

SUPPLEMENT TO THE THIRD PART, QUESTION 4

Of the Time for Contrition (In Three Articles)

We must now consider the time for contrition: under which head there are three points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether the whole of this life is the time for contrition?
- (2) Whether it is expedient to grieve continually for our sins?
- (3) Whether souls grieve for their sins even after this life?

Whether the whole of this life is the time for contrition?

Suppl. q. 4 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that the time for contrition is not the whole of this life. For as we should be sorry for a sin committed, so should we be ashamed of it. But shame for sin does not last all one's life, for Ambrose says (De Poenit. ii) that "he whose sin is forgiven has nothing to be ashamed of." Therefore it seems that neither should contrition last all one's life, since it is sorrow for sin.

Objection 2. Further, it is written (1 Jn. 4:18) that "perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain." But sorrow also has pain. Therefore the sorrow of contrition cannot remain in the state of perfect charity.

Objection 3. Further, there cannot be any sorrow for the past (since it is, properly speaking, about a present evil) except in so far as something of the past sin remains in the present time. Now, in this life, sometimes one attains to a state in which nothing remains of a past sin, neither disposition, nor guilt, nor any debt of punishment. Therefore there is no need to grieve any more for that sin.

Objection 4. Further, it is written (Rom. 8:28) that "to them that love God all things work together unto good," even sins as a gloss declares*. Therefore there is no need for them to grieve for sin after it has been forgiven.

Objection 5. Further, contrition is a part of Penance, convided with satisfaction. But there is no need for continual satisfaction. Therefore contrition for sin need not be continual.

On the contrary, Augustine in De Poenitentia† says that "when sorrow ceases, penance fails, and when penance fails, no pardon remains." Therefore, since it behooves one not to lose the forgiveness which has been granted, it seems that one ought always to grieve for one's sins.

Further, it is written (Ecclus. 5:5): "Be not without fear about sin forgiven." Therefore man should always grieve, that his sins may be forgiven him.

I answer that, As stated above (q. 3, a. 1), there is a twofold sorrow in contrition: one is in the reason, and is detestation of the sin committed; the other is in the sensitive part, and results from the former: and as regards both,

the time for contrition is the whole of the present state of life. For as long as one is a wayfarer, one detests the obstacles which retard or hinder one from reaching the end of the way. Wherefore, since past sin retards the course of our life towards God (because the time which was given to us for the course cannot be recovered), it follows that the state of contrition remains during the whole of this lifetime, as regards the detestation of sin. The same is to be said of the sensible sorrow, which is assumed by the will as a punishment: for since man, by sinning, deserved everlasting punishment, and sinned against the eternal God, the everlasting punishment being commuted into a temporal one, sorrow ought to remain during the whole of man's eternity, i.e. during the whole of the state of this life. For this reason Hugh of St. Victor says‡ that "when God absolves a man from eternal guilt and punishment, He binds him with a chain of eternal detestation of sin."

Reply to Objection 1. Shame regards sin only as a disgraceful act; wherefore after sin has been taken away as to its guilt, there is no further motive for shame; but there does remain a motive of sorrow, which is for the guilt, not only as being something disgraceful, but also as having a hurt connected with it.

Reply to Objection 2. Servile fear which charity casts out, is opposed to charity by reason of its servility, because it regards the punishment. But the sorrow of contrition results from charity, as stated above (q. 3, a. 2): wherefore the comparison fails.

Reply to Objection 3. Although, by penance, the sinner returns to his former state of grace and immunity from the debt of punishment, yet he never returns to his former dignity of innocence, and so something always remains from his past sin.

Reply to Objection 4. Just as a man ought not to do evil that good may come of it, so he ought not to rejoice in evil, for the reason that good may perchance come from it through the agency of Divine grace or providence, because his sins did not cause but hindered those goods; rather was it Divine providence that was their cause, and

* Augustine, De Correp. et Grat. † De vera et falsa Poenitentia, work of an unknown author ‡ Richard of St. Victor, De Pot. Lig. et Solv. 3,5,13

in this man should rejoice, whereas he should grieve for his sins.

Reply to Objection 5. Satisfaction depends on the punishment appointed, which should be enjoined for sins; hence it can come to an end, so that there be no further need of satisfaction. But that punishment is proportionate to sin chiefly on the part of its adherence to a creature

whence it derives its finiteness. On the other hand, the sorrow of contrition corresponds to sin on the part of the aversion, whence it derives a certain infinity; wherefore contrition ought to continue always; nor is it unreasonable if that which precedes remains, when that which follows is taken away.

Whether it is expedient to grieve for sin continually?

Suppl. q. 4 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that it is not expedient to grieve for sin continually. For it is sometimes expedient to rejoice, as is evident from Phil. 4:4, where the gloss on the words, "Rejoice in the Lord always," says that "it is necessary to rejoice." Now it is not possible to rejoice and grieve at the same time. Therefore it is not expedient to grieve for sin continually.

Objection 2. Further, that which, in itself, is an evil and a thing to be avoided should not be taken upon oneself, except in so far as it is necessary as a remedy against something, as in the case of burning or cutting a wound. Now sorrow is in itself an evil; wherefore it is written (Ecclus. 30:24): "Drive away sadness far from thee," and the reason is given (Ecclus. 30:25): "For sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it." Moreover the Philosopher says the same (Ethic. vii, 13,14; x, 5). Therefore one should not grieve for sin any longer than suffices for the sin to be blotted out. Now sin is already blotted out after the first sorrow of contrition. Therefore it is not expedient to grieve any longer.

Objection 3. Further, Bernard says (Serm. xi in Cant.): "Sorrow is a good thing, if it is not continual; for honey should be mingled with wormwood." Therefore it seems that it is inexpedient to grieve continually.

On the contrary, Augustine* says: "The penitent should always grieve, and rejoice in his grief."

Further, it is expedient always to continue, as far as it is possible, those acts in which beatitude consists. Now such is sorrow for sin, as is shown by the words of Mat.

5:5, "Blessed are they that mourn." Therefore it is expedient for sorrow to be as continual as possible.

I answer that, We find this condition in the acts of the virtues, that in them excess and defect are not possible, as is proved in Ethic. ii, 6,7. Wherefore, since contrition, so far as it is a kind of displeasure seated in the rational appetite, is an act of the virtue of penance, there can never be excess in it, either as to its intensity, or as to its duration, except in so far as the act of one virtue hinders the act of another which is more urgent for the time being. Consequently the more continually a man can perform acts of this displeasure, the better it is, provided he exercises the acts of other virtues when and how he ought to. On the other hand, passions can have excess and defect, both in intensity and in duration. Wherefore, as the passion of sorrow, which the will takes upon itself, ought to be moderately intense, so ought it to be of moderate duration, lest, if it should last too long, man fall into despair, cowardice, and such like vices.

Reply to Objection 1. The sorrow of contrition is a hindrance to worldly joy, but not to the joy which is about God, and which has sorrow itself for object.

Reply to Objection 2. The words of Ecclesiasticus refer to worldly joy: and the Philosopher is referring to sorrow as a passion, of which we should make moderate use, according as the end, for which it is assumed, demands.

Reply to Objection 3. Bernard is speaking of sorrow as a passion.

Whether our souls are contrite for sins even after this life?

Suppl. q. 4 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that our souls are contrite for sins even after this life. For the love of charity causes displeasure at sin. Now, after this life, charity remains in some, both as to its act and as to its habit, since "charity never falleth away." Therefore the displeasure at the sin committed, which is the essence of contrition, remains.

Objection 2. Further, we should grieve more for sin than for punishment. But the souls in purgatory grieve for their sensible punishment and for the delay of glory.

Much more, therefore, do they grieve for the sins they committed.

Objection 3. Further, the pain of purgatory satisfies for sin. But satisfaction derives its efficacy from the power of contrition. Therefore contrition remains after this life.

On the contrary, contrition is a part of the sacrament of Penance. But the sacraments do not endure after this life. Neither, therefore, does contrition.

Further, contrition can be so great as to blot out both

* De vera et falsa Poenitentia, work of an unknown author

guilt and punishment. If therefore the souls in purgatory could have contrition, it would be possible for their debt of punishment to be remitted through the power of their contrition, so that they would be delivered from their sensible pain, which is false.

I answer that, Three things are to be observed in contrition: first, its genus, viz. sorrow; secondly, its form, for it is an act of virtue quickened by charity; thirdly, its efficacy, for it is a meritorious and sacramental act, and, to a certain extent, satisfactory. Accordingly, after this life, those souls which dwell in the heavenly country, cannot have contrition, because they are void of sorrow by reason of the fulness of their joy: those which are in hell, have no contrition, for although they have sorrow, they lack the grace which quickens sorrow; while those which are in purgatory have a sorrow for their sins, that is quick-

ened by grace; yet it is not meritorious, for they are not in the state of meriting. In this life, however, all these three can be found.

Reply to Objection 1. Charity does not cause this sorrow, save in those who are capable of it; but the fulness of joy in the Blessed excludes all capability of sorrow from them: wherefore, though they have charity, they have no contrition.

Reply to Objection 2. The souls in purgatory grieve for their sins; but their sorrow is not contrition, because it lacks the efficacy of contrition.

Reply to Objection 3. The pain which the souls suffer in purgatory, cannot, properly speaking, be called satisfaction, because satisfaction demands a meritorious work; yet, in a broad sense, the payment of the punishment due may be called satisfaction.