Like many Roman humanists in the Quattrocento, Giannantonio Campano turned to the clergy for employment and support. He was reproached for this career move by Giulio Pomponio Leto, the founder and leader of the so-called Roman Academy, as appears from the following elegy:

Campanus VII 37 Iulio Pomponio (1–18)
Campano favisse deos Cirrheque puellas,
Iuli, ais, intonsa dum fuit ille coma,
Mox ubi mitrato rasi cecidere capilli,
Fugisse hunc Musas, deseruisse deos.
Accipe quid contra dicat Campanus et eius,
Si sapis, exemplo tu quoque rade caput.
Dum sterilem coleret Cirrham siccamque Aganippem
Campanus sitiit semper et esuriit

1 For Giannantonio Campano and his career as a humanist-bishop, see F. Di Bernardo, Un vescovo umanistà alla corte pontificia. Giannantonio Campano, 1429–1477 (Roma: Università Gregoriana editrice, 1975).
2 Campano wrote a considerable amount of Neo-Latin poetry, mostly in the elegiac and epigrammatic genres. The greatest part was printed in 1495 as part of his Opera Omnia edited by Michele Ferno: Giovanni Antonio Campano, Johannis Antonii Campani tractatus V, orationes XV, epistolarum IX libri, Vita Pii (Papae II), Historia Bracchii (Andreae Fortebrachii, Principies Perusinii), epigrammatum VIII libri. Ed. Michael Fernus (Rome: Eucharius Silber, 1495) and reprinted in 1707 in Leipzig by J. B. Mencken: Giovanni Antonio Campano, Epistolae et poemata, una cum vita auctoris Giovanni Antonio Campano, Recensuit Johannes Burchardus Menckenius (Leipzig: J. F. Gleditsch, 1707). Part of his poetry however is still unedited in various manuscripts. A first exploratory study of these manuscripts can be found in P. Cecchini, Giannantonio Campano. Studi sulla produzione poetica (Urbino: QuattroVenti, 1995). My numbering of the poems is taken from Cecchini who based himself on Ferno’s edition, which differs slightly from that by Mencken. In the case of Campano’s letters I will refer to the edition by Mencken as CE (Campani Epistolae).
Leto had apparently argued that Campano’s poetry had deteriorated, whether in quality or quantity, since he had entered the clergy and become bishop. This poem by Campano is presented as an answer to that accusation by Leto. He even states already at the beginning that if Leto were wise, he would also shave his head, that is take holy orders. The main argument that Campano presents in favour of his career move regards the material wealth he has gained by this, which enables him to dedicate time and energy to his poetry. Thus his clerical career does not prevent him from writing poetry; on the contrary, it enables him to pursue his literary goals.

Campano supports his argument by means of examples from the present and past, starting off with the Cardinal of Pavia, Giacomo Ammannati: his literary works have greatly improved since he entered

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3 Latin text quoted from Cecchini, Giannantonio Campano, 98–99: “Julius, you say that the gods and the Cyrenaic girls [i.e. Muses] have favoured Campano, as long as his hair was still unshaven. And [you say] that soon after he had received a mitre and his shaven hairs had fallen off, the Muses have escaped him and the gods have left him. Now hear what Campano has to say in response, and if you are wise, shave your head after his example as well. When he honoured fruitless Cyrra and dry Aganippe [i.e. poetic sources], Campano was always thirsty and suffered from hunger. But since he has decorated his empty temples with a rich mitre, he has driven away thirst and hunger. The Cardinal of Pavia was hoarse when he was bare, dressed in a white syndo [i.e. priest’s garment], he brought forth swan-like songs. When Maro was poor, the mosquitoes came into being, the rose and the copa, when he was rich he went to Lybia, the kingdom of Pergamum and the gods. When she is cared for, the Muse flies and spreads her wings high above the ether; in a modest toga she sordidly crawls on the ground. With an empty stomach Homer sang about frogs and mice well nourished he sang about wars and about Greek and Trojan leaders.”

4 This must be so, since this poem presents itself as an answer to an accusation by Leto (cf. ais in v. 2 and quid dicat contra in v. 5). We however do not know by which means Leto did this, but presumably it was in a poem or a letter, which has not been preserved. For the practice of correspondence by means of poetry, see n. 48.