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## Native American Madonnas

University of Dayton. Marian Library

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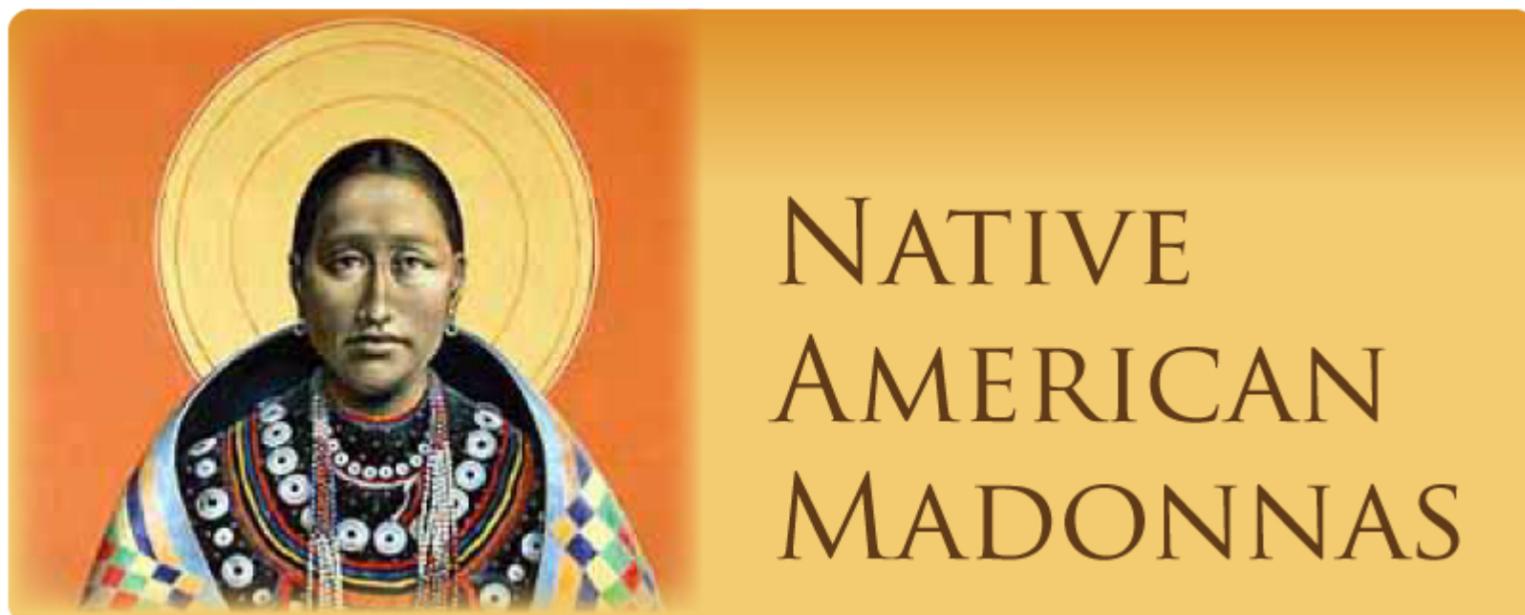
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**Father John B. Giuliani** has produced an astounding number of Madonna representations inspired by Native American culture and art. They come in two series of fourteen panels each: one of them is simply called *The Madonna Series*; the other, *The Crow Series*, refers more specifically to the Montana-based Crow tribe, whose native American name is *Absoroke*, or "People of the Great Beaked Bird," translated as "Crow." If the *Madonna Series* highlights a variety of tribal depictions (e.g., Hopi, Sioux, Navajo, Lakota), so *The Crow Series* offers a whole life of Mary. The following comments concentrate on *The Crow Series'* icons.

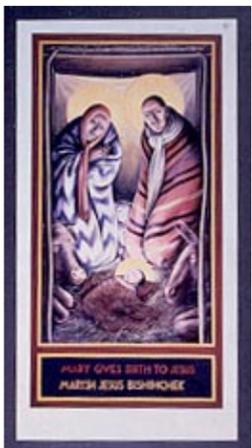
Icons are an expression of the mysteries of the incarnation, the divine becoming human. The key to access the full empowerment of the icon is to surrender to its contemplation, allowing the soul to open up to the revealed Christian mysteries. Fr. Giuliani expanded the traditional rules of iconography to reach out to the Native Americans whose culture Christian arts had left unexplored.

The Crow Series pictures Mary's destiny through her relations to Christ, according to the spiritual significance of the forms, colors and artifacts inherent to the Crow people's religious heritage.



#### Annunciation

In the first icon representing the Annunciation, Mary is draped in the wedding blanket of a Crow maiden, startled by a kneeling Gabriel harboring the vestments of a Crow shaman. This messenger relates to God's earthly creation by the presence of beads, skin, shells, bones, and stones on His clothing as well as to the Holy Spirit—who spreads His protective wings over Mary and Gabriel—through His ceremonial eagle feathers.



#### Mary: From Pregnancy to the Nativity

The next three icons show Mary glowing in her aura of innocence and wisdom, fully accepting the grace of God bestowed upon her. She shares the joyful mystery of God's Son with her equally blessed cousin Elizabeth, and with a strong and sensuous Joseph gazing in awe.



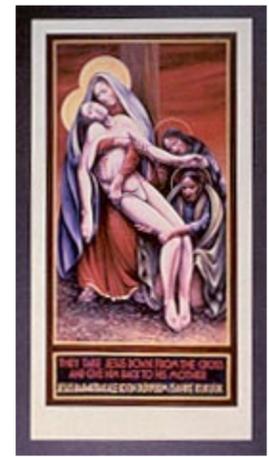
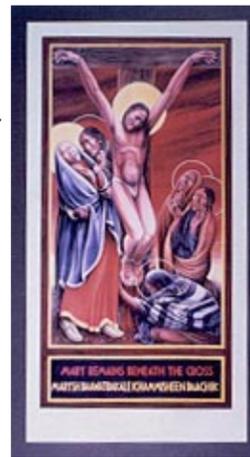
#### Destiny of a Divine Child

Anxiousness and confusion shadow Mary's face in the following three iconic depictions, as she realizes the incredible destiny of her son, whose future is out of her hands. Joseph, resigned to his son's divine mission, shows Mary his support by his gentle and caring embrace.



### Crucifixion

The use of different red hues (scarlet, crimson, magenta) of the Montana sky in the next four panels, sets the tone for the atoning sacrifice endured in their own way by both Jesus and His mother Mary. Here, the visual shock of the colors and the emotional distress reflected in the scenes overtake the beholder with extreme compassion.



### Glory to Mary

The following two icons complete Mary's destiny by showing her in all her glory through an artistic genre admirably mixing traditional Christian art and the Crow people's culture. The Assumption is represented with the usual symbols of the crescent moon and stars, but she is wrapped again in her bridal blanket and two blessed Native American Christians stand as witnesses of her glorification. In *The Mother of All People*, Mary wears a regal dress, while a wreath of healing herbs crowns her head. Her son is depicted as a victorious warrior with His feather displaying the symbol of triumph. As in the first panel, the Eagle/Spirit is offering them His protection and blessing. In the artist's words: "The dramatic course of her life has brought Mary to this moment of triumph and humility. She, like her people, has faced her great ordeal and proven herself heroic. Now she reigns in an eternal sunrise interceding for her people and for all people. She is the fulfillment of the Christian and Crow mysteries of birth, death, renewal, and communion with all creatures in the Great Spirit."



### The Trinity

The Trinity in the last icon encompasses the source of all mysteries, including the fulfillment of Mary's destiny in giving life to the Son of God. God, as the elder, bends over His victorious warrior Son, who with hands raised as a priest, takes His power from his Father, under the protection of The Great Spirit pictured as a red hawk with deployed wings.

The fourteen original panels (3' x 6'), from which these prints have been made, were commissioned in 1997 for the church of St. Dennis in Crow Agency, Montana, and dedicated in their permanent home on September 15, 1999, on the Feast of the Sorrows of Mary.

### Samples of the Madonna Series



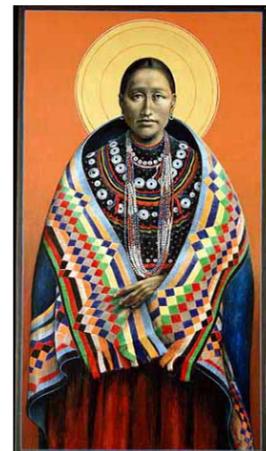
Hopi Madonna and Child



Aymara Madonna and Child



Lakota Madonna



Potawatomi Madonna