

QUESTION 189

The Entry into a Religious Order

Next we have to consider the entry into a religious order (*de ingressu religionis*). And on this topic there are ten questions: (1) Should those who are not experienced at observing the commandments enter a religious order? (2) Is anyone allowed to obligate himself by a vow to enter a religious order? (3) Are those who are obligated by a vow to enter a religious order bound to fulfill that vow? (4) Are those who vow to enter a religious order obligated to remain there in perpetuity? (5) Should children (*pueri*) be received into a religious order? (6) Should anyone be held back from entering a religious order out of deference to his parents? (7) Can parish priest (*presbyteri curati*) or archdeacons transfer into a religious order? (8) Can anyone transfer from one religious order to another? (9) Should anyone induce others to enter a religious order? (10) Is prolonged deliberation with one's relatives and friends required for entering a religious order?

Article 1

Should those who are not experienced at keeping the commandments enter a religious order?

It seems that only those who are experienced at keeping the commandments should enter a religious order (*non debeant religionem ingredi nisi qui sunt in praeceptis exercitati*):

Objection 1: Our Lord gave a counsel of perfection to a young man who claimed that he had been keeping the commandments “from my youth.” But every religious order has taken its origin from Christ. Therefore, it seems that only those who are experienced at keeping the commandments should be admitted into a religious order.

Objection 2: In *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “No one suddenly becomes the greatest; rather, he makes the beginning of a good life from the smallest things in order to arrive at great things.” But the counsels are great things that pertain to the perfection of life, whereas the commandments are lesser things that pertain to general uprightness. Therefore, it seems that no individuals should, in order to observe the counsels, enter a religious order if they have not been previously experienced at keeping the commandments.

Objection 3: Just as holy orders have a certain preeminence (*habent quandam excellentiam*) in the Church, so, too, does the religious state. But as Gregory writes to the bishop Siagrius, and this is contained in *Decretals*, dist. 48, “Holy orders should be approached in an orderly manner. For anyone who seeks to ascend by abrupt leaps to the top of the highest place while neglecting the steps is in fact desiring a fall. For we know that the walls of a building do not accept the weight of the beams unless they have been dried of the moisture of their newness, and that if they receive the weight before they are solidified, they bring down the whole structure at once.” Therefore, it seems that no individuals should pass into a religious order unless they are experienced at keeping the commandments.

Objection 4: A Gloss on Psalm 130:2 (“Like a child quieted at its mother's breast”) says, “We are first conceived in the womb of our mother the Church, when we are formed in the rudiments of the Faith; then we emerge into the light when we are re-generated through baptism; next, we are carried, as it were, in the hands of the Church and nourished with milk, when after baptism we are informed by good works and nourished by spiritual teaching, until, by making progress and already nearly grown up, we move from the milk of our mother to the table of our father; that is, from simple doctrine, where ‘the Word made flesh’ is preached, we arrive at the Word of the Father ‘in the beginning with God’.” And later it adds, “Those who are newly baptized on Holy Saturday are carried, as it were, in the hands of the Church and nourished with milk until Pentecost, during which time nothing arduous is prescribed—no fasts, no rising in the middle of the night. Afterwards, having been confirmed by the Paraclete Spirit—having been

weaned, as it were—they begin to fast and to practice other difficult observances. But many, like the heretics and schismatics, pervert this order by being weaned before their time, as it were, and as a result they are deprived of life.” But the ones who pervert this order seem to be those individuals who enter a religious order, or induce others to enter, before they are experienced at a more effortless observance of the commandments. Therefore, it seems that they are heretics or schismatics.

Objection 5: It is from what is prior that one has to pass to what is posterior. But the commandments are prior to the counsels because they are more general, in the sense that “the inference from the existence of the one to the existence of the other is not convertible” (*Categories*, chap. 9). For whoever observes the counsels observes the commandments, but not vice versa. But the fitting order is to pass from what is prior to what is posterior. Therefore, no one should pass to the observance of the counsels in a religious order unless he is first experienced with the commandments.

But contrary to this: Our Lord called the tax collector Matthew, who was not experienced at keeping the commandments, to the observance of the counsels; for Luke 5:28 says, “Having left everything, he followed Him.” Therefore, it is not necessary for an individual to be experienced at keeping the commandments before he passes to the perfection of the counsels.

I respond: As is clear from what was said above (q. 186, a. 1 and q. 188, a. 1), the religious state is a sort of exercise or practice (*exercitium*) for attaining the perfection of charity, and this occurs insofar as impediments to perfect charity are eliminated by a religious order’s observances.

Now these impediments are whatever ties a man’s affections to earthly things. But by the fact that a man’s affections are tied to earthly things, it is not only the case that the perfection of charity is *impeded*, but sometimes it is even the case that charity itself is *lost*, viz., when through a disordered *turning toward* temporary goods a man *turns away* from the immutable good by committing a mortal sin. Hence, it is clear that just as the observances of a religious order remove impediments to perfect charity, so, too, they also remove occasions for committing [mortal] sin. For instance, it is clear that by means of fasts and vigils and obedience and other practices of this sort, a man is drawn back from the sins of gluttony and lust and from certain other sins as well.

And so entering a religious order is expedient not only for those who are exercised in keeping the commandments, so that they might arrive at greater perfection, but also for those who are not exercised in keeping the commandments, so that they might more easily avoid sin and pursue perfection.

Reply to objection 1: In *Super Matthaicum* Jerome says, “The young man lied in saying, ‘All these I have kept from my youth.’ For if he had actually fulfilled what is posited in the commandments, viz., ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’, then how is it that he later ‘went away sad’ when he heard, ‘Go and sell all that you possess and give it to the poor’?”

But this must mean that he lied with respect to the *perfect* observance of this precept. Hence, in *Super Matthaicum* Origen says, “In the Gospel according to the Hebrews it is written that when our Lord had said to him, ‘Go and sell all that you possess’, the rich man began to scratch his head. And our Lord said to him, ‘How is it that you claim, “I have fulfilled the law and the prophets?” For in the law it is written, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” and, behold, many of your brothers, children of Abraham, are clothed in filth, dying of hunger, while your house is full of many good things and nothing whatsoever has passed to them?’ And thus our Lord, in reproving him, says, ‘If you want to be perfect, etc.’ For it is impossible to fulfill the commandment that says, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ and to be rich—and especially to have such great wealth.” This must be understood as having to do with the *perfect* fulfillment of the commandment in question. On the other hand, it is true that he has kept the commandments in an imperfect and general manner. For as was established above (q. 184, a. 3), perfection consists mainly in fulfilling the precepts of charity.

Thus, in order that our Lord might show that the perfection of the counsels is useful both for innocents and for sinners, he called not only the innocent young man, but also the sinner Matthew. And yet Matthew, but not the young man, followed the one who called him. For sinners are converted to

religion more easily than those who presume upon their own innocence and to whom our Lord says in Matthew 21:31, “Tax collectors and prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.”

Reply to objection 2: ‘Greatest’ and ‘least’ can be taken in three ways:

In one way, *in the same state and in the same man*. And on this score it is clear that no man becomes the greatest suddenly, since each individual who lives aright for the whole time of his life makes progress in arriving at the greatest.

In the second way, *by comparison with diverse states*. And on this score it is not necessary for every individual who wants to arrive at a higher state to begin from a lesser state, just as it is not necessary for an individual who wishes to be a cleric to be previously trained (*prius exerceatur*) in the life of a layman.

In the third way, *with respect to different persons*. And on this score it is clear that one individual begins not only from a higher state, but also from a level of holiness which is a higher than the other individual arrives at over his whole life. Hence, in *Dialogi 2* Gregory says, “Everyone knows, Benedict as a boy began the grace of his life in a religious community with a high degree of perfection.”

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 184, aa. 6 and 8), holiness is a prerequisite for holy orders, whereas the religious state is an exercise for pursuing holiness. Hence, the weight of holy orders has to be imposed on walls that have already been dried by holiness, but the weight of religious life dries the walls, i.e., the men, of all the moisture of the vices.

Reply to objection 4: As is clear from the words of this Gloss, it is mainly talking about the order of teaching insofar as one has to go from what is easier to what is more difficult. Hence, it is clear from what follows that his claim that heretics and schismatics pervert this order pertains to the order of teaching. For it continues, “He says that he has preserved it”—viz., the aforementioned order—“binding himself by a curse as follows: ‘So I was humble not only in other things but also in knowledge. For I was thinking with humility, because I was first fed with milk, which is the Word made flesh, so that I might advance to the Bread of Angels, i.e., to the Word that is in the beginning with God.’”

Now the example that is posited in the middle, viz., that a fast is not imposed on the newly baptized until Pentecost, shows that there is no need to force difficult things on them before they are prompted interiorly by the Holy Spirit to take on difficult things by their own choice. Hence, after Pentecost, after the reception of the Holy Spirit, the Church celebrates a fast. Now as Ambrose says in *Super Lucam*, the Holy Spirit “is not confined to particular ages, limited by death, or excluded from the womb.” Again, in a homily for Pentecost Gregory says, “He fills the boy harpist and makes him a psalmist; he fills the boy who is abstaining and makes him a judge of old men [Daniel 1:8-17].” And later he adds, “No delay keeps Him from teaching everything that He wants to teach; He teaches as soon as He touches the mind.” And as Ecclesiastes 8:8 says, “It is not in a man’s power to stop the Spirit.” And in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 the Apostle warns us, “Do not extinguish the Spirit.” And Acts 7:51 says against certain individuals, “You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

Reply to objection 5: Certain of the commandments, viz., the precepts of charity, are principles that are the ends of both the commandments and the counsels. The counsels are ordered toward those precepts not in such a way that without the counsels the precepts cannot be kept, but in the sense that the precepts are observed more perfectly through the counsels. On the other hand, there are other, secondary, commandments that are ordered toward the precepts of charity in the sense that without them the precepts of charity cannot be observed in any way at all. So, therefore, the *perfect* observance of the precepts of charity precedes the counsels *in intention* but sometimes follows them *in time*. For this is an ordering of an end with respect to the means to that end. By contrast, the observance *in the common manner* (*secundum communem modum*) of the precepts of charity and, similarly, of other commandments, is related to the counsels as the common is related to the proper, since the observance of the commandments can exist without the counsels, but not vice versa.

So, then, the observance of the commandments taken in general precedes the counsels in the order

of *nature*, but it is not necessary for the observance of the commandments to precede the counsels in *time*, since it is not the case that a thing is in a genus prior to being in any of its species. On the other hand, the observance of the commandments *without* the counsels is ordered toward the observance of the commandments *with* the counsels, in the way that an imperfect species is ordered toward a perfect species, e.g., *non-rational animal* toward *rational animal*. Now the perfect is naturally prior to the imperfect, since, as Boethius puts it, “Nature takes its origin from what is perfect.”

And yet it is not necessary that the commandments be observed first without the counsels and afterwards with the counsels, just as it is not necessary for an individual to be a donkey before he is a man, or for an individual to be married before she is a virgin. Similarly, it is not necessary for an individual to keep the commandments in the world before he passes into a religious order, especially because life in the world does not dispose one toward the perfection of the religious state, but instead impedes it.

Article 2

May individuals be obligated by a vow to enter a religious order?

It seems that no one should be obligated by a vow to enter a religious order (*non debeant aliqui voto obligari ad religionis ingressum*):

Objection 1: Through his [religious] profession an individual is tied by a vow to a religious order. But before the profession he is given a year of probation—this according to the rule of St. Benedict and according to the statute of Pope Innocent IV, who also forbade individuals to be tied to a religious order by a profession before the year has been completed. Therefore, it seems that, *a fortiori*, they should not be obligated to a religious order while they are still living in the world.

Objection 2: In *Register* Gregory says, and this is contained in *Decretals*, dist. 45, that Jews “should be persuaded to convert not by force, but by their free will.” But to fulfill what is vowed involves necessitation. Therefore, individuals must not be obligated to enter a religious order.

Objection 3: No one should present someone else with an occasion for ruin; hence, Exodus 21:33-34 says, “If anyone opens a pit ... and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit will pay back the price of the beasts.” But by the fact that certain individuals are obligated by a vow to enter a religious order, it frequently happens that some fall into despair and into different sorts of sin. Therefore, it seems that no one should be obligated by a vow to enter a religious order.

But contrary to this: Psalm 75:12 says, “Vow, and render to the Lord your God,” where a Gloss comments, “There are certain vows proper to individuals, such as vows of chastity, virginity, and the like; hence, [Sacred Scripture] is inviting us to make these vows.” But Sacred Scripture invites us to do only what is better. Therefore, it is better for someone to obligate himself by a vow to enter a religious order.

I respond: As was explained above when we were talking about vows (q. 88, a. 6), one and the same work is such that if it is done because of a vow, it is more praiseworthy than if it is done without a vow—both because (a) vowing is an act of [the virtue of] religion, which has a certain preeminence among the virtues, and also because (b) a man’s will is strengthened by a vow for doing good, and just as a sin is more grave by the fact that it proceeds from a will that is obstinate in evil, so a good work is more praiseworthy by the fact that it proceeds toward the good from a will strengthened by a vow. And so it is praiseworthy in its own right (*secundum se*) for someone to be obligated by a vow to enter a religious order.

Reply to objection 1: There are two sorts of religious vows (*duplex es religionis votum*):

One is a *solemn* vow, which makes a man a monk or a friar of some religious order and which is

called a *profession*. And, as the objection shows, a year of probation must precede this sort of vow.

The other is a *simple* vow, by which an individual does not become monk or religious, but is instead obligated only to enter a religious order. And it is not necessary for a year of probation to precede this sort of vow.

Reply to objection 2: This passage from Gregory is talking about *absolute force* (*de violentia absoluta*). But the necessity required by the obligation that attaches to a vow is not an *absolute necessity*; instead, it is a *necessity of the end*. This is because, after making the vow, the individual cannot attain the end of salvation unless he fulfills the vow. But this sort of necessity need not be avoided. To the contrary, as Augustine explains to Armentarius and Paulinus (*Epistola* 127), “Happy is the necessity that carries one on to better things.”

Reply to objection 3: Vowing to enter a religious order is a sort of strengthening of the will with respect to better things. And, as far as it itself is concerned, it does not give a man an occasion for ruin, but instead eliminates an occasion for ruin. On the other hand, if an individual comes to a graver ruin by breaking the vow, this does not detract from the goodness of the vow, just as it does not detract from the goodness of baptism that some individuals sin more gravely after baptism.

Article 3

Is an individual who has been obligated by a vow to enter a religious order bound to enter?

It seems that an individual who has been obligated by a vow to enter a religious order is not bound to enter (*ille qui obligatus est voto ad religionis ingressum non teneatur intrare*):

Objection 1: *Decretals* 17, q. 2 says, “At one time Consaldus, a [parish] priest oppressed by suffering from an illness, promised that he would become a monk. However, he did not tie himself to any particular monastery or abbot, and he did not commit his promise to writing, but instead renounced his benefice from the [local] church by the hand of a lawyer. Now after he was restored to health, he refused to become a monk.” And later it adds, “We judge that the aforementioned priest may recover his benefice and sacred duties and retain them in peace.” But this would not have occurred if he had been bound to enter a religious order. Therefore, it seems that no one is bound to fulfill a vow by which he has obligated himself to enter a religious order.

Objection 2: No one is bound to do anything that is not within his power. But an individual’s entering a religious order is not within his own power; instead, what is required for this is the assent of those whom he is supposed to be joining. Therefore, it seems that no one is bound to fulfill a vow by which he has obligated himself to enter a religious order.

Objection 3: One cannot through a less useful vow remove a more useful vow. But fulfilling a religious vow could impede the fulfillment of a ‘vow of the Cross’ in support of the Holy Land, which seems more useful, since through the latter vow a man receives the remission of his sins. Therefore, it seems that a vow by which an individual obligates himself to enter a religious order does not have to be fulfilled out of necessity.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiastes 5:3 says, “If you have vowed something to God, do not delay in rendering that thing, for a faithless and foolish promise displeases God.” And a Gloss on Psalm 75:12 (“Vow, and render to the Lord your God”) says, “Vowing is left to the will, but after the promise of a vow, rendering that vow is required out of necessity.”

I respond: As was explained above when we were talking about vows (q. 88, a. 1), a vow is a promise made to God concerning things that involve God. Now as Gregory says in *Epistola ad Bonifacium*, “If among men contracts of good faith are normally not broken for any reason, how much

more is it the case that a promise that one has pledged to God cannot be broken without retribution?” And so a man is bound to fulfill what he has vowed, as long as it is something that involves God.

Now it is clear that entry into a religious order especially involves God, since, as is clear from what was said above (186, a. 1), through it a man delivers himself up totally to serving God. Hence, it follows that an individual who obligates himself to enter a religious order is bound to enter that religious order insofar as he intends to obligate himself by a vow in such a way that, if he intends to obligate himself absolutely speaking, then he is bound to enter as soon as he can, once legitimate impediments are no longer present. On the other hand, if he vows it for a certain time or under a certain condition, then he is bound to enter the religious order when the time arrives or when the condition obtains.

Reply to objection 1: The priest in question made a *simple* vow and not a *solemn* vow. Hence, he had not become a monk in the sense that he ought to be forced by law to remain in a monastery or leave his [local] church.

However, in the forum of conscience he should be advised to leave everything and enter a religious order. Hence, *Extra, De voto et voti redemptione*, chap. *Per tuas*, advises the bishop of Grenoble, who had accepted his episcopal office after having vowed to enter a religious order and without having fulfilled the vow, that “if he wants to heal his conscience, he should resign the rule over his [local] church and render his vows to the Most High.”

Reply to objection 2: As was explained above when we were talking about vows (q. 8, a. 3, ad 2), an individual who obligates himself by a vow to enter a given religious order is bound to do as much as is within his power to be received into that religious order.

And if he intends to obligate himself with respect to religious life absolutely speaking, then if he is not received into one religious order, he is bound to go to another. On the other hand, if he intends to obligate himself specifically with respect to a single religious order alone, then he is bound only according the mode of his obligation.

Reply to objection 3: Since a religious vow is perpetual, it is greater than a vow to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is temporal. And as Alexander III says, and this is contained in *Extra, De voto et voti Redemptione*, “An individual who is known to change a temporary service [to God] into the perpetual service of the religious state is in no way guilty of breaking a vow.”

Now one could reasonably reply that an individual likewise acquires the remission of all sins by entering a religious order. For if a man can make immediate satisfaction for his sins by giving some alms—this according to Daniel 4:24 (“Make up for your sins with alms”)—then, *a fortiori*, it suffices for the satisfaction for all sins that an individual should tie himself totally to the service of God by entering a religious order, which exceeds every genus of satisfaction, even public penance, as is stated in *Decretals* 33, q. 2, chap. *Admonere*—in the same way that a holocaust likewise exceeds a sacrifice, as Gregory points out in *Super Ezechiel*. Hence, in *Vitae Patrum* one reads that those entering a religious order acquire the same grace as those receiving baptism.

However, even if they were not thereby absolved of all susceptibility to punishment, still, entering a religious order is more advantageous than making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land as far making progress in the good is concerned, and this is more important than being absolved of punishment.

Article 4

Is an individual who vows to enter a religious order obligated to remain in the religious state in perpetuity?

It seems that an individual who vows to enter a religious order is obligated to remain in the religious state in perpetuity (*ille qui vovet religionem ingredi teneatur perpetuo in religione permanere*):

Objection 1: It is better not to enter the religious state than to leave it after entering—this according to 2 Peter 2:21 (“It would have been better for them not to know the truth than to turn back after it has been known”), and according to Luke 9:62 (“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”). But, as has been explained (art. 3), an individual who obligates himself by a vow to enter a religious order is bound to enter it. Therefore, he is likewise bound to remain there in perpetuity.

Objection 2: An individual ought to avoid that from which scandal follows and by which bad example is given to others. But by the very fact that, after entering a religious order, an individual leaves and returns to the world, bad example and scandal are generated for others who hold back from entering or stimulated to leave. Therefore, it seems that an individual who enters a religious order in order to fulfill a vow that he has previously made is obligated to remain there in perpetuity.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 3, ad 3 and q. 88, a. 12, ad 1), the vow of religion is thought of as a perpetual vow, and this is why it outranks temporary vows. But this would not be the case if an individual, having made a religious vow, entered with the intention of leaving. Therefore, it seems that an individual who vows to enter a religious order is also bound to remain in the religious order in perpetuity.

But contrary to this: Because the vow of profession obligates a man to remain in a religious order in perpetuity, it requires a year of probation ahead of time—something that is not required ahead of time for the simple vow by which an individual obligates himself to enter a religious order. Therefore, it seems that an individual who vows to enter a religious order is not thereby bound to remain there in perpetuity.

I respond: The obligation that attaches to a vow proceeds from the will, since, as Augustine says, “To vow belongs to the will.” Therefore, the obligation that attaches to a vow is carried as far as the act of willing and intending the vow extends. Therefore, if the individual making the vow intends to obligate himself not only to enter a religious order but to remain there in perpetuity, then he is bound to remain there in perpetuity. By contrast, if he intends to obligate himself to enter a religious order for the sake of trying it out, with the freedom to remain or not to remain, then it is clear that he is not bound to remain.

On the other hand, if in making his vow he was thinking simply about entering a religious order without thinking about the freedom to leave or about remaining in perpetuity, then it seems that he is obligated to enter according to the general law, which is that a year of probation is given to those who are entering. Hence, he is not bound to remain in the religious state in perpetuity.

Reply to objection 1: It is better to enter a religious order with the intention of trying it out than not to enter at all, since one is thereby disposed toward remaining in perpetuity.

Nor, again, is someone understood to be “turning back” or “looking back” except when he fails to do what he has obligated himself to do. Otherwise, if an individual is doing a good work *for some period of time*, he would be unfit for the kingdom of God if he were not *always* doing it—which is clearly false.

Reply to objection 2: If someone who enters a religious order leaves, especially for some sensible reason, he does not generate a scandal or give bad example. And if someone else is scandalized, this will be *passive* scandal on his part and not *active* scandal on the part of the one who is leaving, since the latter has done what he was permitted to do and what was expedient for him to do for some sensible reason, e.g., illness or weakness or something of this sort.

Reply to objection 3: An individual who enters in order to leave immediately does not seem to be fulfilling his vow, since he did not intend this in making the vow. And he is bound to alter his intention, with the result that he at least wants to test whether it is expedient for him to remain in the religious order. But he is not bound to remain in perpetuity.

Article 5

Should children be received into a religious order?

It seems that children should not be received into a religious order (*pueri non sint recipiendi in religione*):

Objection 1: *Extra, De regularibus et transeuntibus ad religionem*, chap. *Nullus*, says, “No one may be tonsured unless he is of legal age and has free will.” But children do not seem to have either legal age or free will, since they do not have the complete use of reason. Therefore, it seems that they should not be received into a religious order.

Objection 2: The religious state seems to be a state of penitence; hence, as Augustine explains in *De Civitate Dei* 10, ‘religion’ comes either from *religere* (to fasten again) or from *reeligere* (to choose again). But penitence is inappropriate for children. Therefore, it seems that they should not enter a religious order.

Objection 3: An individual is obligated by a vow (*votum*) in the same way that he is obligated by an oath (*iuramentum*). But as is stated in *Decretals* 22, q. 5, chaps. *Pueri* and *Honestum*, children under the age of fourteen should not be obligated by an oath. Therefore, it seems that neither should they be obligated by a vow.

Objection 4: It seems to be illicit to bind an individual by an obligation that can be justly cancelled. But if pre-pubescent individuals obligate themselves to enter a religious order, they can be withdrawn by their parents or guardians. For *Decretals* 20, q. 2 says, “If a girl under twelve years of age has taken the sacred veil of her own accord, her parents or guardians can, if they so choose, declare the deed null and void.” Therefore, it is illicit for children, especially before the age of puberty, to be received into, or obligated to, a religious order.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 19:14 our Lord says, “Let the little children (*sinite parvulos*) come to me and do not stop them from coming.” In *Super Mattheum* Origen, in expounding this passage, says, “Before the disciples of Jesus learn the nature of righteousness, they rebuke those who offer their children and infants to Christ. But our Lord exhorts his disciples to condescend to serving the children. Therefore, we should pay attention to this, lest, in deeming our wisdom more excellent, we despise the Church’s little ones, as though we were great, forbidding the children to come to Jesus.”

I respond: As was explained above (a. 2), there are two sorts of religious vow:

One sort is a *simple vow*, and it consists just in a promise which is made to God and which proceeds from the interior deliberation of the mind. And this sort of vow has its efficacy from divine law. Yet there are two ways in which this efficacy can be removed. The first way is through a defect in the deliberation, as is clear in the case of the insane, whose vows are not obligatory—this according to *Decretals, Extra, De regularibus et transeuntibus ad religionem*, chap. *Sicut tenor*. And this same reasoning applies to children who do not yet have the sort of use of reason that is required for them to be capable of guile—which boys frequently have around the age of fourteen and girls around the age of twelve, which is called the age of puberty. In some of them, however, this age comes earlier and in others it comes later, given the different dispositions of their natures. In a second way, the efficacy of a simple vow is impeded if an individual vows to God something that is not within his own power—as, for instance, if a servant, even one who has the use of reason, vows to enter a religious order, or is even ordained, without his master’s knowledge. For his master can revoke this vow—this according to *Decretals*, dist. 54, chap. *Si servus*. And since pre-pubescent boys and girls are in the power of their fathers as regards the disposition of their lives, the father can—as is said explicitly of women in Numbers 30:4-6—revoke their vow or accept it if it pleases him.

So, then, if, before the age of puberty, a child makes a simple vow before he has the full use of reason, then he is not obligated by the vow. On the other hand, if he has the use of reason before the age

of puberty, he is obligated by the vow as far as he himself is concerned, but the obligation can be removed by the authority of his father, in whose power he still remains. For the ordinance of law by which one man is subject to another has to do with what happens in most cases. However, if the child is beyond the age of puberty, the vow cannot be revoked by the authority of the parents, but if he does not yet have the full use of reason, he is not obligated in the eyes of God.

Now it is different with a *solemn vow*, which makes an individual a monk or a religious. This sort of vow is subject to the Church's ordinance because of the solemnity that it has attached to it. And since the Church looks to what is the case in most instances, a profession made before the age of puberty—even if the individual has the use of reason to the extent of being capable of guile—does not have its effect of making the one who makes the profession now a religious.

And yet, even though individuals cannot make their profession before the age of puberty, they can, with the consent of their parents, be received into a religious order as one to be nurtured—just as, in Luke 1:80, we read of John the Baptist that “the boy grew and was strengthened in spirit, and lived in the wilderness.” Hence, as Gregory relates in *Dialogi* 2, “Roman nobles began to give their sons to St. Benedict to be nurtured for God almighty,” a practice that is most expedient—this according to Lamentations 3:27 (“It is good for a man when he has borne the yoke from his youth”). Hence, it is a common custom for children to apply themselves to those roles or skills by which they are going to make their living.

Reply to objection 1: The legal age for an individual's being tonsured with a solemn religious vow is the time of puberty, in which a man is able to make use of his own will. But before the age of puberty there can be a legal age at which an individual is tonsured in order to be nourished within a religious order.

Reply to objection 2: As has been established (q. 186, a. 1, ad 4), the religious state is mainly ordered toward attaining perfection, and on this score it is a fitting state for children, who are easily trained. And this is said to be a ‘state of penitence’ as something concomitant (*ex consequenti*), in the sense that, as was explained above (*ibid.*), occasions of sin are removed by the observances of a religious order.

Reply to objection 3: Just as children are not forced to swear, as the cited canon states, so they are not forced to make a vow. However, if they have bound themselves to do something by swearing or by making a vow, then they are obligated in the eyes of God as long as they have the use of reason, even if they are not obligated in the eyes of the Church before the age of fourteen.

Reply to objection 4: In Numbers 30 a woman who is at girlish age is not rebuked if she makes a vow with the consent of her parents, though the vow can be revoked by her parents. From this it is clear that she does not sin by making a vow, but instead it means that she can obligate herself by a vow as far as she herself is concerned, without prejudice to parental authority.

Article 6

Should anyone be held back from entering a religious order out of deference to his parents?

It seems that some individuals should be held back from entering a religious order out of deference to his parents (*propter obsequium parentum debeant aliqui retrahi ab ingressu religionis*):

Objection 1: It is impermissible to omit what is necessary in order that what one is free to will might be done. But deferring to parents falls under the necessity of the precept that is given in Exodus 20:12 about honoring one's parents; hence, in 1 Timothy 5:4 the Apostle likewise says, “If any widow has children or grandchildren, let her at first learn to govern her own family and then let them

make some return to their parents.” But to enter a religious order is something one is free to will. Therefore, it seems that an individual should not omit deference to his parents for the sake of entering a religious order.

Objection 2: A child seems to be more subject to his parents than a servant is to his master, since sonship (*filiatio*) is natural, whereas servitude, as is clear from Genesis 9:22, comes from the curse of sin. But as one sees from *Decretals*, dist. 54, chap. *Si servus*, a servant cannot omit deference to his master in order to enter a religious order or take on holy orders. Therefore, *a fortiori*, a child cannot omit deference to his father in order to enter a religious order.

Objection 3: An individual is obligated by a greater debt to his parents than to those whom he owes money to. But individuals who owe money to anyone cannot enter a religious order. For in *Registro*—and this is contained in *Decretals*, dist. 53—Gregory says, “If individuals who have business obligations seek to enter a monastery at any time, they are in no way to be admitted unless they have first been freed from all their business affairs.” Therefore, *a fortiori*, children cannot enter a religious order without deferring to their parents.

But contrary to this: Matthew 4:22 says that James and John, “having left their nets and their father, followed the Lord.” From this, as Hilary puts it, “... we learn that those who would follow Christ are not bound by the cares of secular life or by the customs of their father’s house.”

I respond: As was explained above when we were talking about [the virtue of] piety (q. 101, a. 2), parents have the nature of a principle insofar as they are parents, and so it befits them *in their own right* (*per se eis convenit*) to have the care of their children. Because of this, an individual who has children is not permitted to enter a religious order while altogether omitting the care of his children, i.e., without providing for how they are to be brought up and educated. For 1 Timothy 5:8 says, “If anyone does not take care of his own ... he has denied the Faith and is worse than a non-believer.” On the other hand, it befits parents *incidentally* (*per accidens parentibus convenit*) to be assisted by their children, viz., insofar as they find themselves in some sort of necessity.

And so one should reply that if the parents are in need in such a way that they cannot be appropriately helped otherwise than through being assisted by their children, then the children are not permitted to enter a religious order without deferring to their parents. On the other hand, if the parents are not in need to the extent that they greatly require the assistance of their children, the children can enter a religious order without deferring to their parents and even against their parents’ strong desires. For after the age of puberty, every free-born individual has freedom with respect to those things that pertain to the arrangement of his state in life, especially in those matters that have to do with serving God. As the Apostle says in Hebrews 12:9, “We should rather obey the Father of our spirits, that we may live, than the parents of our flesh.” Hence, as we read in Matthew 8:22 and Luke 9:62, our Lord rebuked the disciple who did not want to follow Him immediately because he was going to bury his father; for as Chrysostom remarks, “There were others by whom this task could be accomplished.”

Reply to objection 1: The commandment about honoring one’s parents extends not only to bodily service, but also to spiritual service and to showing reverence. And so even those who are in the religious state can fulfill the commandment to honor their parents—by praying for them, by giving reverence to them, and by giving them assistance insofar as this is fitting for religious. For even those who live in the world honor their parents in diverse ways according to their own situations.

Reply to objection 2: Since servitude is imposed as a punishment for sin, it follows that by servitude a man is deprived of something that would otherwise belong to him, viz., the ability to decide freely about his own person. For “a servant belongs wholly to his master” (*Politics* 1).

By contrast, by being subject to his father a child does not suffer any loss that would make him unable to freely decide about his own person by transferring himself to the service of God, where the latter is especially relevant to the good for a human being.

Reply to objection 3: An individual who has a fixed obligation cannot licitly ignore it if he has the

means to fulfil it. And so if an individual is obligated to make an accounting to someone or to pay back a fixed debt, he cannot lawfully ignore this obligation in order to enter a religious order.

However, if he owes a sum of money and does not have the means to repay it, he is obligated to do what he can, viz., by surrendering his *goods* to his creditor. According to civil law, it is not the *person* of a free man that is obligated because of money, but only his *property*, since the person of a free man “supercedes every monetary valuation.” Hence, after surrendering his property, the individual may licitly enter a religious order; nor is he obligated to remain in the world in order to procure the means to pay back the debt.

Now a child is not obligated by any specific debt to his father—except, as has been explained, in a case of necessity.

Article 7

Can parish priests licitly enter a religious order?

It seems that parish priests (*presbyteri curati*) cannot licitly enter a religious order:

Objection 1: In *Pastoralis* Gregory says that an individual who undertakes the care of souls “receives a terrible warning when it is said in Proverbs 6:1, ‘My son, if you have made a solemn promise on behalf of a friend, you have given your pledge to a stranger.’” And he adds, “For to make a solemn promise on behalf of a friend is to receive the soul of another at the danger of your own way of life.” But an individual who is obligated to a man for some debt cannot enter a religious order unless he pays what he owes, if this is possible. Therefore, since a [parish] priest is able to carry out the care of souls which he has obligated himself to at the danger of his own soul, it seems that he is not permitted to enter a religious order while foregoing the care of souls.

Objection 2: What is permissible for one individual is, by parity of reasoning, permissible for all similar individuals. But if every priest having the care of souls were to enter a religious order, the people would be left without pastoral care—which would be wrong. Therefore, it seems that parish priests cannot licitly enter a religious order.

Objection 3: Among the acts toward which religious orders are directed, the principal ones are those by which they pass on to others the fruits of their own contemplation. But acts of this sort are appropriate to parish priests and archdeacons, to whom it belongs *ex officio* to preach and to hear confessions. Therefore, it seems that a parish priest or archdeacon is not permitted to transfer to a religious order.

But contrary to this: *Decretals* 19, q. 2, chap. *Duae sunt leges* says, “If an individual cleric is maintaining the people in his church under the bishop and living his life as a secular, then if, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he wishes to work out his salvation in a monastery or under some canonical rule, he may go freely by our authority, even if his bishop disagrees.”

I respond: As was explained above (a. 4 and q. 88, a. 12), the obligation of a perpetual vow takes precedence over every other obligation. Now it belongs properly to bishops and religious to be obligated by a perpetual and solemn vow to make time for serving God. Parish priests and archdeacons, on the other hand, are not obligated by a perpetual and solemn vow to maintain the care of souls in the way that bishops are so obligated. Hence, “bishops cannot lay aside their episcopate for any reason whatsoever without the authority of the Roman Pontiff,” as is stated in *Decretals, Extra, De regularibus et transeuntibus*, chap. *Licet*, whereas archdeacons and parish priests can freely relinquish to their bishop the care of souls that has been committed to them without the special permission of the Pope, who alone can give a dispensation in the case of perpetual vows. Hence, it is clear that archdeacons and parish priests are permitted to transfer to a religious order.

Reply to objection 1: Parish priests and archdeacons have obligated themselves to carry out the care of their subjects as long as they maintain their archdiaconate or parish. However, they have not obligated themselves to retaining their archdiaconate or parish in perpetuity.

Reply to objection 2: As Jerome says in *Contra Vigilantium*, “Even though they”—namely, religious—“are made to suffer the savage bites of your poisonous tongue, when you argue by saying, ‘If they all shut themselves off and live in solitude, who will go to the churches? Who will win over worldly men? Who will be able to exhort sinners to be virtuous?’ Along the same lines, if everyone with you is a fool, then who can be wise? And virginity will not be commendable, since if they were all virgins and none got married, the human race would perish. Virtue is rare and not desired by many.” Therefore, it is clear that this fear is stupid—just as, for instance, if a man were to fear drawing water, lest the river run dry.

Reply to objection 3: [*No reply is given.*]

Article 8

Is it permissible to transfer from one religious order to another?

It seems that it is not permissible to transfer from one religious order to another, even to a stricter one (*non liceat de una religione transire ad aliam, etiam arctiorem*):

Objection 1: In Hebrews 10:25 the Apostle says, “... not forsaking our company, as is the habit of some ...”, where an [interlinear] Gloss says, “More specifically, either those who depart due to fear of persecution, or those who, out of their own presumptuousness, withdraw from the sinful or the imperfect in order to appear righteous.” But the latter is what those who transfer from one religious order to another, more perfect, religious order seem to be doing. Therefore, it is impermissible.

Objection 2: As is stated in *Decretals, Extra, De statu monachorum et canonicorum regularium*, chap. *Quod Dei timorem*, the profession made by monks is more strict than the profession made by canons regular. But it is not permissible to pass from the state of canon regulars to the state of monks; for in *Decretals* 19, q. 3 it says, “Our command is that we universally prohibit any professed canon regular from becoming a monk, unless—let it not be!—he has fallen into public sin.” Therefore, it seems that no one is permitted to transfer from one religious order to another, greater, religious order.

Objection 3: An individual is obligated to fulfill what he has vowed for as long as he can licitly fulfill it. For instance, if an individual vows to observe continence, then even after making a verbal matrimonial contract at the present moment, before sexual intercourse, he is still bound to fulfill the vow, since he is able to do this by entering a religious order. Therefore, if someone is licitly able to pass from one religious order to another, he will be obligated to do this if he has previously vowed to do it while he was living in the world. But this seems wrong, since in many cases a scandal would thereby be generated. Therefore, no religious of a given religious order can transfer to another, stricter, religious order.

But contrary to this: *Decretals* 20, q. 4 says, “If sacred virgins have planned, for the good of their soul, to move to another monastery because of its stricter life and have decided to remain there, the holy synod allows them to do so.” And the same line of reasoning seems to hold for any religious whatsoever. Therefore, an individual can licitly transfer from one religious order to another.

I respond: It is not praiseworthy to transfer from one religious order to another except for the sake of some great *advantage* or of some great *necessity*. This is because both (a) those who are left behind are very often scandalized, and also because (b), other things being equal, an individual makes progress more easily in a religious order that he is used to than in a religious order that he is not used to. Hence, in *Collationes Patrum* the abbot Nesteros says, “It is advantageous for each individual that he should, according to the plan that he has chosen, hasten with the greatest zeal and diligence to arrive at the

completion of the work he has seized upon and in no way to depart from the profession that he at one time chose to make.” And later, giving the reason for this, he adds, “It is impossible for one and the same man to sustain all the virtues at once. For if he wants to attempt them equally, he will necessarily fall into acquiring none of them wholly while pursuing all of them.” For different religious orders excel in different works of virtue.

Nevertheless, it is possible for an individual to transfer in a praiseworthy manner from one religious order to another—and this for three reasons:

First, *out of zeal for a more perfect religious life*. As was explained above (q. 188, a. 6), excellence has to do not with strictness alone, but, principally, with what the religious order is directed toward and, secondarily, with respect to the discernment with which the observances are proportioned to the due end.

Second, *because of the decline of the religious order from its due perfection*. For instance, if in some older religious order the religious begin to live in too loose a way, it is praiseworthy for an individual to transfer even to a lesser religious order if its rule is better observed—in the way that in *Collationes Patrum* the abbot John reports about himself that from the solitary life in which he had made his profession he transferred to a lesser religious order, viz., one composed of those who were living in community—and this because the hermetic life had begun to decline and to be observed in a looser way.

Third, *because of illness or weakness (propter infirmitatem vel debilitatem)*, in light of which it sometimes happens that an individual is unable to observe the statutes of a stricter religious order, but would be able to observe the statutes of a more lax religious order.

But there are differences among these three cases. For in the first case, the individual should, out of humility, seek permission, and yet the permission cannot be denied to him as long as it is clear that the other religious order is higher; on the other hand, if this is doubted with some probability, the judgment of the superior *must* be sought in the matter, as is stated in *Extra, De regularibus et transeuntibus ad religionem*, chap. *Licet*. Similarly, the judgment of the superior is required in the second case. By contrast, in the third case the dispensation is likewise necessary.

Reply to objection 1: Those who transfer to a higher religious order do this not presumptuously, in order to *be seen as* righteous, but devoutly, in order to *become* more righteous.

Reply to objection 2: Both sorts of religious orders, viz., orders of monks and orders of canons regular, are directed toward the works of the contemplative life. Chief among these are the ones which are performed in the divine mysteries and toward which an order of canons regular is directly ordered, since it belongs to them in their own right to be religious clerics. By contrast, it does not belong to monks in their own right to be clerics—this according to *Decretals* 16, q. 1.

And so even though an order of monks has a more strict observance, if the monks are laymen and not clerics, they are permitted to transfer from their monastic order to an order of canons regular—this according to Jerome in *Ad Rusticum Monachum* (“Live in the monastery in such a way as to merit becoming a cleric”). However, as stated in *Decretals* 19, q. 3, in the decree cited in the objection, the converse does not hold.

Yet if the monks are clerics devoting themselves to the sacred mysteries, they already have what belongs to canons regular, along with a greater strictness. And so it will be permissible to transfer from an order of canons regular to an order of monks [who are clerics], provided that the individual asks for his superior’s permission—this according to *Decretals* 19, q. 3, chap. *Statuimus*.

Reply to objection 3: A solemn vow by which an individual is bound to a religious order is stronger than a simple vow by which an individual is tied to a greater religious order. For if, after the simple vow, an individual made a matrimonial contract, the marriage would not be invalidated in the way it would be after a solemn vow. And so an individual who has already made his profession in a lesser religious order is not obligated to fulfill the simple vow he once made to enter a greater religious order.

Article 9

Should an individual induce others to enter a religious order?

It seems that no one should induce others to enter a religious order (*nullus debeat alios inducere ad religionem intrandum*):

Objection 1: In his Rule, Saint Benedict mandates that “those who come to a religious order should not easily be offered entrance, but one must test whether their spirits are from God.” And in *De Institutis Coenobiorum* 4 Cassian likewise teaches the same thing. Therefore, *a fortiori*, it is not permissible to induce anyone to enter a religious order.

Objection 2: In Matthew 23:15 our Lord says, “Woe to you who traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he has become a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of Gehenna as you yourselves are.” But this is what those who induce men into a religious order seem to be doing. Therefore, this seems to be something blameworthy.

Objection 3: No one should induce an individual into anything that involves what is detrimental to him. But someone who induces men into a religious order sometimes causes harm thereby, since sometimes they are obligated to join a greater religious order. Therefore, it does not seem praiseworthy to induce anyone into a religious order.

But contrary to this: Exodus 26:3 says, “Let curtain pull curtain.” Therefore, one man should pull another into serving God.

I respond: Those who induce others to enter a religious order not only do not sin, but they merit a great reward. For James 5:20 says, “He who causes a sinner to be converted from the error of his way will save his own soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” And Daniel 12:3 says, “Those who instruct many to be just will be like stars for all eternity.”

However, there are three disorders that could infect an inducement of this sort:

First, if an individual *forces another against his will (violenter)* to enter a religious order; this is prohibited in *Decretals* 20, q. 3.

Second, if an individual *draws another to a religious order by simony, giving him bribes*; this is prohibited in *Decretals* 1, q. 2, chap. 2, *Quam pio*. (However, this does not apply if an individual is providing a poor person with necessities in the world, nurturing him for the religious life, or if, without any set plan, an individual gives small gifts in order to promote friendship.)

Third, if an individual *lures another with lies*. For in such a case the imminent danger is that the other, so induced, will turn back when he discovers that he has been deceived, and thus “the last state of that man will be worse than the first,” as Matthew 12:45 puts it.

Reply to objection 1: A time of probation is still reserved for those who are induced to enter a religious order, and during this time the difficulties of the religious state are experienced. And so they are not given an easy access to entrance into the religious state.

Reply to objection 2: According to Hilary, these words of our Lord were a prediction of the perverse zeal of Jews who, *after the preaching of Christ*, make themselves doubly children of Gehenna by drawing gentiles or even Christians to the Jewish rites. For, specifically, the former sins they have committed are not forgiven in Judaism, and they nonetheless incur the guilt of Judean infidelity. And on this interpretation, these words of our Lord are not relevant to the topic under discussion here.

On the other hand, according to Jerome, this passage refers to the Jews at a time when it was *still permissible to observe the rituals of the Law*, and it has to do with an individual whom they have converted to Judaism: “When he was a gentile, he was merely in error, but when he saw the vices of his teachers, he returned to his own vomit and became a gentile again—a prevaricator, as it were—and became worthy of a greater punishment.” From this it is clear that it is not blameworthy to draw others toward the worship of God. The only thing that is blameworthy is giving bad example to an individual

whom one has converted, with the result that he becomes worse.

Reply to objection 3: The lesser is included in the greater, And so an individual who is obligated by a vow or an oath to enter a lesser religious order can be licitly induced to pass into a greater religious order, unless there is something special that prevents this, e.g., an illness or the hope of making more progress in the lesser religious order.

By contrast, an individual who is obligated by a vow or oath to enter a greater religious order cannot be licitly induced to enter a lesser religious order, except because of some evident special reason, and this with a dispensation from the superior [of the greater order].

Article 10

Is it praiseworthy for an individual to enter a religious order without the advice of many people and without a long prior deliberation?

It seems that it is not praiseworthy for an individual to enter a religious order without the advice of many people and without a long prior deliberation (*non sit laudabile quod aliquis religionem ingrediatur absque multorum consilio et diuturna deliberatione praecedente*):

Objection 1: 1 John 4:1 says, “Do not trust every spirit, but probe the spirits to see if they are from God.” But sometimes the intention to enter a religious order is not from God, since frequently it is annulled by an exit from religious life, and as it says in Acts 5:38-39, “If this counsel or work is from God, you will not be able to destroy it.” Therefore, it seems that individuals should enter a religious order after a detailed prior examination (*magna examinatione praecedente*).

Objection 2: Proverbs 25:9 says, “Discuss your affairs with your friend.” But the matters that involve a change of state seem especially important to a man. Therefore, it seems that an individual should not enter a religious order without having previously discussed the matter at length with his friends.

Objection 3: In Luke 14:28ff. our Lord introduces the example of “a man who wants to build a tower,” saying that “he first sits down and calculates the expenditures that are required for it and whether or not he has the wherewithal to bring the job to completion,” lest he be ridiculed “because this man began to build [a tower] and was unable to finish it.” But as Augustine says in *Epistola ad Laetum*, the expense of building the tower “is nothing other than each individual’s renouncing everything that he possesses.” Now it sometimes happens that many are unable to do this and, similarly, unable to bear the other observances of a religious order. In a figure of this, 1 Kings 17:39 says, “David could not walk in Saul’s armor, because he was not used to it.” Therefore, it seems that an individual should not enter a religious order unless a long deliberation has taken place beforehand and advice has been gotten from many people.

But contrary to this: Matthew 4:20 reports that at the call of our Lord, Peter and Andrew, “leaving their nets, immediately followed Him.” Commenting on this in *Super Matthaeum*, Chrysostom says, “Christ seeks such obedience from us that we do not delay for even an instant.”

I respond: As the Philosopher explains in *Ethics* 3, long deliberation and the counsel of many people is required in momentous matters and in doubtful matters, whereas in matters that are certain and fixed, counsel is not required. Now as regards entrance into a religious order, there are three things that can be thought of:

First, *the very entrance into a religious order taken in its own right (secundum se)*. And on this score it is *certain* that entrance into a religious order is a better good, and anyone who has doubts about this, insofar as it is taken in itself, disparages Christ, who gave this advice. Hence, in *De Verbis Domini* Augustine says, “The East”—i.e., Christ—“calls you, and you are turned to the West,” i.e., to mortal

man, who is able to err.

The second way in which entrance into a religious order can be thought of is *by a comparison to the strengths of the individual who is going to enter the religious order*. And on this score there is again no room for doubt about entering a religious order, since those who enter religious orders are not confident that they can persist by *their own* power, but are instead confident that they can persist by the assistance of *God's* power—this according to Isaiah 40:31 (“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will take on wings like eagles, they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not fail”). However, if there is some *special obstacle*, e.g. a bodily illness or the burden of debts or something of this sort, deliberation *is* required concerning this, along with taking counsel with those whom they hope will help them and not impede them. Hence, Ecclesiasticus 37:12 says, “Consulting with an irreligious man about holiness? And with an unjust man about justice?”—as if to answer “No!”. Hence, the text goes on, “Pay no attention to them in any matter of counsel, but stick with a holy man.” Yet in these matters one should not make long deliberations. Hence, in *Epistola ad Paulinum* Jerome says, “Hasten, I pray you, cut off rather than loosen the rope that ties the boat to the shore.”

Third, one can think of *the manner of entering a religious order and which religious order one should enter*. And on these matters an individual can likewise take counsel with people who will not impede him.

Reply to objection 1: What it says, viz., “Probe the spirits to see if they are from God,” has a place in those matters in which there are doubts about whether it is the Spirit of God. For instance, there can be doubt for those who are already in the religious state about whether someone who offers himself for the religious state is being led by the Spirit of God or whether he is approaching under some pretense; and so they have to test whether an individual who approaches is being moved by the Spirit of God. But for someone who is approaching a religious order there can be no doubt about whether the intention to enter a religious order has arisen in his heart from the Spirit of God, whose role is “to lead a man into the land of uprightness” (Psalm 142:10).

Nor does the fact that some individuals turn back show that it is not from God. For not everything that is from God is incorruptible. Otherwise, corruptible creatures would not be from God, just as the Manicheans claimed; nor would those who have grace from God be able to lose it, which is heretical. However, “the counsel of God,” by which He makes corruptible and changeable things, is imperishable—this according to Isaiah 46 (“My counsel will stand, and all of my will shall be done”). And so the intention to enter a religious order does not need any proof of whether it is from God; for as a Gloss on 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (“Test everything”) says, “Things that are certain do not require discussion.”

Reply to objection 2: Just as, according to Galatians 5:17, “The flesh lusts against the spirit,” so, too, it frequently happens that carnal friends oppose spiritual progress—this according to Micah 7:6 (“A man’s enemies are of his own household”). Hence, in commenting on Luke 9:61 (“Let me first take leave of those who are at home”), Cyril says, “By asking to take leave of those who are at home, he shows that he is to some extent divided. For communicating with his neighbors, and consulting those unwilling to savor what is wise, indicates that he is still to some extent languishing and holding back. Because of this, he hears from our Lord, ‘No man, when he has put his hand to the plough and then looks back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’ For one who looks back is seeking a delay as an occasion for going home and conferring with those close to him.”

Reply to objection 3: The building of the tower signifies the perfection of the Christian life. The renunciation of what one possesses is the expenditure for building the tower. No one doubts or deliberates about whether he wants to have the resources, or about whether he can build the tower if he has the resources. Instead, what is taken under consideration is whether he actually has the resources. Similarly, what does not need to fall under deliberation is whether an individual ought to renounce everything that he possesses, or whether, by doing so, he will be able to arrive at perfection. Instead,

what falls under deliberation is whether what he is doing amounts to “renouncing everything that he possesses,” since unless he renounces everything—i.e., unless he has the resources—“he is unable,” as is added, “to be a disciple of Christ”—i.e., he is unable to build the tower.

Now the fear of those who worry about whether they will be able to arrive at perfection by entering a religious order is unreasonable, and this is shown by the example of many. Hence, in *Confessiones* 8 Augustine says, “In the direction toward which I had turned my face and was quivering in fear of going, there appeared to me the chaste dignity of continence, uprightly alluring me to come to her and not hesitate, and stretching forth her loving hands to receive and embrace me, hands full of multitudes of good examples. There were so many young men and maidens there, much youthfulness and every age, grave widows and aged virgins. And she laughed at me with a persuasive mockery, as if to say, ‘Can you not do what these youths and maidens can? Or are they able to do it by themselves and not in the Lord their God? Why do you stand by yourself and not stand? Cast yourself upon Him. Fear not that He will withdraw Himself, that you should fall. Cast yourself securely upon Him, and He will receive you and heal you.’”

The example introduced about David is not to the point, since Saul’s armor, as the Gloss says, are “the sacraments of the [Old] Law as something burdensome,” whereas the religious state is “the sweet yoke of Christ.” For as Gregory says in *Moralia* 4, “What burden does He lay on the shoulders of the mind, He who commands us to avoid all desires that perturb us, He who warns us to turn aside from the laborious paths of this world?”

To those indeed who take this sweet yoke upon themselves He promises the eating of the divine fruit and everlasting rest for their souls. To this we are led by the one who makes the promise, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is above all things, God blessed forever. Amen.