Worcester F 80 Distinctiones

233 The Wise ones (*Sapientes*)

Some seem wise and are not, just as brass appears to be gold. A kite appears like a noble bird.[[1]](#endnote-1) These are the provident ones in earthly matters, negligent in divine.

¶ They are wise so that they may do evil, they do not know how to act rightly, Rom. 1[:22]: “Professing themselves to be wise, the became fools.” Others do not seem to be, but they are. Just as a staff half in water does not appear straight,[[2]](#endnote-2) but nevertheless

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it is, these persons are provident in divine matters, neglecting those on earth, [1] Cor. 3[:18-19]: “If any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, the foolishness of this world is wisdom with God.”

¶ Others seem and are, as those who do and teach wisdom as the holy teachers, Prov. 3[:13]: “Blessed is the man that finds wisdom.” Thus, they are said [to be] and are wise who use the acts of virtues. For they have the prudence of an eagle that nurtures her own chicks and throws out others, Rom. 12[:3]: “Not to be wiser than it behooves to be wise.”

¶ Others have the wisdom of a dog that serves his master in the hope of food, and the farmer cultivates his land in the hope of a harvest, Prov. 6[:11]. The wise man ought to collect for a time.

¶ Others have the prudence of a serpent that flees the crowd of men, Prov. 14[:16]: “A wise man fears and declines from evil.” Again, it puts off its old skin at a narrow opening, Matt. [10:16]: “Be therefore wise as serpents.”

¶ Others have the wisdom of an ant which gathers in summer, from whence it may live in winter, Prov. 6[:6]: “Go to the ant, O sluggard.” Prov. 10[:5]: “He that gathers in the harvest is a wise son.”

¶ Others have the wisdom of the lion[[3]](#endnote-3) that destroys its tracks with its tail lest it be caught, Prov. 20[:26]: “A wise king scatters the wicked.” Wisdom is certainly like a most splendid gift like the light, even more than the sun. For the sun makes us know what great things are under the heaven, but wisdom makes us know all things, namely, hell that we may fear the world so that we may disdain it, heaven that we may seek it, God that we may praise and love him, Wis. 7[:29]: “She is more beautiful than the sun,” etc. Because by the light, visible things are seen, by wisdom the invisible.

¶ Second,[[4]](#endnote-4) wisdom is a most tasty gift like to honey, even more than honey, Eccli. 24[:27]: “My spirit is sweet above honey.” For honey has one flavor and they who have tasted it are deceived for other tastes. Just like wine tasted after honey does not appear flavorful, but divine wisdom has every flavor. Because there they taste all things, just as they ought to taste temporal things as vile, spiritual things

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as dear, Eccli. 6[:23]: “The wisdom is according to her name,” that is, the taste for knowledge is not detected by many. Bernard,[[5]](#endnote-5) you have clearly found wisdom if you weep for the sins of your previous life, if you set little store to the desires of this life, if you desire eternal beatitude with your whole desire, if they taste to you as one single thing.

¶ Third,[[6]](#endnote-6) wisdom is the most profound gift like to the sea. Deeper than the sea, because the sea has a limited depth, wisdom does not, Job 11[:9]: “The measure of him is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.” Therefore, the Apostle says, Rom. 11[:33]: “O the depth,” and the profundity, “of the riches of the wisdom,” and the knowledge, “of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments,” etc. Therefore, wisdom is called a gift because it is not acquired by study, but by inspiration, James 1[:5]: “If any of you want wisdom,” etc. And Wis. 9[:4]: “Give me wisdom, Lord, that sits by your throne.” According to Gregory, 4 *Moralia*,[[7]](#endnote-7) the wisdom of the world is the heart of schemes to cover the proposition to hide by words, those things which are true to demonstrate as false. They who know this despise others who do not know, the timid in other things are astonished. Concerning these things it is said in Luke [16:8]: “The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.” They change places with their teacher the devil who in knowledge will be surpassing according to Augustine, 19, *De civitate,* c. 22.[[8]](#endnote-8) And Gregory 22 *Moralia*,[[9]](#endnote-9) when Lucifer with the clarity of his nature and the subtility of his knowledge exceeded others was lifted against God. Therefore, the study of wisdom is a necessity for man, just as light is to the traveler walking in darkness. For the wise see and avoid for themselves and others, Prov. 17[:16]: “What does it avail a fool to have riches, seeing he cannot buy wisdom.” For the gift of intellect is useless without wisdom, it weighs down. For its lightness penetrates, it lifts heaviness falling. Wherefore happiness is not secure. Understand many things but guard the intellectual things. Wherefore Gregory, *Moralia* 22,[[10]](#endnote-10) Solomon treated many things of the intellect, investigating the secrets of nature [3 Kings 4:33]: “From the cedar that is in Libanus, unto the hyssop.” But because he had a little wisdom he went to ruin. And as commonly the antique philosophers treated many things of the intellect disputing, defining, and concluding. But “because they had not wisdom, they perished through their folly,” Baruch [3:28]. They perished and their followers with them perished according to Hugh, *De Archa* c. 4,[[11]](#endnote-11) where he says, as many literate men as we now distinguish, who wish to be called Christians, in whose hearts more often is the memory of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, than of Christ and his saints. Therefore, I predict that for them in the end they will be associating with those whom now they join to themselves in their thoughts with affection of the heart.

1. Cf. Bonaventure, *De virtutibus theologicis et cardinalibus* 2 (8:293b): Charitas enim est sicut avis generosa, quae vivit de praeda, sicut accipiter, et falco, et aquila. Istae namque aves nobiles vix vel nunquam tangunt terram, nisi quando rapiunt praedam: sic homines charitatem habentes bona ista transitoria non tangunt, vel terrena, per affectum, n isi quaerendo solummodo simplicem victum. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Nicole Oresme, *De visione stellarum* 2.1 (p. 126): Et propter hoc apparet baculus fractus cuius medietas est inaqua, quia pars que est in aqua apparet visui propinquior quam est. Et si oculus esset in aqua ab eadem parte baculi, tunc propter idem apparet fractio e converso. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologia* 12.2,5 (PL 82:434): cum ambulant, cauda sua cooperiunt vestigia sua, ne eos venator inveniat. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 6.1 (8:311a-b): Secundo sapientia est donum sapidissimum instar mellis, non solum sicut mel, sed etiam plusquam mel. Unde dicit Sapientia in *Ecclesiastico* *Spiritus meus super mel dulcis, et he reditas mea super mel et favum.* Mel namque unum habet saporem, et illo gustato desipiunt alia etiam meliora; sicut vinum, quod post mellis gustum, non apparet sapidum. Sed sapientia divina omnem habet saporem, quia sibi sapiunt oinnia ut debent: scilicet tam mala quam bona temporalia, ut vilia et insipida; bona spiritualia, ut cara; bona æterna, ut fructuosa et summe nobilia. Unde dicitur in *Ecclesiastico: Sapientia secundum nomen suum est,* scilicet sapida scientia, *et non multis est manifesta*. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Bernardus, *Div.* 15,4 (éd. J. Leclercq-H. M. Rochais VI-1, 142,14-19): Invenisti plane sapientiam si prioris vite defleas peccata, si huius seculi desiderabilia parvipendas, si eternam beatitudinem toto desiderio concupiscas. Invenisti sapientiam si horum singula sapiunt prout sunt

See G. Hendrix, “Les ‘Postillae’ de Hugues de Saint-Cher et le traite ‘De doctrina cordis’, *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medievale,* Janvier-Decembre 1980, vol. 47, pp. 114-130 [p. 119]. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 6.1 (8:311b): Tertio sapientia est donum profundissimum instar maris; non solum sicut mare, sed etiam plusquam mare: quia mare habet fundum; sapientia divina nullum habet fundum, ut dipientia citur in *Job: Longior est terra mensura ejus, et latior mari.* Et propterea dicit Apostolus: *0 altitudo,* id est, profunditas, *divitiarum sapientiæ, et scientiæ Dei, quam incomprehensibilia sunt judicia ejus, et investigabiles viae ejus!* quia nimis longe sunt sapientiæ divinæ judicia, quibus disposuit omnia investigabilia, quam guttæ maris valeant numerari. Exemplum de patre et filio volentibus haurire totum mare cum cochleari parvo, ut narrat Hieronymus. Ideo dicitur donum, quia nunquam per studium acquiritur, nisi per inspirationem divinam habeatur. Et ideo dicit *Jacobus: Si quis vestrum indiget sapientia, postulet a Deo, qui dat omnibus affluenter, et non improperat, et dabitur ei.* Et in *Sapientia: Da mihi, Domine, sedium tuarum assistricem sapientiam*.... [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Gregory, *Moralia*, 10.29.48 (PL 75:947): Hujus mundi sapientia est, cor machinationibus tegere, sensum verbis velare, quae falsa sunt vera ostendere, quae vera sunt fallacia demonstrare. Haec nimirum prudentia usu a juvenibus scitur, haec a pueris pretio discitur, hanc qui sciunt caeteros despiciendo superbiunt; hanc qui nesciunt, subjecti et timidi in aliis mirantur, quia ab eis haec eadem duplicitas iniquitatis, nomine palliata, diligitur, dum mentis perversitas urbanitas vocatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 9.22 (LCL 41:232-233): His igitur angelis bonis omnis corporalium temporaliumque rerum scientia qua inflantur daemones vilis est; non quod earum ignari sint, sed quod illis Dei qua sanctificantur caritas cara est, prae cuius

Consequently the good angels hold cheap all the knowledge of things material and temporal that gives the demons such a swollen notion of themselves; not that they are ignorant in such matters, but that the love of God whereby they are sanctified is dear to [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Gregory, [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Gregory, *Moralia* 22.5.8 (PL 76:216-217): Has etenim Salomon sapientiae divitias contemplatus ait: Corona sapientium divitiae eorum (Prov. XIV, 24). Qui quia divitias non metalla terrena, sed prudentiam nominat, illico per contrarietatem subdit: Fatuitas stultorum imprudentia (Ibid., 24). Si enim coronam sapientium terrenas divitias diceret, procul dubio fatuitatem stultorum paupertatem potius quam imprudentiam fateretur. Sed dum fatuitatem stultorum imprudentiam subdidit, sapientum divitias quia prudentiam [Col.0217A] dixerit, indicavit. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Hugh of St. Victor, *De Arca Noe* 4.8 (PL 176:747): quot modo litteratos cernimus, qui vocari Christiani volunt, et cum caeteris fidelibus Ecclesiam intrant, et de sacramentis Christi participant, in quorum cordibus saepius est memoria Saturni [Col.0674C] et Jovis, Herculis et Martis, sive Achillis et Hectoris, Pollucis et Castoris, Socratis et Platonis et Aristotelis, quam Christi et sanctorum ejus? Nugas poetarum diligunt; et veritatem divinarum Scripturarum aut negligunt, aut (quod pejus est!) irrident, et contemnunt. Videant nunc quid eis prosit foris Ecclesiam ingredi, et intus in corde a fide fornicari. Ego eis pronuntio, quod illis in fine sociandi sunt, quos nunc in cogitationibus suis per affectum cordis sibi conjungunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)