

Objection 1. It would seem that poverty is not required for religious perfection. For that which it is unlawful to do does not apparently belong to the state of perfection. But it would seem to be unlawful for a man to give up all he possesses; since the Apostle (2 Cor. 8:12) lays down the way in which the faithful are to give alms saying: “If the will be forward, it is accepted according to that which a man hath,” i.e. “you should keep back what you need,” and afterwards he adds (2 Cor. 8:13): “For I mean not that others should be eased, and you burthened,” i.e. “with poverty,” according to a gloss. Moreover a gloss on 1 Tim. 6:8, “Having food, and wherewith to be covered,” says: “Though we brought nothing, and will carry nothing away, we must not give up these temporal things altogether.” Therefore it seems that voluntary poverty is not requisite for religious perfection.

Objection 2. Further, whosoever exposes himself to danger sins. But he who renounces all he has and embraces voluntary poverty exposes himself to danger—not only spiritual, according to Prov. 30:9, “Lest perhaps . . . being compelled by poverty, I should steal and forswear the name of my God,” and Eccles. 27:1, “Through poverty many have sinned”—but also corporal, for it is written (Eccles. 7:13): “As wisdom is a defense, so money is a defense,” and the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 1) that “the waste of property appears to be a sort of ruining of one’s self, since thereby man lives.” Therefore it would seem that voluntary poverty is not requisite for the perfection of religious life.

Objection 3. Further, “Virtue observes the mean,” as stated in Ethic. ii, 6. But he who renounces all by voluntary poverty seems to go to the extreme rather than to observe the mean. Therefore he does not act virtuously: and so this does not pertain to the perfection of life.

Objection 4. Further, the ultimate perfection of man consists in happiness. Now riches conduce to happiness; for it is written (Eccles. 31:8): “Blessed is the rich man that is found without blemish,” and the Philosopher says (Ethic. i, 8) that “riches contribute instrumentally to happiness.” Therefore voluntary poverty is not requisite for religious perfection.

Objection 5. Further, the episcopal state is more perfect than the religious state. But bishops may have property, as stated above (q. 185, a. 6). Therefore religious may also.

Objection 6. Further, almsgiving is a work most acceptable to God, and as Chrysostom says (Hom. ix in Ep. ad Hebr.) “is a most effective remedy in repentance.” Now poverty excludes almsgiving. Therefore it would seem that poverty does not pertain to religious perfection.

On the contrary, Gregory says (Moral. viii, 26): “There are some of the righteous who bracing themselves up to lay hold of the very height of perfection, while they aim at higher objects within, abandon all

things without.” Now, as stated above, (Aa. 1,2), it belongs properly to religious to brace themselves up in order to lay hold of the very height of perfection. Therefore it belongs to them to abandon all outward things by voluntary poverty.

I answer that, As stated above (a. 2), the religious state is an exercise and a school for attaining to the perfection of charity. For this it is necessary that a man wholly withdraw his affections from worldly things; since Augustine says (Confess. x, 29), speaking to God: “Too little doth he love Thee, who loves anything with Thee, which he loveth not for Thee.” Wherefore he says (QQ. lxxxiii, qu. 36) that “greater charity means less cupidity, perfect charity means no cupidity.” Now the possession of worldly things draws a man’s mind to the love of them: hence Augustine says (Ep. xxxi ad Paulin. et Theras.) that “we are more firmly attached to earthly things when we have them than when we desire them: since why did that young man go away sad, save because he had great wealth? For it is one thing not to wish to lay hold of what one has not, and another to renounce what one already has; the former are rejected as foreign to us, the latter are cut off as a limb.” And Chrysostom says (Hom. lxiii in Matth.) that “the possession of wealth kindles a greater flame and the desire for it becomes stronger.”

Hence it is that in the attainment of the perfection of charity the first foundation is voluntary poverty, whereby a man lives without property of his own, according to the saying of our Lord (Mat. 19:21), “If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all [Vulg.: ‘what’] thou hast, and give to the poor. . . and come, follow Me.”

Reply to Objection 1. As the gloss adds, “when the Apostle said this (namely “not that you should be burthened,” i.e. with poverty),” he did not mean that “it were better not to give: but he feared for the weak, whom he admonished so to give as not to suffer privation.” Hence in like manner the other gloss means not that it is unlawful to renounce all one’s temporal goods, but that this is not required of necessity. Wherefore Ambrose says (De Offic. i, 30): “Our Lord does not wish,” namely does not command us “to pour out our wealth all at once, but to dispense it; or perhaps to do as did Eliseus who slew his oxen, and fed the poor with that which was his own so that no household care might hold him back.”

Reply to Objection 2. He who renounces all his possessions for Christ’s sake exposes himself to no danger, neither spiritual nor corporal. For spiritual danger ensues from poverty when the latter is not voluntary; because those who are unwillingly poor, through the desire of money-getting, fall into many sins, according to 1 Tim. 6:9, “They that will become rich, fall into temptation and into the snare of the devil.” This attachment is put away by those who embrace voluntary poverty, but it gathers strength in those who have wealth, as stated

above. Again bodily danger does not threaten those who, intent on following Christ, renounce all their possessions and entrust themselves to divine providence. Hence Augustine says (De Serm. Dom. in Monte ii, 17): “Those who seek first the kingdom of God and His justice are not weighed down by anxiety lest they lack what is necessary.”

Reply to Objection 3. According to the Philosopher (Ethic. ii, 6), the mean of virtue is taken according to right reason, not according to the quantity of a thing. Consequently whatever may be done in accordance with right reason is not rendered sinful by the greatness of the quantity, but all the more virtuous. It would, however, be against right reason to throw away all one’s possessions through intemperance, or without any useful purpose; whereas it is in accordance with right reason to renounce wealth in order to devote oneself to the contemplation of wisdom. Even certain philosophers are said to have done this; for Jerome says (Ep. xlvi ad Paulin.): “The famous Theban, Crates, once a very wealthy man, when he was going to Athens to study philosophy, cast away a large amount of gold; for he considered that he could not possess both gold and virtue at the same time.” Much more therefore is it according to right reason for a man to renounce all he has, in order perfectly to follow Christ. Wherefore Jerome says (Ep. cxxv ad Rust. Monach.): “Poor thyself, follow Christ poor.”

Reply to Objection 4. Happiness or felicity is twofold. One is perfect, to which we look forward in the life to come; the other is imperfect, in respect of which some are said to be happy in this life. The happiness of this life is twofold, one is according to the active life, the other according to the contemplative life, as the Philosopher asserts (Ethic. x, 7,8). Now wealth conduces instrumentally to the happiness of the active life which consists in external actions, because as the Philosopher says (Ethic. i, 8) “we do many things by friends, by riches, by political influence, as it were by instruments.” On the other hand, it does not conduce to the happiness of the contemplative life, rather is it an obstacle thereto, inasmuch as the anxiety it involves disturbs the quiet of the soul, which is most necessary to one who contemplates. Hence it is that the Philosopher asserts (Ethic. x, 8) that “for actions many things are needed, but the contemplative man needs no such things,” namely external goods, “for his operation; in fact they are obstacles to his contemplation.”

Man is directed to future happiness by charity; and since voluntary poverty is an efficient exercise for the attaining of perfect charity, it follows that it is of great avail in acquiring the happiness of heaven. Wherefore our Lord said (Mat. 19:21): “Go, sell all [Vulg.: ‘what’] thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” Now riches once they are possessed are in themselves of a nature to hinder the perfection of charity, especially by enticing and distracting the mind.

Hence it is written (Mat. 13:22) that “the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choketh up the word” of God, for as Gregory says (Hom. xv in Ev.) by “preventing the good desire from entering into the heart, they destroy life at its very outset.” Consequently it is difficult to safeguard charity amidst riches: wherefore our Lord said (Mat. 19:23) that “a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven,” which we must understand as referring to one who actually has wealth, since He says that this is impossible for him who places his affection in riches, according to the explanation of Chrysostom (Hom. lxiii in Matth.), for He adds (Mat. 19:24): “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Hence it is not said simply that the “rich man” is blessed, but “the rich man that is found without blemish, and that hath not gone after gold,” and this because he has done a difficult thing, wherefore the text continues (Mat. 19:9): “Who is he? and we will praise him; for he hath done wonderful things in his life,” namely by not loving riches though placed in the midst of them.

Reply to Objection 5. The episcopal state is not directed to the attainment of perfection, but rather to the effect that, in virtue of the perfection which he already has, a man may govern others, by administering not only spiritual but also temporal things. This belongs to the active life, wherein many things occur that may be done by means of wealth as an instrument, as stated (ad 4). Wherefore it is not required of bishops, who make profession of governing Christ’s flock, that they have nothing of their own, whereas it is required of religious who make profession of learning to obtain perfection.

Reply to Objection 6. The renouncement of one’s own wealth is compared to almsgiving as the universal to the particular, and as the holocaust to the sacrifice. Hence Gregory says (Hom. xx in Ezech.) that those who assist “the needy with the things they possess, by their good deeds offer sacrifice, since they offer up something to God and keep back something for themselves; whereas those who keep nothing for themselves offer a holocaust which is greater than a sacrifice.” Wherefore Jerome also says (Contra Vigilant.): “When you declare that those do better who retain the use of their possessions, and dole out the fruits of their possessions to the poor, it is not I but the Lord Who answers you; If thou wilt be perfect,” etc., and afterwards he goes on to say: “This man whom you praise belongs to the second and third degree, and we too commend him: provided we acknowledge the first as to be preferred to the second and third.” For this reason in order to exclude the error of Vigilantius it is said (De Eccl. Dogm. xxxviii): “It is a good thing to give away one’s goods by dispensing them to the poor: it is better to give them away once for all with the intention of following the Lord, and, free of solicitude, to be poor with Christ.”