

Objection 1. It would seem that religious perfection is diminished by possessing something in common. For our Lord said (Mat. 19:21): “If thou wilt be perfect, go sell all [Vulg.: ‘what’] thou hast and give to the poor.” Hence it is clear that to lack worldly wealth belongs to the perfection of Christian life. Now those who possess something in common do not lack worldly wealth. Therefore it would seem that they do not quite reach to the perfection of Christian life.

Objection 2. Further, the perfection of the counsels requires that one should be without worldly solicitude; wherefore the Apostle in giving the counsel of virginity said (1 Cor. 7:32): “I would have you to be without solicitude.” Now it belongs to the solicitude of the present life that certain people keep something to themselves for the morrow; and this solicitude was forbidden His disciples by our Lord (Mat. 6:34) saying: “Be not . . . solicitous for tomorrow.” Therefore it would seem that the perfection of Christian life is diminished by having something in common.

Objection 3. Further, possessions held in common belong in some way to each member of the community; wherefore Jerome (Ep. ix ad Helioid. Episc.) says in reference to certain people: “They are richer in the monastery than they had been in the world; though serving the poor Christ they have wealth which they had not while serving the rich devil; the Church rejects them now that they are rich, who in the world were beggars.” But it is derogatory to religious perfection that one should possess wealth of one’s own. Therefore it is also derogatory to religious perfection to possess anything in common.

Objection 4. Further, Gregory (Dial. iii, 14) relates of a very holy man named Isaac, that “when his disciples humbly signified that he should accept the possessions offered to him for the use of the monastery, he being solicitous for the safeguarding of his poverty, held firmly to his opinion, saying: A monk who seeks earthly possessions is no monk at all”; and this refers to possessions held in common, and which were offered him for the common use of the monastery. Therefore it would seem destructive of religious perfection to possess anything in common.

Objection 5. Further, our Lord in prescribing religious perfection to His disciples, said (Mat. 10:9,10): “Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses, nor script for your journey.” By these words, as Jerome says in his commentary, “He reproves those philosophers who are commonly called Bactroperatae*, who as despising the world and valuing all things at naught carried their pantry about with them.” Therefore it would seem derogatory to religious perfection that one should keep some-

thing whether for oneself or for the common use.

On the contrary, Prosper† says (De Vita Contempl. ix) and his words are quoted (XII, qu. 1, can. Expedit): “It is sufficiently clear both that for the sake of perfection one should renounce having anything of one’s own, and that the possession of revenues, which are of course common property, is no hindrance to the perfection of the Church.”

I answer that, As stated above (q. 184, a. 3, ad 1; q. 185, a. 6, ad 1), perfection consists, essentially, not in poverty, but in following Christ, according to the saying of Jerome (Super Matth. xix, 27): “Since it is not enough to leave all, Peter adds that which is perfect, namely, ‘We have followed Thee,’” while poverty is like an instrument or exercise for the attainment of perfection. Hence in the Conferences of the Fathers (Coll. i, 7) the abbot Moses says: “Fastings, watchings, meditating on the Scriptures, poverty, and privation of all one’s possessions are not perfection, but means of perfection.”

Now the privation of one’s possessions, or poverty, is a means of perfection, inasmuch as by doing away with riches we remove certain obstacles to charity; and these are chiefly three. The first is the cares which riches bring with them; wherefore our Lord said (Mat. 13:22): “That which was sown [Vulg.: ‘He that received the seed’] among thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choketh up the word.” The second is the love of riches, which increases with the possession of wealth; wherefore Jerome says (Super Matth. xix, 23) that “since it is difficult to despise riches when we have them, our Lord did not say: ‘It is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven,’ but: ‘It is difficult.’” The third is vainglory or elation which results from riches, according to Ps. 48:7, “They that trust in their own strength, and glory in the multitude of their riches.”

Accordingly the first of these three cannot be altogether separated from riches whether great or small. For man must needs take a certain amount of care in acquiring or keeping external things. But so long as external things are sought or possessed only in a small quantity, and as much as is required for a mere livelihood, such like care does not hinder one much; and consequently is not inconsistent with the perfection of Christian life. For our Lord did not forbid all care, but only such as is excessive and hurtful; wherefore Augustine, commenting on Mat. 6:25, “Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat,” says (De Serm. in Monte‡): “In saying this He does not forbid them to procure these things in so far as they needed them, but to be intent on them, and for their sake to do whatever

* i.e. staff and scrip bearers † Julianus Pomerius, among the works of Prosper ‡ The words quoted are from De Operibus Monach. xxvi

they are bidden to do in preaching the Gospel.” Yet the possession of much wealth increases the weight of care, which is a great distraction to man’s mind and hinders him from giving himself wholly to God’s service. The other two, however, namely the love of riches and taking pride or glorying in riches, result only from an abundance of wealth.

Nevertheless it makes a difference in this matter if riches, whether abundant or moderate, be possessed in private or in common. For the care that one takes of one’s own wealth, pertains to love of self, whereby a man loves himself in temporal matters; whereas the care that is given to things held in common pertains to the love of charity which “seeketh not her own,” but looks to the common good. And since religion is directed to the perfection of charity, and charity is perfected in “the love of God extending to contempt of self”*, it is contrary to religious perfection to possess anything in private. But the care that is given to common goods may pertain to charity, although it may prove an obstacle to some higher act of charity, such as divine contemplation or the instructing of one’s neighbor. Hence it is evident that to have excessive riches in common, whether in movable or in immovable property, is an obstacle to perfection, though not absolutely incompatible with it; while it is not an obstacle to religious perfection to have enough external things, whether movables or immovables, as suffice for a livelihood, if we consider poverty in relation to the common end of religious orders, which is to devote oneself to the service of God. But if we consider poverty in relation to the special end of any religious order, then this end being presupposed, a greater or lesser degree of poverty is adapted to that religious order; and each religious order will be the more perfect in respect of poverty, according as it professes a poverty more adapted to its end. For it is evident that for the purpose of the outward and bodily works of the active life a man needs the assistance of outward things, whereas few are required for contemplation. Hence the Philosopher says (*Ethic. x, 8*) that “many things are needed for action, and the more so, the greater and nobler the actions are. But the contemplative man requires no such things for the exercise of his act: he needs only the necessaries; other things are an obstacle to his contemplation.” Accordingly it is clear that a religious order directed to the bodily actions of the active life, such as soldiering or the lodging of guests, would be imperfect if it lacked common riches; whereas those religious orders which are directed to the contemplative life are the more perfect, according as the poverty they profess burdens them with less care for temporal things. And the care of temporal things is so much a greater obstacle to religious life as the religious life requires a greater care of spiritual things.

Now it is manifest that a religious order established

for the purpose of contemplating and of giving to others the fruits of one’s contemplation by teaching and preaching, requires greater care of spiritual things than one that is established for contemplation only. Wherefore it becomes a religious order of this kind to embrace a poverty that burdens one with the least amount of care. Again it is clear that to keep what one has acquired at a fitting time for one’s necessary use involves the least burden of care. Wherefore a threefold degree of poverty corresponds to the three aforesaid degrees of religious life. For it is fitting that a religious order which is directed to the bodily actions of the active life should have an abundance of riches in common; that the common possession of a religious order directed to contemplation should be more moderate, unless the said religious be bound, either themselves or through others, to give hospitality or to assist the poor; and that those who aim at giving the fruits of their contemplation to others should have their life most exempt from external cares; this being accomplished by their laying up the necessaries of life procured at a fitting time. This, our Lord, the Founder of poverty, taught by His example. For He had a purse which He entrusted to Judas, and in which were kept the things that were offered to Him, as related in *Jn. 12:6*.

Nor should it be argued that Jerome (*Super Matth. xvii, 26*) says: “If anyone object that Judas carried money in the purse, we answer that He deemed it unlawful to spend the property of the poor on His own uses,” namely by paying the tax—because among those poor His disciples held a foremost place, and the money in Christ’s purse was spent chiefly on their needs. For it is stated (*Jn. 4:8*) that “His disciples were gone into the city to buy meats,” and (*Jn. 13:29*) that the disciples “thought, because Judas had the purse, that Jesus had said to him: But those things which we have need of for the festival day, or that he should give something to the poor.” From this it is evident that to keep money by, or any other common property for the support of religious of the same order, or of any other poor, is in accordance with the perfection which Christ taught by His example. Moreover, after the resurrection, the disciples from whom all religious orders took their origin kept the price of the lands, and distributed it according as each one had need (*Acts 4:34,35*).

Reply to Objection 1. As stated above (*q. 184, a. 3, ad 1*), this saying of our Lord does not mean that poverty itself is perfection, but that it is the means of perfection. Indeed, as shown above (*q. 186, a. 8*), it is the least of the three chief means of perfection; since the vow of continence excels the vow of poverty, and the vow of obedience excels them both. Since, however, the means are sought not for their own sake, but for the sake of the end, a thing is better, not for being a greater instrument, but for being more adapted to the end. Thus a physician does not heal

* Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* xiv, 28

the more the more medicine he gives, but the more the medicine is adapted to the disease. Accordingly it does not follow that a religious order is the more perfect, according as the poverty it professes is more perfect, but according as its poverty is more adapted to the end both common and special. Granted even that the religious order which exceeds others in poverty be more perfect in so far as it is poorer, this would not make it more perfect simply. For possibly some other religious order might surpass it in matters relating to continence, or obedience, and thus be more perfect simply, since to excel in better things is to be better simply.

Reply to Objection 2. Our Lord's words (Mat. 6:34), "Be not solicitous for tomorrow," do not mean that we are to keep nothing for the morrow; for the Blessed Antony shows the danger of so doing, in the *Conferences of the Fathers* (Coll. ii, 2), where he says: "It has been our experience that those who have attempted to practice the privation of all means of livelihood, so as not to have the wherewithal to procure themselves food for one day, have been deceived so unawares that they were unable to finish properly the work they had undertaken." And, as Augustine says (*De oper. Monach.* xxiii), "if this saying of our Lord, 'Be not solicitous for tomorrow,' means that we are to lay nothing by for the morrow, those who shut themselves up for many days from the sight of men, and apply their whole mind to a life of prayer, will be unable to provide themselves with these things." Again he adds afterwards: "Are we to suppose that the more holy they are, the less do they resemble the birds?" And further on (*De oper. Monach.* xxiv): "For if it be argued from the Gospel that they should lay nothing by, they answer rightly: Why then did our Lord have a purse, wherein He kept the money that was collected? Why, in days long gone by, when famine was imminent, was grain sent to the holy fathers? Why did the apostles thus provide for the needs of the saints?"

Accordingly the saying: "Be not solicitous for tomorrow," according to Jerome (*Super Matth.*) is to be rendered thus: "It is enough that we think of the present; the

future being uncertain, let us leave it to God": according to Chrysostom*, "It is enough to endure the toil for necessary things, labor not in excess for unnecessary things": according to Augustine (*De Serm. Dom. in Monte* ii, 17): "When we do any good action, we should bear in mind not temporal things which are denoted by the morrow, but eternal things."

Reply to Objection 3. The saying of Jerome applies where there are excessive riches, possessed in private as it were, or by the abuse of which even the individual members of a community wax proud and wanton. But they do not apply to moderate wealth, set by for the common use, merely as a means of livelihood of which each one stands in need. For it amounts to the same that each one makes use of things pertaining to the necessities of life, and that these things be set by for the common use.

Reply to Objection 4. Isaac refused to accept the offer of possessions, because he feared lest this should lead him to have excessive wealth, the abuse of which would be an obstacle to religious perfection. Hence Gregory adds (*Dial.* iii, 14): "He was as afraid of forfeiting the security of his poverty, as the rich miser is careful of his perishable wealth." It is not, however, related that he refused to accept such things as are commonly necessary for the upkeep of life.

Reply to Objection 5. The Philosopher says (*Polit.* i, 5,6) that bread, wine, and the like are natural riches, while money is artificial riches. Hence it is that certain philosophers declined to make use of money, and employed other things, living according to nature. Wherefore Jerome shows by the words of our Lord, Who equally forbade both, that it comes to the same to have money and to possess other things necessary for life. And though our Lord commanded those who were sent to preach not to carry these things on the way, He did not forbid them to be possessed in common. How these words of our Lord should be understood has been shown above (q. 185, a. 6, ad 2; *Ia IIae*, q. 108, a. 2, ad 3).

* Hom. xvi in the *Opus Imperfectum*, falsely ascribed to St. John Chrysostom