

QUESTION 13

Blasphemy

Next we have to consider the sin of blasphemy (*blasphemia*), which is opposed to the act of confessing the Faith (*quod opponitur confessioni fidei*). And we will consider, first, blasphemy in general (question 13) and, second, the sort of blasphemy that is called a sin against the Holy Spirit.

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Is blasphemy opposed to the act of confessing the Faith? (2) Is blasphemy always a mortal sin? (3) Is blasphemy the greatest of sins? (4) Does blasphemy exist in the damned?

Article 1

Is blasphemy opposed to the act of confessing the Faith?

It seems that blasphemy is not opposed to the act of confessing the Faith (*blasphemia non opponatur confessioni fidei*):

Objection 1: To blaspheme is to give expression to some insult or reproach as an affront to the creator (*blasphemare est contumeliam vel aliquod convicium inferre in inuriam creatoris*). But this belongs more to malevolence toward God than to unbelief. Therefore, blasphemy is not opposed to the act of confessing the Faith.

Objection 2: A Gloss on Ephesians 4:31 (“Let blasphemy be far removed from you”) says, “[blasphemy], which is perpetrated against the saints or against God.” But an act of confessing the Faith seems to have to do only with what pertains to God, who is the object of faith. Therefore, blasphemy is not always opposed to the act of confessing the Faith.

Objection 3: Some claim that there are three species of blasphemy, one of which occurs when something that does not befit God is attributed to Him, the second of which occurs when something that befits God is denied of Him, and the third of which occurs when something proper to God is attributed to a creature (*cum attribuitur creaturae quod Deo appropriatur*). And so it seems that blasphemy is directed not only toward God but also toward creatures. But faith has God for its object. Therefore, blasphemy is not opposed to the act of confessing the Faith.

But contrary to this: In 1 Timothy 1:13 the Apostle says, “Previously I was a blasphemer and a persecutor.” And later he adds, “I did it ignorantly in my unbelief.” From this It seems that blasphemy pertains to unbelief.

I respond: The name ‘blasphemy’ (*blasphema*) seems to imply the denigration of some excelling goodness and especially of God’s goodness. Now, as Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 1, God is the very essence of goodness. Hence, whatever belongs to God pertains to His goodness, and whatever does not belong to Him is far removed from the character of perfect goodness, which is His essence. Therefore, if anyone either denies of God something that befits Him or asserts of Him something that does not befit Him, then he denigrates God’s goodness.

There are two ways in which this can happen: (a) by a merely intellectual opinion, and (b) by an intellectual opinion joined to an affective hatred—just as, on the opposite side, faith in God is perfected by love of God. Thus, the denigration of God’s goodness is either solely intellectual or affective as well.

If the denigration exists only in the heart, it is *blasphemy of the heart*. But if it proceeds exteriorly into speech, it is *blasphemy of the mouth*, and it is blasphemy of the mouth that is opposed to the act of confessing (... *est oris blasphemia, et secundum hoc blasphemia confessioni opponitur*).

Reply to objection 1: One who speaks against God, intending to give expression to a reproach, denigrates God’s goodness not only with respect to the truth of the intellect, but also with respect to a depravity of will that detests God’s honor and impedes it as much as possible. This is consummate blasphemy (*quod est blasphemia perfecta*).

Reply to objection 2: Just as God is praised in His saints insofar as the works effected by God in the saints are praised, so, too, blasphemy which is aimed at the saints redounds upon God as a consequence.

Reply to objection 3: Diverse species of the sin of blasphemy cannot properly speaking be distinguished by the three things mentioned here. For attributing to God what does not befit him and denying of Him what does befit Him differ only with respect to affirmation and negation. This sort of diversity of habit does not make for distinct species, since it is through the same knowledge that the falsity of affirmations and negations is made known, and it is through the same ignorance that one errs in both affirmations and negations; for as *Posterior Analytics* 1 establishes, the negation is proved through the affirmation. On the other hand, attributing to creatures things that are proper to God seems to amount to the same thing as attributing to God something that does not befit Him. For whatever is proper to God is God Himself, and so to attribute what is proper to God to a creature is to say that God Himself is the same as a creature.

Article 2

Is blasphemy always a mortal sin?

It seems that blasphemy is not always a mortal sin:

Objection 1: A Gloss on Colossians 3:8 (“Now you should put away ...”) says, “After having prohibited the greater [sins], he now prohibits the lesser sins.” And yet he then adds blasphemy. Therefore, blasphemy is counted among the lesser sins, which are venial sins.

Objection 2: Every mortal sin is opposed to some precept of the Decalogue. But blasphemy does not seem to be opposed to any of them. Therefore, blasphemy is not a mortal sin.

Objection 3: Sins that are committed without deliberation are not mortal sins, and for this reason first movements are not mortal sins. For, as is clear from what was said above (*ST* 1-2, q. 74, aa. 3 and 10), these first movements precede reason’s deliberation. But blasphemy sometimes occurs without deliberation. Therefore, blasphemy is not always a mortal sin.

But contrary to this: Leviticus 24:16 says, “If anyone blasphemes the name of the Lord, let him die the death.” But the punishment of death is inflicted only for a mortal sin. Therefore, blasphemy is a mortal sin.

I respond: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 72, a. 5), a mortal sin is a sin through which a man is separated from the first principle of the spiritual life, which is God’s charity. Hence, whatever is incompatible with charity is by its genus a mortal sin. But blasphemy is by its genus incompatible with God’s charity, since, as has been explained (a. 1), it denigrates God’s goodness, which is the object of charity. And so blasphemy is by its genus a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 1: This Gloss should not be understood to be saying that *all* the things that are added are lesser sins. Rather, it should be understood to be saying that since he has expressly mentioned only major sins above, afterwards he adds some lesser sins, among which he also posits certain of the greater sins.

Reply to objection 2: Since, as has been explained (a. 1), blasphemy is opposed to the act of confessing the Faith, its prohibition is traced back to the prohibition of unbelief that is understood when it is said, “I am the Lord your God, etc.”

Alternatively, it is prohibited when it is said, “You shall not take the name of your God in vain.” For one who asserts something false about God takes God’s name in vain more than does one who affirms something false in the name of God.

Reply to objection 3: There are two ways in which blasphemy can sneak up on someone unawares

without deliberation (*absque deliberatione ex subreptione*):

In one way, when he does not advert to the fact that what he is saying is blasphemous. This can happen when, because of some passion, someone erupts suddenly into words which are suggested by his imagination (*in verba imaginata*) and whose meaning he is not thinking about. In such a case the sin is venial and does not properly have the character of blasphemy.

In a second way, when he adverts to the fact that this is blasphemy, taking into consideration the meaning of the words. And in such a case he is not excused from mortal sin, just as one is not excused from mortal sin if, because of a sudden movement of anger, he kills someone seated next to him.

Article 3

Is blasphemy the greatest sin?

It seems that blasphemy is not the greatest sin:

Objection 1: According to Augustine in *Enchiridion*, evil is that which does harm. But the sin of homicide, which extinguishes a man's life, does more harm than does the sin of blasphemy, which cannot inflict any harm on God. Therefore, the sin of homicide is more grave than the sin of blasphemy.

Objection 2: Whoever perjures himself invokes God as a witness to a falsehood, and so he seems to assert that God is a deceiver (*ita videtur eum asserere esse falsum*). But not every blasphemer goes so far as to assert that God is a deceiver. Therefore, perjury is a more grave sin than blasphemy.

Objection 3: A Gloss on Psalm 74:4-5 ("Lift not up your horn on high") says, "The greatest vice is that making excuses for one's sin (*maximum est vitium excusationis peccati*). Therefore, blasphemy is not the greatest sin.

But contrary to this: A Gloss on Isaiah 18:2 ("To a terrible people ...") says, "Compared to blasphemy, every sin is less serious."

I respond: As was explained above (a. 1), blasphemy is opposed to the act of confessing the Faith. And so it contains within itself the graveness of unbelief. Moreover, the sin is aggravated if the will's hatred (*si superveniat destestatio voluntatis*) is added to it and, still more, if it breaks out into words—just as the praiseworthiness of faith is augmented by love and by confessing (*augetur per dilectionem et confessionem*). Hence, since, as was explained above (q. 10, a. 3) unbelief is the greatest sin by its genus, it follows that blasphemy is the greatest sin, since it belongs to the same genus and aggravates it.

Reply to objection 1: If homicide and blasphemy are compared with respect to the objects in which one sins, then it is clear that blasphemy, which is a sin directly against God, outweighs homicide, which is a sin against one's neighbor. On the other hand, if they are compared with respect to the effect of doing harm, then homicide is weightier, since homicide harms one's neighbor more than blasphemy harms God.

However, as is clear from what was said above (*ST* 1-2, q. 73, 8), since in the assessment of the gravity of a sin the intention of a perverted will is more important than the act's effect, it follows that since blasphemy intends to inflict harm on God's honor, blasphemy is absolutely speaking more grave a sin than homicide is. Yet, as far as punishments are concerned, homicide holds first place among sins committed against one's neighbor.

Reply to objection 2: A Gloss on Ephesians 4:31 ("Let blasphemy be far removed from you") says that it is worse to blaspheme than to perjure oneself. For an individual who perjures himself does not, as a blasphemer does, say or think anything false about God; instead, he introduces God as a witness to a falsehood—not as one who thinks that God is a false witness, but as one who hopes that God will not testify about the matter in question through any evident sign.

Reply to objection 3: Making excuses for one's sin is a circumstance that aggravates every sin, even blasphemy itself. And it is said to be the greatest sin in the sense that it makes every sin greater.

Article 4

Do the damned blaspheme?

It seems that the damned do not blaspheme (*damnati non blasphemant*):

Objection 1: Some bad individuals are even now restrained from blaspheming because of their fear of future punishments. But the damned are experiencing these punishments and hence abhor them even more. Therefore, the damned are all the more held back from blaspheming.

Objection 2: Since blasphemy is the gravest sin, it is maximally demeritorious. But in the future life there is no state of meriting or state of demeriting. Therefore, there will be no place for blaspheming.

Objection 3: Ecclesiastes 11:3 says, "In whatever place the tree falls, it shall be there." From this it is clear that after this life neither merit nor sin accrues to a man which he did not have in this life. But many will be damned who in this life were not blasphemers. Therefore, they will not blaspheme in the future life, either.

But contrary to this: Apocalypse 16:9 says, "The men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of the Lord, who had power over those plagues." A Gloss on this passage says, "Even though those in hell know that they are being punished deservedly, they nonetheless will lament that God has so much power as to inflict plagues on them." But this would be blasphemy in the present life. Therefore, it will be blasphemy in the future life as well.

I respond: As has been explained (aa. 1-3), hatred of God's goodness belongs to the character of blasphemy. Now those who are in hell retain their perverted will, which is turned away from God's justice, in loving the things for which they are being punished, and they would will to make use of those things if they could, and they hate the punishments that are being inflicted on them for these sins. Still, they lament the sins that they have committed—not because they hate those sins, but because they are being punished for them.

So, then, this sort of hatred of God's justice in them is the interior blasphemy of the heart. And it is believable that after the resurrection there will also be vocal blasphemy in them, just as there will be vocal praise of God in the saints.

Reply to objection 1: Men are deterred from blasphemy in the present life by fear of the punishments which they think they will evade. But the damned in hell do not hope that they will be able to evade the punishments. And so in their despair they are carried away to everything which their perverted will suggests to them.

Reply to objection 2: Meriting and demeriting belong to the state of the present life. Hence, in the case of those who are in the present life, good things are meritorious, whereas bad things are demeritorious. However, in the blessed in heaven good things are not meritorious, but instead belong to their reward of beatitude. And, likewise, bad things in those who are damned are not demeritorious, but belong to the punishment of damnation.

Reply to objection 3: Anyone who dies in mortal sin brings along with him a will that detests God's justice with respect to something. Accordingly, blasphemy will be able to exist in him.