

## St. Thomas Aquinas

# The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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### OF THE STATE OF PERFECTION IN GENERAL (EIGHT ARTICLES)

We must now consider those things that pertain to the state of perfection whereto the other states are directed. For the consideration of offices in relation to other acts belongs to the legislator; and in relation to the sacred ministry it comes under the consideration of orders of which we shall treat in the Third Part [\*XP, Question [34]].

Concerning the state of the perfect, a three-fold consideration presents itself: (1) The state of perfection in general; (2) Things relating to the perfection of bishops; (3) Things relating to the perfection of religious.

Under the first head there are eight points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) Whether perfection bears any relation to charity?
  - [\(2\)](#) Whether one can be perfect in this life?
  - [\(3\)](#) Whether the perfection of this life consists chiefly in observing the counsels or the commandments?
  - [\(4\)](#) Whether whoever is perfect is in the state of perfection?
  - [\(5\)](#) Whether especially prelates and religious are in the state of perfection?
  - [\(6\)](#) Whether all prelates are in the state of perfection?
  - [\(7\)](#) Which is the more perfect, the episcopal or the religious state?
  - [\(8\)](#) The comparison between religious and parish priests and archdeacons.
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## Whether the perfection of the Christian life consists chiefly in charity?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the perfection of the Christian life does not consist chiefly in charity. For the Apostle says ([1 Cor. 14:20](#)): "In malice be children, but in sense be perfect." But charity regards not the senses but the affections. Therefore it would seem that the perfection of the Christian life does not chiefly consist in charity.

**Objection 2:** Further, it is written ([Eph. 6:13](#)): "Take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect"; and the text continues ([Eph. 6:14,16](#)), speaking of the armor of God: "Stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of justice... in all things taking the shield of faith." Therefore the perfection of the Christian life consists not only in charity, but also in other virtues.

**Objection 3:** Further, virtues like other habits, are specified by their acts. Now it is written ([James 1:4](#)) that "patience hath a perfect work." Therefore seemingly the state of perfection consists more specially in patience.

**On the contrary,** It is written (Col. 3:14): "Above all things have charity, which is the bond of perfection," because it binds, as it were, all the other virtues together in perfect unity.

**I answer that,** A thing is said to be perfect in so far as it attains its proper end, which is the ultimate perfection thereof. Now it is charity that unites us to God, Who is the last end of the human mind, since "he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him" ([1 Jn. 4:16](#)). Therefore the perfection of the Christian life consists radically in charity.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The perfection of the human senses would seem to consist chiefly in their concurring together in the unity of truth, according to 1 Cor. 1:10, "That you be perfect in the same mind [sensu], and in the same judgment." Now this is effected by charity which operates consent in us men. Wherefore even the perfection of the senses consists radically in the perfection of charity.

**Reply to Objection 2:** A man may be said to be perfect in two ways. First, simply: and this perfection regards that which belongs to a thing's nature, for instance an animal may be said to be perfect when it lacks nothing in the disposition of its members and in such things as are necessary for an animal's life. Secondly, a thing is said to be perfect relatively: and this perfection regards something connected with the thing externally, such as whiteness or blackness or something of the kind. Now the Christian life consists chiefly in charity whereby the soul is united to God; wherefore it is written ([1 Jn. 3:14](#)): "He that loveth not abideth in death." Hence the perfection of the Christian life consists simply in charity, but in the other virtues relatively. And since that which is simply, is paramount and greatest in comparison with other things, it follows that the perfection of charity is paramount in relation to the perfection that regards the other virtues.

**Reply to Objection 3:** Patience is stated to have a perfect work in relation to charity, in so far as it is an effect of the abundance of charity that a man bears hardships patiently, according to Rm. 8:35, "Who... shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? Or distress?" etc.

## Whether any one can be perfect in this life?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that none can be perfect in this life. For the Apostle says ([1 Cor. 13:10](#)): "When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." Now in this life that which is in part is not done away; for in this life faith and hope, which are in part, remain. Therefore none can be perfect in this life.

**Objection 2:** Further, "The perfect is that which lacks nothing" (Phys. iii, 6). Now there is no one in this life who lacks nothing; for it is written ([James 3:2](#)): "In many things we all offend"; and ([Ps. 138:16](#)): "Thy eyes did see my imperfect being." Therefore none is perfect in this life.

**Objection 3:** Further, the perfection of the Christian life, as stated ([Article \[1\]](#)), relates to charity, which comprises the love of God and of our neighbor. Now, neither as to the love of God can one have perfect charity in this life, since according to Gregory (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) "the furnace of love which begins to burn here, will burn more fiercely when we see Him Whom we love"; nor as to the love of our neighbor, since in this life we cannot love all our neighbors actually, even though we love them habitually; and habitual love is imperfect. Therefore it seems that no one can be perfect in this life.

**On the contrary,** The Divine law does not prescribe the impossible. Yet it prescribes perfection according to Mt. 5:48, "Be you... perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." Therefore seemingly one can be perfect in this life.

**I answer that,** As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)), the perfection of the Christian life consists in charity. Now perfection implies a certain universality because according to Phys. iii, 6, "the perfect is that which lacks nothing." Hence we may consider a threefold perfection. One is absolute, and answers to a totality not only on the part of the lover, but also on the part of the object loved, so that God be loved as much as He is lovable. Such perfection as this is not possible to any creature, but is competent to God alone, in Whom good is wholly and essentially.

Another perfection answers to an absolute totality on the part of the lover, so that the affective faculty always actually tends to God as much as it possibly can; and such perfection as this is not possible so long as we are on the way, but we shall have it in heaven.

The third perfection answers to a totality neither on the part of the object served, nor on the part of the lover as regards his always actually tending to God, but on the part of the lover as regards the removal of obstacles to the movement of love towards God, in which sense Augustine says (Questions. LXXXIII, qu. 36) that "carnal desire is the bane of charity; to have no carnal desires is the perfection of charity." Such perfection as this can be had in this life, and in two ways. First, by the removal from man's affections of all that is contrary to charity, such as mortal sin; and there can be no charity apart from this perfection, wherefore it is necessary for salvation. Secondly, by the removal from man's affections not only of whatever is contrary

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Charity is possible apart from this perfection, for instance in those who are beginners and in those who are proficient.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The Apostle is speaking there of heavenly perfection which is not possible to those who are on the way.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Those who are perfect in this life are said to "offend in many things" with regard to venial sins, which result from the weakness of the present life: and in this respect they have an "imperfect being" in comparison with the perfection of heaven.

**Reply to Objection 3:** As the conditions of the present life do not allow of a man always tending actually to God, so neither does it allow of his tending actually to each individual neighbor; but it suffices for him to tend to all in common and collectively, and to each individual habitually and according to the preparedness of his mind. Now in the love of our neighbor, as in the love of God we may observe a twofold perfection: one without which charity is impossible, and consisting in one's having in one's affections nothing that is contrary to the love of one's neighbor; and another without which it is possible to have charity. The latter perfection may be considered in three ways. First, as to the extent of love, through a man loving not only his friends and acquaintances but also strangers and even his enemies, for as Augustine says (Enchiridion lxxiii) this is a mark of the perfect children of God. Secondly, as to the intensity of love, which is shown by the things which man despises for his neighbor's sake, through his despising not only external goods for the sake of his neighbor, but also bodily hardships and even death, according to Jn. 15:13, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Thirdly, as to the effect of love, so that a man will surrender not only temporal but also spiritual goods and even himself, for his neighbor's sake, according to the words of the Apostle ([2 Cor. 12:15](#)), "But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls."

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## Whether, in this life, perfection consists in the observance of the commandments or of the counsels?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that, in this life, perfection consists in the observance not of the commandments but of the counsels. For our Lord said ([Mt. 19:21](#)): "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell all [Vulg.: 'what'] thou hast, and give to the poor... and come, follow Me." Now this is a counsel. Therefore perfection regards the counsels and not the precepts.

**Objection 2:** Further, all are bound to the observance of the commandments, since this is necessary for salvation. Therefore, if the perfection of the Christian life consists in observing the commandments, it follows that perfection is necessary for salvation, and that all are bound thereto; and this is evidently false.

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[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS184.html](#) stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). Now the perfection of charity, seemingly, does not consist in the observance of the commandments, since the perfection of charity is preceded both by its increase and by its beginning, as Augustine says (Super Canonic. Joan. Tract. ix). But the beginning of charity cannot precede the observance of the commandments, since according to Jn. 14:23, "If any one love Me, he will keep My word." Therefore the perfection of life regards not the commandments but the counsels.

**On the contrary**, It is written ([Dt. 6:5](#)): "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart," and (Lev. 19:18): "Thou shalt love thy neighbor [Vulg.: 'friend'] as thyself"; and these are the commandments of which our Lord said ([Mt. 22:40](#)): "On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets." Now the perfection of charity, in respect of which the Christian life is said to be perfect, consists in our loving God with our whole heart, and our neighbor as ourselves. Therefore it would seem that perfection consists in the observance of the precepts.

**I answer that**, Perfection is said to consist in a thing in two ways: in one way, primarily and essentially; in another, secondarily and accidentally. Primarily and essentially the perfection of the Christian life consists in charity, principally as to the love of God, secondarily as to the love of our neighbor, both of which are the matter of the chief commandments of the Divine law, as stated above. Now the love of God and of our neighbor is not commanded according to a measure, so that what is in excess of the measure be a matter of counsel. This is evident from the very form of the commandment, pointing, as it does, to perfection---for instance in the words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart": since "the whole" is the same as "the perfect," according to the Philosopher (Phys. iii, 6), and in the words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," since every one loves himself most. The reason of this is that "the end of the commandment is charity," according to the Apostle ([1 Tim. 1:5](#)); and the end is not subject to a measure, but only such things as are directed to the end, as the Philosopher observes (Polit. i, 3); thus a physician does not measure the amount of his healing, but how much medicine or diet he shall employ for the purpose of healing. Consequently it is evident that perfection consists essentially in the observance of the commandments; wherefore Augustine says (De Perf. Justit. viii): "Why then should not this perfection be prescribed to man, although no man has it in this life?"

Secondarily and instrumentally, however, perfection consists in the observance of the counsels, all of which, like the commandments, are directed to charity; yet not in the same way. For the commandments, other than the precepts of charity, are directed to the removal of things contrary to charity, with which, namely, charity is incompatible, whereas the counsels are directed to the removal of things that hinder the act of charity, and yet are not contrary to charity, such as marriage, the occupation of worldly business, and so forth. Hence Augustine says (Enchiridion cxxi): "Whatever things God commands, for instance, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' and whatever are not commanded, yet suggested by a special counsel, for instance, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman,' are then done aright when they are referred to the love of God, and of our neighbor for God's sake, both in this world and in the world to come." Hence it is that in the Conferences of the Fathers (Coll. i, cap. vii) the abbot Moses says: "Fasting, watchings, meditating on the Scriptures, penury and loss of all one's wealth, these are not perfection but means to perfection, since not in them does the school of perfection find its end, but through them it achieves its end," and he had already said that "we endeavor to ascend by these steps to the perfection of charity."

**Reply to Objection 1:** In this saying of our Lord something is indicated as being the way to perfection by the words, "Go, sell all thou hast, and give to the poor"; and something else is



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commentary on Mt. 19:27, says that "since it is not enough merely to leave, Peter added that which is perfect: 'And have followed Thee'; and Ambrose, commenting on Lk. 5:27, "Follow Me," says: "He commands him to follow, not with steps of the body, but with devotion of the soul, which is the effect of charity." Wherefore it is evident from the very way of speaking that the counsels are means of attaining to perfection, since it is thus expressed: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell," etc., as though He said: "By so doing thou shalt accomplish this end."

**Reply to Objection 2:** As Augustine says (De Perf. Justit. viii) "the perfection of charity is prescribed to man in this life, because one runs not right unless one knows whither to run. And how shall we know this if no commandment declares it to us?" And since that which is a matter of precept can be fulfilled variously, one does not break a commandment through not fulfilling it in the best way, but it is enough to fulfil it in any way whatever. Now the perfection of Divine love is a matter of precept for all without exception, so that even the perfection of heaven is not excepted from this precept, as Augustine says (De Perf. Justit. viii [\*Cf. De Spir. et Lit. XXXVI]), and one escapes transgressing the precept, in whatever measure one attains to the perfection of Divine love. The lowest degree of Divine love is to love nothing more than God, or contrary to God, or equally with God, and whoever fails from this degree of perfection nowise fulfils the precept. There is another degree of the Divine love, which cannot be fulfilled so long as we are on the way, as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)), and it is evident that to fail from this is not to be a transgressor of the precept; and in like manner one does not transgress the precept, if one does not attain to the intermediate degrees of perfection, provided one attain to the lowest.

**Reply to Objection 3:** Just as man has a certain perfection of his nature as soon as he is born, which perfection belongs to the very essence of his species, while there is another perfection which he acquires by growth, so again there is a perfection of charity which belongs to the very essence of charity, namely that man love God above all things, and love nothing contrary to God, while there is another perfection of charity even in this life, whereto a man attains by a kind of spiritual growth, for instance when a man refrains even from lawful things, in order more freely to give himself to the service of God.

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## Whether whoever is perfect is in the state of perfection?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that whoever is perfect is in the state of perfection. For, as stated above ([Article \[3\]](#), ad 3), just as bodily perfection is reached by bodily growth, so spiritual perfection is acquired by spiritual growth. Now after bodily growth one is said to have reached the state of perfect age. Therefore seemingly also after spiritual growth, when one has already reached spiritual perfection, one is in the state of perfection.

**Objection 2:** Further, according to Phys. v, 2, movement "from one contrary to another" has the same aspect as "movement from less to more." Now when a man is changed from sin to grace, he is said to change his state, in so far as the state of sin differs from the state of grace.

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greater grace, so as to reach the perfect degree, one is in the state of perfection.

**Objection 3:** Further, a man acquires a state by being freed from servitude. But one is freed from the servitude of sin by charity, because "charity covereth all sins" ([Prov. 10:12](#)). Now one is said to be perfect on account of charity, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). Therefore, seemingly, whoever has perfection, for this very reason has the state of perfection.

**On the contrary,** Some are in the state of perfection, who are wholly lacking in charity and grace, for instance wicked bishops or religious. Therefore it would seem that on the other hand some have the perfection of life, who nevertheless have not the state of perfection.

**I answer that,** As stated above ([Question \[183\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)), state properly regards a condition of freedom or servitude. Now spiritual freedom or servitude may be considered in man in two ways: first, with respect to his internal actions; secondly, with respect to his external actions. And since according to 1 Kgs. 16:7, "man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart," it follows that with regard to man's internal disposition we consider his spiritual state in relation to the Divine judgment, while with regard to his external actions we consider man's spiritual state in relation to the Church. It is in this latter sense that we are now speaking of states, namely in so far as the Church derives a certain beauty from the variety of states [*\*Cf. Question [183], Article [2]*].

Now it must be observed, that so far as men are concerned, in order that any one attain to a state of freedom or servitude there is required first of all an obligation or a release. For the mere fact of serving someone does not make a man a slave, since even the free serve, according to Gal. 5:13, "By charity of the spirit serve one another": nor again does the mere fact of ceasing to serve make a man free, as in the case of a runaway slave; but properly speaking a man is a slave if he be bound to serve, and a man is free if he be released from service. Secondly, it is required that the aforesaid obligation be imposed with a certain solemnity; even as a certain solemnity is observed in other matters which among men obtain a settlement in perpetuity.

Accordingly, properly speaking, one is said to be in the state of perfection, not through having the act of perfect love, but through binding himself in perpetuity and with a certain solemnity to those things that pertain to perfection. Moreover it happens that some persons bind themselves to that which they do not keep, and some fulfil that to which they have not bound themselves, as in the case of the two sons ([Mt. 21:28,30](#)), one of whom when his father said: "Work in my vineyard," answered: "I will not," and "afterwards... he went," while the other "answering said: I go... and he went not." Wherefore nothing hinders some from being perfect without being in the state of perfection, and some in the state of perfection without being perfect.

**Reply to Objection 1:** By bodily growth a man progresses in things pertaining to nature, wherefore he attains to the state of nature; especially since "what is according to nature is," in a way, "unchangeable" [*\*Ethic. v, 7*], inasmuch as nature is determinate to one thing. In like manner by inward spiritual growth a man reaches the state of perfection in relation to the Divine judgment. But as regards the distinctions of ecclesiastical states, a man does not reach the state of perfection except by growth in respect of external actions.

**Reply to Objection 2:** This argument also regards the interior state. Yet when a man passes from sin to grace, he passes from servitude to freedom; and this does not result from a mere progress in grace, except when a man binds himself to things pertaining to grace.

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## Whether religious and prelates are in the state of perfection?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that prelates and religious are not in the state of perfection. For the state of perfection differs from the state of the beginners and the proficient. Now no class of men is specially assigned to the state of the proficient or of the beginners. Therefore it would seem that neither should any class of men be assigned to the state of perfection.

**Objection 2:** Further, the outward state should answer to the inward, else one is guilty of lying, "which consists not only in false words, but also in deceitful deeds," according to Ambrose in one of his sermons (xxx de Tempore). Now there are many prelates and religious who have not the inward perfection of charity. Therefore, if all religious and prelates are in the state of perfection, it would follow that all of them that are not perfect are in mortal sin, as deceivers and liars.

**Objection 3:** Further, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)), perfection is measured according to charity. Now the most perfect charity would seem to be in the martyrs, according to Jn. 15:13, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends": and a gloss on Heb. 12:4, "For you have not yet resisted unto blood," says: "In this life no love is more perfect than that to which the holy martyrs attained, who strove against sin even unto blood." Therefore it would seem that the state of perfection should be ascribed to the martyrs rather than to religious and bishops.

**On the contrary,** Dionysius (Eccl. Hier. v) ascribes perfection to bishops as being perfecters, and (Eccl. Hier. vi) to religious (whom he calls monks or {therapeutai}, i.e. servants of God) as being perfected.

**I answer that,** As stated above ([Article \[4\]](#)), there is required for the state of perfection a perpetual obligation to things pertaining to perfection, together with a certain solemnity. Now both these conditions are competent to religious and bishops. For religious bind themselves by vow to refrain from worldly affairs, which they might lawfully use, in order more freely to give themselves to God, wherein consists the perfection of the present life. Hence Dionysius says (Eccl. Hier. vi), speaking of religious: "Some call them {therapeutai}," i.e. servants, "on account of their rendering pure service and homage to God; others call them {monachoi}" [\*i.e. solitaries; whence the English word 'monk'], "on account of the indivisible and single-minded life which by their being wrapped in," i.e. contemplating, "indivisible things, unites them in a Godlike union and a perfection beloved of God" [\*Cf. Question [180], Article [6]]. Moreover, the obligation in both cases is undertaken with a certain solemnity of profession and consecration; wherefore Dionysius adds (Eccl. Hier. vi): "Hence the holy legislation in bestowing perfect grace on them accords them a hallowing invocation."

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the pastoral duty, to which it belongs that a shepherd "lay down his life for his sheep," according to Jn. 10:15. Wherefore the Apostle says ([1 Tim. 6:12](#)): "Thou... hast confessed a good confession before many witnesses," that is to say, "when he was ordained," as a gloss says on this passage. Again, a certain solemnity of consecration is employed together with the aforesaid profession, according to 2 Tim. 1:6: "Stir up the grace of God which is in thee by the imposition of my hands," which the gloss ascribes to the grace of the episcopate. And Dionysius says (Eccl. Hier. v) that "when the high priest," i.e. the bishop, "is ordained, he receives on his head the most holy imposition of the sacred oracles, whereby it is signified that he is a participator in the whole and entire hierarchical power, and that not only is he the enlightener in all things pertaining to his holy discourses and actions, but that he also confers this on others."

**Reply to Objection 1:** Beginning and increase are sought not for their own sake, but for the sake of perfection; hence it is only to the state of perfection that some are admitted under certain obligations and with solemnity.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Those who enter the state of perfection do not profess to be perfect, but to tend to perfection. Hence the Apostle says ([Phil. 3:12](#)): "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect; but I follow after, if I may by any means apprehend": and afterwards ([Phil. 3:15](#)): "Let us therefore as many as are perfect, be thus minded." Hence a man who takes up the state of perfection is not guilty of lying or deceit through not being perfect, but through withdrawing his mind from the intention of reaching perfection.

**Reply to Objection 3:** Martyrdom is the most perfect act of charity. But an act of perfection does not suffice to make the state of perfection, as stated above ([Article \[4\]](#)).

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## Whether all ecclesiastical prelates are in the state of perfection?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that all ecclesiastical prelates are in a state of perfection. For Jerome commenting on Titus 1:5, "Ordain... in every city," etc. says: "Formerly priest was the same as bishop," and afterwards he adds: "Just as priests know that by the custom of the Church they are subject to the one who is placed over them, so too, bishops should recognize that, by custom rather than by the very ordinance of our Lord, they are above the priests, and are together the rightful governors of the Church." Now bishops are in the state of perfection. Therefore those priests also are who have the cure of souls.

**Objection 2:** Further, just as bishops together with their consecration receive the cure of souls, so also do parish priests and archdeacons, of whom a gloss on Acts 6:3, "Brethren, look ye out... seven men of good reputation," says: "The apostles decided here to appoint throughout the Church seven deacons, who were to be of a higher degree, and as it were the supports of that which is nearest to the altar." Therefore it would seem that these also are in the state of perfection.

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are parish priests and archdeacons. But this belongs to the perfection of charity, as stated  
above ([Article \[2\]](#), ad 3). Therefore it would seem that parish priests and archdeacons also are  
in the state of perfection.

**On the contrary**, Dionysius says (Eccl. Hier. v): "The order of pontiffs is consummative and  
perfecting, that of the priests is illuminative and light-giving, that of the ministers is cleansing  
and discrete." Hence it is evident that perfection is ascribed to bishops only.

**I answer that**, In priests and deacons having cure of souls two things may be considered,  
namely their order and their cure. Their order is directed to some act in the Divine offices.  
Wherefore it has been stated above ([Question \[183\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#), ad 3) that the distinction of  
orders is comprised under the distinction of offices. Hence by receiving a certain order a man  
receives the power of exercising certain sacred acts, but he is not bound on this account to  
things pertaining to perfection, except in so far as in the Western Church the receiving of a  
sacred order includes the taking of a vow of continence, which is one of the things pertaining  
to perfection, as we shall state further on ([Question \[186\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)). Therefore it is clear that  
from the fact that a man receives a sacred order a man is not placed simply in the state of  
perfection, although inward perfection is required in order that one exercise such acts  
worthily.

In like manner, neither are they placed in the state of perfection on the part of the cure which  
they take upon themselves. For they are not bound by this very fact under the obligation of a  
perpetual vow to retain the cure of souls; but they can surrender it---either by entering  
religion, even without their bishop's permission (cf. Decret. xix, qu. 2, can. Duae sunt)---or  
again an archdeacon may with his bishop's permission resign his arch-deaconry or parish, and  
accept a simple prebend without cure, which would be nowise lawful, if he were in the state of  
perfection; for "no man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom  
of God" ([Lk. 9:62](#)). On the other hand bishops, since they are in the state of perfection, cannot  
abandon the episcopal cure, save by the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff (to whom alone it  
belongs also to dispense from perpetual vows), and this for certain causes, as we shall state  
further on ([Question \[185\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)). Wherefore it is manifest that not all prelates are in the  
state of perfection, but only bishops.

**Reply to Objection 1:** We may speak of priest and bishop in two ways. First, with regard to the  
name: and thus formerly bishops and priests were not distinct. For bishops are so called  
"because they watch over others," as Augustine observes (De Civ. Dei xix, 19); while the priests  
according to the Greek are "elders." [\*Referring to the Greek {episkopos} and {presbyteros}  
from which the English 'bishop' and 'priest' are derived.] Hence the Apostle employs the term  
"priests" in reference to both, when he says ([1 Tim. 5:17](#)): "Let the priests that rule well be  
esteemed worthy of double honor"; and again he uses the term "bishops" in the same way,  
wherefore addressing the priests of the Church of Ephesus he says ([Acts 20:28](#)): "Take heed to  
yourselves" and "to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule  
the church of God."

But as regards the thing signified by these terms, there was always a difference between them,  
even at the time of the apostles. This is clear on the authority of Dionysius (Eccl. Hier. v), and of  
a gloss on Lk. 10:1, "After these things the Lord appointed," etc. which says: "Just as the apostles  
were made bishops, so the seventy-two disciples were made priests of the second order."  
Subsequently, however, in order to avoid schism, it became necessary to distinguish even the  
terms, by calling the higher ones bishops and the lower ones priests. But to assert that priests  
nowise differ from bishops is reckoned by Augustine among heretical doctrines (De Heres. liii),

**Reply to Objection 2:** Bishops have the chief cure of the sheep of their diocese, while parish priests and archdeacons exercise an inferior ministry under the bishops. Hence a gloss on 1 Cor. 12:28, "to one, helps, to another, governments [\*Vulg.: 'God hath set some in the church... helps, governments,' etc.]," says: "Helps, namely assistants to those who are in authority," as Titus was to the Apostle, or as archdeacons to the bishop; "governments, namely persons of lesser authority, such as priests who have to instruct the people": and Dionysius says (Eccl. Hier. v) that "just as we see the whole hierarchy culminating in Jesus, so each office culminates in its respective godlike hierarch or bishop." Also it is said (XVI, qu. i, can. Cunctis): "Priests and deacons must all take care not to do anything without their bishop's permission." Wherefore it is evident that they stand in relation to their bishop as wardens or mayors to the king; and for this reason, just as in earthly governments the king alone receives a solemn blessing, while others are appointed by simple commission, so too in the Church the episcopal cure is conferred with the solemnity of consecration, while the archdeacon or parish priest receives his cure by simple appointment; although they are consecrated by receiving orders before having a cure.

**Reply to Objection 3:** As parish priests and archdeacons have not the chief cure, but a certain ministry as committed to them by the bishop, so the pastoral office does not belong to them in chief, nor are they bound to lay down their life for the sheep, except in so far as they have a share in their cure. Hence we should say that they have an office pertaining to perfection rather than that they attain the state of perfection.

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## Whether the religious state is more perfect than that of prelates?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the religious state is more perfect than that of prelates. For our Lord said ([Mt. 19:21](#)): "If thou wilt be perfect, go" and "sell" all [Vulg.: 'what'] "thou hast, and give to the poor"; and religious do this. But bishops are not bound to do so; for it is said (XII, qu. i, can. Episcopi de rebus): "Bishops, if they wish, may bequeath to their heirs their personal or acquired property, and whatever belongs to them personally." Therefore religious are in a more perfect state than bishops.

**Objection 2:** Further, perfection consists more especially in the love of God than in the love of our neighbor. Now the religious state is directly ordered to the love of God, wherefore it takes its name from "service and homage to God," as Dionysius says (Eccl. Hier. vi); [\* [Quoted above Article \[5\]](#) ] whereas the bishop's state would seem to be ordered to the love of our neighbor, of whose cure he is the "warden," and from this he takes his name, as Augustine observes (De Civ. Dei. xix, 19). Therefore it would seem that the religious state is more perfect than that of bishops.

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excellent than the active life to which the episcopal state is directed. For Gregory says (Pastor. i, 7) that "Isaias wishing to be of profit to his neighbor by means of the active life desired the office of preaching, whereas Jeremias, who was fain to hold fast to the love of his Creator, exclaimed against being sent to preach." Therefore it would seem that the religious state is more perfect than the episcopal state.

**On the contrary,** It is not lawful for anyone to pass from a more excellent to a less excellent state; for this would be to look back [\*Cf. Lk. 9:62]. Yet a man may pass from the religious to the episcopal state, for it is said (XVIII, qu. i, can. Statutum) that "the holy ordination makes a monk to be a bishop." Therefore the episcopal state is more perfect than the religious.

**I answer that,** As Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. xii, 16), "the agent is ever more excellent than the patient." Now in the genus of perfection according to Dionysius (Eccl. Hier. v, vi), bishops are in the position of "perfecters," whereas religious are in the position of being "perfected"; the former of which pertains to action, and the latter to passion. Whence it is evident that the state of perfection is more excellent in bishops than in religious.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Renunciation of one's possessions may be considered in two ways. First, as being actual: and thus it is not essential, but a means, to perfection, as stated above ([Article 3](#)). Hence nothing hinders the state of perfection from being without renunciation of one's possessions, and the same applies to other outward practices. Secondly, it may be considered in relation to one's preparedness, in the sense of being prepared to renounce or give away all: and this belongs directly to perfection. Hence Augustine says (De Questions. Evang. ii, qu. 11): "Our Lord shows that the children of wisdom understand righteousness to consist neither in eating nor in abstaining, but in bearing want patiently." Wherefore the Apostle says ([Phil. 4:12](#)): "I know... both to abound and to suffer need." Now bishops especially are bound to despise all things for the honor of God and the spiritual welfare of their flock, when it is necessary for them to do so, either by giving to the poor of their flock, or by suffering "with joy the being stripped of" their "own goods" [\*Heb. 10:34].

**Reply to Objection 2:** That bishops are busy about things pertaining to the love of their neighbor, arises out of the abundance of their love of God. Hence our Lord asked Peter first of all whether he loved Him, and afterwards committed the care of His flock to him. And Gregory says (Pastor. i, 5): "If the pastoral care is a proof of love, he 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 greater love if a man devotes himself to others for his friend's sake, than if he be willing only to serve his friend.

**Reply to Objection 3:** As Gregory says (Pastor. ii, 1), "a prelate should be foremost in action, and more uplifted than others in contemplation," because it is incumbent on him to contemplate, not only for his own sake, but also for the purpose of instructing others. Hence Gregory applies (Hom. v in Ezech.) the words of Ps. 144:7, "They shall publish the memory... of Thy sweetness," to perfect men returning after their contemplation.

**Objection 1:** It would seem that also parish priests and archdeacons are more perfect than religious. For Chrysostom says in his Dialogue (De Sacerdot. vi): "Take for example a monk, such as Elias, if I may exaggerate somewhat, he is not to be compared with one who, cast among the people and compelled to carry the sins of many, remains firm and strong." A little further on he says: "If I were given the choice, where would I prefer to please, in the priestly office, or in the monastic solitude, without hesitation I should choose the former." Again in the same book (ch. 5) he says: "If you compare the toils of this project, namely of the monastic life, with a well-employed priesthood, you will find them as far distant from one another as a common citizen is from a king." Therefore it would seem that priests who have the cure of souls are more perfect than religious.

**Objection 2:** Further, Augustine says (ad Valerium, Ep. xxi): "Let thy religious prudence observe that in this life, and especially at these times, there is nothing so difficult, so onerous, so perilous as the office of bishop, priest, or deacon; while in God's sight there is no greater blessing, if one engage in the fight as ordered by our Commander-in-chief." Therefore religious are not more perfect than priests or deacons.

**Objection 3:** Further, Augustine says (Ep. lx, ad Aurel.): "It would be most regrettable, were we to exalt monks to such a disastrous degree of pride, and deem the clergy deserving of such a grievous insult," as to assert that 'a bad monk is a good clerk,' "since sometimes even a good monk makes a bad clerk." And a little before this he says that "God's servants," i.e. monks, "must not be allowed to think that they may easily be chosen for something better," namely the clerical state, "if they should become worse thereby," namely by leaving the monastic state. Therefore it would seem that those who are in the clerical state are more perfect than religious.

**Objection 4:** Further, it is not lawful to pass from a more perfect to a less perfect state. Yet it is lawful to pass from the monastic state to a priestly office with a cure attached, as appears (XVI, qu. i, can. Si quis monachus) from a decree of Pope Gelasius, who says: "If there be a monk, who by the merit of his exemplary life is worthy of the priesthood, and the abbot under whose authority he fights for Christ his King, ask that he be made a priest, the bishop shall take him and ordain him in such place as he shall choose fitting." And Jerome says (Ad Rustic. Monach., Ep. cxxv): "In the monastery so live as to deserve to be a clerk." Therefore parish priests and archdeacons are more perfect than religious.

**Objection 5:** Further, bishops are in a more perfect state than religious, as shown above ([Article \[7\]](#)). But parish priests and archdeacons, through having cure of souls, are more like bishops than religious are. Therefore they are more perfect.

**Objection 6:** Further, virtue "is concerned with the difficult and the good" (Ethic. ii, 3). Now it is more difficult to lead a good life in the office of parish priest or archdeacon than in the religious state. Therefore parish priests and archdeacons have more perfect virtue than religious.

**On the contrary,** It is stated (XIX, qu. ii, cap. Duce): "If a man while governing the people in his church under the bishop and leading a secular life is inspired by the Holy Ghost to desire to work out his salvation in a monastery or under some canonical rule, since he is led by a private law, there is no reason why he should be constrained by a public law." Now a man is

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more perfect. Therefore it would seem that religious are more perfect than archdeacons or parish priests.

***I answer that,*** When we compare things in the point of super-eminence, we look not at that in which they agree, but at that wherein they differ. Now in parish priests and archdeacons three things may be considered, their state, their order, and their office. It belongs to their state that they are seculars, to their order that they are priests or deacons, to their office that they have the cure of souls committed to them.

Accordingly, if we compare these with one who is a religious by state, a deacon or priest by order, having the cure of souls by office, as many monks and canons regular have, this one will excel in the first point, and in the other points he will be equal. But if the latter differ from the former in state and office, but agree in order, such as religious priests and deacons not having the cure of souls, it is evident that the latter will be more excellent than the former in state, less excellent in office, and equal in order.

We must therefore consider which is the greater, preeminence of state or of office; and here, seemingly, we should take note of two things, goodness and difficulty. Accordingly, if we make the comparison with a view to goodness, the religious state surpasses the office of parish priest or archdeacon, because a religious pledges his whole life to the quest of perfection, whereas the parish priest or archdeacon does not pledge his whole life to the cure of souls, as a bishop does, nor is it competent to him, as it is to a bishop, to exercise the cure of souls in chief, but only in certain particulars regarding the cure of souls committed to his charge, as stated above ([Article \[6\]](#), ad 2). Wherefore the comparison of their religious state with their office is like the comparisons of the universal with the particular, and of a holocaust with a sacrifice which is less than a holocaust according to Gregory (Hom. xx in Ezech.). Hence it is said (XIX, qu. i, can. Clerici qui monachorum.): "Clerics who wish to take the monastic vows through being desirous of a better life must be allowed by their bishops the free entrance into the monastery."

This comparison, however, must be considered as regarding the genus of the deed; for as regards the charity of the doer it happens sometimes that a deed which is of less account in its genus is of greater merit if it be done out of greater charity.

On the other hand, if we consider the difficulty of leading a good life in religion, and in the office of one having the cure of souls, in this way it is more difficult to lead a good life together with the exercise of the cure of souls, on account of outward dangers: although the religious life is more difficult as regards the genus of the deed, by reason of the strictness of religious observance. If, however, the religious is also without orders, as in the case of religious lay brethren, then it is evident that the pre-eminence of order excels in the point of dignity, since by holy orders a man is appointed to the most august ministry of serving Christ Himself in the sacrament of the altar. For this requires a greater inward holiness than that which is requisite for the religious state, since as Dionysius says (Eccl. Hier. vi) the monastic order must follow the priestly orders, and ascend to Divine things in imitation of them. Hence, other things being equal, a cleric who is in holy orders, sins more grievously if he do something contrary to holiness than a religious who is not in holy orders: although a religious who is not in orders is bound to regular observance to which persons in holy orders are not bound.

***Reply to Objection 1:*** We might answer briefly these quotations from Chrysostom by saying that he speaks not of a priest of lesser order who has the cure of souls, but of a bishop, who is called a high-priest; and this agrees with the purpose of that book wherein he consoles himself and Basil in that they were chosen to be bishops. We may, however, pass this over and reply

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[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS184.html](#)ed by the stormy sea and is able to bring the ship safely out of the tempest, then he deserves to be acknowledged by all as a perfect pilot"; and afterwards he concludes, as quoted, with regard to the monk, "who is not to be compared with one who, cast among the people... remains firm"; and he gives the reason why, because "both in the calm end in the storm he piloted himself to safety." This proves nothing more than that the state of one who has the cure of souls is fraught with more danger than the monastic state; and to keep oneself innocent in face of a greater peril is proof of greater virtue. on the other hand, it also indicates greatness of virtue if a man avoid dangers by entering religion; hence he does not say that "he would prefer the priestly office to the monastic solitude," but that "he would rather please" in the former than in the latter, since this is a proof of greater virtue.

**Reply to Objection 2:** This passage quoted from Augustine also clearly refers to the question of difficulty which proves the greatness of virtue in those who lead a good life, as stated above (ad 1).

**Reply to Objection 3:** Augustine there compares monks with clerics as regards the pre-eminence of order, not as regards the distinction between religious and secular life.

**Reply to Objection 4:** Those who are taken from the religious state to receive the cure of souls, being already in sacred orders, attain to something they had not hitherto, namely the office of the cure, yet they do not put aside what they had already. For it is said in the Decretals (XVI, qu. i, can. De Monachis): "With regard to those monks who after long residence in a monastery attain to the order of clerics, we bid them not to lay aside their former purpose."

On the other hand, parish priests and archdeacons, when they enter religion, resign their cure, in order to enter the state of perfection. This very fact shows the excellence of the religious life. When religious who are not in orders are admitted to the clerical state and to the sacred orders, they are clearly promoted to something better, as stated: this is indicated by the very way in which Jerome expresses himself: "So live in the monastery as to deserve to be a clerk."

**Reply to Objection 5:** Parish priests and archdeacons are more like bishops than religious are, in a certain respect, namely as regards the cure of souls which they have subordinately; but as regards the obligation in perpetuity, religious are more like a bishop, as appears from what we have said above ([Articles \[5\],6](#)).

**Reply to Objection 6:** The difficulty that arises from the arduousness of the deed adds to the perfection of virtue; but the difficulty that results from outward obstacles sometimes lessens the perfection of virtue—for instance, when a man loves not virtue so much as to wish to avoid the obstacles to virtue, according to the saying of the Apostle ([1 Cor. 9:25](#)), "Everyone that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things": and sometimes it is a sign of perfect virtue—for instance, when a man forsakes not virtue, although he is hindered in the practice of virtue unawares or by some unavoidable cause. In the religious state there is greater difficulty arising from the arduousness of deeds; whereas for those who in any way at all live in the world, there is greater difficulty resulting from obstacles to virtue, which obstacles the religious has had the foresight to avoid.