

# MENDICANT

## Mary: Archetype for the First Incarnation

RICHARD ROHR, OFM

In the mythic imagination, I think Mary intuitively symbolizes the first Incarnation—or Mother Earth, if you will allow me. (I am not saying Mary is the first incarnation, only that she became the natural archetype and symbol for it, particularly in art, which is perhaps why the Madonna is still the most painted subject in Western art.) I believe that Mary is the major feminine archetype for the Christ Mystery. This archetype had already shown herself as Sophia or Holy Wisdom (see Proverbs 8, Wisdom 7:7–14), and again in the book of Revelation (12:1–17) in the cosmic symbol of “a woman clothed with the sun and standing on the moon.” Neither Sophia nor the woman of Revelation is precisely Mary of Nazareth; yet, in so many ways, both are—and each broadens our understanding of the Divine Feminine.

Jung believed that humans produce in art the inner images the soul needs in order to see itself and to allow its own transformation. So many paintings in world art museums, churches, and homes show a wonderfully dressed woman offering for your admiration—and hers—a usually naked baby boy! What is the very ubiquity of this image saying, on the soul level? I think it looks something like this: The first incarnation (creation) is symbolized by Sophia, a beautiful, feminine, multicolored, graceful Mary. She is invariably offering us Jesus, God incarnated into vulnerability and

nakedness. Mary became the Symbol of the First Universal Incarnation.

She then hands the Second Incarnation on to us, while remaining in the background; the focus is always on the child. Earth Mother presenting Spiritual Son, the two first stages of the Incarnation. Feminine Receptivity, handing on the fruit of her yes, and inviting us to offer our own yes. There is a wholeness about this that many find very satisfying to the soul.



COPYRIGHT © 2010 JANET INCENZIE WWW.JANETINCENZIE.COM. COLLECTION OF EDDIE S. CLAUDE, JR.

In the many images of Mary, humans see our own feminine soul.

Mary is all of us, both receiving and handing on the gift. We liked her precisely because she was one of us—and not God! I think Christians of the first thousand years understood this on an intuitive and allegorical level. However, by the time of the much-needed Protestant Reformation, all we could see was, “but she is not God.” This is entirely true—and we could no longer see in wholes, and see that, even better, “She is us!”

I have to say this! In the many images of Mary, humans see our own feminine soul. We needed to see ourselves in her and say, with her, “God

[continued on page 2]

# She Is God. She Is Love.

JACQUELINE J. LEWIS

It makes sense that because white men created so much of religion, the image of God was an old white man with grey hair. However, this image needs a makeover because he's no longer working.

My God is a curvy black woman with dreadlocks and dark, cocoa-brown skin. She laughs from her belly and is unashamed to cry. She can rock a whole world to sleep, singing in her contralto voice. Her sighs breathe life into humanity. Her heartbreaks cause eruptions of justice and love.

Of course, because God is a mystery, we don't know everything about Her. So, out of our imaginations and our yearnings, our hopes and our fears, we make stuff up. At our best, we project goodness, power, kindness, and love onto God. At our worst, we create a God who is punitive, angry, judgmental, and harsh. We do this because we are those things, and we think they make us safe.

Projection itself is not the problem. The problem occurs when we don't examine those projections with a critical eye, with a hermeneutic of suspicion. The issue is that we write laws that codify the shadow parts of the god we create in order to diminish others, to abuse others. The trouble starts when our god is too small, when we reduce our worst projections to fit in our pocket and keep this god on our team. When we neglect to confront



My God is an incarnate feminine power, who smells like vanilla and is full of sass and truth, delivered with kindness.

this created god, we get the Crusades and the Doctrine of Discovery; the murder of indigenous people and Jews; apartheid and enslaved Africans; sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia—all in the name of the too-puny god that is the worst of ourselves.

I know I've got my projections. They are inspired by my imagination and by textual studies. In Hebrew, the words for womb and mercy have the same root, and the word for spirit is feminine: *ruach*. In Greek, the word *pneuma* has a feminine article, the word *Sophia* stands for wisdom, and the word *agape*—God's love for us—is also a feminine word. Therefore, my God is an incarnate feminine power, who smells like vanilla and is full of sass and truth, delivered with kindness. She'll do anything for her creation; her love is fierce. She weeps when we do and insists on justice. She is God. She is Love.

THE REV. DR. JACQUELINE J. LEWIS, a recent presenter at the CAC-sponsored Universal Christ conference, is a womanist whose preaching, teaching, speaking, writing, and activism are aimed at racial equality, gun control, economic justice, and equal rights for people of all sexual orientations and genders. She is the author of *The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multi-Racial and Multi-Cultural Congregations*. To learn more about Jacqueline J. Lewis, please visit <https://www.middlechurch.org/ministers/Rev-Jacqueline-J-Lewis>.

## Mary: Archetype for the First Incarnation

RICHARD ROHR, OFM

[continued from page 1]

has looked upon me in my lowliness. From now on, all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). I do realize the dangers here, and I acknowledge that, for all practical purposes, many Catholics divinized Mary, probably out of sentimentality. All the same, I invite you to consider the deeper and more subtle message: Humans like, need, and

trust our mothers to give us gifts, to nurture us, and always to forgive us, which is what we want from God.

This article is an edited excerpt from Richard Rohr's newly published book, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*. To learn more about the book, please visit [universalchrist.org](http://universalchrist.org).

# Indwelling and Outflowing

MIRABAI STARR

As you have undoubtedly noticed, the feminine is rising at last, overflowing the banks of every landscape from politics to religion, from the world of entertainment to the fields of peace and justice. She is unconditionally loving, and she is deliciously irreverent. She is shifting the global paradigm from one of dominance and individualized salvation to one of collective awakening and service to all beings.

Her wisdom has been hidden in the heart of each of the great spiritual traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and all indigenous wisdom ways. Access to these jewels has required excavation, but the treasures that have emerged are transfiguring the soul of the world, offering medicine for the broken heart of humanity and the materials needed to mend the torn fabric of the earth.

Ever since I was a young girl, I have been inexorably drawn to every religion I encountered. Born into a non-religious Jewish family, I had embraced multiple spiritual traditions by the time I was twenty and integrated them into my daily life: a deep devotion to an Indian saint, a daily Buddhist meditation practice, initiation into multiple Sufi lineages, a reclamation of the ancient beauty of my ancestral home in Judaism, and an unexpected friendship with Christ through the mystics, whose words I have since translated. Each of these paths has comingled in my being, creating a rich and robust spiritual soil.

It is the Christian women mystics who have become my most cherished

The feminine is rising at last. . . . She is shifting the global paradigm from one of dominance and individualized salvation to one of collective awakening and service to all beings.



spiritual sisters and role models. The sixteenth-century Spanish mystic Teresa of Ávila has shown me what it looks like to cultivate ecstatic intimacy with God in the center of my own being and also find my Beloved “living among the pots and pans.” The medieval Rhineland visionary Hildegard of Bingen praises God’s greening energy in every particle of creation, helping me to glimpse the face of the One in all that is. The English anchoress Julian of Norwich had a near-death experience in which Christ revealed himself as an unconditionally loving Mother who continuously breaks Herself open and pours Herself out to her children, endlessly forgiving and enthusiastically adoring us.

Through each of these wise women, I have come to recognize the holiness of incarnation. There is nothing in this gorgeous, messy world, not a thing in my own imperfect perfection, no place in the scope of the human predicament or the majesty of the natural world that is not, by its very nature, blessed: the chosen dwelling place of the One we love.

MIRABAI STARR writes creative nonfiction and contemporary translations of sacred literature. The author of numerous books, she has received critical acclaim for her revolutionary translations of the mystics John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila, and Julian of Norwich. Her latest release is *Wild Mercy: Living the Fierce and Tender Wisdom of the Women Mystics*. Mirabai lives with her extended family in the mountains of northern New Mexico. To learn more about Mirabai Starr, please visit <https://www.mirabaistarr.com>.

# We Lovingly Remember...

Shelley Chapin Drake, a beloved friend of the Center for Action and Contemplation, recently passed away after living with cancer for many decades. Shelley's husband, Kirk, shared with us: "No matter what we do, we are held in wonder's presence. I choose to surrender there, to the wonder of presence now, where Shelley is alive and well."

A few weeks before she died, Shelley wrote:

*Kirk and I decided, early on, that what we long to surrender to is not an ideal or a safety net, but Wonder itself...*

*[We] have held on to the concept of Wonder as a guiding concept...a way to focus our attention in*



*these days when life is so uncertain. We have absolutely no idea what the author of Love is asking of us...except we are fairly certain the Beloved One is not asking us to lay claim to any certainties at all. We are fairly sure that the Beloved is simply holding us tight... holding us close...holding us in Pure Love, in the palm of Love's hand... and for what else could we possibly ask?*

*The more we live in the Wonder and welcome our placement in this very heart of Love, the easier it is to trust...to "release our fears"...to live without proclaiming certainties...to settle into this very core we can only call Love.*

Shelley Chapin Drake, "What We Treasure about Wonder," January 20, 2019, <http://www.shelleychapindrake.com/?p=1156>.

## ONLINE COURSES

CAC's online studies are a wonderful way to connect with others on the spiritual path and go deeper with teachings from our faculty.

Registration is currently open for the following courses:

### **MARY MAGDALENE:**

**Apostle to Our Own Times**

MAY 22–JULY 16, 2019

Cynthia Bourgeault sheds light on one of Jesus' most important and beloved disciples.

### **BREATHING UNDER WATER:**

**A Spiritual Study of the Twelve Steps**

JUNE 12–AUGUST 6, 2019

Richard Rohr's classic book blends wisdom from Alcoholics Anonymous and spirituality.

### **THE FRANCISCAN WAY:**

**Beyond the Bird Bath**

JULY 10–AUGUST 27, 2019

Richard Rohr offers a unique window into Franciscan thought and practice.

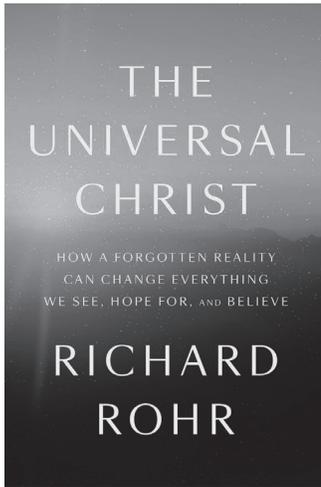
### **IMMORTAL DIAMOND:**

**A Study in Search of the True Self**

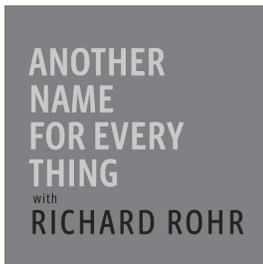
AUGUST 7–OCTOBER 16, 2019

Based on Richard Rohr's book, this course is an opportunity to rediscover the real you.

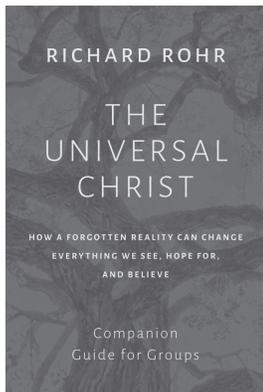
**To register for online courses, please visit <https://cac.org/online-ed>.**



Richard Rohr's new book *The Universal Christ* has recently been released, and we're excited to see so many people experiencing its powerful, inclusive message! We have created a website full of free resources. To learn more about the book, please visit [universalchrist.org](http://universalchrist.org).



In our first conversational podcast, *Another Name for Every Thing*, Richard explores the book chapter by chapter. The final episode of season one comes out May 4. Listen to this and previous episodes on iTunes, Google Play, and other podcast platforms. If you have questions for Richard on the themes of *The Universal Christ*, please share them at [cac.org/podcast](http://cac.org/podcast), and he'll respond in future episodes.



We put together a *Universal Christ* companion guide for groups, including a section to support facilitators. Whether you're already part of a group or would like to start one, we hope this will help you engage more mindfully and contemplatively with the book. The PDF is available for free at [universalchrist.org/#study-guide](http://universalchrist.org/#study-guide) or purchase a printed copy for only \$5 at [store.cac.org](http://store.cac.org).

 Do you have something to say? We'd love to hear what you think of the book. Please use #UniversalChrist to post on social media or leave a review on Amazon or Barnes and Noble.

 Whether or not you've read the book, please check out the Facebook group, Exploring the Universal Christ, where a vibrant community is reflecting on related themes.

## SAVE THE DATES!

Mark your calendar for the final **CONSPIRE** conference exploring Fr. Richard's seven themes of an alternative orthodoxy!

# CONSPIRE | 2020

FRIDAY, MAY 15–SUNDAY, MAY 17  
Albuquerque Convention Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico

(ALSO AVAILABLE AS AN ONLINE WEBCAST)

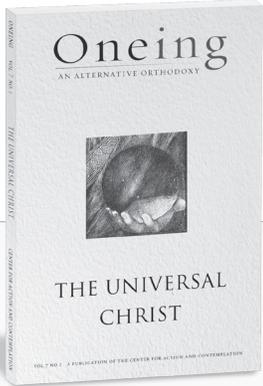
Additional information and registration will be available in the Fall of 2019.



# Center for Action and Contemplation

PO Box 12464 • Albuquerque, NM 87195  
cac.org

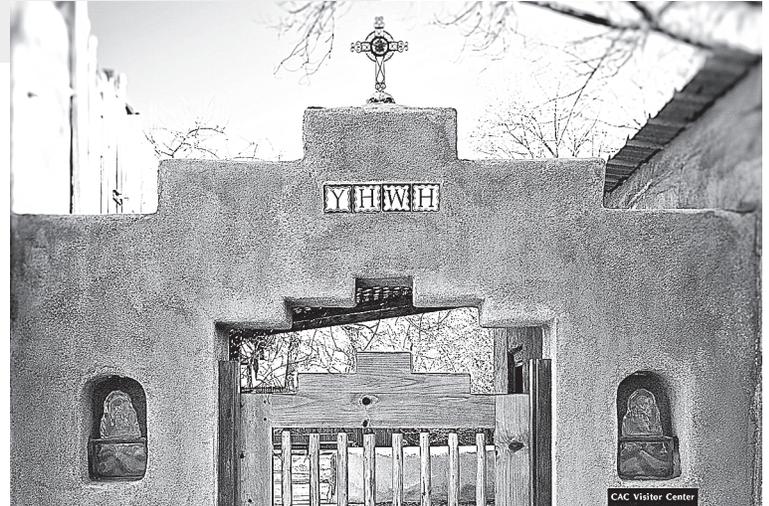
NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE **PAID**  
ALBUQUERQUE, NM  
PERMIT NO. 568



The spring issue of *Oneing* features beautiful poems by Mary Oliver and Avidah Shashaani, as well as compelling articles by Ilia Delio, Cynthia Bourgeault, Matthew Fox, Michael Dowd, and others. Purchase a limited-edition copy at [store.cac.org](http://store.cac.org).

## CONNECT WITH CAC

- Visit us online at [cac.org](http://cac.org) to learn more about CAC's educational programs and resources
- Sign up to receive monthly news and daily or weekly meditations by email: [cac.org/sign-up](http://cac.org/sign-up)
- Follow @CACRadicalGrace on Twitter and Instagram and "Like" Center for Action and Contemplation on Facebook
- Stop by our Visitor Center and Bookstore  
1823 Five Points Rd SW, Albuquerque, NM  
Open weekdays 9 a.m.–noon, 1 p.m.–4 p.m.
- Write to us at [info@cac.org](mailto:info@cac.org) or  
CAC, PO Box 12464, Albuquerque, NM 87195



## SUPPORT THE WORK

The Center for Action and Contemplation is a nonprofit educational organization. Please consider supporting our work by donating securely online at [cac.org/support-cac](http://cac.org/support-cac) or by sending a check, payable to CAC, to PO Box 12464, Albuquerque, NM 87195. We also invite you to remember CAC in your estate plan. For more information about making a charitable contribution, including stock transfers and bequests, please email [development@cac.org](mailto:development@cac.org).