Hierarchical-level gender *as it appears to us*, and the possibility that biological sex might render one-half of the disciple population ineligible to attain adeptship during their present incarnations. Two questions arise:

- Can an individual attain the fifth initiation in a female body?
- Why have all, or the great majority of, masters revealed themselves in male bodies?

A number of writers have insisted that the female form is not equipped, or suited, to support the attainment of adeptship. Certain Buddhist sects and at least one sect in Jainism have held that souls cannot attain liberation from female bodies; “liberation” would seem to correspond at least to the fourth initiation.¹²⁸ In the West, Franz Hartmann conceded that “exceptions are found” but declared:

It does not indeed very often happen that an individual attains adeptship while inhabiting a female organism, because such an organism is not as well adapted as a male one to develop energy and strength, and it is, therefore, frequently the case that those women who have advanced far on the road to adeptship must reincarnate in a male organism, before they can achieve the final result.¹²⁹

Such “gender discrimination” has an eerie resemblance to traditional barriers against women's advance to leadership positions in society, suggestions that women are mentally unsuited to study the sciences, and a long-standing view that women are not physically or emotionally equipped to celebrate the Christian Eucharist. Leadbeater, who was not only a Theosophist but also presiding bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church, commented that the Mass “is not adapted to work through the feminine organism.” He added, though, that Christ could make other arrangements when he returns.¹³⁰

Other authorities have taken a different position. Damodar K. Mavalankar, an early Theosophist and former Brahmin, responded that he saw no “good reason why females should not become Adepts. None of us, Chelas, are aware of any physical or other defect which might entirely incapacitate them from undertaking the dreary ordeal.” But he did warn—without offering a reason—that it might be “more dangerous for them [women] than it is for men.”¹³¹

Helena Blavatsky declared: “Woman has as good a chance as any man has to reach high Adeptship.” She added that this has not occurred in Europe because women were socially conditioned to accept a position of inferiority.¹³² Blavatsky also looked to the future: “[A] woman-adept can produce high occultists—a race of “Buddhas and Christs,” born “without sin.”¹³³

Regarding the issue of how adepts appear to us, the trans-Himalayan teachings speak of “masters,” but never “mistresses.” In the western esoteric tradition adepts are referred to as “elder brothers,” but never “elder sisters.” Almost without exception masculine nouns and pronouns are used to refer to members of the Hierarchy. Sketches, paintings and photographs of the masters known in the West uniformly portray them as male; several are shown with facial hair.¹³⁴

We must not forget that these depictions are of physical bodies, which masters do not normally “wear.” In order to appear in physical form, a master can either use the body in which adeptship was attained or materialize a *mayavirupa*, or “body of Maya.” Presumably a master could manifest a female mayavirupa if that would facilitate the work to be undertaken. A master could also choose to exhibit feminine or masculine characteristics, regardless of the mayavirupa’s sex.

Perhaps we have simply lived in an era when adepts felt that more could be accomplished through male bodies and masculine characteristics. Their work may have required them to blend into a patriarchal society.¹³⁵ Writing in 1928 Dion Fortune attributed the following comment to an adept with whom she was in communication:

It has . . . often been asked why it is that women do not manifest themselves as Masters and Adepts on the inner planes, or indeed on the outer. In the very early days they did so In the future they will again and even now there are certain adepts in female bodies who have definite inner plane missions and who are genuine adepts. The number is small as yet but will increase.¹³⁶

Several writers have reported encounters with initiates of various degrees in female embodiment. Henry Olcott, first president of the Theosophical Society, stated: “I personally have encountered in India two . . . initiated women, and know of a number of others in the East.”¹³⁷ Olcott continued with the interesting statement: “Some women, it must be remembered, are of that sex only in body.” Notwithstanding his view on women and the Eucharist, Leadbeater affirmed: “The existence of the World-Mother is an answer to the question” of whether there are female adepts.¹³⁸

We have a description of at least one initiation of Mary the mother of Christ. Corinne Helene explained: “Mary’s crowning initiatory experiences occurred in connection with the Crucifixion of Christ Jesus and the events associated therewith. . . . It was during the Resurrection of Easter dawn that the initiatory experiences of the Blessed Virgin reached their culmination.”¹³⁹ Reportedly, Mary shared her experience with John the Beloved thus:

I will tell thee an astounding and hidden Mystery which cannot be comprehended by the understanding, which my Lord Jesus Christ, my beloved one and my redeemer, revealed unto me at Golgotha. A shining cloud came and bore me along and took me up into the Third Heaven and set me down at the boundary of the earth. *I looked and saw the whole world was like a thing of nothing.*¹⁴⁰

Based on the notion that Mary, the mother of Christ, presently holds the office of World Mother, that initiation may have been an important one.

Mary Magdalene may have attained a significant initiation on the first Easter morning. In

one of her detailed visions, Anthroposophist and stigmatic Judith von Halle (1972–) recorded the following conversation outside the empty tomb, when the risen Lord asked Mary whom she was seeking:

[Mary Magdalene] answered that she was seeking her Master and wanted to fetch him back. Christ did not ask her for any arbitrary reason. . . . He asked her this question as a teacher of initiation asks his pupil. With this question He asked her if she was seeking *Jesus* or *Christ*. But initially she was only looking for Jesus of Nazareth, her beloved teacher in his physical body. But as Christ then touched her heart (in the Gospels this is when He called her by her name) she reacted immediately, so filled with love and so overwhelmed by the fact that she was standing in front of Him that she forgot everything. At this moment she even forgot that Jesus Christ her teacher had died, that he had died in front of her own eyes.¹⁴¹

Despite attempts to portray her as a repentant prostitute, Mary Magdalene has been held in high spiritual regard from the early church to the present.¹⁴² Of particular note is the account by Jacobus de Voragine, medieval archbishop of Genoa, of Mary's legendary voyage to the south of France. Commenting on her alleged effectiveness as a preacher, Jacobus remarked that "it was no marvel that the mouth that had kissed the feet of our Lord so debonairly and so goodly, should be inspired with the word of God more than the other."¹⁴³

Mavalankar named several female high initiates in South Asia. Additional examples are provided in a study of women adepts in Tibet.¹⁴⁴ And according to legend, Tara, the Tantric embodiment of the Divine Feminine, was a buddha.¹⁴⁵ The classical Buddhist text known as the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* recognized the goddess Prajnaparamita as the mother of all Buddhas.

Subba Row, one of the first individuals to share teachings on the seven rays, declared: "There are instances of females becoming the greatest Adepts." He added: "There is one woman who still stands in the list of the Ma-

hachohans of one of the greatest Rays," and "She is . . . a great Adept of that Ray."¹⁴⁶ According to Subba Row, "There is a Ray specially adapted to women; it is sometimes called the 'body of love'." Its Logos, he added, is female rather than male.¹⁴⁷ Subba Row explained: "I do not think there will ever be a female Adept of the First Ray, because it belongs entirely to the positive pole."¹⁴⁸ We noted earlier that the odd-numbered rays have a "positive," masculine, character.

Hodson recorded the receipt of information from "A Feminine Adept"¹⁴⁹ and "A Great Feminine Chohan."¹⁵⁰ Hodson implied that they were human, but it is possible that they were devas. Because we know much more about the masters than we do about devic adepts, the apparent gender imbalance may stem from our anthropocentric view of the Hierarchy. Devic adepts have passed through the human stage.¹⁵¹ They now work alongside their still-human counterparts but probably have responsibilities that involve less contact with us. At some point, as we move from adepts to chohans and beyond, the human and devic lifestreams merge.

Conclusions

Sex and its higher correlate, gender, are complex topics. Traditional notions of binary sexual categories have been challenged on several fronts. And gender, as understood by modern psychologists and sociologists, is both ill-defined and only loosely correlated with biological sex; almost everyone exhibits a blend of masculine and feminine characteristics. Attempts to define masculinity and femininity inevitably become contentious. The approach adopted here has been to treat gender characteristics as archetypes, rather than attributes of any particular man or woman, or even men and women in general.

The transcendent, unmanifest Godhead is undifferentiated, but gender differentiation is recognized at levels of *manifest* divinity. Western patriarchy's attempts to suppress the female deities of antiquity were confronted by humanity's yearning for a goddess. The result was the deification of individuals like Sophia and Mary. Institutional Christianity missed an

opportunity to incorporate Sophia into the Trinity and condemned its theology to two millennia of gender imbalance. Changes in official doctrine seem unlikely, but Eastern Orthodox theologians have flirted with ways of relating Sophia to the Trinity. And in the West it is becoming more common to refer to the Holy Spirit as “she.”

Another favorable development has been the acknowledgement, by Eastern Orthodox Christianity and most recently within the Church of Rome, of Mary’s role as World Mother. Support has come from the trans-Himalayan teachings where she is viewed as a senior member of the Planetary Hierarchy. The latter teachings drew upon the Mother’s deep roots in the religions of South Asia.

Virgin mothers have always had strong appeal, and several have been mentioned herein, from the Great Goddess of prehistory to the World Mother. But many divine feminine personages were paired with masculine figures in “sexual unions.” Although we may criticize primitive cultures’ projection of the sexual function onto them, the notion of creative tension between the masculine and feminine aspects of Deity has considerable merit.

At the level of the human soul, and possibly the monad, a promising way to define gender is by ray characteristics. The odd-numbered rays have a distinctly masculine quality, and the even-numbered rays a feminine quality. Interactions between the masculine and feminine qualities, within the individual or the group, provide a fertile environment for growth in consciousness and opportunities to contribute to Hierarchical Purpose. From a ray perspective, even the personality and its vehicles can have four possible gender profiles.

The relationship between an individual and his or her solar angel has a gender connotation insofar as the deva evolution, to which solar angels belong, has a feminine polarity, relative to the human lifestream. Creative tension between them urges the disciple forward on the spiritual path. When the disciple attains the fourth initiation, he or she stands free and the solar angel is released to take up work elsewhere.

Ray characteristics may also help identify gender at the level of the Planetary Hierarchy where consciousness is focused in the monad and the spiritual triad. We must be cautious and respectful in projecting our limited understanding of gender onto members of the Hierarchy and their ashrams. Based, however, on evidence from the progressive expansion of “gender” from the mineral to the human kingdom and beyond, we can be sure that the form it may take on Hierarchical levels—and above—is more splendid than anything experienced in our earthly realm.

An issue of some interest is whether an individual can attain the fifth initiation while in female embodiment. Some authorities have implied, or even stated explicitly, that the female form is defective in that regard, while other authorities in both East and West have rejected notions of a “glass ceiling.” Mary the mother of Christ, who unmistakably came from the human lifestream, reportedly attained an initiation of considerable significance before making her transition to the deva evolution. Mary Magdalene may also have attained a significant initiation when she witnessed the Resurrection. Hinduism and Buddhism recognize a number of high initiates in female bodies.

The apparent rarity of masters in female bodies could be attributed to the work they have undertaken in male-dominated societies. But a careful distinction must be drawn between the sex in which they appear to us and the masters’ own gender—assuming that it exists. An important consideration is that the Planetary Hierarchy includes entities from both the human and devic lifestreams. There may actually be a predominance of masculine human masters, but overall gender balance is preserved by feminine devic adepts whose work is less apparent to us.

Part II of this article will explore the “longitudinal” dimension of gender: the evolution of human gender and its implications for the race and ourselves. Humanity’s creative potential can only increase if men and women have equivalent opportunities and if gender differences among—and within—individuals are

joyfully recognized and utilized for cooperative group purpose.

-
- ¹ Chromosomes were identified in the 1880s. Nettie Stevens and Edmund Beecher Wilson independently discovered the XY/XX sex pattern in 1905.
- ² One-half of the father's sperm count carries an X chromosome and the other half a Y chromosome. The baby's sex is determined by which sperm fertilizes the mother's ovum—which carries an X chromosome. Both sperm and ovum also contain DNA, through which ethnic and other genetic characteristics are inherited from the father and mother.
- ³ Melanie Blackless, et al. "How sexually dimorphic are we? Review and synthesis." *American Journal of Human Biology* (vol. 12. 2000), 151-166.
- ⁴ "Beyond XX and XY," *Scientific American* (Sept. 2017), 50-51.
- ⁵ Ibid. Surgical intervention is performed at the request, or with the consent, of parents, many of whom fear the question: "Is it a boy or a girl?" Since the child is not consulted, but faces what may be irreversible, life-altering consequences, such procedures raise serious ethical questions.
- ⁶ See for example, John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Vintage, 1995); Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996).
- ⁷ King David had at least six wives, some of whom bore him sons. Additionally, he had a relationship with Jonathan—the brother of his wife Michal—that writers from medieval times to the present have suspected was homoerotic. In particular, they point to the scriptural passage in which David tells Jonathan: "thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 *Samuel* 1:26).
- ⁸ Acceptance varies greatly, both within and among countries. In some countries homosexual behavior is a capital offense.
- ⁹ Lydia Denworth, "Is There a 'Female' Brain?," *Scientific American* (Sept. 2017), 38-43. Earlier theories asserted either that there is no difference between men's and women's brains, or that the brain features of men and women are distinctively different. Recent research suggests that each of us has a blend or "mosaic" of both features.

-
- ¹⁰ Richard A. Friedman, "How Changeable Is Gender?" (August 22, 2015). Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/23/opinion/sunday/richard-a-friedman-how-changeable-is-gender.html>. (Last accessed Sept. 11, 2017).
- ¹¹ Brain structure can change due to hormonal or environmental factors, possibly explaining the emergence of sexual dysphoria in adults. Alternatively, dysphoria may be present from birth but acknowledged only in adulthood.
- ¹² As will be discussed in Part II, crossdressing also serves other purposes and does not necessarily imply transsexuality or homosexuality.
- ¹³ Perhaps from a desire to be politically correct, some writers, and even professional bodies, use "gender" when referring to biological sex. An example is "gender reassignment surgery."
- ¹⁴ Some writers see this as the *definition* of gender; for example: "Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex." Norman B. Anderson, "Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients," *American Psychologist*, (vol. 67, no. 1, 2012), 11.
- ¹⁵ A small number of women have been ordained Orthodox rabbis in Israel, and some now serve in the United States and elsewhere. A few female *imamas* serve in the United States, the United Kingdom, Denmark and Germany.
- ¹⁶ According to the Pew Research Center, the number of "stay-at-home dads" in the United States increased from 1.1 million in 1989 to 2.0 million in 2012. Moreover: "In 2015, fathers reported spending, on average, seven hours a week on child care—almost triple the time they provided back in 1965. And fathers put in about nine hours a week on household chores in 2015, up from four hours in 1965." Online: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/06/05/growing-number-of-dads-home-with-the-kids/>, and <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/15/fathers-day-facts/>. (Last accessed Sept. 15, 2017).
- ¹⁷ See for example Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (New York: Lucis, 1953), 45, 176.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 62.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 316.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 180.
- ²¹ Aristotle claimed: "[T]he male is by nature superior, and the female inferior," *Politics*, book 1, part V. 350 BCE.

- ²² Franz Hartmann, *With the Adepts: An Adventure Among the Rosicrucians*, (New York: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1910), 89.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ “Three Initiates,” *The Kybalion* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1912), 183. Capitalization in original. An earlier version of 1908 includes the phrase “even the spiritual plane.”
- ²⁵ Ibid., 189. Capitalization in original.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 203
- ²⁷ Ibid., 206.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 205, 209. Capitalization in original.
- ²⁹ Sandra Hodson (ed), *Light of the Sanctuary* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishers, 1988), 81-82. The book is an edited version of her late husband Geoffrey Hodson’s esoteric diary.
- ³⁰ For a detailed discussion of the planes and subplanes see John F. Nash, *The Soul and Its Destiny* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2004), 40ff.
- ³¹ Why the Kabbalists converted Chokmah into a masculine entity or force is unclear. Perhaps they sensed—as Blavatsky did in her exposition of Vedantic teachings—that the first definite manifestation from the Godhead is feminine and saw Chokmah and Binah as co-creative agents.
- ³² Published by Goodreads of San Francisco. Gray suggested, for example, that men try to offer solutions to problems, while women just want to talk about them. The outcome is poor communication: men become frustrated that women are indifferent to their suggestions, while women complain that men refuse to listen to them.
- ³³ Persisting stereotypes depict homosexual men as effeminate in appearance and/or mannerisms.
- ³⁴ This favoritism carries over, in third-world countries and elsewhere, to a preference for sons over daughters. In some societies preference even manifests in female infanticide.
- ³⁵ *Genesis* 1:27.
- ³⁶ Monica Sjöö & Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 67.
- ³⁷ The liturgical calendars of more modern religious traditions are still based on solar and lunar cycles. For example, the dates of Passover, Easter and Ramadan are all determined by the intersection of solar and lunar cycles.
- ³⁸ Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).
- ³⁹ Supporting the theory of an ancient matriarchal culture are the many pre-historic figurines depicting women with exaggerated sexual characteristics, suggesting fertility and childbirth. One of the most famous is the Seated Mother Goddess of Çatal Höyük, excavated in present-day Turkey and said to date from 6000 BCE.
- ⁴⁰ In Greco-Roman culture *virgo* could be applied to an independent, i.e., single, adult woman. *Virgo intacta* referred specifically to a woman without sexual experience.
- ⁴¹ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 10.
- ⁴² *Jeremiah* 7:18. The passage reads: “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven.”
- ⁴³ There is no evidence that *ruach ha-kodesh* was considered a personage in biblical Judaism; more likely it was regarded as a divine force or presence. Even in modern Christianity, theologians struggle to make the case that the Holy Spirit is a “person.” Words or phrases that were, or became, names, like Chokmah, are shown with initial capitalization, even though the Hebrew alphabet does not provide distinctive capitals.
- ⁴⁴ Women also played significant roles in Christ’s ministry and in the early church, but church history downplayed their contributions.
- ⁴⁵ *Hypostasis*, which originally meant “underlying reality,” was honed over a period of centuries to contrast with *Ousia* (οὐσία, “substance”). Its final meaning became “individual, or distinct, reality”—imperfectly translated as “person”—providing the trinitarian formula: “three Hypostases in one Ousia,” or “three Persons in one [substance of] God.”
- ⁴⁶ Theophilus of Antioch is credited with coining the term “trinity.” See his *Epistle to Autolychum*, II, 15.
- ⁴⁷ Christianity made no serious attempt to develop a theology of a unifying, transcendent Godhead, on the lines of the Hindu Brahman or the Kabbalistic Ain Soph. At best, the three persons of the Trinity were said to be united in their common substance. And notwithstanding the doctrine that the Son and Holy Spirit are consubstantial with God the Father, the latter two “proceed” from the Father, implying the Father’s precedence. Attempts by Peter Lom-

bard and Meister Eckhart, in the 12th and 13th centuries, to conceive of an overshadowing Godhead were declared heretical.

48 Source: <https://99namesofallah.name/>. (Last accessed Sept. 15, 2017).

49 *Proverbs* 8:22-30. Emphasis added.

50 *Wisdom of Solomon* 8:2.

51 Bernice H. Hill, "Sophia and Sustainability," 2006. Online: <http://www.cgjungpage.org/learn/articles/technology-and-environment/810-sophia-and-sustainability>. (Last accessed Aug. 8, 2017).

52 See the discussion in Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1993), 47.

53 Caitlin Matthews, *Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom, Bride of God* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publ. House, 2001), 175. The notion of a "hidden treasure" comes from the extra-Qur'anic *hadith*: "I was a hidden treasure, then I desired to be known so I created a creation to which I made Myself known." See: <https://darvish.wordpress.com/2010/10/21/i-was-a-hidden-treasure/>.

54 Liturgy for the feast of the Dormition of Mary, August 15. Source: Sophia Foundation of North America. Translated from Old Church Slavonic by Natalia Bonetskaya. Use of this hymn for a Marian feast suggests that Sophia was sometimes confused, or conflated, with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

55 Quoted in Eugenia Gourvitch, *Vladimir Solovyov: the Man and the Prophet* (Sussex, UK: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1992), 25.

56 Sergei Bulgakov *Sophia: the Wisdom of God*, (transl: P. Thompson *et al.*; Stockbridge, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1993), 50.

57 *Ibid.*, 65.

58 The various claims made about Sophia are discussed in detail in John F. Nash, "Sophia: the Gnostic Heritage," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Fall 2009), 29-39.

59 Church father Irenaeus described Mary as "the second Eve." *Against Heresies*, book III, ch. 22, §4, (transl: W. Rambaut; Christian Classics Library).

60 Some bishops at the Council of Ephesus suggested that Mary should instead be termed *Christotokos* ("Christ bearer"). When the council decreed that Christ was a single hypostasis, the dissenting view was swept up in the more general condemnation of Nestorianism.

61 *Qur'an* 3:42 (transl: T. Khalidi; New York: Viking Press, 2008). Mary is mentioned 34 times in the *Qur'an*, far exceeding the number of New Testament references. An entire *surah*, or chapter, is named for her, and significant references appear elsewhere.

62 *Ibid.* 3:45.

63 *Revelation* 12:1.

64 Quoted in Marianne Dorman, "Andrewes and the Caroline Divines: Teachings on the Blessed Virgin Mary," Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 2000.

65 The immaculate conception, not to be confused with the virgin birth, asserts that Mary was conceived free from the stain of original sin.

66 Pius XII, Encyclical *Ad Caeli Reginam*, 1954.

67 John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, part I, 1:8, 1987.

68 Maria Skobtsova, *Veneration of the Mother of God* (transl: S. Janos; Paris: YMCA Press, 1992/2001), 109-126.

69 See for example Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation* (Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1997), 83.

70 Note that the Creed does not say that the Holy Spirit *impregnated* Mary, though that has been the traditional interpretation in Christian doctrine. Rather it says *conceived by*, which has female connotations.

71 Rudolf Steiner, *The Gospel of St. John* (Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 1908/1940), 191.

72 Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925/1953), 288.

73 Corinne Heline, *The Blessed Virgin Mary: Her Life and Mission* (Black Mountain, NC: New Age Press, 1971), 78, 106.

74 *Ibid.*, 109.

75 Source: International Marian Research Institute, Dayton, Ohio: <https://udayton.edu/imri/miry/archive.php?tags=Miracles%20and%20Apparitions>. (Last accessed Sept. 9, 2017). The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith sets stringent standards of authenticity. For example, a factor that persuaded the Congregation that the phenomena at Zeitoun were authentic was the testimony of non-believers, including law-enforcement officers. Blurred images in window condensation or faded plaster walls are not even considered.

- 76 Ibid. 19: 30-33.
 77 *Luke* 1:38.
 78 The hymn contains language such as “Meek and lowly may be, Thou art all humility” and “Loving Jesus, gentle Lamb.”
 79 John Paul II, prayer before the Roman Icon of Our Lady, “Salus Populi Romani,” December 8, 1990—the feast of the Immaculate Conception.
 80 For a detailed discussion of esoteric claims regarding Mary, see John F. Nash, “Mary, Blessed Virgin and World Mother,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Winter 2010), 19-39. See also John F. Nash, “The World Mother: Teachings of Helena Roerich and Geoffrey Hodson,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Winter 2006), 35-46.
 81 Hodson, *Light of the Sanctuary*, 414.
 82 Ibid., 267. Emphasis in original.
 83 Charles W. Leadbeater, *The World-Mother as Symbol and Fact* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1928), 4.
 84 Geoffrey Hodson, *Illuminations of the Mystery Tradition* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1992), 70. See also Hodson, *Light of the Sanctuary*, 355.
 85 Geoffrey Hodson, *The Kingdom of the Gods* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1952), 244.
 86 Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Lucis, 1951), 253. Parenthesis in original.
 87 Ibid., 253-254. Capitalization in original.
 88 Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, 362-363.
 89 Ibid., 363.
 90 Corinne Heline, *The Mystery of the Christos* (Los Angeles: New Age Press, 1961), 213.
 91 Ibid., 13.
 92 Heline, *The Blessed Virgin Mary*, 19. Capitalization in original.
 93 Helena I. Roerich, *Letters of Helena Roerich*, vol. I, June 18, 1935. Online: http://www.agniyoga.org/ay_en/Letters-of-Helena-Roerich-I.php. (Last accessed July 30, 2017).
 94 Ibid. Capitalization in original.
 95 Bede Griffiths, *Marriage of East and West* (Tuscan, AZ: Medio, 1976), 192. Italicization in original.]
 96 T. Subba Row, “The Virgin of the World,” *Esoteric Writings* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1895), 230ff.
 97 Helena P. Blavatsky, *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society: Stanzas I & II*, (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1889), 4.
- 98 In contrast to later writers, like Leadbeater and Bailey, Subba Row gave Isis a higher status than Mary, insisting that the former could be identified with the Cosmic Virgin, whereas Mary was an incarnation of the Virgin of the World.
 99 Helena I. Roerich, *Fiery World*, vol. 1 (New York: Agni Yoga Society, 1933), §663.
 100 Roerich, *Letters of Helena Roerich*, vol. I, Jan. 9, 1935.
 101 Anna B. Kingsford, *The Perfect Way*, Cambridge (UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1882/2011), 55-56. Capitalization in original.
 102 Ibid., 56.
 103 The author is indebted to a reviewer for these insights into Islamic views of the soul. Notions of the Guardian Angel, trivialized in modern usage, were taken seriously by theologians like Thomas Aquinas.
 104 W. H. D. Rouse (ed.), *Great Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Mentor, 1956), 86-87.
 105 *Genesis* 1:20.
 106 *Zohar*, vol. 1, (transl.; D. C. Mott, Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004), 314 and accompanying footnotes.
 107 Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I (New York: Lucis, 1936), 278.
 108 Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human & Solar* (New York: Lucis, 1951), 121.
 109 Harriette A. & F. Homer Curtis, *The Key to the Universe: or a Spiritual Interpretation of Numbers and Symbols* (San Francisco: Curtiss Philosophic, Book Co., 1917), 86. The Curtisses also listed Vishnu as one of the female deities, though Hinduism traditionally depicts him as male.
 110 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. 1, 201-210.
 111 Brief comments on these correlations were made in Nash, *The Soul and Its Destiny*, 117.
 112 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. 1, 26-27.
 113 Ibid., 411.
 114 Ibid.
 115 Ibid.
 116 Ibid., 402.
 117 Subba Row “Women Adepts,” *Esoteric Writings*, 539-542.
 118 Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (New York: Lucis, 1925), 91.
 119 Bailey, *The Rays and The Initiations*, 106.
 120 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 579.
 121 “Relative” may be the key word. Gender presumably lies on a continuous spectrum, so that an entity can be viewed as masculine from one side but feminine from the other.

- ¹²² Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. 1 (New York: Lucis, 1944), 366. See also her remarks concerning the etheric body on p. 566.
- ¹²³ Note that the “physical body” includes both the dense physical and the etheric bodies. Restriction of the physical body to masculine rays in no way implies that all dense physical bodies are, or should be, male!
- ¹²⁴ If all restrictions were lifted, as for “senior disciples and initiates,” the number of possible gender profiles would increase to 16.
- ¹²⁵ In the western esoteric tradition, *adepts* tends to be used more generally.
- ¹²⁶ Correspondingly, for disciples at lower levels, the soul’s vehicles are the (lower) mental, emotional, etheric, and dense physical bodies, collectively known as the lower quaternary.
- ¹²⁷ Bailey, *Initiation, Human & Solar*, 49.
- ¹²⁸ Alice Bailey refers to the fourth initiation as the “liberating initiation.” *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 121.
- ¹²⁹ Hartmann, *With the Adepts*, 89.
- ¹³⁰ Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Science of the Sacraments* (Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 1920/2000), 291, 349-350. It should be noted that women priests now celebrate the Eucharist in the Anglican Communion and in the major branches of Lutheranism.
- ¹³¹ Damodar K. Mavalankar, “Can Females become Adepts,” *The Theosophist* (vol. V, Oct. 1883), 23.
- ¹³² Helena P. Blavatsky, “A Few Queries,” *Lucifer* (vol. 4, no. 22, June 1889), 348. An accompanying comment, possibly by someone else with Blavatsky’s approval, states: “[I]t would testify of a, least said, curious partiality on the part of the ‘All-love’ and ‘All-wisdom’ to have denied woman, that half of humanity which is said to be the counter-type of even that Wisdom—*Love* being the masculine, *Wisdom* the feminine, principle in Deity—the means and possibilities to claim and attain the same high wisdom which is attainable for men.” Capitalization and italicization in original.
- ¹³³ Helena P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. IV (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989), 262. Capitalization of “woman-adept” removed.
- ¹³⁴ We should note that most of the portraits date from a period when beards were fashionable. If the masters’ desire was to blend in with the general population, growth of facial hair was understandable.
- ¹³⁵ We are reminded of the charge to the Brothers of the Rose Cross to “follow the custom of the country” and “not wear distinctive clothing.” *Fama Fraternitatis*, (transl.: Thomas Vaughn), 1610/1652.
- ¹³⁶ Dion Fortune *The Esoteric Orders and Their Work* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1928/1978), 22.
- ¹³⁷ Henry S. Olcott, “Becoming a Theosophist,” *The Theosophist* (March & May, 1880). Olcott did not specify what level of initiation the women had attained.
- ¹³⁸ Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path*, 288.
- ¹³⁹ Heline, *The Blessed Virgin Mary*, 69
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Italicization in original.
- ¹⁴¹ Judith von Halle, *And if He had not Been Raised: The Stations of Christ’s path to Spirit Man* (Forest Row, UK: Temple Lodge, 2007), 133-134. Parenthesis in original. See an interview with von Halle at: <http://southerncrossreview.org/112/jvh-interview.html>. (Last accessed Sept. 6, 2017).
- ¹⁴² In a notorious case of character assassination, Pope Gregory I and subsequent generations of western church leaders conflated Mary Magdalene with the “woman from the city” (*Luke 7:37*)—a prostitute. The Eastern Orthodox Churches never accepted that conflation, and the Church of Rome finally rejected it in 1969. By contrast, the early church fathers gave Mary Magdalene the accolade “Apostle to the Apostles” based on *John 20:17-18* and *Mark 16:9-11*. Theosophist and Hermeticist Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) claimed that Mary Magdalene appeared to her and chose Mary as her confirmation name when she became a Roman Catholic.
- ¹⁴³ Jacobus de Voragine, “The Life of St Mary Magdalene,” *The Golden Legend*, vol. IV, (transl.; W. Caxton; c.1275/1460). Online: <http://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/basis/goldenlegend/GoldenLegend-Volume4.asp#MaryMagdalene>. (Last accessed Sept. 6, 2017).
- ¹⁴⁴ Tsultrim Allione, *Women of Wisdom* (Boulder, CO: Snow Lion, 2000).
- ¹⁴⁵ See for example: Lama Surya Das, *Awakening the Buddha Within: Eight Steps to Enlightenment* (West Chester, PA: Broadway, 1998), 245-247.
- ¹⁴⁶ Subba Row, “Women Adepts,” *Esoteric Writings*, 568.
- ¹⁴⁷ We would have preferred “feminine rather than masculine,” but we recognize the limited vocabulary available in the nineteenth century.

-
- ¹⁴⁸ Subba Row, "Women Adepts," *Esoteric Writings*, 568.
- ¹⁴⁹ Hodson, *Light of the Sanctuary*, 504.
- ¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 535.
- ¹⁵¹ Devic adepts may, like Mary, have made the transition from the human kingdom to the deva evolution during Earth's present planetary cycle. Alternatively, they may have experienced the human condition elsewhere or in another cycle.