

Consilium 81

Translated by Alice Browne

On the fourth title of the fifth book on Airs, Waters, and Places.

Argument.

The most illustrious and reverend Lord Bishop of Chiusi suffered from a weakness in his sight, and blamed this condition on the density of the air in that city (which was formerly called Camers, as Ferdinando Ughelli states in his *Italia sacra*, volume 3, chapter on the Bishop of Chiusi). As time went on, it seemed that not only was this weakness in his sight increasing markedly, but his sight was darkening day by day. So, fearing that he was slipping into total loss of that sense and complete blindness, he decided to renounce the bishopric. There were doubts about whether he had just cause to do this; however, I have shown in the following arguments that they can be fully resolved.

Summary.

1. To decide whether it is lawful to renounce a bishopric because of illness, one must first consider whether the illness is curable or not.
2. South winds dull sight, and all the senses.

3. Renunciation is a serious matter, not to be granted easily.
4. A bishop cannot renounce his bishopric on account of every kind of infirmity, only on account of one that makes him unable to fulfill the duties of a bishop.
5. Inclemency of climate is a legitimate cause for renouncing a bishopric; this is also covered in 14.
6. The danger of contracting a disease has the same effect as the disease itself.
7. If blindness is cause for renouncing a bishopric, the risk of blindness was a just cause in the same way.
8. If a part of the body is in a weak state, it receives the superfluities from all the healthy parts.
9. The sense of sight needs a great deal of pure and clear spirit.
10. The sense of sight is damaged by old age more than the other senses.
11. South winds darken the sight.
12. Old people usually have weak sight.
13. Sometimes the stomach alone causes weakness of sight.

Although the most illustrious and reverend Lord Bishop of Chiusi is moved by a very reasonable fear that staying in his own church of Chiusi might damage his sight so much that he would lose it altogether, it is still to the point to wonder whether there might be a remedy for this danger, so he would not later be

obliged to renounce his bishopric for this reason. As he himself says, the weakness of sight afflicting him at present is adventitious, resulting from the density and excessive humidity of the air of Chiusi, so, before renouncing his bishopric, it seems he is obliged to find out whether there is any possible way of compensating for the density and superfluous humidity of this air. Just as if it is lawful to renounce a bishopric on the grounds of illness, one must first inquire and decide whether the illness is curable or not; if it is curable, there is no valid cause for renunciation, as has been acknowledged. So if there is any way of compensating for the climate of the city of Chiusi, and avoiding its harmful effects, or if there are any remedies that can protect his sight from being damaged by it and preserve it in its natural essence, the illustrious lord does not have a valid cause for renouncing his bishopric.

But it is clear that there are ways to compensate for the unwholesomeness of this kind of air; either it is excessively damp by nature, or it has been made harmful by incursions of bad winds. So by blocking the assault of those winds, and providing an entry for better winds, it is possible, at least in part, to overcome the dampness, and avoid the evil effects of the bad winds. If, for example, as they say, the south winds spoil the air of Chiusi, they can be kept from blowing through the bishop's palace by closing the windows and other south facing entries, and opening to

the north winds, which can completely blunt the evil effects of the south winds. Just as the south winds weaken all the senses, and are especially effective at darkening sight, (see Hippocrates, Aphorisms, book 3, no. 5), because they thicken the air, so the north winds purify the air and can give great support to sight. In this way, not only will the illustrious bishop not suffer any increased weakness in his sight, but if he has contracted any in the past, it will disappear as a result of this precaution, and obviously the grounds for renouncing his bishopric will disappear as well.

But even if we grant that compensating for the air in this way is impossible, there is no lack of natural remedies to apply to weakness of sight and make that sense purer and clearer. When the practical physicians discuss this, they suggest many beneficial remedies, with which we not only conserve the strength of the eyes, but even improve it, as we see every day in old people. We often get results in old people from prescribing eye medicines, such as distilled waters, liquors, ointments, and other things of that kind. Besides the numerous doctors who have written on the diseases of the old, François Ranchin, at *De morbis particularibus senum*, class 1, chapter 5, has a great deal to say about weakness of sight and treats it as a symptom specific to old age. Although many people wrongly think all these remedies are useless, yet it seemed that the illustrious bishop was obliged to try everything before he considered renunciation, since

renunciation of a bishopric is a grave matter, which should not be granted easily. See [Flaminio] Parisio, *De renunciatione [i.e. resignatione] beneficiorum*, question 3, number 5, book 5. Since the illustrious lord has not taken steps to remove or overcome the weakness of his sight, we cannot be certain whether it is remediable or not, and so he does not have a justifiable cause to renounce his bishopric. For if there are remedies that could remove this weakness, the legitimate cause of renunciation ends: because a bishop cannot renounce his bishopric on the grounds of every illness, only on the grounds of one which makes him permanently incapable of fulfilling his pastoral duties. Parisio, *ibid.*, number 18; it must also have no hope of cure or restoration of health. A bishop is not rendered incapable by a curable disease, except temporarily, and so the cause which should legitimate his renunciation is no longer valid.

It does not contradict this that inclemency of climate alone is a just cause for renouncing a bishopric, as Parisio says, *loc. cit.*, no. 144, where he states this is the general opinion of the learned. As Parisio states there, this holds true when the said inclemency of the climate is a threat to life, and contrary to the very nature of the bishop; but it does not apply when it can induce diseases which are not life threatening, and do not hinder a man's performance of his duties. For example, if it causes a heaviness or pain in the head which are not constant, or a catarrh which is

unpleasant but not dangerous, or, as in our case, it makes the sight weaker and less acute, or even causes hardness of hearing; none of these diseases or symptoms endanger life or make a man unable to perform the duties of a bishopric, and in these cases a bishop cannot be justified at all in renouncing his office solely and simply on account of the inclemency of the climate.

But to uncover the truth of the matter we must consider several attendant conditions, both concerning the most illustrious bishop and concerning the city of Chiusi itself. First, the most illustrious lord has had poor sight from his birth, so we must argue that he was born with considerable weakness in this sense. Second, he is already in his declining years, as he is sixty years old. Third, he is not in entirely good health, because he sometimes suffers from indigestion without any extrinsic cause. Fourth, his head is very poorly tempered, and excessively damp, so that the material from its distillations is constantly supplied to the internal parts. In addition, the city of Chiusi has a remarkably inclement climate; not only is it constantly exposed to south winds, but it is washed by the river Chiana, so that it has the highest degree possible of excessive humidity.

Since these things are so, we must decide that it is absolutely true that the most illustrious lord has the clearest possible case for renouncing his bishopric,

because of the imminent danger of blindness. Any one of the aforesaid conditions provides a very pressing case, and the combination of them all will make it all the more pressing. This probable and immediate danger gives the most illustrious lord bishop secure grounds for lawfully renouncing his bishopric; for the danger of contracting an illness has the same effect as actually suffering an illness, and both this danger and the presence of an illness must rightly excuse a man from residence in a place. If a blind man is unable to fulfill the duties of a bishopric and must renounce the bishopric because his blindness has evidently made him ineligible (see [the decision of the] Rota [i.e. the Roman apostolic Court] in Valentina coadjutoriae January 1637, coram Coccino, number 14), a probable danger of going blind has the same effect: so, since there is evidence for this danger, the most illustrious lord bishop can lawfully renounce his bishopric.

Again, the evidence for this danger is sufficiently proved above. First, because of the natural weakness of the sense of sight, which means it is very quickly damaged by any external cause that can harm it; for it naturally happens that any part of the body which is weak by nature receives the superfluities before other parts of the body, because they usually flow to the weak part before any other: Galen, book 13, De methodo medendi, chapter 5, and numerous other passages. But there is no more obvious cause of damage to the sense of sight than air that is

excessively heavy or damp, for this sense needs a great deal of pure clear spirit to function well: (see Galen, book 16, *De usu partium*, c. 3, and book 7, *De placitis Hippocratis & Platonis*, chapter 5). Air of this kind darkens, pollutes, and obscures the sense of sight, and makes the eyes incapable of seeing, even if they are healthy in other ways. What if they are weak by nature? Since in this situation the eyes are filled with small quantities of impure and rather polluted spirits, any manifest and constantly acting cause, such as the air, not only pollutes the spirits and throws them into greater disorder, but completely extinguishes them, so that the person necessarily becomes completely blind.

An additional cause is the most illustrious bishop's advanced age, since he is sixty years old. Sight is damaged more than any other sense by old age, mainly because the spirits become thicker and less clear as time goes on. As we have said, the sense of sight requires extremely fine, pure and transparent spirits; but the excessive excrementitious humidity, which is abundant in old people's heads, makes the instrument of vision, that is, the eye, and especially the cornea, excessively damp, and so the sense of sight is not only weakened by the overpowering humidity of the eye, but is almost always affected by a darkening, cloudiness or smokiness, and eventually disappears altogether: Galen, book 1, *De symptomatum causis*, chapter 2. So when the harmfulness of the climate contributes to perturbing and thickening the spirits, a

complete loss of vision is all the more certain, and total blindness is to be expected.

Moreover, a climate dominated by south winds, like that of the city of Chiusi, is remarkably damaging to people with damp heads, such as old people in general, and the most illustrious lord bishop has an extremely damp head; see Galen, [De] arte medica, chapter 19. Because of this, the south winds themselves darken sight: Hippocrates, book 3, aphorism 5, and Galen, commenting on the first book [of Hippocrates], De morbis vulgaribus, com. 1, text 18. Therefore, since blunted sight is common among old people, for the reasons stated above, and see Galen, comm. 3 aphorism 31, and since air which is dark, turbid, thick and dominated by south winds weakens the sense of sight, as is clear from the above, and the practical physicians bear witness: (see [Giolamo] Mercuriale, de morbis oculorum, chapter 1), it is certain that residing in a climate of this kind would cause the most illustrious lord so much harm within a few months that he would completely lose his sight. So, with the excellent justification of avoiding this immediate danger, the most illustrious gentleman has every right to protect himself by renouncing his bishopric.

The most illustrious lord bishop's health provides no less vulnerability to this danger, since he is extremely subject to stomach complaints, because of indigestion resulting from diminished heat. As a result, it is easy

to see that dense vapors and excrementitious matter must constantly be supplied to the head; since it is common knowledge that a darkening and weakness of vision can sometimes result from the stomach alone. See Giovanni Battista da Monte, Cons.[i.e Consilia or Consultationes], 45, and Pieter van Foreest, book 11, observatio 32. It is no wonder, since every day much greater evils are communicated from the stomach to the head. The climate of the city of Chiusi, and the illustrious lord bishop's health both attack his sight in equal measure; principally, the weakness of his stomach increases the power of the climate and constantly adds force to it, so that it is obvious that the danger of losing his sight is clearly imminent, unless he protects himself by departing.

Finally, the cold and damp imbalance of the head, which the most illustrious lord happens to have by nature, and which old age has increased to a remarkable extent, is of a kind which tends constantly to send superfluous matter and thick and turbid humors to the eyes, so it is extraordinary how, with this weakness, the most illustrious gentleman was able to avoid complete blindness from his previous sojourn in such an unwholesome climate. Who can deny that a man of this physical make-up, with very weak eyes from birth, advanced in years, and constantly afflicted with indigestion, can only have been saved by a miracle from complete blindness, since he has already spent so much time in Chiusi? Even if some cause has preserved

him from this misfortune until now, if he stays in this climate, which is so unwholesome for the head and the eyes, there is no way he will be able to avoid it.

Therefore, since it is lawful for a bishop to renounce his bishopric for the sole reason of inhospitable climate, as we have said above, citing Parisio's arguments, how much more just a cause for renouncing his bishopric does the most illustrious lord have, when so many conditions produce such a pressing danger of losing his vision that he cannot possibly avoid it if he continues to reside in the climate of Chiusi. Indeed, I would even think that his own conscience obliges him to look out for himself, and avoid such powerful and imminent causes of misfortune, lest the loss of his sight forces him to desist from many good works.