

Objection 1. It would seem unlawful for religious to live on alms. For the Apostle (1 Tim. 5:16) forbids those widows who have other means of livelihood to live on the alms of the Church, so that the Church may have “sufficient for them that are widows indeed.” And Jerome says to Pope Damasus* that “those who have sufficient income from their parents and their own possessions, if they take what belongs to the poor they commit and incur the guilt of sacrilege, and by the abuse of such things they eat and drink judgment to themselves.” Now religious if they be able-bodied can support themselves by the work of their hands. Therefore it would seem that they sin if they consume the alms belonging to the poor.

Objection 2. Further, to live at the expense of the faithful is the stipend appointed to those who preach the Gospel in payment of their labor or work, according to Mat. 10:10: “The workman is worthy of his meat.” Now it belongs not to religious to preach the Gospel, but chiefly to prelates who are pastors and teachers. Therefore religious cannot lawfully live on the alms of the faithful.

Objection 3. Further, religious are in the state of perfection. But it is more perfect to give than to receive alms; for it is written (Acts 20:35): “It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than to receive.” Therefore they should not live on alms, but rather should they give alms of their handiwork.

Objection 4. Further, it belongs to religious to avoid obstacles to virtue and occasions of sin. Now the receiving of alms offers an occasion of sin, and hinders an act of virtue; hence a gloss on 2 Thess. 3:9, “That we might give ourselves a pattern unto you,” says: “He who through idleness eats often at another’s table, must needs flatter the one who feeds him.” It is also written (Ex. 23:8): “Neither shalt thou take bribes which . . . blind the wise, and pervert the words of the just,” and (Prov. 22:7): “The borrower is servant to him that lendeth.” This is contrary to religion, wherefore a gloss on 2 Thess. 3:9, “That we might give ourselves a pattern,” etc., says, “our religion calls men to liberty.” Therefore it would seem that religious should not live on alms.

Objection 5. Further, religious especially are bound to imitate the perfection of the apostles; wherefore the Apostle says (Phil. 3:15): “Let us . . . as many as are perfect, be thus minded.” But the Apostle was unwilling to live at the expense of the faithful, either in order to cut off the occasion from the false apostles as he himself says (2 Cor. 11:12), or to avoid giving scandal to the weak, as appears from 1 Cor. 9:12. It would seem therefore that religious ought for the same reasons to refrain from living on alms. Hence Augustine says (De

oper. Monach. 28): “Cut off the occasion of disgraceful marketing whereby you lower yourselves in the esteem of others, and give scandal to the weak: and show men that you seek not an easy livelihood in idleness, but the kingdom of God by the narrow and strait way.”

On the contrary, Gregory says (Dial. ii, 1): The Blessed Benedict after leaving his home and parents dwelt for three years in a cave, and while there lived on the food brought to him by a monk from Rome. Nevertheless, although he was able-bodied, we do not read that he sought to live by the labor of his hands. Therefore religious may lawfully live on alms.

I answer that, A man may lawfully live on what is his or due to him. Now that which is given out of liberality becomes the property of the person to whom it is given. Wherefore religious and clerics whose monasteries or churches have received from the munificence of princes or of any of the faithful any endowment whatsoever for their support, can lawfully live on such endowment without working with their hands, and yet without doubt they live on alms. Wherefore in like manner if religious receive movable goods from the faithful they can lawfully live on them. For it is absurd to say that a person may accept an alms of some great property but not bread or some small sum of money. Nevertheless since these gifts would seem to be bestowed on religious in order that they may have more leisure for religious works, in which the donors of temporal goods wish to have a share, the use of such gifts would become unlawful for them if they abstained from religious works, because in that case, so far as they are concerned, they would be thwarting the intention of those who bestowed those gifts.

A thing is due to a person in two ways. First, on account of necessity, which makes all things common, as Ambrose† asserts. Consequently if religious be in need they can lawfully live on alms. Such necessity may occur in three ways. First, through weakness of body, the result being that they are unable to make a living by working with their hands. Secondly, because that which they gain by their handiwork is insufficient for their livelihood: wherefore Augustine says (De oper. Monach. xvii) that “the good works of the faithful should not leave God’s servants who work with their hands without a supply of necessaries, that when the hour comes for them to nourish their souls, so as to make it impossible for them to do these corporal works, they be not oppressed by want.” Thirdly, because of the former mode of life of those who were unwont to work with their hands: wherefore Augustine says (De oper. Monach. xxi) that “if they had in the world the wherewithal easily to support this life without working, and gave it to the needy when they were converted to

* Cf. Cf. Can. Clericos, cause. i, qu. 2; Can. Quoniam, cause xvi, qu. 1; Regul. Monach. iv among the supposititious works of St. Jerome † Basil, Serm. de Temp. Ixiv, among the supposititious works of St. Ambrose

God, we must credit their weakness and bear with it.” For those who have thus been delicately brought up are wont to be unable to bear the toil of bodily labor.

In another way a thing becomes due to a person through his affording others something whether temporal or spiritual, according to 1 Cor. 9:11, “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we reap your carnal things?” And in this sense religious may live on alms as being due to them in four ways. First, if they preach by the authority of the prelates. Secondly, if they be ministers of the altar, according to 1 Cor. 9:13,14, “They that serve the altar partake with the altar. So also the lord ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel.” Hence Augustine says (*De oper. Monach.* xxi): “If they be gospellers, I allow, they have” (a claim to live at the charge of the faithful): “if they be ministers of the altar and dispensers of the sacraments, they need not insist on it, but it is theirs by perfect right.” The reason for this is because the sacrament of the altar wherever it be offered is common to all the faithful. Thirdly, if they devote themselves to the study of Holy Writ to the common profit of the whole Church. Wherefore Jerome says (*Contra Vigil.* xiii): “It is still the custom in Judea, not only among us but also among the Hebrews, for those who meditate on the law of the Lord day and night, and have no other share on earth but God alone, to be supported by the subscriptions of the synagogues and of the whole world.” Fourthly, if they have endowed the monastery with the goods they possessed, they may live on the alms given to the monastery. Hence Augustine says (*De oper. Monach.* xxv) that “those who renouncing or distributing their means, whether ample or of any amount whatever, have desired with pious and salutary humility to be numbered among the poor of Christ, have a claim on the community and on brotherly love to receive a livelihood in return. They are to be commended indeed if they work with their hands, but if they be unwilling, who will dare to force them? Nor does it matter, as he goes on to say, to which monasteries, or in what place any one of them has bestowed his goods on his needy brethren; for all Christians belong to one commonwealth.”

On the other hand, in the default of any necessity, or of their affording any profit to others, it is unlawful for religious to wish to live in idleness on the alms given to the poor. Hence Augustine says (*De oper. Monach.* xxii): “Sometimes those who enter the profession of God’s service come from a servile condition of life, from tilling the soil or working at some trade or lowly occupation. In their case it is not so clear whether they came with the purpose of serving God, or of evading a life of want and toil with a view to being fed and clothed in idleness, and furthermore to being honored by those by whom they were wont to be despised and

downtrodden. Such persons surely cannot excuse themselves from work on the score of bodily weakness, for their former mode of life is evidence against them.” And he adds further on (*De oper. Monach.* xxv): “If they be unwilling to work, neither let them eat. For if the rich humble themselves to piety, it is not that the poor may be exalted to pride; since it is altogether unseemly that in a life wherein senators become laborers, laborers should become idle, and that where the lords of the manor have come after renouncing their ease, the serfs should live in comfort.”

Reply to Objection 1. These authorities must be understood as referring to cases of necessity, that is to say, when there is no other means of succoring the poor: for then they would be bound not only to refrain from accepting alms, but also to give what they have for the support of the needy.

Reply to Objection 2. Prelates are competent to preach in virtue of their office, but religious may be competent to do so in virtue of delegation; and thus when they work in the field of the Lord, they may make their living thereby, according to 2 Tim. 2:6, “The husbandman that laboreth must first partake of the fruits,” which a gloss explains thus, “that is to say, the preacher, who in the field of the Church tills the hearts of his hearers with the plough of God’s word.” Those also who minister to the preachers may live on alms. Hence a gloss on Rom. 15:27, “If the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, they ought also in carnal things to minister to them,” says, “namely, to the Jews who sent preachers from Jerusalem.” There are moreover other reasons for which a person has a claim to live at the charge of the faithful, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 3. Other things being equal, it is more perfect to give than to receive. Nevertheless to give or to give up all one’s possessions for Christ’s sake, and to receive a little for one’s livelihood is better than to give to the poor part by part, as stated above (q. 186, a. 3, ad 6).

Reply to Objection 4. To receive gifts so as to increase one’s wealth, or to accept a livelihood from another without having a claim to it, and without profit to others or being in need oneself, affords an occasion of sin. But this does not apply to religious, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 5. Whenever there is evident necessity for religious living on alms without doing any manual work, as well as an evident profit to be derived by others, it is not the weak who are scandalized, but those who are full of malice like the Pharisees, whose scandal our Lord teaches us to despise (*Mat.* 15:12-14). If, however, these motives of necessity and profit be lacking, the weak might possibly be scandalized thereby; and this should be avoided. Yet the same scandal might be occasioned through those who live in idleness on the common revenues.