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Woman Earth and Spirit: The Feminine Symbol and Myth

Helen M. Luke

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In the thirty years since this book was published the world has changed dramatically. It is more difficult with each passing decade to recognize true spiritual values because the rituals and collective symbols by which they are known have been progressively supplanted with polarized fundamentalism, mish-mash mysticism, spiritual materialism and so on. It is a relief to take a brief foray back to the simpler time when this type of helpful little book was written. It's uncomplicated, it's sincere. It's not a showcase for hard-edged philosophical theory, neither is it an instruction manual for the trenches of the gender wars. Luke shares her ideas on the feminine aspect in its many forms, without vitirol or defensiveness on the one hand, or exaggerated Goddess identification on the other. It's even more of a relief is to remember that there are things that haven't changed at all. The old myths, plays, poems and folklore that Helen Luke addresses in these seven essays fall in that category. It is well that they haven't changed. Set adrift in the strange waters of the present, they are much-needed anchors. Luke tackles several myths here, most notably the Mother-Daughter Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. Her reading of the Oresteia by Aeschylus, though brief, also gives much to consider. Luke was influenced by Jung's theories of the unconscious, the anima and animus, and the alchemical fires of individuation, and her interpretations have a decidedly Jungian slant. But there is also a Christian simplicity to her refreshing hopefulness, and Zen Buddhism lends clarity to some of her elucidations. Her interpretations are grounded in an urge to preserve the value of ancient feminine symbolism, while embracing the wide range of more recent psychological developments. She asserts that the feminine qualities of receptivity and nurturing (qualities that exist in both men and women) are forces that are deeply necessary to our success as individuals and as a society.

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