268 Sheep (*Oves*)

According to the Philosopher, book 7, *De animalibus*,[[1]](#endnote-1) a sheep is a quiet animal, but deprived of intellect, it shakes the ice from itself in the winter. These conditions Christ wants to find in his sheep, which “he shall separate from the goats” in the end, Matt. 25[:32]. Therefore, he wants that his sheep be a quiet animal, of which matter he gave in himself to us the example, Isai. 53[:7]: “He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth.”

Again, Christ wants that he be deprived of intellect, as namely anyone of the faithful is subdued and in the present “bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ,” 2 Cor. 10[:5]. Namely lest he follow his own, but rather the faith of Christ. Wherefore Christ says, John 10[:3-4]: because “he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he has let out his own sheep, he goes before them: and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice.”

¶ Naturally, where the sheep sees the ram to go it follows. It is not like the ass which is a proud animal and as if of its own sense, because of the vice which it sees as some danger although little it goes back into the muddy and vile way. Therefore, perhaps it was commanded in the law that an ass not be offered in a sacrifice, but “the firstborn of an ass thou shalt change for a sheep,” Exod. 13[:13]. Therefore, it is said in the Psal. [76:21]: “You have conducted your people like sheep, by the hand of Moses.” Christ was made the ram of his flock, sacrificed on the cross, and preceded the sheep in order that the sheep be separated from him which first went astray, 1 Pet. 2[:25]: “For you were as sheep going astray; but you are now converted to the shepherd and bishop of your souls.”

¶ Again, in Psal. [118:176]: “I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost.” And Isai. 54[:6]: “All we like sheep have gone astray; everyone has turned aside into his own way.”

¶ Note here that although man follows his own will and for the time being, he was, therefore Christ said, Matt. 10[:6]: “Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Third, the sheep is a useful animal for all things if he is well watched over, Psal. [143:13]: “Their sheep fruitful in young.” So, all things which proceed from man are necessarily well regulated, Rom. 8[:28]: “We know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good.” In the figure of these first “Abel was a shepherd,” Gen. 4[:2]. And all the patriarchs and that the brothers of Joseph [Gen.] 37[:12], and Moses, Exod. 13[:12] and David before he was taken into the kingdom he was, 1 Reg. 17[:20].

¶ Fourth, a sheep shakes the ice off unless thus it is too weak. Wherefore according to the Philosopher, as above,[[2]](#endnote-2) through this the shepherds know if the sheep can live. If in the winter they shake the ice from themselves, so it is a sign of life and spiritual strength in man if they shake from themselves the hardness of sins through penitence. And, it is a sign of enough heat to sustain life, Luke. 9[:5] Christ says, “Shake off even the dust of your feet.” Beyond the preaching, it is known that sheep need the shepherd protecting, so also the obtuseness of man needs the Holy Spirit, Num. 27[:16-17] Moses said, “May the Lord of the spirits of all flesh provide a man, that may be over this multitude” who can “go out and in before them, and may lead them out, or bring them in: lest the people of the Lord be as sheep without a shepherd.”

The Philosopher, book 3, chapter 3, *De animalibus*,[[3]](#endnote-3) says that shepherds teach sheep to walk quickly at the hearing of any sound. For at the sound of thunder if it remains one of the pregnant sheep may make an abortion. The pastoral prelates ought to teach their subordinates that they hurry “into that rest,” Heb. 4[:11]. And because whoever follows his flock lest by chance anyone who is separated makes an abortion, that is, loses the fetus of good intention, Eccle. 4[:10]: If one is alone “when he falls, he has none to lift him up.” Wherefore the Lord against the shepherds, Ezech. 34[:2-5], “Thus says the Lord, Woe to the shepherds of Israel, that fed themselves: should not the flocks be fed by the shepherds,” etc. And it follows, “but my flock you did not feed. My sheep were scattered, because there was no shepherd: and they became the prey of all the beasts of the field,” etc. Also, the sheep need water for nourishing.

Wherefore the Philosopher, book 7, *De animalibus,* c. 5,[[4]](#endnote-4) because the sheep in drinking water become fat, so the faithful of Christ by taking up the drink of the doctrine of salvation or grace. Wherefore Gen. 29[:7]: “Give the sheep drink, and so lead them back to feed.” Wherefore also the sheep of Jacob, Gen. 30[:41] by drinking water in the channels in which branches were placed conceived fetuses of various colors. So, they that drink the water of sacred doctrine in which are examples of the saints conceive fetuses of good intentions. Christ said, Matt. 10[:16]: “Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves,” that is, like good men among the evil. Certainly, the just are compared to sheep.

First, on account of the simplicity of innocence. For they will not be harmed among the wolves, 2 Kings last chapter [24:17]: “These that are the sheep, what have they done,” as if saying, nothing of evil.

Second, on account of peace and tranquility. For they will not die like dogs, Isai. 53[:7]: “He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter.”

Third, on account of the immolation of fitness. For they are not useless after death like bees, Psal. [43:22]: “We are counted as sheep for the slaughter.”

¶ Fourth, on account of the ministration of much usefulness. For they are not like swine, ministering to nothing while they live except their own, Isai. 7[:21-22]: In an evil “day a man shall nourish two sheep, and for the abundance of milk he shall eat butter.”

¶ Fifth, on account of the fleece, that is, the comfort and heat of association, not like the pelt of a dog which although pure it is nothing. However, it confers to the comfort, so it is concerning evil associations, Job 31[:20]: “If he were warmed with the fleece of my sheep.”

¶ Sixth, on account of the fertility of the noble minded, for there is no sterility there, Psal. [143:13]: “Their sheep fruitful in young, abounding in their goings forth.”

¶ Seventh, on account of the awareness of their shepherds. For they are not like moles without sight, digging their spirits in the earth, John [10:4]: “The sheep follow him.” But alas because our sheep quickly scatter, Zach. 13[:7]: “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”

¶ Again, they wander perilously, Psal. [118:176]: “I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost.” 1 Pet. 2[:25]: “For you were as sheep going astray.”

Again, without defense they are captured, John 10[:12]: “The wolf catches and scatters the sheep.”

1. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.3 610b22-27, 32-34 (Barnes 1:952): The sheep is said to be naturally dull and stupid. Of all quadrupeds it is the most foolish: it will saunter away to lonely places with no object in view; oftentimes in stormy weather it will stray from shelter; if it be overtaken by a snowstorm, it will stand still unless

   the shepherd sets it in motion; it will stay behind and perish unless the shepherd brings up the rams; it will then follow home.

   …

   You will have a warmer bed in amongst the goats than among the sheep, because the goats will be quieter and will creep up towards you; for the goat is more impatient of cold than the sheep. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 8.10 596a31-596b2 (Barnes 1:933): Sheep will lose flesh if they be kept overmuch on the move or be subjected to any hardship. In winter time shepherds can easily distinguish the vigorous sheep from the weakly, from the fact that the vigorous sheep are covered with hoar-frost while the weakly ones are quite free of it; the fact being that the weakly ones feeling oppressed with the burden shake themselves and so get rid of it. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.3 610b35-611a2 (Barnes 1:952): Shepherds train sheep to close in together at a clap of their hands, for if, when a thunderstorm comes on, a ewe stays behind without closing in, the storm will kill it if it be with young; consequently if a sudden clap or noise is made, they close in together within the sheepfold by reason of their training. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 3.19 520b28-521a1 (Barnes 1:826): Animals that are in good condition, either from natural causes or from their health having been attended to, have the blood neither too abundant-as creatures just after drinking have the liquid inside them in abundance-nor again very scanty, as is the case with animals when exceedingly fat. For animals in this condition have pure blood, but very little of it, and the fatter an animal gets the less becomes its supply of blood; for whatsoever is fat is destitute of blood. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)