183 To Understand (*Intelligere*)

We ought to understand[[1]](#endnote-1) those matters which are above us, Luke 2[:50] God. Rom. 1[:20]: “The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”

And this is evident in a double book, because in the book of Scripture where the legal figures shine forth, where the prophets are collected, Luke last chapter [24:45] “He opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. Similarly, in the book of nature where the intellect finds the saying that in the magnitude of the creatures are found the omnipotence of God, in the beauty and order the wisdom of God, and in the utility and fruit the goodness and clemency of God. Therefore, it is said in Wis. 13[:5]: “By the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby.”

Second,[[2]](#endnote-2) we ought to understand those matters which are next to us, namely, our neighbor, Eccli. [31:18]: “Judge of the disposition of your neighbor by yourself.” For in cold and in hunger and thirst and sorrow I must understand the necessity of my neighbor and thus he who understands well is moved. So, it is concerning men of compassion because they sometimes will be moved by God, Psal. [40:2]: “Blessed is he who understands concerning the needy and the poor.”

Third,[[3]](#endnote-3) we must understand by that which are below with us, namely, the body and the soul. For just as the eye guides the hand to work and in exterior motion, so the intellect directs our heart in interior work. Wherefore the intellect is said as if an interior text because the soul informs and quiets, or the intellect is said as if an interior place because just as it contains and preserves the located contents, so the intellect and good conscience dictates or rather says what is found rather than man, Psal. [48:13]: “Man when he was in honor did not understand.” This is also to be known that man ought to understand many things because there are things pertinent to himself, pertinent to his neighbor, and pertinent to God.

Matters pertinent to himself are three. First, what is to be believed because what is true for him, he should assent to, Eccli. 5[:13]: “Be meek to hear the word of God, that you may understand.” And 2 Tim. 2[:7]: “Understand what I say: for the Lord will give you in all things understanding.” But, alas, because many have a heart so blinded that they do not understand, Mark [4:12]: “That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand.”

Second, what good ought to be done because just as the traveler tends to understand from another who knows the better way that he may go through it, Jos. 1[:7]: “That you may understand all things which you do.” The volume of this law does not go back from your mouth, and Prov. 14[:8]: “The wisdom of a discreet man is to understand his way.” But, alas, because according to the Psal. [13:2]: “The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there be any that understand.”

Third, what ought to be guarded against because of sin. So, the infirm is helped to understand what things are harmful there, so that he may be careful, Eccli. 3[:32]: “A wise heart, and which hath understanding, will abstain from sins.” And in Psal. [118:104]: “By your commandments I have had understanding: therefore, have I hated every way of iniquity.”

¶ Concerning these three, Isai. 52[:13]: “Behold my servant shall understand, he shall be exalted.” And Deut. 32[:29]: “O that they would be wise and would understand and would provide for their last end.” But alas because in the Psal. [81:5] it is said, “They have not known nor understood: they walk on in darkness.” The example of that one who for a hundred solidi bought wisdom.

¶ Again the matters connected to our neighbor are three according to those three which man has appropriate to himself which are corporal, body and soul according to these man ought to understand.

First, the needs of our neighbor so that one may help him just as the bird attending to the hunger of her chicks feeds them, Psal. [40:2]: “Blessed is he that understands concerning the needy and the poor.”

Second his insolence so that he may castigate it, Psal. [2:10]: “And now, O you kings, understand: receive instruction, you that judge the earth.” And Eccli. 31[:18]: “Judge of the disposition of your neighbor by yourself.” And Wis. 6[:2]: “Hear, you kings, and understand: learn, you who are judges of the ends of the earth.”

Third, his ignorance that one may teach him, Prov. 1[:5]: “A wise man shall hear and shall be wiser: and he who understands, shall possess governments.” And Prov. 14[:35]: “A wise servant is acceptable to the king.”

Third, the needs for God are three which man ought to understand. First, that he understand the premonitory office of the Lord so that thus he may take more care, so the servant therefore takes care in the presence of the Lord, Psal. [93:8]: “Understand, you senseless among the people: and, you fools, be wise at last.” But many are like boys who when they close their eyes think they are not seen by anyone, Eccli. 23[:27]: “And he understands not that his eye sees all things.”

Second, man ought to understand that God will be the marvelous distributor of good things so that one may serve him more, Psal. [100:1-2]: “I will sing, and I will understand in the unspotted way, when you shall come to me.” But alas because it is said in Isai. 1[:3]: “The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel has not known me.”

Third, one ought to understand that God will be the terrible stinger of evils and thus one may fear him more, [Psal. 49:21-22]: “You thought unjustly that I should be like to you,” etc., up to “Understand these things, you that forget God.” But, alas, who according to the Psal. [105:7]: “Our fathers understood not your wonders in Egypt.”

¶ Concerning this punishment three things are to be attended to. First, the severity of the judge, Psal. [2:10-13]: “And now, O you kings, understand: receive instruction, you that judge,” etc. up to “his wrath,” now softened, “shall be kindled slowly but then fiercely.

Second, his acerbity shall be poured out, Matt. 13[:49-50]: “The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just,” etc., up to “gnashing of teeth.”

Third, the perpetuity of his acerbity, Jer. 20[:11]: “They have not understood the everlasting reproach, which never shall be effaced.” And Jer. 30[:24]: “In the latter days you shall understand these things.” As happens concerning the mole which having eyes under its bristly skin lives as does God but being warned of death breaks the skin and sees, Eph. 5[:5]: “For know this and understand.”

¶ Concerning the rewards which are to be sought. First, benignity, Psal. [106:43]: “Who is wise, and will keep these things: and will understand the mercies of the Lord?”

Second, the delectability of the reward, Wis. 3[:7-9]: “The just shall shine,” and the cases in which they are enveloped by authority. The four endowments of the body which are clarity because they shine forth; judgment because “like sparks”; agility because “they shall run about”; immunity to suffering because “they shall reign forever,” and it follows, “They that trust in the Lord, shall understand the truth.”

Third, the perpetuity of the declarations, [Wis. 4:14]: “The people see this, and understand not, nor lay up such things in their hearts,’ etc.

1. Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 6.3 (8:309b-310a): Debemus enim per donum intellectus subtiliter penetrre et intelligere quae sunt supra nos, ut Deum....

Et nota, quod duplex est liber in quo intellectus potest legre, et intelligere, et addiscere Deum, scilicet: liber Scripturae, et hunc librum dedit Salvator discipulis suis post resurrectionem, ut scilicet in figuris legalibus et canticis prophetalibus intelloigerent mysteria gratiae, que opertus est Christus, id est, ut per ea quae facta sunt et dicta in Veteri Testamento, intelligant ea quae completa sunt in novo. Unde dicitur in *Luca*: *Tunce aperuit eis sensum, ut intelligerent Scripturas*. Alius est liber creaturae, in quo intellectus fidelis debet Deum quaerere, quia potest eum invenire: sicut in magnitudine creaturarum, omnipotentiam Dei; in pulchritudine et ordine, sapientiam; in utilitate et fructu, bonitatem Dei summam; quia dicitur in libro *Sapientiae: A magnitudine speciei creaturae, cognoscibiliter pot4est eorum Creator videri.* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 6.3 (8:310b): Secundo debemus intelligere quæ sunt juxta nos scilicet proximum juxta illud quod diciintelligere tur in *Ecclesiastico: Intellige quæ sunt proximi tui ex te ipso* Nam in frigore meo debeo intelsunt ligere pauperis nuditatem in fame et siti pauDuplex peris sitim et esuriem et in dolore meo pauliber peris infirmitatem et sic de aliis Et sicut homines bene intelligentes consueverunt ad hoScripturæ nores et dignitates promoveri ita qui intellipulis gunt necessitatem proximi promoventur et quasi episcopantur ad beatitudinem paradisi Unde dicitur in *Psalmo Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 6.3 (8:310b): Tertio debemus intelligere quæ sunt infra nos sicut animam nostram et corpus nostrum Sicut enim oculus noster dirigit manum in opere et motu exteriori sic intellectus regulat affecfidelis tum in omni opere et motu interiori Unde ininvenire tellectus dicitur interior lectus quia animam informat animam tranquillat et quietat sicut corpus in lecto pausat Dicitur etiam interior locus quia sicut locus continet et conservat lo catum sic intellectus stabilitat et conservat lieorum berum arbitrium et omnem interiorem motum Ideo dicitur in Psalmo: *Intellectus bonus omni bus facientibus eum* quia si homo non faciat quod intellectus et conscientia dicunt nec Deus nec angelus nec homo quia ista tria habent intellectum dici meretur sed potius jumento comparatur Unde dicitur in Psalmo: *Homo cum in honore esset non intellexit* Creatoter rem suum sed jumentis comparatus et similis factus est illis [↑](#endnote-ref-3)