

SUPPLEMENT TO THE THIRD PART, QUESTION 73

Of the Signs That Will Precede the Judgment (In Three Articles)

We must next consider the signs that will precede the judgment: and under this head there are three points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether any signs will precede the Lord's coming to judgment?
- (2) Whether in very truth the sun and moon will be darkened?
- (3) Whether the powers of the heavens will be moved when the Lord shall come?

Whether any signs will precede the Lord's coming to judgment?

Suppl. q. 73 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that the Lord's coming to judgment will not be preceded by any signs. Because it is written (1 Thess. 5:3): "When they shall say: Peace and security; then shall sudden destruction come upon them." Now there would be no peace and security if men were terrified by previous signs. Therefore signs will not precede that coming

Objection 2. Further, signs are ordained for the manifestation of something. But His coming is to be hidden; wherefore it is written (1 Thess. 5:2): "The day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night." Therefore signs ought not to precede it.

Objection 3. Further, the time of His first coming was foreknown by the prophets, which does not apply to His second coming. Now no such signs preceded the first coming of Christ. Therefore neither will they precede the second.

On the contrary, It is written (Lk. 21:25): "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars," etc.

Further, Jerome* mentions fifteen signs preceding the judgment. He says that on the "first" day all the seas will rise fifteen cubits above the mountains; in the "second" day all the waters will be plunged into the depths, so that scarcely will they be visible; on the "third" day they will be restored to their previous condition; on the "fourth" day all the great fishes and other things that move in the waters will gather together and, raising their heads above the sea, roar at one another contentiously; on the "fifth" day, all the birds of the air will gather together in the fields, wailing to one another, with neither bite nor sup; on the "sixth" day rivers of fire will arise towards the firmament rushing together from the west to the east; on the "seventh" day all the stars, both planets and fixed stars, will throw out fiery tails like comets; on the "eighth" day there will be a great earthquake, and all animals will be laid low; on the "ninth" day all the plants will be bedewed as it were with blood; on the "tenth" day all stones, little and

great, will be divided into four parts dashing against one another; on the "eleventh" day all hills and mountains and buildings will be reduced to dust; on the "twelfth" day all animals will come from forest and mountain to the fields, roaring and tasting of nothing; on the "thirteenth" day all graves from east to west will open to allow the bodies to rise again; on the "fourteenth" day all men will leave their abode, neither understanding nor speaking, but rushing hither and thither like madmen; on the "fifteenth" day all will die and will rise again with those who died long before.

I answer that, When Christ shall come to judge He will appear in the form of glory, on account of the authority becoming a judge. Now it pertains to the dignity of judicial power to have certain signs that induce people to reverence and subjection: and consequently many signs will precede the advent of Christ when He shall come to judgment, in order that the hearts of men be brought to subjection to the coming judge, and be prepared for the judgment, being forewarned by those signs. But it is not easy to know what these signs may be: for the signs of which we read in the gospels, as Augustine says, writing to Hesychius about the end of the world (Ep. lxxx), refer not only to Christ's coming to judgment, but also to the time of the sack of Jerusalem, and to the coming of Christ in ceaselessly visiting His Church. So that, perhaps, if we consider them carefully, we shall find that none of them refers to the coming advent, as he remarks: because these signs that are mentioned in the gospels, such as wars, fears, and so forth, have been from the beginning of the human race: unless perhaps we say that at that time they will be more prevalent: although it is uncertain in what degree this increase will foretell the imminence of the advent. The signs mentioned by Jerome are not asserted by him; he merely says that he found them written in the annals of the Hebrews: and, indeed, they contain very little likelihood.

Reply to Objection 1. According to Augustine (Ad

* St. Peter Damian, Opuscul. xlix; he quotes St. Jerome, but the reference is not known.

Hesych., Ep. lxxx) towards the end of the world there will be a general persecution of the good by the wicked: so that at the same time some will fear, namely the good, and some will be secure, namely the wicked. The words: “When they shall say: Peace and security,” refer to the wicked, who will pay little heed to the signs of the coming judgment: while the words of Lk. 21:26, “men withering away,” etc., should be referred to the good.

We may also reply that all these signs that will happen about the time of the judgment are reckoned to occur within the time occupied by the judgment, so that the judgment day contains them all. Wherefore although men be terrified by the signs appearing about the judgment day, yet before those signs begin to appear the wicked will think themselves to be in peace and security, after the

death of Antichrist and before the coming of Christ, seeing that the world is not at once destroyed, as they thought hitherto.

Reply to Objection 2. The day of the Lord is said to come as a thief, because the exact time is not known, since it will not be possible to know it from those signs: although, as we have already said, all these most manifest signs which will precede the judgment immediately may be comprised under the judgment day.

Reply to Objection 3. At His first advent Christ came secretly, although the appointed time was known beforehand by the prophets. Hence there was no need for such signs to appear at His first coming, as will appear at His second advent, when He will come openly, although the appointed time is hidden.

Whether towards the time of the judgment the sun and moon will be darkened in very truth?

Suppl. q. 73 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that towards the time of the judgment the sun and moon will be darkened in very truth. For, as Rabanus says, commenting on Mat. 24:29 “nothing hinders us from gathering that the sun moon, and stars will then be deprived of their light, as we know happened to the sun at the time of our Lord’s passion.”

Objection 2. Further, the light of the heavenly bodies is directed to the generation of inferior bodies, because by its means and not only by their movement they act upon this lower world as Averroes says (*De Subst. Orbis.*). But generation will cease then. Therefore neither will light remain in the heavenly bodies.

Objection 3. Further, according to some the inferior bodies will be cleansed of the qualities by which they act. Now heavenly bodies act not only by movement, but also by light, as stated above (obj. 2). Therefore as the movement of heaven will cease, so will the light of the heavenly bodies.

On the contrary, According to astronomers the sun and moon cannot be eclipsed at the same time. But this darkening of the sun and moon is stated to be simultaneous, when the Lord shall come to judgment. Therefore the darkening will not be in very truth due to a natural eclipse.

Further, it is not seemly for the same to be the cause of a thing’s failing and increasing. Now when our Lord shall come the light of the luminaries will increase according to Is. 30:26, “The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold.” Therefore it is unfitting for the light of these bodies to cease when our Lord comes.

I answer that, If we speak of the sun and moon in respect of the very moment of Christ’s coming, it is not

credible that they will be darkened through being bereft of their light, since when Christ comes and the saints rise again the whole world will be renewed, as we shall state further on (q. 74). If, however, we speak of them in respect of the time immediately preceding the judgment, it is possible that by the Divine power the sun, moon, and other luminaries of the heavens will be darkened, either at various times or all together, in order to inspire men with fear.

Reply to Objection 1. Rabanus is speaking of the time preceding the judgment: wherefore he adds that when the judgment day is over the words of Isaias shall be fulfilled.

Reply to Objection 2. Light is in the heavenly bodies not only for the purpose of causing generation in these lower bodies, but also for their own perfection and beauty. Hence it does not follow that where generation ceases, the light of the heavenly bodies will cease, but rather that it will increase.

Reply to Objection 3. It does not seem probable that the elemental qualities will be removed from the elements, although some have asserted this. If, however, they be removed, there would still be no parallel between them and light, since the elemental qualities are in opposition to one another, so that their action is corruptive: whereas light is a principle of action not by way of opposition, but by way of a principle regulating things in opposition to one another and bringing them back to harmony. Nor is there a parallel with the movement of heavenly bodies, for movement is the act of that which is imperfect, wherefore it must needs cease when the imperfection ceases: whereas this cannot be said of light.

Objection 1. It would seem that the virtues of heaven will not be moved when our Lord shall come. For the virtues of heaven can denote only the blessed angels. Now immobility is essential to blessedness. Therefore it will be impossible for them to be moved.

Objection 2. Further, ignorance is the cause of wonder (Metaph. i, 2). Now ignorance, like fear, is far from the angels, for as Gregory says (Dial. iv, 33; Moral. ii, 3), “what do they not see, who see Him Who sees all.” Therefore it will be impossible for them to be moved with wonder, as stated in the text (Sent. iv, D, 48).

Objection 3. Further, all the angels will be present at the Divine judgment; wherefore it is stated (Apoc. 7:11): “All the angels stood round about the throne.” Now the virtues denote one particular order of angels. Therefore it should not be said of them rather than of others, that they are moved.

On the contrary, It is written (Job 26:11): “The pillars of heaven tremble, and dread at His beck.” Now the pillars of heaven can denote only the virtues of heaven. Therefore the virtues of heaven will be moved.

Further, it is written (Mat. 24:29): “The stars shall fall from heaven, and the virtues [Douay: ‘powers’] of heaven shall be moved.”

I answer that, Virtue is twofold as applied to the angels,* as Dionysius states (Coel. Hier. xi). For sometimes the name of “virtues” is appropriated to one order, which according to him, is the middle order of the middle hierarchy, but according to Gregory (Hom. in Evang. xxxiv) is the highest order of the lowest hierarchy. In another sense it is employed to denote all the angels: and then they are said to the question at issue it may be taken either way. For in the text (Sent. iv, D, 48) it is explained according to the second acceptation, so as to denote all the angels: and then they are said to be moved through wonder at the renewing of the world, as stated in the text. It can also be explained

in reference to virtue as the name of a particular order; and then that order is said to be moved more than the others by reason of the effect, since according to Gregory (Hom. in Evang. xxxiv) we ascribe to that order the working of miracles which especially will be worked about that time: or again, because that order—since, according to Dionysius (Coel. Hier. xi), it belongs to the middle hierarchy—is not limited in its power, wherefore its ministry must needs regard universal causes. Consequently the proper office of the virtues is seemingly to move the heavenly bodies which are the cause of what happens in nature here below. And again the very name denotes this, since they are called the “virtues of heaven.” Accordingly they will be moved then, because they will no more produce their effect, by ceasing to move the heavenly bodies: even as the angels who are appointed to watch over men will no longer fulfill the office of guardians.

Reply to Objection 1. This movement changes nothing pertaining to their state; but refers either to their effects which may vary without any change on their part, or to some new consideration of things which hitherto they were unable to see by means of their concreated species, which change of thought is not taken from them by their state of blessedness. Hence Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. viii, 20) that “God moves the spiritual creature through time.”

Reply to Objection 2. Wonder is wont to be about things surpassing our knowledge or ability: and accordingly the virtues of heaven will wonder at the Divine power doing such things, in so far as they fail to do or comprehend them. In this sense the blessed Agnes said that the “sun and moon wonder at His beauty”: and this does not imply ignorance in the angels, but removes the comprehension of God from them.

The Reply to the Third Objection is clear from what has been said.

* Cf. Ia, q. 108, a. 5, ad 1