Excerpt:

“The Black Madonna and the Green Man”

From

The Hidden Spirituality of Men:
Ten Metaphors to Awaken the Sacred Masculine

By Matthew Fox

PURCHASE THE HIDDEN SPIRITUALITY OF MEN FOR $5 OFF WITH COUPON CODE 5OFF AT BIT.LY/HIDDENSPIRITUALITY
Sacred Marriage Number Two: Green Man and the Black Madonna.

In chapter two we celebrated the return of the Green Man. We were reminded that the Green Man honors our relationship to other earth creatures and the plant world in particular and how the Green Man is a spiritual warrior standing up for and defending Mother Earth and her creatures. He also represents the heart chakra, the greening power of compassion, since the color of the heart chakra is green. And he represents holy sexuality, our renewed powers of generativity in all their diverse and manifold manifestations.

But what happens when Green Man returns? Is he alone on this earth? Does he find a mate? Is there someone also emerging who might make a good marriage, a bonding of equals, friends for life? I propose that the return of the Black Madonna represents such a partner, such a consort. And why?

The first reason is historical. The last time the Black Madonna emerged in force in Western culture was at the very time that the Green Man arrived--the twelfth century, the “only renaissance that worked in the West” (Chenu) when the goddess emerged and society reinvented itself. In ages past the Black Madonna not only took root in France but in many other cultures. She is found all over Europe—in Sicily, Spain, Switzerland, France, Poland, Czechoslovakia—as well as in Turkey and in Africa, the Soviet Union. In Asia she is seen as Tara in China and as Kali in India. She is also named by Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. (Sometimes called the “brown Madonna.”) And the Celts knew her as “Hag,” or the cailleach, the dark feminine who exercises “tough mother love that challenges its children to stop acting in destructive ways…It is the energy that will bring death to those dreams and fantasies that are not for our highest good.” (75 of Whelan)

Who is the Black Madonna and What does she stand for? In her study on the Dark Goddess Lucia Birnbaum describes how the African goddess Isis “prevailed through the force of love, pity, compassion, and her personal concern for sorrows.” (20) She was associated with healing, she was a “compassionate mother” and she represented not only the earth but also water which “held a sacred quality: holy water, holy rivers, and holy sea…” A mistress of medicine, she also signifies nonviolent transformation. The sister of Isis was Ma’at and together Isis and Ma’at epitomized justice and order in nature. For all these reasons the black goddess seems right for our times.
The next step toward religious understanding, and a just world, is to bring the dark mother of prehistory and popular history to consciousness and to public knowledge. We need to bring her to consciousness in light of genetic and archeological evidence that verifies that all of us descend from an African dark mother, that we are all peoples of colors of many tribes, many climates, and many diasporas….In our violent times, we need to bring the dark mother to consciousness because she connotes justice with compassion. (26f)

Recently a Black Madonna Exhibition was put on the road and accompanying it was this commentary:

The Black Madonna is the embodiment of the Divine Feminine, our Earth Goddess and the Mother of all humanity. She represents the fertile womb, black and sacred and stands as a symbol of transformation and change. The images of the Virgin Mother portrayed as a dark-skinned woman symbolize majesty and power, a love of great strength, powerful, enduring and unbroken…. She is an important symbol in the present-day, redefining darkness as a positive mage in contemporary culture. Darkness or blackness is too often associated with the negative. That kind of association is one of the cornerstones of racism. …Darkness represents the internal being and includes pride in one’s history and culture, as well as struggle, survival and achievements. (Jennifer Zazo)

Woodman agrees when she observes that

In the dreams of contemporary men and women, there is appearing with increasing frequency the image of a sensual, sexual, earthy Black Madonna. This is not an idealized, chaste, detached Madonna, high up on a pedestal. This is a Madonna who loves her own body, her own flirtations, her own compassionate presence among human beings…That she is beginning to surface in contemporary dreams suggests that as a race we are at last beginning to find in ourselves a vision of the feminine that has been buried in the unconscious for too long. (146f)

In a previous study I listed a number of reasons why the Black Madonna is returning in our time. Among them are the following:¹ ²

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² See book with my art in also….
1. *The Black Madonna calls us to the darkness* and to depth. Darkness is something we need to get used to again—the “Enlightenment” has deceived us into being afraid of the dark and distant from it. Light switches are illusory. They feed the notion that we can “master nature” (Descartes’ false promise) and overcome all darkness with a flick of our finger. Meister Eckhart observes that “the ground of the soul is dark.” Thus to avoid the darkness is to live superficially, cut off from one’s ground, one’s depth. The Black Madonna invites us into the dark and therefore into our depths. This is what the mystics call the “inside” of things, the essence of things. This is where Divinity lies. It is where the true self lies. It is where illusions are broken apart and the truth lies. Andrew Harvey puts it this way: “The Black Madonna is the transcendent Kali-Mother, the black womb of light out of which all of the worlds are always arising and into which they fall, the presence behind all things, the darkness of love and the loving unknowing into which the child of the Mother goes when his or her illumination is perfect.” She calls us to that darkness which is mystery itself. She encourages us to be at home there, in the presence of deep, black, unsolveable mystery. She is, in Harvey’s words, “the blackness of divine mystery, that mystery celebrated by the great Aphophatic mystics, such as Dionysius Areopagite, 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.” 

Eckhart calls God’s darkness a “superessential darkness, a mystery behind mystery, a mystery within mystery that no light has penetrated.”

To honor darkness is to honor the experience of people of color. Its opposite is racism. The Black Madonna invites us to get over racial stereotypes and racial fears and projections and to go for the dark.

2. The Black Madonna calls us to *cosmology, a sense of the whole of space and time*. The cosmos is dark in its depths and the Black Madonna represents the great cosmic Mother on whose lap all creation exists. The universe itself is embraced and mothered by her. She yanks us out of our *anthropocentrism* and back into a state of honoring *all our relations*. She ushers in an era of cosmology, of our relationship to the whole (“kosmos” means whole in Greek) instead of just

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5 Ibid.
6 Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, 43.
parts, be they nation parts or ethnic parts or religious parts or private parts. She pulls us out of
the Newtonian parts-based relation to self and the world—out of our tribalism—into a
relationship to the whole again. Since we are indeed inheriting a new cosmology in our time, a
new “Universe Story,” the timing of the Black Madonna’s return could not be more fortuitous.
She brings a blessing of the new cosmology, a sense of the sacred, to the task of educating our
species in a new universe story. 8 9

Today’s science is zeroing in on the “dark side of the universe” as Michael Turner, a cosmologist
at the University of Chicago, recently put it in a talk about the mysteries of dark matter and dark
energy. The truth is that up to now only 4 percent of the matter and energy of the universe has
been found. “The other 96% remains elusive—scientists are looking in the farthest reaches of
space and deepest depths of Earth to solve the two dark riddles” we are told. Light does not
interact with dark matter so it is very hard to detect; but it does exhibit the tug of gravity.
Experiments are underway underground as in deep caves in Minnesota in search of WIMPS or
weakly interactive, massive particles. These might answer what is going on at a microcosmic or
particle level.

But at the macrocosmic and large level, is “dark energy” which is a kind of invisible force that is
anti-gravity, pushing galactic clusters apart and causing the accelerated expansion of the
universe. Turner thinks dark energy is the biggest mystery of all and physicists predict that it
makes up 74% of energy density in the universe. But up to now, it is all mysterious.
The metaphor of the Black Madonna seems especially apt at this moment of exploring the dark
matter and dark energy of the universe. Darkness and matter, both at its micro and macro level,
seem to go together.

3. The Black Madonna calls us down to honor our lower charkas. One of the most dangerous
aspects of western culture is its constant flight upwards, its race to the upper charkas (Descartes:
“truth is clear and distinct ideas”) and its flight from the lower charkas. The Black Madonna
takes us down, down to the first charkas including our relationship to the whole (first chakra, as I
have explained elsewhere is about picking up the vibrations for sounds from the whole cosmos),
our sexuality (second chakra) and our anger and moral outrage (third chakra). European culture

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8 See Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992) and Brian
9 Nancy book too
in the modern era especially has tried to flee from all these elements both in religion and in education. The Black Madonna will not tolerate such flights from the earth, flights from the depths.  

4. Because she honors the direction of down and the lower charkas that take us there, the Madonna honors the earth and represents ecology and environmental concerns. Mother Earth is named by her very presence. Mother Earth is dark and fecund and busy birthing. So is the Black Madonna. Andrew Harvey says: “The Black Madonna is also the Queen of Nature, the blesser and agent of all rich fertile transformations in external and inner nature, in the outside world and in the psyche.”  

Mother Earth nurtures her children and feeds the world and the Black Madonna welcomes them home when they die. She recycles all things. The Black Madonna calls us to the environmental revolution, to seeing the world in terms of our interconnectedness with all things and not our standing off to master or rule over nature (as if we could even if we tried). She is an affront to efforts of capitalist exploitation of the resources of the earth including the exploitation of the indigenous peoples who have been longest on the earth interacting with her in the most nuanced of ways. The Black Madonna sees things in terms of the whole and therefore does not countenance the abuse, oppression or exploitation of the many for the sake of financial aggrandizement of the few. She has always stood for justice for the oppressed and lower classes (as distinct from the lawyer classes). She urges us to stand up to those powers that, if they had their way, would exploit her beauty for short term gain at the expense of the experience of beauty that future generations will be deprived of. She is a conservationist, one who conserves beauty and health and diversity. Furthermore, if Thomas Berry is correct that “ecology is functional cosmology,” then to be called to cosmology is to be called to its local expression of ecology. One cannot love the universe and not love the earth. And, vice versa, one cannot love the earth and ignore its temporal and spatial matrix, the universe.  

5. The Black Madonna calls us to our Divinity which is also our Creativity. First, our Divinity. Because she is a goddess, the Black Madonna resides in all beings. She is the divine presence inside of creation. She calls us inside, into the “kingdom/queendom of God”

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10 For a fuller development of the charkas see Matthew Fox, Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh (New York: Harmony, 1999), 94-116; 167-327.  
11 Harvey, 371.
where we can co-create with Divinity and feel the rush of Divinity’s holy breath or spirit. But to call us to Divinity is to call us to our responsibility to give birth. If Carl Jung is correct when he says that creativity comes “from the realm of the mothers” then the Black Madonna, who is surely a realm of the mothers, calls us to creativity. She expects nothing less from us than creativity. Hers is a call to create, a call to ignite the imagination. What but our collective imaginations can succeed in moving us beyond our energy dependence on fossil fuels to an era of self-sustaining energy based on solar and renewable, clean fuels? What but an education in creativity can reinvent learning so that the joy and wonder and enticement of learning displaces our failing and boring educational systems? What but moral imagination can move us beyond the growing divide between materially impoverished nations and materially sated but spiritually impoverished nations?

The Black Madonna would usher in an era where more and more artists will get good work and thrive on good work and reawaken the human soul by way of moral and political imagination. 12

6. The Black Madonna calls us to Diversity. There is no imagination without diversity—imagination is about inviting disparate elements into soul and culture so that new combinations can make love together and new beings can be birthed. Because the Black Madonna is black, she addresses the fundamental phobia around race and differences of color and culture that come with race and ethnic diversity. Meister Eckhart says: “All the names we give to God come from an understanding of ourselves.” 13 To give Divinity the name “Black Madonna” is to honor blackness and all people of color and to get over an excessive whiteness of soul and culture. It is also to honor the feminine.

Divinity is diverse. Diverse in color and diverse in traditions and diverse in gender. God as Mother, not just Father. God as Birther, not just Begetter. Gender diversity is honored by the Black Madonna and so too is gender preference. The Black Madonna, the Great Mother, is not homophobic. She welcomes the diversity of sexual preferences that are also part of creation, human and more than human. (We have now counted 464 species of birds and mammals that have significant homosexual populations. The earlier notion that homosexuality is “against nature” has been disproven: A homosexual minority is very much part of nature.)

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13 Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, 42.
John Boswell, in his ground-breaking scholarly work entitled *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* has demonstrated that the twelfth century, that century that birthed the great renaissance and the Black Madonna in France, rejected homophobia. For a period of 125 years—years that were the most creative years in western civilization—diversity was welcomed at all levels of society.  

Creativity thrives on diversity.

7. The Black Madonna calls us to *Grieve*. The Black Madonna is the sorrowful mother, the mother who weeps tears for the suffering in the universe, the suffering in the world, the brokenness of our very vulnerable hearts. In the Christian tradition she holds the dying Christ in her lap but this Christ represents all beings—it is the cosmic Christ and not just the historical Jesus that she is embracing, for all beings suffer and the Black Madonna, the Great Mother, knows this and empathizes with us in our pain. She embraces us like a tender mother, for compassion is her special gift to the world. She invites us to enter into our grief and name it and be there to learn what suffering has to teach us. Creativity cannot happen, birthing cannot happen, unless the grieving heart is paid attention to. Only by passing through grief can creativity burst forth anew. Grieving is an emptying, it is making the womb open again for new birth to happen. A culture that would substitute addictions for grieving is a culture that has lost its soul *and its womb*. It will birth nothing but more pain and abuse and misuse of resources. It will be a place where waste reigns and where Divinity itself wastes away unused in the hearts and imaginations of the people. Andrew Harvey writes of how the Black Madonna provides “an immense force of protection, an immense alchemical power of transformation through both grief and joy, and an immense inspiration to compassionate service and action in the world.”

To grieve is to enter what John of the Cross in the sixteenth century called the “dark night of the soul.” We are instructed not to run from this dark night but to stay there to learn what darkness has to teach us. The Dark Madonna does not run from the darkness of spirit and soul that sometimes encompasses us. She invites us not to flee from pain and suffering. Part of being a warrior is sticking around for the lessons to be learned when chaos seems to be taking over. The Black Madonna is also “queen of hell,” or “queen of the underworld,…that force of pure suffering mystical love that annihilates evil at its root and engenders the Christ-child in the ground of the soul even as the world burns.”

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15 Harvey, *The Return of the Mother*, 372f.
within her just like Kali does. Kali is a dark mother. And she is a fierce mother, often depicted
with a necklace of skulls encircling her neck. What is this about? This is a warning not to
sentimentalize the feminine. The Feminine is not to be trivialized or sentimentalized, not to be
“feminized” in Ann Douglas’ terms, not to be treated as the “proper lady” or as a “kept doll” but
for what she is: Strong, powerful and independent. “Mother Nature” is not always benign: Ask
the survivors of Katrina or of the tsunami in southeast Asia. Kali bring death as well as life,
destruction along with construction. All creativity is that way: It “tears down and builds up” as
the prophet says about the work of the prophet. Gaia too is not to be sentimentalized.
Recently I and others in the Bay Area were jolted awake at 3 AM by the rattling of our houses.
An earthquake occurred. We were reminded once again, like the inhabitants in New Orleans at
Katrina’s hitting, or the inhabitants of Sri Lanka and India in the tsunami’s arrival or of Japan
recently when an earthquake tore up the world’s largest nuclear plant that Mother Nature is in
charge. She will not be mocked. She is fierce. She is Kali. The Dark Mother is this way. She
demands respect which is not the same as sentimentalizing. She is not the mother of soap opera
romance but the mother of a fierce and unrelenting universe that is beautiful but tragic, powerful
but ferocious, caring but violent. All this is part of the wedding of the Green Man and the Black
Madonna. It is a coming together of strong forces. There is nothing prissy about it. It is unlike
many contemporary weddings. It is the union of wild energies. Wildness reigns. It is not for the
feint of heart

8. The Black Madonna calls us to Joy, Celebration and Dance. The Black Madonna, while she
weeps tears for the world, as the sorrowful mother, does not wallow in her grief, does not stay
there forever. Rather, she is a joyful mother, a mother happy to have being and to have shared it
with so many other creatures. She expects joy in return. Celebration of life and its pleasures lie
at the core of her reason for being. She expects us to take joy in her many pleasures, joy in her
fruits. Sophia or Wisdom in the Scriptures sings to this element of pleasure and eros, deep and
passionate love of life and all its gifts.

I have exhaled a perfume like cinnamon and acacia,
I have breathed out a scent like choice myrrh….
Approach me, you who desire me,
And take your fill of my fruits,
For memories of me are sweeter than honey,
Inheriting me is sweeter than the honeycomb.
They who eat me will hunger for more,
They who drink me will thirst for more.
Whoever listens to me will never have to blush….(Eccl. 24.15, 19-22)

Celebration is part of compassion. As Meister Eckhart puts it: “What happens to another be it a joy or a sorrow happens to me.” Celebration is the exercise of our common joy. Praise is the noise that joy makes. Joy, praise and celebration are intrinsic to community and to the presence of the Black Madonna. She did not birth her Divine Child by whatever name in vain. She opts in favor of children, in favor of life, in favor of eros and in favor of biophilia. She is a lover of life par excellence. She expects us, her children, to be the same.

9. The Black Madonna calls us to our Divinity which is Compassion. Compassion is the best of which our species is capable. It is also the secret name for Divinity. There is no spiritual tradition East or West, North or South, that does not exist to instruct its people in how to be compassionate. “Maat” is the name for justice, harmony, balance and compassion among the African peoples who after all birthed the Black Madonna first as Isis. The Black Madonna calls us to Maat. To balance, harmony, justice and compassion. Grieving and Celebrating and Acting Justly are all parts of compassion. In both Arabic and Hebrew, the word for compassion comes from the word for “womb.” A Patriarchal period does not teach compassion, it ignores the womb-like energies of our world and our species. If it mentions compassion at all it trivializes it and renders it sissy. (For example, Webster’s dictionary declares that the idea that compassion is about a relationship among equals is “obsolete.”) Patriarchy neglects what Meister Eckhart knew and taught: “Compassion means justice.” 16 Compassion has a hard side, it is not about sentiment but about relationships of justice and interdependence. Jesus pronounced that he brought a sword as well as peace and Mary his mother is famous for having declared that the Almighty

   has routed the proud of heart..
   He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.
   The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. (Lk 1. 51-53)

16 Fox, Meditations with Meister Eckhart, 103.
Compassion knows when enough is enough; compassion does not overindulge; compassion does not hoard and does not run its life on addictions of insecurity and pyramid-building to overcome these addictions. Compassion trusts life and the universe ultimately to provide what is necessary for our being. But compassion works hard as a co-creator with the universe to see that a balance and basic fairness is achieved among beings. Compassion is present in the Black Madonna in her very essence for “the first outburst of everything God (and Goddess) does is compassion.”

(Eckhart) To return to compassion is to return to the Goddess.

Cultural historian and feminist Henry Adams writes about the role of Mary at Chartres Cathedral in the twelfth century. “The convulsive hold which Mary to this day maintains over human imagination—as you can see at Lourdes—was due much less to her power of saving soul or body than to her sympathy with people who suffered under law—justly or unjustly, by accident or design, by decree of God or by guile of Devil.” 17 Adams understood Mary as the “Buddhist element in Christianity” for with her as with Buddha, compassion is the first of all the virtues. “To Kwannon the Compassionate One and to Mary the Mother of God, compassion included the idea of sorrowful contemplation.” 18 Only the Great Mother could provide the compassion needed by the sorrowful human condition.

She was beyond the law, a friend of the outlaws who appealed to the masses who “longed for a power above law—or above the contorted mass of ignorance and absurdity bearing the name of law.” 19 This power had to be more than human. It required the goddess.

The Black Madonna, the goddess, provides the womb of the universe as the cosmic lap where all creatures gather. An ancient hymn dedicated to Isis underscores her cosmic role as sovereign over all of nature and queen of all the gods and goddesses.

I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven, the wholesome sea-breezes, the lamentable silences of the world below. 20

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 203.
How like a twelfth century poem to the Christian goddess Mary is this ancient hymn to Isis.

Alan of Lille wrote the following poem about Nature in the twelfth century:

O child of God and Mother of things,
Bond of the world, its firm-tied knot,
Jewel set among things of earth, and mirror to all that passes away
    Morning star of our sphere;
Peace, love, power, regimen and strength,
Order, law, end, pathway, captain and source,
Life, light, glory, beauty and shape,
    O Rule of our world! 21

Interestingly, Alan of Lille speaks of the “Mother of things” as a “firm-tied knot” and the Thet which is an important symbol of Isis is also understood to be a knot.22 We play in her cosmic lap, we bump up against one another there, and we work for balance, Maat, and justice there.

The Black Madonna is the Throne of Compassion, the Divine lap. That is the meaning of the name “Isis” and Isis is the African goddess who gave us the Black Madonna in Ephesus, Turkey and through Spain and Sicily directly into Western Europe. Indeed, certain passages of the Christian Gospels such as the birth narratives, which are clearly not historical but are stories of the Cosmic Christ, are passages taken from stories about Isis and her son, Horus. Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, the late keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities at the British Museum, writes:

The pictures and sculptures wherein she is represented in the act of suckling Horus formed the foundation for the Christian paintings of the Madonna and Child.

Several of the incidents of the wanderings of the Virgin with the Child in Egypt as recorded in the Apochryphal Gospels reflect scenes in the life of Isis…and many of the attributes of Isis, the God-mother, the mother of Horus…are identical with those of Mary the Mother of Christ.23

22 See McKinney-Johnson, 71.
23 Ibid., 67.
10. The Black Madonna Calls us to a renaissance of culture, religion and the city and shakes things up to accomplish this. Isis often wears a regal headress that symbolizes her name as meaning “throne” or “queen.” Erich Neumann has written about Isis as “Throne.”

As mother and earth woman, the Great Mother is the ‘throne’ pure and simple, and, characteristically, the woman’s motherliness resides not only in the womb but also in the seated woman’s broad expanse of thigh, her lap on which the newborn child sits enthroned. To be taken on the lap is, like being taken to the breast, a symbolic expression for adoption of the child, and also for the man, by the Feminine. It is no accident that the greatest Mother Goddess of the early cults was named Isis, the ‘seat,’ ‘the throne,’ the symbol of which she bears on her head; and the king who ‘takes possession’ of the earth, the Mother Goddess, does so by sitting on her in the literal sense of the word.24

The twelfth century renaissance was especially conscious of the role of “throne” and the goddess. In Latin the word for “throne” is “cathedra.” The medieval church gave birth to cathedrals—over 125 were built the size of Chartres—and every single one was dedicated to Mary with such titles as Notre Dame de Chartres, Notre Dame de Lyons, Notre Dame de Paris, etc. Over 375 other churches the size of these cathedrals were built dedicated to Mary also. In many of these cathedrals a statue to the Black Madonna can be found even to this day. A cathedral by definition meant the throne where the goddess sits ruling the universe with compassion and justice for the poor. Anthropocentrism, clericalism and sexism have co-opted the invention of cathedral to mean the “place where the bishop has his (usually his) throne.”

This is false. The cathedral is designed to be the center of the city, it is bringing the goddess to the center of the city to bring the city alive with goddess energies and values. Cities were birthed in the twelfth century with the breakup of the land-based economy and religious and political system of the feudal era. The youth fled to the cities where religion reinvented itself apart from the monastic establishment that ruled for eight centuries and where education invented itself apart from the rural monastic educational system in the form of universities. Worship reinvented itself in the Cathedral in the city and apart from the monastic liturgical practice in the countryside.

24 Ibid., 68.
Today for the first time in human history more than 50% of humans are living in cities; By 2015, over two-thirds of humans—a great proportion of them young people—will be living in cities. The Black Madonna and the “throne as goddess” motif contribute to the resurrection of our cities. They give us a center, a cosmic center, a synthesis and unity and a life-energy by which we can redeem our cities and take them back from lifelessness and thanatos. Artists gather in a city. Celebration and ritual happen in a city. Nature and human nature congregate in a city. No wonder Meister Eckhart and other medieval mystics celebrated the human soul as city and the city as soul. It is the task of a renaissance to bring soul back to city. We might even define renaissance as a “rebirth of cities based on a spiritual initiative.”

Part of a renaissance is a reinvention of education and art. The goddess also ruled at the university—she was “Queen of the sciences” and “mistress of all the arts and sciences” who was “afraid of none of them, and did nothing, ever, to stunt any of them.” All learning was to culminate in her. She was about wisdom not just knowledge. The renaissance that the Madonna represented was both religious and educational.

Often the headdress of Isis depicts the full moon between curved horns and has the shape of the musical instrument that the Egyptians played in her honor called the sistrum. Plutarch stated that the purpose of the sistrum which is a kind of rattle was that “all things in existence need to be shaken, or rattled about…to be agitated when they grow drowsy and torpid.” The Black Madonna shakes things up.

Is this not an archetype for our times? Is she not a forebearer of a renaissance, one who comes to give new birth to a civilization, a birth based on a new sense of spirituality and cosmology and learning—a learning that reawakens us to our place in the universe? How will work in the world become wise as opposed to exploitive without wisdom? How will the human soul move from knowledge to wisdom without the kind of effort the goddess can bring? Without a balance of male/female, heart/head, body/spirit truly happening at all levels of education from childhood to professional degrees? How will a renaissance happen if education is left behind? What role will art play when the artist too lets go of the internalized oppression of the modern era and

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25 Blackmur, Henry Adams, 206.
26 See McKinney-Johnson, 71.
recommits himself/herself to serving the community and to serving the larger community of ecological sustainability?  

Isn’t it clear now, having considered these ten dimensions of the Black Madonna, that a marriage of the Green Man and the Black Madonna would truly constitute a marriage of the century? The twenty-first century? A truly Sacred Union? Here the Divine Feminine and the Sacred Masculine would nurture and sustain one another. In this way a new era, one that drew from the wisdom of ancient eras, might truly emerge. It is a marriage to work and pray for.

Why would the Green Man and the Black Madonna represent so vital a family at this time in history? First, because colors are changing. Caucasians are occupying less and less of the human species. People of color, whether African or Asian, Latino or Indigenous, are clearly on the ascendancy. If it is true, what scientists have learned, that the pale skin was developed by our African ancestors who migrated north in order to take in more light rays as they ventured into colder and colder climates, and if it is true that global warming is truly happening on this planet, then clearly it behooves our species to develop more dark skinned people and less fair-skinned peoples. Which is exactly what is happening.

So the honoring of the Black Madonna and Dark Madonnas, whether Guadalupe or Pele, is of great significance in our time. An honoring of darkness is long overdue in a world that has been dominated by more fair-skinned empires for a long time.

Another historical reason for honoring the Black Madonna is that we all come from Dark Africa. Some of us, for reasons mentioned above, just don’t look like it. Ours is a time for recognizing that all humans are kin; we are one tribe; one race, the human race. And our ancestors, our mothers and fathers, were all African. The Black Madonna reminds us of this important fact, our common ancestry, our common lineage, our common tribe and single race. Here all racism ceases; it shuts its ugly mouth; it gets out of our confused and degraded brains; and it exits our institutions and ideologies once and for all. Unity becomes the bedrock for diversity. The unity comes first. Our origins matter. They count. Recently we were teaching a group of inner city teen-agers these lessons and one yelled out: “You mean Eve was black?” He got it. “In the beginning” we were all black. Get over it. Get on with life. Exorcised and purged of all racism. That is the Black Madonna’s message for our time.

A Black Madonna consorting with a Green Man makes for a colorful courtship. The green and the black; the bright and the dark; the motherly solitude of blackness and the fecund potency of greenness marrying. Imagine that! A Sacred Marriage indeed. The Defender the Mother Earth marrying the Origin of our Species.

What other meanings are attached to a marriage of the Green and the Black? Darkness depicts depth and the Green Man, as all living things, shoots its roots into the darkness from which it derives its nourishment and sustenance. Without the black, green withers and dies. It must live connected to the depths in order to survive. Green needs black. And Green provides Black with Color and Conspicuousness; it brings the darkness up to the surface where others can see it and admire its handiwork. It is a channel by which the beauty of the Black becomes more visible. Green spreads. The planet turned green when foliage took over. It made black less lonely, more a contributor to diversity and the thrill of colors.

My experience with the Black Madonna is also that she is a bit of a Trickster. Her logic is not the logic of the daytime or the logic of Aristotle and patriarchal clarity. It is more the logic of paradox, of humor, of foolishness, of surprise, of the unconscious. To respect her is to respect another kind of logic. She is not for the literal-minded which may be one reason why she is so unhonored by Fundamentalists as well as by liberal, exclusively left-brain, thinkers. Her sense of time is not that of our clock time. It is more like that of indigenous people, more a time of waiting, a time of gestation and coming to fruition than it is of the clock. She takes us to the edge. She operates on her time more than on ours. But she does operate.

Green Man is already a marriage—that of Nature and the Human. He brings out the inherent love of nature that goes back as far as humans go back but that the modern age sidetracked with its anthropocentrism and idolatry of the human at the expense of the rest of nature. And the Green Man is marriage of heaven (sun, clouds, water) with the earth (roots, soil, subsoil).

Together, Green Man and the Black Madonna represent a deep marriage of the masculine and the feminine, light (photosynthesis) and dark.

*Sacred Marriage Number Three: Yin/Yang*

The ancient Chinese symbol of Yin/Yang represents the entire universe and the basic dynamic within it which is understood to be sunlight (Yang) and moon light (Yin). “Yang is like man. Yin is like woman. Yang wouldn’t grow without Yin. Yin couldn’t give birth without Yang.
Yin is born (begins) at Summer Solstice and Yang is born (begins) at Winter Solstice.” (Allen Tsai, etc.) This dynamic of Yin/Yang, Feminine/Masculine energies is understood to apply to the cycles of the sun, the four seasons, the yearly calendar, medicine and healing, and more. The key is to keep the tension alive. It is a way of talking about the “marriage of opposites.” As Richard Hooker puts it:

The yin and yang represent all the opposite principles one finds in the universe…. Each of these opposites produce the other: Heaven creates the ideas of things under yang, the earth produces their material forms under yin, and vice versa.

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