

Objection 1. It would seem that it is lawful to desire the office of a bishop. For the Apostle says (1 Tim. 3:1): “He that desires [Vulg.: ‘If a man desire’] the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” Now it is lawful and praiseworthy to desire a good work. Therefore it is even praiseworthy to desire the office of a bishop.

Objection 2. Further, the episcopal state is more perfect than the religious, as we have said above (q. 184, a. 7). But it is praiseworthy to desire to enter the religious state. Therefore it is also praiseworthy to desire promotion to the episcopal state.

Objection 3. Further, it is written (Prov. 11:26): “He that hideth up corn shall be cursed among the people; but a blessing upon the head of them that sell.” Now a man who is apt, both in manner of life and by knowledge, for the episcopal office, would seem to hide up the spiritual corn, if he shun the episcopal state, whereas by accepting the episcopal office he enters the state of a dispenser of spiritual corn. Therefore it would seem praiseworthy to desire the office of a bishop, and blameworthy to refuse it.

Objection 4. Further, the deeds of the saints related in Holy Writ are set before us as an example, according to Rom. 15:4, “What things soever were written, were written for our learning.” Now we read (Is. 6:8) that Isaias offered himself for the office of preacher, which belongs chiefly to bishops. Therefore it would seem praiseworthy to desire the office of a bishop.

On the contrary, Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19): “The higher place, without which the people cannot be ruled, though it be filled becomingly, is unbecomingly desired.”

I answer that, Three things may be considered in the episcopal office. One is principal and final, namely the bishop’s work, whereby the good of our neighbor is intended, according to Jn. 21:17, “Feed My sheep.” Another thing is the height of degree, for a bishop is placed above others, according to Mat. 24:45, “A faithful and a wise servant, whom his lord hath appointed over his family.” The third is something resulting from these, namely reverence, honor, and a sufficiency of temporalities, according to 1 Tim. 5:17, “Let the priests that rule well be esteemed worthy of double honor.” Accordingly, to desire the episcopal office on account of these incidental goods is manifestly unlawful, and pertains to covetousness or ambition. Wherefore our Lord said against the Pharisees (Mat. 23:6,7): “They love the first places at feasts, and the first chairs in the synagogues, and salutations in the market-place, and to be called by men, Rabbi.” As regards the second, namely the height of degree, it is presumptuous to desire the episcopal office. Hence our Lord

reproved His disciples for seeking precedence, by saying to them (Mat. 20:25): “You know that the princes of the gentiles lord it over them.” Here Chrysostom says (Hom. lxxv in Matth.) that in these words “He points out that it is heathenish to seek precedence; and thus by comparing them to the gentiles He converted their impetuous soul.”

On the other hand, to desire to do good to one’s neighbor is in itself praiseworthy, and virtuous. Nevertheless, since considered as an episcopal act it has the height of degree attached to it, it would seem that, unless there be manifest and urgent reason for it, it would be presumptuous for any man to desire to be set over others in order to do them good. Thus Gregory says (Pastor. i, 8) that “it was praiseworthy to seek the office of a bishop when it was certain to bring one into graver dangers.” Wherefore it was not easy to find a person to accept this burden, especially seeing that it is through the zeal of charity that one divinely instigated to do so, according to Gregory, who says (Pastor. i, 7) that “Isaias being desirous of profiting his neighbor, commendably desired the office of preacher.”

Nevertheless, anyone may, without presumption, desire to do such like works if he should happen to be in that office, or to be worthy of doing them; so that the object of his desire is the good work and not the precedence in dignity. Hence Chrysostom* says: “It is indeed good to desire a good work, but to desire the primacy of honor is vanity. For primacy seeks one that shuns it, and abhors one that desires it.”

Reply to Objection 1. As Gregory says (Pastor. i, 8), “when the Apostle said this he who was set over the people was the first to be dragged to the torments of martyrdom,” so that there was nothing to be desired in the episcopal office, save the good work. Wherefore Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19) that when the Apostle said, “‘Whoever desireth the office of bishop, desireth a good work,’ he wished to explain what the episcopacy is: for it denotes work and not honor: since *skopos* signifies ‘watching.’ Wherefore if we like we may render *episkopein* by the Latin ‘superintendere’ [to watch over]: thus a man may know himself to be no bishop if he loves to precede rather than to profit others.” For, as he observed shortly before, “in our actions we should seek, not honor nor power in this life, since all things beneath the sun are vanity, but the work itself which that honor or power enables us to do.” Nevertheless, as Gregory says (Pastor. i, 8), “while praising the desire” (namely of the good work) “he forthwith turns this object of praise into one of fear, when he adds: It behooveth. . . a bishop to be blameless,” as though to say: “I praise what you seek, but learn first

* The quotation is from the Opus Imperfectum in Matth. (Hom. xxxv), falsely ascribed to St. John Chrysostom.

what it is you seek.”

Reply to Objection 2. There is no parity between the religious and the episcopal state, for two reasons. First, because perfection of life is a prerequisite of the episcopal state, as appears from our Lord asking Peter if he loved Him more than the others, before committing the pastoral office to him, whereas perfection is not a prerequisite of the religious state, since the latter is the way to perfection. Hence our Lord did not say (Mat. 19:21): “If thou art perfect, go, sell all [Vulg.: ‘what’] thou hast,” but “If thou wilt be perfect.” The reason for this difference is because, according to Dionysius (Eccl. Hier. vi), perfection pertains actively to the bishop, as the “perfecter,” but to the monk passively as one who is “perfected”: and one needs to be perfect in order to bring others to perfection, but not in order to be brought to perfection. Now it is presumptuous to think oneself perfect, but it is not presumptuous to tend to perfection. Secondly, because he who enters the religious state subjects himself to others for the sake of a spiritual profit, and anyone may lawfully do this. Wherefore Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19): “No man is debarred from striving for the knowledge of truth, since this pertains to a praiseworthy ease.” On the other hand, he who enters the episcopal state is raised up in order to watch over others, and no man should seek to be raised thus, according to Heb. 5:4, “Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God”: and Chrysostom says: “To desire supremacy in the Church is neither just nor useful. For what wise man seeks of his own accord to submit to such servitude and peril, as to have to render an account of the whole Church? None

save him who fears not God’s judgment, and makes a secular abuse of his ecclesiastical authority, by turning it to secular uses.”

Reply to Objection 3. The dispensing of spiritual corn is not to be carried on in an arbitrary fashion, but chiefly according to the appointment and disposition of God, and in the second place according to the appointment of the higher prelates, in whose person it is said (1 Cor. 4:1): “Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God.” Wherefore a man is not deemed to hide spiritual corn if he avoids governing or correcting others, and is not competent to do so, neither in virtue of his office nor of his superior’s command; thus alone is he deemed to hide it, when he neglects to dispense it while under obligation to do so in virtue of his office, or obstinately refuses to accept the office when it is imposed on him. Hence Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19): “The love of truth seeks a holy leisure, the demands of charity undertake an honest labor. If no one imposes this burden upon us, we must devote ourselves to the research and contemplation of truth, but if it be imposed on us, we must bear it because charity demands it of us.”

Reply to Objection 4. As Gregory says (Pastor. i, 7), “Isaias, who wishing to be sent, knew himself to be already cleansed by the live coal taken from the altar, shows us that no one should dare uncleansed to approach the sacred ministry. Since, then, it is very difficult for anyone to be able to know that he is cleansed, it is safer to decline the office of preacher.”