



Living in the Balance

June 2015

Traveling in northern Spain recently gave me my first up close encounters with the black Madonna. The first dark Madonna was off to the side in the nave of the very large and ornate Mother Mary and I craned my neck and squeezed my camera through the nave gates to get a photo of her. The Black Madonna of Montserrat I glimpsed from the distance as services were starting and the gates to the line were closed. Disappointed I settled for a gift shop post card. My final encounter was in the Barcelona Chocolate Museum where the Black Madonna of Montserrat, molded in chocolate and dusted completely in cocoa powder, sat in near life size next to a glistening chocolate Pietà.

The guides had several theories about why the Madonnas were black. One made the case for “soot” darkening. I puzzled why then all Madonnas from those times were not black. When I got home, I did a little research which I will share with the following excerpts from the March 17, 2011 edition, **National Catholic Reporter**.

*A statue or painting of Mary in which she is depicted with dark or black skin, the Black Madonna images are among the oldest Madonna images in the world. The blackness of the images is purportedly not related to race or ethnic origins but has to do with symbolic meanings and connections to early goddesses. Canadian Jungian analyst Marion Woodman brought this archetype of the feminine divine to the attention of psychology circles in her popular books *Addiction to Perfection* and *The Pregnant Virgin*. Scholar of mysticism Andrew Harvey describes the Madonna's dark aspect as “the blackness of divine mystery celebrated by the great mystics who see the divine as forever unknowable, mysterious, beyond all our concepts, hidden from all our senses in a light so dazzling it registers on them as darkness.” The Black Madonna is also the Queen of Nature, the agent of all fertile transformation in the outside world and in the psyche. She urgently demands a return to balance and wholeness, honoring the earth and representing ecology and environmental concerns, according to theologian Matthew Fox.*

In Austria in the 1950s artist (and then Benedictine sister) Meinrad Craighead saw a poster of a black-skinned Virgin Mary. “Little by little I learned about her. In Catholicism she is the Sorrowful Mother, Mater Dolorosa, the Madonna of Solitude and Sorrow, who can receive and contain even our most unbearable pain,” said the artist.

Craighead moved to Montserrat, the mountaintop monastery near Barcelona known for its Black Madonna shrine. She lived there under the bell tower for almost a year. “Throughout Europe and Mexico, images of [the Black Madonna] are enshrined in countless pilgrim churches, in remote monasteries, in tiny chapels and vast cathedrals, down in dark crypts and up on high altars. She has been visited by millions for hundreds of years. She is the lodestone, always pulling us into her mystery,” Craighead said. “On her face is an expression of utter solitude so intense that the child on her knees or in the embrace of her left arm seems strangely appended. Her eyes are opaque, blank, veiled in the deepest interiority. She sits deeply, a curtained container, a tabernacle, the eternal bloody cave of birth, disintegration and rebirth.”

Craighead saw a connection between this Madonna and the Native American Hopi spirit, Crow Mother, another face the feminine divine wears, who both cares and challenges. Craighead has lived and worked in the southwestern United States since she left the European Benedictines in the 1970s. “She is Crow, black as the night sky and the richest soil, dark as the miracle of deeply watered earth in the arid Southwest. She is the mother who fertilizes all life. She visits Hopi villages to initiate the young in the predawn winter darkness. She is the Keeper of the Balance.” Crow Mother comes from the spirituality of the Earth as does the Black Madonna.

With contemporary lore about black holes at the center of our galaxy and elementary particles bubbling into existence out of nothing, Craighead said, “Science now shows us pragmatically what people in both the Old World and the New have probably always known forever, with their deep hunches about our origins. Black is holy. It's the mysteries of the night sky. We both come from and are contained somehow by this darkness.”



Calendar considerations.....

Valle Crucis Conference Center

Three Day Centering Prayer Retreat, June 12 – 14

For information about this prayer retreat, contact

Becky Hannah at 828-702-3518

Men's Work: A Journey to Discovering your True Self, June 12 – 14

Women Writer's Workshop 2, August 20 – 24

<http://www.highsouth.com/vallecrucis/>

Southern Dharma Center

Mindful Advocacy, June 17 – 21

Insight Dialogue and the Path of Peace, July 10 – 15

Developing Insight into Power, July 22 – 26

Touching the Unconditioned: A Vipassana Retreat, August 5 – 9

Cooling the Mind, Expanding the Heart, August 14 – 19

Buddhism and the Twelve Steps, August 26 – 30

For more information www.southerndharma.org

Offerings by **The Anchorage** in Greenville, SC

Mepkin Abbey Directed Retreats offered July

For more information: <http://www.theanchorage.org/>

The Sophia Institute, Charleston, SC

Women, Wisdom, Leadership from the Inside Out, Friday evening, June 17

Getting the Love you Want, August 29 – 30

Finding Success First Within Yourself, September 9

Creation and Expression, September 11 – 12

www.thesophiainstitute.org

Montreat Retreat Center

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's Unfinished Agenda

Intergenerational "teach-in." Speakers include Leonard Pitts, Yvette Flunder, and

Bishop Vashti McKenzie August 21 – 23

Neighbor: Being Christian in a Multifaith World, Brian McLaren speaking

October 12 – 15

www.montreat.org

Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat

Eight Day Intensive and Post Intensive, August 2 – 9

St. Mary's Retreat Center, Sewanee, Tennessee

<https://copnc.org>





Calendar considerations.....

Lake Junaluska Retreat Center

Women's Retreat with Dr. Lauren Winner, September 17 – 19

Peace Conference, November 12 – 15

Lake Junaluska Conference Center, North Carolina

http://www.lakejunaluska.com/events/spiritual_enrichment/signature_series/

Anderson School of Theology for Laypersons

Searching for Jesus Beyond Belief

Harry Cook

Two different presentations at 2:30 and 4:30, Sunday, October 4

Trinity United Methodist Church, Anderson, SC

www.astlonline.org

Kanuga Conference Center

Enneagram Conference, October 4–7

Lansing Lee Conference October 18 – 20 featuring keynotes

Rev. Dr. George Carey and Rev. Canon John Petersen

Icon Writing November 15 –21

www.kanuga.org

AwakeningSoul Offers

Circling the Fire with Walter Brueggemann and Valerie Tutson

November 5 – 8

Lutheridge, near Asheville, NC

www.awakeningsoulpresents.org

Cathedral of St. Philip

Sacred in the City with Margaret Silf

November 14

Atlanta, Georgia

www.stphilipscathedral.org/spiritualityconference

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<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses/>





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- Discerning ways to live in a more integrated and whole way
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- Exploring new or fresh ways to be in relationship with God

For more information about Spiritual Direction, please feel free to contact me by phone
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