Bonaventure, Commentary on the Sentences [of Peter Lombard]¹

Prologue

(translated by Oleg Bychkov)

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Question 3

Is this book, or theology, for the sake of contemplation, or for the purpose of us becoming good, i.e., is it a speculative or a practical science?

Third, what is asked about is the final cause. And since it has been said that this book is for the purpose of revealing the mysteries, it is asked whether this work is for the sake of contemplation or for the purpose of improving us.

[Arguments in favor]

And it seems that it is for the sake of us becoming good, for the following reasons:
a. Any teaching about those things, without whose knowledge we cannot live righteously, serves the purpose of us becoming good. But this book is precisely for the sake of learning the true faith, without which it is “impossible to please God” or live righteously, as is said in Hebrews 11:6; therefore, this book is for the sake of our improvement.
b. Also, any teaching whose object is the same as that of a virtue is for the purpose of our improvement: this is obvious in itself. But the object of this teaching is the same as that of faith,² for it is about matters of belief, something that faith also deals with; therefore, etc.
c. Also, the end of a subdivision of a discipline coincides with the end of the discipline as a whole; but the end of sacred Scripture as a whole is not only us becoming good, but also us becoming blessed; blessedness is the best thing; therefore the end of this discipline [of theology] is [for sure] our improvement.

[Arguments to the contrary]

1. The Master says in his text that his goal or intention is to “lay open the secrets of theological inquiry”: but this pertains to something that has speculation as its goal; therefore, etc.
2. Also, the discipline that is for the sake of our improvement pertains to our morals. However, although theology is, indeed, about faith and morals, this particular book [Peter Lombard’s Sentences] is about those things that pertain to faith, not morals; therefore, this work is not for the purpose of us becoming good.
3. Also, any science, which is for the sake of our improvement, is practical. But any such science is about those things that originate from our [own] works. However, this one is not about those things that originate from our works, but from God: therefore it is for the sake of contemplation, not our improvement.

¹ The English text is based on the Great Quaracchi edition of the Latin.
² And faith is one of the virtues.
In order to make sense of the aforesaid things it must be noted that it is our intellect or understanding that is perfected by a science. And it [i.e., the intellect] should be understood in three different ways: in itself; insofar as it extends towards affection; or insofar as it extends towards action (and our intellect extends itself by way of command or control). According to this threefold condition, because it has a tendency to err, the intellect possesses three ways of regulating itself through a habit or disposition [such as a science]. For if we consider the intellect in itself, in this way it is properly speaking speculative and perfected by a habit which serves the purpose of contemplation and is called speculative science. Now if we consider the intellect as naturally capable of extending itself toward action, in this way it is perfected by a habit that serves the purpose of our improvement—which is practical or moral science. But if one considers it from an intermediate point of view, insofar as it is naturally capable of extending itself toward affection, in this way it is perfected by a habit that occupies an intermediate position between purely speculative and practical, and which embraces both. And this habit is called wisdom, which implies both cognition (or knowledge) and affection at the same time: for wisdom is like her name (Ecclesiasticus 6:23). Therefore this [habit] is for the sake of both contemplation and our improvement, but mainly for the purpose of our improvement.

Such is the sort of cognition that is treated in this book. For this sort of cognition or knowledge helps faith, and faith is positioned in the intellect in such a way that, insofar as it contains its elements (or principles), it is naturally capable of moving our affection. This is quite clear. Indeed, the knowledge of the type ‘Christ died for us,’ and the like—unless the person is an inveterate sinner—moves one to love, unlike this one: ‘the diameter is incommensurate with the semicircle [based on this diameter].’

Therefore we must concede that it is for the sake of our improvement.

1. As for the objection that it is for the sake of revealing the secrets, one must reply that one need not stop there, for such revelation disposes one towards affection. 2-3. As for the objection that it is not about morals nor about those things that originate from our [own] works, a reply to that is already clear, because [Master Peter] himself speaks of it as of a practical science, whose proper aim is our improvement.

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[^3]: Sapientia, from sapere, ‘to taste.’