

“Wisdom in all ages entering into holy souls makes them friends of God.” The Wisdom of Solomon 7:27
Sermon for the Office of the Burial of the Dead for Dr Donald John Hambrick (1935-2016)
St George’s Round Church, Halifax
May 18, 2016
Dr Wayne J. Hankey

Shirley asked that Don’s life and love for Dante and the Department be gathered up into the conclusion of the Paradiso, the very last line of the greatest Christian poem: “*l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stele*”, “the love which moves the sun and the other stars”. What is that love? Don’s doctoral thesis on Aristotle’s *Ethics* in the *Comedia* gives the answer: the love of all things for the self-sufficient contemplation of God. The desire of all to be part of God’s self-sufficient thinking, or to imitate it in the ways Dr Diamond has demonstrated about living beings in his *Mortal Imitations of Divine Life*. Stated so sharply we are stunned to realize that the conclusion of the medieval Christian gathering in of Jewish, Hellenic, Roman, and Islamic culture is the acme of pure paganism: Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Λ: “Life belongs to God. For the activity of intellect is life”; “ζωὴ δὲ γε ὑπάρχει (θεῷ): ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωή.” Yet if you turn to the picture of another union of Jewish, Hellenic and Christian, a 3rd century Christian Sarcophagus from Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, you will see the same beginning and end. The figure at the centre is Jesus Christ depicted with the philosopher’s beard seated in contemplation of the scroll of wisdom.



Dante’s union of what comes to us from Athens and Jerusalem also brings us to the Wisdom of Solomon, the book from which a lesson was set for our liturgy and from which I have taken my text. There we find another Hellenistic fusion. The *Liber Sapientiae* was written in Greek by a Jew of Alexandria, that Entrepôt of ancient cultures gathered in from China, India, Afghanistan, Persia, Babylonia, Syria, Pharaonic Egypt, Rome, to Gaul and Celtic Britain, just to move from East to West. In that ancient centre of learning, with the world’s first research library, Greek and Jew met to produce the great translation of the Hebrew scripture into Greek, the Septuagint. It served as the Torah for the vast world of Hellenic Judaism and then as the first Scripture of the Christian Church. The *Liber Sapientiae*, whose Scriptural quotations are from the Septuagint, was a great favorite of ancient and medieval Jewish and Christian philosophers. It gives us the conflation of pagan and Jewish, of Hellenic philosophy and the God of Moses which produced Philo Judaeus of Alexandria as its most splendid intellectual result. From that same conflation Christianity arose, the religion for which Philo set the fundamental shape of theology. Though depicted by Christians as a bishop, Philo was a faithful Jew and apologist for Judaism who in his old age travelled to Rome for a face to face struggle with the Emperor Caligula for the Alexandrian Jewish community.

In Rome we arrive back at the other mixing of Hellenic pagan and Jewish, the 3rd century Sarcophagus from Santa Maria Antiqua, which I shall use as a focus of our meditations. Having looked at Christ as depicted here, consider the only figure who faces us with imperial and divine frontality: Sophia, Wisdom, veiled, inspired and offering prayer. She has already had a past as a goddess, scholars detect the Egyptian Isis in her, and, as the beauty of pure form in Plato's *Phaedrus* (210D), she arouses "terrible love" (Wisdom 7:10 & 8:2)¹, to say nothing of her evident genesis from the Platonic and Stoic *Logos*.

This description of her by King Solomon is the heart of his Book of Wisdom:

All things, whether secret or manifest, I know. Wisdom, the Maker of all things, taught me: for in her is an understanding spirit holy, one only, manifold, subtle, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subject to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, which cannot be letted, ready to do good, Kind to man, steadfast, sure, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things, and going through all understanding, pure, and most subtle spirits. More moving than any motion: she passes and goes through all things by reason of her pureness. For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty...Being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself, she makes all things new: in all ages entering into holy souls, she makes them friends of God.²

She will have a future as the Divine *Logos* of Philo, "God's Son: a new synthesis...of the Wisdom of the Bible...the Platonic *Logos*... and the divine Word".³ Again, in the Prologue of John's Gospel, she is incorporated within the godhead to become the only Begotten and Incarnate Son. Again, as the *Sedes Sapientiae*, she is Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. Again, in another great concord of Hellenistic myth, poetry, religion and philosophy, the *Consolation* of Boethius, she is Lady Philosophy. Robert Crouse, Don's supervisor, in his last piece of published scholarship, which concerned the Book of *Wisdom* in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, wrote of her: "*Sapientia*, Christologically understood, is both transcendent and immanent, both divine and human, both ancient and ever new, divine healer (*medicus*) and medicine (*medicamentum*) for human ills."⁴ Again, as Dante's Beatrice, she fuses St Mary and Lady Philosophy. As "Sophia" once again, she will be an English Protestant in *Tom Jones* where Henry Fielding draws us back to her origins in Plato's *Phaedrus* and Solomon's Wisdom.⁵ Aristotle, and the great Jewish philosopher theologian Moses Maimonides (to say nothing of all the rest), maintain that the friendship with God, brought by contemplative wisdom, brings us under His providence and makes us sharers of the Divine Immortality. Thus the central figures of the Sarcophagus, with their message of eternal life. What of the rest?

Turning to the right is easier here. At the end we find the Baptism of Christ (that lump overhead is the Dove of the Holy Spirit) understood, as St Paul did, through the Greek Mysteries: "so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death...buried with him by baptism into death...For, if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his

¹ William Horbury, « The Wisdom of Solomon » in Goodman & Barton (eds) *The Apographa, The Oxford Biblical Commentary* (2012), 44.

² The Wisdom of Solomon 7:21-27

³ Daniel Boyarin, "Logos, A Jewish Word. John's Prologue as Midrash", Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 546-547.

⁴ R.D. Crouse, *HAEC IPSA VERBA DELECTANT: Boethius and the LIBER SAPIENTIAE*, in A. Campodonico, ed., *Verità nel tempo. Platonismo, Cristianesimo e contemporaneità. Studi in onore di Luca Obertello* (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2004), 54-61 at 61.

⁵ See W.J. Hankey, "Conversion: Ontological & Secular from Plato to *Tom Jones*", *Numero Cinq*, V: 7, July 2014 <http://numerocinqmagazine.com/2014/07/15/conversion-ontological-secular-from-plato-to-tom-jones-essay-wayne-j-hankey/>. Her's is the terrible beauty of the pure form.

resurrection.”⁶ Next comes a figure common to Jew and Hellene, the Good Shepherd, like the Praying (*Orans*) Wisdom at the centre, he is found early in the Catacombs, here, as there, he carries the soul of the departed as one of his lambs. The left is more complex but makes our point about the fusion of Jewish and Greek artfully. A boat rocks in the waves, a sea monster, ominously perched on a rock, bares its teeth filled head, and an exquisitely beautiful youth sleeps peacefully under a gourd, which provides a platform for sheep of the heavenly pasture. It is the story of Jonah, vomited up by the whale after prefiguring Christ’s three days in the realm of death. Resurrected, he has been transformed into the most beautiful of Greeks, Endymion. Selene, the moon goddess, had him given divine immortality by way of endless sleep so he would never leave her. He became a symbol of immortal life and a popular figure on sarcophagi. Here he joins with other pagan forms, Jewish and Christian ones to preach one message: the love of Wisdom, “pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty”, brings friendship with God and the gift of endless life.

The harmony I have set out between Jew and Greek, Semitic and Aryan, has been the core assumption and continuous teaching of the Classics Department Don and I entered and in which we studied and taught together. For hundreds of years now others have sought to separate and oppose them, a project which had the most evil possible results with the Nazis, who used the results of such scholarship to claim that their anti-Semitism was scientific. James Doull insisted that the real historical conveyers of Hellenic culture were the Abrahamic religions and Robert Crouse set an essential purpose of his work in a very early essay on the modern attempt to deHellenize Christianity. He wrote:

While schematizations of contrasts between Hebrew and Greek modes of thought and expression are useful, it is dangerous...to regard them as in any sense absolute....To say that Greek thought about God is static, for instance, is untrue; for the Greeks, God is full of active power. And it is similarly wrong to suppose that the Hebrews have no concept of the being of God. The real distinctions here, as elsewhere, are rather a matter of emphasis on different aspects of the same concept. Thus...Hebrew and Greek ways of thinking should be regarded as complementary rather than opposed....Perhaps it is no longer necessary to think of hellenization in terms of deterioration....[T]he hellenization of Christianity is implicit in the historicity of Christianity itself—in the enfleshment of revelation...⁷

The questions involved here are by no means past. Indeed they are more urgently present than ever, and the conflicts to which they belong fill the news every day. In the work to which Don and his teachers devoted themselves and which his colleagues continue, by setting before students the harmonizing monuments and figures of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, including the Book of Wisdom and the *Comedia*, we may hope and pray that Wisdom still enters into holy souls making them friends of God, of one another, and members of the immortal Communion of Saints. Amen.

⁶ Romans 6:3-5.

⁷ Robert D. Crouse, “The Hellenization of Christianity: A Historiographical Study,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* 8 (1962): 22–33 at 33.

Dedication *Dionysius* 33 (2015)
DONALDO JOHANNI HAMBRICK
MCMXXXV-MMXVI
BACCALAUREO LITTERARUM GRAECORUM ET LATINORUM
MAGISTRO HISTORIAE LITTERARUMQUE CLASSICARUM
DOCTORI LITTERARUM STUDIORUMQUE MEDIAEVALIUM
ALUMNO PAEDAGOGO PROFESSORI AMICO BENEFACTORI
HOC VOLUMEN GRATO ANIMO DEDICATUM EST

Dr Donald Hambrick devoted his whole life to a humble and completely dedicated study and teaching of Classics, of Ancient and Medieval philosophy and literature, and of history. A student of the Dalhousie Department of Classics from 1951, he took his final degree from us, a doctorate on Aristotle and Dante, in 1998. Friend of its teachers and students for sixty years, from 1989 to 2001, he taught Latin, Ancient, Medieval and Modern history in the Classics and History Departments at Dalhousie, retiring to become our constant and sacrificial benefactor.

Don's primary education was acquired in the public schools of Nova Scotia at a time when they prepared students for university admission standards higher than those now required for graduation. A perfectionist in the Classical languages, Don won the Howard Murray Greek Prize as an undergraduate. After his first period of teaching in Nova Scotia schools, and a year as an exchange teacher at the Lessing Gymnasium in Mannheim, he went on to a MA with a thesis on Zeus in Aeschylus (1968). His next period of teaching in the urban and rural schools of Nova Scotia (and at the Nova Scotia Teacher's College) was augmented by a Master's degree in History from the University of New Brunswick with a thesis on the social and political philosophy of Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1976).

Don returned to teach in rural schools in Nova Scotia until he took early retirement in 1988 to begin the PhD awarded for a dissertation entitled "Aristotle Transformed: Dante and the structure of the Inferno and Purgatorio", which he located in Aristotle's *Ethics*. So that he could carry on his studies, both as a doctoral student and after, Don took on enormous amounts of teaching for us, for the History Department, for Mount St Vincent University and, in 1992-93 for the Foreign Affairs College, Beijing. There were many years in which the maintenance of the curriculum of our Department depended on his work. Finally, he overworked himself into bad health. Still, his sense of humor never failed. An indication is the final thanks in his Dante thesis which went to his dentist, who, by giving him painkillers for his toothache, enabled him to survive his *viva*.

A Memorial will be celebrated at St George's Round Church on his birthday, May 18th at which I shall deliver the homily. His wife, Shirley, who cared for him through a long and painful illness asked that his life and love for Dante and the Department be gathered up into "*l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stele*". To no one more than Donald Hambrick is the prayer for the departed appropriate: "Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis".

WJH