

SUPPLEMENT TO THE THIRD PART, QUESTION 28

Of the Solemn Rite of Penance (In Three Articles)

We must now consider the solemn rite of Penance: under which head there are three points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether a penance can be published or solemnized?
- (2) Whether a solemn penance can be repeated?
- (3) Whether public penance should be imposed on women?

Whether a penance should be published or solemnized?

Suppl. q. 28 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that a penance should not be published or solemnized. Because it is not lawful for a priest, even through fear, to divulge anyone's sin, however notorious it may be. Now a sin is published by a solemn penance. Therefore a penance should not be solemnized.

Objection 2. Further, the judgment should follow the nature of the tribunal. Now penance is a judgment pronounced in a secret tribunal. Therefore it should not be published or solemnized.

Objection 3. Further, "Every deficiency is made good by penance" as Ambrose* states. Now solemnization has a contrary effect, since it involves the penitent in many deficiencies: for a layman cannot be promoted to the ranks of the clergy nor can a cleric be promoted to higher orders, after doing solemn penance. Therefore Penance should not be solemnized.

On the contrary, Penance is a sacrament. Now some kind of solemnity is observed in every sacrament. Therefore there should be some solemnity in Penance.

Further, the medicine should suit the disease. Now a sin is sometimes public, and by its example draws many to sin. Therefore the penance which is its medicine should also be public and solemn so as to give edification to many.

I answer that, Some penances should be public and solemn for four reasons. First, so that a public sin may have a public remedy; secondly, because he who has committed a very grave crime deserves the greatest confusion even in this life; thirdly, in order that it may deter others; fourthly, that he may be an example of repentance, lest those should despair, who have committed grievous sins.

Reply to Objection 1. The priest does not divulge

the confession by imposing such a penance, though people may suspect the penitent of having committed some great sin. For a man is not certainly taken to be guilty, because he is punished, since sometimes one does penance for another: thus we read in the Lives of the Fathers of a certain man who, in order to incite his companion to do penance, did penance together with him. And if the sin be public, the penitent, by fulfilling his penance, shows that he has been to confession.

Reply to Objection 2. A solemn penance, as to its imposition, does not go beyond the limits of a secret tribunal, since, just as the confession is made secretly, so the penance is imposed secretly. It is the execution of the penance, that goes beyond the limits of the secret tribunal: and there is nothing objectionable in this.

Reply to Objection 3. Although Penance cancels all deficiencies, by restoring man to his former state of grace, yet it does not always restore him to his former dignity. Hence women after doing penance for fornication are not given the veil, because they do not recover the honor of virginity. In like manner, after doing public penance, a sinner does not recover his former dignity so as to be eligible for the clerical state and a bishop who would ordain such a one ought to be deprived of the power of ordaining, unless perhaps the needs of the Church or custom require it. In that case such a one would be admitted to minor orders by way of exception, but not to the sacred orders. First, on account of the dignity of the latter; secondly, for fear of relapse; thirdly, in order to avoid the scandal which the people might take through recollection of his former sins; fourthly, because he would not have the face to correct others, by reason of the publicity of his own sin.

Whether a solemn penance can be repeated?

Suppl. q. 28 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that a solemn penance can be repeated. For those sacraments which do not imprint a character, can be solemnized a second time, such as the Eucharist, Extreme Unction and the like. But Penance does not imprint a character, therefore it can be solemnized over again.

Objection 2. Further, penance is solemnized on account of the gravity and publicity of the sin. Now, after doing penance, a person may commit the same sins over again, or even more grievous sins. Therefore the solemn penance should be imposed again.

On the contrary, Solemn penance signifies the ex-

* Cf. Hypognost. iii, among the spurious works ascribed to St. Augustine

pulsion of the first man from paradise. Now this was done but once. Therefore solemn penance should be imposed once only.

I answer that, Solemn penance ought not to be repeated, for three reasons. First, lest frequency bring it into contempt. Secondly, on account of its signification; for it signifies the expulsion of the first man from paradise, which happened only once; thirdly, because the solemnization indicates, in a way, that one makes profession of continual repentance. Wherefore repetition is inconsistent with solemnization. And if the sinner fall

again, he is not precluded from doing penance, but a solemn penance should not be imposed on him again.

Reply to Objection 1. In those sacraments which are solemnized again and again, repetition is not inconsistent with solemnity, as it is in the present case. Hence the comparison fails.

Reply to Objection 2. Although, if we consider his crime, he ought to do the same penance again, yet the repeated solemnization is not becoming, for the reasons stated above.

Whether solemn penance should be imposed on women and clerics, and whether any priest can impose it?

Suppl. q. 28 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that solemn penance should not be imposed on women. Because, when this penance is imposed on a man, he has to cut his hair off. But this becomes not a woman, according to 1 Cor. 11:15. Therefore she should not do solemn penance.

Objection 2. It also seems that it ought to be imposed on clerics. For it is enjoined on account of a grievous crime. Now the same sin is more grievous in a cleric than in a layman. Therefore it ought to be imposed on a cleric more than on a layman.

Objection 3. It also seems that it can be imposed by any priest. Because to absolve in the tribunal of Penance belongs to one who has the keys. Now an ordinary priest has the keys. Therefore he can administer this penance.

I answer that, Every solemn penance is public, but not vice versa. For solemn penance is done as follows: "On the first day of Lent, these penitents clothed in sackcloth, with bare feet, their faces to the ground, and their hair shorn away, accompanied by their priests, present themselves to the bishop of the city at the door of the church. Having brought them into the church the bishop with all his clergy recites the seven penitential psalms, and then imposes his hand on them, sprinkles them with holy water, puts ashes on their heads, covers their shoulders with a hairshirt, and sorrowfully announces to them that as Adam was expelled from paradise, so are they expelled from the church. He then orders the ministers to put them out of the church, and the clergy follow reciting the responsory: 'In the sweat of thy brow,' etc. Every year on the day of our Lord's Supper they are brought back into the church by their

priests, and there shall they be until the octave day of Easter, without however being admitted to Communion or to the kiss of peace. This shall be done every year as long as entrance into the church is forbidden them. The final reconciliation is reserved to the bishop, who alone can impose solemn penance"*.

This penance can be imposed on men and women; but not on clerics, for fear of scandal. Nor ought such a penance to be imposed except for a crime which has disturbed the whole of the city.

On the other hand public but not solemn penance is that which is done in the presence of the Church, but without the foregoing solemnity, such as a pilgrimage throughout the world with a staff. A penance of this kind can be repeated, and can be imposed by a mere priest, even on a cleric. Sometimes however a solemn penance is taken to signify a public one: so that authorities speak of solemn penance in different senses.

Reply to Objection 1. The woman's hair is a sign of her subjection, a man's is not. Hence it is not proper for a woman to put aside her hair when doing penance, as it is for a man.

Reply to Objection 2. Although in the same kind of sin, a cleric offends more grievously than a layman, yet a solemn penance is not imposed on him, lest his orders should be an object of contempt. Thus deference is given not to the person but to his orders.

Reply to Objection 3. Grave sins need great care in their cure. Hence the imposition of a solemn penance, which is only applied for the most grievous sins, is reserved to the bishop.

* Cap. lxiv, dist. 50