Worcester F 80 Distinctiones

184 Poverty (*Paupertas*)

Poverty ought to be chosen because of three things. First, because of the approbation of Christ who not only chose it by word but by work. But according to the Philosopher in the *Topica*,[[1]](#endnote-1) that the wise man chooses that which should be chosen. Wherefore although before the coming of Christ poverty was contemptible and odious, afterward then it was praiseworthy. Wherefore Christ frequently did not have lodgings, Mark 11[:11]: “Having viewed all things round about, when now the eventide was come, he went out to Bethania.”

¶ Second, it is to be chosen because of security, Isai. 14[:30]: “The poor shall rest with confidence.” But on the other hand, concerning the rich that is said in Job last chapter [15:21]: “The sound of dread is always in their ears.”

¶ Third, the excellent remuneration. For poverty in reward is equated to martyrdom. Wherefore Bernard,[[2]](#endnote-2) truly a kind of martyrdom is voluntary poverty. For what in the genus of martyrdom is graver than to be hungry between feasts?

¶ Again poverty is the price set for heaven, with which the poor properly negotiate. For Christ taxed this sin, which properly the poor pay, therefore there is properly the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 19[:29]: “Every one that has left house,” etc. Again, it is

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preparatory for heaven toward which the poor are changed. Just as it is figured, Luke 14[:16]: “A certain man made a great supper,” etc. Where afterwards three kinds of men excused themselves, the poor were led in, and the lame were introduced.

¶ Third, poverty is the ground of heaven on which the poor are gathered, Matt. 19[:27-28]: You who have left “all things,” it follows, “you also shall sit on seats.” Again, God is more solicitous over the state of the poor than the rich, according to that of the Psal. [39:18]: “But I am a beggar and poor: the Lord is careful for me.” So, parents having many children are more solicitous of the one of them if he is sick than for the rest [who are] healthy. And those things which God provided to the poor are not transitory but perpetual, Tob. 4[:23]: “We lead indeed a poor life, but we shall have many good things if we fear God.” The example[[3]](#endnote-3) of the falcon and the hen, of whom the falcon was useful only in life, but not useful in death. On the other hand, is the hen.

¶ Again, the example[[4]](#endnote-4) of the rich man and Lazarus, according to that to the Heb. [12:1]: “Laying aside every weight,” etc. Thus, Peter did so much to hasten his death. He had light feet in his crucifixion with his feet erect toward heaven. And Bartholomew that he might be more expeditious to follow he took off his skin lest it be superfluous when he went forth. Laurence left the burden of fatness in song. Francis left the shoes for his feet and the other saints so hurried that they might catch Christ now in heaven. We see that in money the image does not appear unless it was previously impressed with a hammer on a stamp. Thus, neither in man does the likeness of God appear unless it was earlier impressed by the stick of tribulation, Eccli. 27[:6]: “The furnace tries the potter’s vessels. In this furnace the poverty of Christ the craftsman in gold makes the vessels of glory, that is, holy souls in honor.

1. Aristotle, *Topica* 3.3 (116a13-23), (LCL 391:382-385): In the first place, then, that which is more permanent (a) The more durable and what commends itself to the wise and good is preferable. or constant is more worthy of choice than that which is less so, and also that which the prudent or good man would prefer, or the right law, or those who are excellent in any particular sphere when they make their choice as such, and those who are skilled in some particular subject, or what most of them, or all, would choose, for example, in medicine (or carpentry) what most, or all, doctors would choose, or generally those things which most people or everybody or all things would choose, for example, the good; for everything aims at the good. You must direct the future course of the discussion in whatever direction may be advantageous; but the absolute criterion of what is better and more worthy of choice is the better knowledge, though for the individual it may be his own particular knowledge. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bernard, *Sermones de sanctis* 1.15 (PL 183:426): Quid mirabilius, aut quod martyrium gravius est, quam inter epulas esurire, inter vestes multas et pretiosas algere, paupertate premi inter divitias, quas offert mundus, quas ostentat malignus, quas desiderat noster ipse appetitus? [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. *Fasciculus morum* 4.12 (p. 392): Circa autem mala que eveniunt contemptoribus voluntarie paupertatis est sciendum quod ita contingit in fine de avaro divite et volutario paupere sicut de gallina et falcone. Falco autem in vita in pugno portatur, in pertica collocatur, de carne recenti reficitur. Set gallina in locis vilissimis sicut in fovea et sterquilinio et huiusmodi querit refectionem, in tugurrio locatur. Et tamen mortuo falcone in foveam proicitur, et gallina assata coram rege et magnatibus in aulam defertur. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. *Fasciculus morum* 4.12 (p. 392): Exemplum Luce 16 de divite epulone et Lazaro pauperrimo. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)