

**Invocation to Sophia
Robert McDermott
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I. Sophia, We Call to You

We invoke you, divine mother,¹
humanity's first image,
and first word.

You were Demeter and Persephone,
the goddess Zoe,
and the mother of the lunar cycle.

As Ishtar and Inanna you waged war
—and you'd better again
to save the Earth.

As Inanna you were Queen of Heaven,
a title and identity
you lost in Christendom.

Before the garden of Eden
and Plato's cave²
you held spirit and matter as one.

We know you hear with the aged sagacity of the Psalms,
of *Hokhmah*, essential Hebraic wisdom,
you were there when God created heaven and earth.³

As Isis you were sacred cow, sow, and bird;
guardian of the underworld;
loving mother of your son Horus.⁴

As Isis you weep,
as Mary you suffer and comfort,
as Avalokiteshwara you are wisdom and compassion.

¹ Acknowledgement: This invocation is deeply indebted to Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: The Evolution of an Image* (NY: Viking/Penguin, 1991). With prodigious scholarship, this book depicts the evolution of the goddess within a framework influenced by C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell, as well as by Owen Barfield (who, in turn, acknowledges his debt to Rudolf Steiner). For a Jungian conception of the divine feminine, see Edward C. Whitmont, *Return of the Goddess* (NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992). For Sophia in the western tradition, see Caitlin Matthews, *Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom: The Divine Feminine from Black Goddess to World Soul* (London: HarperCollins/Grafton, 1991).

² Plato's *Republic*, sects. 514-21.

³ Proverbs, 8: 2-31.

⁴ See Baring and Cashford, chapter 6.

We recall the litany of your images as Mary—
holy mother of God, mother ever faithful,
queen of angels and saints, portal of heaven.⁵

You reigned as Isis for three millennia,
as Mary you inspired Christendom
—Dante’s Beatrice⁶ and the Grail.⁷

Water, womb, silence, and mother, inner and subtle,
Tao, *sunyata*, Quan Yin, *shakti* all try to name you,⁸
but none is your eternal name.⁹

II. That We Lost You¹⁰

We are too accustomed to the guy project,
a brilliant faustian bargain ending too slowly.
Steiner taught “we have not lost Christ, we have lost Sophia.”¹¹

Cosmic alienation has seized the modern mind.
We didn’t lose you in a day or a year.
A profound cosmic transformation takes a century or two.

⁵ For Mary, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); Charlene Spretnak, *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). The great contemporary mystic Adrienne von Speyr has written two small, profound books, *Mary in the Redemption* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999) and *Three Women and the Lord* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1978). For an anthroposophical interpretation of Mary, see Emil Bock, *Threefold Mary* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 2003).

⁶ For Dante’s Beatrice, see *Paradiso* in *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allan Mandelbaum (NY: Knopf, 1980). See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Eternal Feminines: Three Theological Allegories in Dante’s “Paradiso”* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980); Helen M. Luke, *Dark Wood to White Rose: Journey and Transformation in Dante’s Divine Comedy* (NY: Parabola Books, 1989); Peter S. Hawkins, *Dante’s Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imaginations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁷ For the Grail, see A. E. Waite, *The Holy Grail: The Galahad Quest in the Arthurian Literature* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1933/61); Rene Querido, *The Mystery of the Holy Grail: A Modern Path of Initiation* (Fair Oaks, CA: Rudolf Steiner College Publications, 1991); Linda Sussman, *The Speech of the Grail: A Journey Toward Speaking that Heals and Transforms* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1995); Sergius (Sergei) Bulgakov, *The Holy Grail and the Eucharist* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1997).

⁸ For the divine feminine in world religions, see Andrew Harvey, *The Return of the Mother* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books/Frog, 1995) and Shirley Nicholson, ed., *The Goddess Re-Awakening: The Feminine Principle Today* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989).

⁹ See the first stanza of LaoTse: “The Dao that can be named is not the eternal Dao.”

¹⁰ For the loss of original participation, see Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (NY: Harcourt, 1965).

A Cartesian-Newtonian billiard ball cosmos,¹²
not to mention the quest for gold,
fueled passion for control and power.

The modern project can't handle interiors and subtleties:
bring on the visible and solid, surfaces only;
nothing too soft, fluid, or flexible.

They say the take-over started with *Enu Elish*,
in Baghdad—still in the news—
as Inanna you hung on a hook for three days.¹³

Crucifixion has been a male specialty;
no more the generative goddesses,
give us the thunderbolt gods.

As goddess, you're assigned to girls and crones,
but empires need Marduk;
a god's gotta do what a god's gotta do.

On he came morphing and starring—
as Zeus, ruling the sky and mountain tops,
as YHWH, vengeful god of the garden.

Your daughter Eve made a bad marriage.
In the Garden Adam was a loser;
Eve, a scapegoat.

All sin then traceable to a woman,
childbirth a curse, males in charge,
sin and salvation over service and generation.¹⁴

Your archetypal image surfaced
in Mediaeval European towns,
hundreds of cathedrals to Notre Dame!

Too good to be go unopposed,
from Notre Dame of Paris
to the Temple of Reason,

¹² For the fundamental disenchantment resulting from the Newtonian-Cartesian worldview, see Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (NY: Crown/Harmony, 1991), especially "The Post-Copernican Double Bind," 416-22.

¹³ For Inanna and Marduk see Baring and Cashford, pp. 275-79.

¹⁴ For the negative influence of the Genesis myth see Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1969) and Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (NY: Routledge, 2003).

Bacon is our Man:¹⁵
nature on the rack,
control at all cost.

By the shadow of the Enlightenment,
knowledge and power over wisdom,
analysis and argument over insight.

We will have knowledge,
get the secret, blow the atom,
take charge, go the limit, no price too high.

And we did, and it feels good.
We have dominion, even over death—sort of.
Why are we so depressed, fearful, and violent?

What shall we make of the hard images
Are you really Kali with a company of destroyers?¹⁶
Are they you embracing all opposites?

Should we accept your embrace of suffering and evil—
war, hunger, rape, HIV/AIDS, cancer, despair, suicide?
Does your hard mother-love find these useful?

Are you the source of pain, illness, and loss?
—alienation, deadends, Beckett's *Endgame*?
We really need to know this!

Were you behind Gettysburg, Verdun, Hiroshima?
Could you have stopped them?
What are you doing about sex slaves?

We believe you bind each nation's wounds,
comforting soldiers slain,
and their widows and orphans.¹⁷

But why are these? Why?
Is this your way to make us conscious?
For us to try harder? What a strange way!

¹⁵ For the negative influence of Francis Bacon, see Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (Harper San Francisco, 1980).

¹⁶ Ajit Mookerjee, *Kali: The Feminine Force* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988).

¹⁷ See Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, 1865: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

And what of spiritual suffering?
Have you led the West
to suffer the loss of your comfort?

III. By Sight and Sound We Call to You

As your Christopher¹⁸ has written,
you are again arising like Venus.
Some are seeing the hem of your mantle.¹⁹

Searching for inner realities,
seeing behind, and within,
are we seeing signs of your presence?

We practice philo-sophy,
looking to interiors and a single vision,
participating subject and object.

We know such sightings are rare
in a culture of denial,
a passion for “nothing but.”

What about the books on your behalf?
Are they seeing you,
or fantasizing your mantle, your image, and sound?

Leonardo, Michael Angel, and Rapha-el
renaissanced your sacred image,
Mama and Bambino, for all times and all hearts.

We see you through the holy Fra,²⁰
Duccio and the Sienese School,²¹

¹⁸ Christopher Bamford, editor of Steinerbooks and Lindisfarne Press, author of *An Endless Trace* (New Paltz, NY: Codhill Press, 2003), and editor, *Isis Mary Sophia*.

¹⁹ “Over the past centuries, the being of Sophia, or feminine Divine Wisdom, has been emerging from the mists of ancient history, like Venus from the waters, to become a sign and mystery of our times. Though it is difficult to say who she is, wherever we turn, we see traces of her coming—as if tracking the fringes of her mantle as it brushes aside the tangled, sclerotic cobwebs of centuries of cerebration. As she draws near, much that was forgotten is reentering consciousness, not only as memory but also from the future, as *possibility*.” “Introduction,” *Isis Mary Sophia*, p. 7.

²⁰ Fra Angelico, early Renaissance Italian painter, 1387-1455.

²¹ For Duccio and the Sienese School, see Enzo Carli, *Sienese Painting: from the Origins to Duccio* (NY: Scala Books, 1983).

and the American Henry Ossawa Tanner.²²

You've sent healing cosmic sounds
to Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven.
Deo gratias for Schubert's "Ave."

Shakespeare has revealed you:
"There are more things under heaven and earth..."²³
They are the hidden, subtle, and mysterious.

Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe,
the greatest three, all know you
in ambiguity, artistry, inner *anthropos*.

Goethe's poetry and *urpflanze*, gentle science,
alchemy, mysteries, polarities²⁴—
and Faust, the rascal—all approach you.

Your Gretchen, Faust's victim and savior,
in the end reveals your grace:
"The Eternal Feminine draws us onward."²⁵

You've sent us the mantras of wise women,
mothers, teachers, poets, and children.
Abigail wrote to John, "Remember the Ladies."²⁶

Henry Adams, son and grandson of presidents,
looked past the dynamo to the Virgin
and saw the secrets of Chartres.²⁷

We still learn from Laotse,
a correction for Confucian rigidity,
bringing grace to order, surprise to tradition.

²² Henry Ossawa Tanner (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1992)

²³ *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 5.

²⁴ See Alice Raphael, *Goethe and the Philosopher's Stone: Symbolic Patterns in "The Parable" and the Second Part of "Faust"* (NY: Garrett Publications, 1965), and David Seamon and Arthur Zajonc, eds., *Goethe's Way of Science* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998).

²⁵ Goethe, *Faust*, Part Two, Act 5 (last line).

²⁶ Abigail Adams' letter to her husband John, 1776: "Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors." See David McCullough, *John Adams* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 104.

²⁷ Henry Adams, "The Dynamo and the Virgin," in *The Education of Henry Adams* (NY: Bartleby, 1999/1918), ch. 25. See also: Henry Adams, *Mont [Saint] Michel and Chartres* (NY: Penguin, 1986).

Not mere chaos, Dao weaves subtly.
After enlightenment the river remains.
Jack teaches laundry after ecstasy.²⁸

You've shown the interiors of exteriors.
You are *shakti*, a hot knife through butter;
you slice as needed, and at the joint.

No Rama without Sita,
no Krishna without Radha,
no Buddha without Quan Yin.

No Jesus without you,
no Aurobindo without the Mother;²⁹
His Holiness, verily Avalokiteshvara.³⁰

We know you break through concrete,
like the lily in the wall,
and grass on Madison Avenue.

As *prajnaparamita* you teach us "gate', gate',"
"Go beyond, beyond,
Wisdom beyond knowledge, Emptiness beyond form."³¹

With Blofeld we see you as Quan Yin, in the crevice,
arranging pregnancies, auspicious births,
tending to the bereft.³²

Long before Lovelock, you knew you were Gaia.³³
long before permaculture
the farmers of Assam rotated crops.

²⁸ Jack Kornfield, *After Ecstasy the Laundry* (NY: Bantam, 2000).

²⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972), Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary, vol. 25; K. R. Srinivas Iyengar, *On the Mother: The Chronicle of a Manifestation and Ministry* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1994).

³⁰ For the relationship between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Avalokitesvara, the goddess of wisdom and compassion, see Glenn H. Mullin, *The Fourteen Dalai Lamas: A Sacred Legacy of Reincarnation* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 2001), p. 90, and throughout.

³¹ For the text of the *prajnaparamita sutra*, see Robert A. F. Thurman, ed., *Essential Tibetan Buddhism* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1995), pp. 171-72, and for a thorough interpretation see Lex Hixon, *Mother of the Buddhas: Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1993).

³² John Blofeld, *The Bodhisattva of Compassion: The Mystical Tradition of Quan Yin* (Boston, MA: Shambala, 1988).

³³ James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), and *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of our Living Earth* (NY: Norton, 1988).

You taught Derzu Uzala to know the river and the wind,³⁴
Francis to celebrate the sun
and befriend the wolf of Gubbio.³⁵

You led Teilhard³⁶ and Thomas³⁷ to reverence Gaia,
Mary Evelyn and John to teach religion and ecology,
Joanna to teach the truth of Chernobyl and deep time.

Surely you led Al to teach,
and the Norwegians to applaud,
the inconvenient truth.³⁸

Will fundamentalist Christians,
held by Calvin's misanthropy and the Rapture,³⁹
replace "dominion" by "protection"?⁴⁰

When New York State sprayed DDT,
Marjorie sued, Rachel took notes
and wrote *Silent Spring*.⁴¹

Despite these whistle blowers,
as Gaia you burn,
are you *Pieta* forever?

His Holiness knows you as Tara,

³⁴ Akira Kurosawa, director, *Derzu Uzala* (1975)

³⁵ Edward A. Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).

³⁶ Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

³⁷ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1988).

³⁸ Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Book and film

³⁹ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, multi-volume "Left Behind" fictional series on the "The Rapture."

⁴⁰ Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" (Revised Standard Version)

⁴¹ In 1955 New York State sprayed the farms on Long Island. Marjorie Spoke, who owned a farm with her partner, Mary Richards, sued the State in Garden City Superior Court. Rachel Carson listened to Marjorie argue against the State, took notes, and then wrote *Silent Spring* the book that launched the ecological movement in the United States. See Linda Lear, *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature* (NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), pp. 318ff.

faithful to the bodhisattva vow,⁴²
he holds Tibet as you held your Son.

We know you as Notre Dame in blue veil,
as the Virgin of Chartres, as Guadalupe in gold,
revealed by the peasant, the pure, the peaceful.

We still need our guide books,
and fabulous Icons—Greek, Russian, Bulgarian;
we study the Grail, Dante, Hildegard,⁴³ Julian.⁴⁴

We call to you by your many names,
knowing you as Isis-Mary-Sophia,
three names for your singularity.

IV. Gaiasophia's Response

Save my body; it burns from greed.
turn the Ganges from brown to green,⁴⁵
plant trees in Africa,⁴⁶

Spread *Blessed Unrest*,⁴⁷
save the rainforest,⁴⁸
speak truth to power.⁴⁹

My mantle will do for some of you,
others of you need a good smack
and a "Thou Shalt Not."

⁴² "And now, as long as space endures, as long as there are beings to be found, may I continue likewise to remain to soothe the sufferings of those who live." In the Dalai Lama, *A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night: A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Boston: Shambala, 1994), 126.

⁴³ Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions/Bear & Company, 2002).

⁴⁴ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (NY: Viking Press, 1982). In mid-14th century Julian prayed: "As truly as God is our Father, so just as truly He is our Mother."

⁴⁵ See David L. Haberman, "River of Love in an Age of Pollution," in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 339-54.

⁴⁶ Wangari Maathai, *Unbowed* (NY: Knopf, 2006), and *The Greenbelt Movement: Sharing the Approach and Experience* (NY: Lantern Books, 2006).

⁴⁷ Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest* (NY: Viking, 2007).

⁴⁸ Rain Forest Action Network (RAN)

⁴⁹ Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, *Speak Truth to Power*. Ed., Nan Richardson. Photographs by Eddie Adams. (NY: Crown Publishers, 2000).

Thou shalt not poison my blood,
Thou shalt not hammer my bones,
Thou shalt not commit deicide.

I am the sucking infant and the Alzheimer patient,
I am the Mississippi and the Hudson,
I am Mt. Tam and Mt. Kailash.

Recall the forgotten ancient wisdom:
HPB announced my unveiling;
her Indian and Tibetan masters knew me.⁵⁰

Heed Steiner's divine *coniunctio*
—Anthropos and Sophia—
and Sophianic thinking.⁵¹

And my Sophiologists,
Soloviev,⁵² Bulgakov,⁵³ Florensky,
and the wise Tarot meditator, Valentin Tomberg.⁵⁴

Read the profound Prokofieff.⁵⁵
Robert Powell knows me as
Trinosophia—Mother, Daughter, Holy Soul.⁵⁶

I am the Primordial Flaring Forth,⁵⁷
Steiner's etheric, Jung's *anima mundi*.⁵⁸
and Thomas's Great Work.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Syliva Cranston, *HPB: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky* (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons/Tarcher, 1993).

⁵¹ Rudolf Steiner, teacher of Anthroposophy: see Robert McDermott, ed., intro., *The New Essential Steiner* (Great Barrington, MA: Steinerbooks, 2009).

⁵² Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, ed., *The Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁵³ Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1993).

⁵⁴ Valentin Tomberg ("Unknown Author"), *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey Into Christian Hermeticism*, trans. Robert Powell (NY: Penguin/Tarcher, 1985/2002).

⁵⁵ Sergei Prokofieff, *The Heavenly Sophia and the Being Anthroposophia* (London: Temple Lodge Press, 1996).

⁵⁶ Robert Powell, president of the Sophia Foundation of North America and author of *The Most Holy Trinosophia* (Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 1985) and *The Sophia Teachings: The Emergence of the Divine Feminine in Our Time* (NY: Booklight/Lantern, 2001).

⁵⁷ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (NY: HarperCollins, 1992).

⁵⁸ J. Bockemuhl, et. al., *Toward a Phenomenology of the Etheric World* (Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (NY: Bell Tower/Random House, 1999).

Know me,
come to me and love me,
as I have loved you.

Your Mother,
GaiaSophia.