

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF THINGS PERTAINING TO THE EPISCOPAL STATE (EIGHT ARTICLES)

We must now consider things pertaining to the episcopal state. Under this head there are eight points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) Whether it is lawful to desire the office of a bishop?
 - [\(2\)](#) Whether it is lawful to refuse the office of bishop definitively?
 - [\(3\)](#) Whether the better man should be chosen for the episcopal office?
 - [\(4\)](#) Whether a bishop may pass over to the religious state?
 - [\(5\)](#) Whether he may lawfully abandon his subjects in a bodily manner?
 - [\(6\)](#) Whether he can have anything of his own?
 - [\(7\)](#) Whether he sins mortally by not distributing ecclesiastical goods to the poor?
 - [\(8\)](#) Whether religious who are appointed to the episcopal office are bound to religious observances?
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Whether it is lawful to desire the office of a bishop?

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS185.html](#) says (1 Tim. 3:1): "He that desires [Vulg.: 'If a man desire'] the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Now it is lawful and praiseworthy to desire a good work. Therefore it is even praiseworthy to desire the office of a bishop.

Objection 2: Further, the episcopal state is more perfect than the religious, as we have said above ([Question \[184\]](#), [Article \[7\]](#)). But it is praiseworthy to desire to enter the religious state. Therefore it is also praiseworthy to desire promotion to the episcopal state.

Objection 3: Further, it is written ([Prov. 11:26](#)): "He that hideth up corn shall be cursed among the people; but a blessing upon the head of them that sell." Now a man who is apt, both in manner of life and by knowledge, for the episcopal office, would seem to hide up the spiritual corn, if he shun the episcopal state, whereas by accepting the episcopal office he enters the state of a dispenser of spiritual corn. Therefore it would seem praiseworthy to desire the office of a bishop, and blameworthy to refuse it.

Objection 4: Further, the deeds of the saints related in Holy Writ are set before us as an example, according to Rm. 15:4, "What things soever were written, were written for our learning." Now we read ([Is. 6:8](#)) that Isaias offered himself for the office of preacher, which belongs chiefly to bishops. Therefore it would seem praiseworthy to desire the office of a bishop.

On the contrary, Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19): "The higher place, without which the people cannot be ruled, though it be filled becomingly, is unbecomingly desired."

I answer that, Three things may be considered in the episcopal office. One is principal and final, namely the bishop's work, whereby the good of our neighbor is intended, according to Jn. 21:17, "Feed My sheep." Another thing is the height of degree, for a bishop is placed above others, according to Mt. 24:45, "A faithful and a wise servant, whom his lord hath appointed over his family." The third is something resulting from these, namely reverence, honor, and a sufficiency of temporalities, according to 1 Tim. 5:17, "Let the priests that rule well be esteemed worthy of double honor." Accordingly, to desire the episcopal office on account of these incidental goods is manifestly unlawful, and pertains to covetousness or ambition. Wherefore our Lord said against the Pharisees ([Mt. 23:6,7](#)): "They love the first places at feasts, and the first chairs in the synagogues, and salutations in the market-place, and to be called by men, Rabbi." As regards the second, namely the height of degree, it is presumptuous to desire the episcopal office. Hence our Lord reproved His disciples for seeking precedence, by saying to them ([Mt. 20:25](#)): "You know that the princes of the gentiles lord it over them." Here Chrysostom says (Hom. lxxv in Matth.) that in these words "He points out that it is heathenish to seek precedence; and thus by comparing them to the gentiles He converted their impetuous soul."

On the other hand, to desire to do good to one's neighbor is in itself praiseworthy, and virtuous. Nevertheless, since considered as an episcopal act it has the height of degree attached to it, it would seem that, unless there be manifest and urgent reason for it, it would be presumptuous for any man to desire to be set over others in order to do them good. Thus Gregory says (Pastor. i, 8) that "it was praiseworthy to seek the office of a bishop when it was certain to bring one into graver dangers." Wherefore it was not easy to find a person to accept this burden, especially seeing that it is through the zeal of charity that one divinely instigated to do so, according to Gregory, who says (Pastor. i, 7) that "Isaias being desirous of profiting his neighbor, commendably desired the office of preacher."

happen to be in that office, or to be worthy of doing them; so that the object of his desire is the good work and not the precedence in dignity. Hence Chrysostom* says: "It is indeed good to desire a good work, but to desire the primacy of honor is vanity. For primacy seeks one that shuns it, and abhors one that desires it." [*The quotation is from the Opus Imperfectum in Matth. (Hom. xxxv), falsely ascribed to St. John Chrysostom.]

Reply to Objection 1: As Gregory says (Pastor. i, 8), "when the Apostle said this he who was set over the people was the first to be dragged to the torments of martyrdom," so that there was nothing to be desired in the episcopal office, save the good work. Wherefore Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19) that when the Apostle said, "'Whoever desireth the office of bishop, desireth a good work,' he wished to explain what the episcopacy is: for it denotes work and not honor: since {skopos} signifies 'watching.' Wherefore if we like we may render {episkopein} by the Latin 'superintendere' [to watch over]: thus a man may know himself to be no bishop if he loves to precede rather than to profit others." For, as he observed shortly before, "in our actions we should seek, not honor nor power in this life, since all things beneath the sun are vanity, but the work itself which that honor or power enables us to do." Nevertheless, as Gregory says (Pastor. i, 8), "while praising the desire" (namely of the good work) "he forthwith turns this object of praise into one of fear, when he adds: It behooveth... a bishop to be blameless," as though to say: "I praise what you seek, but learn first what it is you seek."

Reply to Objection 2: There is no parity between the religious and the episcopal state, for two reasons. First, because perfection of life is a prerequisite of the episcopal state, as appears from our Lord asking Peter if he loved Him more than the others, before committing the pastoral office to him, whereas perfection is not a prerequisite of the religious state, since the latter is the way to perfection. Hence our Lord did not say ([Mt. 19:21](#)): "If thou art perfect, go, sell all [Vulg.: 'what'] thou hast," but "If thou wilt be perfect." The reason for this difference is because, according to Dionysius (Eccl. Hier. vi), perfection pertains actively to the bishop, as the "perfecter," but to the monk passively as one who is "perfected": and one needs to be perfect in order to bring others to perfection, but not in order to be brought to perfection. Now it is presumptuous to think oneself perfect, but it is not presumptuous to tend to perfection. Secondly, because he who enters the religious state subjects himself to others for the sake of a spiritual profit, and anyone may lawfully do this. Wherefore Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19): "No man is debarred from striving for the knowledge of truth, since this pertains to a praiseworthy ease." On the other hand, he who enters the episcopal state is raised up in order to watch over others, and no man should seek to be raised thus, according to Heb. 5:4, "Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God": and Chrysostom says: "To desire supremacy in the Church is neither just nor useful. For what wise man seeks of his own accord to submit to such servitude and peril, as to have to render an account of the whole Church? None save him who fears not God's judgment, and makes a secular abuse of his ecclesiastical authority, by turning it to secular uses."

Reply to Objection 3: The dispensing of spiritual corn is not to be carried on in an arbitrary fashion, but chiefly according to the appointment and disposition of God, and in the second place according to the appointment of the higher prelates, in whose person it is said ([1 Cor. 4:1](#)): "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God." Wherefore a man is not deemed to hide spiritual corn if he avoids governing or correcting others, and is not competent to do so, neither in virtue of his office nor of his superior's command; thus alone is he deemed to hide it, when he neglects to dispense it while under obligation to do so in virtue of his office, or obstinately refuses to accept the office when it is imposed on him. Hence Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19): "The love of truth seeks a holy leisure, the demands of charity undertake an honest labor. If no one imposes this

Reply to Objection 4: As Gregory says (Pastor. i, 7), "Isaias, who wishing to be sent, knew himself to be already cleansed by the live coal taken from the altar, shows us that no one should dare uncleansed to approach the sacred ministry. Since, then, it is very difficult for anyone to be able to know that he is cleansed, it is safer to decline the office of preacher."

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Whether it is lawful for a man to refuse absolutely an appointment to the episcopate?

Objection 1: It would seem that it is lawful to refuse absolutely an appointment to the episcopate. For as Gregory says (Pastor. i, 7), "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 by contemplation exclaimed against being sent to preach." Now no man sins by being unwilling to forgo better things in order to adhere to things that are not so good. Since then the love of God surpasses the love of our neighbor, and the contemplative life is preferable to the active, as shown above ([Question \[25\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#); [Question \[26\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#); [Question \[182\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)) it would seem that a man sins not if he refuse absolutely the episcopal office.

Objection 2: Further, as Gregory says (Pastor. i, 7), "it is very difficult for anyone to be able to know that he is cleansed: nor should anyone uncleansed approach the sacred ministry." Therefore if a man perceives that he is not cleansed, however urgently the episcopal office be enjoined him, he ought not to accept it.

Objection 3: Further, Jerome (Prologue, super Marc.) says that "it is related of the Blessed Mark* that after receiving the faith he cut off his thumb that he might be excluded from the priesthood." [*This prologue was falsely ascribed to St. Jerome, and the passage quoted refers, not to St. Mark the Evangelist, but to a hermit of that name. (Cf. Baronius, Anno Christi, 45, num. XLIV)] Likewise some take a vow never to accept a bishopric. Now to place an obstacle to a thing amounts to the same as refusing it altogether. Therefore it would seem that one may, without sin, refuse the episcopal office absolutely.

On the contrary, Augustine says (Ep. xlviii ad Eudox.): "If Mother Church requires your service, neither accept with greedy conceit, nor refuse with fawning indolence"; and afterwards he adds: "Nor prefer your ease to the needs of the Church: for if no good men were willing to assist her in her labor, you would seek in vain how we could be born of her."

I answer that, Two things have to be considered in the acceptance of the episcopal office: first, what a man may fittingly desire according to his own will; secondly, what it behooves a man to do according to the will of another. As regards his own will it becomes a man to look chiefly to his own spiritual welfare, whereas that he look to the spiritual welfare of others

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS185.html](#) ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 3). Hence just as it is a mark of an inordinate will that a man of his own choice incline to be appointed to the government of others, so too it indicates an inordinate will if a man definitively refuse the aforesaid office of government in direct opposition to the appointment of his superior: and this for two reasons.

First, because this is contrary to the love of our neighbor, for whose good a man should offer himself according as place and time demand: hence Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19) that "the demands of charity undertake an honest labor." Secondly, because this is contrary to humility, whereby a man submits to his superior's commands: hence Gregory says (Pastor. i, 6): "In God's sight humility is genuine when it does not obstinately refuse to submit to what is usefully prescribed."

Reply to Objection 1: Although simply and absolutely speaking the contemplative life is more excellent than the active, and the love of God better than the love of our neighbor, yet, on the other hand, the good of the many should be preferred to the good of the individual. Wherefore Augustine says in the passage quoted above: "Nor prefer your own ease to the needs of the Church," and all the more since it belongs to the love of God that a man undertake the pastoral care of Christ's sheep. Hence Augustine, commenting on Jn. 21:17, "Feed My sheep," says (Tract. cxxiii in Joan.): "Be it the task of love to feed the Lord's flock, even as it was the mark of fear to deny the Shepherd."

Moreover prelates are not transferred to the active life, so as to forsake the contemplative; wherefore Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 19) that "if the burden of the pastoral office be imposed, we must not abandon the delights of truth," which are derived from contemplation.

Reply to Objection 2: No one is bound to obey his superior by doing what is unlawful, as appears from what was said above concerning obedience ([Question \[104\]](#), [Article \[5\]](#)). Accordingly it may happen that he who is appointed to the office of prelate perceive something in himself on account of which it is unlawful for him to accept a prelacy. But this obstacle may sometimes be removed by the very person who is appointed to the pastoral cure—for instance, if he have a purpose to sin, he may abandon it—and for this reason he is not excused from being bound to obey definitely the superior who has appointed him. Sometimes, however, he is unable himself to remove the impediment that makes the pastoral office unlawful to him, yet the prelate who appoints him can do so—for instance, if he be irregular or excommunicate. In such a case he ought to make known his defect to the prelate who has appointed him; and if the latter be willing to remove the impediment, he is bound humbly to obey. Hence when Moses had said ([Ex. 4:10](#)): "I beseech thee, Lord, I am not eloquent from yesterday, and the day before," the Lord answered ([Ex. 4:12](#)): "I will be in thy mouth, and I will teach thee what thou shalt speak." At other times the impediment cannot be removed, neither by the person appointing nor by the one appointed—for instance, if an archbishop be unable to dispense from an irregularity; wherefore a subject, if irregular, would not be bound to obey him by accepting the episcopate or even sacred orders.

Reply to Objection 3: It is not in itself necessary for salvation to accept the episcopal office, but it becomes necessary by reason of the superior's command. Now one may lawfully place an obstacle to things thus necessary for salvation, before the command is given; else it would not be lawful to marry a second time, lest one should thus incur an impediment to the episcopate or holy orders. But this would not be lawful in things necessary for salvation. Hence the Blessed Mark did not act against a precept by cutting off his finger, although it is credible that he did this by the instigation of the Holy Ghost, without which it would be unlawful for anyone to lay hands on himself. If a man take a vow not to accept the bishop's

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prelate, his vow is unlawful; but if he intend to bind himself, so far as it lies with him, not to seek the episcopal office, nor to accept it except under urgent necessity, his vow is lawful, because he vows to do what it becomes a man to do.

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Whether he that is appointed to the episcopate ought to be better than others?

Objection 1: It would seem that one who is appointed to the episcopate ought to be better than others. For our Lord, when about to commit the pastoral office to Peter, asked him if he loved Him more than the others. Now a man is the better through loving God the more. Therefore it would seem that one ought not to be appointed to the episcopal office except he be better than others.

Objection 2: Further, Pope Symmachus says (can. Vilissimus I, qu. 1): "A man is of very little worth who though excelling in dignity, excels not in knowledge and holiness." Now he who excels in knowledge and holiness is better. Therefore a man ought not to be appointed to the episcopate unless he be better than others.

Objection 3: Further, in every genus the lesser are governed by the greater, as corporeal things are governed by things spiritual, and the lower bodies by the higher, as Augustine says (De Trin. iii, 3). Now a bishop is appointed to govern others. Therefore he should be better than others.

On the contrary, The Decretal [*Can. Cum dilectus, de Electione] says that "it suffices to choose a good man, nor is it necessary to choose the better man."

I answer that, In designating a man for the episcopal office, something has to be considered on the part of the person designate, and something on the part of the designator. For on the part of the designator, whether by election or by appointment, it is required that he choose such a one as will dispense the divine mysteries faithfully. These should be dispensed for the good of the Church, according to 1 Cor. 14:12, "Seek to abound unto the edifying of the Church"; and the divine mysteries are not committed to men for their own meed, which they should await in the life to come. Consequently he who has to choose or appoint one for a bishop is not bound to take one who is best simply, i.e. according to charity, but one who is best for governing the Church, one namely who is able to instruct, defend, and govern the Church peacefully. Hence Jerome, commenting on Titus 1:5, says against certain persons that "some seek to erect as pillars of the Church, not those whom they know to be more useful to the Church, but those whom they love more, or those by whose obsequiousness they have been cajoled or undone, or for whom some person in authority has spoken, and, not to say worse than this, have succeeded by means of gifts in being made clerics."

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS185.html](#) a gloss of Augustine [*Ep. clxvii ad Hieron.] on James 2:1, "Brethren, have not... with respect of persons," says: "If this distinction of sitting and standing be referred to ecclesiastical honors, we must not deem it a slight sin to 'have the faith of the Lord of glory with respect of persons.' For who would suffer a rich man to be chosen for the Church's seat of honor, in despite of a poor man who is better instructed and holier?"

On the part of the person appointed, it is not required that he esteem himself better than others, for this would be proud and presumptuous; but it suffices that he perceive nothing in himself which would make it unlawful for him to take up the office of prelate. Hence although Peter was asked by our Lord if he loved Him more than the others, he did not, in his reply, set himself before the others, but answered simply that he loved Christ.

Reply to Objection 1: Our Lord knew that, by His own bestowal, Peter was in other respects fitted to govern the Church: wherefore He questioned him about his greater love, to show that when we find a man otherwise fitted for the government of the Church, we must look chiefly to his pre-eminence in the love of God.

Reply to Objection 2: This statement refers to the pursuits of the man who is placed in authority. For he should aim at showing himself to be more excellent than others in both knowledge and holiness. Wherefore Gregory says (Pastor. ii, 1) "the occupations of a prelate ought to excel those of the people, as much as the shepherd's life excels that of his flock." But he is not to be blamed and looked upon as worthless if he excelled not before being raised to the prelacy.

Reply to Objection 3: According to 1 Cor. 12:4 seqq., "there are diversities of graces... and... of ministries... and... of operations." Hence nothing hinders one from being more fitted for the office of governing, who does not excel in the grace of holiness. It is otherwise in the government of the natural order, where that which is higher in the natural order is for that very reason more fitted to dispose of those that are lower.

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Whether a bishop may lawfully forsake the episcopal cure, in order to enter religion?

Objection 1: It seems that a bishop cannot lawfully forsake his episcopal cure in order to enter religion. For no one can lawfully pass from a more perfect to a less perfect state; since this is "to look back," which is condemned by the words of our Lord ([Lk. 9:62](#)), "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Now the episcopal state is more perfect than the religious, as shown above ([Question \[184\]](#), [Article \[7\]](#)). Therefore just as it is unlawful to return to the world from the religious state, so is it unlawful to pass from the episcopal to the religious state.

according to nature a thing is not moved in contrary directions; thus if a stone be naturally moved downwards, it cannot naturally return upwards from below. But according to the order of grace it is lawful to pass from the religious to the episcopal state. Therefore it is not lawful to pass contrariwise from the episcopal to the religious state.

Objection 3: Further, in the works of grace nothing should be inoperative. Now when once a man is consecrated bishop he retains in perpetuity the spiritual power of giving orders and doing like things that pertain to the episcopal office: and this power would seemingly remain inoperative in one who gives up the episcopal cure. Therefore it would seem that a bishop may not forsake the episcopal cure and enter religion.

On the contrary, No man is compelled to do what is in itself unlawful. Now those who seek to resign their episcopal cure are compelled to resign (Extra, de Renunt. cap. Quidam). Therefore apparently it is not unlawful to give up the episcopal cure.

I answer that, The perfection of the episcopal state consists in this that for love of God a man binds himself to work for the salvation of his neighbor, wherefore he is bound to retain the pastoral cure so long as he is able to procure the spiritual welfare of the subjects entrusted to his care: a matter which he must not neglect--neither for the sake of the quiet of divine contemplation, since the Apostle, on account of the needs of his subjects, suffered patiently to be delayed even from the contemplation of the life to come, according to Phil. 1:22-25, "What I shall choose I know not, but I am straitened between two, having a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, a thing by far better. But to abide still in the flesh is needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide"; nor for the sake of avoiding any hardships or of acquiring any gain whatsoever, because as it is written ([Jn. 10:11](#)), "the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep."

At times, however, it happens in several ways that a bishop is hindered from procuring the spiritual welfare of his subjects. Sometimes on account of his own defect, either of conscience (for instance if he be guilty of murder or simony), or of body (for example if he be old or infirm), or of irregularity arising, for instance, from bigamy. Sometimes he is hindered through some defect in his subjects, whom he is unable to profit. Hence Gregory says (Dial. ii, 3): "The wicked must be borne patiently, when there are some good who can be succored, but when there is no profit at all for the good, it is sometimes useless to labor for the wicked. Wherefore the perfect when they find that they labor in vain are often minded to go elsewhere in order to labor with fruit." Sometimes again this hindrance arises on the part of others, as when scandal results from a certain person being in authority: for the Apostle says (1 Cor. 8:13): "If meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh": provided, however, the scandal is not caused by the wickedness of persons desirous of subverting the faith or the righteousness of the Church; because the pastoral cure is not to be laid aside on account of scandal of this kind, according to Mt. 15:14, "Let them alone," those namely who were scandalized at the truth of Christ's teaching, "they are blind, and leaders of the blind."

Nevertheless just as a man takes upon himself the charge of authority at the appointment of a higher superior, so too it behooves him to be subject to the latter's authority in laying aside the accepted charge for the reasons given above. Hence Innocent III says (Extra, de Renunt., cap. Nisi cum pridem): "Though thou hast wings wherewith thou art anxious to fly away into solitude, they are so tied by the bonds of authority, that thou art not free to fly without our permission." For the Pope alone can dispense from the perpetual vow, by which a man binds himself to the care of his subjects, when he took upon himself the episcopal office.

different standpoints. For it belongs to the perfection of a religious to occupy oneself in working out one's own salvation, whereas it belongs to the perfection of a bishop to occupy oneself in working for the salvation of others. Hence so long as a man can be useful to the salvation of his neighbor, he would be going back, if he wished to pass to the religious state, to busy himself only with his own salvation, since he has bound himself to work not only for his own but also for others' salvation. Wherefore Innocent III says in the Decretal quoted above that "it is more easily allowable for a monk to ascend to the episcopacy, than for a bishop to descend to the monastic life. If, however, he be unable to procure the salvation of others it is meet he should seek his own."

Reply to Objection 2: On account of no obstacle should a man forego the work of his own salvation, which pertains to the religious state. But there may be an obstacle to the procuring of another's salvation; wherefore a monk may be raised to the episcopal state wherein he is able also to work out his own salvation. And a bishop, if he be hindered from procuring the salvation of others, may enter the religious life, and may return to his bishopric should the obstacle cease, for instance by the correction of his subjects, cessation of the scandal, healing of his infirmity, removal of his ignorance by sufficient instruction. Again, if he owed his promotion to simony of which he was in ignorance, and resigning his episcopate entered the religious life, he can be reappointed to another bishopric [*Cap. Post transl., de Renunt.]. On the other hand, if a man be deposed from the episcopal office for some sin, and confined in a monastery that he may do penance, he cannot be reappointed to a bishopric. Hence it is stated (VII, qu. i, can. Hoc nequaquam): "The holy synod orders that any man who has been degraded from the episcopal dignity to the monastic life and a place of repentance, should by no means rise again to the episcopate."

Reply to Objection 3: Even in natural things power remains inactive on account of a supervening obstacle, for instance the act of sight ceases through an affliction of the eye. So neither is it unreasonable if, through the occurrence of some obstacle from without, the episcopal power remain without the exercise of its act.

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Whether it is lawful for a bishop on account of bodily persecution to abandon the flock committed to his care?

Objection 1: It would seem that it is unlawful for a bishop, on account of some temporal persecution, to withdraw his bodily presence from the flock committed to his care. For our Lord said ([Jn. 10:12](#)) that he is a hireling and no true shepherd, who "seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and flieth": and Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ev.) that "the wolf comes upon the sheep when any man by his injustice and robbery oppresses the faithful and the humble." Therefore if, on account of the persecution of a tyrant, a bishop withdraws his bodily presence from the flock entrusted to his care, it would seem that he is a hireling and not a shepherd.

hast engaged fast thy hand to a stranger," and afterwards ([Prov. 6:3](#)): "Run about, make haste, stir up thy friend." Gregory expounds these words and says (Pastor. iii, 4): "To be surety for a friend, is to vouch for his good conduct by engaging oneself to a stranger. And whoever is put forward as an example to the lives of others, is warned not only to watch but even to rouse his friend." Now he cannot do this if he withdraw his bodily presence from his flock. Therefore it would seem that a bishop should not on account of persecution withdraw his bodily presence from his flock.

Objection 3: Further, it belongs to the perfection of the bishop's state that he devote himself to the care of his neighbor. Now it is unlawful for one who has professed the state of perfection to forsake altogether the things that pertain to perfection. Therefore it would seem unlawful for a bishop to withdraw his bodily presence from the execution of his office, except perhaps for the purpose of devoting himself to works of perfection in a monastery.

On the contrary, our Lord commanded the apostles, whose successors bishops are ([Mt. 10:23](#)): "When they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another."

I answer that, In any obligation the chief thing to be considered is the end of the obligation. Now bishops bind themselves to fulfil the pastoral office for the sake of the salvation of their subjects. Consequently when the salvation of his subjects demands the personal presence of the pastor, the pastor should not withdraw his personal presence from his flock, neither for the sake of some temporal advantage, nor even on account of some impending danger to his person, since the good shepherd is bound to lay down his life for his sheep.

On the other hand, if the salvation of his subjects can be sufficiently provided for by another person in the absence of the pastor, it is lawful for the pastor to withdraw his bodily presence from his flock, either for the sake of some advantage to the Church, or on account of some danger to his person. Hence Augustine says (Ep. ccxxviii ad Honorat.): "Christ's servants may flee from one city to another, when one of them is specially sought out by persecutors: in order that the Church be not abandoned by others who are not so sought for. When, however, the same danger threatens all, those who stand in need of others must not be abandoned by those whom they need." For "if it is dangerous for the helmsman to leave the ship when the sea is calm, how much more so when it is stormy," as Pope Nicholas I says (cf. VII, qu. i, can. Sciscitaris).

Reply to Objection 1: To flee as a hireling is to prefer temporal advantage or one's bodily welfare to the spiritual welfare of one's neighbor. Hence Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ev.): "A man cannot endanger himself for the sake of his sheep, if he uses his authority over them not through love of them but for the sake of earthly gain: wherefore he fears to stand in the way of danger lest he lose what he loves." But he who, in order to avoid danger, leaves the flock without endangering the flock, does not flee as a hireling.

Reply to Objection 2: If he who is surety for another be unable to fulfil his engagement, it suffices that he fulfil it through another. Hence if a superior is hindered from attending personally to the care of his subjects, he fulfils his obligation if he do so through another.

Reply to Objection 3: When a man is appointed to a bishopric, he embraces the state of perfection as regards one kind of perfection; and if he be hindered from the practice thereof, he is not bound to another kind of perfection, so as to be obliged to enter the religious state. Yet he is under the obligation of retaining the intention of devoting himself to his neighbor's salvation, should an opportunity offer, and necessity require it of him.

Whether it is lawful for a bishop to have property of his own?

Objection 1: It would seem that it is not lawful for a bishop to have property of his own. 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"; whence it would seem to follow that voluntary poverty is requisite for perfection. Now bishops are in the state of perfection. Therefore it would seem unlawful for them to possess anything as their own.

Objection 2: Further, bishops take the place of the apostles in the Church, according to a gloss on Lk. 10:1. Now our Lord commanded the apostles to possess nothing of their own, according to Mt. 10:9, "Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses"; wherefore Peter said for himself and the other apostles ([Mt. 19:27](#)): "Behold we have left all things and have followed Thee." Therefore it would seem that bishops are bound to keep this command, and to possess nothing of their own.

Objection 3: Further, Jerome says (Ep. lii ad Nepotian.): "The Greek {kleros} denotes the Latin 'sors.' Hence clerics are so called either because they are of the Lord's estate, or because the Lord Himself is the estate, i.e. portion of clerics. Now he that possesses the Lord, can have nothing besides God; and if he have gold and silver, possessions, and chattels of all kinds, with such a portion the Lord does not vouchsafe to be his portion also." Therefore it would seem that not only bishops but even clerics should have nothing of their own.

On the contrary, It is stated (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."

I answer that, No one is bound to works of supererogation, unless he binds himself specially thereto by vow. Hence Augustine says (Ep. cxxvii ad Paulin. et Arment.): "Since you have taken the vow, you have already bound yourself, you can no longer do otherwise. Before you were bound by the vow, you were free to submit." Now it is evident that to live without possessing anything is a work of supererogation, for it is a matter not of precept but of counsel. Wherefore our Lord after saying to the young man: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments," said afterwards by way of addition: "If thou wilt be perfect go sell" all "that thou hast, and give to the poor" ([Mt. 19:17,21](#)). Bishops, however, do not bind themselves at their ordination to live without possessions of their own; nor indeed does the pastoral office, to which they bind themselves, make it necessary for them to live without anything of their own. Therefore bishops are not bound to live without possessions of their own.

Reply to Objection 1: As stated above ([Question \[184\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#), ad 1) the perfection of the Christian life does not essentially consist in voluntary poverty, but voluntary poverty conduces instrumentally to the perfection of life. Hence it does not follow that where there is greater poverty there is greater perfection; indeed the highest perfection is compatible with great

Reply to Objection 2: This saying of our Lord can be understood in three ways. First, mystically, that we should possess neither gold nor silver means that the preacher should not rely chiefly on temporal wisdom and eloquence; thus Jerome expounds the passage.

Secondly, according to Augustine's explanation (De Consens. Ev. ii, 30), we are to understand that our Lord said this not in command but in permission. For he permitted them to go preaching without gold or silver or other means, since they were to receive the means of livelihood from those to whom they preached; wherefore He added: "For the workman is worthy of his meat." And yet if anyone were to use his own means in preaching the Gospel, this would be a work of supererogation, as Paul says in reference to himself ([1 Cor. 9:12,15](#)).

Thirdly, according to the exposition of Chrysostom [*Hom. ii in Rom. xvi, 3], we are to understand that our Lord laid these commands on His disciples in reference to the mission on which they were sent to preach to the Jews, so that they might be encouraged to trust in His power, seeing that He provided for their wants without their having means of their own. But it does not follow from this that they, or their successors, were obliged to preach the Gospel without having means of their own: since we read of Paul ([2 Cor. 11:8](#)) that he "received wages" of other churches for preaching to the Corinthians, wherefore it is clear that he possessed something sent to him by others. And it seems foolish to say that so many holy bishops as Athanasius, Ambrose, and Augustine would have disobeyed these commandments if they believed themselves bound to observe them.

Reply to Objection 3: Every part is less than the whole. Accordingly a man has other portions together with God, if he becomes less intent on things pertaining to God by occupying himself with things of the world. Now neither bishops nor clerics ought thus to possess means of their own, that while busy with their own they neglect those that concern the worship of God.

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Whether bishops sin mortally if they distribute not to the poor the ecclesiastical goods which accrue to them?

Objection 1: It would seem that bishops sin mortally if they distribute not to the poor the ecclesiastical goods which they acquire. For Ambrose [*Basil, Sermon. lxiv, de Temp., among the supposititious works of St. Jerome] expounding Lk. 12:16, "The land of a certain... man brought forth plenty of fruits," says: "Let no man claim as his own that which he has taken and obtained by violence from the common property in excess of his requirements"; and afterwards he adds: "It is not less criminal to take from him who has, than, when you are able and have plenty to refuse him who has not." Now it is a mortal sin to take another's property by violence. Therefore bishops sin mortally if they give not to the poor that which they have in excess.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS185.html](#) lays that "ecclesiastical goods belong to the poor." Now whoever keeps for himself or gives to others that which belongs to another, sins mortally and is bound to restitution. Therefore if bishops keep for themselves, or give to their relations or friends, their surplus of ecclesiastical goods, it would seem that they are bound to restitution.

Objection 3: Further, much more may one take what is necessary for oneself from the goods of the Church, than accumulate a surplus therefrom. Yet Jerome says in a letter to Pope Damasus [*Cf. Can. Clericos, cause. i, qu. 2; Can. Quoniam; cause. xvi, qu. 1; Regul. Monach. iv, among the supposititious works of St. Jerome]: "It is right that those clerics who receive no goods from their parents and relations should be supported from the funds of the Church. But those who have sufficient income from their parents and their own possessions, if they take what belongs to the poor, they commit and incur the guilt of sacrilege." Wherefore the Apostle says ([1 Tim. 5:16](#)): "If any of the faithful have widows, let him minister to them, and let not the Church be charged, that there may be sufficient for them that are widows indeed." Much more therefore do bishops sin mortally if they give not to the poor the surplus of their ecclesiastical goods.

On the contrary, Many bishops do not give their surplus to the poor, but would seem commendably to lay it out so as to increase the revenue of the Church.

I answer that, The same is not to be said of their own goods which bishops may possess, and of ecclesiastical goods. For they have real dominion over their own goods; wherefore from the very nature of the case they are not bound to give these things to others, and may either keep them for themselves or bestow them on others at will. Nevertheless they may sin in this disposal by inordinate affection, which leads them either to accumulate more than they should, or not to assist others, in accordance with the demands of charity; yet they are not bound to restitution, because such things are entrusted to their ownership.

On the other hand, they hold ecclesiastical goods as dispensers or trustees. For Augustine says (Ep. clxxxv ad Bonif.): "If we possess privately what is enough for us, other things belong not to us but to the poor, and we have the dispensing of them; but we can claim ownership of them only by wicked theft." Now dispensing requires good faith, according to 1 Cor. 4:2, "Here now it is required among the dispensers that a man be found faithful." Moreover ecclesiastical goods are to be applied not only to the good of the poor, but also to the divine worship and the needs of its ministers. Hence it is said (XII, qu. ii, can. de reatibus): "Of the Church's revenues or the offerings of the faithful only one part is to be assigned to the bishop, two parts are to be used by the priest, under pain of suspension, for the ecclesiastical fabric, and for the benefit of the poor; the remaining part is to be divided among the clergy according to their respective merits." Accordingly if the goods which are assigned to the use of the bishop are distinct from those which are appointed for the use of the poor, or the ministers, or for the ecclesiastical worship, and if the bishop keeps back for himself part of that which should be given to the poor, or to the ministers for their use, or expended on the divine worship, without doubt he is an unfaithful dispenser, sins mortally, and is bound to restitution.

But as regards those goods which are deputed to his private use, the same apparently applies as to his own property, namely that he sins through immoderate attachment thereto or use thereof, if he exceeds moderation in what he keeps for himself, and fails to assist others according to the demands of charity.

On the other hand, if no distinction is made in the aforesaid goods, their distribution is entrusted to his good faith; and if he fail or exceed in a slight degree, this may happen without

what ought to be done. On the other hand, if the excess be very great he cannot be ignorant of the fact; consequently he would seem to be lacking in good faith, and is guilty of mortal sin. For it is written ([Mt. 24:48-51](#)) that "if that evil servant shall say in his heart: My lord is long a-coming," which shows contempt of God's judgment, "and shall begin to strike his fellow-servants," which is a sign of pride, "and shall eat and drink with drunkards," which proceeds from lust, "the lord of that servant shall come in a day that he hopeth not... and shall separate him," namely from the fellowship of good men, "and appoint his portion with hypocrites," namely in hell.

Reply to Objection 1: This saying of Ambrose refers to the administration not only of ecclesiastical things but also of any goods whatever from which a man is bound, as a duty of charity, to provide for those who are in need. But it is not possible to state definitely when this need is such as to impose an obligation under pain of mortal sin, as is the case in other points of detail that have to be considered in human acts: for the decision in such matters is left to human prudence.

Reply to Objection 2: As stated above the goods of the Church have to be employed not only for the use of the poor, but also for other purposes. Hence if a bishop or cleric wish to deprive himself of that which is assigned to his own use, and give it to his relations or others, he sins not so long as he observes moderation, so, to wit, that they cease to be in want without becoming the richer thereby. Hence Ambrose says (De Offic. i, 30): "It is a commendable liberality if you overlook not your kindred when you know them to be in want; yet not so as to wish to make them rich with what you can give to the poor."

Reply to Objection 3: The goods of churches should not all be given to the poor, except in a case of necessity: for then, as Ambrose says (De Offic. ii, 28), even the vessels consecrated to the divine worship are to be sold for the ransom of prisoners, and other needs of the poor. In such a case of necessity a cleric would sin if he chose to maintain himself on the goods of the Church, always supposing him to have a patrimony of his own on which to support himself.

Reply to Objection 4: The goods of the churches should be employed for the good of the poor. Consequently a man is to be commended if, there being no present necessity for helping the poor, he spends the surplus from the Church revenue, in buying property, or lays it by for some future use connected with the Church or the needs of the poor. But if there be a pressing need for helping the poor, to lay by for the future is a superfluous and inordinate saving, and is forbidden by our Lord Who said ([Mt. 6:34](#)): "Be... not solicitous for the morrow."

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Whether religious who are raised to the episcopate are bound to religious observances?

Objection 1: It would seem that religious who are raised to the episcopate are not bound to religious observances. For it is said (XVIII, qu. i, can. Statutum) that a "canonical election

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ordination makes of a monk a bishop." Now the regular observances pertain to the yoke of the rule. Therefore religious who are appointed bishops are not bound to religious observances.

Objection 2: Further, he who ascends from a lower to a higher degree is seemingly not bound to those things which pertain to the lower degree: thus it was stated above ([Question \[88\]](#), [Article \[12\]](#), ad 1) that a religious is not bound to keep the vows he made in the world. But a religious who is appointed to the episcopate ascends to something greater, as stated above ([Question \[84\]](#), [Article \[7\]](#)). Therefore it would seem that a bishop is not bound to those things whereto he was bound in the state of religion.

Objection 3: Further, religious would seem to be bound above all to obedience, and to live without property of their own. But religious who are appointed bishops, are not bound to obey the superiors of their order, since they are above them; nor apparently are they bound to poverty, since according to the decree quoted above (Objection [1]) "when the holy ordination has made of a monk a bishop he enjoys the right, as the lawful heir, of claiming his paternal inheritance." Moreover they are sometimes allowed to make a will. Much less therefore are they bound to other regular observances.

On the contrary, It is said in the Decretals (XVI, qu. i, can. De Monachis): "With regard to those who after long residence in a monastery attain to the order of clerics, we bid them not to lay aside their former purpose."

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 2) the religious state pertains to perfection, as a way of tending to perfection, while the episcopal state pertains to perfection, as a professorship of perfection. Hence the religious state is compared to the episcopal state, as the school to the professorial chair, and as disposition to perfection. Now the disposition is not voided at the advent of perfection, except as regards what perchance is incompatible with perfection, whereas as to that wherein it is in accord with perfection, it is confirmed the more. Thus when the scholar has become a professor it no longer becomes him to be a listener, but it becomes him to read and meditate even more than before. Accordingly we must assert that if there be among religious observances any that instead of being an obstacle to the episcopal office, are a safeguard of perfection, such as continence, poverty, and so forth, a religious, even after he has been made a bishop, remains bound to observe these, and consequently to wear the habit of his order, which is a sign of this obligation.

On the other hand, a man is not bound to keep such religious observances as may be incompatible with the episcopal office, for instance solitude, silence, and certain severe abstinences or watchings and such as would render him bodily unable to exercise the episcopal office. For the rest he may dispense himself from them, according to the needs of his person or office, and the manner of life of those among whom he dwells, in the same way as religious superiors dispense themselves in such matters.

Reply to Objection 1: He who from being a monk becomes a bishop is loosened from the yoke of the monastic profession, not in everything, but in those that are incompatible with the episcopal office, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 2: The vows of those who are living in the world are compared to the vows of religion as the particular to the universal, as stated above ([Question \[88\]](#), [Article \[12\]](#), ad 1). But the vows of religion are compared to the episcopal dignity as disposition to perfection. Now the particular is superfluous when one has the universal, whereas the disposition is still necessary when perfection has been attained.

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS185.html](#) the superiors of their order, because, to wit, they have ceased to be their subjects; even as those same religious superiors. Nevertheless the obligation of the vow remains virtually, so that if any person be lawfully set above them, they would be bound to obey them, inasmuch as they are bound to obey both the statutes of their rule in the way mentioned above, and their superiors if they have any.

As to property they can nowise have it. For they claim their paternal inheritance not as their own, but as due to the Church. Hence it is added (XVIII, qu. i, can. Statutum) that after he has been ordained bishop at the altar to which he is consecrated and appointed according to the holy canons, he must restore whatever he may acquire.

Nor can he make any testament at all, because he is entrusted with the sole administration of things ecclesiastical, and this ends with his death, after which a testament comes into force according to the Apostle ([Heb. 9:17](#)). If, however, by the Pope's permission he make a will, he is not to be understood to bequeath property of his own, but we are to understand that by apostolic authority the power of his administration has been prolonged so as to remain in force after his death.