

SECOND PART OF THE SECOND PART, QUESTION 36

Of Envy (In Four Articles)

We must now consider envy, and under this head there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) What is envy?
- (2) Whether it is a sin?
- (3) Whether it is a mortal sin?
- (4) Whether it is a capital sin, and which are its daughters?

Whether envy is a kind of sorrow?

IIa IIae q. 36 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that envy is not a kind of sorrow. For the object of envy is a good, for Gregory says (Moral. v, 46) of the envious man that “self-inflicted pain wounds the pining spirit, which is racked by the prosperity of another.” Therefore envy is not a kind of sorrow.

Objection 2. Further, likeness is a cause, not of sorrow but rather of pleasure. But likeness is a cause of envy: for the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 10): “Men are envious of such as are like them in genus, in knowledge, in stature, in habit, or in reputation.” Therefore envy is not a kind of sorrow.

Objection 3. Further, sorrow is caused by a defect, wherefore those who are in great defect are inclined to sorrow, as stated above (Ia IIae, q. 47, a. 3) when we were treating of the passions. Now those who lack little, and who love honors, and who are considered wise, are envious, according to the Philosopher (Rhet. ii, 10). Therefore envy is not a kind of sorrow.

Objection 4. Further, sorrow is opposed to pleasure. Now opposite effects have not one and the same cause. Therefore, since the recollection of goods once possessed is a cause of pleasure, as stated above (Ia IIae, q. 32, a. 3) it will not be a cause of sorrow. But it is a cause of envy; for the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 10) that “we envy those who have or have had things that befitted ourselves, or which we possessed at some time.” Therefore sloth is not a kind of sorrow.

On the contrary, Damascene (De Fide Orth. ii, 14) calls envy a species of sorrow, and says that “envy is sorrow for another’s good.”

I answer that, The object of a man’s sorrow is his own evil. Now it may happen that another’s good is apprehended as one’s own evil, and in this way sorrow can be about another’s good. But this happens in two ways: first, when a man is sorry about another’s good, in so far as it threatens to be an occasion of harm to himself, as when a man grieves for his enemy’s prosperity, for fear lest he may do him some harm: such like sorrow is not envy, but rather an effect of fear, as the Philosopher states (Rhet. ii, 9).

Secondly, another’s good may be reckoned as being one’s own evil, in so far as it conduces to the lessening of one’s own good name or excellence. It is in this way

that envy grieves for another’s good: and consequently men are envious of those goods in which a good name consists, and about which men like to be honored and esteemed, as the Philosopher remarks (Rhet. ii, 10).

Reply to Objection 1. Nothing hinders what is good for one from being reckoned as evil for another: and in this way it is possible for sorrow to be about good, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 2. Since envy is about another’s good name in so far as it diminishes the good name a man desires to have, it follows that a man is envious of those only whom he wishes to rival or surpass in reputation. But this does not apply to people who are far removed from one another: for no man, unless he be out of his mind, endeavors to rival or surpass in reputation those who are far above him. Thus a commoner does not envy the king, nor does the king envy a commoner whom he is far above. Wherefore a man envies not those who are far removed from him, whether in place, time, or station, but those who are near him, and whom he strives to rival or surpass. For it is against our will that these should be in better repute than we are, and that gives rise to sorrow. On the other hand, likeness causes pleasure in so far as it is in agreement with the will.

Reply to Objection 3. A man does not strive for mastery in matters where he is very deficient; so that he does not envy one who surpasses him in such matters, unless he surpass him by little, for then it seems to him that this is not beyond him, and so he makes an effort; wherefore, if his effort fails through the other’s reputation surpassing his, he grieves. Hence it is that those who love to be honored are more envious; and in like manner the faint-hearted are envious, because all things are great to them, and whatever good may befall another, they reckon that they themselves have been bested in something great. Hence it is written (Job 5:2): “Envy slayeth the little one,” and Gregory says (Moral. v, 46) that “we can envy those only whom we think better in some respect than ourselves.”

Reply to Objection 4. Recollection of past goods in so far as we have had them, causes pleasure; in so far as we have lost them, causes sorrow; and in so far as others have them, causes envy, because that, above all,

seems to belittle our reputation. Hence the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii) that the old envy the young, and those who have spent much in order to get something, envy

those who have got it by spending little, because they grieve that they have lost their goods, and that others have acquired goods.

Whether envy is a sin?

Ia IIae q. 36 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that envy is not a sin. For Jerome says to Laeta about the education of her daughter (Ep. cvii): “Let her have companions, so that she may learn together with them, envy them, and be nettled when they are praised.” But no one should be advised to commit a sin. Therefore envy is not a sin

Objection 1. Further, “Envy is sorrow for another’s good,” as Damascene says (De Fide Orth. ii, 14). But this is sometimes praiseworthy: for it is written (Prov. 29:2): “When the wicked shall bear rule, the people shall mourn.” Therefore envy is not always a sin.

Objection 3. Further, envy denotes a kind of zeal. But there is a good zeal, according to Ps. 68:10: “The zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up.” Therefore envy is not always a sin.

Objection 4. Further, punishment is condvided with fault. But envy is a kind of punishment: for Gregory says (Moral. v, 46): “When the foul sore of envy corrupts the vanquished heart, the very exterior itself shows how forcibly the mind is urged by madness. For paleness seizes the complexion, the eyes are weighed down, the spirit is inflamed, while the limbs are chilled, there is frenzy in the heart, there is gnashing with the teeth.” Therefore envy is not a sin.

On the contrary, It is written (Gal. 5:26): “Let us not be made desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another.”

I answer that, As stated above (a. 1), envy is sorrow for another’s good. Now this sorrow may come about in four ways. First, when a man grieves for another’s good, through fear that it may cause harm either to himself, or to some other goods. This sorrow is not envy, as stated above (a. 1), and may be void of sin. Hence Gregory says (Moral. xxii, 11): “It very often happens that without charity being lost, both the destruction of an enemy rejoices us, and again his glory, without any sin of envy, saddens us, since, when he falls, we believe that some are deservedly set up, and when he prospers, we dread lest many suffer unjustly.”

Secondly, we may grieve over another’s good, not because he has it, but because the good which he has, we have not: and this, properly speaking, is zeal, as

the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 9). And if this zeal be about virtuous goods, it is praiseworthy, according to 1 Cor. 14:1: “Be zealous for spiritual gifts”: while, if it be about temporal goods, it may be either sinful or sinless. Thirdly, one may grieve over another’s good, because he who happens to have that good is unworthy of it. Such sorrow as this cannot be occasioned by virtuous goods, which make a man righteous, but, as the Philosopher states, is about riches, and those things which can accrue to the worthy and the unworthy; and he calls this sorrow *nemesis*^{*}, saying that it belongs to good morals. But he says this because he considered temporal goods in themselves, in so far as they may seem great to those who look not to eternal goods: whereas, according to the teaching of faith, temporal goods that accrue to those who are unworthy, are so disposed according to God’s just ordinance, either for the correction of those men, or for their condemnation, and such goods are as nothing in comparison with the goods to come, which are prepared for good men. Wherefore sorrow of this kind is forbidden in Holy Writ, according to Ps. 36:1: “Be not emulous of evil doers, nor envy them that work iniquity,” and elsewhere (Ps. 72:2,3): “My steps had well nigh slipped, for I was envious of the wicked, when I saw the prosperity of sinners[†].” Fourthly, we grieve over a man’s good, in so far as his good surpasses ours; this is envy properly speaking, and is always sinful, as also the Philosopher states (Rhet. ii, 10), because to do so is to grieve over what should make us rejoice, viz. over our neighbor’s good.

Reply to Objection 1. Envy there denotes the zeal with which we ought to strive to progress with those who are better than we are.

Reply to Objection 2. This argument considers sorrow for another’s good in the first sense given above.

Reply to Objection 3. Envy differs from zeal, as stated above. Hence a certain zeal may be good, whereas envy is always evil.

Reply to Objection 4. Nothing hinders a sin from being penal accidentally, as stated above (Ia IIae, q. 87, a. 2) when we were treating of sins.

* The nearest equivalent is “indignation.” The use of the word “nemesis” to signify “revenge” does not represent the original Greek.

† Douay: “because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners”

Objection 1. It would seem that envy is not a mortal sin. For since envy is a kind of sorrow, it is a passion of the sensitive appetite. Now there is no mortal sin in the sensuality, but only in the reason, as Augustine declares (*De Trin.* xii, 12)*. Therefore envy is not a mortal sin.

Objection 2. Further, there cannot be mortal sin in infants. But envy can be in them, for Augustine says (*Confess.* i): “I myself have seen and known even a baby envious, it could not speak, yet it turned pale and looked bitterly on its foster-brother.” Therefore envy is not a mortal sin.

Objection 3. Further, every mortal sin is contrary to some virtue. But envy is contrary, not to a virtue but to *nemesis*, which is a passion, according to the Philosopher (*Rhet.* ii, 9). Therefore envy is not a mortal sin.

On the contrary, It is written (*Job* 5:2): “Envy slayeth the little one.” Now nothing slays spiritually, except mortal sin. Therefore envy is a mortal sin.

I answer that, Envy is a mortal sin, in respect of its genus. For the genus of a sin is taken from its object; and envy according to the aspect of its object is contrary to charity, whence the soul derives its spiritual life, according to *1 Jn.* 3:14: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.” Now the object both of charity and of envy is our neighbor’s good, but by contrary movements, since charity rejoices in our neighbor’s good, while envy grieves over it, as stated above (a. 1). Therefore it is evident that envy is a mortal sin in respect of its genus.

Nevertheless, as stated above (q. 35, a. 4; Ia IIae, q. 72, a. 5, ad 1), in every kind of mortal sin we find

certain imperfect movements in the sensuality, which are venial sins: such are the first movement of concupiscence, in the genus of adultery, and the first movement of anger, in the genus of murder, and so in the genus of envy we find sometimes even in perfect men certain first movements, which are venial sins.

Reply to Objection 1. The movement of envy in so far as it is a passion of the sensuality, is an imperfect thing in the genus of human acts, the principle of which is the reason, so that envy of that kind is not a mortal sin. The same applies to the envy of little children who have not the use of reason: wherefore the Reply to the Second Objection is manifest.

Reply to Objection 3. According to the Philosopher (*Rhet.* ii, 9), envy is contrary both to *nemesis* and to pity, but for different reasons. For it is directly contrary to pity, their principal objects being contrary to one another, since the envious man grieves over his neighbor’s good, whereas the pitiful man grieves over his neighbor’s evil, so that the envious have no pity, as he states in the same passage, nor is the pitiful man envious. On the other hand, envy is contrary to *nemesis* on the part of the man whose good grieves the envious man, for *nemesis* is sorrow for the good of the undeserving according to *Ps.* 72:3: “I was envious of the wicked, when I saw the prosperity of sinners”†, whereas the envious grieves over the good of those who are deserving of it. Hence it is clear that the former contrariety is more direct than the latter. Now pity is a virtue, and an effect proper to charity: so that envy is contrary to pity and charity.

Objection 1. It would seem that envy is not a capital vice. For the capital vices are distinct from their daughters. Now envy is the daughter of vainglory; for the Philosopher says (*Rhet.* ii, 10) that “those who love honor and glory are more envious.” Therefore envy is not a capital vice.

Objection 2. Further, the capital vices seem to be less grave than the other vices which arise from them. For Gregory says (*Moral.* xxxi, 45): “The leading vices seem to worm their way into the deceived mind under some kind of pretext, but those which follow them provoke the soul to all kinds of outrage, and confuse the mind with their wild outcry.” Now envy is seemingly a most grave sin, for Gregory says (*Moral.* v, 46): “Though in every evil thing that is done, the venom of our old enemy is infused into the heart of man, yet in this wickedness the serpent stirs his whole bowels and discharges the bane of spite fitted to enter deep into the mind.” Therefore envy is not a capital sin.

Objection 3. Further, it seems that its daughters are unfittingly assigned by Gregory (*Moral.* xxxi, 45), who says that from envy arise “hatred, tale-bearing, detraction, joy at our neighbor’s misfortunes, and grief for his prosperity.” For joy at our neighbor’s misfortunes and grief for his prosperity seem to be the same as envy, as appears from what has been said above (a. 3). Therefore these should not be assigned as daughters of envy.

On the contrary stands the authority of Gregory (*Moral.* xxxi, 45) who states that envy is a capital sin and assigns the aforesaid daughters thereto.

I answer that, Just as sloth is grief for a Divine spiritual good, so envy is grief for our neighbor’s good. Now it has been stated above (q. 35, a. 4) that sloth is a capital vice for the reason that it incites man to do certain things, with the purpose either of avoiding sorrow or of satisfying its demands. Wherefore envy is accounted a capital vice for the same reason.

Reply to Objection 1. As Gregory says (*Moral.*

* Cf. Ia IIae, q. 74, a. 4 † Douay: ‘because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners’

xxxii, 45), “the capital vices are so closely akin to one another that one springs from the other. For the first offspring of pride is vainglory, which by corrupting the mind it occupies begets envy, since while it craves for the power of an empty name, it repines for fear lest another should acquire that power.” Consequently the notion of a capital vice does not exclude its originating from another vice, but it demands that it should have some principal reason for being itself the origin of several kinds of sin. However it is perhaps because envy manifestly arises from vainglory, that it is not reckoned a capital sin, either by Isidore (*De Summo Bono*) or by Cassian (*De Instit. Caenob. v, 1*).

Reply to Objection 2. It does not follow from the passage quoted that envy is the greatest of sins, but that when the devil tempts us to envy, he is enticing us to that which has its chief place in his heart, for as quoted further on in the same passage, “by the envy of the devil, death came into the world” (*Wis. 2:24*).

There is, however, a kind of envy which is accounted among the most grievous sins, viz. envy of another’s spiritual good, which envy is a sorrow for the increase of God’s grace, and not merely for our neighbor’s good. Hence it is accounted a sin against the Holy Ghost, because thereby a man envies, as it were, the Holy Ghost

Himself, Who is glorified in His works.

Reply to Objection 3. The number of envy’s daughters may be understood for the reason that in the struggle aroused by envy there is something by way of beginning, something by way of middle, and something by way of term. The beginning is that a man strives to lower another’s reputation, and this either secretly, and then we have “tale-bearing;” or openly, and then we have “detraction.” The middle consists in the fact that when a man aims at defaming another, he is either able to do so, and then we have “joy at another’s misfortune;” or he is unable, and then we have “grief at another’s prosperity.” The term is hatred itself, because just as good which delights causes love, so does sorrow cause hatred, as stated above (q. 34, a. 6). Grief at another’s prosperity is in one way the very same as envy, when, to Wit, a man grieves over another’s prosperity, in so far as it gives the latter a good name, but in another way it is a daughter of envy, in so far as the envious man sees his neighbor prosper notwithstanding his efforts to prevent it. On the other hand, “joy at another’s misfortune” is not directly the same as envy, but is a result thereof, because grief over our neighbor’s good which is envy, gives rise to joy in his evil.