

THE SACRED SCIENCE OF ALCHEMY
AND THE BLACK MADONNA

*While all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course,
Thy almighty Word, O Lord, came down from heaven from Thy royal throne.*
—Wisdom 18:14–15

Out of the blackness of cosmic midnight the Primal Mother birthed the seeds of creation, the Primal Mother on whose lap all creation exists, also known as the Black Madonna. Her blackness represents the womb of the unmanifest quantum field from which all of creation arises and into which all of creation will eventually dissolve. Black is the color that contains all colors. Out of the black depths of space, stars, suns and planets form. Alchemists called this nascent matter that preceded all other substance the 'prima materia'. This was the original essence from which all alchemical transmutation manifested. The prima materia is known in Alchemy as the cause of all effects that occur.

The Black Madonna's primordial material provides the substance for the Great Work of Alchemy, which is a process of revelation, incarnation, illumination and transfiguration. On the material plane it is the science of transmuting lead into gold and on the subtle plane it is the science of transmuting the 'prima materia' of the pre-conscious soul into the gold of the awakened soul that is reunited with its cosmic ground. The emphasis is on building awareness of and communion with spirit and creating an incorruptible body of light or subtle body that will hold this relationship beyond the death of the physical body. The Great Work of Alchemy transmutes the relationship between the human being and the cosmos through the integration of body, soul and spirit and the conscious reunion with the *unus mundus* or the divine ground of being. Alchemy is a sacred rite of unification, an *opus divinum* (divine work), which ultimately reveals or brings to birth the innate divinity of the human being.

The question at hand is: What is the deeper relationship of the Black Madonna and the science of Alchemy?

At least 4000 years old, the science of Alchemy has deep roots in Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek, as well as Chinese, Indian and Persian civilizations. The connection between the Black Virgin and Alchemy was prefigured in Greco-Egyptian Hermeticism from its beginnings. The color black attributed to Isis was expressly presented as the symbol of the 'Secret Doctrine.' In the treatise entitled *Core Cosmu* — translated as 'The Cosmic Virgin' (no. 23 of the *Corpus Hermeticum*), Isis herself declares:

*"Listen carefully, Horus my son, for here I tell you the secret doctrine [Crypte theoria] that my grandfather Kamephis learnt from Hermes . . . and I from Kamephis, when he honored me with the gift of perfect Blackness [teleio melani]."*¹

From *Kore Kosmu*, the sacred book of Hermes Trismegistus. *Meditations on the Tarot*, Arcana 9, The Hermit.

Historians recognize the statue of the Egyptian Goddess Isis with her child Horus in her arms as the first Madonna and Child. Egypt was thought of as a black, fertile land, and Isis as a black Goddess of fertility, growth and life. The French alchemist Fulcanelli, in his work, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales* (*The Mystery of the Cathedrals*), spoke of the origin of the word alchemy comprised of: the first two letters “Al” which is Arabic for Al (Allah), “God,” which corresponds directly to the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים El, God.” “Chem” has different roots. Kimia (Greek χυμεία) means “to fuse or cast a metal.” Chem or khem, which is translated as “the black earth”, is also the old Egyptian name for Egypt. The great obelisks which stood gleaming in the courtyards of Egyptian temples were once covered with electrum, an alloy of silver and gold. Certain Egyptians discovered how to make an alloy of these two basic elements—the gold of the masculine element and the silver of the feminine one—to create a scientific process to divinize the soul.

The original goal of the ‘Great Work’ of alchemy was to effect a way of redeeming matter and the material world; its method consists in purifying metallic substances, combining them, and raising their qualities to a higher pitch so as to hasten their development towards the perfect metallic state, that of gold. This is equally the goal of nature. The immediate goal of alchemy is the acquisition of the ‘Philosophers’ Stone’, which makes the transmutation of metals and their ‘redemption’ possible, this being the first step in a ‘cosmic redemption’, including a spiritual realization for the human being.

The Great Work carried out in the “laboratory” was conceived as the tangible, physical support of an interior, spiritual activity capable of leading the practitioner to knowledge and illumination. R. Alleau’s, in his book, *Aspects de l’alchimie traditionnelle*, writes: “The masters of alchemy look upon the mineral Adam as the reflection of man and the universe in the mirror of nature. Through knowing the conditions of transformation of the metallic microcosm, man is able to discover and analogically understand the laws of his own metamorphosis. Through purifying and perfecting the ‘Sage’s Subject’ (the matter of the Work), and by capturing and finally absorbing the energy from other worlds condensed by this mysterious Lodestone, the human being possesses a means to make the Light descend into the depths of his body and consciousness.”

The alchemical method is based upon an imitation of the cosmogonic act. The process results in the separation, followed by the union, of two fundamental principles expressing all oppositions and ‘sympathies’—the Luminous-Fire or Spirit, and undifferentiated ‘prima materia’. In Genesis the Spirit moves on the waters producing the creative light. In alchemy, these two principles are called Sulfur, the element related to fire, and Mercury, that related to water. These two elements signify not so much the material substances themselves, but express the two higher principles found at the cosmogenic level. The ‘Great Work’ of alchemy consists in realizing as perfectly as possible the harmonious union of Sulfur and Mercury, the Masculine and Feminine, called the ‘hermetic marriage’, which allows access to the Philosophers’ Stone.

The first step consists in procuring the substance that has the potential to become the Philosopher's Stone. The ‘original matter’, also called ‘primal earth’ by alchemists, is

described in certain texts as 'an ore-like material, 'a black stone-like substance'. This formless matter is precious because it contains all the possibilities of transmutation. Most alchemists obtained the raw material by reducing common gold and silver, these two substances being the richest in Sulfur (gold) and Mercury (silver).

Before starting, the two metals first had to be purified so that 'philosophers' gold and silver' could be obtained. By a process of dissolution, the Sulfur and Mercury were extracted in the form of salts, which were then calcined and the residue dissolved in acids, and in this way a liquid was obtained. This was enclosed in the 'Philosophers' Egg', a completely sealed ball of glass, which was heated on an athanor.

Here, evaporations, condensations and crystallizations occurred during which the matter took on different colors, of which the principal, Black, White, and Red, served to denote the three main phases of the work. The procedures carried out in the laboratory serve above all as a support for a parallel and analogous activity within the practitioner, with a view to realizing a transformation of a spiritual order.

In the first, called the 'black work' (nigredo), the matter is dissolved so as to release the two principles, Sulfur and Mercury, and there is a reduction to 'prima materia' in the shape of a sort of black 'stone' called the 'raven'. At the same time, the practitioner suffers the 'dissolution' of his or her individuality, which is purified and undergoes the ordeal of 'death': a descent into the obscure layers of the self which are related to macrocosmic analogies. This dissolution leads the human being back to impersonal cosmic roots by which they are fed. A light expands over the ambiguous lower world and transforms these shadowy figures into the precise forms of the higher world. Through distillation, 'mercury', the vital energy, returns to the free state of an undetermined vital possibility; this is the conversion to 'prima materia' upon which the inner 'sulfur' can efficaciously work.

In the second phase, called the 'white work' (albedo), the 'hermetic' or 'philosophical marriage' of the two principles, called the 'King' and the 'Queen' takes place. At this stage, the matter is called the 'Rebis' or the 'alchemical hermaphrodite', and the 'stone' gradually becomes white. Initially dead and black, it is reborn and named the 'swan', a resurrection signaled by a luminous twinkling. In the 'white work', 'sulphur' and 'mercury', the masculine and feminine principles, the animus and anima of the human personality, are united harmoniously and give birth to the hermetic androgyne, the 'Hermetic Child', whose appearance is heralded by a 'star', the sparkling of the 'stone'. Within the practitioner, the soul issues forth from the night of initial chaos and finds itself re-established in its original integrity. The inner light and fire are rekindled, and in the heart the dark fire is transformed by the living light in harmony with the divine Water. The Woman, the 'Virgin Sophia', 'Celestial Mercury' opens the 'gate of heaven' in the heart. This process inwardly transmutes attachment to personal desires into desire for God, in such a way that the Virgin Sophia and Holy Spirit coincide with the desire. The alchemist, through this purification then experiences successive illuminations: the 'black stone' has become white.

In the third phase, the 'red work' (rubedo), the stone passes through all the colors of the rainbow and becomes a bright red, the "secret fire" that unites human and divine, the limited with the unlimited. The 'red work' enables one, at the end of the alchemical process, to obtain the Philosophers' Stone, which changes metals into gold. The soul experiences definitive illumination, a state in which the opposites fuse: the 'two white doves', the 'birds of Hermes', Sulphur and Mercury, are transformed into a single bird, the 'Phoenix', which sparkles like the sun and attains to heaven; the solar principle regains mastery over the individuality, and the human becomes divine.

The alchemical process unfolds in the same order as all processes of spiritual realization, an order that is defined in the classic formula of purification, illumination, and union, which correspond analogously to the 'three phases' of the Great Work. The whole alchemical process works to bring about the incarnation of spirit in the human soul and the long incubation or preparation needed for the soul to become capable of containing the tension, dangers and revelation of this gradual incarnation or awakening of spirit through the expansion of the heart, the instinctive capacity to love, to give to others, and to serve life through awakened compassion.

The alchemical process presents a context for phenomena marking the events in the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Jean Hani, in her book, The Black Madonna: A Marian Mystery, speaks of the first stage of the Great Work, in which the practitioner suffers the dissolution of his or her personality, corresponding to the Annunciation when the Angel Gabriel told Mary she would bear God's son. She responded with the words, "Let it be unto me according to thy word ". Mary needed to become 'earth', the 'Heavenly Earth', substance that is perfectly 'humble' (humilis, like humus) and 'docile', the two characteristics of 'prima materia' which are the indispensable conditions for the activity of the Spirit to be manifested.

In the second stage the appearance of the 'white stone' corresponds to the Child-God, with the sparkling brightness heralding it, represented in the star of Bethlehem. This sparkle, or star, shows that the 'philosophical mixture' has been made in accordance with the principles of creation and announces the birth of the alchemical Child-King, corresponding to the birth of the Christ Child.

At the third stage, when the white stone becomes the Philosophers' Stone, sometimes called the 'Phoenix', or the 'Pelican', or the 'Young Crowned King' clothed in royal purple, it is transfused with Christ. The Philosophers' Stone is the active condensation of the spiritus mundi, 'the origin of all things' also called Azoth, the supreme secret of transformation that contains all things within itself. Known in alchemy as the *Mercury of the Wise* or the *Universal Cure*, the Azoth is also the Universal Life Force. It is known in Hindu or Sanskrit as Kundalini. In the Bible Azoth is present in the brass serpent of Moses, and "the fiery flames of Pentecost". The Pentecostal flames gave the Apostles the power to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to speak the word of God.

Azoth is also a cryptogram for a mystery composed of the first and last letters of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin alphabets: 'A' is common to all three; 'Z' being the final letter of the Latin alphabet; 'O' the final of the Greek alphabet; and 'Th' the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

These correspondences serve to provide an understanding that the true goal of alchemy is of a spiritual order, it is a way of regeneration for human beings. Within the alchemical process, the Virgin Mary has a primary role. She enacts it on the operative plane, as indicated by Fulcanelli, where the Black Virgins found in the crypts of churches, the statues of 'Our Lady Underground', represent the matter on which the alchemist is to work, matter buried underground, 'a black substance of stone-like appearance', 'the philosophers' earth'. The Virgin Mary also plays a central role in the substantive manifestation of the alchemical process on the subtle plane, the divine work which brings to birth the innate divinity of the human being.

Rudolf Steiner unveiled significant insights regarding The Black Madonna and The Virgin Mary in his reincarnation indications.² He spoke of The Queen of Sheba, the black queen from the south who spoke the following words to King Solomon, "I am Black but I am Beautiful" (Song of Solomon 1:5). The Queen of Sheba is only mentioned in three places in the Bible, but there is a large body of literature and art that acclaim her significance. She is depicted twice in the Cathedral of Chartres, at the north portal next to Solomon, directly opposite Melchizedek, where she is associated with the Prophets and Kings of Israel who are considered to be the foundation of Christianity. She also stands prominently on the Royal Portal at the West façade of the Cathedral.

In the Gospel of Matthew 12:42, Christ speaks: 'The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, one greater than Solomon is here.' It is an enigma to think of the Queen of Sheba as judge at the Last Judgment. Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* shows Christ alongside the Virgin Mary, sitting in judgment over humanity. It is their presence which draws human souls to them. If one has lived according to virtuous ideals, one will be drawn to the light, whereas negative intentions will cause one to flee the light. Christ has indicated that the Queen will sit in judgment on the human race.

In the *Aurora consurgens* or 'Rising Light of Dawn', which is attributed to Thomas Aquinas, it says: 'And that is the wisdom, The Queen of Sheba who has come from the orient to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And given into her hand is power, honor, strength and dominion, and she bears upon her head a king's crown fashioned from the rays of the

² The source of these indications is Uwe Lemke, a Christian Community priest whose book, *Das Kreuz als Lebensmotiv. Frauenschicksale um das Mysterium von Golgatha*, is cited by Robert Powell in chapter 2 of *The Mystery, Biography, and Destiny of Mary Magdalene* (see footnotes 33 and 34 in Powell's book). Lemke's book has not yet been translated into English. The title roughly translates as *The Cross as Life-Motif: The Destiny of the Women connected with the Mystery of Golgotha*.

twelve shining stars, like a bride arrayed for her bridegroom, and upon her robes she bears a golden inscription: "As queen I will rule, and of my realm will there be no end for all who find me and explore me with astuteness, inventiveness and persistence."³

Isidore of Seville writes: 'The Queen of Sheba must be understood as the Church, which gathers itself from the outer edges of the world in order to hear the voice of God. But the Church is Mary, is the bride of God!'⁴

Johannes Graceus writes in the *Arca Arcani*: 'The primal material of the philosophers is that lead, also called the "lead of the air" in which the radiant white dove is contained, which is called the "salt of the metals", in which the mastery of the work consists. This salt is that chaste, wise and rich Queen of Sheba, clothed in a white veil.'⁵

Rudolf Steiner indicated that The Queen of Sheba was the reincarnated Eve, the mother of Cain and Abel, the progenitor of humanity, the original mother (mater, from which the word "matter" is derived), the seed from which human evolution began on the Earth. She later incarnates as The Black Madonna in her life as The Queen of Sheba. Rudolf Steiner also indicated that "The arrival of The Queen of Sheba represents what is being attempted at our present time."⁶ Humanity must find The Black Madonna who is given into her hand the power, honor, strength and dominion, she who bears upon her head a crown fashioned from the rays of the twelve shining stars, who is like a bride arrayed for her bridegroom. The golden inscription: "As queen I will rule, and of my realm will there be no end for all who find me and explore me with astuteness, inventiveness and persistence" describes the task of our time.

The mystery of the lineage of The Queen of Sheba growing out of her primal role as The Mother of Humanity continues to unfold as Rudolf Steiner also revealed that subsequently Eve, who later incarnated as The Queen of Sheba, appeared again as The Blessed Virgin Mary, The Queen of Heaven. To think of The Blessed Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross, having been Eve, The Mother of Humanity, and of Cain and Abel, whose blood was the first to defile the earth, effects a staggering, eye-opening contemplation within the soul. The science of Alchemy has worked with the metaphysical level of this sequence of evolution from its inception and has sought to bring it to light within the Christian church.

The Breton basilica of Notre Dame de Bon-Secours, at Guingamp, a building that bridges alchemy with the Christian edifice, shelters a black statue of the Virgin. The statue is placed on a pedestal in the form of a baphomet. Inscribed on the ground is a labyrinth, which is a reduced version of the Chartres labyrinth, and which has at its center a black stone on which the words "Ave Maria" are carved in white. Labyrinths are often encountered in churches dedicated to the Virgin, especially those with a Black Madonna,

³ Manfred Schmidt-Brabant and Virginia Sease, *The Archetypal Feminine in the Mystery Stream of Humanity*. page 82.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

which is directly related to initiation. Walking the labyrinth is a form of descent into the obscure parts of the individuality to take cognizance of those elements that constitute obstacles on the path of spiritual realization with a view to rectifying and overcoming them. This enables one at the end of the journey to reach the center of one's being where spiritual ascension can be affected.

The hermetic cryptogram, VITRIOL, refers to the first phase of the alchemical work and is composed of the first letters of the words: *Visita interiora terrae, rectificando invenies occultam lapidem*, 'Visit the interior of the earth, through rectification [purification] you will find the hidden stone'. The black stone at the center of the labyrinth in the Breton basilica explicitly addresses the Virgin—Ave Maria— and honors her role at the center of the journey of initiation.

The sequence of incarnations of Eve, reborn as The Queen of Sheba, and then as The Blessed Virgin Mary suggests another series of correspondences with the sacred science of Alchemy through the evolutionary process of transformation from black to white to red, the three primary stages within the alchemical process. Through the sequence of feminine lives of Eve, The Queen of Sheba, and The Blessed Virgin Mary, a process of evolution becomes evident. Beginning with Eve, the progenitor of humanity, we have the "primal earth" from which all human life on the earth proceeds. She is the substance from which humanity has evolved. Eve can be likened to the starting point of the alchemical process, the securing of the 'prima materia', the substance without which the alchemical process could not occur.

The Queen of Sheba, coming out of the south to reunite with her sons, Abel and Cain, in the individualities of Solomon and Hiram, bears a correlation to the first stage of the Great Work, called the 'black work' (*nigredo*). As stated earlier in the words of Johannes Graceus, the primal material of the philosophers, which is called the 'salt of the metals', is the "chaste, wise and rich Queen of Sheba, clothed in a white veil." Her arrival is what is being attempted in our time. She came as a queen to heal the karma of Cain and Abel, which is again being attempted in our time. This did not occur in the tenth century B.C.E. It has now become a matter of reconciling the karma of Cain and Abel within every human heart. Within the alchemical perspective, The Black Virgin is the prototype to which the individual soul needs to conform; it needs to become 'black virginity', 'humble earth', to 'naught itself' in perfect humility so as to return to the state of 'prima materia', of virgin matter qualified to receive the influx of the Spirit, the condition needed for humanity to heal the karma of Cain and Abel that plagues human souls.

Through the process of alchemical transformation, one finds support through the help of Mary. This is why the alchemists assigned her such a significant place, the 'Virgo Paritura', she who is about to give birth to the 'stone' as she gives birth to Christ. She brings the soul forth to the light. The Black Virgin teaches that hidden 'underground', as she is in the crypt, is 'the mineral light'. Hidden in darkness, the black statue portrays that in the very depths of her body, she conceals the Light of the world. Because of this, certain of these statues are shown with a radiating sun over the womb. And this is why The Black Virgin

could be considered 'Our Lady of Alchemy', she who presides over the process of the Great Work.

As practitioners enter this intensely difficult process they receive help from The Holy Virgin. She makes herself black to show them the way; like her, they, too, need to become 'earth', the 'Heavenly Earth', substance that is perfectly 'humble'. Practitioners must undergo initiatic 'death', 'forgetfulness of self', in the full sense of this expression, by casting off, with the help of the Virgin, all the dross of the ego. This is the 'black work', after which the mystery of the Annunciation is reenacted for them: the Spirit penetrates them and transforms what in them was the 'black virgin', into the 'white virgin', enabling them to pass from the darkness of the earth to the light. The moment the Spirit penetrates, a white portion that is aqueous and airy, mercurial and volatile, separates out, and, in its development, settles on the sulfur and consummates the 'hermetic marriage'.

In this sequence of correspondences, The Blessed Virgin Mary can be likened to the second stage of the Great Work, the *albedo*, the appearance of the 'white stone' which becomes an image of the Child-God. She represents the substantial condition for the manifestation of the Word, to be 'pure' and 'empty' so as to serve as support to the divine Presence. The albedo is essential not only as a stage to pass through, but for the creation of a vessel which will ultimately contain all that follows. A transformation takes place which gradually leads the soul towards the 'virginal' state, rendering it fit to receive the birth of the Word within itself. "If your soul is serving and pure like Mary," says Angelus Silesius, "it should instantly be pregnant with God."

If we consider the black and the white icons of The Virgin, the first symbolizes *infinity* and the second absolute *purity*. The symbolism of the black color of Marian statuary signifies 'silence' or absence of manifestation in the soul of the contemplative. It embraces the entire space extending from earth to heaven, from the darkness of the womb of the earth to the super-essential Darkness of the Supreme Divinity. The symbolism of the white color signifies illumination and amplification. This stage is referred to as bride, Mary as intercessor, moon, dawn, and dove. Primary white is immaculate, innocent, ignorant, unsullied and unsoiled.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, after the Mystery of Golgotha, underwent a greater initiatory experience at Pentecost, during which Holy Sophia permeated her being.

"At the time of the Pentecost event, the Twelve Apostles represented a twelve-petalled flower in which the individual "petals" arranged themselves around one central point. This point was represented by a Figure occupying the central position as the thirteenth in the midst of the circle. In ecclesiastical tradition this Figure is named and described as Mary, the Mother of Jesus; in the Gnostic esoteric tradition she was called the "Virgin Sophia". Maria-Sophia was the "Heart of the Heart" — that is, she represented the central point of the circle of Twelve, which, at the hour of the Pentecost event, was, as it were, the "heart of humanity". Mary had an astral body so purified that it could receive the

revelations of the Sophia-being and pour them forth again as Inspirations of the soul. The possession of this faculty was the very reason why— at the time of the Pentecostal revelation—the Virgin Mary occupied the central position within the circle of the Twelve. Without her, the revelation would have been only spiritual: there would have been twelve prophets, united with the Spirit in the same way as ancient prophecy was united with it. Through the co-operation of Mary, however, something more could happen: the hearts of the disciples beat in harmony with hers, and simultaneously the content of the Pentecostal revelation was experienced by the disciples as a personal human conviction. And by this experience they became, not prophets, but apostles. For there is an immense spiritual difference between prophecy and apostleship: a prophet was an impersonal proclaimer of spiritual revelation, but an apostle bore the revelation of the Spirit *within his soul*. And this was only possible because the spiritual revelation of the Pentecost event could become *soul* through the Virgin Mary, and could be transmitted by Mary as *soul* to the disciples.

It was at the Pentecost-event that Christ entered into the souls of the disciples. And this He did in such a way that He was, as it were, born a second time: through the Heavenly Mother, Sophia. He was born in the souls of the disciples. Thus, the Ego of the disciples was filled with the Christ Who became the Kyrios, the common Ego of their group. This Ego was sheathed in the communal astral body of the Sophia; in their ether-body, however, they bore the combined experiences of the life-tableau of Christ – and, physically, they represented a circle formed to be the organ of the Pentecost revelation, having as its central point, Mary, whose esoteric name was the *Virgin Sophia*."

FROM *Anthroposophical Studies of the New Testament* by Valentin Tomberg

From this point onward, Sophia was present within Mary, working through Her. She attained a new level of initiation as a bearer of Divine Wisdom, Sophia. If we look at the icons of Sophia, she is most often depicted as a red winged woman wearing a red gown. Red-gold is the color of the *rubedo* and the red rose and the red stone are symbols of the completion of the Greater Work.

The *rubedo* achieves the exaltation of the conscious mind under the auspices of an integrated unconscious, and accomplishes the full expansion or awakening of the heart. The sixteenth century alchemist, Martin Ruland, a pupil of Paracelsus, called the *rubedo* the star in the human being—the celestial or super-celestial body. The divine spirit, the soul, and the body are transfigured in the experience of enlightenment and union, sometimes at the moment of death. The *coniunctio*, this holy union, or sacred marriage, is the unification of the spirit-soul-body with the *unus mundus*, the potential world of the first day of creation when nothing existed. It is an entrance into unity, where one experiences the totality of creation as one.

When the Great Work has been completed, the divine spirit has been brought "down" to shine through the soul and body and unified itself with them—the final union with the divine ground, consciously present within the soul. The power to transform, to serve, to

heal, comes from this source. The stone or elixir has the power to multiply (*multiplicatio*) as in the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fish in the Gospels. At Pentecost Mary reached the state of coniunctio as Holy Sophia united with her and she became an agent to ensoul the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ. She became Mary Sophia, analogous to the rubedo or third and final stage of the Great Work.

Here we have considered the alchemical sequence of transformation from the 'prima materia', to the *nigredo* or 'black work', to the *albedo* or 'white work', to the *rubedo* or 'red work, through correspondences with Eve, The Queen of Sheba, The Virgin Mary, and Mary-Sophia. The process of spiritual redemption or reunion with the *unus mundus*, as portrayed through the sequence of reincarnations beginning with Eve, the Mother of us all, reveals the stages of purification, illumination, and union through the Feminine.

The Feminine image of Divine Wisdom, Holy Sophia, is the presiding image of Alchemy. The alchemists called themselves the Sons of Wisdom. Sometimes she is named *Anima-Mundi*, sometimes *Sophia*, *Sapientia* or *Lady Alchymeia*. Alchemists who were kabbalists knew her as the Shekinah, the Bride of God, the divine ground of the phenomenal world. All these images point to the Wisdom of God, and the role of the Feminine in the work of spiritual maturation.

The Black Madonna, symbol of Isis and Eve, the prima materia and the black lands, is the prototype to which every individual soul must conform. It needs to become 'black virginity', 'humble earth', to return to the state of 'prima materia', virgin matter qualified to receive the influx of the Spirit, in perfect humility. Humanity must find The Black Madonna who is "given into her hand the power, honor, strength and dominion, she who bears upon her head a crown fashioned from the rays of the twelve shining stars, who is like a bride arrayed for her bridegroom."

No one, the alchemists said, may accomplish this work except through humility and love. To fulfill the Great Work, to bring to birth the sacred union with Christ born out of the Sophianic womb is our divine imperative.

O Holy Mary Sophia,
Thou Queen of Peace,
pray for us and bless us,
that we – through Thee –
United with the Archangel Michael
and through the power of Thy Divine Son,
May work for the redemption of the earth and humanity.
Aumeyn