

SECOND PART OF THE SECOND PART, QUESTION 14

Of Blasphemy Against the Holy Ghost (In Four Articles)

We must now consider in particular blasphemy against the Holy Ghost: under which head there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether blasphemy or the sin against the Holy Ghost is the same as the sin committed through certain malice?
- (2) Of the species of this sin;
- (3) Whether it can be forgiven?
- (4) Whether it is possible to begin by sinning against the Holy Ghost before committing other sins?

Whether the sin against the Holy Ghost is the same as the sin committed through certain malice?

IIa IIae q. 14 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that the sin against the Holy Ghost is not the same as the sin committed through certain malice. Because the sin against the Holy Ghost is the sin of blasphemy, according to Mat. 12:32. But not every sin committed through certain malice is a sin of blasphemy: since many other kinds of sin may be committed through certain malice. Therefore the sin against the Holy Ghost is not the same as the sin committed through certain malice.

Objection 2. Further, the sin committed through certain malice is convided with sin committed through ignorance, and sin committed through weakness: whereas the sin against the Holy Ghost is convided with the sin against the Son of Man (Mat. 12:32). Therefore the sin against the Holy Ghost is not the same as the sin committed through certain malice, since things whose opposites differ, are themselves different.

Objection 3. Further, the sin against the Holy Ghost is itself a generic sin, having its own determinate species: whereas sin committed through certain malice is not a special kind of sin, but a condition or general circumstance of sin, which can affect any kind of sin at all. Therefore the sin against the Holy Ghost is not the same as the sin committed through certain malice.

On the contrary, The Master says (Sent. ii, D, 43) that “to sin against the Holy Ghost is to take pleasure in the malice of sin for its own sake.” Now this is to sin through certain malice. Therefore it seems that the sin committed through certain malice is the same as the sin against the Holy Ghost.

I answer that, Three meanings have been given to the sin against the Holy Ghost. For the earlier doctors, viz. Athanasius (Super Matth. xii, 32), Hilary (Can. xii in Matth.), Ambrose (Super Luc. xii, 10), Jerome (Super Matth. xii), and Chrysostom (Hom. xli in Matth.), say that the sin against the Holy Ghost is literally to utter a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, whether by Holy Spirit

we understand the essential name applicable to the whole Trinity, each Person of which is a Spirit and is holy, or the personal name of one of the Persons of the Trinity, in which sense blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is distinct from the blasphemy against the Son of Man (Mat. 12:32), for Christ did certain things in respect of His human nature, by eating, drinking, and such like actions, while He did others in respect of His Godhead, by casting out devils, raising the dead, and the like: which things He did both by the power of His own Godhead and by the operation of the Holy Ghost, of Whom He was full, according to his human nature. Now the Jews began by speaking blasphemy against the Son of Man, when they said (Mat. 11:19) that He was “a glutton... a wine drinker,” and a “friend of publicans”: but afterwards they blasphemed against the Holy Ghost, when they ascribed to the prince of devils those works which Christ did by the power of His own Divine Nature and by the operation of the Holy Ghost.

Augustine, however (De Verb. Dom., Serm. lxxi), says that blasphemy or the sin against the Holy Ghost, is final impenitence when, namely, a man perseveres in mortal sin until death, and that it is not confined to utterance by word of mouth, but extends to words in thought and deed, not to one word only, but to many. Now this word, in this sense, is said to be uttered against the Holy Ghost, because it is contrary to the remission of sins, which is the work of the Holy Ghost, Who is the charity both of the Father and of the Son. Nor did Our Lord say this to the Jews, as though they had sinned against the Holy Ghost, since they were not yet guilty of final impenitence, but He warned them, lest by similar utterances they should come to sin against the Holy Ghost: and it is in this sense that we are to understand Mark 3:29,30, where after Our Lord had said: “But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost,” etc. the Evangelist adds, “because they said: He hath an unclean spirit.”

But others understand it differently, and say that the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, is a sin committed against that good which is appropriated to the Holy Ghost: because goodness is appropriated to the Holy Ghost, just a power is appropriated to the Father, and wisdom to the Son. Hence they say that when a man sins through weakness, it is a sin “against the Father”; that when he sins through ignorance, it is a sin “against the Son”; and that when he sins through certain malice, i.e. through the very choosing of evil, as explained above (Ia IIae, q. 78, Aa. 1, 3), it is a sin “against the Holy Ghost.”

Now this may happen in two ways. First by reason of the very inclination of a vicious habit which we call malice, and, in this way, to sin through malice is not the same as to sin against the Holy Ghost. In another way it happens that by reason of contempt, that which might have prevented the choosing of evil, is rejected or removed; thus hope is removed by despair, and fear by presumption, and so on, as we shall explain further on (Qq. 20,21). Now all these things which prevent the choosing of sin are effects of the Holy Ghost in us; so that, in this sense, to sin through malice is to sin against the Holy Ghost.

Reply to Objection 1. Just as the confession of faith consists in a protestation not only of words but also of deeds, so blasphemy against the Holy Ghost can be uttered in word, thought and deed.

Reply to Objection 2. According to the third interpretation, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is condivided with blasphemy against the Son of Man, forasmuch as He is also the Son of God, i.e. the “power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). Wherefore, in this sense, the sin against the Son of Man will be that which is committed through ignorance, or through weakness.

Reply to Objection 3. Sin committed through certain malice, in so far as it results from the inclination of a habit, is not a special sin, but a general condition of sin: whereas, in so far as it results from a special contempt of an effect of the Holy Ghost in us, it has the character of a special sin. According to this interpretation the sin against the Holy Ghost is a special kind of sin, as also according to the first interpretation: whereas according to the second, it is not a species of sin, because final impenitence may be a circumstance of any kind of sin.

Whether it is fitting to distinguish six kinds of sin against the Holy Ghost?

Ia IIae q. 14 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem unfitting to distinguish six kinds of sin against the Holy Ghost, viz. despair, presumption, impenitence, obstinacy, resisting the known truth, envy of our brother’s spiritual good, which are assigned by the Master (Sent. ii, D, 43). For to deny God’s justice or mercy belongs to unbelief. Now, by despair, a man rejects God’s mercy, and by presumption, His justice. Therefore each of these is a kind of unbelief rather than of the sin against the Holy Ghost.

Objection 2. Further, impenitence, seemingly, regards past sins, while obstinacy regards future sins. Now past and future time do not diversify the species of virtues or vices, since it is the same faith whereby we believe that Christ was born, and those of old believed that He would be born. Therefore obstinacy and impenitence should not be reckoned as two species of sin against the Holy Ghost.

Objection 3. Further, “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17). Therefore it seem that resistance of the known truth, and envy of a brother’s spiritual good, belong to blasphemy against the Son rather than against the Holy Ghost.

Objection 4. Further, Bernard says (De Dispens. et Praecept. xi) that “to refuse to obey is to resist the Holy Ghost.” Moreover a gloss on Lev. 10:16, says that “a feigned repentance is a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.” Again, schism is, seemingly, directly opposed to the Holy Ghost by Whom the Church is united together.

Therefore it seems that the species of sins against the Holy Ghost are insufficiently enumerated.

On the contrary, Augustine* (De Fide ad Petrum iii) says that “those who despair of pardon for their sins, or who without merits presume on God’s mercy, sin against the Holy Ghost,” and (Enchiridion lxxxiii) that “he who dies in a state of obstinacy is guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost,” and (De Verb. Dom., Sermon lxxi) that “impenitence is a sin against the Holy Ghost,” and (De Sermon. Dom. in Monte xxii), that “to resist fraternal goodness with the brands of envy is to sin against the Holy Ghost,” and in his book De unico Baptismo (De Bap. contra Donat. vi, 35) he says that “a man who spurns the truth, is either envious of his brethren to whom the truth is revealed, or ungrateful to God, by Whose inspiration the Church is taught,” and therefore, seemingly, sins against the Holy Ghost.

I answer that, The above species are fittingly assigned to the sin against the Holy Ghost taken in the third sense, because they are distinguished in respect of the removal of contempt of those things whereby a man can be prevented from sinning through choice. These things are either on the part of God’s judgment, or on the part of His gifts, or on the part of sin. For, by consideration of the Divine judgment, wherein justice is accompanied with mercy, man is hindered from sinning through choice, both by hope, arising from the consideration of the mercy

* Fulgentius

that pardons sins and rewards good deeds, which hope is removed by “despair”; and by fear, arising from the consideration of the Divine justice that punishes sins, which fear is removed by “presumption,” when, namely, a man presumes that he can obtain glory without merits, or pardon without repentance.

God’s gifts whereby we are withdrawn from sin, are two: one is the acknowledgment of the truth, against which there is the “resistance of the known truth,” when, namely, a man resists the truth which he has acknowledged, in order to sin more freely: while the other is the assistance of inward grace, against which there is “envy of a brother’s spiritual good,” when, namely, a man is envious not only of his brother’s person, but also of the increase of Divine grace in the world.

On the part of sin, there are two things which may withdraw man therefrom: one is the inordinateness and shamefulness of the act, the consideration of which is wont to arouse man to repentance for the sin he has committed, and against this there is “impenitence,” not as denoting permanence in sin until death, in which sense it was taken above (for thus it would not be a special sin, but a circumstance of sin), but as denoting the purpose of not repenting. The other thing is the smallness or brevity of the good which is sought in sin, according to Rom.

6:21: “What fruit had you therefore then in those things, of which you are now ashamed?” The consideration of this is wont to prevent man’s will from being hardened in sin, and this is removed by “obstinacy,” whereby man hardens his purpose by clinging to sin. Of these two it is written (Jer. 8:6): “There is none that doth penance for his sin, saying: What have I done?” as regards the first; and, “They are all turned to their own course, as a horse rushing to the battle,” as regards the second.

Reply to Objection 1. The sins of despair and presumption consist, not in disbelieving in God’s justice and mercy, but in contemning them.

Reply to Objection 2. Obstinacy and impenitence differ not only in respect of past and future time, but also in respect of certain formal aspects by reason of the diverse consideration of those things which may be considered in sin, as explained above.

Reply to Objection 3. Grace and truth were the work of Christ through the gifts of the Holy Ghost which He gave to men.

Reply to Objection 4. To refuse to obey belongs to obstinacy, while a feigned repentance belongs to impenitence, and schism to the envy of a brother’s spiritual good, whereby the members of the Church are united together.

Whether the sin against the Holy Ghost can be forgiven?

IIa IIae q. 14 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that the sin against the Holy Ghost can be forgiven. For Augustine says (De Verb. Dom., Serm. lxxi): “We should despair of no man, so long as Our Lord’s patience brings him back to repentance.” But if any sin cannot be forgiven, it would be possible to despair of some sinners. Therefore the sin against the Holy Ghost can be forgiven.

Objection 2. Further, no sin is forgiven, except through the soul being healed by God. But “no disease is incurable to an all-powerful physician,” as a gloss says on Ps. 102:3, “Who healeth all thy diseases.” Therefore the sin against the Holy Ghost can be forgiven.

Objection 3. Further, the free-will is indifferent to either good or evil. Now, so long as man is a wayfarer, he can fall away from any virtue, since even an angel fell from heaven, wherefore it is written (Job 4:18,19): “In His angels He found wickedness: how much more shall they that dwell in houses of clay?” Therefore, in like manner, a man can return from any sin to the state of justice. Therefore the sin against the Holy Ghost can be forgiven.

On the contrary, It is written (Mat. 12:32): “He that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come”: and Augustine says (De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 22) that “so great is the downfall of this sin that it cannot submit to the

humiliation of asking for pardon.”

I answer that, According to the various interpretations of the sin against the Holy Ghost, there are various ways in which it may be said that it cannot be forgiven. For if by the sin against the Holy Ghost we understand final impenitence, it is said to be unpardonable, since in no way is it pardoned: because the mortal sin wherein a man perseveres until death will not be forgiven in the life to come, since it was not remitted by repentance in this life.

According to the other two interpretations, it is said to be unpardonable, not as though it is nowise forgiven, but because, considered in itself, it deserves not to be pardoned: and this in two ways. First, as regards the punishment, since he that sins through ignorance or weakness, deserves less punishment, whereas he that sins through certain malice, can offer no excuse in alleviation of his punishment. Likewise those who blasphemed against the Son of Man before His Godhead was revealed, could have some excuse, on account of the weakness of the flesh which they perceived in Him, and hence, they deserved less punishment; whereas those who blasphemed against His very Godhead, by ascribing to the devil the works of the Holy Ghost, had no excuse in diminution of their punishment. Wherefore, according to Chrysostom’s com-

mentary (Hom. xlii in Matth.), the Jews are said not to be forgiven this sin, neither in this world nor in the world to come, because they were punished for it, both in the present life, through the Romans, and in the life to come, in the pains of hell. Thus also Athanasius adduces the example of their forefathers who, first of all, wrangled with Moses on account of the shortage of water and bread; and this the Lord bore with patience, because they were to be excused on account of the weakness of the flesh: but afterwards they sinned more grievously when, by ascribing to an idol the favors bestowed by God Who had brought them out of Egypt, they blasphemed, so to speak, against the Holy Ghost, saying (Ex. 32:4): “These are thy gods, O Israel, that have brought thee out of the land of Egypt.” Therefore the Lord both inflicted temporal punishment on them, since “there were slain on that day about three and twenty thousand men” (Ex. 32:28), and threatened them with punishment in the life to come, saying, (Ex. 32:34): “I, in the day of revenge, will visit this sin . . . of theirs.”

Secondly, this may be understood to refer to the guilt: thus a disease is said to be incurable in respect of the nature of the disease, which removes whatever might be a

means of cure, as when it takes away the power of nature, or causes loathing for food and medicine, although God is able to cure such a disease. So too, the sin against the Holy Ghost is said to be unpardonable, by reason of its nature, in so far as it removes those things which are a means towards the pardon of sins. This does not, however, close the way of forgiveness and healing to an all-powerful and merciful God, Who, sometimes, by a miracle, so to speak, restores spiritual health to such men.

Reply to Objection 1. We should despair of no man in this life, considering God’s omnipotence and mercy. But if we consider the circumstances of sin, some are called (Eph. 2:2) “children of despair”*.

Reply to Objection 2. This argument considers the question on the part of God’s omnipotence, not on that of the circumstances of sin.

Reply to Objection 3. In this life the free-will does indeed ever remain subject to change: yet sometimes it rejects that whereby, so far as it is concerned, it can be turned to good. Hence considered in itself this sin is unpardonable, although God can pardon it.

Whether a man can sin first of all against the Holy Ghost?

IIa IIae q. 14 a. 4

Objection 1. It would seem that a man cannot sin first of all against the Holy Ghost, without having previously committed other sins. For the natural order requires that one should be moved to perfection from imperfection. This is evident as regards good things, according to Prov. 4:18: “The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards and increases even to perfect day.” Now, in evil things, the perfect is the greatest evil, as the Philosopher states (Metaph. v, text. 21). Since then the sin against the Holy Ghost is the most grievous sin, it seems that man comes to commit this sin through committing lesser sins.

Objection 2. Further, to sin against the Holy Ghost is to sin through certain malice, or through choice. Now man cannot do this until he has sinned many times; for the Philosopher says (Ethic. v, 6,9) that “although a man is able to do unjust deeds, yet he cannot all at once do them as an unjust man does,” viz. from choice. Therefore it seems that the sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be committed except after other sins.

Objection 3. Further, repentance and impenitence are about the same object. But there is no repentance, except about past sins. Therefore the same applies to impenitence which is a species of the sin against the Holy Ghost. Therefore the sin against the Holy Ghost presupposes other sins.

On the contrary, “It is easy in the eyes of God on a sudden to make a poor man rich” (Ecclus. 11:23). There-

fore, conversely, it is possible for a man, according to the malice of the devil who tempts him, to be led to commit the most grievous of sins which is that against the Holy Ghost.

I answer that, As stated above (a. 1), in one way, to sin against the Holy Ghost is to sin through certain malice. Now one may sin through certain malice in two ways, as stated in the same place: first, through the inclination of a habit; but this is not, properly speaking, to sin against the Holy Ghost, nor does a man come to commit this sin all at once, in as much as sinful acts must precede so as to cause the habit that induces to sin. Secondly, one may sin through certain malice, by contemptuously rejecting the things whereby a man is withdrawn from sin. This is, properly speaking, to sin against the Holy Ghost, as stated above (a. 1); and this also, for the most part, presupposes other sins, for it is written (Prov. 18:3) that “the wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth.”

Nevertheless it is possible for a man, in his first sinful act, to sin against the Holy Ghost by contempt, both on account of his free-will, and on account of the many previous dispositions, or again, through being vehemently moved to evil, while but feebly attached to good. Hence never or scarcely ever does it happen that the perfect sin all at once against the Holy Ghost: wherefore Origen says (Peri Archon. i, 3): “I do not think that anyone who stands on the highest step of perfection, can fail or fall suddenly;

* ‘Filiis diffidentiae,’ which the Douay version renders ‘children of unbelief.’

this can only happen by degrees and bit by bit.”

The same applies, if the sin against the Holy Ghost be taken literally for blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. For such blasphemy as Our Lord speaks of, always proceeds from contemptuous malice.

If, however, with Augustine (De Verb. Dom., Serm. lxxi) we understand the sin against the Holy Ghost to denote final impenitence, it does not regard the question in point, because this sin against the Holy Ghost requires persistence in sin until the end of life.

Reply to Objection 1. Movement both in good and in evil is made, for the most part, from imperfect to perfect, according as man progresses in good or evil: and yet in both cases, one man can begin from a greater (good or evil) than another man does. Consequently, that from which a man begins can be perfect in good or evil ac-

ording to its genus, although it may be imperfect as regards the series of good or evil actions whereby a man progresses in good or evil.

Reply to Objection 2. This argument considers the sin which is committed through certain malice, when it proceeds from the inclination of a habit.

Reply to Objection 3. If by impenitence we understand with Augustine (De Verb. Dom., Serm. lxxi) persistence in sin until the end, it is clear that it presupposes sin, just as repentance does. If, however, we take it for habitual impenitence, in which sense it is a sin against the Holy Ghost, it is evident that it can precede sin: for it is possible for a man who has never sinned to have the purpose either of repenting or of not repenting, if he should happen to sin.