

Section 10 – Roman Christianity

The Goddess in Christianity

Constantine became Western Roman Emperor in 312 CE after routing his predecessor, Maxentius, at the battle of Mulvian Bridge. A year later, he and the Eastern Emperor Licinius co-authored the Edict of Milan, legalising Christian worship and bringing to an end the 'Age of Martyrs'. By 324 CE, Constantine had become ruler of both Empires and had made his capital in Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople. He continued to promote the Christian faith, and convened the Council of Nicea in 325, where the basic tenets of Christianity, the Nicene Creed, were established. The Eastern Emperor Theodosius and his western counterpart Gratian made Nicene Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 380.

Rome was a patriarchy, but one with the Goddess at its heart. She was everywhere, in myriad forms. The Goddess was deeply loved, and a part of everyone's life: for her not to appear centre-stage in the new Roman state cult would have been unthinkable. It would have immediately led to the rejection of that cult by some of the most important peoples of the Empire – not least the Romans themselves! The overtly Goddess-worshipping cultures within the Empire, as well as Romans, would require the Goddess to be represented materially, rather than just within the terms of Christ's message. In other words, there would have to be an actual goddess character in the mythology.

There was only one possible candidate, and that was Mary. As the mother of Jesus, she was the Mother of God, so she assumed the role that went with that, Queen of Heaven. Like Isis, she remained a perpetual virgin. Within Catholic dogma, hers was an 'immaculate conception', without 'original sin', which is similar to the way Ki/ Ninhursag was born thousands of years before. She appears in the Bible in the three key roles of the Goddess – the virgin, the mother, and the crone who grieves over the dead god at the foot of the cross. The god is resurrected from a tomb, from within the Earth itself, which is also cognate with the Goddess. The name 'Mary' appears in triplicate at the crucifixion of Jesus, again at his tomb, and three times as the daughters of St Anne, who was the mother of the Virgin Mary. These symbolic references suggest that the gospel writers intended the followers of the new religion to recognise Mary as the Goddess, and the Catholic Church simply developed this in terms of ceremonial practice.

In order to establish the structure and dogma of the new state religion, the Romans organised a series of formal councils. The First Council of Ephesus, in what is now Turkey, in 431 CE,

established Mary, the mother of Jesus, as Theotokos or 'Mother of God'.¹ This step put the Goddess at the centre of the new state religion, to make it attractive to those imperial subjects who were devoted to her.² At a stroke, the Church Fathers had transformed Christianity, making the central role of Mary, the Goddess incarnate, not only implicit in the faith but also explicitly at the centre of it. The so-called 'Marianist' tradition had been made the dominant strain of Catholicism and, since Catholicism was by definition 'the universal church', the Goddess was placed at the head of Christianity.

This move is sometimes referred to as Mary's 'promotion' but it can only be seen this way from a particular point of view. The Gospels themselves identify Mary as the Goddess, the Mother of God. Her acceptance as such, and the title 'Queen of Heaven' that went with it, was a natural progression. This role was to become, as Dr. Francesca Stavrokopoulou has noted, possibly the most commanding that the Mother Goddess has ever had.³

The Goddess-worshipping Celts had been granted their Goddess, in a position of supreme authority at the heart of the church. It is little wonder, then, that Christianity was so readily adopted by the Celtic peoples and that they should become some of the most devout Catholics in Europe. The political ends of the Empire were well served by the Council of Ephesus and, while the temporal Empire's decline was not prevented, the spiritual authority of Rome was assured and would persist.

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <http://www.britannica.com/facts/5/281254/Council-of-Chalcedon-as-discussed-in-Theotokos-Eastern-Orthodoxy>

² <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05491a.htm>

³ Stavrokopoulou, Dr. Francesca. *The Bible's Buried Secrets*. BBC Television Broadcast. 2011.