

QUESTION 32

The Works of Mercy (Almsgiving)

We next have to consider almsgiving or the works of mercy. And on this topic there are ten questions: (1) Is almsgiving or doing a work of mercy (*eleemosynae largitio*) an act of charity? (2) How are the works of mercy divided? (3) Which are the most important works of mercy, the spiritual or corporal? (4) Do the corporal works of mercy have a spiritual effect? (5) Does doing the works of mercy fall under a precept? (6) Should a corporal work of mercy be done from resources that are necessary for one to live on? (7) Should a corporal work of mercy be done from resources that have been unjustly acquired? (8) Whose role is it to do the works of mercy? (9) To whom should the works of mercy be done? (10) How should the works of mercy be done?

Article 1

Is almsgiving or doing a work of mercy an act of charity?

It seems that almsgiving or doing a work of mercy (*dare eleemosynam*), is not an act of charity:

Objection 1: An act of charity cannot exist in the absence of charity. But almsgiving can exist in the absence of charity—this according to 1 Corinthians 13:3 (“If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor ... but do not have charity ...”). Therefore, almsgiving or doing a work of mercy is not an act of charity.

Objection 2: The works of mercy (*eleemosyna*) are numbered among the acts of satisfaction—this according to Daniel 4:24 (“Redeem your sins with alms, and your iniquities with works of mercy for the poor”). Therefore, almsgiving is an act of justice and not of charity.

Objection 3: To offer sacrifice to God is an act of worship (*actus latriae*). But to do a work of mercy is to offer sacrifice to God—this according to Hebrews 13:16 (“Do not forget to do good and to share, for God is merited by such sacrifices”). Therefore, a work of mercy is an act of worship and not an act of charity.

Objection 4: To give something for the sake of some good is an act of generosity (*actus liberalitatis*). But this is especially done in almsgiving or doing a work of mercy. Therefore, almsgiving or doing a work of mercy is not an act of charity.

But contrary to this: 1 John 3:17 says, “How does the charity of God abide in one who has the substance of this world and sees his brother in need and does not have compassion on him?”

I respond: Exterior acts are referred back to the virtue that the motive for doing such acts is related to. Now the motive for a work of mercy is to alleviate need for someone who is enduring it. Hence, there are some who, in defining almsgiving (*definientes eleemosynam*), say that almsgiving is a work by which something is given to someone who is needy out of compassion because of God. This motive, as was explained above (q. 30, a. 4), belongs to mercy.

Hence, it is clear that to give alms is properly speaking an act of mercy. This is apparent from the name itself. For in Greek ‘*eleemosynae*’ comes from ‘pity’ (*eleos*), just as in Latin ‘*miseratio*’ comes from ‘pity’ (*miser cordia*). And since, as was shown above (q. 30, a. 2), mercy is an effect of charity, it follows that almsgiving is an act of charity, mediated by mercy.

Reply to objection 1: There are two ways in which something is said to be an act of a given virtue.

In one way, *materially*, in the way that the act of justice is to do what is just (*facere iusta*). And such an act of virtue can exist without the virtue. For many who do not have the habit of justice do what is just, either by natural reason or out of fear or out of the hope of acquiring something.

In the second way, something is said to be an act of virtue *formally*, in the way that an act of justice is a just act done in the way that a just individual does it, viz., promptly and with pleasure. And an act of a virtue in this sense does not exist in the absence of the virtue.

Accordingly, almsgiving can exist *materially* in the absence of charity, whereas to give alms formally, i.e., because of God and promptly and in all the other appropriate ways, does not exist in the absence of charity.

Reply to objection 2: Nothing prevents an act that properly belongs to one virtue as its elicited act (*elicitive*) from being attributed to another virtue as commanding that act and ordering it toward its own end. And it is in this way that almsgiving is posited among the works of satisfaction, insofar as commiserating with the need of a sufferer is ordered toward satisfaction for one's sins. Now insofar as the act is ordered toward pleasing God, it has the nature of a sacrifice and as such it is commanded by [the virtue of] worship.

Reply to objection 3: The reply to the third objection is clear from this.

Reply to objection 4: Almsgiving belongs to generosity insofar as generosity removes an impediment to almsgiving that could arise from an excessive love of wealth, resulting in one's becoming too protective of his wealth.

Article 2

Are the works of mercy appropriately divided?

It seems that the works of mercy are not appropriately divided:

Objection 1: Seven corporal works of mercy are posited, viz., (a) feeding the hungry (*pascere esurientem*), (b) giving drink to the thirsty (*potare sitientem*), (c) clothing the naked (*vestire nudum*), (d) sheltering the homeless (*recolligere hospitem*), (e) visiting the sick (*visitare infirmum*), (f) ransoming the captive (*redimere captum*), and (g) burying the dead (*sepelire motuum*). These are contained in the verse: '*Visito, poto, cibo, redimo, tego, colligo, condo*'.

Likewise, seven spiritual works of mercy are posited, viz. (a) instructing the ignorant (*docere ignorantem*), (b) counseling the doubtful (*consulere dubitanti*), (c) comforting the sorrowful (*consolari tristem*), (d) correcting the sinner (*corrigere peccantem*), (e) forgiving the one who offends us (*remittere offendenti*), (f) bearing burdens and wrongs (*portare onerosos et graves*), and (g) praying for everyone (*pro omnibus orare*). These are likewise contained in a verse, '*Consule, castiga, solare, remitte, fer, ora*', but in such a way that counseling and instructing are both understood under '*consule*'.

However, it seems that these works of mercy are not appropriately divided. For a work of mercy is ordered toward helping one's neighbor. But burying one's neighbor does not help him in any way; otherwise, what our Lord says in Matthew 10:28 ("Do not fear those who kill the body and after that do not have anything further that they might do") would not be true. Hence, in Matthew 25:35-36:42, our Lord, in recalling the works of mercy, does not mention burying the dead. Therefore, it seems that these works of mercy are not appropriately divided.

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 1), alms are given in order to alleviate the needs of one's neighbor. But there are many needs of human life besides those mentioned above; for instance, the blind man needs someone to lead him, the lame man needs something to lean on, the poor man needs wealth. Therefore, the works of mercy mentioned above are not appropriately enumerated.

Objection 3: Almsgiving is an act of mercy. But correcting the delinquent seems to belong more to severity than to mercy. Therefore, it ought not to be counted among the spiritual works of mercy.

Objection 4: Almsgiving is ordered toward alleviating deficiencies (*ad subveniendum defectui*). But there is no man who does not suffer the deficiency of ignorance in some matters. Therefore, it seems that each individual ought to instruct everyone who is ignorant of what he himself knows.

But contrary to this: In a certain homily Gregory says, "Let him who has understanding take care not to remain altogether silent; let him who is affluent be careful not to become tired of the generosity of

mercy; let him who has a skill by which he is guided be most eager to share its use and usefulness with his neighbor; let him who has the opportunity to speak with a rich man fear damnation for hiding his talent if, when he is able to, he does not intercede with him on behalf of the poor.” Therefore, the works of mercy mentioned above are appropriately distinguished according to the things in which men abound or are deficient.

I respond: The division of the works of mercy laid out above is appropriately made in a way that corresponds to the diverse needs of one’s neighbors. Some of these needs belong to the soul, and the spiritual works of mercy are directed toward them, whereas others belong to the body, and the corporal works of mercy are directed toward them.

For a corporeal need occurs either during one’s life or after one’s life. If it occurs during one’s life, then it is either a common need for things that everyone needs, or it is a special need because of some supervening accident. If the first, then the need is either interior or exterior. There are two sorts of interior needs, one of which, viz., hunger, is relieved by solid nourishment, and on this score *feeding the hungry* is posited; the other interior need, viz., thirst, is relieved by liquid nourishment, and on this score *giving drink to the thirsty* is posited. On the other hand, there are two common exterior needs, one of which has to do with clothing, and in this regard *clothing the naked* is posited; the other has to do with shelter, and in this regard *sheltering the homeless* is posited. Similarly, if the need is a special need, then it derives either from an intrinsic cause, and in this regard *visiting the sick* is posited, or from an extrinsic cause, and in this regard *ransoming the captive* is posited. After life, what is given to the dead is *burial*.

Similarly, there are two ways in which spiritual needs are alleviated by the spiritual acts of mercy. In one way, by asking God for help, and in this regard what is posited is prayer by which one is *praying for others*. In the other way, by employing human help, and this in three ways. In one way, as regards the needs of the intellect, and if it is a need that belongs to the speculative intellect, then the remedy is applied through *instructing*, whereas if it is a need that belongs to the practical intellect, then the remedy is applied through *counseling*. In the second way, there is a need that stems from a passion of the appetitive power, among which the greatest problem is sadness, which is alleviated through *comforting*. In the third way, the need stems from a disordered act, which can be thought of in three ways. In one way, on the part of the sinner himself, insofar as the act proceeds from his disordered will, and here the remedy is applied through *correcting*. In the second way, the need belongs to the one against whom the sin is committed, and so if the sin is against us, then we apply the remedy by *forgiving* the offense; on the other hand, if the sin is against God or our neighbor, then, as Jerome points out in *Super Matthaem*, it does not fall within our discretion to forgive it. In the third way, on the part of the aftermath of the disordered act itself, by which those living with the sinner are burdened, even beyond the sinner’s intention, and so the remedy is applied by *bearing* the injury, especially in the case of those individuals who sin out of weakness—this according to Romans 15:1 (“We who are stronger must bear the weaknesses of others”)—and not only insofar as the weak are troublesome because of their disordered acts, but also all of their burdens whatsoever are to be borne—this according to Galatians 6:2 (“Bear one another’s burdens”).

Reply to objection 1: The burial of a dead man does not confer on him any sort of sensation that a corpse might have after death. And this is why our Lord says that those who kill the body “do not have anything further that they might do.” And it is also because of this that our Lord does not number burial among the other works of mercy; instead, He enumerates only those things that involve a more evident need.

Still, what is done to a dead man’s corpse belongs to him, both (a) because he lives in the memories of men, and so his honor is sullied if he remains unburied, and also (b) because of the affection which he had for his body while he was still alive and which the affections of the pious ought to conform themselves to after his death. Accordingly, as is clear from Augustine in *De Cura Pro Mortuis Agenda*, some individuals, e.g., Tobias and those who buried our Lord, are commended for burying the dead.

Reply to objection 2: All the other needs are traced back to these. For instance, blindness and lameness are certain infirmities, and directing the blind and holding up the lame are traced back to *visiting the sick*. Similarly, to help a man in the face of any sort of oppression inflicted exteriorly is traced back to *ransoming the captive*. And wealth, which alleviates poverty, is sought only to alleviate the needs mentioned above, and so no special mention has to be made concerning this particular need.

Reply to objection 3: As regards the very execution of the act, correcting sinners seems to contain the severity of justice. But as regards the intention of the one giving the correction, who wishes to free the man from the evil of sin, the act belongs to mercy and the affection of love—this according to Proverbs 27:6 (“Better the wounds inflicted by one who loves you than the deceitful kisses given by one who hates you”).

Reply to objection 4: It is not just any instance of ignorance that pertains to a man’s need, but rather the ignorance by which one does not know what it is important for him to know; and it belongs to a work of mercy to alleviate this need. Still, the appropriate circumstances of person and time and place must be observed, just as in the case of other virtuous acts.

Article 3

Are the corporal works of mercy more important than the spiritual works of mercy?

It seems that the corporal works of mercy are more important (*potiores*) than the spiritual works of mercy:

Objection 1: It is more praiseworthy to do a work of mercy for someone who is more needy, since a work of mercy has its praise from the fact that it helps someone in need. But the body, which is helped by the corporal works of mercy, has a more needy nature than does the spirit, which is helped by the spiritual works of mercy. Therefore, the corporal works of mercy are more important.

Objection 2: Repayment for benefits diminishes their praise and merit; this is why in Luke 14:12 our Lord says, “When you make a lunch or dinner, do not invite your neighbors who are rich, lest perhaps they return the invitation.” But there is always repayment in the case of the spiritual works of mercy, since those who pray for others always profit from it themselves—this according to Psalm 34:13 (“My prayer shall be turned back into my bosom”)—and, in addition, one who teaches another makes progress in knowledge himself. But this does not happen with the corporal works of mercy. Therefore, the corporal works of mercy are more important than the spiritual works of mercy.

Objection 3: It is part of the praise of a work of mercy that the poor man is consoled by the work of mercy done for him; hence, Job 31:20 says, “If his limbs have not blessed me ...,” and in Philemon 7 the Apostle says, “The hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.” But sometimes a poor man is more grateful for a corporal work of mercy than for a spiritual work of mercy. Therefore, a corporal work of mercy is more important than a spiritual work of mercy.

But contrary to this: In *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, commenting on the passage “Give to him who asks of you,” Augustine says, “You should give in such a way as to do harm neither to yourself nor to another; and when you refuse what someone asks for, you must indicate your justification, lest you send him away empty. And sometimes you will give something better, after you have corrected an individual who has asked unjustly.” But correction is a spiritual work of mercy. Therefore, the spiritual works of mercy are to be preferred to the corporal works of mercy.

I respond: There are two possible ways to think about the comparison between these works of mercy.

In one way, *absolutely speaking*, and on this score the spiritual works of mercy are preeminent, and this for three reasons. First, because what is given is more noble, viz., a spiritual gift, which is better

than a corporeal gift—this according to Proverbs 4:2 (“I will give you a good gift; forsake not my Law”). Second, *by reason of the thing that is helped*, since the spirit is more noble than the body. Hence, just as a man ought to provide for himself more as regards his spirit than as regards his body, so also for his neighbor, whom he ought to love as himself. Third, *with respect to the acts themselves by which one helps his neighbor*, since spiritual acts are more noble than corporeal acts, which are in some sense servile.

In the second way, the works of mercy can be compared with respect to a particular case in which some corporal work of mercy is preferable to some spiritual work of mercy. For instance, someone who is dying of hunger should be fed rather than instructed, just as, according to the Philosopher in *Topics* 3, “it is better for a needy man to acquire money than to philosophize,” even though the latter is better absolutely speaking.

Reply to objection 1: All other things being equal, it is better to give to someone who is needy. But if a less needy individual is better and needs what is better, then it is better to give to him. And this is how it is in the case under discussion.

Reply to objection 2: If repayment is not intended, then it does not diminish the merit and praise that belong to a work of mercy, just as human glory, if it is not intended, likewise does not diminish the nature of a virtue. As Sallust says of Cato, “The more he fled from glory, the more glory pursued him.” And this is what happens with the spiritual works of mercy. And yet intending spiritual goods does not diminish merit, just as intending good corporeal goods does not diminish merit.

Reply to objection 3: The merit of one who does a work of mercy has to do with what the will of the one who receives it should come to rest in according to reason, and not with what it comes to rest in if it is disordered.

Article 4

Do the corporal works of mercy have a spiritual effect?

It seems that the corporal works of mercy do not have a spiritual effect:

Objection 1: An effect is not more potent than its cause. But spiritual goods are more potent than corporeal goods. Therefore, the corporal works of mercy do not have spiritual effects.

Objection 2: To give something corporeal in return for something spiritual is the vice of simony. But this vice is altogether to be avoided. Therefore, works of mercy should not be offered in order to obtain spiritual effects.

Objection 3: When the cause is multiplied, the effect is multiplied. Therefore, if a corporal work of mercy caused a spiritual effect, then it would follow that a greater work of mercy would bring about more spiritually. But this is contrary to what we read in Luke 21:2ff. about the widow who gave two brass coins to the treasury and who, in our Lord’s view, gave more than everyone. Therefore, a corporal work of mercy does not have a spiritual effect.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiasticus 17:22 says, “A man’s works of mercy ... shall preserve the man’s grace as the apple of His eye.”

I respond: A corporal work of mercy can be thought of in three ways.

In one way, *with respect to its own substance*. And on this score it has only a corporeal effect, viz., insofar as it alleviates the needs of one’s neighbor.

In the second way, it can be thought of *as regards its cause*, viz., insofar as someone does a corporal work of mercy because of his love of God and neighbor. And in this regard it bears spiritual fruit—this according to Ecclesiasticus 29:13-14 (“Lose your money for your brother. Put your treasure in the precepts of the Most High, and that will profit you more than gold”).

In the third way, it can be thought of *as regards its effect*. And in this way it likewise bears spiritual fruit, viz., insofar as one's neighbor, who is helped by the corporal work of mercy, is moved to pray for his benefactor. Hence, in the same passage it is added, "Store your alms in the heart of the poor man, and it will save you from every evil."

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through for a corporal work of mercy with respect to its own substance.

Reply to objection 2: Someone who does a corporal work of mercy does not intend to purchase something spiritual through the corporeal, since he realizes that spiritual goods infinitely exceed corporeal goods. Rather, he intends to merit a spiritual fruit through the affection of charity.

Reply to objection 3: The widow, who gave less as far as quantity is concerned, gave more in proportion. Because of this, the affection of charity is thought of as being greater in her, and it is because of this affection that the corporal work of mercy has a spiritual effect.

Article 5

Is doing a work of mercy contained in a precept?

It seems that doing a work of mercy is not contained in a precept (*non sit in praecepto*):

Objection 1: Counsels are distinguished from precepts. But it is a counsel to perform works of mercy—this according to Daniel 4:24 ("Let my counsel please the king, and redeem your sins with works of mercy"). Therefore, doing a work of mercy is not contained in a precept.

Objection 2: Everyone is permitted to use his own property and to keep it. But if someone keeps his own property, then he will not do works of mercy. Therefore, it is permitted not to do works of mercy. Therefore, doing a work of mercy is not contained in a precept.

Objection 3: What falls under a precept is such that at certain times it makes transgressors liable to mortal sin, since affirmative precepts impose obligations for determinate times. Therefore, if doing a work of mercy fell under a precept, it would be possible to determine some time at which a man would sin mortally unless he did a work of mercy. But this does not seem to be the case, since one can always calculate that the poor man can probably be helped in some other way, and that the resources that would have to be expended for works of mercy could be necessary for oneself either in the present or in the future. Therefore, it seems that doing a work of mercy is not contained in a precept.

Objection 4: All precepts are traced back to the precepts of the Decalogue. But there is nothing contained in those precepts about doing works of mercy. Therefore, doing a work of mercy does not fall under a precept.

But contrary to this: No one is punished with an eternal punishment for failing to do something that does not fall under a precept. But some are punished with an eternal punishment for failing to do works of mercy—this according to Matthew 25. Therefore, doing a work of mercy is contained in a precept.

I respond: Since the love of one's neighbor is contained in a precept, everything without which the love of one's neighbor is not preserved must fall under a precept.

Now it belongs to the love of our neighbor not only that we *will* the good for our neighbor but also that we *do* good for him—this according to 1 John 3:18 ("Let us love not in word or with our tongue, but in deed and in truth"). But in order for us to will the good and to do good for someone, it is required that we alleviate his needs, and this is accomplished by doing works of mercy. And so doing works of mercy is contained in a precept.

However, because precepts are given concerning the acts of the virtues, the gift of a work of mercy has to fall under a precept insofar as it is necessary for the virtue, i.e., insofar as right reason requires it.

And in accord with right reason, there is something to consider on the part of the one who does the work of mercy, and something to consider on the part of the one for whom the work of mercy is to be done.

On the part of *the one who does the work*, it must be considered whether the resources that have to be expended in doing the work of mercy are from his surplus—this according to Luke 11:41 (“Give alms from that which remains”). And I say ‘surplus’ not only with respect to his own self, i.e., not only that which is over and beyond what is necessary for an individual, but also with respect to those others whose care is incumbent upon him. For it is first necessary that each individual should provide for himself and for those whose care is incumbent upon him (we say that the latter are ‘necessary to the person’ insofar as ‘person’ implies his important function (*dignitas*)), and afterwards he may alleviate the needs of others from what is left over—just as nature first takes for itself, in order to sustain its own body, what is necessary for the role of the nutritive power, whereas it expends the surplus for the generation of another individual through the generative power.

As for *the recipient*, what is required is that he have a need; otherwise, there would be no reason why a work of mercy should be done for him. But since it is not possible for any one individual to help all of those who have a need, not every need imposes an obligation under the precept, but only a need which is such that the one enduring it cannot sustain himself without help. What Ambrose says applies in such a case: “Feed the man who is dying of hunger; if you are not worried about him, you are killing him.”

So, then, doing works of mercy out of one’s surplus is contained in a precept, along with doing a work of mercy for anyone who is in extreme need. For the rest, doing a work of mercy falls under a counsel, just as counsels are handed down concerning any better good.

Reply to objection 1: Daniel was speaking to a king who was not subject to God’s Law. And so even those things that belong to the precepts of the Law, which he did not profess, were to be proposed to him in the manner of counsels.

An alternative reply is that Daniel was speaking in a situation in which doing a work of mercy was not contained under a precept.

Reply to objection 2: Temporal goods, which are divinely bestowed on a man, belong to him as far as *ownership* is concerned, but as far as *use* is concerned, they ought to belong not only to him but also to others who can be sustained by them when taken from his surplus. Hence, Basil says, “If you claim that [your temporal goods] have come to you from God, is God unjust in distributing them unequally? Why do you have an abundance while that other man goes begging, except in order that you might gain the merit of good stewardship, while he is adorned with the rewards of patience? It is the hungry man’s bread that you are holding on to, the naked man’s cloak that you are keeping in your closet, the barefoot man’s shoes that are rotting away in your house, the indigent man’s silver that you openly possess. And so you injure as many as you are able to help.” And Ambrose says the same thing in *Decreta*, dist. 47.

Reply to objection 3: It is possible to designate a time when someone sins mortally in failing to do a work of mercy: *on the part of the recipient*, when the need appears to be evident and urgent and no one is at hand who might help him; *on the part of the giver*, when he has extra resources that are not needed by him in his present situation, insofar as this can be estimated with probability. Nor is it necessary for him to take into account all the cases that can occur in the future, for this is to give thought to tomorrow, which our Lord prohibits in Matthew 6:34. Instead, he should make judgments about what is surplus and what is necessary in accord with what occurs with probability and in most cases.

Reply to objection 4: Every instance of helping one’s neighbor is traced back to the precept about honoring one’s parents. For this is the Apostle’s interpretation in 1 Timothy 4:8 when he says, “Godliness (*pietas*) is useful to all things, holding the promise of the life that now is and the life that is to come.” He says this because a promise is added to the precept about honoring one’s parents, “that you may live long upon the earth.” Every instance of doing a work of mercy is included here under

‘godliness’.

Article 6

Should one do a corporal work of mercy with resources that are necessary for himself?

It seems that one should not do a work of mercy with resources that are necessary for himself (*non debet eleemosynam dare de necessario*):

Objection 1: The order of charity has no less to do with the effect of beneficence than with the interior affection of beneficence. But someone sins if he reverses the order of charity (*si praepostere agit in ordine caritatis*), since the order of charity is contained in a precept. Therefore, since, in keeping with the order of charity, one ought to love himself more than his neighbor, it seems that he sins if he takes away what is necessary for himself in order to give it to someone else.

Objection 2: If someone gives out of what is necessary for himself, then he dissipates his own substance, and, as is clear from *Ethics* 4, this belongs to the prodigal individual. But one ought not to do a vicious deed. Therefore, a work of mercy is not to be done with resources that are necessary for oneself.

Objection 3: In 1 Timothy 5:8 the Apostle says, “If any man does not take care of his own—and especially of his household—then he has denied the faith and is worse than a non-believer.” But for someone to give of what is necessary for himself or for his own seems to detract from the care that he ought to exercise for himself and his own. Therefore, if someone does a work of mercy with necessary resources, then he sins gravely.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 19:21 our Lord says, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor.” But one who gives all that he has to the poor not only gives from his surplus but also gives away what is necessary. Therefore, a man can do a work of mercy with resources that are necessary for himself.

I respond: There are two senses of ‘necessary’.

In one sense, the necessary is that in the absence of which something cannot be. And, in this sense of ‘necessary, a work of mercy should absolutely not be done with resources that are necessary—for instance, if someone in dire need had only what made it possible for his children and others belonging to him to be sustained. For to perform an act of mercy with resources that are necessary in this sense is to take life itself away from himself and those who belong to him. But I say this only as long as there is no imminent situation such that in taking resources from himself, he would be giving them, say, to some important person through whom the Church or the republic would be sustained; for it would be praiseworthy to expose himself and those who belong to him to the danger of death for the sake of liberating such a person, since the common good is to be preferred to one’s own good.

In a second sense, something is said to be necessary when without it life cannot be lived in a way that befits the condition or status of a given person himself and the other persons whose care is incumbent upon him. The limit of this sort of necessity is not fixed at any indivisible point; instead, even when many things have been added, it cannot be judged that one is beyond necessity of this sort, and even when many things have been taken away, there is still enough that one might be able to live his life in a way that befits his status. Thus, it is good to perform a work of mercy with resources that are necessary in this sense, and this falls under a counsel and not a precept. On the other hand, it would be disordered if someone took so much away from his own proper goods in order to give it to others that he would not be able to live on what remains in a way befitting his proper status and ordinary business. For no one is obligated to live in an unfitting way.

However, three exceptions have to be made to this rule.

The first is when someone changes his status, viz., by entering religious life (*per religionis ingressum*). For in such a case, giving away everything for the sake of Christ, he does a work of perfection by placing himself in a different state.

Second, when, even if what he takes away from himself is necessary for a fitting life, it can nonetheless be easily restored, so that the worst sort of unfittingness (*maximum inconueniens*) does not ensue.

Third, when some private person experiences extreme need, or when even the republic experiences great need. For in these cases someone would be praiseworthy for foregoing what would seem to be suitable for his status in order to alleviate a major need.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: On the basis of what has been said, the replies to the objections are easily seen.

Article 7

Can a corporal work of mercy be done with illicitly acquired resources?

It seems that a work of mercy can be done with illicitly acquired resources:

Objection 1: Luke 16:9 says, “Make friends with the mammon of iniquity.” But ‘mammon’ signifies wealth. Therefore, one can, with wickedly acquired wealth, make spiritual friends for himself by doing works of mercy.

Objection 2: All filthy lucre seems to be illicitly acquired. But what is acquired from prostitution is filthy lucre, and so a sacrifice or oblation should not be offered to God out of this sort of wealth—this according to Deuteronomy 23:18 (“Do not offer a prostitute’s fee in the house of your God”). Similarly, what is acquired through gambling is filthy, since, as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 4, “We take such gains from our friends, to whom we ought to be giving instead.” Most filthy of all is what is acquired by simony, through which one does injury to the Holy Spirit. And yet works of mercy can be done with resources of these sorts. Therefore, someone can do a work of mercy from badly acquired resources.

Objection 3: Greater evils are more to be avoided than lesser evils. But the holding of something that belongs to another is less a sin than is homicide, which one incurs unless he helps an individual who is in extreme need. This is clear from Ambrose, who says, “Feed the one who is dying of hunger, since if you are not worried about him, you are killing him.” Therefore, in some cases one can do a work of mercy from badly acquired resources.

But contrary to this: In *De Verbis Domini* Augustine says, “Do works of mercy from the resources gained by your just labors. For you will not corrupt Christ the judge, so that He does not hear you along with the poor whom you rob ... Do not do works of mercy from the proceeds of interest and usury. I am speaking to believers, to whom we distribute the Body of Christ.”

I respond: There are three ways in which something can be illicitly acquired.

In one way, what is illicitly acquired by someone is owed as a debt to the one from whom it has been acquired and it cannot be kept by the one who acquired it—as happens with pillaging and theft and usury. And since the man is obligated to make restitution, a work of mercy cannot be done with such resources.

In a second way, something is illicitly acquired because the one who acquired it cannot keep it, and yet it is not owed as a debt to the one from whom he acquired it, because he received it in a way contrary to justice and the other gave it in a way contrary to justice—as happens in the case of simony, in which both the giver and the receiver act against the justice of God’s law. Hence, restitution does not have to be made to the giver; instead, what was illicitly acquired should be given away for works of mercy. And the same line of reasoning holds in similar cases, i.e., cases in which both the giving and the receiving is

against the law.

In the third way, something is illicitly acquired not, to be sure, because the very acquisition of it is illicit, but rather because that from which it is acquired is illicit—as is clear in the case of what a woman acquires through prostitution. And this is what is properly called ‘filthy lucre’ (*turpe lucrum*). By the fact that the woman practices prostitution, she acts in a shameful way and contrary to God’s law, but she does not act unjustly or against the law in taking what she acquires. Hence, what is illicitly acquired in this way can be kept and a work of mercy can be done with it.

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine says in *De Verbis Domini* (Sermon 113), “There are those who, misinterpreting these words of our Lord, plunder the property of others and give something from it to the poor, and think that they are doing what our Lord has commanded. This interpretation has to be corrected.” Instead, “all wealth (*omnes divitiae*) is being called ‘the mammon of iniquity’,” as he puts it in *De Quaestionibus Evangelii*, “since mammon belongs only to the iniquitous, who put their hope in it.”

Alternatively, according to Ambrose, “He says ‘mammon of iniquity’ (*mammon iniquitatis*) because the enticement of riches tempts our affections.”

Alternatively, as Basil says, “Among the many predecessors whom you have succeeded with their patrimony, someone will be found who unjustly usurped the property of others, even though you do not know of it.”

Alternatively, all mammon (*divitiae*) is said to be ‘of iniquity’, i.e., of inequality, because goods are not equally distributed to everyone; instead, one individual is poor and another wealthy.

Reply to objection 2: It has already been explained how a work of mercy can be done from what is acquired through prostitution. However, a sacrifice or oblation is not to be made from such resources at the altar, both because of scandal and also because of reverence for the sacred. Likewise, a work of mercy can be done from what is acquired through simony, since these resources are not owed to the one who gave them and yet one deserves to lose them.

By contrast, what is acquired through games of chance seems to be something illicit by divine law, viz., (a) that someone should profit from those who cannot give over their own property, e.g., minors and madmen and others of this sort, and (b) that he entices them because of their disordered desire to profit from a game, and (c) that he profits at their expense through fraud. In such cases one is obligated to make restitution, and so he cannot do a work of mercy from his gains.

Moreover, what is acquired through games of chance seems further to be something illicit by positive civil law, which universally prohibits such gain. However, since civil law does not obligate everyone, but obligates only those who are subject to the relevant laws, and, again, since civil law can be abrogated by disuse, it follows that among those who are restricted by laws of this sort, the ones who profit are without exception obligated to make restitution—unless, perhaps, a contrary custom prevails or unless one is enriched at the expense of someone who lured him into the game. In a case like that, he is not obligated to make restitution, since the one who lost the money is unworthy to get it back. But neither can the winner licitly retain what he has acquired, as long as this sort of positive law remains in effect. Hence, he ought to do a work of mercy from his winnings in such a case.

Reply to objection 3: In a case of extreme need all things are held in common (*omnia sunt communia*). Hence, it is permissible for someone who experiences such a need to take from another for his own survival, if he does not find anyone who wants to give to him. And for the same reason, it is permissible to hold on to something that belongs to another—and even to take what belongs to another—and to do a work of mercy with it, if there is no other possible way to help someone suffering extreme need. However, if this can be done without danger, he ought to provide for the poor man who is suffering from extreme need after having requested the consent of the owner of the property.

Article 8

Can someone who is under the power of another do works of mercy?

It seems that someone who is under the power of another can do a work of mercy:

Objection 1: Religious are under the power of those to whom they have vowed obedience. But if they were not permitted to do acts of mercy, then they would suffer a loss from the religious state, since, as Ambrose puts it, “The summit of the Christian life consists in piety, which is especially set off by the doing of works of mercy.” Therefore, those who are under the power of another can do works of mercy.

Objection 2: As Genesis 3:16 says, a wife is “under the power of her husband.” But a wife can do works of mercy after she is assumed into the society of her husband; hence, it is said of St. Lucy that she did works of mercy without her spouse knowing about it. Therefore, the fact that one is under the power of another does not prevent him from being able to do works of mercy.

Objection 3: There is a certain natural subjection of children to their parents; hence, in Ephesians 6:1 the Apostle says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord.” But, it seems, children can do works of mercy with their father’s property, since it in some way belongs to them, because they are his heirs. And since they are able to use that property for the advantage of their own bodies, it seems, *a fortiori*, that they can use it to do works of mercy as a remedy for their souls. Therefore, those who are under the power of another can do works of mercy.

Objection 4: Servants are under the power of their masters—this according to Titus 2:9 (“Servants are to be subject to their masters”). Still, they are permitted to do what is advantageous for their master, and this is accomplished in the best way of all if they do works of mercy on their master’s behalf. Therefore, those who are under the power of another can do works of mercy.

But contrary to this: Works of mercy should not be done with resources that belong to another, but instead each one should do works of mercy “from his own just labors,” as Augustine puts it in *De Verbis Domini*. But if those who are subject to others do a work of mercy, then this is from someone else’s resources. Therefore, those who are under the power of others cannot do works of mercy.

I respond: One who is under the power of another should as such be regulated by the power of his superior. For it is the natural order that the lower should be regulated by the higher. And so in those matters in which someone lower is subject to someone higher, he must not act otherwise than he has been commissioned to by his superior.

So, then, one who is under the power of another with respect to some matter in which he is subject to his superior should not do a work of mercy except insofar as he has been permitted to by his superior. On the other hand, if one has some resources with respect to which he is not subject to his superior’s power, then he is in that respect not subject to a power, but is in this matter his own law. And he is able to do a work of mercy from those resources.

Reply to objection 1: If a monk has a dispensation commissioned by his prelate, then he can do a work of mercy from the monastery’s resources, insofar as this has been commissioned to him. On the other hand, if he does not have a dispensation, then since he has nothing that belongs to him as an individual, he cannot do a work of mercy without the abbot’s permission, either expressly given or presumed with high probability—except perhaps in a case of extreme necessity of the sort in which it would be permissible for him to steal in order to do the work of mercy.

Nor is a religious for this reason put in a worse position, since as *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus* says, “It is a good thing to give one’s property to the poor little by little, but it is better still to give everything all at once with the intention of following our Lord and, having been freed from care, to be needy with Christ.”

Reply to objection 2: If a wife has other property—i.e., over and beyond her dowry, which is ordered toward taking care of the burdens of matrimony—regardless of whether this extra property is

from her own earnings or from some other licit source, she can do works of mercy from it even without requesting her husband's assent—though moderate works of mercy, lest she impoverish her husband by the excessiveness of those works.

Otherwise, a wife should not do works of mercy without either the express or presumed consent of her husband, just as was explained above in the case of a monk. For even though the woman is an equal in the act of matrimony, nonetheless, in matters that pertain to the running of the home the husband is “the head of his wife” according to the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 11:3.

Now St. Lucy was engaged to be married and as yet had no husband. Hence, she was able to do works of mercy with her mother's consent.

Reply to objection 3: What belongs to the children belongs to the father. And so the children cannot do works of mercy—except perhaps modest ones, which one can assume the father approves of—unless perhaps there were some portion of property that they were commissioned by their father to be the dispensers of. And the same thing holds for servants.

Reply to objection 4: The answer to the fourth objection is clear from this.

Article 9

Should works of mercy be done more for those who are closer to oneself?

It seems that works of mercy should not be done more for those who are closer to oneself:

Objection 1: Ecclesiasticus 12:4-6 says, “Give to the merciful and uphold not the sinner ... Do good to the humble and give not to the ungodly.” But it sometimes happens that those close to us are sinners and ungodly. Therefore, works of mercy are not to be done more for them.

Objection 2: Works of mercy are to be done in order that one might receive an eternal reward in return—this according to Matthew 6:18 (“And your Father, who sees what is hidden, will reward you”). But the reward of eternal life is acquired especially through works of mercy that are done for the saints—this according to Luke 16:9 (“Make friends with the mammon of iniquity, that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings”), which, in *De Verbis Domini* (Sermon 113), Augustine expounds by saying, “Who are the ones who will have everlasting dwellings, if not the saints of God? And who are the ones who will be received by them into their tents, if not those who serve them in their need?” Therefore, works of mercy should be done for those who are holier more than for those who are closer.

Objection 3: A man is closest of all to himself. But a man cannot do works of mercy for himself. Therefore, it seems that works of mercy are not to be done more for a person who is more closely connected with oneself.

But contrary to this: In 1 Timothy 5:8 the Apostle says, “If any man does not take care of his own—and especially of his own household—then he has denied the faith and is worse than a non-believer.”

I respond: As Augustine says in *De Doctrina Christiana* 1, those who are more closely connected with us come to us, as it were, by happenstance, so that we ought to provide for them more.

However, on this matter reasons for discretion have to be applied according to differences in the connection, in holiness, and in usefulness. For works of mercy are to be done much more for a holier individual, and more for an individual who is useful to the common good than for a person who is close to us—especially if that person is not very close to us or someone whose special care is incumbent upon us, and if that person is not suffering from great need.

Reply to objection 1: A sinner is not to be helped insofar as he is a sinner, i.e., in order that through this help he is supported in his sin. Rather, he is to be helped insofar as he is a man, i.e., in order

that his nature might be sustained.

Reply to objection 2: There are two ways in which a work of mercy contributes to the reward of eternal recompense.

In one way, *from the root of charity*. And on this score a work of mercy is meritorious as long as it preserves the order of charity, according to which we should, all other things being equal, take more care of those who are more closely connected with us. Hence, in *De Officio* 1 Ambrose says, “This generosity is shown by your not despising your blood relatives if you know them to be in need. For it is better that you yourself should help your own people, for whom it would be shameful to request something from others.”

In a second way, a work of mercy contributes to the recompense of eternal life *by the merit of the one for whom it is done*, who prays for the one who has done the work of mercy. Augustine speaks along these lines in the same place.

Reply to objection 3: Given that almsgiving is a work of mercy, just as mercy is not properly directed toward oneself except by a certain similitude, as was explained above (q. 30, a. 1), so too, properly speaking, no one does a work of mercy for himself—except perhaps when he acts in the person of another. For instance, when someone is appointed as a distributor of works of mercy, he is able to receive one for himself if he needs it, along the same lines as when he ministers to others.

Article 10

Should works of mercy be done in abundance?

It seems that works of mercy should not be done in abundance:

Objection 1: Works of mercy ought to be done especially for those who are more closely connected with oneself. But works of mercy should not be done for them in such a way “that they want to become rich thereby,” as Ambrose puts it in *De Officio* 1. Therefore, works of mercy should not be done in abundance for others, either.

Objection 2: In the same place Ambrose says, “Our riches should not be poured out all at once, but dispensed in degrees.” But an abundance of works of mercy is a pouring out of riches. Therefore, works of mercy ought not to be done in abundance.

Objection 3: In 2 Corinthians 8:13 the Apostle says, “... not that others should have it easy,” i.e. live off of your resources idly, “and you be troubled,” i.e., impoverished. But this would happen if works of mercy were done abundantly. Therefore, works of mercy are not to be done in abundance.

But contrary to this: Tobias 4:9 says, “If you have a lot, then give in abundance.”

I respond: Abundance in works of mercy can be thought of in two ways, viz., (a) on the part of the giver and (b) on the part of the recipient.

On the part of the *giver*, viz., when someone gives a lot in proportion to his resources. And in this sense it is praiseworthy to give abundantly. Hence, in Luke 21:3-4 our Lord praised the widow, who “out of her want, has cast in all the living that she had”—as long as one observes the points explained above (a. 6) about doing works of mercy with resources that are necessary for oneself.

On the part of the *recipient*, there are two senses of abundant works of mercy. In one sense, what is abundant is what is sufficient to take care of his need. And in this sense it is praiseworthy to do works of mercy abundantly. In the other sense, what is abundant is excessive. And this is not praiseworthy; instead, it is better to give to a greater number of needy individuals. Hence, in 1 Corinthians 13:3 the Apostle says, “If I should distribute food to feed the poor ...,” where a Gloss says, “By this a cautionary note is taught about works of mercy, in order that they might be done not for just one individual but for many, in order to help a greater number of individuals.”

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through for abundance that exceeds the need of the recipient of the work of mercy.

Reply to objection 2: This passage is talking about an abundance of works of mercy on the part of the giver. But one should understand that God did not want all our riches to be poured out at once, except in the case of a change of state. Hence, he adds in the same place, "... except perhaps in the way that Elisha killed his oxen and fed the poor out of what he had, in order not to be obliged by any domestic cares."

Reply to objection 3: The cited passage, as far as the phrase "not that the others should have it easy or refreshing ..." is concerned, is speaking about an abundance of works of mercy that exceeds the needs of the recipient, who is to be granted works of mercy not in order that he might become rich, but in order that he might be sustained. Still, discretion is to be applied in such cases because of the diverse conditions of men, some of whom, having been nurtured on more delicate things, need more delicate foods and clothes. Hence, in *De Officio* Ambrose says, "When you are giving, you have to take age and weakness into consideration, and sometimes even the shame which betrays noble origins or the fact that someone has fallen from riches to poverty through no fault of his own."

As regards what is added, "... and you be troubled," he is talking about abundance on the part of the giver. But as a Gloss on this passage puts it, "He does not say this because abundant giving would not be better; instead, he is worried about those who are weak and whom he is warning to give in such a way as not to suffer from need themselves."