

SECOND PART OF THE SECOND PART, QUESTION 39

Of Schism (In Four Articles)

We must now consider the vices contrary to peace, which belong to deeds: such are schism, strife, sedition, and war. In the first place, then, about schism, there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether schism is a special sin?
- (2) Whether it is graver than unbelief?
- (3) Of the power exercised by schismatics;
- (4) Of the punishment inflicted on them.

Whether schism is a special sin?

IIa IIae q. 39 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that schism is not a special sin. For “schism,” as Pope Pelagius I says (Epist. ad Victor. et Pancrat.), “denotes a division.” But every sin causes a division, according to Is. 59: “Your sins have divided between you and your God.” Therefore schism is not a special sin.

Objection 2. Further, a man is apparently a schismatic if he disobeys the Church. But every sin makes a man disobey the commandments of the Church, because sin, according to Ambrose (De Parad. viii) “is disobedience against the heavenly commandments.” Therefore every sin is a schism.

Objection 3. Further, heresy also divides a man from the unity of faith. If, therefore, the word schism denotes a division, it would seem not to differ, as a special sin, from the sin of unbelief.

On the contrary, Augustine (Contra Faust. xx, 3; Contra Crescon. ii, 4) distinguishes between schism and heresy, for he says that a “schismatic is one who holds the same faith, and practises the same worship, as others, and takes pleasure in the mere disunion of the community, whereas a heretic is one who holds another faith from that of the Catholic Church.” Therefore schism is not a generic sin.

I answer that, As Isidore says (Etym. viii, 3), schism takes its name “from being a scission of minds,” and scission is opposed to unity. Wherefore the sin of schism is one that is directly and essentially opposed to unity. For in the moral, as in the physical order, the species is not constituted by that which is accidental. Now, in the moral order, the essential is that which is intended, and that which results beside the intention, is, as it were, accidental. Hence the sin of schism is, properly speaking, a special sin, for the reason that the schismatic intends to sever himself from that unity which is the effect of charity: because charity unites not only one person to another with the bond of spiritual love, but also the whole Church in unity of spirit.

Accordingly schismatics properly so called are those

who, wilfully and intentionally separate themselves from the unity of the Church; for this is the chief unity, and the particular unity of several individuals among themselves is subordinate to the unity of the Church, even as the mutual adaptation of each member of a natural body is subordinate to the unity of the whole body. Now the unity of the Church consists in two things; namely, in the mutual connection or communion of the members of the Church, and again in the subordination of all the members of the Church to the one head, according to Col. 2:18,19: “Puffed up by the sense of his flesh, and not holding the Head, from which the whole body, by joints and bands, being supplied with nourishment and compacted, groweth unto the increase of God.” Now this Head is Christ Himself, Whose viceregent in the Church is the Sovereign Pontiff. Wherefore schismatics are those who refuse to submit to the Sovereign Pontiff, and to hold communion with those members of the Church who acknowledge his supremacy.

Reply to Objection 1. The division between man and God that results from sin is not intended by the sinner: it happens beside his intention as a result of his turning inordinately to a mutable good, and so it is not schism properly so called.

Reply to Objection 2. The essence of schism consists in rebelliously disobeying the commandments: and I say “rebelliously,” since a schismatic both obstinately scorns the commandments of the Church, and refuses to submit to her judgment. But every sinner does not do this, wherefore not every sin is a schism.

Reply to Objection 3. Heresy and schism are distinguished in respect of those things to which each is opposed essentially and directly. For heresy is essentially opposed to faith, while schism is essentially opposed to the unity of ecclesiastical charity. Wherefore just as faith and charity are different virtues, although whoever lacks faith lacks charity, so too schism and heresy are different vices, although whoever is a heretic is also a schismatic, but not conversely. This is what Jerome says in

his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*: “I consider the difference between schism and heresy to be that heresy holds false doctrine while schism severs a man from the Church.” Nevertheless, just as the loss of charity is the road to the loss of faith, according to 1 Tim. 1:6: “From which things,” i.e. charity and the like, “some going astray, are turned aside into vain babbling,” so too,

schism is the road to heresy. Wherefore Jerome adds (In Ep. ad Tit. iii, 10) that “at the outset it is possible, in a certain respect, to find a difference between schism and heresy: yet there is no schism that does not devise some heresy for itself, that it may appear to have had a reason for separating from the Church.”

Whether schism is a graver sin than unbelief?

Ia IIae q. 39 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that schism is a graver sin than unbelief. For the graver sin meets with a graver punishment, according to Dt. 25:2: “According to the measure of the sin shall the measure also of the stripes be.” Now we find the sin of schism punished more severely than even the sin of unbelief or idolatry: for we read (Ex. 32:28) that some were slain by the swords of their fellow men on account of idolatry: whereas of the sin of schism we read (Num. 16:30): “If the Lord do a new thing, and the earth opening her mouth swallow them down, and all things that belong to them, and they go down alive into hell, you shall know that they have blasphemed the Lord God.” Moreover the ten tribes who were guilty of schism in revolting from the rule of David were most severely punished (4 Kings 17). Therefore the sin of schism is graver than the sin of unbelief.

Objection 2. Further, “The good of the multitude is greater and more godlike than the good of the individual,” as the Philosopher states (Ethic. i, 2). Now schism is opposed to the good of the multitude, namely, ecclesiastical unity, whereas unbelief is contrary to the particular good of one man, namely the faith of an individual. Therefore it seems that schism is a graver sin than unbelief.

Objection 3. Further, a greater good is opposed to a greater evil, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. viii, 10). Now schism is opposed to charity, which is a greater virtue than faith to which unbelief is opposed, as shown above (q. 10, a. 2; q. 23, a. 6). Therefore schism is a graver sin than unbelief.

On the contrary, That which results from an addition to something else surpasses that thing either in good or in evil. Now heresy results from something being added to schism, for it adds corrupt doctrine, as Jerome declares in the passage quoted above (a. 1, ad 3). Therefore schism is a less grievous sin than unbelief.

I answer that, The gravity of a sin can be considered in two ways: first, according to the species of that sin, secondly, according to its circumstances. And since particular circumstances are infinite in number, so too they can be varied in an infinite number of ways: wherefore if one were to ask in general which of two sins is the graver,

the question must be understood to refer to the gravity derived from the sin’s genus. Now the genus or species of a sin is taken from its object, as shown above (Ia IIae, q. 72, a. 1; Ia IIae, q. 73, a. 3). Wherefore the sin which is opposed to the greater good is, in respect of its genus, more grievous, for instance a sin committed against God is graver than a sin committed against one’s neighbor.

Now it is evident that unbelief is a sin committed against God Himself, according as He is Himself the First Truth, on which faith is founded; whereas schism is opposed to ecclesiastical unity, which is a participated good, and a lesser good than God Himself. Wherefore it is manifest that the sin of unbelief is generically more grievous than the sin of schism, although it may happen that a particular schismatic sins more grievously than a particular unbeliever, either because his contempt is greater, or because his sin is a source of greater danger, or for some similar reason.

Reply to Objection 1. It had already been declared to that people by the law which they had received that there was one God, and that no other God was to be worshipped by them; and the same had been confirmed among them by many kinds of signs. Consequently there was no need for those who sinned against this faith by falling into idolatry, to be punished in an unwonted manner: it was enough that they should be punished in the usual way. On the other hand, it was not so well known among them that Moses was always to be their ruler, and so it behooved those who rebelled against his authority to be punished in a miraculous and unwonted manner.

We may also reply by saying that the sin of schism was sometimes more severely punished in that people, because they were inclined to seditions and schisms. For it is written (1 Esdra 4:15): “This city since days gone by has rebelled against its kings: and seditions and wars were raised therein*.” Now sometimes a more severe punishment is inflicted for an habitual sin (as stated above, Ia IIae, q. 105, a. 2, ad 9), because punishments are medicines intended to keep man away from sin: so that where there is greater proneness to sin, a more severe punishment ought to be inflicted. As regards the ten tribes,

* In Ep. ad Tit. iii, 10 * Vulg.: ‘This city is a rebellious city, and hurtful to the kings and provinces, and . . . wars were raised therein of old’

they were punished not only for the sin of schism, but also for that of idolatry as stated in the passage quoted.

Reply to Objection 2. Just as the good of the multitude is greater than the good of a unit in that multitude, so is it less than the extrinsic good to which that multitude is directed, even as the good of a rank in the army is less than the good of the commander-in-chief. In like manner the good of ecclesiastical unity, to which schism is opposed, is less than the good of Divine truth, to which unbelief is opposed.

Reply to Objection 3. Charity has two objects; one is

its principal object and is the Divine goodness, the other is its secondary object and is our neighbor's good. Now schism and other sins against our neighbor, are opposed to charity in respect of its secondary good, which is less than the object of faith, for this is God Himself; and so these sins are less grievous than unbelief. On the other hand, hatred of God, which is opposed to charity in respect of its principal object, is not less grievous than unbelief. Nevertheless of all sins committed by man against his neighbor, the sin of schism would seem to be the greatest, because it is opposed to the spiritual good of the multitude.

Whether schismatics have any power?

Iia IIae q. 39 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that schismatics have some power. For Augustine says (Contra Donat. i, 1): "Just as those who come back to the Church after being baptized, are not baptized again, so those who return after being ordained, are not ordained again." Now Order is a kind of power. Therefore schismatics have some power since they retain their Orders.

Objection 2. Further, Augustine says (De Unico Bap. *): "One who is separated can confer a sacrament even as he can have it." But the power of conferring a sacrament is a very great power. Therefore schismatics who are separated from the Church, have a spiritual power.

Objection 3. Further, Pope Urban II[†] says: "We command that persons consecrated by bishops who were themselves consecrated according to the Catholic rite, but have separated themselves by schism from the Roman Church, should be received mercifully and that their Orders should be acknowledged, when they return to the unity of the Church, provided they be of commendable life and knowledge." But this would not be so, unless spiritual power were retained by schismatics. Therefore schismatics have spiritual power.

On the contrary, Cyprian says in a letter (Ep. lii, quoted vii, qu. 1, can. Novatianus): "He who observes neither unity of spirit nor the concord of peace, and severs himself from the bonds of the Church, and from the fellowship of her priests, cannot have episcopal power or honor."

I answer that, Spiritual power is twofold, the one sacramental, the other a power of jurisdiction. The sacramental power is one that is conferred by some kind of

consecration. Now all the consecrations of the Church are immovable so long as the consecrated thing remains: as appears even in inanimate things, since an altar, once consecrated, is not consecrated again unless it has been broken up. Consequently such a power as this remains, as to its essence, in the man who has received it by consecration, as long as he lives, even if he fall into schism or heresy: and this is proved from the fact that if he come back to the Church, he is not consecrated anew. Since, however, the lower power ought not to exercise its act, except in so far as it is moved by the higher power, as may be seen also in the physical order, it follows that such persons lose the use of their power, so that it is not lawful for them to use it. Yet if they use it, this power has its effect in sacramental acts, because therein man acts only as God's instrument, so that sacramental effects are not precluded on account of any fault whatever in the person who confers the sacrament.

On the other hand, the power of jurisdiction is that which is conferred by a mere human appointment. Such a power as this does not adhere to the recipient immovably: so that it does not remain in heretics and schismatics; and consequently they neither absolve nor excommunicate, nor grant indulgence, nor do anything of the kind, and if they do, it is invalid.

Accordingly when it is said that such like persons have no spiritual power, it is to be understood as referring either to the second power, or if it be referred to the first power, not as referring to the essence of the power, but to its lawful use.

This suffices for the Replies to the Objections.

* De Bap. contra Donat. vi, 5 † Council of Piacenza, cap. x; cf. Can. Ordinationes, ix, qu. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that schismatics are not rightly punished with excommunication. For excommunication deprives a man chiefly of a share in the sacraments. But Augustine says (*Contra Donat.* vi, 5) that “Baptism can be received from a schismatic.” Therefore it seems that excommunication is not a fitting punishment for schismatics.

Objection 2. Further, it is the duty of Christ’s faithful to lead back those who have gone astray, wherefore it is written against certain persons (*Ezech.* 34:4): “That which was driven away you have not brought again, neither have you sought that which was lost.” Now schismatics are more easily brought back by such as may hold communion with them. Therefore it seems that they ought not to be excommunicated.

Objection 3. Further, a double punishment is not inflicted for one and the same sin, according to *Nahum* 1:9: “God will not judge the same twice”*. Now some receive a temporal punishment for the sin of schism, according to q. 23, a. 5, where it is stated: “Both divine and earthly laws have laid down that those who are severed from the unity of the Church, and disturb her peace, must be punished by the secular power.” Therefore they ought not to be punished with excommunication.

On the contrary, It is written (*Num.* 16:26): “Depart from the tents of these wicked men,” those, to wit, who had caused the schism, “and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be involved in their sins.”

I answer that, According to *Wis.* 11:11, “By what things a man sinneth, by the same also he should be pun-

ished” [Vulg.: ‘he is tormented’]. Now a schismatic, as shown above (a. 1), commits a twofold sin: first by separating himself from communion with the members of the Church, and in this respect the fitting punishment for schismatics is that they be excommunicated. Secondly, they refuse submission to the head of the Church, wherefore, since they are unwilling to be controlled by the Church’s spiritual power, it is just that they should be compelled by the secular power.

Reply to Objection 1. It is not lawful to receive Baptism from a schismatic, save in a case of necessity, since it is better for a man to quit this life, marked with the sign of Christ, no matter from whom he may receive it, whether from a Jew or a pagan, than deprived of that mark, which is bestowed in Baptism.

Reply to Objection 2. Excommunication does not forbid the intercourse whereby a person by salutary admonitions leads back to the unity of the Church those who are separated from her. Indeed this very separation brings them back somewhat, because through confusion at their separation, they are sometimes led to do penance

Reply to Objection 3. The punishments of the present life are medicinal, and therefore when one punishment does not suffice to compel a man, another is added: just as physicians employ several body medicines when one has no effect. In like manner the Church, when excommunication does not sufficiently restrain certain men, employs the compulsion of the secular arm. If, however, one punishment suffices, another should not be employed.

* Septuagint version