

The beauty of Wisdom

Heather Smith *reflects on* Proverbs 8:1-4. 22-31

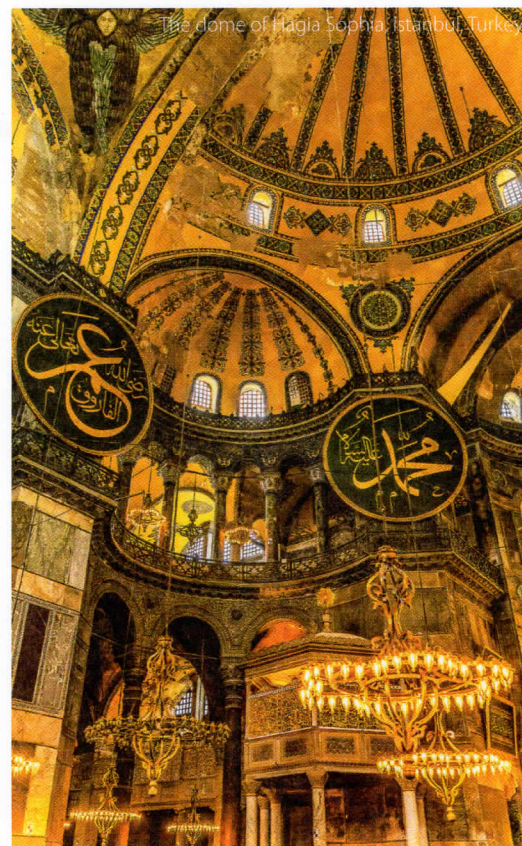
It's easy to be wise after the event. "We should have checked," goes the cry when something has gone wrong. In engineering there's a "lessons-learned review" at the end of a project. Everyone involved writes down what went well – so they can do the same next time – and what that went badly – so as not to repeat mistakes. Unfortunately, such reviews often get filed away and never looked at again, so the next team is destined to repeat mistakes, and probably add a few new ones.

By contrast, God brought in Wisdom at the beginning. In *Principles of Philosophy*, the French philosopher, scientist, and mathematician René Descartes wrote, "It is really only God alone who has Perfect Wisdom... who has a complete knowledge of the truth of all things."

Today's psalm tells us that God's first act was to create Wisdom and then to work with her to create the world.

Wisdom has a Greek name – Sophia – and mystics such as Thomas Merton and Hildegard of Bingen meditated upon her. In Constantinople, the famous Eastern Orthodox church, Hagia Sophia, is dedicated to Wisdom.

Sister Joyce Rupp wrote: "We need to look for Sophia. By her very nature she is relational, present in the world, interacting among people and ordinary human lives. By desiring to know her, by opening our minds and hearts, her radiance will permeate our lives." If we do as Sister Joyce suggests perhaps we can learn to be wise before the event. ☺



Lord God, from whom all wisdom comes. We look for Sophia, present in the world, among us in our day-to-day lives. We desire to know her, to open our hearts and minds, and to allow her radiance to permeate our lives. Amen.

Poetry and faith

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

by Julia McGuinness

Can a Jesuit priest be a poet? Gerard Manly Hopkins thought not. Before pursuing ordination, in 1868, he made a bonfire of all his poetry.

Seven years later, Hopkins' religious superior asked him to write a poem commemorating the five Franciscan nuns exiled from Germany, who drowned in a storm at sea. In thirty-five verses, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" addresses and wrestles with the all-loving God: "Thou mastering me / God! giver of breath and bread", who yet allows suffering.

Former Archbishop Rowan Williams asserts that poets "find new words for God," and Hopkins pushes language to its extreme. He uses words familiar, formal, from dialects and Old English, and combines them fresh ways. Where the sense of Hopkins' poetry can be elusive, its unique music and rhythm captivate. Hopkins said his work is "less to be read than heard". We know this in the flow of his lines on "The Windhover", as this bird in flight, "this morning's minion, king- / dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn / drawn Falcon", turns the poet's heart to Christ. ☺

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

"If you have livestock you have deadstock". It's a harsh saying used by farmers, but a true one. We've been lucky not to lose any lambs this year but our neighbour lost a cow just last Thursday. She was fine, suckling her calf and then two days later she was dead. There seemed no reason for it. I hatched fifteen ducklings in the incubator last Wednesday and on Friday ten of them died in half an hour despite

eating, drinking and running around just before.

So what do we make of it when farming isn't all sunshine and animals frolicking? What helps? The solidarity with other farming neighbours is a huge consolation as they know the sadness and puzzlement of unexplained loss, and Psalm 10 gives me voice: "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" This is the question faith asks. ☺

“To have the fruition of God the Trinity, after whose image we are made, is indeed the fullness of our joy, than which there is no greater.”

St Augustine (AD 354-430), theologian, philosopher and bishop