

MOONSTONE

EXPLORATIONS IN
FEMININE THEOLOGY

By Maxine Hanks

*The light of the moon shall be as the
light of the sun.* —Isaiah 30:26

MOONSTONE IS A NEW COLUMN in SUNSTONE's pages that will address a long-standing need—the exploration and inclusion of the divine feminine in Mormon theology and religious studies. This column will be a place where the feminine side of theology can be expressed.

Theology is the study of god and our relationship to deity; thus, this column will address aspects of the divine feminine and women's relationship to theology and priesthood. It will feature a variety of women writers, scholars, mystics, or theologians (as well as men).

What do I mean by the divine feminine? Perhaps simply, it is the feminine aspect of the divine—whether speaking of god or of the divine within us (both men and women). It's also the divine expressing itself in the feminine voice (or in women themselves). We explore the divine feminine simply by seeking it, finding and expressing it, via images, symbols, insights, wisdom, words, song, voices.

As Mormon theology emerged in the 1820s to 1840s, it contained faint hints of a feminine god. Yet little about her was canonized; and in the years since, nothing of her has been added to the canon. Masculine imagery has overwhelmed the feminine, nearly erasing it from Mormon culture. How long should a religion wait for manifestations of the divine mother? How long can the human soul stay silent or afraid to express the divine from within?

Without some focus on the feminine side of theology, we may never see it or integrate it. Before an idea can be fully realized, it has to be expressed, take form; otherwise a con-

cept remains abstract, nebulous. The feminine god is revealed in images and descriptions and approached via symbols.

MOON AS DIVINE FEMININE

A PRIMARY symbol of the divine feminine is the moon, which has a long precedent in human history and culture as a sign of the mother god. From the ancient Venus of Laussel carving to Isis of the Egyptians and Diana of the Ephesians, the divine feminine archetype has been associated with the moon.

Wearing the crescent was a 'visible worship' of the Goddess. That was why the prophet Isaiah denounced the women of Zion for wearing lunar amulets (Isaiah 3:18). The crescent moon worn by Diana and used in the worship of other goddesses is said to be the Ark or vessel of boat-like shape, symbol of fertility, the Container of the Germ of all life.¹

Across the ancient world, the moon was associated with the feminine.

Half moon, and star in crescent are astral symbols referring to the Great Goddess as queen of the sky and particularly of the night sky, with which the planet Venus and the moon are archetypally correlated both in Europe and America . . . Over and over again we find . . . woman connected with the symbols . . . of night and moon.²

The moon was an obvious natural symbol for a female god, mirroring the sun as a masculine god. "In classical philosophy both lunar and earth principles were considered receptive or 'feminine,' while the solar principle was understood to be the active, 'posi-

tive' energy of the masculine."³

The moon offered visible proof of the dual nature of life. Nature made the day and night equal partners. Viewed from the earth, the sun and moon had the same apparent size or diameter, traveling along the same path across the sky.

SUN/MOON AS DYAD

HERMETIC tradition used the sun and moon symbols as a dyad or joined pair, denoting the dual nature of human existence—the dance of opposite forces. Neither symbol eclipses the other, both are necessary partners.

Sun and moon are archetypal symbols representing duality, which when married produce a wholeness or higher order of being. Sun and moon are king and queen, the archetypal couple, dual principals of the cosmos. They represent conscious and unconscious aspects of humanity, both essential to the process of human transformation.

The moon as an icon is an archetypal image of one polarity. It symbolizes the subordinated aspects of culture, history, theology, cosmology, or psychology. It is a symbol of what is forgotten, ignored, denied, or underestimated.

The moon also signifies inclusion, integration, impending restoration. The moon represents entering our spiritual, emotional, or psychological depths in hopes of gaining insight. The moon evokes an image of the deeper self, a sense of potential, latent possibility or power, a longing to reclaim the "other." The lunar orb is a light that shines in the darkness of night, unconquered, representing hope and redemption of the soul.

The sun and moon as an hermetic dyad suggest integration and healing of separated or fractured aspects of our own psyche. This is also the Jungian approach to human and social problems—integrating the subverted or unconscious aspects of the psyche into consciousness. Wholeness or health require working actively with both aspects.

We have before us two systems, the latter of which (sun, patriarchy, consciousness) cannot exist without the earlier (moon, matriarchy, unconscious) and neither of which exhausts the ultimate possibilities of transformation.⁴

Some feminist theologians urge this same integrating process for religion, as the only way to wellness.

The solar principle must be "wedded" to its natural opposite, the feminine energy. . . . Worship of



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an exclusively male image of God is destructive . . . without its feminine counterbalance, the lunar. . . . But the feminine principle alone . . . is just as dangerous as the masculine principle without its partner. . . . The formula for the promised kingdom of heaven on earth is the harmonious balance of masculine and feminine.⁵

MOONSTONE AS SYMBOL

ONE tangible form of moon imagery is the moonstone—a gemstone of pale white shimmering quality that resembles the full moon. A moonstone symbolizes the mysterious, ethereal, or spiritual realms; it is a symbol of the seer and mystic; it also symbolizes the “white stone” or purified matter, a transformation to higher form.

Mormonism has a unique moonstone of its own in early church history and theology. The crescent moon symbol of the female god is the very image that was carved onto the stone pedestals of the Nauvoo temple. Known as the “moonstone,” it was a white limestone base for each temple pillar (pilaster), which was topped by the sunstone capital. The moonstone was a foundation upon which each pilaster and sunstone rested.

The moon itself was an important icon in early Mormon cosmology, where vivid mythic symbols for the divine and supernatural were plentiful (ranging from the all-seeing-eye to angel Moroni, from pentagrams and talismans to clasped hands, from seerstones to sunstones). The sun and moon represented two realms of heaven inhabited by resurrected human beings—the sun denoting the highest or celestial glory, the moon a secondary glory or terrestrial heaven.

Yet, the moon also represented a feminine aspect of cosmology. As Joseph Smith once commented, “General Law asked why the sun was called by a masculine name and the moon by a feminine one. I replied that the root of masculine is stronger, and of the feminine weaker . . . the moon borrows her light from the sun.”⁶ This imagery, though overtly sexist, evokes the ancient tradition of the lunar as feminine, which is “espousing concepts ultimately derived . . . from the optimistic gnosis of the hermetic tradition.”⁷

Interestingly, the temple moonstone had a feminine quality about it, while the sunstone was masculine. Simple and serene compared to the elaborate and animated sunstone, the moonstone was merely an outline of the crescent moon, face down in horizontal or prone

position, with smiling lips, a nose and one eye. This moon image was faint in form, like a blueprint, waiting to be finished or fully realized.

The moonstone with its undeveloped moon offers a perfect symbol for the preliminary, sketchy, unfinished nature of feminine theology. After 175 years, the crescent moon still waits for a sculpted image, a raised relief.

The creation of the temple moonstones actually corresponded to the rise of women’s religious authority in Mormon history. For as workers carved and set the moonstones of the Nauvoo temple into place in 1842 and 1843, Mormon women were being organized as a “kingdom of priests” in both the Relief Society and in the “anointed quorum” or priesthood endowment.⁸

The alchemical-hermetic term of *coniunctio* powerfully summarizes the resolution that Smith had achieved at Nauvoo by the summer of 1844. He had established a theology of the conjunction—the unification—of the living and the dead, of men and women, of material and spiritual.⁹

This joining of opposites or dualities is hermetic philosophy, which Mormon theology invokes. Hermeticism’s two chief symbols are sun and moon. Thus, the moonstone was a monument to hermetic balance (whether coincidental, intuitive, or intentional)—a balance between Mormon men and women, sun and moon icons, and capital and pedestal linked together as one unified pillar.

The sun on high linked to moon below simulates heaven and earth joined. While this celestial and terrestrial hierarchy can imply a superior/inferior relationship or hegemony, the hermetic joining of the two as a dyad actually implies a dance or marriage, a reversal or deconstruction that creates balance, union, and renewal. This marriage continues in the tension between masculine and feminine, in heaven and on earth, in culture and in church. Sun and moon are always in motion, shifting position, in cosmic dance.

The sunstone and moonstone of the Nauvoo Temple signify hermetic union, transformation. They also evoke an apocalyptic image. The crescent moons at the foot of temple pilasters, with suns at the top and stars hovering above, resemble the female image in Revelation 12:1, as one early church member testified:

The order of architecture was . . . a representation of the Church, the Bride, the Lamb’s Wife. . . . “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet,

and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” This is portrayed in the beautifully cut stone of this grand temple.¹⁰

This image implies a forthcoming feminine, resulting in hermetic balance or union. Likewise, “feminist Mormons . . . are advocating the central hermetic ideal of a dual divinity, comprising both male and female genders.”¹¹

MOONSTONE AS COLUMN

LIKE the sunstone as a symbol for theology and Mormon studies, the moonstone offers a symbol for theological inquiry into the feminine and women’s studies. When theology revolves around the sun, its natural focus is masculinity; thus the moon moves us beyond masculine images. Yet moonstone imagery does not suggest that feminists worship the moon nor that women are equated with the lunar orb.

The moon is simply a symbol to remind us to include the feminine or “other” in our theology and culture. The moon provides a needed focus for inquiry into the feminine, the divine, and the unconscious. Transcendence comes only by uniting both sides of reality, the known and unknown, the privileged and subverted.

The Moonstone column in *SUNSTONE* magazine creates balance between masculine and feminine theology. And the moonstone icon signifies a long-awaited return of the divine feminine in Mormonism. ☽

NOTES

1. Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 670.
2. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, Bollingen Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 141, 296.
3. Margaret Starbird, *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear & Co., 1998), 158.
4. Neumann, 54.
5. Starbird, 134, 157–58.
6. Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 5:210–11.
7. John L. Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 295.
8. D. Michael Quinn, “Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843,” in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, ed. Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 365–68.
9. Brooke, 281.
10. Wandle Mace, *Autobiography*, 3. Photocopy of manuscript in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
11. Brooke, 302.

