

## Wisdom-Sophia in the Life and Theology of Thomas Merton

Dr. Christopher Pramuk

July 10-12, 2014

Vancouver School of Theology

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915-1968) is widely celebrated as one of the most influential spiritual writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Less explored is Merton's deepening realization of Christ as Wisdom-Sophia in the last decade of his life, a memory and experience of the feminine divine deep in the biblical-mystical tradition but largely marginalized in the West. Drawing from his journals and poetry, drawings and essays, this course explores Merton's prayer life while illuminating his enduring witness as a poet, prophet, and mystical theologian. Above all we look to the prose poem "Hagia Sophia" as Merton's consummate hymn of wisdom and peace. Sessions will incorporate periods of lecture, imagery, music, and *lectio divina*, as well as open discussion and shared exploration.

### Objectives

1. To understand the historical and social context of Merton's life and writings. What were the forces at play in society and church that shaped the writer Merton would become? Why Wisdom-Sophia in a century of unspeakable violence?
2. To engage Merton's autobiographical and spiritual writings, prophetic essays, poetry, and interreligious dialogue, and especially the influences that found expression in the prose poem "Hagia Sophia." Why are so many still drawn to Merton today? What might be the implications of Wisdom's dawning into our consciousness today?
3. To cultivate reading, writing, and prayer practices such as *lectio divina* and journaling that might engender a deeper sense of divine presence, mercy, and compassion in our everyday lives. What can Merton teach us about "finding God in all things," even in a world riven by suffering and violence?

**Thursday July 10:** 2 - 3:30 pm introductory session for retreat/course participants  
St. Andrew's Hall Board room: 6040 Iona Drive  
6 pm Merton lecture wine and cheese reception  
SAH Chapel: 6040 Iona Drive  
7 - 9 pm Merton Public Lecture - 1 hour plus questions & answers  
SAH Chapel

**Friday July 11:** 9 am - noon and 1 - 4 pm sessions for retreat/course participants  
Canadian Memorial United Church: 1825 W 16th Ave, Vancouver

**Saturday July 12:** 9 am - noon and 1 - 4 pm sessions for retreat/course participants  
Canadian Memorial United Church  
(One hour for lunch; not provided but restaurants/cafes in area.)

### Required Reading

Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master*, ed. Lawrence Cunningham (Paulist, 1992)

Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton* (Orbis, 2008)

Christopher Pramuk, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (Liturgical, 2009)

## Recommended

*Merton and Hesychasm: Prayer of the Heart*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (Fons Vitae, 2003)  
*In the Dark Before Dawn: New Selected Poems*, Thomas Merton (New Directions, 2005)  
*Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*, ed. Patrick O'Connell (Orbis 2013)  
*The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*, ed. William Shannon et al (Orbis, 2006)

Christopher Pramuk is Associate Professor of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH, and author of *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (2009), recipient of the International Thomas Merton Society's 2011 Thomas Merton Award. His recent work, *Hope Sings, So Beautiful: Graced Encounters Across the Color Line* (2013), focuses on racial justice and interracial solidarity in society and church. [www.HopeSingsSoBeautiful.org](http://www.HopeSingsSoBeautiful.org)

## CERTIFICATE & DEGREE EVALUATION INFORMATION

Students taking a Summer School course for certificate or degree credit will meet in an additional paper topic consultation seminar group with the instructor for one hour. Reading prior to the course and written assignments following it comprise the total package of learning time.

**The final day of Summer Term August 29, 2014** is the due date for all Summer School papers.

**Requirements for Certificate, Diploma, M.Div., M.A. credit:** pre-reading assignments; reading and full participation in classes during the retreat; research and course assignments before, during and/or after the retreat period. 100% attendance is expected.

### Written Assignment:

#### Certificate in Theological Studies Students:

A 5 - 7 page **reflection paper** which demonstrates the ability to thoughtfully engage the material and reading for the class, and gives a personal reflection on the reading and material covered. The paper will be submitted to the Course Instructor **no later than August 29, 2014**. **Certificate students are graded on an Approved/Not Approved basis only. No letter grades are given.**

#### Degree Students (Diploma/M.A./M.Div):

A **topic paper** will be the final evaluation method. The topic for the paper will be determined in consultation with the instructor. The paper will demonstrate the following competencies:

- Integration of course content, assigned reading, and the student's contemporary social, cultural and ecclesial context
- Knowledge of the chosen subject and relevant primary and secondary literature
- Critical analysis of the chosen topic
- Originality and creativity regarding choice of and approach to the chosen topic
- Clarity and organization of the student's writing style

**Paper:** 12 pages in length (3,000 words). **Research paper bibliography:** 4 – 8 entries beyond course texts. The paper will be submitted to the Course Instructor **no later than August 29, 2014.**

**Grading and Evaluations:** Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system with a competence model of assessment. Assignments within a course are given either an APP (Approved) or NAPP (Not Approved) designation. One re-write is allowed on any assignment which is NAPP within a course. The final grade for a course is reported both as a letter grade and as a narrative evaluation on the basis of a student's overall fulfillment of the competencies and expectations of the course. Final grade designations are: A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-; and NAPP. Competency for VST graduate courses is defined as B- or better. No re-writes are allowed to improve a letter grade given as a final grade for a course.

**Paper Length Policy:** Instructors have a right to refuse to grade papers that exceed the proscribed maximum length. If a student wishes to submit a paper longer than the proscribed limit, he or she must negotiate this with the professor.

**\*Students taking degree credit for another institution must initiate the request for transcript from VST's records department with appropriate information as to where transcript is to be sent.**

#### **Withdrawal from Courses:**

Students must notify the Registrar's Office that they are withdrawing from a course by filling out the designated form and submitting it to the Registrar. Email: [registrar@vst.edu](mailto:registrar@vst.edu). In all cases, **\$50/course and any student fees are non-refundable.** Of the remaining tuition, refunds are given as follows:

- 100% refunded if notification received prior to the retreat;
- 80% refunded if notification received by the end of the 1st day of the retreat (Friday evening);
- After the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the retreat, no refund can be given, and a WDR notation will appear on the student record
- Students may switch their registration from credit to audit until the final day of the retreat. A student who neither changes to audit nor withdraws before the required dates, and does not submit a final paper, will receive a NAPP grade for the course.

**Medical extensions** can be granted by the Dean for documented medical reasons only. Requests for extensions must be made prior to the initial due date, and will normally extend the due date one month. The instructor will be informed about any extensions granted.

#### **Additional Bibliography**

*Passion for Peace: The Social Essays*, ed. William Shannon (Crossroad, 1995)  
*Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*, ed. Patrick O'Connell (Orbis 2013)  
*The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*, ed. William Shannon et al (Orbis, 2006)  
*Merton and Hesychasm: Prayer of the Heart*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (Fons Vitae, 2003)  
*Merton and Buddhism: Realizing the Self* (Fons Vitae, 2007)  
*Merton and Judaism: Holiness in Words*, ed. Edward Kaplan (Fons Vitae, )  
*In the Dark Before Dawn: New Selected Poems*, Thomas Merton (New Directions, 2005)  
*The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart (New Directions, 1985)  
*The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*, ed. Jane Marie Richardson (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992).  
*An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition Vol. 3*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Cistercian, 2008).  
*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, ed. Naomi Burton et al (New Directions, 1973).  
*A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's Life. Vol. 3*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (Harper, 1996).  
*Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Vol. 4*, ed. Victor Kramer (Harper, 1997).  
*Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Vol. 5*, ed. Robert Daggy (Harper, 1997).  
*Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom. Vol. 6*. Ed. Christine Bochen (Harper, 1997).  
*The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*. Ed. William Shannon. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985).  
*The Courage for Truth: The Letters of Thomas Merton to Writers*. Ed. by Christine Bochen (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993).  
*Witness to Freedom: The Letters of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis*. Ed. William Shannon (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994)

*The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, Michael Mott (Houghton Mifflin, 1984)  
*Silent Lamp: The Thomas Merton Story*, William Shannon (Crossroad, 1992)  
*Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination*, Ross Labrie (University of Missouri, 2001)  
*The Merton Annual, Volumes 23-26*

*Thomas Merton: A Film Biography*, DVD, dir. Paul Wilkes (First Run, 2004)  
*Soul Searching: The Journey of Thomas Merton*, DVD, dir. Morgan Atkinson (Duckworks, 2006)