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THE BOOK OF WISDOM



CHAPTER 13

THE BOOK OF WISDOM—A PROLOGUE BY SAINT JEROME

The Book of Wisdom never existed among the Hebrews. Its style has rather the fragrance of Greek eloquence. The Jews claim that it is a work of Philo; it is then said to be a work of Wisdom because in it the coming of Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, and his passion are clearly expressed. This is the Prologue Jerome put before the Book of Wisdom; he shows firstly the origin of this book saying: 'The Book of Wisdom never existed among the Hebrews. Its style, that is, its language is so elegant that it 'has rather the fragrance of Greek eloquence', that is, its taste is more Greek than Hebrew. The Greeks are more eloquent and deeper in their statements than the Hebrews. So, since this book has a most elegant style with the deepest teachings, it is clear that it was written in Greek rather than in Hebrew. Secondly, Jerome names its author when he says: 'The Jews claim that it', namely, the Book of Wisdom 'is a work of Philo' as its compiler but that Solomon was the person who discovered it. While Philo was a Jew he was highly skilled in the Greek language. Jerome says of him in the book *De viris illustribus* that 'he was a Jew of Alexandria of the class of priests'. Thirdly, he gives the reason for the title when he says: 'it is then said to be a work of Wisdom because in it the coming of Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, and his passion are clearly expressed'. The translation is based on the Douay Rheims version of the Bible.

'I say they are vain with a vanity of thought'

THE COMMENTARY ON THE CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF WISDOM ARE THE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SERAPHIC DOCTOR SAINT BONAVENTURE, OFM

Chapter 13

Secondly, on the punishment decreed for the heavier penalties for condemnation discussed in two ways

However all people are vain, in whom there is not the knowledge of God, and who by these good things that are seen, could not understand the one that is, neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the artisan. He determined above the punishment of the enemies by lighter penalties decreed for correction, but here he determines their punishment by heavier penalties for condemnation. He determines, firstly, on the merit of their sin, namely, till the sixteenth chapter; secondly, on the torment of their penalties, namely, from chapter sixteen on.

(Verse 17). *And concerning his substance*, that is, external possessions, *and his children*, that is, concerning the welfare of his children, *or his marriage*, namely, to be entered into, *makes prayer*, namely, to it, *inquiring*, from it so as to beg for what is necessary for himself and his children, even though vows should be made only to God, according to Psalm 75:12: 'Vow you, and pay to the Lord your God, all you that are round about him bring presents'; also Isaiah 19:21: 'They shall make vows to the Lord and perform them'. *And he is not ashamed to speak*, namely he who has life, *to that*, namely, to a false god, *which has no life*; Baruch 6:40: 'Who when they hear of one dumb that cannot speak, they present him to Baal'; Psalm 113:5 (or 13): 'They have mouths and speak not'.

(Verse 18). *And for health*, that is, his own or his children, *to the weak*, that is, to something totally powerless, *indeed*, that is, certainly, *makes supplication*, *and for life prays to that which is dead*, that is completely lifeless, so that it is understood in a negative sense, not of a deprivation, because if it were a deprivation then it would be understood that it had life at one time but was later deprived of it; this would be false. *And for help calls upon that which is unprofitable*, that is, on something not able to help him or any other; so Baruch 6:14: 'And it has in its hand a sword but cannot save itself from robbers'.

(Verse 19). *And for a good journey*, that is, for a direction of a journey, *he petitions him that cannot walk*, according to Psalm 113:7 (or 15): 'They have hands and feel not, they have feet and walk not, neither shall they cry out through their throat'; Baruch 6:25: 'Having not the use of feet they are carried upon the shoulders'. *And for getting*, namely, by negotiation, *and for working*, namely, by mechanical skills, *and for the event of all things he asks him that is unable to do any thing*; Isaiah 44:10: 'he formed a god, and made a graven thing that is profitable for nothing'.

But it seems the same thing can be objected to in Christians adoring images.

But it must be said that is not similar. Idolaters adore images as things, thinking there is some life in them; but Christians adore images only as signs and in so far as they lead to that of which they are signs.

END OF WISDOM 13

Firstly, on the demerit of sin treated in three ways

The merit of sin in regards to the condemnatory penalty was idolatry, by which they transferred divine honour to a creature or directed it to a creature. So he treats, firstly, of the multiple error of idolaters, namely, in this chapter; secondly, the renouncing of idols, namely, in chapter fourteen; thirdly, the commendation of the true God, namely, in chapter fifteen.

Firstly, on the error of idolaters

The error of idolaters is treated in two ways: of those worshipping creatures of God; second, of those worshipping their own products: *But unhappy are they, and their hope is among the dead, who have called gods the works of human hands*.

Their first error

In the first part he treats, firstly, of the cause in them of so great an error, namely, ignorance of God; secondly, he treats of the effect of this cause, namely, the worship of a creature: *either the fire*; thirdly, that both are inexcusable: *With whose beauty, if they, being delighted, took them to be gods*; fourthly, compared with other idolaters: *But yet as to these they are less to be blamed*. – In the first section a double ignorance is stated: *and who by these good things that are seen, could not understand the one that is*.

(Verse 1). Therefore, he says: *However all people are vain* etc. It is said in this way that between the torments some acknowledged God but did not venerate God; *however* for but; *all people are vain* etc.; Ecclesiastes 1:2: 'Vanity of vanities, said Ecclesiastes, vanity of vanities and all is vanity'. 'They have gone far from me and have walked after vanity, and are become vain', I say they are vain with a vanity of thought; so Romans 1:21: 'They became vain in their thoughts and their foolish heart was darkened'; also Psalm 93:11: 'The Lord knows out thoughts, that they are vain'. Also, vanity in speech; so in Psalm 11:3: 'They have spoken vain things everyone to a neighbour, with deceitful lips and with a double heart have they spoken'. Also, vanity in work; so Jeremiah 51:18: 'They are vain works and worthy to be laughed at'. *In whom there is not the knowledge of God*, that is, knowledge about God through faith. 'Not everything can be known by a person with human concerns in which there is much useless vanity and harmful curiosity, but I concede it to this knowledge, namely, to divine knowledge; but only that knowledge by which a most life giving faith is born, nourished, defended and strengthened, by which knowledge they are not able' etc.

And who by these good things that are seen, namely, openly, could not understand, namely, an inability caused by and not preceding the will; 'They could not understand the one that is, neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the artisan, hindered by the blindness of sin', according to Wisdom 2:21: *Their own malice blinded them*; Psalm 35:4: 'he would not understand that he might do well'; *understand*, that is, know in the mind; God cannot be known by the mind; 1 John 4:12: 'No one has seen God at any time'; *the one that is*, that is, God whose being is substantial not accidental; 'To exist is not an accident for God, but God is subsistent truth'.

Also, for God to exist is always present, never past or future. God was not nor will be, because God did not have an experience of past or future. Also, God's being is pure because everything in God is God; 'Everything in God is God'. Also, because God's being is not from another, it is unchangeable; In the Epistle by Saint Jerome, *Ad Marcellam*: 'God, who alone has no beginning, claimed the title of a true essence, because in comparison with God, who truly is since God is unchangeable, things that are changeable are as if they are not', as applies to all creatures, according to Psalm 101:27-28: 'Like clothing you shall change them, and they shall be changed. But you are always the same and your years do not fail'; also Malachi 3:6: 'I am' God, or 'the Lord and I change not'. For the above reasons God, in Exodus 3:14, said to Moses when he asked for God's name: 'I am who I am. He said: Thus shall you say to the children of Israel: He who is, has sent me to you'.

Neither by attending to the works, which they did not make, *have they acknowledged who was the artisan*, namely, of these things that they could have easily acknowledged; Romans 1:20: 'For the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made'.

(Verse 2). *But either the fire*, namely, Vulcan, like the Canaanites adoring fire; *or the wind*, that is, the upper atmosphere, the upper part of the air that some thought of as Jupiter shining; *or the swift air*, that is, the lower atmosphere that they called Juno; *or the circle of the stars*, that is, the starry sky, like those who adored the host of heaven of whom Deuteronomy 7:3 says: 'So as to go and serve strange gods, and adore them, the sun and the moon, and all the host of heaven'; *or the great water*, that they call Neptune; *or the sun*, that they call Phoebus or Apollo whom the Babylonians adore; *or the moon*, that they call Diana or 'the queen of heaven' to whom Jeremiah 44:18-19 refers. *They have imagined to be the gods that rule the world*, based on some effects they necessarily have on the world.

(Verse 11). *Or if an artist, a carpenter*; carpenter is here understood in a broad sense for a worker in any material, be it wood or something else, not only iron; *has cut down a tree proper for his use*; Isaiah 44:14: 'He has cut down cedars, taken the holm and the oak that stood among the trees of the forest'. *And has skilfully taken off all the bark thereof*, namely, the exterior, *and with his art, diligently forms a vessel profitable for the common uses of life*; : 'Most useful', *for the common uses of life*, namely, of human life; 2 Timothy 2:20: 'In a great house there are wooden and earthen vessels' etc.

(Verse 12). *The chips of his work*, that is, of the aforementioned wood, *he takes advantage of to dress his meat*, that is, uses, according to Isaiah 44:15: 'He took thereof and warmed himself, and he kindled it and baked bread'.

(Verse 13). *And taking what was left thereof*, namely, of those things taken for human use, *which are good for nothing*, namely, human use; *taking*, that is, being capable, I say, he *carves diligently a crooked piece of wood*, namely, crooked in itself, *and full*, on the outside, *of knots*, that is, knobs, and removes the knots, *when he has nothing else to do*, because as often as he works there, all his work is regarded as laziness since he works for no purpose. *And by the skill of his art fashions it*, namely, in its external shape and so gives it form; *and makes it like the image of a human being*, namely, in shaping the limbs. And note that it does not say he makes it like a human being but *like the image of a human being*, because it can represent a human person externally but not internally.

(Verses 14, 15, 16). *Or makes the resemblance of some beast*, that is, represents; Romans 1:23: 'They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and of creeping things'; also in Psalm 105:20: 'They changed their glory into the likeness of a calf that eats grass'. *Laying it over*, that is, on the outside, *with vermilion*, that is, dawn by a ruler or a thread with red colour, by which it becomes distinct. The Red earth and colour used is called vermilion, the ruler or thread used and the dye itself should always be made a secondary colour. *And painting it red*, *red* refers to an unnatural colour, almost not genuine. Note also that *red* is used for an animal similar to a bee that does not produce honey but devours honey; also for a certain plant that dyes; also, for any counterfeit colour; also, for a lie or fraud and deceit. *And covering with earth every spot that is in it*. - *And makes a convenient dwelling place for it*; so Baruch 6:16: 'When they are placed in the house, their eyes are full of dust by the feet of them that go in'. *And setting it in a wall*, namely, so that it may be better seen, *and fastening it with iron*, that is, with iron nails. - *Lest it should fall*; Isaiah 41:7: 'He strengthened it with nails that it should not be moved'; *providing for it*, that is, anticipating and taking care; knowing that it is unable to help itself, namely, of itself; so Psalm 113:7: 'They have hands and feel not, they have feet and walk not, neither shall they cry out through their throat'. This is not surprising *for it is an image*, that is a likeness of something, not the thing itself; *and has need of help*, namely, human help; Baruch 6:26: 'If they fall to the ground, they will not rise up again of themselves', as is clear of Dagon, 1 Samuel 5:2-5; also Jeremiah 10:5: 'They must be carried to be removed, because they cannot go'.

(Verse 10). I say, therefore: *But unhappy are they*, namely, by a loss of happiness in life, of which there was said above in Wisdom 3:11: *Those who reject wisdom, and discipline, are unhappy. And their hope*, that is, expectation, *is among the dead*, namely, in eternal death; *hope* is not used here with its proper meaning because hope properly is used only for what is good. *Among the dead*, I say, is *their hope*, from privation of eternal happiness, according to Psalm 87:6: 'Like the slain sleeping in the sepulchres, whom you remember no more, and they are cast off from your hand', from the hand of saving mercy, not from the hand of punishing justice.

Or the first refers to the punishment of loss in the future, the second to a punishment of the senses. *Who*, I say, *have called gods the works of human hands*. It says well *have called* for they are gods only in name not by their nature. *The works of human hands*, according to Psalm 113:4: 'The idols of the Gentiles are silver and gold, the works of human hands'; Isaiah 2:8: 'They have adored the work of their own hands which their own fingers have made'; *gold and silver*, that is, the materials were from gold and silver, according to Hosea 2:8: 'I multiplied silver and gold for them which they made a Baal', according to Isaiah 2:7-8: 'Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end of their treasures, and their land also is full of idols'. *The inventions of art*, that is, some figure made by art and this refers to its form. *And the resemblances of beasts*, not animals but an image or likeness of them; this is against what is said in Deuteronomy 4:16: 'You shall not make a likeness of all the animals that are upon the earth'. *Or an unprofitable stone*, namely, of any value that idolaters believe is in it, even though it may be useful in its natural use because in the works of God who made creatures there is nothing superfluous; Deuteronomy 32:4: 'The works of God are perfect', neither superfluous nor incomplete. *The work of an ancient hand*, that is, the hand of an ancient worker because 'in the ancient is wisdom', Job 12:12. Against all these things, Acts 17:29 says: 'Being therefore the offspring of God, we must not suppose the divinity to be like unto gold, or silver, or stone, the graving of art, or a product of human thought'.

Or if an artist, a carpenter, has cut down a tree proper for his use in the wood, and has skilfully taken off all the bark thereof, and with his art, diligently forms a vessel profitable for the common uses of life. Here the error of those worshipping what they have made from wood is treated; and, firstly, their error in making or shaping is treated; secondly, in showing reverence: *And then makes prayer to it, inquiring concerning his substance*. – In the first part, it treats, firstly, of the material and, secondly of the form: *And by the skill of his art fashions it*; thirdly, the place: *And makes a convenient dwelling place for it*; fourthly, its powerlessness: *It is an image, and has need of help*.

Note, one must not think of creatures as gods, firstly, because of their bodily nature, for God is spirit; John 4:24: 'God is a spirit'. Also, because of their limits with regard to place and form; for the whole God is present everywhere; also, the Deity in itself has no shape. Also, because of the boundary and limit of strength for certain tasks; for God is omnipotent; above in Wisdom 11:24: *You have mercy upon all, because you can do all things*. Also, because of the necessity and inevitability of natural effects; for God has free will. Also, because of local movement; because God is immovable being the principle of all movement; and by 'Remaining steadfast you give movement to all things'. Also, because of a variety in eternity; for God is eternal, but for creatures eternity is lacking or does not exist.

In a spiritual sense, those who live extravagantly cultivate *fire*; the proud, *wind*; the angry and impetuous, *swift air*; those curious for knowledge, *the circle of the stars*; pleasure seekers, *the great water*; the greedy, *the sun* that brings forth lesser bodies; the lazy and slothful, *the moon*.

With whose beauty, if they, being delighted, took them to be gods, let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they; for the first author of beauty made all those things. Here is shown their culpability because they were able to know the Creator either from the beauty of creatures or from their power; this is shown in the text: *Or if they admired their power and their effects, let them understand by them, that the one that made them, is mightier than they*. Or by both together which is shown in the text: *For by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby*.

(Verse 3). It says, therefore: *With whose beauty, if they, being delighted*, that is, with the beauty; Daniel 13:56: 'Beauty has deceived you, and lust has perverted your heart'; *took them to be gods*, by adding: them to be; *took*, by a false and wrong judgment since there is only one God; Deuteronomy 6:4: 'Your God is one'. *Let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they*, namely, their Creator, ruler, conservator and owner, according to Judith 9:17: 'O God of the heavens, creator of the waters, and king of your every creature'; *is more beautiful than they*, namely, who made such beautiful creatures; *more beautiful*, I say, by an infinite difference because God is essentially beautiful while creatures share in it; above in Wisdom 7:29: *More beautiful than the sun. For the first author of beauty, namely, of the beauty of creatures by making them, 'God most beautiful, bearing in your mind a world of beauty, making all in a like image'*.

Or: of uncreated beauty, that is, by the eternal generation of the Son. *Made all those things*, namely, the higher, the middle and the lower.

(Verse 4). *Or if they admired their power*, that is, the greatness of the power, *and their effects*, that is, the effects coming from the power, *they admired*, namely, in such a way that they thought them to be gods. *Let them understand by them*, that is, from a reflection on them, according to Job 12:7: 'Ask now the beasts and they shall teach you'; *since the one that made them*, namely God, *is mightier than they*, that is, more powerful; so Sirach 43:30-31: 'The Almighty is above all his works and is exceeding great'; also Job 9:19: 'If strength is demanded God is most strong'.

(Verse 5). *For by the greatness of the beauty*, that is, of the attractiveness, *and of the creature*, that is, of the power of a creature, *the Creator of them may be seen*, not physically but with the eye of the mind; Creator can be recognized from his power, wisdom, goodness that shine forth in creatures; so Sirach 24:32: 'All these things are the book of life'; Isidore 'The Creator is praised by every creature, and just how much more excellent is the Creator, is evident from the nature of the work of the Creator'.

But yet as to these they are less to be blamed, for they perhaps err, seeking God, and desirous to find God. Here, it shows the fault of those who worship creatures when compared to other idolaters; and, firstly, they are shown to be in some way inexcusable when compared to others; secondly, it is shown that they are simply inexcusable: *But then again they are not to be pardoned.*

(Verse 6). *But yet as to these*, as if to say: they err in such a way; *they are less to be blamed*, namely, by erring in this way, less to be blamed, that is, less reason for blame than in those who adore sculptures because, as stated in Baruch 6:66: 'nor shine as the sun, nor give light as the moon', namely the sculptures. *For they*, namely, who worship creatures, *perhaps err*; perhaps here refers to free will, not to a doubt. *Seeking God*, namely by a certain curiosity, according to Acts 17:26-27: 'God made of one all humankind, to dwell upon the whole face of the earth, determining appointed times, and the limits of their habitation, that they should seek God, if happily they may feel after or find God'. *And desirous to find God*, namely, by an intention of affection; Song 3:2: 'I will rise and go about the city', that is, all creatures. According to the philosopher Boethius in *De consolation* 'There is implanted in human minds a desire for what is true and good'.

But an objection by a philosopher says: because Luke 11:10 says: 'Everyone that asks receives': therefore, these find the true God.

It has to be said that this is understood of those who seek piously not out of curiosity.

(Verse 7). *For being conversant among God's works*, namely, from discussing their meaning, according to Ecclesiastes 3:11: 'God has delivered the world to their consideration'; and from using them, namely, in affection and in their effect, as in Matthew 5:45: 'Your Father makes his sun to rise upon the good and the bad'. *They search*, namely, by reasoning, and they are persuaded, namely, by sentiment, *that the things are good which are seen*; Genesis 1:31: 'God saw all the things that God had made and they were very good'. In this they are better or less evil than the Manicheans who say that all visible things are evil.

(Verses 8, 9). *But then again they are not to be pardoned.* Simple ignorance merits pardon; so 1 Timothy 1:13: 'I obtained the mercy of God because I did it ignorantly in unbelief'; but crass and lethargic ignorance does not merit pardon; so 1 Corinthians 14:38: 'Whoever does not know this shall not be known'. - *For if they were able to know so much as to make a judgment of the world*, that is, to know the natures of things of the world, *how did they not more easily find out the Lord*, namely, of the world, *thereof?* This is equivalent to saying: they could have known God more easily.

But contra: Above in Wisdom 9:16: *And hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth, but the things that are in heaven, who shall search out?*

It has to be said that it does not intend to say that they had been able to know more easily and completely that God is the author of these things, but rather that God is God rather than the things they worshipped.

Their second error in two things

But unhappy are they, and their hope is among the dead, who have called gods the works of human hands, gold and silver, the inventions of art, and the resemblances of beasts, or an unprofitable stone the work of an ancient hand. Here, the error of those worshipping what they have made is stated,

firstly, what they made from metal;

secondly, from wood: *Or if an artist, a carpenter.*