

QUESTION 88

Vows

Next we have to consider vows (*de voto*), through which something is promised to God. And on this topic there are twelve questions: (1) What is a vow? (2) What may fall under a vow? (3) What sort of obligation attaches to a vow? (4) What is the advantage of making a vow? (5) Which virtue is vowing an act of? (6) Is it more meritorious to do something because of a vow or without a vow? (7) What sort of solemnity does a vow have? (8) Can those who are subject to someone else's power make a vow? (9) Can children be obligated by a vow to enter religious life (*possint voto obligari ad religionis ingressum*)? (10) Can a vow be dispensed with or changed? (11) Can one who is under a solemn vow of [sexual] continence (*in solempni voto continentiae*) be granted a dispensation? (12) Is the authority of a superior required for a dispensation from a vow?

Article 1

Does a vow consist just in a resolution of the will?

It seems that a vow consists just in a resolution of the will (*votum consistat in solo proposito voluntatis*):

Objection 1: According to some, to make a vow is to formulate a good resolution (*conceptio boni propositi*), strengthened by the mind's deliberation, by which someone obligates himself to God to do something or not to do something. But formulating a good resolution, along with all these added things, can consist just in a movement of the will. Therefore, a vow consists just in a resolution of the will.

Objection 2: The very name 'vow' (*votum*) seems to be derived from willing (*a voluntate assumptum*), since someone is said to do by his own will (*proprio voto*) whatever he does voluntarily. But a resolution is an act of the will, whereas a promise is an act of reason. Therefore, a vow consists just in an act of the will.

Objection 3: In Luke 9:62 our Lord says, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." But someone puts his hand to the plow by the very fact that has the resolve to do good. Therefore, if he looks back, desisting from his resolve to do good, then he is not fit for the kingdom of God. Therefore, by his good resolution alone he is obligated before God, even without making any promise. And so it seems that a vow consists just in a resolution of the will.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiastes 5:3 says, "If you have vowed something to God, do not delay in fulfilling it; for an unfaithful and foolish promise displeases Him." Therefore, to vow is to promise, and a vow is a promise.

I respond: Making a vow implies an obligation to do something or to forego something (*votum quandam obligationem ad aliquid faciendum vel dimittendum*). Now it is in the manner of a *promise* that one man obligates himself to another with respect to something. A promise is an act of reason, and it pertains to reason to give order; for just as, by commanding or pleading, a man in some sense orders what is to be done for him by others, so, too, by promising he orders what he himself is supposed to do for someone else.

Now a promise that is made by one man to another man can occur only through words or some kind of exterior sign, whereas a promise can be made to God only through an interior thought (*per solam interiorem cogitationem*), since as 1 Kings 16:7 says, "Men see what is apparent, but God sees the heart." Still, exterior words are sometimes enunciated either (a) in order to stir oneself up, as was explained above in the case of prayer (q. 83, a. 12), or (b) in order to call others to bear witness, so that one might refrain from breaking the vow not only out of fear of God but also out of fear of what other men might think (*sed etiam propter reverentiam hominum*).

Now a promise proceeds from the resolve to do something. But such a resolution requires some

deliberation, since it is the act of a deliberate will.

So, then, three things are necessarily required for a vow: (a) *deliberation (deliberatio)*, (b) a *resolution (propositum)* on the part of the will, and (c) a *promise (promissio)*, in which the notion of a vow is brought to fulfillment. Sometimes two other things are added: (d), for a sort of confirmation of the vow, an *oral pronouncement (pronuntiatio oris)*—this according to Psalm 65:13 (“I will pay you my vows, which my lips have uttered”)—and (e) *others witnessing to it (testimonium aliorum)*.

Hence, in *Sentences* 4, dist. 38 the Master says that a vow is “a certain sort of testifying to a freely undertaken promise which has to be made to God and to concern the things of God”—though ‘testifying’ can properly make reference to an interior testifying.

Reply to objection 1: The formulation of a good resolution is strengthened by the mind’s deliberation only by means of a promise that follows upon the deliberation.

Reply to objection 2: The will moves reason to promise something with respect to what is subject to its will. And a vow (*votum*) takes its name from the will (*voluntas*) in the sense that the will is the first mover.

Reply to objection 3: One who puts his hand to the plow is already doing something. By contrast, one who only formulates a resolution is not yet doing anything. But once he promises, he already begins to show that he is acting, even though he is not yet fulfilling his promise—just as one who puts his hand to the plow is not yet plowing, even though he has already put his hand to the plow.

Article 2

Does a vow always have to be made with respect to a better good?

It seems that a vow does not always have to be made with respect to a better good:

Objection 1: A better good is one that pertains to supererogation. But a vow is taken not only with respect to what is supererogatory, but also with respect to what pertains to [mere] salvation. For even “in Baptism men vow to renounce the devil and his pomps, and to preserve their faith,” as is asserted by a Gloss on Psalm 75:12 (“Make your vow to the Lord your God, and fulfill it”). Likewise, as Genesis 28:21 relates, Jacob vowed that “that the Lord would be his God.” But this is especially necessary for salvation. Therefore, a vow is not made only with respect to a better good.

Objection 2: As is clear from Hebrews 11:32, Jephthah is included in the catalogue of saints. But as is related in Judges 11:9, he killed his innocent daughter because of a vow. Therefore, given that the killing of the innocent is not a greater good but is instead illicit in its own right, it seems that a vow can be made not only with respect to a better good, but even with respect to what is illicit.

Objection 3: What redounds to the detriment of a person or is not good for anything does not have the character of a better good. But vows are sometimes made with respect to immoderate fasts and night vigils, which tend to be dangerous for a person. Again, sometimes vows are made with respect to certain indifferent matters or matters that amount to nothing. Therefore, a vow does not always have to do with a greater good.

But contrary to this: Deuteronomy 23:22 says, “If you do not want to promise, you will be without sin.”

I respond: As was explained above (a. 1), a vow is a promise made to God. But what is promised is something that one does voluntarily for someone. For it would be a threat (*comminatio*)—and not a promise—if one said that he was going to do something against someone.

Similarly, a promise would be empty if one were to promise to someone what is unacceptable to him. And so, since every sin is against God, no deed is acceptable to God unless it is virtuous, and, as a result, a vow should be made only with respect to some act of virtue and not with respect to anything

illicit or even with respect to anything indifferent.

However, since a vow implies a voluntary promise, whereas necessity excludes the will, what must absolutely be the case or not be the case does not fall under a vow. For it would be ridiculous for someone to vow that he will some day die or that he will not fly. On the other hand, what has *necessity of the end* rather than *absolute necessity*—viz., because without it one cannot be saved—falls under a vow insofar as it is done voluntarily, but not insofar as it involves necessity.

By contrast, what does not fall under either absolute necessity or necessity of the end is voluntary absolutely speaking, and so this is what falls under a vow in the most proper way. But it is this that is said to be a better good in comparison to a good that is necessary in general for salvation. And so, properly speaking, a vow is said to be made with respect a better good.

Reply to objection 1: Renouncing the pomps of the devil, along with preserving faith in Christ, falls under the vow of the baptized because it is done voluntarily, even though it is indeed necessary for salvation.

And something similar can be said about Jacob's vow, though one could also adopt an interpretation according to which Jacob vowed that he would treat the Lord as God by a special sort of worship to which he was not bound, e.g., by an oblation of tithes and other things of this sort that are added in that passage.

Reply to objection 2: Some [acts] are good no matter how things turn out (*in omnem eventum*)—e.g., works of virtue and others—and these can fall under a vow without qualification (*absolute*). On the other hand, some [acts] are bad no matter how things turn out—e.g., those that are sins in their own right (*secundum se*)—and these cannot in any way fall under a vow.

By contrast, some [acts] are good considered in themselves and, accordingly, can fall under a vow, and yet they can have an evil outcome in light of which they should not be complied with (*in quo non sunt observanda*). This is what happened with the vow made by Jephthah, who, as Judges 11:30-31 reports, made a vow to the Lord with these words, "If you deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, then whatever comes forth first from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace, I will offer it up for a burnt offering." For this was able to have a bad outcome if some animal that was unlawful to sacrifice (*aliquod animal non immolativum*) were to meet him—and this is indeed what happened. Thus, as Jerome says, "He was stupid in vowing"—since he did not exercise discretion—"and wicked in fulfilling the vow." Yet in the same place (Judges 11:29) it is said just before this that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him," since his faith and devotion, by which he was moved to make the vow, were from the Holy Spirit. It is because of this, along with the victory that he won, that he is included in the catalogue of saints—and also because it is likely that he repented of the wicked deed he had done—a deed which, nonetheless, prefigured something good.

Reply to objection 3: The wasting away of one's own body through, for instance, night vigils and fasts, is not acceptable to God except insofar as it is a work of virtue, i.e., except insofar as it is done with due discretion, so that disordered desire (*concupiscentia*) is restrained and one's nature is not excessively burdened. Under this condition, acts of this sort can fall under a vow. This is why, in Romans 12:1, after he had said, "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God," the Apostle adds, "your reasonable service." But since a man easily fails in his judgment in matters that pertain to himself, it is more fitting that such vows should be either undertaken or omitted in accord with the judgment of a superior—yet in such a way if a man senses great and manifest harm because he is fulfilling such a vow and there is no possibility of having recourse to a superior, then he ought not keep the vow. On the other hand, vows that have to do with vain and useless things are more to be laughed at than to be fulfilled.

Article 3

Does every vow obligate one to fulfill it?

It seems that not every vow obligates one to fulfill it (*non omne votum obliget ad sui observantiam*):

Objection 1: A man has more need of things done by other men than does God, who has no need of our goods. But a simple promise made to a man does not obligate one to keep it according to the institution of human law, and this seems to have been instituted because of the mutability of the human will. Therefore, all the less does a simple promise made to God, called a vow, obligate one to fulfill it.

Objection 2: No one is obligated to do what is impossible. But sometimes what one vows becomes impossible for him, either (a) because it depends on someone else's decision—as when someone vows to enter a monastery whose monks do not want to receive him—or (b) because of some defect that emerges later on—as with a woman who vows to preserve her virginity and is afterwards corrupted, or as with a man who vows to pay some money and afterwards loses the money. Therefore, it is not always the case that a vow is obligatory.

Objection 3: If someone is obligated to do something, then he is obligated to do it immediately. But one is not obligated to do immediately what he has vowed to do, especially when he makes his vow under some future condition. Therefore, a vow is not always obligatory.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiastes 6:3-4 says, “If you have vowed anything, then fulfill the vow ... It is much better not to make a vow than, after having made a vow, not to do what has been promised.”

I respond: It pertains to a man's faithfulness (*fidelitas*) that he does what he promises to do. Hence, according to Augustine, “‘Faithfulness’ (*fides*) is taken from the fact that what is said is done (*ex hoc quod fiunt dicta*).” Now a man owes faithfulness especially to God, both by reason of His being the Lord and also by reason of the gifts that have been received. And so a man is especially obligated to fulfill vows made to God. For this is part of the faithfulness that a man owes to God, whereas breaking a vow is a species of unfaithfulness (*infidelitas*). Thus, Solomon gives the following as the reason why vows are to be fulfilled: “because a faithless promise (*infidelis promissio*) displeases God” (Ecclesiastes 5:3).

Reply to objection 1: In accord with moral uprightness (*honestas*), a man is obligated to another man for any promise whatsoever, and this is an obligation that belongs to what is *naturally* right (*est obligatio iuris naturalis*). However, certain other things are required in order for one to be obligated by a *civil* obligation for some promise.

Now even though God does not need our goods, we are nonetheless obligated to Him to the highest degree. And so a vow that is made to Him is obligatory to the highest degree.

Reply to objection 2: If what a man vows is for any reason rendered impossible, then he ought to do what is within his power (*quod est in se*); at the very least, he should have a prompt willingness to do what he is able to do.

Hence, the one who has vowed to enter a monastery should take care to do whatever he can in order to be accepted there. And if his intention was mainly to obligate himself to enter religious life, and if as a result he chose this religious order or this place as more fitting for him, then if he cannot be accepted there, he is obligated to enter another religious order (*tenetur aliam religionem intrare*). On the other hand, if his intention was mainly to obligate himself to *this* religious order or to *this* place—and this because of the special agreeableness of *this* religious order or *this* place, then he is not obligated to enter another religious order if *this* one is not willing to accept him.

By contrast, if it is by one's own fault that he falls into the impossibility of fulfilling a vow, then he is obligated from then on to do penance for his own past sin. For instance, if a woman who vows virginity is afterwards corrupted, then not only should she preserve what is within her power, viz.,

perpetual continence, but she should also do penance for what she has lost by sinning.

Reply to objection 3: The obligation that attaches to a vow is caused by one's own will and intention; hence, Deuteronomy 23:23 says, "But once it has come out from your lips, you shall fulfill it, and you will do as you have promised to the Lord your God; and you have spoken by your own will and with your own mouth." And so if it is the intention and will of the one who makes a vow to obligate himself to do something immediately, then he is obligated to do it immediately. On the other hand, if the vow is made for a certain time or under a certain condition, then he is not obligated to fulfill it immediately. However, he should not delay beyond the time for which he intended to obligate himself. For in the same place (Deuteronomy 23:21) it says, "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not delay in fulfilling it, since the Lord your God will require it; and if you do delay, it shall be imputed to you as a sin."

Article 4

Is it expedient to make a vow?

It seems not to be expedient to make a vow (*non expedit aliquid vovere*):

Objection 1: It is not expedient for anyone to deprive himself of a good that God has given him. But freedom is one of the greatest goods that God has given to man, and he seems to be deprived of it by the necessity that a vow imposes. Therefore, it does not seem expedient for a man to make any vow.

Objection 2: No one should put himself in danger. But anyone who takes a vow puts himself in danger, since something that, before the vow, he could have omitted without danger becomes dangerous if, after the vow, it is not done. Hence, in *Epistola ad Armentarium et Paulinum* Augustine says, "Since you have already made the vow, you have already bound yourself, and you are not permitted to do otherwise. If you do not do what you have vowed to do, you will not be such as you would have been if you had not vowed any such thing. For in the latter case you would have been less great, but not less good. But now you will be wretched to a greater degree if (may it not happen) you break faith with God than you would have been happy if you had persevered in the vow." Therefore, it is not expedient to vow anything.

Objection 3: In 1 Corinthians 4:16 the Apostle says, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." But we do not read that either Christ or the apostles made any vows. Therefore, it seems that it is not expedient to vow anything.

But contrary to this: Psalm 75:12 says, "Make your vow to the Lord your God, and fulfill it."

I respond: As has been explained (aa. 1-2), a vow is a promise made to God. Now the reason for promising something to a man is different from the reason for promising something to God.

We promise something to a man because of its usefulness to him, where it is useful to him both that we offer something and that we assure him ahead of time of its being offered in the future.

By contrast, we make a promise to God because of its usefulness to *us* and not because of its usefulness to Him. Hence, in the letter cited above Augustine says, "He is a kind and not a needy exacter; and He does not grow rich from what is rendered to Him, but instead He makes those who render to Him grow rich within themselves." And just as what we give to God is useful for us rather than for Him—since, as Augustine adds in the same place, "What is rendered to Him is added to the one who renders it"—so, too, a promise by which we vow something to God is not useful to Him, who does not need to be assured by us, but is instead useful to *us*, insofar as, by vowing, we fix our will immovably with respect to something that it is expedient for us to do. And this is why it is expedient to make vows.

Reply to objection 1: Just as not being able to sin does not diminish one's freedom, so, too, the necessity of a will fixed on the good does not diminish one's freedom. This is clear in the case of God

and in the case of the blessed in heaven. And the necessity of a vow is like this, since it bears a certain similarity to the way in which the blessed in heaven are confirmed in the good (*similitudinem quandam habens cum confirmatione beatorum*). Hence, in the same letter Augustine says, “It is a happy necessity that compels one toward what is better.”

Reply to objection 2: When the danger arises from the very deed that is being done, then that particular thing that is done is not expedient, as when someone crosses a river over a rickety bridge. By contrast, if the danger threatens because the man fails in the deed itself, then the deed does not thereby cease to be expedient; for instance, it is expedient to climb onto a horse, even though danger threatens someone who falls from a horse. Otherwise, one who have to forego all goods that can be dangerous incidentally because of some turn of events (*ex aliquo eventu possent esse periculosa*). Hence, Ecclesiastes 11:4 says, “One who pays attention to the wind never sows, and one who pays attention to the clouds never reaps.”

Now danger threatens one who makes a vow not because of the vow itself, but through the fault of the man, who changes his mind and transgresses the vow. This is why, in the same letter, Augustine says, “Do not repent that you have made the vow. Indeed, rejoice that you are no longer permitted to do what you would have been permitted to do to your detriment.”

Reply to objection 3: It was not appropriate for Christ to make vows in His own right (*secundum se*), both (a) because He was God and also (b), insofar as He was a man, He had a will that was confirmed in the good in the sense that He was a comprehender [of the divine essence] (*quasi comprehensor existens*). Still, according to a Gloss, it is in His person, through a certain similitude, that Psalm 2:26 says, “I will fulfill my vows in the sight of those who fear Him.”

Now the apostles are thought of as having vowed what pertained to the state of perfection when, having left everything behind, they followed Christ.

Article 5

Is a vow an act of worship (*latría*), i.e., an act of the virtue of religion?

It seems that a vow is not an act of worship (*latría*), i.e., an act [of the virtue] of religion (*religio*):

Objection 1: Every work of virtue may fall under a vow. But it belongs to the same virtue both to promise something and to do it. Therefore, vows belong to every virtue whatsoever and not specifically to [the virtue] of religion.

Objection 2: According to Tully, it belongs to religion “to offer worship and ceremonies to God.” But one who makes a vow is not yet offering anything to God, but is only promising to do so. Therefore, a vow is not an act of [the virtue] of religion.

Objection 3: The worship that belongs to [the virtue of] religion should be given only to God. But vows are made not only to God, but also to saints and to prelates, whom those professing the religious state (*religiosi profitentes*) vow obedience to. Therefore, a vow is not an act of [the virtue of] religion.

But contrary to this: Isaiah 19:21 says, “They shall worship him with sacrifices and offerings, and they shall make vows to the Lord and fulfill them.” But to worship God (*colere Deum*) is properly an act of [the virtue] of worship (*latría*), i.e., an act of [the virtue] of religion.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 81, a. 1), every act of virtue belongs to religion or worship in the manner of a *command*, insofar as it is ordered toward reverence for God, which is the proper end of worship. Now to order other acts toward their end belongs to the *commanding* virtue and not to the *commanded* virtues. And so the very ordering of the acts of any virtue toward the service of God is the proper act of [the virtue of] worship.

Now it is clear from what was said above (a. 1) that a vow is a promise made to God and that a

promise is nothing other than the ordering of what is promised toward the one to whom it is promised. Hence, a vow is an ordering of what one is vowing toward reverence for, i.e., service to, God. And so it is clear that making a vow is properly an act of [the virtue of] worship, i.e., an act of [the virtue of] religion.

Reply to objection 1: What falls under a vow is, to be sure, sometimes the act of another virtue, e.g., fasting or preserving continence, but sometimes it is an act of religion, e.g., offering sacrifice or praying. Yet both sorts of promise made to God belong to [the virtue of] religion in the way that has already been explained.

Hence, it is clear that some vows belong to [the virtue of] religion just by reason of the promise that has been made to God, where the promise is the *essence* of a vow, whereas sometimes it is *also* by reason of the thing that has been promised, where the thing is the *matter* of a vow.

Reply to objection 2: Insofar as the one who makes a promise obligates himself to give, he is already giving, just as something is said to come to be when its cause comes to be; for an effect is contained virtually in its cause. And this is why gratitude is shown not only to the one who gives, but also to the one who promises.

Reply to objection 3: A vow is made to God alone, whereas a promise can be made to a man as well, and the very promise of something good that is made to man can fall under a vow insofar as it is a virtuous act. And the way understand a vow by which someone makes a vow to saints or prelates is that the very promise made to saints or prelates falls under the vow *materially*, viz., insofar as the man vows to God that he will fulfill what he is promising to the saints or to the prelates.

Article 6

Is it more laudable and meritorious to do something without a vow than with a vow?

It seems that it is more laudable and meritorious to do something without a vow than with a vow:

Objection 1: In *De Vita Contemplativa* Prosper says, “We should abstain or fast in such a way that we do not subject ourselves to the necessity of fasting, lest we do something voluntary unwillingly and without devotion.” But one who vows a fast subjects himself to the necessity of fasting. Therefore, it would be better for him to fast without a vow.

Objection 2: In 2 Corinthians 9:7 the Apostle says, “Everyone as he has determined in his heart, not with sadness or by necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” But some do the things they vow with sadness, and this seems to proceed from the necessity that the vow imposes. For as *Metaphysics* 5 points out, “Necessity brings sadness.” Therefore, it is better to do something without a vow than with a vow.

Objection 3: As was established above (a. 4), a vow is necessary for a man’s will to be strengthened with respect to the thing that he vows. But the will cannot be strengthened with respect to doing something any more than when he actually does it. Therefore, it is not better to do something with a vow than without a vow.

But contrary to this: A Gloss on Psalm 75:12 (“Make your vow, and fulfill it”) says, “Vowing gives counsel to the will.” But a counsel has to do only with a better good. Therefore, it is better to do a better work from a vow than without a vow, since one who does it without a vow fulfills only one counsel, viz., the counsel to do it, whereas one who does it with a vow fulfills two counsels, viz., the counsel to vow it and the counsel to do it.

I respond: There are three reasons why doing the same work with a vow is better and more meritorious than doing it without a vow.

First, as has been explained (a. 5), vowing is an act of worship (*actus latriae*), which is the most important of the moral virtues. But the work of a more noble virtue is better and more meritorious. Hence, the act of a lower virtue is better and more meritorious because it commanded by a higher virtue

whose act is effected by the command. For instance, an act of faith or hope is better if it is commanded by charity. And so the acts of the other moral virtues, e.g., fasting, which is an act of abstinence, and being continent, which is an act of chastity, are better and more meritorious if they are effected by a vow, since as such they already belong to divine worship in the sense that they are sacrifices to God. Hence, in *De Virginitate* Augustine says, “Virginitas itself is honored not because it is virginity, but because it is promised to God. It is the continence of piety that recommends and preserves it.”

Second, someone who vows something and does it subjects himself to God more than someone who merely does it. For he subjects himself to God not only with respect to the act, but also with respect to the power, since for the duration he cannot do otherwise—in the same way that, as Anselm points out in *De Similitudine*, he who gives a man the tree along with the fruit gives more than he who gives him just the fruit. And this is why, as has been explained (a. 5), gratitude is shown to those who promise.

Third, through a vow one’s will is unchangeably strengthened in the good. Now as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 2, doing something from a will confirmed in the good belongs to the perfection of virtue—just as sinning with an obstinate mind makes the sin worse and, as was explained above (q. 14, a. 2), is called a sin against the Holy Spirit.

Reply to objection 1: This passage should be taken to be about a necessity of *coercion*, which causes involuntariness and excludes devotion. Hence, he distinctly says, “... lest we do something voluntary unwillingly and without devotion.” By contrast, the necessity that belongs to a vow is by way of the immutability of the will, and so it strengthens the will and increases one’s devotion. Therefore, the argument does not go through.

Reply to objection 2: According to the Philosopher, the necessity of coercion causes sadness insofar as it is contrary to the will. But the necessity of a vow, insofar as it strengthens the will, does not cause sadness in those who are well disposed, but instead causes joy. This is why, in *Epistola ad Armentarium et Paulinum*, Augustine says, “Do not regret that you have made the vow. Indeed, rejoice that you are no longer permitted to do what you would have been permitted to do to your detriment.”

However, if the same deed, considered in itself, were rendered sad and involuntary after the vow, even while the resolution to fulfill the vow remained, this would still be more meritorious than if it happened without the vow. For the fulfillment of the vow is an act of [the virtue of] religion, which is a higher virtue than abstinence, whose act is fasting.

Reply to objection 3: Someone who does something without a vow has an unchangeable will with respect to the particular act that he is performing and for the time when he is performing it, but his resolution does not remain entirely fixed for the future, as does the will of the one who has made a vow. For the latter has obligated his will to do something (and perhaps to do it many times) even before he performs this particular act.

Article 7

Is a vow solemnized by the reception of Holy Orders and by the profession of a particular Rule?

It seems not to be the case that a vow is solemnized by the reception of Holy Orders and by the profession of a particular Rule (*votum non solemnizetur per susceptionem sacri ordinis et per professionem ad certam regulam*):

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), a vow is a promise made to God. But the things that are done pertaining to solemnization seem to be ordered toward men and not to God. Therefore, they are related incidentally (*per accidens*) to the vow. Therefore, it is not the case that solemnization of this sort is a proper condition for a vow.

Objection 2: What pertains to the condition of a thing (*ad conditionem alicuius rei*) seems to be

such that it can belong to all the things in which that thing is found. But many things that can fall under a vow are such that either they do not pertain to Holy Orders or they do not pertain to a particular Rule, as when someone vows to make a pilgrimage or something of this sort. Therefore, the solemnity that occurs in the reception of Holy Orders, or in the making a promise with respect to a particular Rule, does not belong to the condition of a vow.

Objection 3: A solemn vow seems to be the same thing as a public vow. But there are many vows that can be made in public other than a vow that is made in the reception of Holy Orders or in the profession of a particular Rule—and even the latter vows can be made in secret. Therefore, it is not only vows of this sort that are solemn.

But contrary to this: As will be explained in the Third Part of this work, only vows of the sort in question (a) are impediments to contracting marriage and (b) bring to naught a marriage contract that has already been made.

I respond: Each thing is such that solemnization is applied to it in keeping with its condition. For instance, the solemnity of a new army, viz., in an array of horses and arms and an assembly of soldiers, is different from the solemnization of a marriage, which consists in an array of the spouses and a gathering of those close to them.

Now a vow is a promise made to God. Hence, the solemnization of a vow involves something spiritual that pertains to God, i.e., some spiritual blessing or consecration which is used by the institution of the apostles in the profession of a particular Rule—which, according to Dionysius in *De Ecclesiasticis Hierarchibus*, is the second level after the reception of Holy Orders. And the reason for this is that solemnization used to be applied only when someone gave himself up totally to some thing. For instance, the solemnization of a marriage is applied only in the celebration of matrimony, when both of the spouses hand the power of their body over to the other. And, similarly, the solemnization of a vow is applied when someone, through the reception of Holy Orders, is applied to divine ministry, and in the profession of a particular Rule, when someone takes on the state of perfection by renouncing the world along with his own will.

Reply to objection 1: Solemnization pertains not only to men but also to God, insofar as it involves a spiritual consecration or blessing whose author is God—even though a man administers it—this according to Numbers 6:27 (“They will invoke my name over the children of Israel, and I will bless them”). And so a solemn vow carries a stronger obligation before God than a simple vow does, and one who breaks a solemn vow sins more gravely.

The claim that a simple vow carries no less of an obligation before God than a solemn vow does should be taken to mean that one who breaks either sort of vow commits a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, solemnization is usually applied not to particular acts but to the assumption of a new state. And so when someone vows certain particular deeds, e.g., a pilgrimage or some special fast, solemnization is not congruent with such a vow; instead, solemnization is congruent only with a vow by which someone subjects himself totally to a divine ministry or type of service. Still, this sort of, as it were, universal vow includes many particular deeds.

Reply to objection 3: By the fact that a vow is made in public it can have a certain human solemnity without having a spiritual and divine solemnity of the sort that the vows discussed above have, even if they are made before just a few people. Hence, it is one thing for a vow to be public and another thing for it to be solemn.

Article 8

Are those who are subject to someone else's power impeded from making a vow?

It seems that those who are subject to someone else's power are not impeded from making a vow:

Objection 1: A lesser bond is exceeded by a greater bond. But the obligation by which one is subject to a man is a lesser bond than a vow, through which one is obligated to God. Therefore, those who are subject to someone else's power are not impeded from making a vow.

Objection 2: Children are under the power of their father. But children can make a profession of a religious Rule (*possunt profiteri in aliqua religione*) even without the consent of their parents (*etiam sine voluntate parentum*). Therefore, one is not impeded from making a vow by the fact that he is subject to someone else's power.

Objection 3: To do is greater than to promise. But religious who are under the power of prelates can do certain things without the permission (*sine licentia*) of their prelates, e.g., recite certain Psalms or undertake certain sorts of abstinence. Therefore, *a fortiori*, they can promise something of this sort by making a vow to God.

Objection 4: If anyone does what he cannot do under the law (*de iure*), then he commits a sin. But subjects do not sin by making a vow, since this is never prohibited. Therefore, it seems that they can make a vow under the law.

But contrary to this: In Numbers 30:4ff. it is commanded that "if a woman living in her father's house and still a girl makes a vow, then the vow is not binding unless her father consents." And it says the same thing about a woman who has a husband. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, no other persons subject to someone else's power can obligate themselves by making a vow.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 7), a vow is a certain promise made to God. But no one can, through a promise, obligate himself in fixed way to what is under someone else's control; rather, he can obligate himself in fixed way only to what is altogether under his own control. Now if someone is subject to someone else, then with respect to that in which he is subject, it is not under his control to do what he pleases, but it instead depends upon the other's will. And so without the consent of his superior he cannot obligate himself in a firm way through a vow in those matters in which he is subject to the other.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (a. 2), only what is virtuous falls under a promise made to God. But as was likewise explained above (q. 86, a. 3), it is contrary to virtue that a man should offer to God something that belongs to another. And so the nature of a vow cannot be altogether preserved when someone who is situated under a power vows something that is under someone else's control—except under the condition that the one whose control it is under does not object.

Reply to objection 2: By the fact that a man reaches the age of the puberty, if he has the status of a free man (*si sit liberae conditionis*), then those things that pertain to his own person are such that they are under his own control, e.g., that he should obligate himself to religious life through a vow or that he should contract marriage. However, arrangements within the family do not fall under his power. Hence, in these matters he cannot vow anything that is valid without the consent of his father.

On the other hand, since a servant (*servus*) is under the power of his master even with respect to his personal actions, he cannot by a vow obligate himself to religious life, through which he would be removed from the service of his master.

Reply to objection 3: A religious is subject to his prelate with respect to his actions in accord with his profession of the Rule. And so even if someone can do something at an hour when he is not given other things to do by the prelate, still, since there is no exempt time at which the prelate cannot give him something to do, no vow by a religious is fixed except with the consent of his prelate—just as no vow made by a girl living at home is fixed except with the consent of her father, and no vow made by a wife is fixed except with the consent of her husband.

Reply to objection 4: Even though a vow made by those who are under someone else's power is not firm without the consent of those to whom they are subject, still, they do not sin in making the vow, since the necessary condition is understood in their vows, viz., if it is approved by, or not objected to, by their superiors.

Article 9

Can children, by making a vow, obligate themselves to enter religious life?

It seems that children cannot, by making a vow, obligate themselves to enter religious life (*pueri non possint voto se obligare ad religionis ingressum*):

Objection 1: Since mental deliberation is required for making a vow, only those who have the use of reason are fit to make a vow. But this is lacking in children, just as it is those who are out of their minds or furious (*sicut et in amentibus et furiosis*). Therefore, just as those who are out of their minds or furious cannot bind themselves to anything by making a vow, so, too, neither can children, it seems, obligate themselves to religious life by making a vow.

Objection 2: What can be done legally (*rite*) cannot be abnegated by another. But as *Decretals* 20, q. 2, chap. *puella* has it, a vow to enter religious life (*votum religionis*) made by a boy or a girl before the age of puberty can be revoked by the parents or by a guardian (*tutor*). Therefore, it seems that before the age of fourteen, a boy or girl cannot legally make a vow.

Objection 3: According to the Rule of St. Benedict and the second statute of Innocent IV, a year of probation is given to those entering religious life, in order that the probation might precede the obligation attaching to a vow. Therefore, it seems to be illicit for children to be obligated to religious life before the year of probation.

But contrary to this: What is not legally done is not valid, even if no one revokes it. But as *Decretals* 20, q. 17, chap. *puella* has it, a girl's vow, even one that is made before the age of puberty, is valid if it is not revoked within a year by the parents. Therefore, children can licitly and legally be obligated by a vow to enter religious life, even before the age of puberty.

I respond: As is clear from what was said above (a. 7), there are two types of vow, viz., *simple* and *solemn*. And since, as has been explained (a. 7), the solemnization of a vow consists in a certain spiritual benediction and consecration, which is performed by a minister of the Church, it follows that the solemnization of a vow falls under the administration of the Church.

A simple vow has its efficacy from the mind's deliberation, in light of which one intends to obligate himself. Now there are two ways in which it can happen that such an obligation lacks force:

(a) *because of a defect of reason*, as is clear in the case of those who are not in their right minds and the furious, who cannot obligate themselves to anything by a vow while they are in a fury or not in their right minds.

(b) *because the one who makes the vow is subject to someone else's power*, as was explained above (a. 8).

And these two ways come together in the case of children before the age of puberty, since (a) they suffer a defect of reason in most cases (*ut in pluribus*) and (b) they are naturally under the care of their parents or under the care of guardians who take the place of their parents. And so in light of this twofold cause their vows do not have force.

It happens, however, that, because of a natural disposition, in some children, albeit only a few of them, the use of reason is accelerated, and for this reason they are said to be 'capable of deceit' (*doli capaces*). However, they are not for this reason exempted in any way from the care of their parents; for this care is subject to human law, which takes into account what happens in most cases.

Therefore, one should reply that if boys or girls before the age of puberty do not yet have the use of reason, then they are in no way able to obligate themselves to anything by a vow. But if they have attained the use of reason before the age of puberty, then, just taking this into account, they can obligate themselves, but their vow can be invalidated by their parents, whose care they still remain subject to.

Yet however much they are capable of deceit before the age of puberty, they are still not able to be obligated by a *solemn* vow of the religious state (*non potest obligari voto solemnī religionis*), and this because of a statute of the Church that takes into account what happens for the most part. However, after the age of puberty, they can now obligate themselves by a vow of the religious state, either a simple vow or a solemn vow, without the consent of their parents.

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through for children who have not yet attained the use of reason and whose vows, as has been explained, are invalid.

Reply to objection 2: The vows of those who are under someone else's power contain an implicit condition, viz., as long as the vows are not revoked by a superior, and, as has been explained, the vows are rendered licit and valid if that condition holds.

Reply to objection 3: This argument goes through for a solemn vow that is made by means of a profession.

Article 10

Can a dispensation be granted in the case of a vow?

It seems that a dispensation cannot be granted in the case of a vow (*in voto dispensari non possit*):

Objection 1: It is a lesser thing for a vow to be changed than for a dispensation to be granted in the case of a vow. But a vow cannot be changed; for Leviticus 27:9-10 says, "An animal that can be sacrificed to the Lord, if someone vows this, will be holy and cannot be changed, either a better one for one that is bad or a worse one for one that is good." Therefore, *a fortiori*, a dispensation cannot be granted in the case of a vow.

Objection 2: One cannot be granted a dispensation by any man in matters having to do with natural law and in the case of divine precepts; this is especially so with the precepts of the first tablet, which are ordered directly toward loving God, which is the ultimate end of the precepts. But to fulfill a vow is a matter that has to do with natural law, and, as is clear from what has been said above (a. 3), it is also a precept of divine law that pertains to the act of worship. Therefore, a dispensation cannot be granted in the case of a vow.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 3), the obligation that attaches to a vow is founded on the faithfulness that a man owes to God. But no one can be granted a dispensation in the case of this faithfulness. Therefore, neither can he be granted a dispensation in the case of a vow.

But contrary to this: What proceeds from a common will seems to be more firm than what proceeds from the singular will of any particular person. But in matters pertaining to law, which has its force from a common will, one can be granted a dispensation through a man. Therefore, it seems that one can likewise be granted a dispensation through a man in the case of a vow.

I respond: A dispensation in the case of a vow should be understood in the manner of a dispensation that is granted from the observance of some law. For as was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 96, a. 6 and q. 97, a. 4), a law is made by looking to what is good for the most part (*in pluribus*). However, since in a given case of the relevant sort it happens that it is not good, it was necessary for it to be determined by someone that in this particular case the law need not be observed. And this is, properly speaking, what it is to grant a dispensation. For a dispensation seems to imply a measured distribution or application of what is common to what is contained under it, in the way in which one is said to dispense

food to a family.

Similarly, one who makes a vow establishes in a certain way a law for himself, binding himself to something that is good in its own right and good for the most part. Yet it can happen that in a given case it is either simply bad or disadvantageous or an obstacle to a greater good—which, as is clear from what was said above (a. 3), is contrary to the character of what falls under a vow. And so in such a case it must be determined that the vow should not be kept. And if the determination is made in an absolute way that a given vow is not to be fulfilled, then this is said to constitute a *dispensation* from the vow, whereas if it is determined that something else should be imposed instead of what was supposed to have been fulfilled, then this is said to constitute a *commuting* of the vow. Hence, it is a lesser thing to commute a vow than to grant a dispensation from the vow. Still, both lie within the power of the Church.

Reply to objection 1: By the very fact that what was vowed was an animal eligible to be sacrificed, the animal was considered holy in the sense of being given over for divine worship, and this was the reason why it could not be changed—just as no one could exchange an item which he had vowed and which was already consecrated, e.g., a chalice or a house, for something better or for something worse.

However, an animal that was unable to be sanctified because it was not eligible to be sacrificed (*quia not erat immolatum*) could be, and was supposed to be, bought back, as the Law states in the same place. And so even now vows can be commuted if no consecration has taken place in the meantime.

Reply to objection 2: Just as a man is obligated by natural law and divine precept to fulfill a vow, so, too, he is obligated by the same law and precepts to obey the law or mandate of his superiors. And yet when he is granted a dispensation in a case of human law, this does not bring it about that a human law is not obeyed, which is contrary to natural law and to divine mandate; instead, what is brought about is that what was a law is not a law in this case.

So, too, by the authority of the superior who grants a dispensation, it is brought about that what was contained under a vow is not now contained under it insofar as it is determined in this case that this is not an appropriate matter for a vow. And so when a prelate of the Church grants a dispensation from a vow, he does not give a dispensation from a precept of natural or divine law, but instead makes a determination about what fell under an obligation deriving from human deliberation, which was unable to take everything into account.

Reply to objection 3: It is irrelevant to the faithfulness owed to God for a man to do what is such that to vow it is bad or disadvantageous or an obstacle to a greater good—which is what a dispensation from a vow focuses on. And so receiving a dispensation from a vow is not contrary to the faithfulness that is owed to God.

Article 11

Can a dispensation be granted in the case of a solemn vow of [sexual] continence?

It seems that a dispensation can be granted in the case of a solemn vow of [sexual] continence:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 10), one reason for granting a dispensation in the case of a vow is that the vow impedes a greater good. But a vow of continence, even if it is a solemn vow, can be an obstacle to a greater good, since the common good is more godlike than is the good of a single individual. But someone's continence can impede the good of the whole multitude, e.g., when the peace of the fatherland could be secured through a contract of marriage between persons who have vowed continence. Therefore, it seems that a dispensation can be granted in the case of a solemn vow of continence.

Objection 2: Worship (*latria*) is a more noble virtue than chastity. But if someone vows an act of

worship, e.g., offering a sacrifice to God, he can receive a dispensation from that vow. Therefore, *a fortiori*, someone can receive a dispensation from a vow of continence, which involves an act of chastity.

Objection 3: Just as a vow of abstinence, when observed, can lead to danger for a person, so, too, can the observance of a vow of continence. But in the case of a vow of abstinence, if it leads to corporeal danger for the one who makes the vow, then a dispensation can be granted. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, a dispensation can likewise be granted in the case of a vow of continence.

Objection 4: Just as a vow of continence is included within the religious profession by which it is solemnized, so, too, are the vow of poverty and the vow of obedience. But a dispensation can be granted in the case of the vows of poverty and obedience, as is clear in the case of those who are raised to the episcopacy after their religious profession. Therefore, it seems that a dispensation can be granted in the case of a solemn vow of continence.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiasticus 26:20 says, “A continent soul outweighs everything (*omnis ponderatio non est digna animae continentis*).”

Furthermore, in *De Statu Monachium*, at the end of the Decretal *Cum ad monasterium*, it says, “The renunciation of property, like the preservation of chastity, is so bound up with the monastic rule that not even the Supreme Pontiff can be lenient in opposition to it (*contra eam nec summus pontifex possit indulgere*).

I respond: In the case of a solemn vow of continence there are three possible things to consider: (a) the *matter* of the vow, viz., continence itself; (b) the *perpetuity* of the vow, since by the vow one binds himself to the perpetual observance of chastity; and (c) the *solemnization itself* of the vow.

Hence, as is clear from the passage cited above, some claim that no dispensation can be granted because of the *continence itself*. Some give as a reason for this that it is through continence that a man overcomes his ‘domestic enemy’, or that it is through continence that a man is perfectly conformed to Christ as regards purity of soul and body.

But this line of reasoning does not seem to work. For the goods of the soul, such as contemplation and prayer, are much better than the goods of the body, and yet one can be granted a dispensation from a vow to pray or from a vow to contemplate. Hence, if one looks simply (*absolute*) at the dignity of continence, there does not seem to be any reason why a dispensation cannot be granted in the case of a vow of continence—especially because in 1 Corinthians 7:34 the Apostle encourages continence *for the sake of* contemplation, asserting that “an unmarried woman thinks of the things that belong to God,” where the end is more important than the means to the end.

And so others look for a reason in the *perpetuity* and *universality* of the vow in question. They claim that a vow of continence cannot be subject to an omission except through something that is altogether contrary to it, which is never permitted in the case of any vow.

But this is manifestly false. For just as engaging in carnal intercourse is contrary to continence, so, too, eating meat or drinking wine is contrary to abstaining from such things, and yet vows involving things of this sort can be dispensed with.

And so it seems to others that a dispensation can be granted in the case of a solemn vow of continence because of some common advantage or necessity, as is clear in the example brought up above about making peace among territories by contracting a marriage.

However, because the Decretal cited above explicitly says that not even the Supreme Pontiff can grant a monk a permission contrary to the preservation of chastity, it seems that we must make a different reply, viz. that, as was explained above (a. 10) and is contained in Leviticus 27:9-10, what is once made holy for the Lord cannot be changed to other uses.

Now a prelate of the Church cannot bring it about, even in the case of inanimate things, that something that has been made holy should lose its holiness—for instance, that a consecrated chalice should cease to be consecrated, as long as it remains intact. Hence, *a fortiori*, no prelate can bring it about that a man consecrated to God should cease to be consecrated for as long as he lives. But, as has

been explained (a. 7), the solemnity of a vow consists in a certain sort of consecration or blessing of the one who is making the vow. And so it cannot be brought about by any prelate of the Church that someone who has pronounced a solemn vow ceases to be consecrated with respect to what he was consecrated for, e.g., that he who is a priest should not be a priest—even though a prelate can, for some reason, keep him from exercising his [Holy] Orders. For a similar reason, the Pope is unable to bring it about that someone who has professed the religious life is not a religious—even though certain lawyers have in ignorance claimed the contrary.

Therefore, one has to figure out whether continence is tied essentially to the reason why the vow is solemnized. For if it is not tied to it essentially, then the solemnity of the consecration can remain without the obligation of continence—something that cannot happen if continence is tied essentially to the reason why the vow is solemnized.

Now continence is not tied essentially to Holy Orders, but is instead tied to Holy Orders by an *ecclesiastical statute*. Hence, it seems that one can be granted a dispensation by the Church in the case of a vow of continence that has been solemnized by the reception of Holy Orders. By contrast, the obligation of continence is *essential* to the state of religious life, through which (a) a man renounces the world and is bound totally to the service of God and which (b) cannot exist together with matrimony, in which one is pressed upon by the necessity of taking care of his wife, children, and family, and of taking care of the things that are required for this. Hence, in 1 Corinthians 7:33 the Apostle says, “He who has a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he might please his wife, and is divided.” Hence, the name ‘monk’ (*monachus*) is taken from unity (*monos*) as an opposite to the sort of division just mentioned.

And so the Church cannot grant a dispensation for a vow solemnized in a profession of the religious state, and the decretal gives the reason, viz., that “chastity is tied to the monastic Rule.”

Reply to objection 1: The dangers associated with human things should be obviated by means of human things and not by means of divine things being turned to human use. But those who have professed the religious state are dead to the world and live for God. Hence, they are not to be called back to human life by reason of any turn of events whatsoever.

Reply to objection 2: A dispensation can be granted in the case of a vow of temporary continence, just as in the case of a vow of temporary prayer or of temporary abstinence.

However, the fact that a dispensation cannot be granted in the case of a vow of continence solemnized by a profession [of religious life] stems not from its being an act of chastity, but from the fact that it begins to belong to [the virtue of] worship (*latria*) through the profession of religious life.

Reply to objection 3: Food is directly ordered toward the conservation of a person, and so abstinence from food can directly turn into a danger for the person. Hence, this is the reason why a vow of abstinence can receive a dispensation.

By contrast, sexual intercourse (*coitus*) is directly ordered not to the conservation of a person, but to the conservation of the species. Hence, abstinence from sexual intercourse does not directly turn into a danger for the person. On the other hand, if some personal danger does incidentally (*per accidens*) arise from this, then it can be alleviated in other ways, viz., through abstinence [from food] or through other corporeal remedies.

Reply to objection 4: Just as a religious who becomes a bishop is not absolved of the vow of continence, so neither is he absolved of the vow poverty, since he ought to have nothing as his own, but should instead act as the dispenser of the common goods of the Church. Similarly, he is likewise not absolved of the vow of obedience; instead, he is incidentally not obligated to obey if he has no superior—just like the abbot of a monastery, who is nonetheless not absolved of the vow of obedience.

Reply to argument to the contrary: The passage from Ecclesiasticus that is posited in the argument to the contrary should be understood to mean that neither the fruitfulness of the flesh nor any corporeal good is to be compared with continence, which is counted among the goods of the soul, as

Augustine points out in *De Sancta Virginitate*. Hence, it explicitly says “a continent *soul*” and not “continent *body (carnis)*.”

Article 12

Is the authority of a prelate required for changing a vow or granting a dispensation from a vow?

It seems that the authority of a prelate is not required for changing or dispensing with a vow:

Objection 1: One can enter religious life (*potest intrare religionem*) without the authority of any higher prelate. But in entering religious life a man is absolved of vows made in the world, even of a vow to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land (*etiam a voto terrae sanctae*). Therefore, there can be a change in a vow or a dispensation from a vow without the authority of a higher prelate.

Objection 2: A dispensation from a vow seems to consist in determining that in this case the vow does not have to be observed. But if a prelate makes this determination incorrectly (*male*), then the one who has made the vow does not seem to be absolved from the vow, since, as has been explained (aa. 10-11), no prelate can grant a dispensation in a way contrary to God’s precept concerning the fulfillment of a vow. Similarly, even if someone does determine correctly (*recte*) by the proper authority that in this case the vow does not have to be fulfilled, the one in question does not [in any case] seem to be obligated by the vow. For, as has been explained (a. 2), a vow does not obligate when it has a worse outcome. Therefore, the dispensation from a vow does not require the authority of any prelate.

Objection 3: If it belongs to the power of prelates to grant a dispensation from a vow, then, by parity of reasoning, this would belong to everyone. But it does not belong to everyone to grant a dispensation from every vow. Therefore, granting a dispensation for vows does not belong to the power of prelates.

But contrary to this: Just as a law obligates one to do something, so, too, does a vow. But as was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 96, a. 6 and q. 97, a. 4), the authority of a superior is required for granting a dispensation from a precept of the law. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, the authority of a superior is likewise required for granting a dispensation from a vow.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 2), a vow is a promise made to God with respect to something that is acceptable to God. Now what is acceptable in a given promise to the one to whom the promise is made depends on his judgment (*ex eius pendet arbitrio*). But a prelate in the Church acts in the place of God. And so what is required in cases in which vows are changed or dispensed with is a prelate’s authority, which determines in the person of God what is acceptable to God—this according to 2 Corinthians 2:10 (“... for I have done it for your sake in the person of Christ”). And he explicitly says “for your sake” because every dispensation that is sought from a prelate ought to be made either for the honor of Christ, in whose person he gives the dispensation, or for the advantage of the Church, which is His body.

Reply to objection 1: All other vows have to do with particular deeds, but through a vow of religious life (*per religionem*) a man hands over his whole life to the service of God. But the particular is contained within the universal. And this is why the decretal says, “One who exchanges temporary service for the perpetual observance of the religious life is not held guilty of a broken vow.” Nor is one who enters religious life obligated to fulfill vows of fasting or prayer or other such things that he made while in the world, since one who enters religious life dies to his prior life. Also, singular observances do not fit in with religious life, and the burden of religious life is difficult enough for a man that it is unnecessary to add other burdens.

Reply to objection 2: Some have claimed that prelates can grant dispensations from vows as they please, since, as was explained above in the case the vows of subordinates (a. 8), every vow conditionally

includes the consent of the superior; for instance, the vow of a servant or of a child contains the understood condition: *as long as it pleases the father or master or as long as he does not object*. And so a subordinate could without any remorse of conscience omit the fulfillment of a vow whenever a prelate tells him to omit it.

But the position just laid out is based on something false. For since, as is clear from 2 Corinthians 10:8, the power of a spiritual prelate, who is not a master but a dispenser, is given for building up and not for tearing down, it follows that just as a prelate cannot command what in its own right displeases God, viz., sins, so neither can he prohibit what in its own right pleases God, viz., works of virtue. And so a man can unconditionally (*absolute*) vow works of virtue.

However, it does belong to a prelate to judge what is more virtuous and more pleasing to God. And so in obvious cases a prelate's dispensation would not excuse one from sin—for instance, if a prelate were to grant someone a dispensation from a vow to enter religious life when there was no apparent cause impeding [the fulfillment of the vow]. But if there is an apparent impeding cause that might cast at least a doubt on the matter, then the individual could stand by the judgment of a prelate who was dispensing him from the vow or changing the vow. But the individual could not stand by his own judgment, since he himself is not acting in the place of God—except perhaps in a case where what the individual had vowed was clearly illicit and he could not in a timely fashion have recourse to a superior.

Reply to objection 3: Since, the Supreme Pontiff acts most fully in the place of Christ in the Church as a whole, he himself has the fullness of the power to grant dispensations in the case of all vows for which dispensations can be granted. But granting dispensations is entrusted to other lower prelates in the case of vows that are commonly made and need frequent dispensations — for instance, vows to make pilgrimages and fasts and other things of this sort — so that men easily have someone to have recourse to. However, more serious vows, e.g., vows of continence and vows to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, are reserved to the Supreme Pontiff.