

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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TREATISE ON THE STATES OF LIFE (Questions [183]-189)

OF MAN'S VARIOUS DUTIES AND STATES IN GENERAL (FOUR ARTICLES)

We must next consider man's various states and duties. We shall consider (1) man's duties and states in general; (2) the state of the perfect in particular.

Under the first head there are four points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) What constitutes a state among men?
 - [\(2\)](#) Whether among men there should be various states and duties?
 - [\(3\)](#) Of the diversity of duties;
 - [\(4\)](#) Of the diversity of states.
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Whether the notion of a state denotes a condition of freedom or servitude?

Objection 1: It would seem that the notion of a state does not denote a condition of freedom or servitude. For "state" takes its name from "standing." Now a person is said to stand on account of his being upright; and Gregory says (Moral. vii, 17): "To fall by speaking harmful words is to forfeit entirely the state of righteousness." But a man acquires spiritual uprightness by submitting his will to God; wherefore a gloss on Ps. 32:1, "Praise becometh the upright," says:

Objection 2: Further, the word "state" seems to denote immobility according to 1 Cor. 15:48, "Be ye steadfast [stabiles] and immovable"; wherefore Gregory says (Hom. xxi in Ezech.): "The stone is foursquare, and is stable on all sides, if no disturbance will make it fall." Now it is virtue that enables us "to act with immobility," according to Ethic. ii, 4. Therefore it would seem that a state is acquired by every virtuous action.

Objection 3: Further, the word "state" seems to indicate height of a kind; because to stand is to be raised upwards. Now one man is made higher than another by various duties; and in like manner men are raised upwards in various ways by various grades and orders. Therefore the mere difference of grades, orders, or duties suffices for a difference of states.

On the contrary, It is thus laid down in the Decretals (II, qu. vi, can. Si Quando): "Whenever anyone intervene in a cause where life or state is at stake he must do so, not by a proxy, but in his own person"; and "state" here has reference to freedom or servitude. Therefore it would seem that nothing differentiates a man's state, except that which refers to freedom or servitude.

I answer that, "State," properly speaking, denotes a kind of position, whereby a thing is disposed with a certain immobility in a manner according with its nature. For it is natural to man that his head should be directed upwards, his feet set firmly on the ground, and his other intermediate members disposed in becoming order; and this is not the case if he lie down, sit, or recline, but only when he stands upright: nor again is he said to stand, if he move, but only when he is still. Hence it is again that even in human acts, a matter is said to have stability [statum] in reference to its own disposition in the point of a certain immobility or restfulness. Consequently matters which easily change and are extrinsic to them do not constitute a state among men, for instance that a man be rich or poor, of high or low rank, and so forth. Wherefore in the civil law [*Dig. I, IX, De Senatoribus] (Lib. Cassius ff. De Senatoribus) it is said that if a man be removed from the senate, he is deprived of his dignity rather than of his state. But that alone seemingly pertains to a man's state, which regards an obligation binding his person, in so far, to wit, as a man is his own master or subject to another, not indeed from any slight or unstable cause, but from one that is firmly established; and this is something pertaining to the nature of freedom or servitude. Therefore state properly regards freedom or servitude whether in spiritual or in civil matters.

Reply to Objection 1: Uprightness as such does not pertain to the notion of state, except in so far as it is connatural to man with the addition of a certain restfulness. Hence other animals are said to stand without its being required that they should be upright; nor again are men said to stand, however upright their position be, unless they be still.

Reply to Objection 2: Immobility does not suffice for the notion of state; since even one who sits or lies down is still, and yet he is not said to stand.

Reply to Objection 3: Duty implies relation to act; while grades denote an order of superiority and inferiority. But state requires immobility in that which regards a condition of the person himself.

Whether there should be different duties or states in the Church?

Objection 1: It would seem that there should not be different duties or states in the Church. For distinction is opposed to unity. Now the faithful of Christ are called to unity according to Jn. 17:21,22: "That they... may be one in Us... as We also are one." Therefore there should not be a distinction of duties and states in the Church.

Objection 2: Further, nature does not employ many means where one suffices. But the working of grace is much more orderly than the working of nature. Therefore it were more fitting for things pertaining to the operations of grace to be administered by the same persons, so that there would not be a distinction of duties and states in the Church.

Objection 3: Further, the good of the Church seemingly consists chiefly in peace, according to Ps. 147:3, "Who hath placed peace in thy borders," and 2 Cor. 13:11, "Have peace, and the God of peace... shall be with you." Now distinction is a hindrance to peace, for peace would seem to result from likeness, according to Ecclus. 13:19, "Every beast loveth its like," while the Philosopher says (Polit. vii, 5) that "a little difference causes dissension in a state." Therefore it would seem that there ought not to be a distinction of states and duties in the Church.

On the contrary, It is written in praise of the Church ([Ps. 44:10](#)) that she is "surrounded with variety": and a gloss on these words says that "the Queen," namely the Church, "is bedecked with the teaching of the apostles, the confession of martyrs, the purity of virgins, the sorrowings of penitents."

I answer that, The difference of states and duties in the Church regards three things. In the first place it regards the perfection of the Church. For even as in the order of natural things, perfection, which in God is simple and uniform, is not to be found in the created universe except in a multiform and manifold manner, so too, the fulness of grace, which is centered in Christ as head, flows forth to His members in various ways, for the perfecting of the body of the Church. This is the meaning of the Apostle's words ([Eph. 4:11,12](#)): "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and other some evangelists, and other some pastors and doctors for the perfecting of the saints." Secondly, it regards the need of those actions which are necessary in the Church. For a diversity of actions requires a diversity of men appointed to them, in order that all things may be accomplished without delay or confusion; and this is indicated by the Apostle ([Rm. 12:4,5](#)), "As in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ." Thirdly, this belongs to the dignity and beauty of the Church, which consist in a certain order; wherefore it is written ([3 Kgs. 10:4,5](#)) that "when the queen of Saba saw all the wisdom of Solomon... and the apartments of his servants, and the order of his ministers... she had no longer any spirit in her." Hence the Apostle says ([2 Tim. 2:20](#)) that "in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth."

Reply to Objection 1: The distinction of states and duties is not an obstacle to the unity of the Church, for this results from the unity of faith, charity, and mutual service, according to the saying of the Apostle ([Eph. 4:16](#)): "From whom the whole body being compacted," namely by

Reply to Objection 2: Just as nature does not employ many means where one suffices, so neither does it confine itself to one where many are required, according to the saying of the Apostle ([1 Cor. 12:17](#)), "If the whole body were the eye, where would be the hearing?" Hence there was need in the Church, which is Christ's body, for the members to be differentiated by various duties, states, and grades.

Reply to Objection 3: Just as in the natural body the various members are held together in unity by the power of the quickening spirit, and are dissociated from one another as soon as that spirit departs, so too in the Church's body the peace of the various members is preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit, Who quickens the body of the Church, as stated in Jn. 6:64. Hence the Apostle says ([Eph. 4:3](#)): "Careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Now a man departs from this unity of spirit when he seeks his own; just as in an earthly kingdom peace ceases when the citizens seek each man his own. Besides, the peace both of mind and of an earthly commonwealth is the better preserved by a distinction of duties and states, since thereby the greater number have a share in public actions. Wherefore the Apostle says ([1 Cor. 12:24,25](#)) that "God hath tempered [the body] together that there might be no schism in the body, but the members might be mutually careful one for another."

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Whether duties differ according to their actions?

Objection 1: It would seem that duties do not differ according to their actions. For there are infinite varieties of human acts both in spirituals and in temporals. Now there can be no certain distinction among things that are infinite in number. Therefore human duties cannot be differentiated according to a difference of acts.

Objection 2: Further, the active and the contemplative life differ according to their acts, as stated above ([Question \[179\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). But the distinction of duties seems to be other than the distinction of lives. Therefore duties do not differ according to their acts.

Objection 3: Further, even ecclesiastical orders, states, and grades seemingly differ according to their acts. If, then, duties differ according to their acts it would seem that duties, grades, and states differ in the same way. Yet this is not true, since they are divided into their respective parts in different ways. Therefore duties do not differ according to their acts.

On the contrary, Isidore says (Etym. vi, 19) that "officium [duty] takes its name from 'efficere' [to effect], as though it were instead of 'efficiam,' by the change of one letter for the sake of the sound." But effecting pertains to action. Therefore duties differ according to their acts.

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directed to three things: perfection, action, and beauty; and according to these three we may distinguish a threefold distinction among the faithful. One, with regard to perfection, and thus we have the difference of states, in reference to which some persons are more perfect than others. Another distinction regards action and this is the distinction of duties: for persons are said to have various duties when they are appointed to various actions. A third distinction regards the order of ecclesiastical beauty: and thus we distinguish various grades according as in the same state or duty one person is above another. Hence according to a variant text [*The Septuagint] it is written ([Ps. 47:4](#)): "In her grades shall God be known."

Reply to Objection 1: The material diversity of human acts is infinite. It is not thus that duties differ, but by their formal diversity which results from diverse species of acts, and in this way human acts are not infinite.

Reply to Objection 2: Life is predicated of a thing absolutely: wherefore diversity of acts which are becoming to man considered in himself. But efficiency, whence we have the word "office" (as stated above), denotes action tending to something else according to *Metaph. ix*, text. 16 [*Ed. Did. viii, 8]. Hence offices differ properly in respect of acts that are referred to other persons; thus a teacher is said to have an office, and so is a judge, and so forth. Wherefore Isidore says (*Etym. vi*, 19) that "to have an office is to be officious," i.e. harmful "to no one, but to be useful to all."

Reply to Objection 3: Differences of state, offices and grades are taken from different things, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 3). Yet these three things may concur in the same subject: thus when a person is appointed to a higher action, he attains thereby both office and grade, and sometimes, besides this, a state of perfection, on account of the sublimity of the act, as in the case of a bishop. The ecclesiastical orders are particularly distinct according to divine offices. For Isidore says (*Etym. vi*): "There are various kinds of offices; but the foremost is that which relates to sacred and Divine things."

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Whether the difference of states applies to those who are beginning, progressing, or perfect?

Objection 1: It would seem that the difference of states does not apply to those who are beginning, progressing, or perfect. For "diverse genera have diverse species and differences" [*Aristotle, *Categ. ii*]. Now this difference of beginning, progress, and perfection is applied to the degrees of charity, as stated above ([Question \[24\]](#), [Article \[9\]](#)), where we were treating of charity. Therefore it would seem that the differences of states should not be assigned in this manner.

Objection 2: Further, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)), state regards a condition of servitude or freedom, which apparently has no connection with the aforesaid difference of beginning, progress, and perfection. Therefore it is unfitting to divide state in this way.

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"more" and "less," and this seemingly implies the notion of grades. But the distinction of grades differs from that of states, as we have said above ([Articles \[2\],3](#)). Therefore state is unfittingly divided according to beginning, progress, and perfection.

On the contrary, Gregory says (Moral. xxiv, 11): "There are three states of the converted, the beginning, the middle, and the perfection"; and (Hom. xv in Ezech.): "Other is the beginning of virtue, other its progress, and other still its perfection."

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)) state regards freedom or servitude. Now in spiritual things there is a twofold servitude and a twofold freedom: for there is the servitude of sin and the servitude of justice; and there is likewise a twofold freedom, from sin, and from justice, as appears from the words of the Apostle ([Rm. 6:20,22](#)), "When you were the servants of sin, you were free men to justice... but now being made free from sin," you are... "become servants to God."

Now the servitude of sin or justice consists in being inclined to evil by a habit of sin, or inclined to good by a habit of justice: and in like manner freedom from sin is not to be overcome by the inclination to sin, and freedom from justice is not to be held back from evil for the love of justice. Nevertheless, since man, by his natural reason, is inclined to justice, while sin is contrary to natural reason, it follows that freedom from sin is true freedom which is united to the servitude of justice, since they both incline man to that which is becoming to him. In like manner true servitude is the servitude of sin, which is connected with freedom from justice, because man is thereby hindered from attaining that which is proper to him. That a man become the servant of justice or sin results from his efforts, as the Apostle declares ([Rm. 6:16](#)): "To whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are whom you obey, whether it be of sin unto death, or of obedience unto justice." Now in every human effort we can distinguish a beginning, a middle, and a term; and consequently the state of spiritual servitude and freedom is differentiated according to these things, namely, the beginning--to which pertains the state of beginners--the middle, to which pertains the state of the proficient--and the term, to which belongs the state of the perfect.

Reply to Objection 1: Freedom from sin results from charity which "is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, Who is given to us" ([Rm. 5:5](#)). Hence it is written ([2 Cor. 3:17](#)): "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Wherefore the same division applies to charity as to the state of those who enjoy spiritual freedom.

Reply to Objection 2: Men are said to be beginners, proficient, and perfect (so far as these terms indicate different states), not in relation to any occupation whatever, but in relation to such occupations as pertain to spiritual freedom or servitude, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)).

Reply to Objection 3: As already observed ([Article \[3\]](#), ad 3), nothing hinders grade and state from concurring in the same subject. For even in earthly affairs those who are free, not only belong to a different state from those who are in service, but are also of a different grade.