

QUESTION 184

The State of Perfection in General

Next we have to consider the *state of perfection*, toward which the other states are ordered. For the consideration of *roles* or *offices* with respect to other acts pertains to lawmakers, whereas with respect to sacred ministries, it pertains to the consideration of *orders*, which we will talk about in the Third Part (*Supplement*, q.34).

Now as regards the state of those who are perfect, there are three things to consider: first, the state of perfection in general (question 184); second, what pertains to the perfection of bishops (question 185); and third, what pertains to the perfection of religious, [i.e., those in religious life] (questions 186-189).

On the first topic there are eight questions: (1) Does perfection have to do with charity? (2) Can an individual be perfect in the present life? (3) Does perfection in the present life consist mainly in the counsels, or in the precepts instead? (4) Is everyone who is perfect in the *state* of perfection? (5) Is it especially prelates and religious who are in the state of perfection? (6) Are all prelates in the state of perfection? (7) Which state is more perfect, that of religious or that of bishops? (8) How do religious compare with parish priests (*plebani*) and archdeacons (*archidiaconi*)?

Article 1

Does the perfection of the Christian life have to do specifically with charity?

It seems that the perfection of the Christian life does not have specifically to do with charity (*perfectio Christianae vitae non attendatur specialiter secundum caritatem*):

Objection 1: In 1 Corinthians 14:20 the Apostle says, "... in malice be infants, but in understanding (*sensibus*) be perfect." But charity involves affection rather than understanding. Therefore, it seems that the perfection of the Christian life does not consist principally in charity.

Objection 2: Ephesians 6:13 says, "Put on the armor of God, that you might be able to resist in the evil day and to stand perfect in everything." And concerning the armor of God he continues, saying, "Stand with your loins girt in truth, and put on the breast-plate of justice ... taking up the shield of faith in everything" (6:14-16). Therefore, the perfection of the Christian life has to do not only with charity, but also with other virtues.

Objection 3: Like other habits, virtues are specified by their acts. But James 1:4 says, "Patience has a perfect work." Therefore, it seems that the state of perfection has instead to do with patience.

But contrary to this: Colossians 3:14 says, "Above all, have charity, which is the bond of perfection"—because, namely, it in some way binds all the other virtues together into a perfect unity.

I respond: Each thing is said to be perfect or complete (*perfectum*) insofar as it attains to its proper end, which is the ultimate perfection of a thing. But it is charity that unites us to God, who is the ultimate end of the human mind, since, as 1 John 4:16 says, "He who abides in charity abides in God and God in him." And so the perfection of the Christian life has to do specifically with charity.

Reply to objection 1: The perfection of human understandings (*perfectio humanorum sensuum*) seems to consist mainly in their coming together into the unity of truth—this according to 1 Corinthians 1:10 ("Be perfect in the same understanding and in the same knowledge" (*in eodem sensu et in eadem scientia*)). But this is effected by charity, which effects a consensus among men. And so the perfection of understandings (*perfectio sensuum*) is rooted in a radical way (*radicaliter radicatur*) in the perfection of charity.

Reply to objection 2: There are two ways in which an individual can be called perfect:

In one way, *absolutely speaking* (*simpliciter*), and this sort of perfection has to do with what belongs to the very nature of the thing. For instance, an animal is called perfect when it lacks nothing in

the arrangement of its members and other things of this sort that are required for the animal's life.

Second, a thing is said to be perfect *in a certain respect* (*secundum quid*). This sort of perfection has to do with something that is more exterior added to it, e.g., perfection in whiteness or in blackness or in something of this sort.

Now the Christian life consists specifically in charity, through which the soul is joined to God; hence, 1 John 3:14 says, "He who does not love remains in death." And so the perfection of the Christian life has to do, *absolutely speaking*, with charity and, *in a certain respect*, with all the other virtues. And since what is the case absolutely speaking is the principle and limit with respect to other things, it follows that the perfection of charity is the principle with respect to the perfection that attends upon the other virtues.

Reply to objection 3: Patience is said have a perfect work relative to charity, viz., insofar as from an abundance of charity it happens that an individual patiently undergoes adversities—this according to Romans 8:35 ("What will separate us from the love of God? Tribulation? Or difficulties ...?").

Article 2

Can anyone be perfect in the present life?

It seems that no one can be perfect in the present life (*nullus in hac vita possit esse perfectus*):

Objection 1: In 1 Corinthians 13:10 the Apostle says, "When what is perfect or complete arrives, what is partial will be done away with." But what is partial is not done away with in the present life, since faith and hope, which are partial, remain in the present life. Therefore, no one is perfect in the present life.

Objection 2: As *Physics* 3 says, "The perfect [or complete] is what is lacking in nothing." But in the present life there is no one who is lacking in nothing. For James 3:2 says, "We have all committed offenses in many things," and Psalm 138:16 says, "Your eyes have seen me as imperfect." Therefore, no one is perfect in the present life.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 1), the perfection of the Christian life has to do with charity, which includes under itself love of God and love of neighbor (*dilectionem Dei et proximi*). But as regards love of God, no one can have perfect charity in this life, since, as Gregory puts it in *Super Ezechiel*, "The fire of love (*amoris ignis*), which begins to burn here when one loves him whom he sees, burns more fully into the love of Him [who is not seen]." Nor, again, as regards the love of neighbor, since in the present life we cannot love all our neighbors in actuality; and even if we love them all by way of a habit, habitual love is imperfect. Therefore, it seems that no one can be perfect in the present life.

But contrary to this: Divine law does not lead us to what is impossible. But it does lead us to perfection—this according to Matthew 5:48 ("Be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect"). Therefore, it seems that an individual can be perfect in the present life.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), the perfection of the Christian life consists in charity. But perfection implies a sort of universality, since, as *Physics* 3 says, "The perfect [or complete] is what is lacking in nothing." Therefore, three sorts of perfection can be thought of.

One sort of perfection is *absolute perfection*, which involves *a totality not only on the part of the one who loves but also on the part of the thing that is lovable* (*ex parte diligibilis*)—so that, namely, God is loved to the extent that He is lovable. And this sort of perfection is not possible for any creature, but instead belongs only to God, in whom the good is found wholly and by His essence (*integraliter et essentialiter*).

A second sort of perfection is a perfection that involves *an absolute totality on the part of the one who loves*, viz., in the sense that his affection, in all its capacity, always tends in actuality toward God.

And this sort of perfection is not possible in the present life (*in via*), but will exist in heaven (*in patria*).

The third sort of perfection, which does not involve either (a) a totality on the part of what is lovable or (b) a totality on the part of the one who loves, in the sense that the individual's affections are always in actuality being moved toward God; instead, it involves *the exclusion of those things that are incompatible with a movement of love toward God*—in keeping with what Augustine says in 83 *Quaestiones*: “What is poisonous to charity is excessive sentient desire (*cupiditas*); perfection means no excessive sentient desire” (*perfectio nulla cupiditas*). And this sort of perfection can be had in the present life—and in two ways:

(a) In one way, insofar as what is excluded from a man's affections is *everything that is contrary to charity* in the way that mortal sin is. Charity cannot exist without this sort of perfection. Hence, this sort of perfection is necessary for salvation.

(b) In a second way, insofar as what is excluded from a man's affections is not only what is contrary to charity, but also *everything that impedes the mind's affections from being totally directed toward God*. Charity can exist without this sort of perfection, e.g., in beginners (*in incipientibus*) and in those making progress (*in proficientibus*).

Reply to objection 1: In this passage the Apostle is talking about the perfection of heaven, which is not possible in the present life.

Reply to objection 2: Those who are perfect in this life are being said to commit offenses in many things *by means of venial sins*, which follow from the infirmity of the present life. And on this score they do indeed have something imperfect in comparison to the perfection of heaven.

Reply to objection 3: Just as the mode of the present life does not allow for a man's being always borne in actuality toward God, so neither does it allow for his being borne in actuality toward each of his neighbors individually. Instead, it suffices that he be borne in general toward everyone in a universal way, and toward each one habitually and by way of preparing his mind [to love that one in actuality].

Now just as in the case of loving God, there are likewise two sorts of perfection having to do with love of neighbor.

One sort of perfection, without which charity cannot exist, is such that a man *has nothing in his affections which is contrary to the love of neighbor*.

On the other hand, the second sort of perfection, without which charity can exist, has to do with three things:

The first has to do with the *extent of the individual's love*—so that, namely, he loves not only his friends and acquaintances, but also strangers and, further, his enemies. For the latter, as Augustine points out in *Enchiridion*, “marks the perfect children of God.”

The second has to do with the *intensity of the individual's love*, which is shown by those things that a man disdains for the sake of his neighbor—so that, namely, the man disdains not only exterior goods for the sake of his neighbor, but even bodily afflictions and, ultimately, death—this according to John 15:13 (“Greater love has no man, than to lay down his life for his friends”).

The third has to do with the *effect of the individual's love*—so that, namely, the man provides not only temporal benefits, but also spiritual benefits and, ultimately, his very self—this according to the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 12:15 (“But I will spend most willingly and be spent myself for your souls”).

Article 3

Does the perfection of the present life consist in the precepts or the counsels?

It seems that the perfection of the present life (*perfectio viae*) consists in the counsels and not in the precepts:

Objection 1: In Matthew 19:21 our Lord says, “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all that you

possess and give it to the poor, and come, follow me.” But that is a counsel. Therefore, perfection has to do with the counsels and not with the precepts.

Objection 2: Everyone is obligated to obey the precepts, since they are necessary for salvation. Therefore, if the perfection of the Christian life consists in the precepts, it follows that perfection is necessary for salvation and that everyone is held to it—which is clearly false.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 1), the perfection of the Christian life has to do with charity. But the perfection of charity does not seem to consist in obedience to the precepts, since, as is clear from Augustine in *Super Canonicam Ioannem*, both the beginning of charity and the increase of charity precede the perfection of charity. And it is impossible for charity to begin before the observance of the precepts, since, as John 14:23 says, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.” Therefore, the perfection of a life has to do with the counsels and not with the precepts.

But contrary to this: Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart.” And Leviticus 19:18 says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But these are the two precepts about which our Lord says in Matthew 22:40, “On these two precepts depend the Law and the Prophets.” But the perfection of charity, in accord with which a Christian life is said to be perfect, involves our loving God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Therefore, it seems that perfection consists in obeying the precepts.

I respond: There are two ways in which perfection is said to consist in something: (a) *in its own right* and *essentially* (*per se et essentialiter*), and (b) *secondarily* and *incidentally* (*secundario et accidentaliter*).

The perfection of the Christian life consists *in its own right* and *essentially* in charity, principally with respect to love of God and, secondarily, with respect to love of neighbor—and, as has been said, the main precepts of divine law are given about love of God and love of neighbor. Now it is not the case that love of God and love of neighbor fall under the precept accompanied by some fixed measure, i.e., in such a way that something is left over for a counsel. This is clear from the very form of the precept, which points to perfection when it says, “You shall love the Lord your God *with your whole heart*.” For according to the Philosopher in *Physics* 3, *whole* or *complete* (*totum*) is the same as *perfect* (*perfectum*). And when it says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” each individual loves himself to the greatest degree (*maxime*). The reason for this is that, as the Apostle says in 1 Timothy 1:5, “Charity is the *end* of the precept.” And as the Philosopher explains in *Politics* 1, no measure is applied in the case of the *end*, but only in the case of the *means to the end*—just as a physician applies a measure not to how much he heals, but only to how much medicine or dieting he makes use of in order to accomplish the healing. And so it is clear that the perfection consists *essentially* in the *precepts*. Hence, in *De Perfectione Iustitiae* Augustine says, “Why, then, would this perfection not be commanded of a man, even if no man has it in this life?”

On the other hand, in a *secondary* and *instrumental* way perfection *does* consist in the *counsels*, all of which, like the precepts, are ordered toward charity—though in different ways. For the other precepts are ordered toward removing things which are contrary to charity and in the presence of which charity cannot exist, whereas the counsels are ordered toward removing things which are impediments to the act of charity and yet which are not contrary to charity, e.g., matrimony, an occupation with worldly affairs, and other things of this sort. Hence, in *Enchiridion* Augustine says, “Whatever things God commands—one of which is, ‘You shall not commit adultery’—and whatever things, though not commanded, are suggested by a special counsel—one of which is, ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman’—are rightly done when they are referred to loving God and to loving neighbor for the sake of God, both in this world and in the world to come.” And so it is that in *Collationes Patrum* the abbot Moses says, “Fasts, vigils, meditating on the Scriptures, shabby clothes, and the lack of all wealth are not themselves perfection; instead, they are the instruments of perfection. For the end of these disciplines does not consist in the disciplines themselves; instead, it is through them that one arrives at the end.” Earlier he had premised these remarks with, “We try to climb by the following steps to the perfection of

charity.”

Reply to objection 1: In these words of our Lord there is something posited as a way to perfection, viz., His saying, “Go and sell all that you possess and give it to the poor” whereas there is something else added which perfection consists in, viz., His saying, “... and follow me.” Hence, in *Super Matthaem* Jerome says, “Since it is not sufficient just to leave [everything], Peter adds what is perfect, i.e., “... we have followed you.” Again, in commenting on Luke 5:27 (“Follow me ...”), Ambrose says, “He commands him to follow not by bodily steps, but by the affections of his mind”—something that is accomplished through charity. And so from the very mode of speaking it is clear that the counsels are certain instruments for arriving at perfection: When He says, “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell, etc.,” it is as if he is saying, “You will arrive at the end in question by doing this.”

Reply to objection 2: In *De Perfectione Iustitiae* Augustine says, “The perfection of charity is commanded of a man in the present life, since [the course of life] is not rightly run if it is not known how it should be run. But how would it be known if it were not shown by any precepts?” But since what falls under a precept can be fulfilled in different ways, an individual does not become a transgressor of the precept by the fact that he does not fulfill it in the *best* way; instead, it is sufficient that he fulfill it *in some way or other*.

Now the perfection of the love of God does, to be sure, fall under a precept in a universal way, to such an extent that, as Augustine points out, even the perfection of heaven is not excluded from that precept; however, an individual avoids violating the precept as long as he attains to the perfection of loving God in some way or other. Now the lowest degree of love of God is that nothing else be loved either (a) more than God, or (b) in a way opposed to God, or (c) equally as much as God; and if anyone falls short of this degree of perfection, he does not in any way fulfill the precept. However, as has been explained (a. 2), there is a degree of perfect love that cannot be attained in the present life (*in via*), and it is clear that if an individual falls short of this degree of love, he does not thereby transgress the precept. And, similarly, an individual who does not attain to the middle degrees of perfection does not transgress the precept, as long as he attains to the lowest degree.

Reply to objection 3: Just as (a) immediately upon being born, a man has a sort of perfection of his nature that belongs to the character of his species, whereas (b) there is another perfection added to this through his growth, so, too, (a) there is a sort of perfection of charity that belongs to the very species of charity, viz., that God is loved above all things and that nothing contrary to Him is loved, whereas (b) there is another perfection of charity, even in the present life, at which an individual arrives through some sort of spiritual growth—as, for instance, when a man abstains from things that are permitted in order to free himself up for serving God in a more unrestricted way (*ut liberius divinis obsequiis vacet*).

Article 4

Is it the case that everyone who is perfect is in the state of perfection?

It seems that everyone who is perfect is in the state of perfection:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 3, ad 3), just as through bodily growth one arrives at bodily perfection, so through spiritual growth one arrives at spiritual perfection. But after bodily growth an individual is said to be in the state of a perfect or complete age. Therefore, it likewise seems that after spiritual growth, when an individual has already achieved perfection, he is in the state of perfection.

Objection 2: As is explained in *Physics* 5, for the same reason that a thing moves from one contrary to the other, it likewise moves from what is lesser to what is greater. But when an individual goes from sin to grace, he is said to change his state, since the *state of sin* and the *state of grace* are distinct. Therefore, it seems, by parity of reasoning, that when an individual progresses from less grace to more grace until he arrives at what is perfect, he attains the *state of perfection*.

Objection 3: An individual acquires a state by the fact that he is liberated from servitude. But through charity an individual is liberated from servitude to sin, since, as Proverbs 10:12 says, “Charity covers all sins.” But as has been explained, an individual is perfect by reference to charity. Therefore, it seems that if anyone has perfection, then by that very fact he has the state of perfection.

But contrary to this: There are some in the state of perfection who lack charity and grace altogether, e.g., bad bishops or bad religious. Therefore, it seems that, contrariwise, some individuals have perfection of life but nonetheless do not have the state of perfection.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 183, a. 1), *state* properly pertains to the condition of freedom or servitude. Now spiritual freedom or servitude can be present in a man in two ways: (a) with respect to what is done *internally*, and (b) with respect to what is done *externally*. And since, as 1 Kings 16:7 says, “Men see appearances, but God perceives the heart,” it follows that the condition of a man’s spiritual state is taken from the man’s *interior* disposition in relation to God’s judgment, whereas in relation to the Church a man’s spiritual state is taken from what is done externally. And we are now speaking of *states* in the sense in which a sort of beauty that belongs to the Church arises from the diversity of states.

Now we must take into account that, as regards men, what is required for an individual to acquire a state of freedom or a state of servitude is, first of all, either *an obligation or an absolution*. For it is not the case that someone becomes a servant by the fact that he serves someone, since even those who are free serve—this according to Galatians 5:13 (“By the charity of the Spirit, serve one another”). Nor, again, does an individual who ceases to serve thereby become free, as is clear in the case of fugitive servants. Instead, an individual is properly a servant if he is *obligated* to serve, and an individual is properly free if he is *absolved* from servitude.

What is required, second, is that the aforementioned obligation be effected with *some sort of solemnity*, in the same way that in the case of other obligations that secure permanent stability among men, some sort of solemnity is applied.

So, then, an individual is properly said to be in the *state of perfection* not by the fact that he has an act of perfect love, but by the fact that *he obligates himself in a permanent way, with some sort of solemnity, to those things that belong to perfection*. It is also possible for individuals who do not serve to obligate themselves, and for individuals to fulfill what they have not obligated themselves to; this is clear from Matthew 21:28-31 concerning the two sons, the one of whom, when the father says to him, “Work in the vineyard,” replies, “I will not,” and afterwards went, whereas the other says in response, “I will go,” and he did not go. And so nothing prevents it from being the case that some individuals who are perfect are not in the state of perfection, and that some who are in the state of perfection are not perfect.

Reply to objection 1: Through bodily growth an individual makes progress in those things that pertain to nature and acquires a state of nature—especially because what is in accord with nature is in some sense immutable, given that a nature is directed toward one outcome.

Similarly, through interior spiritual growth an individual acquires a state of perfection *as regards God’s judgment*. But as regards the distinctions among ecclesiastical states, an individual does not acquire the state of perfection except through growth in those things that are done externally.

Reply to objection 2: This argument likewise goes through with respect to the interior state.

And, yet, when an individual passes from from sin to grace, he passes from servitude to freedom—something that does not happen through simple progress in grace except when the individual obligates himself to those things that belong to grace.

Reply to objection 3: This argument once again goes through with respect to the interior state.

And, yet, even though charity is what changes the condition of spiritual freedom and spiritual servitude, an increase of charity does not do this.

Article 5

Are prelates and religious in the state of perfection?

It seems that prelates and religious are not in the state of perfection:

Objection 1: The state of perfection is distinct from the state of beginners and the state of those who are making progress. But there are no classes of men assigned specifically to the state of those making progress or to the state of beginners. Therefore, it seems that neither should there be any class of men assigned to the state of perfection.

Objection 2: The exterior state should correspond to the interior state; otherwise, one incurs mendacity, which, as Ambrose explains in a sermon, “exists not only in false words but also in deceitful deeds.” But there are many prelates or religious who do not have the interior perfection of charity. Therefore, if all religious and prelates were in the state of perfection, it would follow that those among them who are not perfect are, as deceivers and liars, in mortal sin.

Objection 3: As was established above (a. 1), perfection has to do with charity. But the most perfect charity seems to exist in the martyrs—this according to John 15:13 (“Greater love no man has than one who lays down his life for his friends”). And a Gloss on Hebrews 12:4 (“You have not yet resisted up to blood”) says, “There is no more perfect love in the present life than that to which the holy martyrs attained; they struggled against sin to the point of [shedding their] blood (*contra peccatum usque ad sanguinem certaverunt*).” Therefore, it seems that the state of perfection should be attributed to the martyrs rather than to religious and bishops.

But contrary to this: In *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, chap. 5 Dionysius attributes perfection to bishops as those who *bring about* perfection (*tanquam perfectioribus*), and in chap. 6 he attributes perfection to religious—whom he calls monks or *therapeutai*, i.e., servants of God—as those who *are made perfect* (*tanquam perfectis*).

I respond: As has been explained (a. 4), what is required for the state of perfection is a perpetual obligation with respect to the things that belong to perfection, along with some sort of solemnity. Each of these belongs both to religious and to bishops.

For religious bind themselves by a vow to abstaining from worldly things which they could have licitly made use of, in order to make time for God in a more unrestricted way (*liberius*), and the perfection of the present life consists in this. Hence, in speaking of religious in *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, chap. 6, Dionysius says, “Some call themselves *therapeutai*”—that is, servants—“because of their pure service to God and homage of Him, whereas others call themselves monks, because of the indivisible and singular life that unites them, since their being wrapped around with”—that is, contemplating—“indivisible things unites them in a Godlike union and a perfection that is lovable to God.” Again, their obligation is marked by a certain solemnity of profession and blessing. Hence, in the same place Dionysius adds, “Because of this, in bestowing perfect grace on them, holy legislation accords them a certain sanctifying invocation.”

Similarly, bishops likewise obligate themselves to those things that belong to perfection, and they assume a pastoral role that involves “the shepherd laying down his life for his sheep,” as John 10:11 says. Hence, in 1 Timothy 6:12 the Apostle says, “You have made a good profession before many witnesses”—that is, “at your ordination,” as a Gloss on the same passage comments. Again, a certain solemnity of consecration is applied along with the profession just mentioned—this according to 2 Timothy 1:6: “Stir up the grace of God which is in you by the imposition of my hands,” which the Gloss expounds as “episcopal grace.” And in *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, chap. 5 Dionysius says, “The high priest”—that is, the bishop—“in his ordination receives on his head the most holy imposition that belongs to the Scriptures (*eloquiorum*), whereby it is signified that he participates fully in the whole power of the hierarchy, and that he not only illuminates everything that pertains to the sacred words and actions, but also hands these things on to others.”

Reply to objection 1: The beginning and the increase are sought not for their own sake, but for the sake of perfection. And so it is only to the state of perfection that certain men are taken up with a certain obligation and solemnity.

Reply to objection 2: Men take up the state of perfection not in the sense that they are professing themselves to be perfect, but in the sense that they are professing themselves to be striving for perfection. Hence, in Philippians 3:12 the Apostle says, “Not that I already comprehend or am already perfect; rather, I press on in order that I might in some way comprehend.” And later (v. 15) he adds, “Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded.” Hence, an individual is guilty of mendacity or deception not because he takes on the state of perfection without being perfect, but because he mentally revokes, his intention to pursue perfection.

Reply to objection 3: Martyrdom consists in the most perfect act of charity. But, as has been explained, an *act* of perfection is not sufficient to create the *state* of perfection.

Article 6

Are all ecclesiastical prelates in the state of perfection?

It seems that all ecclesiastical prelates are in the state of perfection:

Objection 1: In *Super Epistolam ad Titum* Jerome says, “In former times, *priest* was the same as *bishop*,” and later he adds, “Therefore, just as priests know that by the custom of the Church they are subject to the one who has been placed over them, so, too, bishops should recognize that, by custom rather than by the very ordinance of our Lord, they are greater than the priests and ought to govern the Church together.” But bishops are in the state of perfection. Therefore, so are priests who have the care of souls.

Objection 2: Just as bishops undertake the care of souls with a consecration, so, too, with the parish priests (*presbyteri curati*), along with the archdeacons, of whom a Gloss on Acts 6:5 (“Brothers, think of seven men of good reputation”) says, “Here the apostles decided that seven deacons were to be appointed through the Church, and that they would be of a higher rank and, as it were, columns close around the altar.” Therefore, it seems that they, too, are in the state of perfection.

Objection 3: Just as bishops are obliged to “lay down their lives for their sheep,” so, too, with the parish priests and archdeacons. But as has been explained (aa. 2 and 5), this involves the perfection of charity. Therefore, it seems that the parish priest and the archdeacons are also in the state of perfection.

But contrary to this: In *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, chap. 5 Dionysius says, “The order of pontiffs is the crowning order and perfective, whereas the order of priests is illuminative and light-giving, while the order of the ministers is purgative and prudential.” From this it is clear that perfection is attributed to the bishops alone.

I respond: There are two things that can be considered in the case of priests and deacons who have the care of souls, viz., their [*holy*] *order* and their *care* [*of souls*]

The *order* is itself ordered toward a certain act among divine roles; hence, it was explained above (q. 183, a. 3, ad 3) that the distinction among orders is contained under the distinction among roles or offices (*sub distinctione officiorum continentur*). Hence, by the fact that individuals receive a holy order, they receive the power to perform certain sacred acts, but they are not by that very fact obligated to those things that belong to perfection, except to the extent that, as in the Eastern Church, a vow of continence is uttered in the reception of the holy order—where, as will be explained below (q. 186, a. 4), a vow of continence is one of the things that belong to perfection. Hence, it is clear that from the fact that an individual receives a holy order, he is not placed, absolutely speaking, in the state of perfection, even though interior perfection is required for an individual to exercise the acts in question worthily.

Similarly, [priests and deacons] are not placed in the state of perfection because of the *care* [of

souls] that they undertake. For they are not obligated by the bond of a perpetual vow to continue on with the care of souls. Instead, they are able to give it up, either (a) by entering religious life (*transeundo ad religionem*), even without permission of their bishop, as provided for in *Decretis, Causa* 19, q. 2; or, again, (b) with the permission of his bishop, an individual can step down from his archdiaconate or parish and receive a modest income without care for souls (*et simplicem praebendam accipere sine cura*). The latter would in no way be permitted if the individual were in the state of perfection, since, as Luke 9:62 says, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

On the other hand, since bishops are in the state of perfection, they can step down from their episcopal care only by the authority of the supreme Pontiff, to whom it pertains to give dispensations in the case of perpetual vows—and this for determinate reasons, as will be explained below (q. 185, a. 4).

Hence, it is clear that not all prelates are in the state of perfection, but only bishops.

Reply to objection 1: There are two ways in which we talk about the priest and the bishop:

In one way, with respect to *the name*. And on this score bishops and priests were at one time not distinguished. For as Augustine notes in *De Civitate Dei* 19, bishops (*episcopi*) are so called from the fact that they are *overseers* (*ex eo quod superintendunt*), whereas in Greek *presbyteri* (*priests*) means something like *elders* (*seniores*). Hence, the Apostle commonly uses the name *presbyteri* for both [priests and bishops], as in 1 Timothy 5:17 when he says, “The priests (*presbyteri*) who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor.” And he does the same with the name *episcopi* (bishops); hence, in Acts 20:28, speaking to the priests (*presbyteri*) of the church of Ephesus, he says, “Attend to yourselves and to your whole flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as *episcopi* (bishops) to rule the church of God.”

On the other hand, with respect to *the reality*, there was always a distinction between them, even during the time of the apostles, as is clear from Dionysius in *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, chap. 5. And a Gloss on Luke 10:1 (“After this the Lord appointed ...”) says, “Just as, in the case of the apostles, the pattern is that of bishops (*forma est episcoporum*), so, in the case of the seventy-two disciples, the pattern is that of priests of the second order (*forma est presbyterorum secundi ordinis*).”

Afterwards, however, in order to avoid schism, it was necessary to distinguish the names as well, so that, namely, the higher ones were called *bishops*, and the lower ones were called *priests*. Moreover, the claim that priests do not differ from bishops was numbered among the heretical dogmas by Augustine in *De Haeresibus*, where he reports that the Arians “claimed that the priest should not be distinguished from the bishop by any sort of difference.”

Reply to objection 2: The bishops have the principal care of all the souls who belong to their diocese, whereas parish priests and archdeacons have certain subministries under the bishops. Hence, a Gloss on 1 Corinthians 12:28 (“... helpers, administrators ...”) says, “*Helpers*, i.e., those who give assistance to the higher ups, in the way that Titus gave assistance to the Apostle or in the way that archdeacons give assistance to their bishops; *administrators*, viz., leaders of lower persons, as are the priests who lead by instructing the ordinary people.” And in *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, chap. 5 Dionysius says, “Just as we see the whole hierarchy culminating in Jesus, so each [of these roles] culminates in its own divine hierarch, i.e., the bishop.” And *Decretals* 16, qu. 1 says, “All priests and deacons must take care that they do nothing without the permission of their own bishop.”

From this it is clear that they are related to the bishop in the way that municipal officials or commanders (*baillivi vel praepositi*) are related to their king. And because of this, just as the king alone receives the solemn blessing in worldly affairs, whereas the others are appointed through a simple commission, so, too, within the Church it is the bishop’s care [for souls] that is commissioned with a solemnity of consecration, whereas the care that falls to the archdiaconate or to the ordinary clergy is commissioned by a simple injunction. Still, the latter are consecrated when they receive their [holy] orders, even before they have the care [of souls].

Reply to objection 3: Just as the ordinary clergy and archdeacons do not have the principal care [of souls] but instead have a ministry insofar as it is commissioned to them by their bishop, so, too, the

pastoral role, along with the obligation to lay down their lives for their sheep, belongs to them *not principally*, but insofar as they *participate* in the care [of souls]. Hence, instead of obtaining the *state of perfection*, they play a certain role that *belongs to perfection*.

Article 7

Is the state of religious more perfect than the state of prelates?

It seems that the state of religious is more perfect than the state of prelates:

Objection 1: In Matthew 19:21 our Lord says, “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all that you possess and give it to the poor”—which is what religious do. By contrast, bishops are not held to this; for *Decretals* 12, q. 1 says, “Bishops bequeath to their heirs their own or acquired property, or whatever they have of their own.” Therefore, religious are in a more perfect state than bishops are.

Objection 2: Perfection consists more principally in love of God than in love of neighbor. But the state of religious is directly ordered toward the love of God; this is why, as Dionysius points out in *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, chap. 6, they are named from their servitude and obedience to God. But the state of bishops seems to be ordered toward love of neighbor, whose care they oversee, as is clear from Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* 19. Therefore, it seems that the state of religious is more perfect than the state of bishops.

Objection 3: The state of religious is ordered toward the contemplative life, which is more important than the active life that the state of bishops is ordered toward; for in *Pastoralis* Gregory says, “Isaiah, wanting to do good for his neighbors through the active life, desires the role of preaching, whereas Jeremiah, wanting to cling to the zealous love of his creator, protests that he should not be sent to preach.” Therefore, it seems that the state of religious is more perfect than the state of bishops.

But contrary to this: No one is permitted to pass from a higher state to a lower state, for this is “to look back.” But an individual can pass from the state of religion to the episcopal state; for *Decretals* 18, q. 1 says, “Holy ordination makes a bishop out of a monk.” Therefore, the state of bishops is more perfect than the state of religious.

I respond: As Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12, “Acting is always more excellent than being acted upon.” Now in the genus perfection, bishops, according to Dionysius, behave as those *who make others perfect (se habent ut perfectores)*, whereas religious behave as those *who are being perfected*. The one of these involves acting, whereas the other involves being acted upon. Hence, it is clear that the state of perfection is more important in bishops than in religious.

Reply to objection 1: There are two possible ways to think about the renunciation of one’s own resources (*abrenuntiatio propriarum facultatum*):

In one way, *insofar as it is actual*. And on this understanding perfection does not consist in renunciation, but, as was explained above (a. 3), renunciation is a certain instrument of perfection. And so there is nothing to prevent the state of perfection from existing without the renunciation of one’s own possessions. The same thing should likewise be said about other exterior observances.

In the second way, renunciation can be thought of as *a preparation of the mind*, in the sense that a man is prepared, if the need arises, to let go of and give away everything. And this pertains directly to perfection. Hence, in *Quaestionum Evangeliorum* Augustine says, “Our Lord shows that the children of wisdom understand that uprightness exists neither in abstaining nor in eating, but in enduring want with equanimity.” Hence, the Apostle says, “I know how to abound and how to suffer want” (Philippians 4:12).

Now bishops are especially obligated to disdain everything that belongs to them when the need arises—and this for the honor of God and the salvation of their flock—either by giving these things to the poor of his flock or by “bearing with joy the plundering of one’s own goods” (Hebrews 10:34).

Reply to objection 2: The very fact that bishops are intent on those things that involve the love of neighbor stems from the abundance of their love for God. Hence, our Lord first asked Peter whether he loved Him and then committed the care of the flock to him. And in *Pastoralis* Gregory says, “If a pastor’s care [of souls] is a testimony to love, then an individual who refuses to feed God’s flock, though having the means to do so, is convicted of not loving the supreme Pastor.” And it is a sign of a greater love if a man serves another for the sake of his friend than if he wants to serve his friend alone.

Reply to objection 3: As Gregory says in *Pastoralis*, “A prelate should be foremost in action, and more uplifted than others in contemplation,” because contemplating pertains to prelates not only for their own sake, but also for the purpose of instructing others. Hence, in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “It is said of perfect men returning after their contemplation, ‘They shall publish the memory of Your sweetness’ (Psalm 144:7).”

Article 8

Do even parish priests and archdeacons have more perfection than religious?

It seems that even parish priests and archdeacons have more perfection than religious (*presbyteri curati et archidiaconi sint maioris perfectionis quam religiosi*):

Objection 1: In his dialogue [*De Sacerdotio*] Chrysostom says, “If you bring up some monk to me of the sort, I say with exaggeration, Elijah was, he should not be compared with someone who, handed over to the people and compelled to carry the sins of many, remains firm and strong.” And a little while later he says, “If I were given the choice of where I would prefer to please, in the priestly office or in monastic solitude, without hesitation I would choose the one I said first.” And in the same book he says, “If someone were to compare the toils of this project”—viz., the monastic life—“to a well-managed priesthood, he would find them as far distant from one another as a common citizen and a king.” Therefore, it seems that priests who have the care of souls are more perfect than religious.

Objection 2: In his letter *Ad Valerium* Augustine says, “Let your religious prudence observe that in this life, and especially at these times, there is nothing more difficult, more onerous, or more perilous than the office of bishop, priest, or deacon. But in God’s eyes there is no greater blessing, if one engages in the battle in the way that our Commander dictates.” Therefore, it is not the case that religious are more perfect than priests or deacons.

Objection 3: In *Ad Aurelium* Augustine says, “It is most regrettable if we exalt monks to so ruinous a degree of pride and deem the clergy worthy of so serious a reproach”—viz., as in the dictum, ‘A bad monk is a good cleric’—“since sometimes even a good monk scarcely makes a good cleric.” And a little before this he had said, “God’s servants”—i.e., the monks—“must not be given allowance to facilely think themselves chosen for something better”—viz., the clerical state—“if they have become worse”—viz., by leaving the monastic state. Therefore, it seems that those who are in the clerical state are more perfect than religious.

Objection 4: It is not permissible to pass from a greater state to a lesser state. But it is permissible to pass from the monastic state to the office of a priest having care of souls. This is clear in *Decretals* 16, q. 1, from the decree of Pope Gelasus, who says, “If there is a monk who, by merit of his venerable life, is seen to be worthy of the priesthood, and if the abbot under whose authority he fights for Christ the King requests that he be made a priest, he should be chosen by the bishop and ordained for the place the bishop has decided upon.” And in *Ad Rusticum Monachum* Jerome says, “Live in the monastery in such a way that you deserve to be a cleric.” Therefore, parish priests and archdeacons are more perfect than religious.

Objection 5: As is clear from what was said above (a. 7), bishops are in a more perfect state than religious. But by the fact that parish priests and archdeacons have the care of souls, they are more similar

to bishops than religious are. Therefore, they have greater perfection.

Objection 6: As *Ethics 2* explains, “Virtue has to do with what is difficult and good.” But it is more difficult for an individual to live well in the role of a parish priest or an archdeacon than in the state of religion. Therefore, parish priests and archdeacons are more perfect in virtue than religious are.

But contrary to this: *Decretal 19*, q. 2, chap. *Duae* says, “If a man is retaining the people in his church under the bishop and leading a secular life, and if, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he desires to work out his salvation in a monastery or under some canonical rule, then since he is being led by a private law, no argument requires him to be constrained by a public law.” But an individual is not being led by the law of the Holy Spirit—which is here called a ‘private law’—unless it is toward something more perfect. Therefore, it seems that religious are more perfect than archdeacons or parish priests.

I respond: The comparison of the relative eminence of two things takes place not with respect to what they agree on, but with respect to what they differ in.

Now in the case of parish priests and archdeacons there are three things to consider: (a) their *state*, (b) their *order*, and (c) their *office* or *role*. Their *state* involves their being *seculars*; their *order* involves their being *priests* or *deacons*; and their *office* or *role* involves their *having care of souls*. Therefore, if, on the other side, we posit *religious* as the *state*, *deacon* or *priest* as the *order*, and *having care of souls* as the *office* or *role* (since most monks and canons regular do have care of souls), then the religious win on the first point and are equal on the other two. On the other hand, if the second (*religious*) differ from the first (*seculars*) in both *state* and *office*, as in the case of religious priests and deacons who do not have care of souls, then it is clear that the second (*religious*) will be more excellent in *state* but less excellent in *office* and equal in *order*. Therefore, we have to think about what has greater preeminence: the *state* or the *office*.

On this score, there seem to be two things that we have to pay attention to, viz., (a) *goodness* and (b) *difficulty*.

(a) Thus, if a comparison is made with respect to *goodness*, then the *state of religion* is preferable to the *office of parish priest* or the *office of archdeacon*, since a religious binds the whole of his life to the pursuit of perfection, whereas a parish priest or archdeacon does not bind the whole of his life to the care of souls in the way that the bishop does; nor, again, does it belong to him to have principal care for those under him in the way that bishops do. Instead, as is clear from what has been said (a. 6, ad 2), certain particular matters are committed to the office of parish priest or the office of archdeacon. And so the comparison of *the state of religion* to *the office of priest or archdeacon* is like the comparison of the *universal* to the *particular*, and like the comparison of a *holocaust* to a *sacrifice*, which, as is clear from Gregory in *Super Ezechiel*, is less than a holocaust. Hence, in *Decretals 19*, q. 1 it says, “Because clerics who desire the situation of monks want to follow a better kind of life, free entrance into monasteries must be granted to them by their bishop.”

This comparison, however, must be understood as having to do with the *genus of the work* (*secundum genus operis*). For as regards the *charity of the worker* (*secundum caritatem operantis*), it sometimes happens that work which is lesser by its genus is more meritorious if it is done out of greater charity.

(b) On the other hand, if one attends to the *difficulty* involved in living well in the religious state and in living well in the role of having care of souls, then because of *exterior perils* (*propter exteriora pericula*), it is more difficult to live well with the care of souls—even though living out the religious life is more difficult as regards the very *genus of the work* because of the strictness of regular observance. However, if a religious also lacks holy orders, as in the case of religious lay brothers (*sicut patet de conversis religionum*), then it is clear that the preeminence of orders wins with respect to dignity, since by holy orders a man is appointed to the most worthy of ministries, by which he serves Christ Himself in the sacrament of the altar. What is required for this is a greater interior holiness than even the religious state requires. For as Dionysius says in *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, chap. 6, “The monastic order must follow priestly orders and ascend to divine things in imitation of them.” Hence, other things being

equal, a cleric who is established in holy orders sins more grievously if he does something contrary to holiness than a religious who is not in holy orders—even though a religious who is not in holy orders is bound to regular observance, which those in holy orders are not bound to.

Reply to objection 1: To these passages from Chrysostom one could reply tersely that he is talking about a bishop, who is a high priest, and not about a priestly curate of a lower order. And this would fit in with the intention of his book, in which he consoles himself and Basil about the fact that they have been chosen as bishops.

But having set this reply aside, one should reply instead that he is talking about the *difficulty*. For he had already said, “When a pilot has been surrounded by surging waves and has been able to free his ship from the storm, then he deserves to be acknowledged by all as a perfect pilot.” And later he concludes with what was quoted above about the monk, who “should not be compared with someone who, handed over to the people ... remains firm.” And he adds the reason why: “He kept himself under control in the storm, just as he had in the calm.” This proves nothing more than that the state of one who has the care of souls is fraught with more danger than the monastic state, whereas to keep oneself innocent in face of a greater peril is proof of greater virtue. On the other hand, greatness of virtue is also indicated by a man’s avoiding dangers by entering religion. Hence, he does not say that he *would prefer* the priestly office to the monastic solitude, but that he “*would prefer to please*” in the former than in the latter, since this is a proof of greater virtue.

Reply to objection 2: This passage from Augustine is clearly talking about the *difficulty*, which, as has been said, shows a greatness of virtue in those who live this life well.

Reply to objection 3: Augustine is here comparing monks to clerics with respect to the distance between their *orders*, and not with respect to the distance between the religious life and the secular life.

Reply to objection 4: Since those who are taken into the care of souls from the state of religion were previously established in holy orders, they acquire something that they did not have before, the *role or office of caring for souls*, but they do not set aside what that they had before, viz., the *state of religion*. For in *Decretals* 16, *Causa*, q. 1, it says, “Concerning monks, if those who, having lived for a long time in monasteries, obtain clerical orders, we have decided that they should not step down from their former purpose.”

By contrast, when parish priests or archdeacons enter into religious life, they set aside the care of souls in order to take up the state of perfection. Hence, excellence on the part of the religious state is shown by this very fact. On the other hand, as was explained above, lay religious who are taken up into the clerical state and into sacred orders are clearly moving forward to something better. And this is shown by the very manner of speaking, when Jerome says, “Live in the monastery in such a way that you deserve to be a cleric.”

Reply to objection 5: There is one respect in which parish priests and archdeacons are more similar to bishops than religious are, viz., the care of souls, which they have in a secondary way. But, as is clear from has been said above (aa. 5-6), religious are more similar to a bishop with respect to the perpetual obligation that is required for the state of perfection.

Reply to objection 6: The sort of difficulty that stems from the *arduousness of a work* adds to the perfection of the virtue.

However, the sort of difficulty that stems from *exterior impediments* sometimes diminishes the perfection of virtue, e.g., when an individual does not love virtue enough to want to avoid the impediments to virtue—this according to the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 9:25 (“Everyone who fights in the battle holds himself back from all things”). On the other hand, it is sometimes a sign of the perfection of virtue, e.g., when an individual does not fall away from virtue despite the fact that the impediments to virtue occur because of an unexpected cause or because of an unavoidable cause.

Now in the state of religion there is more difficulty because of how hard the works themselves are, whereas in the case of those who live in the world in some way, there is more difficulty posed by those impediments to virtue that religious have avoided by their foresight [in entering the religious state].