

Objection 1. It would not seem praiseworthy to enter religion without taking counsel of many, and previously deliberating for a long time. For it is written (1 Jn. 4:1): “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits if they be of God.” Now sometimes a man’s purpose of entering religion is not of God, since it often comes to naught through his leaving the religious life; for it is written (Acts 5:38,39): “If this counsel or this work be of God, you cannot overthrow it.” Therefore it would seem that one ought to make a searching inquiry before entering religion.

Objection 2. Further, it is written (Prov. 25:9): “Treat thy cause with thy friend.” Now a man’s cause would seem to be especially one that concerns a change in his state of life. Therefore seemingly one ought not to enter religion without discussing the matter with one’s friends.

Objection 3. Further, our Lord (Lk. 14:28) in making a comparison with a man who has a mind to build a tower, says that he doth “first sit down and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether he have wherewithal to finish it,” lest he become an object of mockery, for that “this man began to build and was not able to finish.” Now the wherewithal to build the tower, as Augustine says (Ep. ad Laetum ccxliii), is nothing less than that “each one should renounce all his possessions.” Yet it happens sometimes that many cannot do this, nor keep other religious observances; and in signification of this it is stated (1 Kings 17:39) that David could not walk in Saul’s armor, for he was not used to it. Therefore it would seem that one ought not to enter religion without long deliberation beforehand and taking counsel of many.

On the contrary, It is stated (Mat. 4:20) that upon our Lord’s calling them, Peter and Andrew “immediately leaving their nets, followed Him.” Here Chrysostom says (Hom. xiv in Matth.): “Such obedience as this does Christ require of us, that we delay not even for a moment.”

I answer that, Long deliberation and the advice of many are required in great matters of doubt, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 3); while advice is unnecessary in matters that are certain and fixed. Now with regard to entering religion three points may be considered. First, the entrance itself into religion, considered by itself; and thus it is certain that entrance into religion is a greater good, and to doubt about this is to disparage Christ Who gave this counsel. Hence Augustine says (De Verb. Dom., Serm. c, 2): “The East,” that is Christ, “callethe thee, and thou turnest to the West,” namely mortal and fallible man. Secondly, the entrance into religion may be considered in relation to the strength of the person who intends to enter. And here again there is no room for doubt about the

entrance to religion, since those who enter religion trust not to be able to stay by their own power, but by the assistance of the divine power, according to Is. 40:31, “They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” Yet if there be some special obstacle (such as bodily weakness, a burden of debts, or the like) in such cases a man must deliberate and take counsel with such as are likely to help and not hinder him. Hence it is written (Ecclus. 37:12): “Treat with a man without religion concerning holiness*, with an unjust man concerning justice,” meaning that one should not do so, wherefore the text goes on (Ecclus. 37:14,15), “Give no heed to these in any matter of counsel, but be continually with a holy man.” In these matters, however, one should not take long deliberation. Wherefore Jerome says (Ep. and Paulin. liii): “Hasten, I pray thee, cut off rather than loosen the rope that holds the boat to the shore.” Thirdly, we may consider the way of entering religion, and which order one ought to enter, and about such matters also one may take counsel of those who will not stand in one’s way.

Reply to Objection 1. The saying: “Try the spirits, if they be of God,” applies to matters admitting of doubt whether the spirits be of God; thus those who are already in religion may doubt whether he who offers himself to religion be led by the spirit of God, or be moved by hypocrisy. Wherefore they must try the postulant whether he be moved by the divine spirit. But for him who seeks to enter religion there can be no doubt but that the purpose of entering religion to which his heart has given birth is from the spirit of God, for it is His spirit “that leads” man “into the land of uprightness” (Ps. 142:10).

Nor does this prove that it is not of God that some turn back; since not all that is of God is incorruptible: else corruptible creatures would not be of God, as the Manicheans hold, nor could some who have grace from God lose it, which is also heretical. But God’s “counsel” whereby He makes even things corruptible and changeable, is imperishable according to Is. 46:10, “My counsel shall stand and all My will shall be done.” Hence the purpose of entering religion needs not to be tried whether it be of God, because “it requires no further demonstration,” as a gloss says on 1 Thess. 5:21, “Prove all things.”

Reply to Objection 2. Even as “the flesh lusteth against the spirit” (Gal. 5:17), so too carnal friends often thwart our spiritual progress, according to Mic. 7:6, “A man’s enemies are they of his own household.” Wherefore Cyril expounding Lk. 9:61, “Let me first take my leave of them that are at my house,” says[†]: “By asking first to take

* The Douay version supplies the negative: ‘Treat not . . . nor with . . .’

† Cf. St. Thomas’s *Catena Aurea*

his leave of them that were at his house, he shows he was somewhat of two minds. For to communicate with his neighbors, and consult those who are unwilling to relish righteousness, is an indication of weakness and turning back. Hence he hears our Lord say: 'No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,' because he looks back who seeks delay in order to go home and confer with his kinsfolk."

Reply to Objection 3. The building of the tower signifies the perfection of Christian life; and the renunciation of one's possessions is the wherewithal to build this tower. Now no one doubts or deliberates about wishing to have the wherewithal, or whether he is able to build the tower if he have the wherewithal, but what does come under deliberation is whether one has the wherewithal. Again it need not be a matter of deliberation whether one ought to renounce all that one has, or whether by so doing one may be able to attain to perfection; whereas it is a matter of deliberation whether that which one is doing amounts to the renunciation of all that he has, since unless he does renounce (which is to have the wherewithal) he cannot, as the text goes on to state, be Christ's disciple, and this is to build the tower.

The misgiving of those who hesitate as to whether they may be able to attain to perfection by entering religion is shown by many examples to be unreasonable. Hence Augustine says (Confess. viii, 11): "On that side whither I had set my face, and whither I trembled to go, there ap-

peared to me the chaste dignity of continency. . . honestly alluring me to come and doubt not, and stretching forth to receive and embrace me, her holy hands full of multitudes of good examples. There were so many young men and maidens here, a multitude of youth and every age, grave widows and aged virgins. . . And she smiled at me with a persuasive mockery as though to say: Canst not thou what these youths and these maidens can? Or can they either in themselves, and not rather in the Lord their God? . . . Why standest thou in thyself, and so standest not? Cast thyself upon Him; fear not, He will not withdraw Himself that thou shouldst fall. Cast thyself fearlessly upon Him: He will receive and will heal thee."

The example quoted of David is not to the point, because "the arms of Saul," as a gloss on the passage observes, "are the sacraments of the Law, as being burdensome": whereas religion is the sweet yoke of Christ, for as Gregory says (Moral. iv, 33), "what burden does He lay on the shoulders of the mind, Who commands us to shun all troublesome desires, Who warns us to turn aside from the rough paths of this world?"

To those indeed who take this sweet yoke upon themselves He promises the refreshment of the divine fruition and the eternal rest of their souls.

To which may He Who made this promise bring us, Jesus Christ our Lord, "Who is over all things God blessed for ever. Amen."