Worcester F 80 Distinctiones

67 Alms (*Elemosinam*)

Alms. “Give alms; and behold, all things are clean unto you,” Matt. 6[:2-3] and Luke 11[:41]. Note that God made the rich because of the poor, rather than the poor because of the rich. For it does better to be poor than rich in acquiring for himself the reward of

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eternal life, than to be rich for bestowing upon the poor temporal subsistence. Wherefore in Prov. 19[:17]: “He that has mercy on the poor, lend to the Lord.” Again, alms gives to man as if a sack with him. For nothing of his things of the world does a man carry with him when in death except his alms previously made which by the hand of the poor he sends in advance to heaven.

¶ What therefore is more useful than alms which do not desert the giver when other things desert the one holding on. In that one to whom it is given he lays waste to need, he covers nakedness, in him who gives he expels fault, covers sin. But under no circumstances for criminal men making alms are all things clean. For is it not read that whatever uncleanness touches will be unclean? And wisdom [Eccli. 7:11]: “Say not: God will have respect to the multitude of my gifts.” For those offering from gifts do not please. But there are many offering. The Example of Abel whose gifts of a pennyworth would not have pleased except he had pleased God before [Gen. 4:4]. Because God attends more to the manner in the deed than in the deed. In the manner, that is, how something happened than what and how something happened. Wherefore the Apostle to [1] Cor. [13:3]: “If I should distribute all my goods,” etc. For it is true that alms which proceed from a true cause and root, that is, from charity as namely for those whom we help, just as we wish to be helped by them, Wherefore, it is said, Luke [7:47]: “Many sins are forgiven her, because she has loved much.” It is not said there because she gave much, but he posited the root to meriting, that is, the love of charity. Because if it is opposed to Cornelius [Act. 10], how can alms benefit him not having the faith without which it is impossible to please God. Furthermore, if it is objected concerning Nabuchodonosor [Dan. 4:30-34] how alms could benefit him an infidel, it can be said just as someone by way of preparation for fault. Thus, some are preparatory for grace. For the malign suggestion precedes in man as part of the concupiscence, just like the serpent persuading she succeeded to the wicked delight on the part of the flesh as if a woman eating what although it is not yet mortal. However, it debilitates the mind and prepares for the consent, which when it happens, makes the preparation mortal. Thus, also in the sinner when something preparatory precedes to grace which softens the soul just as fire does for wax that it receives the image of the seal, that is, the similarity of God.

¶ Wherefore it is thus counseled to the sinner, Do in the meanwhile whatever you can of good so that God will enlighten your heart. In this way fear, which is said to be a small part of wisdom, prepares for grace just as a bristle introduces a thread. So also, alms before charity habituates, makes apt, and prepares, although it is not sufficient.

¶ Therefore fasting is good, but alms are better because what fasting subtracts, alms add

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otherwise, what fasting subtracts from the will is restored to cupidity.

¶ Again alms descend to one’s neighbor and ascend to God through merit. Solomon says [Eccli. 29:15]: “Shut up alms in the heart of the poor, and it shall obtain help for you” from God. Nor consider who has a lack of things, if there is sufficient good will. Wherefore Tob. [4:8-9]: “According to your ability be merciful. If you have much give abundantly.” But three things impede the rich from making alms, love, hope, and fear. Love of blood relatives, hope of faithful executors, and fear of sickness.

¶ And in making alms there should concur four causes. First that it is clean. For an offered dish of food does not please unless the vessel is clean, Eccli. 31[:8]: ““Blessed is the rich man that is found,” etc. For a man ought first to have mercy on himself through penitence, then on others for mercy. The example of Abel and of Cain.

The second cause is material as it is owed and man is led by this because it is from his own possessions not another’s, Tob. 4[:7]: “Give alms out of your substance.” Secondly, because it is for the poor not the rich. For when a vessel is overfilled it spoils, arid land ought to be irrigated not wet, Eccle. 4[:1]: “Defraud not the poor of alms.”

¶ Third the due form is double, namely, that it happens quickly lest perhaps the things given would spoil and then the reason for saving is cursed and thus then merit is lessened, Job 31 [:16]: “If I have made the eyes of the widow wait.” Second, that it be done hidden, so not by man but by God the reward is expected, Matt. 6[:2]: “When you do an alms deed, sound not a trumpet,” etc.

¶ In the giving of alms three things are to be considered, who asks, what is asked, for whom it is asked.

¶ As for the first, God himself asks in his poverty, Matt. 25[:40], because “you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.” And therefore, if the poor are refused, it is to be feared lest the rich refuse others of the kingdom, Prov. 21[:13]: “He that stops his ear against the cry of the poor, shall also cry himself and shall not be heard.” As for the second,[[1]](#endnote-1) note that God seeks for what is his. Therefore, he is an ingrate who denies, [1] Paral. 29[:14]: David said, “All things are yours, Lord: and we have given you what we received of your hand.” As for the third,[[2]](#endnote-2) note that God does not seek for giving, but for lending a hundredfold, Prov. 19[:17]: “He that has mercy on the poor, lends to the Lord.” The gloss, a hundredfold is to be received.

1. Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaeta Salutis* 2.7 (8:274a-b): Debet secundo considerare dives, quid petit Deus, quando eleemosynam petit in suis pauperibus: petit enim Deus non nostrum, sed suum. Ideo valde ingratus est Deo, qui pauperi negat modicam eleemosynam, cum de bonis Dei habeat abundanter ad mensam suam. Hoc consideravit David, qui dicit: *Tu sunt, Domine, omnia, et quae de tua manu accepimus, dedimus tibi.* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaeta Salutis* 2.7 (8:274b): Tertio, debet considerare dives homo, qd quid petit Deus, Deus enim petit non ad dandum, sed at mutuandum; nec tantum at riplas, imo ad centuplas usuras. Unde dicit Augustinus: “Homo, quod foeneras homini, foenerare Deo, et centuplum accipies, et vitam aeternam possidebis.” [↑](#endnote-ref-2)