

Objection 1. It would seem that alms should not be given in abundance. For we ought to give alms to those chiefly who are most closely connected with us. But we ought not to give to them in such a way that they are likely to become richer thereby, as Ambrose says (*De Officiis* i, 30). Therefore neither should we give abundantly to others.

Objection 2. Further, Ambrose says (*De Officiis* i, 30): “We should not lavish our wealth on others all at once, we should dole it out by degrees.” But to give abundantly is to give lavishly. Therefore alms should not be given in abundance.

Objection 3. Further, the Apostle says (2 Cor. 8:13): “Not that others should be eased,” i.e. should live on you without working themselves, “and you burdened,” i.e. impoverished. But this would be the result if alms were given in abundance. Therefore we ought not to give alms abundantly.

On the contrary, It is written (Tob. 4:93): “If thou have much, give abundantly.”

I answer that, Alms may be considered abundant in relation either to the giver, or to the recipient: in relation to the giver, when that which a man gives is great as compared with his means. To give thus is praiseworthy, wherefore Our Lord (Lk. 21:3,4) commended the widow because “of her want, she cast in all the living that she had.” Nevertheless those conditions must be observed which were laid down when we spoke of giving alms out of one’s necessary goods (a. 9).

On the part of the recipient, an alms may be abundant in two ways; first, by relieving his need sufficiently, and in this sense it is praiseworthy to give alms: secondly, by relieving his need more than sufficiently; this is not praiseworthy, and it would be better to give to several that are in need, wherefore the Apostle says (1 Cor.

13:3): “If I should distribute... to feed the poor,” on which words a gloss comments: “Thus we are warned to be careful in giving alms, and to give, not to one only, but to many, that we may profit many.”

Reply to Objection 1. This argument considers abundance of alms as exceeding the needs of the recipient.

Reply to Objection 2. The passage quoted considers abundance of alms on the part of the giver; but the sense is that God does not wish a man to lavish all his wealth at once, except when he changes his state of life, wherefore he goes on to say: “Except we imitate Eliseus who slew his oxen and fed the poor with what he had, so that no household cares might keep him back” (3 Kings 19:21).

Reply to Objection 3. In the passage quoted the words, “not that others should be eased or refreshed,” refer to that abundance of alms which surpasses the need of the recipient, to whom one should give alms not that he may have an easy life, but that he may have relief. Nevertheless we must bring discretion to bear on the matter, on account of the various conditions of men, some of whom are more daintily nurtured, and need finer food and clothing. Hence Ambrose says (*De Officiis* i, 30): “When you give an alms to a man, you should take into consideration his age and his weakness; and sometimes the shame which proclaims his good birth; and again that perhaps he has fallen from riches to indigence through no fault of his own.”

With regard to the words that follow, “and you burdened,” they refer to abundance on the part of the giver. Yet, as a gloss says on the same passage, “he says this, not because it would be better to give in abundance, but because he fears for the weak, and he admonishes them so to give that they lack not for themselves.”