

COMMENTARY ON BOOK II OF THE SENTENCES¹

PROLOGUE

Only this have I found out: God made humankind² straight, and human beings have entangled themselves in endless questioning.³

INTRODUCTION

1. To anyone who carefully considers this passage from Ecclesiastes, it will become apparent that the whole import and ambit of the present book is directed toward what the Wise Man proposes in the aforesaid passage. Since he had tried all manner of things to reach wisdom and had more often failed than succeeded, he finally admitted that he had found out that *God had made humankind straight* and so forth.

This text contains two elements, namely that humankind's right formation and uprightness is from God,⁴ and this is alluded to when it is said that God made humankind straight. The other element is the fact that humankind's miserable deviation comes from itself,

¹ The Latin text is Bonaventure's Prooemium, *Commentarius in II librum Sententiarum*, Opera Omnia II, 3-6.

² The Latin word *homo* is a common noun referring to any human person. The word is frequently used in this tightly argued text and is translated humankind or some variant.

³ See Ecclesiastes 7:30. The Vulgate reads *miscuerit* ("mixed up") while Bonaventure has *immiscuit* ("entangled").

⁴ The Latin *recta formatio et rectitudo* indicates not only a play on words but also articulates an important word image which seeks to convey a depth of meaning. See below n. 4 and n. 5; *On the Reduction of the Arts*, nn. 23-25 (Hayes, 59-61)

and this is alluded to when it is said that humankind is entangled in endless questioning.⁵

In these two elements are included the goal of all human comprehension, namely that humankind should know the origin of good so that humanity might seek this origin until it is reached and find rest therein; at the same time, humankind ought to know the origin and source of evil in order to avoid it. In these two elements are likewise contained the purpose of the present book which deals with two things, namely the creation of humankind and how it has gone astray.

2. HUMANKIND WAS CREATED UPRIGHT

Humanity's creation is touched upon when it is said that God made humankind straight. This is explained in Ecclesiasticus 17: *The Lord from the earth created humankind – which refers to the body – and made them in the image of God – and this refers to the nature of the soul; and turned humankind into it again*, which refers to the gratuitous gift that turns the soul toward God by virtuous habits.⁶ This text shows that not only did God make rectitude possible for humankind by endowing it with God's own image, but God also actually made humankind upright by turning (*conversus*)⁷ humanity toward God.

⁵ The Latin is *et ipse se infinitis immiscuit questionibus* and is rendered "endless questioning" to emphasize humankind's failure to understand – to use "rightly" – the capacity to know and to love God their Creator, Source, and End.

⁶ See Ecclesiasticus 17:1-2.

⁷ The Latin *conversus* is rendered "turning toward" (conversion) to image and emphasizes humanity's fundamental relationship with God as well as to indicate the basic nature of sin itself ("a turning away from God" and "a turning toward" lesser goods as indicated in nn. 11-17).

Thus it is that humankind is upright when intelligence is consonant with the highest truth in knowing, when the will is in conformity with the highest goodness in loving, and the powers conjoined with the supreme power in acting. This happens when a human person turns totally toward God.

3. THE RECTIFICATION OF THE HUMAN INTELLECT

Consequently, humankind is first of all upright when intelligence is consonant with the highest truth. By "consonant" I do not mean that the mind is thereby completely filled [or all-knowing], but only by way of a certain imitation. If as Anselm says: "Truth is rectitude perceptible only by the mind,"⁸ and only what is upright is consonant with rectitude, then when our intellect is consonant with truth, it is necessarily rectified. It is rendered consonant with the truth only when it actually turns toward the truth. Actual truth is defined as "an agreement between a thing and the intellect."⁹ Once our intelligence is turned to the truth, it is "made true" and consequently consonant with the truth, and when consonant with rectitude, it is rectified. Thus, "without truth no one judges correctly," as is said in the book *De vera religione*,¹⁰ and the person who looks to the truth judges rightly, as the Lord said to Simon in Luke 7: *You have judged rightly*,¹¹ that is, you have decreed rightly.

⁸ See *De Veritate*, ch. 11 (Schmitt, I, 191); *On Truth*, ch. 11 (Davies and Evans, 166). The citation is verbatim.

⁹ This definition, although often attributed to Aristotle, is from Averroes. See *Opera Omnia* (I:707, n. 5).

¹⁰ This is a modification of Augustine; see *De Vera Religione*, XXXI, n. 57 (CCSL xxxii, 224); *Of True Religion*, book XXXI, n. 57 in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, John H.S. Burleigh, trans., LChC, vol. VI (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 254.

¹¹ Luke 7:43.

4. THE RECTIFICATION OF THE HUMAN WILL

Similarly, humankind is rectified when the will is in conformity with the highest goodness. Highest goodness is the highest equity or justice. A human person is better to the extent that the person is more just. As Anselm says: "Justice is the rectitude of the will."¹² However, only what is upright is in conformity with rectitude. As long as the will is in conformity with the highest goodness and equity, it is necessarily made upright. Thus Hugh of St. Victor wrote: "Know, O my soul, that somehow by the association of love you are transformed to the likeness of the very one to whom you are joined by affection."¹³ The person who loves goodness is made upright. And this is what is said in the book of the Song of Songs: *The upright love you.*¹⁴ The upright are turned to your goodness and your goodness bends down to them. The soul experiencing this exclaims and says: *How good the God of Israel is to those who are upright in heart.*¹⁵ And because only the upright experience this, therefore: *Praise from the upright is fitting.*¹⁶

5. THE RECTIFICATION OF HUMAN POWER

Moreover, humankind is made upright when its powers are conjoined to the highest power.¹⁷ The upright

¹² See *De Veritate*, ch. 12 (Schmitt, I, 196); *On Truth*, ch. 12 (Davies and Evans, 167). See also *On Free Will*, ch. 3 (Davies and Evans, 179).

¹³ QuarEd indicate (p. 4, n 8) that this citation comes from *Soliloquium de arrha animae*, but give no specific reference. See PL 176: 951-70; *Earnest Money* (Herbert, 16).

¹⁴ Cant 1:3.

¹⁵ Ps 72:1.

¹⁶ Ps 32:1.

¹⁷ The primary meaning of the Latin *virtus* is power, the strength or ability to act. The person who acts rightly (virtuously) is understood

is a mean between extremes.¹⁸ The extremes are the first and the last, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and end.¹⁹ The mean between these is action whereby the agent attains his goal. Hence, a virtue is upright whose action comes from the first principle and tends toward the final goal. Since therefore divine power does everything and does so on account of God, this is why the divine power is most righteous in acting. Nothing is conjoined to the upright except the upright. Consequently, when our powers are conjoined to the highest power, they are undoubtedly rectified. This is why a humankind is not only upright, but ruler and king,²⁰ as is intimated in Deuteronomy: *And he will be king with the most upright, the princes of the people having been assembled with the tribes of Israel.*²¹ This will happen in heaven when our powers will be conjoined to the divine power. Then we will be in full control of our powers, as God is of his. And thus all are kings and all are promised the kingdom of heaven.

6. THE RECTITUDE OF HUMANKIND IS IN ITS TURNING

Thus God made humanity upright when God made it to be turned toward God. In humanity's turning to

to be developing those strengths of character which reflect a right relationship with God, the source of all power.

¹⁸ Plato, Parmenides, 137 in *Parmenides: Lessons, Translation and Explanation of Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Kenneth Sayre (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 140-41. The Latin *medium* (mean) or *medio* (middle) in the next section has important neo-Platonic and metaphysical meaning for Bonaventure. It implies much more than an arithmetic mean or a fixed point as the English words "mean" and "middle" more typically convey.

¹⁹ See Rev 22:13: "I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

²⁰ Bonaventure employs a play on words: *rectus* ("upright"), *rector* ("ruler"), *rex* ("king").

²¹ Deut 33:5.

God, human beings were not only made rectified with respect to what is above, but also with respect to what is below. Humankind stands in the middle, and as long as humanity is turned toward and subject to God, then all other things are subject to humankind. Thus God subjected every created truth to be judged by the human intellect, every good to human affections to be used, and every power to humanity's power to be governed.

7. THE TURNING OF THE HUMAN INTELLECT

Thus it is that from the fact that the intelligence is turned toward divine truth that it can lay claim to wisdom whereby everything is judged, as we read in Wisdom: *He has given me knowledge of all existing things, that I might know the organization of the universe and the force of its elements. The beginning and the end and the midpoint of times, the alterations of their courses and the changes of the seasons. Cycles of years, positions of the stars, natures of animals, tempers of beasts. Powers of the winds and thoughts of men, the uses of plants and the powers of roots, and whatever things are hidden and unforeseen.*²² This is why Adam gave all things their names.²³

8. THE TURNING OF THE HUMAN WILL

God subjected all things to the will of a human being to be used, so that humankind might turn everything to its use and utility. The Psalmist says: *You have subjected all things under his feet.*²⁴ The Apostle said to those who had converted and turned to God: *All things are yours.*²⁵

²² This is an adaptation of Wis 7:17-21.

²³ See Gen 2:20.

²⁴ Ps 8:8.

²⁵ 1 Cor 3:21.

9. THE TURNING OF HUMAN POWER

God also subjected everything to humankind's governance. Genesis reads: *Subdue the earth, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air.*²⁶

10. SUMMATION: HUMANKIND WAS CREATED UPRIGHT

The fact that the human person was created upright, both with regard to what is above and what is below, is alluded to in the passage: *Let us make humankind in our image and likeness. Let them have dominion, etc.*²⁷ Therefore, God made humankind upright, and as long as human beings turned toward God, the human person became like God, and thereby humankind was given rulership over all things. Thus humanity's upright condition is obvious.

11. THE MISERABLE DEVIATION OF HUMANKIND: MANNER OF FALLING AND FALLEN STATE

The Scripture passage that follows shows humankind's miserable deviation: *And human beings have entangled themselves in endless questioning.*²⁸ In this text, we can see the manner in which humanity fell and the state into which it fell.

12. THE MANNER OF FALLING

The manner of the fall is to be found in the three things expressed in the passage, which three things are likewise to be found in sin. For in sin, there is a certain aversion or "turning away," a certain conversion or "turning toward,"

²⁶ See Gen 1:28.

²⁷ Gen 1:26.

²⁸ Ecclesiastes 7:30.

and finally a loss or deprivation of the good. Conversion is expressed by “being entangled,” aversion by “losing sight of the final goal,” and deprivation by “questioning.” The conversion makes one impure, the aversion makes one weak, and the deprivation makes one a beggar. All of this is expressed in the text: *Human beings have entangled themselves in endless questionings.*

13. HUMANKIND’S FALLEN STATE

We can also see the state into which humankind has fallen. Humankind fell from rectitude such that rectitude was lost, but not the tendency to rectitude; lost the habit but not the appetite for rectitude. Thus humankind lost its “likeness,” but retained its image.²⁹ And because the appetite without the corresponding habit was retained, humans became worrisome seekers. Since no creaturely thing can make up for a lost good that is infinite, humankind desires, seeks, and is never at rest. Hence, turning away from rectitude, *human beings have entangled themselves in endless questioning.*

14. HUMANKIND’S INTELLECT IN ITS FALLEN CONDITION

Therefore, by turning away from the highest truth, intelligence has become ignorant and mixed up in an infinite number of questions by curiosity, as we read in Ecclesiastes: *There are people who day and night take no sleep with their eyes. And I understood that human beings could find no reason for all the works of God,*³⁰ meaning a rest that would satisfy its appetite and searching. Rather one question generates another and gives birth to a new contention, and so humanity ends up by getting bogged down in inextricable doubts. This is why Proverbs

²⁹ See Ps 38:7.

³⁰ Ecclesiastes 8:17.

says: *It is honorable for a person to distance himself from quarrels. But all fools are entangled in reproaches.*³¹ Such are miserable human beings who, as we read in 1 Timothy, *study fables and endless genealogies, etc.*³² They get involved in charges and countercharges because, as 2 Timothy says, *they are*³³ *always learning, “but never attaining knowledge of the truth.”*³⁴

15. THE FALLEN STATE OF THE HUMAN WILL

By its lack of harmony with the highest goodness, the will is rendered needy and becomes involved in an infinite quest through disordered desire (*concupiscentia*)³⁵ and cupidity, as is related in Proverbs: *Fire never says “enough.”*³⁶ *The covetous person will not be filled with money, as we read in Ecclesiastes.*³⁷ Thus humankind is always seeking and begging. Likewise, disordered desire is never satisfied; rather it becomes involved in an unending search for pleasure. Wisdom says: *And all is confusion – blood, murder, theft ... guile, corruption, faithlessness, turmoil ... perjury, disturbance, forgetfulness of the good things of the Lord, besmirching of souls, changing of the birth process, instability in marriage, the disorder of adultery and impurity.*³⁸ These are the endless quests in which humankind becomes involved when the will was deformed by turning away from the highest good.

³¹ Prov 20:3.

³² See 1 Tim 1:3.

³³ The QuarEd note rightly (p. 5, n. 13) that the Vulgate does not read *sunt* (“they are”).

³⁴ 2 Tim 3:7.

³⁵ As indicated above, the Latin *concupiscentia* is rendered “disordered desire.” See the Introduction, p. 11 and pp. 33-34, and *Threefold Way*, ch. I, n. 4, note 17.

³⁶ Prov 30:16.

³⁷ Ecclesiastes 5:9.

³⁸ This is a modification of Wis 14:25-26.

16. THE FALLEN CONDITION OF HUMAN POWER

Likewise, by cutting itself off from the highest power, humankind's powers were made weak. Because of its instability, it became involved in an endless search. Thus humankind always seeks rest and never finds it. So Isaiah says: *The Lord has entangled³⁹ a spirit of dizziness within Egypt.*⁴⁰ This is the spirit of instability because there is nothing left to give humankind stability. Thus the sinful person will be "like the dust that the wind blows away from the face of the earth."⁴¹ Therefore, the Psalm states: *If you turn away your face, they will be troubled. You will take away their spirit, etc.*⁴² And so he will be *like dust that the wind blows away from the face of the earth.* Hence, just as dust cannot rest as long as it is in the whirlwind, so neither can our powers remain stable. Therefore humankind roams endlessly about, is constantly changing, and begging for relief.

17. CONCLUSION

Thus humankind has become entangled in endless questioning by curiosity when humanity fell from truth into ignorance; by cupidity when humanity fell from goodness into malice; by instability when humanity fell from power into impotency. And so, as we have noted from the passage in Scripture, we see humankind's creation and fall. And this is what I really see as being determined in this book.

³⁹ QuarEd indicate accurately (p. 3, n. 3) that the Vulgate reads *miscuit* ("mixed") while Bonaventure has *immiscuit* ("entangled"). Also, the Vulgate reads *in medio eius* ("in its midst") but Bonaventure has *in medio Aegypti* ("within Egypt"). Bonaventure modifies Isa 19:14 to make it correspond to his opening citation from Ecclesiastes 7:30.

⁴⁰ See Isa 19:14.

⁴¹ See Ps 1:4.

⁴² See Ps 103:29 which concludes: "... and they will fail and will return to their dust."

"ON THE WAY OF LIFE"

De Modo Vivendi