

to imply much about his own sacramental embrace of language. For him, there are manifestations of mystery and wisdom (*logos/Logos*) – its words, silences and absences – in which language is not symbol at play to be approached by the human imagination or its religious/theological capacities. In this mystic tradition, language itself is sacramental, as indeed, is every category which one might offer the discussion of cosmology, human and otherwise. As Merton's poetics demonstrate most complexly in his anti-poetry, language is not confined to its powers as an instrument of communication or as a site of communion. Its ground is the Incarnate/*Logos/Word* made Flesh, in and of itself. As in the "general dance" in which we all play, like Sophia, language is one of the essences of God Himself – *analogia entis* – in which created being, including human language, is in analogical relation to divine being. In poetry, uniquely and essentially, Merton would contend, the incarnation is embodied in experience that cannot, in any other way, be engendered. *Hagia Sophia*, as the *magnum opus* of this *theoria*, manifested in creative writing as a way of doing theology, requires the privileging of an aesthetic different from that of any other of Merton's writings. It is literary mysticism in its purest poetic form, not excluding, but also not limited to, any form of inquiry, case study, disciplinary initiatives, etc.; Trinitarian, sophianic and cosmic in its proportions primarily because it has been conceived in the language of poetry which is the word/Word of Genesis, of the Incarnation, and of the Resurrection of Christ Himself without mediation or proposition – of God.

Upon these observations and prejudices, I rest any case that might arise from my engagement with this perspicacious and probing study of *Hagia Sophia* and its sophiological influences on Thomas Merton's Christology.

Lynn R. Szabo

### Author's Response

It is an unexpected privilege to be invited into this conversation about my book, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*, with such able and inspiring scholars as Daniel Horan, Lynn Szabo, and Edward Kaplan. I wish to thank each of them, as well as editors David Belcastro and Gray Matthews, for the opportunity to participate in this review symposium. In what follows I have tried to address the reviewers' major points of appreciation and criticism in a way that is not simply mechanical but that might be

constructive, developing the book's argument where possible and correcting where necessary. I hope I can be pardoned for writing in a key that is (to borrow from Edward Kaplan) both "professional" and "personal." Since the book's publication I have felt myself drawn into a widening circle of friends, many of whom, like the three reviewers, happen to be Merton scholars, and most of whom seem to share my own (and Merton's) sense of working more or less from the "margins" of our respective disciplines and traditions. Or better, in the words of Fr. Dan Berrigan, perhaps we are trying, with Merton as our guide, to establish a "new center," a center that is both new and wordlessly ancient in the life story of God.<sup>1</sup> In any case, whatever one might call this warm place of solidarity, I am very grateful to be here with such good people.

In his small but luminous and now-classic book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, biblical scholar and poet-theologian Walter Brueggemann identifies one of the crucial tasks of prophetic imagination and ministry as "the offering of symbols that are adequate to contradict a situation of hopelessness in which newness is unthinkable." This voicing of hope, Brueggemann adds, "cannot be done by inventing new symbols, for that is wishful thinking. Rather it means to move back into the deepest memories of community and activate those very symbols that have always been the basis for contradicting the regnant consciousness."<sup>2</sup> It would not be unreasonable, I think, to describe our present historical moment, viewed from a truly global and planetary perspective, as approximating a "situation of hopelessness in which newness is unthinkable." More and more, life everywhere seems to be threatened and colonized by a "regnant consciousness" that makes wholeness, justice, and peace not merely difficult but well-nigh impossible. Yet it is precisely from within this dark breach, as Brueggemann suggests, in the silences between lamentation and despair, that the prophet seeks to retrieve and activate the community's deepest symbols of memory, resistance and hope. To say it another way, with Edward Kaplan, the prophet and poet "must speak for a silent God."<sup>3</sup>

Maybe it is too much to expect the Christian community *en*

1. Interview with Fr. Daniel Berrigan, in *Soul Searching: The Journey of Thomas Merton* [DVD], written and directed by Morgan Atkinson (Louisville, KY: Duckworks, 2006).

2. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001) 63-64.

3. Edward Kaplan, "Introduction," in Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Ineffable Name of God: Man* (New York: Continuum, 2005) 15.

*masse*, or even its ablest pastors and theologians, to go into the terrible breach where the prophets have gone. But if Brueggemann's and Kaplan's insights may be applied to the theologian, then to think prophetically in our times must be to pray theologically for a word of hope where things look hopeless, for a renewed sense of presence where God feels absent, for a memory of healing and liberation where relationships seem broken or coercive beyond repair. This remembering and naming of our deepest identity in God is, I believe, what Thomas Merton discovered in Russian literature and theology. In that pregnant space between divine invitation and creation's response, something new is ever waiting to be born into the world, something beautiful, in the very flesh and spirit of our lives: *Sophia*. But can we believe it? As Dan Horan puts it so well in the last line of his review, Merton helps us to remember and to express once again "something of the impossible." Beneath the din of pseudo-prophets dominating our public spaces, against every cause for resignation and creeping despair, maybe it is the poet, after all, who will help us "get back to ourselves before it is too late."<sup>4</sup>

I begin with Dan Horan's sensitive theological reading of *Sophia* as one attempt, with Merton, to render something of the impossible. Together with Ryan Scruggs' review in *The Merton Seasonal*,<sup>5</sup> it is a joy to discover in a young colleague so attuned to the myriad challenges facing contemporary theology not only a lucid grasp of the book's densely layered argument but real sympathy and energy surrounding its central thesis. Horan begins by affirming an intuition that drove much of my research from the beginning, namely, Merton's contribution not only as "an interdisciplinary bridge between theology and other fields (poetry and literature, for example)," but as a resource for engagement in "the ongoing systematic theological conversation about contemporary Christology." The latter judgment, of course, has proved more elusive in the environs of academic theology, even after George Kilcourse's seminal (and still quite relevant) *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ*.<sup>6</sup> But there are reasons, I think, to be hopeful that Catholic

4. Thomas Merton, "Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal," in *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: New Directions, 1981) 340; cf. also Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

5. Ryan Scruggs, "Illuminating Wisdom," *The Merton Seasonal* 35.1 (Spring 2010) 34-37.

6. George A. Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ* (Notre Dame,

theology is beginning to overcome the “disastrous” split – as Merton saw the problem fifty years ago – between theology and spirituality, doctrine and mysticism, scholarship and prayer. Both Scruggs and Horan are right in seeing my method in *Sophia* as a kind of “cartography” of grace charted by thinkers as diverse as Karl Rahner, John Henry Newman, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Thomas Merton. “Central to all,” as Horan notes, “is the sense of human experience as necessary for theology.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet Merton also saw how the appropriation of “experience” in theology – corresponding with modernity’s much-celebrated, and much-maligned, “turn to the subject” – can too often serve to justify a Cartesian or solipsistic obsession with the “ego-self,” cut off from “God” and “others,” leaving “my experience” as the ultimate arbiter of “Reality.” Perhaps it was partly this suspicion, namely, that modern theology had too uncritically absorbed the epistemological first principles of the Enlightenment, which drove Merton to seek after alternative ways of knowing, the more holistic way of wisdom, or *sapientia*, which he found in the East; and not only the East of Zen and of Gandhi, but of Russian Orthodoxy and its iconic Sophia tradition, “so compatible,” as Horan astutely notes, “with “pre-Platonic or Heraklitan philosophical currents.” In short, in his growing desire to see *and love* the world ever more through a divine perspective, Merton allowed himself, as Jesuit Fr. James Martin observes, to “contradict” himself, to become “large,” to “contain multitudes.” And indeed “Merton’s contradictions,” as Martin confesses, “are his most endearing features.”<sup>8</sup>

Such a thing might also be said of any orthodox or fully incarnational Christology, where the internal “contradictions” and “multitudes” of the creed – i.e., the realization of divine-humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, and through God incarnate, in all creation and in our very selves – turn out to be the source of Christianity’s revolutionary good news. Thus with Merton, “If we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of

IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

7. Also central to all, I would add, is the question of theological form and its relation to content, a particular concern in the early to mid-twentieth century, as the Church and its theologians began to break free of the scholastic manual form, as well as the presumptions of a more or less Kantian or “scientific” epistemology, and return to more biblical, narrative, autobiographical and poetical forms.

8. James Martin, *My Life with the Saints* (Chicago: Loyola, 2006) 43-44, citing Whitman’s “Song of Myself.”

Christ." Or more freely, in a sophiological key, "the Lord plays and diverts Himself in the garden of His creation."<sup>9</sup> Horan emphasizes a crucial point, detailed in my final chapter and conclusion, that rather than advancing "new dogmatic claims or doctrines" the sophiological tradition instead "offers a new way to look at the entirety of Christianity," a "new way to consider the *kerygmatic* or even dogmatic core of Christian belief." His further observation that Merton followed the Russians in their (apocalyptic) remembrance of Sophia "during tumultuous social and ecclesial times" is not an incidental point, not for them, certainly, but neither for us, as we seek to counter the ruling consciousness of our own times with a dangerous memory and inbreaking promise of hope. Such is the gentle inbreaking, the "cool hand," of Sophia.

I want to acknowledge, finally, Horan's gentle criticism regarding the "readability and voice of the text" with its occasional "piling on" of primary and secondary literature, a comment echoed by more than one reviewer, and which I take to heart as an invitation to write more accessibly, and freely, in my own voice. And I hope Horan, or someone as capable and inspired, might explore the gestures he finds in my study toward "an emergent Mariology that merits further consideration."

In an analogous way, I sense in Lynn Szabo's careful and eminently balanced remarks a desire to press my analysis of Merton's *Hagia Sophia* in a direction beyond, or at least not constrained by, the limitations or interpretive biases I may have brought to the text as a systematic theologian. Before I get to the substance of Szabo's critical reservations, I want to first acknowledge gratefully her generous reprise of some of the more positive critical attention the book has received to date. The praise from Fr. John Dear and Br. Patrick Hart, in particular, gives me great encouragement that the book not only "rings true" in its prophetic and mystical (and monastic!) bearings, but further, that it might find a hearing beyond academics and Merton scholars to include a more general audience. That fate, of course, is out of my hands, but it seems to me that the wide range of thinkers treated in the book, from Newman and Heschel to Soloviev, Bulgakov, and Merton, are quite worth the "reaching up to," even where doing so requires considerable intellectual labor, as in the denser sections of my book. Perhaps in the struggle itself – or so I pray – we will find ourselves "becoming

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9. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961) 296.

larger" as Christians and as human beings, welcoming others on the road to Emmaus: more able, intellectually, and more inclined, lovingly, to "contain multitudes."

Let me jump to the more critical sections of Szabo's review. Though I am far from confident I understand all the nuances of Szabo's comments as informed by contemporary literary theory, or in particular, how my sustained analysis of "words as sacraments" in chapters 2 and 3 is substantively different, much less incompatible, with her sacramental affirmation of poetics *qua* poetics, I would agree without qualification that *Hagia Sophia* merits much more exposition from a "purely literary" standpoint than I was able or qualified to offer in chapter 5. Certainly the omission of Ross Labrie's and Patrick O'Connell's literary and poetic studies marks a serious, though unintentional, gap in the resources that were brought to bear in my analysis of the poem; likewise my failure to tether Merton's sapiential imagination more explicitly to the Romantic and Transcendentalist traditions. Neither would I argue with Szabo's suggestion that the poem's realization, as with any great poem, involved "a recovery of craft, if not artifice, and hiddenness, if not artfulness." Jonathan Montaldo has made a similarly sensitive and compelling case for the famous "Fourth and Walnut" account as "a literary event with literary antecedents."<sup>10</sup>

Yet something in me resists Szabo's contention, if I understand her correctly, that "language itself is sacramental" *irrespective* of its reception or interpretation "by the human imagination or its religious/theological capabilities." (If a poem falls in the forest, does anybody hear?) What I hear in her analysis of *Hagia Sophia* is a laudable desire to celebrate the poem's "words, silences, and absences" as truly sacramental, grounded incarnationally, if analogically, in God's very essence, irrespective of any "theological meaning" human beings might discover in or glean from the text. "It is literary mysticism in its purest form . . . conceived in the language of poetry which is the word/Word of Genesis, of the Incarnation, and of the Resurrection of Christ Himself without mediation or proposition – of God." Still, I cannot grasp how one can build a (Christian) theory of *unmediated* sacramentality, even a "purely mystical" one, without presupposing the very mediations and propositions on which Szabo (and Merton) depends, namely, the mediation of the "Word," the "Incarnation," the "Resurrection of Christ," and

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10. Jonathan Montaldo, "A Gallery of Women's Faces and Dreams of Women from the Drawings of Thomas Merton," *The Merton Annual* 14 (2001) 157.

so on, all of which shape and give positive (loving) content to our communal confidence in the sacramental (yet analogical) power of language. To say it more starkly, with attention to the interpretive community both "behind" and "in front of" the text, can a poem, image, or any other ritual shaping of language be "sacramental" where it rises from, and / or evokes in its performance, a positively demonic framework of meaning?<sup>11</sup>

Without wishing to press further into a maze of technical debate, more broadly I wonder if I am right to discern in Szabo's "unsettledness" with my reading of *Hagia Sophia* a suspicion that I have more or less hijacked Merton from the poets and mystics and, by a kind of "reaching," sought to conscript him into the ranks of academic theology, or worse, traditional apologetics.<sup>12</sup> Her foregrounding of a somewhat technical footnote from the book's concluding pages – and a potentially misleading one out of context – adds to this sense. If I misread Szabo on this point, which is quite possible, let me at least clarify that the note she highlights takes aim at Catholic theologians (and bishops) from both the right and left who have too casually dismissed Merton (the famous "spiritual writer," "poet," "free-loving Yogi") as a theologian worthy of consideration, not in spite of but partly because of his enormous appeal among (unlettered) spiritual seekers everywhere.

In the broadest sense what I hope to have "put to rest" in this study – in the whole of it, and not only in chapter 5 – is the tendency and by now wearisome temptation to press "Thomas Merton" (as

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11. Merton's alertness to the potentially demonic use of language is well-known. See, e.g., "Auschwitz: A Family Camp," and "War and the Crisis of Language," in *Passion for Peace: The Social Essays*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 276-86; 300-14. On the formal relationship between (doctrinal) language and (mystical) experience, which occupied Merton considerably in his dialogue with Zen, see Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 39-46. Much of my second and third chapters are taken up with the question of language as a vehicle of sacramental mediation. My own instincts on this question are shaped by a Rahnerian framework, which maintains that the (mystical; sacramental) experience of God's immediacy or grace is always a "mediated immediacy," mediated by the inner freedom-in-transcendence of the person in their deepest self (what Rahner calls the "supernatural existential"), but also that person's constitution as a social, historical, relational being, i.e., as a subject whose freedom-in-transcendence is always shaped by the social matrix of others' freedom, inclusive of the sin and guilt of others.

12. This is not to dismiss the importance of "apologetics," especially understood in a mystical-prophetic key. Like Heschel, Merton's writings are apologetic in a particular kind of way (see *Sophia* 63).

symbol) into an “either/or” framework: either poet or theologian, either mystic or intellectual, either liberal or conservative, either christocentric or theocentric, and so on – no surer way, as I’m sure Szabo would agree, to distort his authentic legacy and kill him dead (or get him scrapped, at least, from the *Adult Catechism*). In sum, whether assessing Merton’s corpus from the literary or theological vantage point, the cardinal error (however difficult to avoid) is still to “isolate one aspect of [Merton’s] life or thought from the larger pattern.”<sup>13</sup> I hope I am not too much guilty of this with respect to *Hagia Sophia*, by not setting the poem “into the context of Merton’s entire poetic corpus.” That task, I think, would require another book, and abler hands than mine.

I turn finally to Edward Kaplan’s comments. Where Dan Horan has highlighted the implications of Merton’s life and thought for “the ongoing systematic theological conversation about contemporary Christology,” Kaplan carries this point into the realm of interfaith dialogue, where Christology has been and continues to be the greatest “stumbling block.” That he does so in such an honest and personal key, not only as a Merton scholar of the highest caliber but “as a Jew in search of integrity,” means more to me personally than I can say. Above all, his attention to the book’s method as a “model of interfaith exegesis,” and his embrace of that method, gives me reason to hope that Christology can remain faithful to itself and still, by retrieving its deepest human and Jewish roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, move beyond a fulfillment or supercessionist model.<sup>14</sup>

There is some irony, indeed, as Kaplan notes, and not a little risk on both sides, in opening ourselves to such a method, i.e., a “method of catholicity,” a “free theosophy.” The fact that Kaplan himself has practiced such interfaith and humanistic scholarship for decades, with his studies of Christian mystics such as Merton

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13. Douglas Burton-Christie, in “Review Symposium on George Kilcourse’s *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton’s Christ*,” with Christine Bochen and Anthony Padovano, *Horizons* 21.2 (1994) 332-42 (see 332).

14. Paul Knitter, a Catholic systematic theologian long engaged in Jewish-Christian dialogue, suggests as much in his review (see *Theological Studies* 71.3 [2010] 731-32). Rather than the “fulfillment” of Judaism, the sophiological perspective speaks of the positive and ongoing “filling out” of Chalcedon, Christianity’s core christological doctrine, both in its divine *and* fully human (and Jewish!) dimensions. Sophiology, one might say, moves theology and Church-world engagement forward, in part, by moving backward into the deepest (pre-Christian) wellsprings of divine-human-cosmic *memoria*.



and Howard Thurman, is an extraordinary gift to Christians and Christian theology, not to be taken for granted. From the other side, Kaplan seems to draw energy and hope from the fact that I would look to Heschel, a Jewish theologian and mystic, "to help explicate Merton's incarnational theology." Not to overstate the case – there have been and continue to be many Catholics and Christians (including theologians) working across doctrinal boundary lines – but Kaplan puts his finger on what may be Merton's (and by extension, perhaps my book's) most "radical" contribution, which is his *method*, his way of thinking, feeling, and *praying* through the deepest theological questions: the question of God, of human history, the planet, the universe, all held in the ever greater memory of God, the still-emerging life story of God. In sum, Kaplan shares my wonder at what I have called Merton's "cross-cultural exegesis by reminiscence" (see 112, 140).

Within such a "daring" methodological (and mystical) framework, the most interesting and critical question for me, as I think can also be said for Merton and the Russians, is not the tension between a christocentric and theocentric emphasis in theology or spirituality. That question, while not unimportant, misses the deep soteriological thrust of biblical faith and eschatological hope: everything dissolves finally, or is consummated, in the unfathomable love and mercy of God – including the religions, houses "that will one day perish."<sup>15</sup> (Threatening that extraordinary good news in the Bible there lurks the ever-present danger of idolatry, not least religious idolatry.) The critical soteriological question today, and arguably since the dawn of modernity, hinges on the deep ontological (and epistemological) question of God, and thus of revelation, i.e., whether and how we can affirm with any confidence the experience and reality of God, God's "real presence" in human history, even in "the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest."<sup>16</sup> This is, rendered variously, the "neverending struggle" between God's presence and absence (Bulgakov), God's immanence and transcendence (Merton), between the "analogical" and "dialectical" imagination (David Tracy).

There are certainly moments, as in his most prophetic (and an-

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15. From the opening of "Fire Watch: July 4, 1952," in Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953) 349.

16. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 141.

griest) social essays, and under the influence of Barth, that Merton flirts with a more dialectical rendering of the God-world (and by extension, Church-world, Christ-human) relationship.<sup>17</sup> Yet even here, where Merton seems almost to despair of modern society and the reigning modern (and Christian) consciousness as beholden to idolatry, one still senses, perhaps in direct proportion to prophetic disappointment, a deep affirmation and (divine) expectation of human beings as *imago Dei*, *imago Christi*, and of human history and culture as the consummate locus and birthplace of God's love, mercy, and presence. On this point, both *Hagia Sophia* and "The Time of the End Is the Time of No Room"<sup>18</sup> stand out – though their tenor is quite different – as consummate examples of Merton at his analogical and apocalyptic best: the unveiling of presence-in-absence, light-in-darkness, hope-in-hopelessness, a pattern that Merton draws from the deep structure of the Bible itself.<sup>19</sup>

The affirmation of divine-human relationality and promise even "in the valley of the shadow of death," which might dare even to affirm the incarnational presence of God (Sophia/Shekinah) in the darkness of Auschwitz, seems to me the profoundest seed of biblical good news that both Jews and Christians can and must embrace in an increasingly fragmented and violent world.<sup>20</sup> Whether Muslims might have recourse to such analogical imagination, through Sufi mysticism, for example, or elements of the Qur'an, I do not know. But on this point, I think, hinge a great many theological (and political) difficulties, which converge ultimately on the realization of ontological unity in God, the "hidden Ground of Love" – i.e., the deep ground for dialogue, justice and peace.<sup>21</sup>

17. See, for example, "Events and Pseudo-Events: Letter to a Southern Churchman," in Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968) 145-64; the problem of the God-world dialectic runs through the whole of *Faith and Violence*.

18. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966) 65-75.

19. See Christopher Pramuk, "Apocalypticism in a Catholic Key: Lessons from Thomas Merton," *Horizons* 36.2 (2009) 235-64.

20. For a powerful example of a Jewish theology of presence during the Holocaust, a theology with striking sophiological and incarnational resonances, see Melissa Raphael's breathtaking *The Female Face of God at Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

21. In her review of my book, Bonnie Thurston rightly laments the omission of any substantive reference to Merton's engagement with Islam or Sufi mysticism (see *The Merton Journal* 17.1 [Easter 2010] 47-48). Thurston's own work has helped me begin to address this gap in my fluency with Merton's corpus.

Perhaps all of this is to confess again the sense of hopefulness, even joy, that I draw from Kaplan's comments, not only with respect to the sophiological tradition and Merton's *Hagia Sophia*, but in the very seeds of conversation between "a doubt-laden Jewish scholar" and a "Catholic theologian's loyal faith," converging not least on the question of Christology. Is it too much to hope and pray that something new might be coming to birth, in the awakening of deeper roots that bind us already together? That "something" I had already felt years ago when first reading Heschel, but it was Kaplan's scholarship – his existential-theological musicianship – corresponding with my reading of John Henry Newman, which pointed me in directions I had not discovered in the assumed methods and canons of academic theology. I can imagine no greater compliment to my work than Ed Kaplan's concluding description of *Sophia* as "a book with which to think and pray."

With sincere thanks again to the reviewers, and asking the reader's patience for a moment longer, I would like to conclude by sharing one of the more extraordinary conversations I've been blessed to have since the book's publication. It took place with the artist and iconographer William Hart McNichols, known to friends as Fr. Bill, who had been introduced to the book by Fr. John Dear, and who subsequently wrote to me, initiating a lively correspondence that continues to this day. In a long telephone conversation from his home in New Mexico, Fr. Bill described to me the breakthrough of *Sophia* into his own consciousness some forty years ago as "much more like a flashing red light than a pleasant apparition."<sup>22</sup> For Fr. Bill, the inbreaking of Wisdom-*Sophia* comes at a time in history when the social and planetary matrix "of life itself is being threatened." Against what Fr. Daniel Berrigan calls the relentless "war on children" throughout the world – even, to our horror, inside the Church – the vocation of "giving birth to images," Fr. Bill suggests, is essential both in and *for* the life of the Church, even (or especially) where doing so is perceived as a threat. This insight, of course, reverberates darkly with Brueggemann's observation about the role of prophetic imagination in offering symbols of interruption and hope into a social imaginary increasingly paved over by dehumanizing racist, patriarchal, technical-economic forces.

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22. Fr. McNichols' icons, including a gallery of "sophianic icons," can be viewed at [www.standreirublevicons.com](http://www.standreirublevicons.com). One of these is inspired by Victor Hammer's "Hagia Sophia."

In the context of such a world, and the diminishment of our hope both in God and in human beings, the important question may not be "*Why Sophia?*" as I have framed it in the book, but rather – as Fr. Bill's own haunting body of work seems to ask – for how long can we continue to bear the silencing and desecration of Sophia? May her gentle and merciful presence help us get back to ourselves before it is too late.

Christopher Pramuk

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