

The Hidden Wealth of the Virgin Mary

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Over the past few decades I have developed a growing fascination for images of the Virgin Mary, in particular when she is depicted with her child, either holding it in her arms or sitting on her lap. Through the centuries countless statues and paintings have been made of her, many of them in the Middle Ages, but also after that period people have never stopped creating them. As research has convincingly shown and is also quite well known by now, her imagery has a very long history, reaching back beyond Christianity to the Stone Age, and perhaps even further.

The ancient roots of the Virgin Mary are most prominently expressed in the imagery of the Black Madonna, who in France alone is still worshipped in hundreds of places. Although the church authorities have argued that the blackness had been caused by candle smoke or by other irrelevant causes, it has become clearer that these arguments have been largely suggested to divert our attention. The fact that for centuries the church authorities have struggled to suppress the worship of the Black Madonna and unfortunately during this process managed to destroy many of her statues or repaint them to a more acceptable skin colour, has provided enough evidence that these authorities knew very well that the blackness had a ‘pagan’ origin that did not fit into their Christian outlook.



*The Black Madonna at le Puy en Velay,
France*

Anyway, the worship of the Virgin Mary in her various manifestations – sometimes with, sometimes without a child – has managed to survive from the distant past all the way to the present. In this article I will try to make it clear why I believe that she *had* to survive and why I think her symbolism

has never lost its relevance – and is also meaningful for people with no Catholic background like me. I am convinced that her symbolism does not belong to a particular religion, and that she speaks a universal language to us all.

The mother and her child

The mother's body is the first experience in anybody's individual life, as has been pointed out by the American mythologist Joseph Campbell. According to him, the mother with a child is the basic image of mythology. He argues that there is a mythic participation between the mother and the child and between the child and the mother, and that our early experience of the earth and the whole universe as a mother is being taken along into our adult experience. Importantly, Campbell adds that feeling in relationship to the universe like a child to the mother makes you feel in complete harmony with the universe.¹

In every individual mother the Earth Mother or Earth Goddess, the gigantic living being that was called Gaia by the Ancient Greeks and also by a growing number of scientists today, is reflected. From her body, which includes the atmosphere that envelops all planetary life like a matrix, all life on the planet is born from her body and all life will return to it. The inclusion of the cycles of life into her imagery is wonderfully captured by the concept of the Triple Goddess, which has been imagined as the three stages of womanhood – as maiden, matron and crone – thereby pointing to the various cycles of perpetual change. Her triple form is meaningful in different ways: it expresses the ongoing cycle of the seasons in which all earthly life is embedded, and in particular the cycle of our human life from birth, through death onto rebirth. Spatially it is reflected in the distinction between the upper world, the middle world and the underworld – worlds whose interconnectedness and oneness were expressed by the tree, with its roots reaching deep into the earth and its branches reaching out towards the sky. But she also provides an answer to the dualistic tensions arising within human life – between light and dark, mind and matter, good and evil, etc. She shows that these poles are not really opposites and are always united and transcended by a third factor. The Taoist Yin/Yang symbol, whose third factor is represented by the circle containing the Yin and Yang, expressed something similar.² We come back to that below.

Connectedness to earth

In the transformation process from the Goddess to the Virgin Mary unfortunately important qualities of the Goddess have largely been lost, in particular her triple quality, her intimate connection to the earth and its natural cycles. As is well known, the Virgin was not an official part of Christianity in the first centuries of its existence, and it might well be that in those centuries her role has gradually been transformed and reduced to that of *Theotokos*, Mother of God, by which she was officially included in the Christian doctrine at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. The first centuries have been used by the Church to shape its doctrine and to exclude the deviant views that didn't fit in. It is, for instance, well known that Gnostic views were suppressed and their texts – of which parts have been rediscovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 – were excluded.

In the development of its doctrine the Church had become focused entirely on the realm of Heaven. The Christian life had become associated



Geertgen tot Sint Jans, about 1490

with eternal life that was raised above our temporal earthly existence – which increasingly had become identified as the dangerous realm of the Devil.³ In the view of the Church real life for Christians only began when this earthly life was over, in Heaven, which was supposed to be located somewhere far above the earth. Understandably, this view also left little space for an earthly connection in the worship of the Virgin Mary: the dragon- or serpentlike creature which Mary often trampled under her feet (as can be seen in many statues and paintings) even expressed a conscious suppression of it, which

needed to be repeated. In the view of the Church Mary's life and being – just like that of Jesus and God – only made sense in connection to the transcendental heavenly region.⁴ It also implied that the entire field of sensual experience could have no place in the worship of Mary either. As we will see below, however, this sensual world does play an important role

in her worship practices and therefore the church authorities have never been fully comfortable with these practices.

This is what the heritage of the Black Madonna makes so interesting, because this is the tradition par excellence that has preserved the connection to the natural world. As Annine van der Meer has pointed out in her very interesting book about the Black Madonna, a lot of the handed-down stories about the genesis of its worship tell us about the discovery of a statue of the Madonna in some remote place in nature: near a well, a tree, a forest, on a mountain. Often this remote place had been used by pre-Christian cultures. The discovery was often made first by an animal: a cow or a sheep. Another striking element is that attempts to remove the statue to an urban area or a town often turned out to be unsuccessful as the statue kept on returning to the place in nature where she was first discovered. Sometimes the people came to a compromise: in the autumn, winter and spring the Madonna remains in the urban area or town, and in the summer there is a procession to the place where she was found.⁵

These stories show that in the worship of the Black Madonna the intimate connection to the local natural environment was still alive. And of course it had not started with this worship, for she had simply provided a Christian banner to an already existing pre-Christian Goddess heritage. From her worship we can gain a pretty good idea how widespread the Goddess heritage once must have been in the specific regions.

The resistance of the Black Madonna statues to being moved to another location is very telling. It tells us that these statues were not dead objects but truly subjects that are alive, with a will of their own. In other words, these statues should not be considered mere *idols* – which means that the worship is directed at the statues themselves, without any context – but living *icons* that are intimately connected to a specific place and in fact are essentially ‘intermediaries’ to open the human mind to the sacred dimension of that place.⁶ In this respect Jean Markale has pointed out that every statue loses something of its essential meaning when it is removed from the place where it has originated and belongs to a museum: ‘If, in very ancient times, a statue had been erected in a carefully determined place, then its presence asserted itself there as an element of concentration, of crystallization, of different magnetic currents, telluric and cosmic. In this sense, the statue was indispensable to this precise spot. Once moved (...) this statue lost all its power. And if we follow this line of reasoning through

to the end, we have to conclude that all statues, so-called pagan as well as Christian ones, that have been saved from destruction and sheltered in museums lost all spiritual or religious value. (...) Any statue exiled in a museum becomes a lifeless object.⁷ Because these statues lost their living quality as a result of this moving process, in fact it meant that they turned from icons into idols.

The Madonna of Mercy

For me the Goddess heritage is also beautifully expressed by the paintings and statues of the Madonna della Misericordia, the Madonna of Mercy. Here the Virgin gives shelter to a group of people under her large mantle. Like the Earth Goddess she is still the matrix in which the people are fully embedded, who therefore feel very safe and very much part of her being.



The Madonna della Misericordia, in Venice, Italy

The large cloak which envelopes the body of many Virgins (as shown in some of the other pictures in this article) gives them a hill-like shape. This brings to mind that the Earth Goddess was often associated or identified with a specific hill or mountain. This could be a natural hill, or an artificial one (like Silbury Hill in England) – a sacred hill in the shape of a pregnant womb which was part of the identification of the Goddess with the entire

surrounding landscape. Perhaps the idea has survived in the Germanic folklore about the mountains of Venus in which the Goddess resided, as it appears for instance in the story of Tannhauser; or in the Dutch folklore about White Ladies (*Witte Wieven*) who reputedly had lived in Neolithic burial mounds.⁸



White Ladies in burial mounds, Gerrit van Goedesbergh, 1660

In this context we can also place the traditional belief that human beings were first born from the earth before they were born from an individual mother. According to Mircea Eliade this belief has once been universal. To be born the babies had to hide themselves for a while in caves, moors or wells. There they led a kind of embryo life in the womb of Mother Earth, before they were brought into the world by their mother.⁹

The Shrine Madonna

Closely related to the Madonnas of Mercy are the Shrine Madonnas, in French called *Vierges Ouvrantes*. These are statues depicting the Virgin, whose body can be opened like a little cupboard with two doors. Inside her body images of the Trinity – of God, his Son and the Holy Ghost – can often be found. It is amazing that here Maria is really shown as the Mother of God, suggesting a feminine supremacy in the field of religion. The first *Vierge Ouvrante* dates back to 1200 and was made in central France, and after that the idea managed to spread to other countries in Europe. About 50 of these statues have survived.¹⁰ It is not hard to see that in these statues the

ancient Goddess heritage somehow could be revived – and how it was given shape in a surprisingly imaginative way within a Christian context.

More ‘pagan’ survivals

The representations of the Black Madonna, the Madonna of Mercy and the Shrine Madonna offer us hope with regard to repairing our diminished feeling of connection to the earth and her cycles. But even the more ‘regular’ representations of the Virgin Mary – with or without her child – have managed to maintain significant ‘pagan’ qualities. First there is the central importance of the *imagery* itself in Marian worship, which in this sense is very different from the emphasis on the written word and its interpretation of institutionalized Christianity. And second, the imagery of the Virgin with her child continues the importance given to *both the feminine and the masculine* as it had been expressed for a very long time by the Goddess and her son/lover. This imagery shows that they should always be considered together in mutual relationship to each other.



Shrine of the Virgin, Germany, about 1300

The importance of imagery

Let us have a look at the first element, the importance of imagery. Although Christianity is part of the Judeo-Christian heritage, in which the sacred was revealed through the written words in the holy books of the Thora, the Bible and the Koran, among the ‘common’ people an older approach to the sacred was kept alive, through the use of imagery. In this respect Leonard Shlain has argued convincingly in his book *The Alphabet versus the Goddess* that in Goddess worship imagery was primal and the feminine was highly regarded, whereas in the monotheistic religions of the Judeo-Christian heritage the written word became central and subsequently the feminine was suppressed (which implied a subordination of women as well).¹¹ These religions not only emphasized the written word, but kept on struggling fiercely against all forms of worship in which the use of imagery

was prominent – thus, in particular against the Goddess heritage. Because the Marian worship was hardly based on texts in the Bible and was being kept alive largely through the use of powerful imagery, understandably the Church authorities have always been quite suspicious of this worship and initially have tried to suppress and even eradicate it. When it turned out that that they had been unsuccessful in it, and were not very likely going to be successful, they saw no other option but to transform it into something acceptable – as has happened after 431 AD.

Somehow the prominent use of imagery in Marian worship has managed to persist and is shown on different occasions. First it can be seen in the way the Virgin has often been depicted on the church altar: both she and her child usually wear beautiful crowns, she often wears a richly embroidered dress and they often are surrounded by an overwhelming arrangement of golden and silvery creations, which are mysteriously shining due to a play of soft light, and often provided with additional colour with bunches of flowers. Although the child is missing in the depiction of *la Virgen de la Macarena* in Seville, it is a telling example of this splendor. But you can find many other examples of this.¹²



La Virgen de la Macarena in Seville, Spain

Second, there are the many processions dedicated to the Virgin Mary. When on one day of the year she is taken out of the church, carried through

the streets and fields during a procession, the emphasis is once more on the senses and extra attention is put on her splendid imagery. Of course historically these processions go back to the time before the invention of the printing press, when the majority of the people never had even a look in the few copies of the Bible in the possession of the Church and probably couldn't even read. But now that most people can read and the processions have still not stopped. The city streets, the landscapes that are passed through, the lights and music to accompany it, all serve to heighten the sensual nature of the experience.

Third, imagery has often played a central role to get local forms of Marian worship going. As we have said earlier, the worship of the Black Madonna was often started after reputedly a statue had been found somewhere in nature – in a cave, near a well, in a tree – and often managed to keep her connection to these specific spots alive. This linked the worship with the sensual experience of surrounding nature. In other cases local forms of Marian worship had started after the Virgin had appeared to some people, often to some innocent children. And usually this apparition also happened in some natural environment, far away from the towns and cities, in a cave or on a mountain. Large crowds of people were drawn to these specific localities to try and witness the event for themselves. Famous in this regard are for instance the apparitions at Lourdes, Fatima, Knock, and Beauraing. Yet she hasn't always avoided urban areas, for she has even appeared – as is well known to most Dutch people – right in the centre of Amsterdam. With a special message, as we will see below.

Generally we can say that in Marian worship the power of imagery came to the foreground and the power of the written word was diminished. If we follow the arguments of Leonard Shlain, the importance of the use of imagery in Marian worship points to a continuation or revival of the Goddess heritage. This is even strengthened by the fact that the power of the imagery during the processions and apparitions has helped to revive the sacred connection to the earth, to the surrounding natural environment. Quite literally all these forms of expression of the Marian worship have helped, and are still helping, to bring the transcended, heavenly focus of Christianity back down to earth – back to the immanent experience of the sacred. It made us aware again that the Holy Land is right where we are at this moment: the landscape around us.

Balance in our dual nature

And now we turn to the second element that has survived from the ‘pagan’ past: the way in which the Virgin with her child represents both the feminine and the masculine and it is ‘captured’ in one image. This representation goes back a long way, and can even be traced back to the Paleolithic Age, to the self-fertilizing Goddesses which – by including a phallic element in their depiction – were androgynous in character. In the Neolithic Age the masculine separated itself and then in many different religions / mythologies we meet a Goddess with her son/lover. They are known under many names: Inanna and Dumuzi, Ishtar and Tammuz, Asherah and El/Jahweh, Kybele and Attis, Isis and Osiris/Horus, Aphrodite/Venus and Adonis, and many other local variations of these pairs.¹³ In this respect Mary and her son are part of a long tradition. As has been argued by others as well, the self-fertilizing element of the Paleolithic Goddess might still be expressed by the virgin quality of Mary.



*Gallo-Roman Dea Nutrix
figurines, found in a well at
Auxerre, France*

It is obvious that in the imagery of the Virgin with her child the feminine and masculine are not in equal size and age. But they are definitely equivalent. In the way the feminine and masculine are shown, they complement and balance each other. In this sense their symbolism is comparable to the Taoist Yin/Yang symbol, in which both the feminine dark and the masculine light are presented as complementary forces and not as poles which are dualistically opposing each other.¹⁴ Yet in the Marian imagery the emphasis is a little bit different. After all, it shows that in our dual nature the feminine is always the larger phenomenon, the much more encompassing power. The smaller masculine is loved, being cared for by the larger feminine, and feels protected in her embrace or sits safely on her lap. This does not, however, express a hierarchical order, for it is not a question of one being on a higher or lower level. We should also realize that this is a symbolic expression that is not directly referring to women and men, but to feminine and masculine qualities which both women and men

possess, at least potentially. Both these qualities need one another, and we must consider each of equivalent importance to maintain a balanced life. These feminine qualities for instance entail being cooperative, caring, empathic, soft, open-minded and interconnected, and the masculine qualities being competitive, combative, tough, rational, reserved and independent. As we have already pointed out, these are not equal to each other but *equivalent*, and it shows that the positive qualities are not equal to the negative ones, but much *more powerful*. They can heal the negative qualities, but before they can do this, we must know individually that this feminine side exists within us – within all of us, men included.

So the fact that our human nature is essentially a dual nature was not really a recent discovery: it was in any case already known to the Chinese Taoists. But it has later been confirmed by many thinkers from various backgrounds, also in our time. In this regard the Dutch anthropologist Jan van Baal has made it clear that on the one hand we are born from and remain inextricably connected to the universe, but on the other hand as subjects we are opposing the world around us.¹⁵ Our connected side is the deeper and larger part of ourselves, which manifests itself in the form of feminine qualities; and our opposing side is the smaller part of ourselves, residing more on the surface, which manifests itself in the form of masculine qualities. The experience of our self as a subject that van Baal refers to is what psychologists have, of course, called the ego. These two sides do not exist in us to draw us into an ongoing conflict between each other (with the ego projecting it on the outside world, as we can still see happening all over the world), but invite us to find a balance between them – in ourselves and in the world around us. This is what the images of the Virgin Mary with her child can inspire us to.

The meaning of equivalence can be experienced by simply looking around us, at night time and during the day. On a clear night we are directly looking at a cosmos of unimaginably large proportions; in the day time, however, on a clear day our view is always limited by the blue sky, by the atmosphere around the earth. During the night we know that the day exists, and visa versa, but both can be so powerfully present that the other seems to have almost disappeared entirely. In the Yin-Yang symbol there is the black dot in the white side and the white dot in the black side: however small, the other side always remains present, and there is an ongoing alteration of the two sides, powered by the dots. The imagery of the Goddess with her

son/lover and Mary with her child might help to make us more aware of the fact that also during the day we remain fully embraced by or embedded in a dark but ‘benevolent cosmos’.¹⁶

The difference between dark and light is also revealed by merely looking up to the clear sky at night: we can see that the darkness surrounding the stars is much larger and encompassing than the little dots of starlight. There is only one immeasurable field of darkness, and the tangible and visible lights of the stars are many, apparently countless. Everything that is manifesting can do so because it is always embraced and fed by much larger fields, invisible matrices which (like wombs) make all life and growth possible. Our distant ancestors, who spent much more time outdoors than we and unavoidably must have experienced the darkness at night much more intensely, must also have been spiritually much more aware of the power of these matrices. As I have argued in my book *The Survival and Revival of the Goddess Heritage*, I believe that this kind of awareness was at the heart of the Goddess Heritage – and that the Virgin Mary is one of the ways in which (part of) this heritage has managed to survive.



Starry night over the Rhône, Vincent van Gogh, 1888

In our modern world, with much more time spent indoors, with its emphasis on the day time and the extensive use of electric lighting to cancel the dark, we might have lost the awareness that we are always enveloped in these kinds of invisible matrices, which exist on different levels, and help us to grow not only biologically but also psychologically and spiritually. On a biological, material level a matrix manifests itself in the female womb. We can see how first a tiny male sperm being (one of many!) nests itself and gets embedded in one comparably gigantic female egg, and how in the safe matrix of the womb the fetus can grow into a baby. On a planetary level we have the changing seasons, the green appearing in spring and later the flowers and the fruits, all of them temporary and tangible manifestations of the unmanifested.

On a psychological and spiritual level we can become aware of the limitations of our own ego and that it is born from and always remains embedded in the much larger unconsciousness – as the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung has advocated. Now that we know that our sense of being separated from the world around us, and increasingly identifying with it, with our ego, is probably not much older than 6000 years (see Steve Taylor’s book *The Fall* on this theme¹⁷), this means that our awareness of its limitation only became possible after that. This new awareness even had to wait until our time. It connects us back to an ancient awareness of being an integral part of the larger web of life, which for instance has been powerfully expressed by Native American Chief Seattle (‘Man did not

weave the thread of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself’).

In fact, it is all about acknowledging and accepting the power of the darkness in our lives. In this regard the American religious thinker Matthew Fox believes that the Black Madonna can help us with this process. According to him she is an appropriate symbol for our time. He describes twelve gifts that she brings to our time, like the fact that she calls us to the darkness, into our depths of our own being and to honor the lower chakras, but also that



*The Black Madonna at
Rocamadour, France*

she reconnects us to the ‘Great Cosmic Mother’.¹⁸ So he believes that the Black Madonna provides us with a kind of opening to the older Goddess heritage: she could help us further with the reintegration of the element of darkness into our modern world, and it would also ecologically be a very welcome reappraisal of the cyclic quality of nature.

A bottom-up movement

What is particularly interesting about the worship of Mary is the fact that it was not the result of a process of imposition by a powerful Church in a *top-down* way. The worship has begun and has primarily been kept alive in a *bottom-up* way. It reflected a deep need that lived in the hearts of the ‘common’ people. Apparently they could not accept a religion which only satisfied masculine sentiments and lacked a feminine representative. As we have pointed out already, in 431 the church authorities gave in and integrated her anyway into the church doctrine under the title ‘Mother of God’.

Although the mention of God in this title was of course supposed to refer to Jesus Christ as the representative of God on earth, we may wonder why was Mary not simply given the title ‘Mother of Jesus’ or ‘Mother of Christ’. After all, the title that was chosen implies that God did not exist yet at the beginning and the Mother had clearly preceded him. This fact, together with the persisting need among the people for a feminine representative, strengthens the evidence that Christianity has tried to replace an existing heritage that turned out to be very strong and deeply rooted – namely the Goddess heritage.

Not belonging to any specific religion

As we know that the worship of Mary can largely be qualified as the continuation of Goddess worship, which already existed in the region and from which it could quite simply borrow its symbolism, her essence does not really belong to any specific religion. As we have said earlier, before the image of the Virgin Mary and her child there was the image of the Goddess with her son/lover was known under many different names in many different religions / mythologies. In another way the apparitions of the Virgin Mary that have been reported also show that she never really belonged to any specific religion. Often the apparitions were first reported by children, like has been the case in Lourdes and Fatima. These children

reported initially that they had seen a mysterious female figure, which only later was identified by the church authorities as the Virgin Mary. What if



Popular depiction of the apparition of Mary by Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, France

these kinds of apparitions had occurred in other times and places, quite unrelated to Christianity? When they had occurred before the rise of Christianity, it is conceivable that the apparitions were recognized as a manifestation of the locally worshipped Goddess. Who knows, these kinds of apparitions might have already happened a lot to our distant ancestors who were much more often intensely confronted with the surrounding natural world, and therefore also felt intimately connected it. Feminine apparitions might even have been responsible for the anthropomorphic depictions of the Goddess...

Not connected to any specific nation

The worship of Mary is also not connected to any specific parish, region or nation. She has always been depicted differently from parish to parish, from region to region and even from nation to nation, as can still be witnessed by the many different ways she has been sculpted or painted through the centuries.¹⁹ Somehow worshippers know that their local or national depiction is only a specific manifestation of the Virgin, of her ungraspable mysterious being which transcends all borders.

History has shown, and is still showing today, that monotheistic, masculine Gods can easily be used to defend one's country or to attack another one. In warfare the Gods appear to have little problem – at least according to their worshippers – with taking sides in a conflict. In this sense Mary, like her predecessor the Goddess, has always been entirely different in nature. As has been pointed out for the Celtic religion by archaeologist Barry Cunliffe, all Goddesses in the Irish tradition of Celtic mythology have been reflections of the Mother Earth Goddess and all masculine Gods reflections of the Tribal God.²⁰ The Celtic scholar Proinsias Mac Cana subscribed to this difference and added that the sacred sovereignty,

imagined mythologically by the Goddess as the personification of the land, has been a permanent and fundamental element of the Irish tradition and that similar conceptions have also existed elsewhere.²¹ This connection to the land implied that the Goddess did not belong to any specific tribe or nation.

In the apparitions of Mary in Amsterdam in the 1940s and 1950s she is supposed to have emphasized regularly that from then on she did not want to be called Mary anymore but 'Lady of all peoples'. This was another way of saying that she did not want to be claimed any longer by a specific religion, tribe or nation. In fact, here she expressed something which has always been at the heart of the Goddess heritage.

Connecting to the scientific field

Earlier we have shown how the imagery of Mary with her child, and the Goddess with her son/lover before her, has symbolically expressed the balance in our dual nature, the balance between the feminine and the masculine. I think it is not a coincidence that in our time the field theories in science, of which several variations have been developed, are telling us something similar. How do they connect to each other?

In this respect it is good to tell something first about the distinction between *Zoe* and *Bios* made by Anne Baring and Jules Cashford in their book *The Myth of the Goddess*. In their view the Goddess creates from the level of *Zoe*, which is the eternal, invisible matrix or cosmic womb from which all life is born and to which it returns again. *Bios* is the temporal, tangible sphere of life that rises from her intangible being. The distinction between the Goddess and her son/lover is in fact expressing the distinction between *Zoe* and *Bios*. *Zoe* is the realm of the soul, which has traditionally been considered feminine in nature; and *Bios* – the way in which *Zoe* is manifesting itself continually on a material level, as plants, rivers and mountains, as grains and fruits, as human beings, etc – has traditionally been considered masculine in nature. (And I bring to mind once more that the feminine and masculine refer to qualities which exist in both women and men.) As said, we can distinguish the two realms but we cannot separate them. They are part of our dual nature.

When with the rise of Christianity Mary and her son took over the role of the Goddess and her son/lover, this implied that from then on it was primarily Mary who was associated with *Zoe*, with the eternal and

unmanifested dimension. And, like the annually rising and dying god, her son was associated with Bios, with the temporary and manifested world.²² Both the imagery of the Goddess with her son/lover and of Mary with her son on her lap or in her arms expresses the idea that the realm of unmanifested always loves the material world. By embracing it, she cares for it and protects it. In this sense dual nature is essentially a living, animated nature, a sacred natural world, with all living beings and all landscapes in it sharing this sacred quality.

Now the surprising thing is that these two realms are also distinguished in the scientific field theories which have arisen from quantum theory. In them the existence of a deep dimension beyond space and time is acknowledged from which the material realm is continually created. In this respect Max Planck, who received the Nobel prize for his development of the quantum theory in 1918, already stated in 1944: 'There is no matter as such. All matter originates and exists by virtue of a force which brings the particle of an atom into vibration and holds this most minute solar system together.' 'We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent Mind. This Mind is the matrix of all matter.'²³

Planck inspired a good few modern researchers. Well known in this regard are Ervin Laszlo's theory about *the Akashic Field*, Rupert Sheldrake's theory about *morphic fields*, and Lynne McTaggart's theory about *the Field*.²⁴ Also David Bohm's theory about *the implicate and explicate order* fits into this category.²⁵ In Planck's terms they all agree that beyond space and time there is a conscious and intelligent Mind which is the matrix of all matter. His concept of *the matrix* is simply another word for *the field*. In fact, it is even a better word because by naming it 'matrix' – which is related to both 'matter' and 'mother' – its essential feminine nature, its womb quality, is emphasized. The most important feature of a matrix or a womb is the fact it offers to new life a safe place to grow, as has been argued by Joseph Chilton Pearce in his book *The Magical Child*.²⁶ We have seen earlier that the term *Zoe*, with its relation to *Bios*, expresses something similar. So the initial idea about it goes back a very long way.

Interestingly, Rupert Sheldrake has pointed out that the concept of *the field* is simply a new scientific name for something that in earlier, less scientific, times was called *the soul*. If we bring back to mind that *Zoe* is qualified as the realm of the soul, this means that by developing the field theories science has not only taken a daring step with descending from *Bios*

to the deeper level of Zoe, but simultaneously has allowed spirituality to enter its domain. This is the earthly form of spirituality that once had been expressed by the worship of the Goddess and her son/lover and later still echoed on, however faintly sometimes it might have become, by the worship of the Virgin Mary and her child.

Seen in this light, it is understandable why the imagery of Mary with her child has survived for so long, even *had* to survive and keeps on expressing something which is deeply connected to our being human. Therefore I think we do well to keep on cherishing her, as much as we can.

Let it be

I like to conclude this article with some words from the song 'Let it be' by the Beatles:

'When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be
And in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be'...

At the time when the song was in the charts I had little clue what this song really was about. Later Paul McCartney has revealed that he wrote this song in the period when the Beatles were breaking up: 'One night during this tense time I had a dream. I saw my mum, who'd been dead ten years or so. It was so wonderful for me and she was very reassuring. In the dream she said "It'll be all right"'. Mary was the name of his mother.²⁷

This is a beautiful example of Joseph Campbell's insight that we have mentioned earlier about the mythic participation between the mother and the child in early childhood, and the way this experience is still alive and meaningful in our adult life. McCartney's dead mother is still alive in his dream and is not only his own individual mother, but a much larger mythic being, the protective Mother Earth Goddess, the Virgin Mary. Through his song her message is spread to all humanity: she is telling us that everything will turn out OK when we can accept life as it is. A wonderful message with a lasting archetypal power that is reaching much further than the breakup of the Beatles, and might help to pull us through the various crises threatening us today.

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Notes

¹ Joseph Campbell, *Mythos I, The Shaping of Our Mythic Tradition, part 3: On Being Human*, DVD, Joseph Campbell Foundation 2007.

² Adam McLean has argued that duality is transcended by the Triple Goddess. Adam McLean, *The Triple Goddess. An Exploration of the Archetypal Feminine*, Phanes Press, Grand Rapids USA 1989, p. 10-12. Sukie Colegrave has shown that the Ying-Yang symbol is an expression of the Goddess heritage: Sukie Colegrave, *The Spirit of the Valley, Androgyny and Chinese Thought*, Virago, London.

³ In fact, the association of the Devil with the earthly regions goes back to the story of Genesis, in which Satan in the shape of a snake seduces Eve in paradise to eat from the apple.

⁴ Due to the separation of Mary from the earthly context Marina Warner has argued that she could not be a good example for women to follow: Marina Warner, *Alone of all her sex. The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, Weidenfelt and Nicolson, London 1976.

I think it is not coincidental that the triple form of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit could only come to life when Goddess had lost her triple quality in the transformation process to the Virgin Mary. But the three aspects of God did not have the quality anymore of representing the natural cycles of life.

⁵ Annine van der Meer, *De Zwarte Madonna van Oer- tot Eindtijd. De Moeder van Donker en Licht en haar dochter Maria Magdalena*, Pansophia Press 2015, p. 59 and further. An English edition of this book is forthcoming.

⁶ My attention was drawn to this important distinction by Annine van der Meer: Annine van der Meer, *Venus is geen vamp*,

⁷ Jean Markale, *The Great Goddess. Reverence to the Divine Feminine from the Paleolithic to the Present*, Inner Traditions, Rochester 1999, p. 36-37.

⁸ Aat van Gilst, *De Sagen van de Vrouwenbergen*, Uitgeverij Aspekt, Soesterberg 2006.

⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, 164/164.

¹⁰ I found some interesting information about the Shrine Madonna on a website run by a Dutch researcher into feminine spirituality, Han Marie Stiekema: <https://www.healingtheplanet.info/>. I only discovered his website recently, but apparently he has already been active in the field of feminine spirituality for a few decades. His website is a bit dated, but worth investigating.

¹¹ Leonard Shlain, *The Alphabet versus the Goddess. Male Words and Female Images*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London 1998.

¹² Marie-France Boyer, *The Cult of the Virgin. Offerings, Ornaments and Festivals*, Thames & Hudson, London 2000. This book contains many beautiful photos showing the incredibly rich imagery of Marian worship.

¹³ For a good overview of the Goddesses with their son/lover, see: Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess. Evolution of an Image*, Penguin, London 1991.

¹⁴ Interesting in this respect is the fact that when Christianity spread to Buddhist China the imagery of the Virgin Mary has had a direct influence on the imagery of the Goddess Kwan Yin. Martin Palmer, Jay Ramsay, Man-Ho Kwok, *Guanyin. Mythen en profetieën van de Chinese Godin van Mededogen*, Altamria-Becht, Haarlem 2001, p. 9.

¹⁵ J. Van Baal, *Man's Quest for Partnership*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1981.

¹⁶ These words I have borrowed from the English holistic therapist and spiritual writer William Bloom: William Bloom, *The Power of Modern Spirituality. How to live a life of compassion and personal fulfillment*, Piatkus, London 2011.

¹⁷ Steve Taylor, *The Fall. The Insanity of The Ego in Human History and The Dawning of A New Era*, O Books, Winchester 2005.

¹⁸ Matthew Fox, *The Return of the Black Madonna. A Sign of Our Times or How the Black Madonna Is Shaking Us Up for the Twenty-First Century*. This article dating from 2006 is available on his website: <http://www.matthewfox.org/blog/the-return-of-the-black-madonna-a-sign-of-our-times-or-how-the-black-madonna-is-shaking-us-up-for-the-twenty-first-century>

¹⁹ Jo Claes, *De vele gedaantes van Maria. Meer dan 500 afbeeldingen uit de Lage Landen*, DavidsFonds/Uitgeverij Kok, Leuven/Kampen 2011. This beautifully illustrated book contains pictures of more than 500 different statues and paintings of the Virgin from the Netherlands and Belgium. Not two of them are the same.

²⁰ Barry Cunliffe, *The Celtic World*, BCA London, 1992, p. 72.

²¹ Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, Chancellor Press, London, 1997, p. 19, 25 en 92-93.

²² Perhaps it is good to add here that this relationship was changed radically due to the so-called patriarchal reversal (as for instance described by Joseph Campbell as the 'Great Reversal') and the subsequent rise of dualism, which happened several thousands of years ago. As a result of that reversal women and the feminine became associated with the 'low world' of nature and matter, whereas men elevated themselves and the masculine to the 'high world' of culture and spirit. With this, an apparently unbridgeable hierarchical distance was created between them, which could continue until the present. But fortunately now the natural order of things is revived again from different angles: Mary and her child as inheritors of the Goddess heritage have never stopped expressing it, and the modern field theories in science also help to revitalize it.

²³ Quoted in: Ervin Laszlo and others, *What is reality. The New Map of Cosmos and Consciousness*, Select Books, New York, 2016, p. 7. This basis insight of the field theories disagrees completely with the still popular materialistically inspired scientific idea that our consciousness is a product of our brain cells. After all, when Mind is the matrix of all matter, this means that consciousness creates the brain cells.

²⁴ Ervin Laszlo, *Science and the Reenchantment of the Cosmos. The Rise of the Integral Vision of Reality*, Inner Traditions, Rochester 2006; Ervin Laszlo, *The Chaos Point. The World at the Crossroads*, Hampton Roads, Charlottesville 2006; Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past. The Habits of Nature*, Park Street Press, Rochester 1995; Lynne McTaggart, *The Field. The Quest for the Secret Force in the Universe*, HarperCollins, New York 2003.

²⁵ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, Routledge, London 1980.

²⁶ Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Magical Child. Rediscovering Nature's Plan for our Children*, Bantam Books, New York 1980, p. 18 and further.

²⁷ I found the history behind the song in a book on the importance of sleep by Arianna Huffington. Arianna Huffington, *The Sleep Revolution. Transforming Your Life, One Night at a Time*, W H Allen, London 2016, p. 138.