

WILLIAM OF SAINT-AMOUR

On Able-Bodied Begging

Translated from the critical edition edited in:
A. G. Traver, 'William of Saint-Amour's Two Disputed Questions
De quantitate eleemosynae and *De valido mendicante*', *Archives d'histoire
doctrinale et litteraire du moyen age* 62 (1995): 295–342.

It is asked whether we should give alms to an able-bodied mendicant if he is poor.

[Arguments for the Proposition]

It seems that it is:

1. Job 31:16: *If I have denied to the poor what they desired. Therefore alms ought to be given to whichever begging poor.*
2. Item, Proverbs 21:13: *He who stops up his ears to the cries of the poor, he himself shall cry.*
3. Item, Eccli. 29:12: *Help the poor because of the commandment; and do not send him away empty-handed because of his poverty.*
4. Item, Matthew 25:40: *What you did for the least one of mine, you did for me.*
5. Item, Romans 12:13: *Sharing in the needs of the holy.*
6. Item, 1 Corinthians 12:26: *If one member suffers something, all members suffer, unless they be rotten.*
7. Item, Hebrews 13:16: *Do not forget beneficence and sharing.*
8. Item, 1 John 3:17: *Should one have property [substantiam] of this world, and have seen that his brother has need, and have closed his heart to him, how can the love of God remain in that one?*
9. Item, Matthew 5:42: *He who asks of you, give to him.*
10. Item, Luke 6:30: *Give to all seeking from you.*
11. Item, 2 Corinthians 8:14: *Let one satisfy the need of others with his wealth, as even their wealth—the Gloss: 'deservedly [the wealth] of those who lack divine things'—may be a supplement to your need—namely spiritual need—so that there will then be equality; the Gloss: 'For those who live in this world do not have merits sufficient for eternal life, /334/ unless it*

is found through the poor of Christ (whose kingdom is of the heavens) whom debtors have made their friends.’

12. Item, 1 Timothy 6:17–18: *Command the rich in this world to distribute freely, to share.*
13. Item, Acts 2:45: *They sold possessions and property, and they divided everything to everyone, according to whomever there was need.*
14. Item, Rom. 15:25: *Now therefore I shall make for Jerusalem to minister the holy.* The Gloss: ‘These ones gave themselves wholly over to divine obedience, caring for nothing mundane, they offered an example of good behaviour for the believers’. And below: *For if the gentiles made [them] participants of spiritual things, they ought to minister them in carnal things:* Romans 15:27. The Gloss: ‘That is, the Jews who sent them preachers from Jerusalem’. If they ought to, then they cannot deny.
15. Item, something ought especially to be given to a poor preacher: *But let him, who is taught the Word, share with one who instructed him in all good things:* Galatians 6:6. The Gloss: ‘Let him make all good things common for him. For it is a customary precept that he who is instructed offer necessities to the preacher of the word of God.’
16. Item, Galatians 6:10: *Epecially to the members of the faith.* The Gloss: ‘Compassion ought to be extended to all, over whom the just, who are of the faith, ought to be set’. /335/
17. Item, Luke 6:27: *Do well to those who hate you.* Therefore from the minor, etc.
18. Item, Chrysostom, *On the Letter to the Hebrews*: ‘If someone asks for nourishment, do not examine on these. Were Abraham an investigator of the poor, never would he have received angels in hospitality, but he would drive them away with the rest’: D. 42 c. *Quiescamus*.¹
19. Item, Bonifacius in 1 q. 2 c. *Quam pio*:² ‘Nowhere do we read that the disciples of the Lord called forth anyone to the cult of God with gifts, unless, perchance, someone awkwardly offered with regard to nourishment for the poor, none of whom, whatever their profession are denied victuals’ (*nisi forte de pauperum alimento quis inconcinne proponat, quorum nulli, cuiuscumque professionis esset, victualia negabantur*).

1. D. 42 c. 2 (1.152).

2. C. 1 q. 2 c. 2 (1.408).

20. Item, 11 q. 3 c. *Quoniam multos* (at the end):³ ‘If someone wishes to give something to the excommunicate in forbearance, not in pride, but for the sake of humanity, we do not prohibit them.’
21. Item, Jerome to the monk Paul: ‘He whom you feel is either always or frequently speaking of money, excepting alms which can be discussed indifferently by all, hold him a peddler rather than a monk’: 16 q. 1 c. *Si cupis*.⁴ Therefore, alms can be given to all indiscriminately.
22. Item, Augustine on the Psalms: ‘When we speak those two names—‘man’, ‘sinner’—they are not spoken in vain. Because a sinner, accuse him, because a man, pity him. And thus alms, which are extended by the law of humanity to any and all poor, ought not be spurned’: 23 q. 4 c. *Duo ista*.⁵

[Arguments Against the Proposition]

On the contrary:

1. Luke 14:12–14: *When you make lunch or dinner, do not invite your friends, brothers, relatives, or your rich neighbours so that they themselves do not by chance invite you back, and repayment be made to you; but call the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind: and you will be blessed since they do not have anything whence they might repay you.* The Gloss: ‘from whom /336/ you can expect nothing in the present.’ Therefore since you can expect something from a able-bodied pauper or servant of the mighty, alms ought not be made to him.
2. Item, Ambrosius, *De officiis*, in 86 dist. *Non satis*, [and] *Consideranda*:⁶ ‘Consideration ought to be made of age and debility, sometimes even modesty (which betrays noble origins), in bestowing [alms], so that you bestow more for the old (who cannot now seek victual for themselves). Likewise feebleness of the body ought to be helped more promptly; then, if someone falls from riches into need, and most especially if free from fault, villainy, proscription, or artifice he sent away what he had.’ Therefore alms should only be given to such people.

3. C. 11 q. 3 c. 103 (1.672–3).

4. C. 16 q. 1 c. 5 (1.762).

5. C. 23 q. 4 c. 35 (1.915–6).

6. D. 86 c. 14 (1.300–1), c. 17 (1.301)

3. Item, Augustine, writing to Vincent the Donatist: ‘More usefully is bread withheld from the hungry, if, unconcerned about food, he neglects justice than bread be broken with that same one so that he, withdrawn, may acquiesce to injustice’: 5 q. 5 c. *Non omnis*.⁷ But he who does not wish to physically work to seek food—although he be able to work, or who can otherwise have food without sin—if he should demand food, he does so unjustly because it is contrary to the doctrine of the Apostle, as I shall prove. Therefore, bread ought to be taken away from such a one. Therefore it ought not be given.
- i. Proof of the minor:⁸ 2 Thessalonians 3:10: *If one does not wish to work, nor shall he eat*; the Gloss: ‘The Apostle wishes that the servants of God work bodily whence they may live, in order that they not be compelled to seek the necessities in need’.
 - ii. Item, the Apostle instructs that such people be avoided, 2 Thessalonians 3:14: *If one will not obey our word* (namely about acquiring victual by working bodily, if he does not have another way whence he may live) *through the letter, take note of him*; the Gloss: ‘so that we sharply rebuke him’. *And do not eat with him so that he be confounded*; the Gloss: ‘That is, he, rejected by all, grow ashamed so that he thus subjects himself to the precepts of the Apostle’, namely about physically working for the sake of victual. Therefore, such a person acts unjustly. /337/
 - iii. Item, 1 Thessalonians 4:11: *Work with your hands so that you desire something of nobody*; the Gloss: ‘One ought to work, not be otiose so that they not desire something of another, much less ask for it’. Therefore, he who asks in this way, does so contrary to the Apostle.

7. C. 5 q. 5 c. 2 (1.549–50).

8. It seems that William is arguing a sub-claim here. By ‘proof of the minor’, he means he is going to prove the minor premise of the supposed syllogism in objection 3 (i.e., demanding food without first working is against a precept of St Paul). Given that objections 4 through 7 are derived from the Pauline epistles, and that they all deal with the obligation to work, it seems reasonable to assume that they are the ‘proof’ of his minor premise in 3. Depending on how heavily William edited the text following the public dispute (for this is a ‘disputed question’: first, the question is publicly debated; second, the master [William in this case] provides a response; third, the master takes the report [*reportatio*] of the public debate home and tidies it up, so to speak, before publishing the official version [*redactio*]), some of the other Pauline *pericopae* might have originally been a part of this proof. In any event, I have modified Traver’s text to make the structure of this sub-argument more explicit.

Therefore he behaves unjustly.

- iv. Item, 1 Thessalonians 4:10–11: *We ask you brothers that you offer work so that you thirst for rest*—the Gloss: ‘from curiosity’—*and to do your own work*—the Gloss: ‘having dismissed other peoples’ property [*dimissis alienis*] which is useful for you in the correction of your life’—*and work with your hands*; the Gloss: ‘which helps you be at ease, for that evil comes from free time’. Therefore, he who does not do this, seeks [something] contrary to the doctrine of the Apostle. Therefore, he behaves unjustly. Therefore, bread should be taken away from him. Therefore, it should not be given.
4. Item, Luke 12:33: *Sell what you possess and give alms*; the Gloss: ‘so that, having spurned all your things for the sake of the Lord, you afterwards work by the labour of your hands whence you may live and give alms’. Therefore, after the sale of everything, one ought not beg but work. Therefore he who does not do this goes against the doctrine of the church. Therefore he behaves unjustly.
5. Item, Ephesians 4:28: *Let each person work with their hands*—not the depraved works for profit—but *the in working that is good so that each one may have*—not only whence he may live, but even—*whence he may share with those in need*.
6. Item, Jerome to the monk Rusticus: ‘If the apostles holding the power to live from the gospel worked with their own hands, why do you not ready the things to follow for your own uses?’ And below: ‘nets were weaved to catch fish, books were written so that both the hand earned food and the soul be satisfied with reading. /338/ All leisure lies in desires’: *De cons. D. 5 c. Numquam de manu*.⁹ Therefore, all regulars ought to work, especially if he does not have another way whence he might live. Therefore, if he does no work, he behaves unjustly.
7. Item, Blessed Benedict in the *Rule, c. On the Daily Manual Labour* (48.1):¹⁰ ‘Leisure is inimical to the soul, and for this reason the brothers ought to be occupied at certain hours in manual labour, and at certain [other] hours in divine reading.’ Therefore etc.
8. Item, in the same place (48.8): ‘They are then truly monks if they live from the labour of their own hands, just like our fathers and the

9. *De cons. D. c. 33* (1.1420–21).

10. This and the following statement clearly show that William considers the mendicant orders no different than ‘regular’ monastic orders.

apostles.’ Therefore, if they do not do this, alms should not be given to them. Therefore, etc.

9. Item, from the Carthage Council, 21 q. 1:¹¹ ‘Any cleric learned in the word of God should seek victual by means of an occupation’. Therefore, etc.
10. Item, in the same place: ‘All clerics who are healthy [enough] to work, let them teach small crafts and letters’. Therefore, etc.
11. Item, John 21:3: *Simon Peter says: I go to fish*. The Gloss: ‘after the living Christ’s return, after the receipt of his breathing spirit’ (*post redditum vivum Christum, post acceptum eius insufflationis spiritum*), after his words, *just as the Father sent me, so I send you*: John 20:21, suddenly they became what they were, namely fishermen not of men but of fish. But it ought to be known that they were prohibited not to seek victual by their licit art, with the integrity of the apostolate preserved’, for that reason although they did not have [things] whence they might live. Therefore, those who are not apostles especially ought to work with their hands whence they might live. Therefore, he who does not [work], behaves unjustly. Therefore, etc.
12. Item, Augustine to Vincent the Donatist: ‘Evil men often persecute good men, and good men evil: those ones injuring through injustice, these ones counselling through teaching. The impious killed the prophets, the prophets /339/ killed the impious; the Jews beat Christ; and Christ beat the Jews. What is understood [*attenditur*] in all these affairs, if not which one of them is for the truth, which one for iniquity? Which one for the sake of killing, which one for the sake of emending?’ 23 q. 4 c. 37, *Nimium*.¹² Therefore, bread ought to be taken away from those who act contrary to the doctrine of the Apostle so that they be corrected; because he who does this follows the wicked.
13. Item, It is proved that preachers can seek nothing in 1 Thessalonians 2:5: *Nor did we once have an opportunity for avarice*; the Gloss: ‘I do not say “in avarice”; I neither did nor said anything in which there was an opportunity for avarice’; but in asking for money, an opportunity for avarice is assumed [to be present]. Therefore, asking is contrary to

11. William seems confused here. His quotation is found in D. 91 c. 4 (1.316–17). In William of Saint-Amour 1632, 84, a more correct reference is found: ‘Item ex Conc. 4. Carthag. Can. 51 *Clericus quantumlibet verbô Dei eruditus, artificiolô victum quaerat, vt habetur dist. 91. can. Clericus; Ergo si non facit, iniustè agit.*’

12. C. 23 q. 4 c. 37 (1.889).

the doctrine of the Apostle. Therefore it should not be given to those asking for it.

14. Item, A preacher should not use flattery in his sermon in 1 Thessalonians 2:5: *Nor did we use flattery on occasion*; the Gloss: ‘On which account some please men, but those who continually and frequently ask for victual, it is necessary that they flatter.’ 2 Thessalonians 3:9: *In order that we may give a model for you*. Says the Gloss: ‘One who, given over to leisure, frequently comes to another’s table, it is necessary that they flatter the one feeding him, although the Christian religion calls men to liberality.’ Therefore he who is a preacher should not frequently ask for victual. Therefore, it should not be given if he asks.
15. Item, 2 Corinthians 12:14: *I do not seek your things, but you*; the Gloss: ‘not to save your riches in gold and silver, but to save you’.
16. Item, Philippians 4:17: *I do not seek a gift but reward*. Therefore even the true apostles should ask for nothing. /340/
17. Item, he who receives food for some spiritual [work, deed], either before or after, commits simony.¹³ Therefore, for preaching, even after preaching, it is not licit to accept food, at least for the one to whom it is not owed, that is, he who is not an apostle. ‘For accepting is at some time or another seizing’: 1 q. 1 c. *Eos qui per pecunias*.¹⁴ Therefore, it should not be given, if he asks.
18. Item, Giezi, servant of Eliseus, is said to have committed the crime of simony in that he asks something from Naaman Syro to whom his Lord, namely Helyseus, had given the gift of health: 2 Kgs.@ 5. Therefore, if the brother of that one who preached asks something from those ones to whom he preached, even after the preaching, he commits simony. And Gregory Nazianzus says this in 1 q. 1 c. 11, *Qui studet*, etc.¹⁵ And in such a way ‘Giezi sold the gift of health to Naaman Syro; and made a leper, he lost that same gift of health when Helyseus punished him’ (*eandem gratiam sanitatis Helyseo vindicante leprosus factus amisit*). Therefore, he who thus accepts commits simony. Therefore, it should not be given to him.
19. Item, according to human law, ‘A healthy beggar, if he is discovered, if he is of a servile condition, is made the servant of the finder. If

13. Cf. C. 1 q. 3 c. 15, *Si quis prebendas* (1.418).

14. C. 1 q. 1 c. 21 (1.364–6).

15. C. q. c. 11 (1.360–1).

he is free, he is made his perpetual farmer': Codex 11.26(25).1, *De mendicantibus validis*.¹⁶ Therefore, although it is clear that he has committed a serious crime, 'because it is worse to be sold': 24 q. 1 c. *Non afferamus*,¹⁷ it remains that an able-bodied beggar seriously commits a crime. Therefore, it seems that he, who knowingly places himself in such a state, is not in a state of salvation.

[Response]

I respond without a previous judgment. Concerning the first [1], I distinguish between those who ask alms, some knowingly, others unknowingly; likewise some ask as if from debt, as preachers and prelates [do], others for sustaining life. If he asks from debt and as if by reason of duty, if it is agreed concerning his duty or authority, he ought to be accepted. If he is unknown, it ought to be examined whether he is in this fashion, as Chrysostom says in *On the Letter to the Hebrews*: D. 42 c. *Quiescamus*:¹⁸ /341/ 'If he asks only for nourishment', then it ought to be given indiscriminately, 'unless secure about food he neglects justice', as Augustine says in 5 q. 5 c. *Non omnis*.¹⁹ For then it should not be given to him unless he is already dying of hunger: 'For you kill those whom you can save by feeding, if you do not feed them': D. 86 c. *Pasce fame*.²⁰ But he who begs, although he can live from the labour of his body, neglects justice because he goes against the doctrine of the Apostle, and he ought to be excommunicated, as it was said above. Therefore, it should not be given to such a person.

All those authorities [9, 10], therefore, that say 'something ought to be given to all asking poor', I understand it thus: it is true, either the thing sought, or [something] better, namely correction, if he asks unjustly.

And the Gloss says this, Matthew 5:42: *Give to him who asks something from you*; the Gloss: 'even if he does not ask for something, but it is better when you correct one asking unjustly'. But it is agreed that he asks unjustly and contrary to the precept of the Apostle who was able to otherwise have [something] without sin.

16. Cod. 11.26(25).1 (2.435).

17. C. 24 q. c. 21 (1.973-4).

18. D. 42 c. 2 (1.152).

19. C. 5 q. 5 c. 2 (1.549-50).

20. D. 86 c. 21 (1.302).

Concerning the poor, travellers, scholars, the enfeebled, who casually beg and did not appoint their life for begging, the same should not be said.

[Response to the Objections]

Regarding those paupers who were in Jerusalem [14], for whom they were summarily made (? *quibus fiebant collecte*?). I respond: it is not said there that they themselves asked [for anything], and it should be understood concerning those ones who either were disciples or prelates and they sent their own preachers to the gentiles, or who had need and poverty from labour beyond that which they were able to have. 2 Thessalonians 3:13: *But you, o brothers, don't fail to do good deeds*; the Gloss: 'for the poor'. For, even if they were working, nevertheless they can [still] lack several things. For one does not come into blame who is humane in giving bountifully, but the one who, although able to bear labour, wishes to live life in idleness [does come into blame]—even perhaps all those preaching and not able to take fees from his fellow believers to whom he preached. Rather, they persecute them more whence they can take up fees from other churches (I do not, however, say demand), just as Paul in preaching to the Corinthians from other churches received [fees, i.e., *sumptus*] on account of the avarice of the /342/ Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:8: *I plundered other churches, receiving a stipend to serve you*; the Gloss: 'so that I be able to preach to you and not receive anything of yours even when I am in need'.

Regarding [15], 'Let he who is taught, share', etc., it is truly said that when one is catechizing he holds apostolic power.

Regarding [20] that alms should be given to the excommunicate, it is true in extreme necessity.

That which is asked concerning preachers, whether they can ask for alms, I believe that the answer is no, lest there seem to be an *opportunity for avarice*: 1 Thessalonians 2:5. *Nor corrupting the word of God*: 2 Corinthians 4:2; the Gloss: [when] 'preaching for profit [*que(a)stu*], lest they either be compelled to be corrupted, as it was said, or be compelled to slander [the word of God]'. Romans 16:18: *People of this kind do not serve the Lord Christ, but their own stomach*; the Gloss: 'They flatter others; they slander others, so that they can fill their own stomach'. Or, lest they seem to commit simony, if they receive something by means of the excuse of

preaching—especially those ones, who are not apostles (nor discharge their office), since one should abstain not only from evil, but even *from all appearance of evil*: 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

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