

QUESTION 21

Presumption

We next have to consider presumption (*praesumptio*). And on this topic there are four questions: (1) What is the object of presumption in the sense of what it relies on? (2) Is presumption a sin? (3) What is presumption opposed to? (4) Which vice does presumption arise from?

Article 1

Does the presumption that is a sin against the Holy Spirit rely on God or on one's own power?

It seems that the presumption that is a sin against the Holy Spirit relies on one's own power and not on God (*non innitatur Deo sed propriae virtuti*):

Objection 1: The weaker a power is (*quanto minor est virtus*), the more one sins in relying on it too much. But human power is weaker than God's power. Therefore, someone who is presumptuous about human power sins more gravely than someone who is presumptuous about God's power. But a sin against the Holy Spirit is the gravest of sins. Therefore, the presumption that is posited as a species of sin against the Holy Spirit adheres to human power rather than to God's power.

Objection 2: Other sins arise from a sin against the Holy Spirit, since what is called a sin against the Holy Spirit is the malice from which one sins. But other sins arise from the sort of presumption by which a man is presumptuous about himself rather than from the sort of presumption by which a man is presumptuous about God; for as is clear from Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* 14, love of self is the principle of sinning. Therefore, it seems that the presumption that is a sin against the Holy Spirit relies especially on human power.

Objection 3: Sin comes from a disordered turning toward a changeable good. But presumption is a certain sin. Therefore, it comes from turning toward human power, which is a changeable good, rather than from turning toward God's power, which is an unchangeable good.

But contrary to this: Just as by despair one disdains God's mercy, which hope relies on, so by presumption one disdains God's justice, which punishes sinners. But just as mercy exists in God, so, too, justice likewise exists in Him. Therefore, just as despair occurs through a turning away from God, so presumption occurs through a disordered turning toward God.

I respond: Presumption seems to imply a sort of immoderation with respect to hope (*importare quandam immoderantiam spei*).

Now the object of hope is a good that is arduous and possible. But there are two ways in which something is possible for a man, viz., (a) through his own power and (b) only through God's power. And there can be presumption through immoderation with respect to both sorts of hope.

For as regards the hope by which one trusts in his own power, presumption arises from his striving for, as possible for himself, something that exceeds his power—this according to Judith 6:15 (“You humble those who presume of themselves”) And this sort of presumption is opposed to the virtue of magnanimity, which holds to the mean in hope of this sort.

On the other hand, as regards the hope by which one adheres to God's power, there can be presumption through immoderation in someone's striving for, as possible through God's power and mercy, something that is not possible—as when someone hopes that he will obtain forgiveness without repentance or glory without merits. Now this sort of presumption is properly speaking a species of sin against the Holy Spirit, because through this sort of presumption what is destroyed or disdained is that assistance of the Holy Spirit by which a man is called back from sinning.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (q. 20, a. 3 and *ST* 1-2, q. 73, a. 3), a sin that is opposed to God is more grave in its genus than other sins. Hence, the presumption by which someone relies on God in a disordered way is a graver sin than the presumption by which someone relies on his

own power. For the fact that someone relies on God's power to obtain something that is unbecoming to God amounts to belittling God's power (*hoc est diminuere divinam virtutem*). But it is clear that someone who belittles God's power sins more gravely than someone who exaggerates his own power.

Reply to objection 2: The very presumption by which one is presumptuous about God in a disordered way also includes a love of self by which one desires his own good in a disordered way. For what we greatly desire we take to be such that it can come to us easily through others, even if this is impossible.

Reply to objection 3: Presumption with respect to God's mercy involves both (a) a turning toward a changeable good, insofar as it proceeds from a disordered desire for one's own proper good, and (b) a turning away from the unchangeable good, insofar as it attributes to God's power what does not belong to it—for a man thereby turns himself away from God's truth.

Article 2

Is presumption a sin?

It seems that presumption is not a sin:

Objection 1: No sin is a reason why a man is heard by God. But some are heard by God because of their presumption; for Judith 9:17 says, "Hear me, a poor wretch, making supplication to you and presuming on your mercy." Therefore, being presumptuous about God's mercy is not a sin.

Objection 2: Presumption implies an excess of hope. But there cannot be an excess in the hope that one has in God, since his power and mercy are unlimited. Therefore, it seems that presumption is not a sin.

Objection 3: What is itself a sin does not excuse one from sin. But presumption excuses one from sin; for in *Sentences* 2, dist. 22, the Master says, "Adam sinned less because he sinned with the hope of forgiveness"—and this seems to pertain to presumption. Therefore, presumption is not a sin.

But contrary to this: Presumption is posited as a species of sin against the Holy Spirit (cf. q. 14, a. 2).

I respond: As was explained above concerning despair (q. 20, a. 1), every appetitive movement that conforms itself to a false understanding is bad in itself and a sin. Now presumption is a certain appetitive movement, since it implies a sort of disordered hope. But it conforms itself to a false understanding, just as despair does; for just as it is false that God is not indulgent with sinners or that He does not turn sinners toward repentance, so it is false that He gives forgiveness to those who persist in sin and that He bestows glory on those who desist from good work—which is the judgment that the movement of presumption conforms itself to.

And so presumption is a sin. However, it is a lesser sin than despair to the extent that, because of His infinite goodness, it is more proper to God to have mercy and to spare than to punish. For the former belongs to Him in His own right, whereas the latter belongs to Him because of our sins.

Reply to objection 1: 'To be presumptuous' (*praesumere*) is sometimes used for 'to hope' (*sperare*) because the upright hope which is had in God seems like presumption if it is measured by the human condition (*si menseatur secundum conditionem humanam*). However, it is not in fact presumption if the immensity of God's goodness is taken into account.

Reply to objection 2: Presumption implies an excess of hope not in the sense that someone hopes in God too much, but in the sense that he hopes to receive from God something that does not befit God—which, as has been explained, is to hope even less in God, because in a certain sense it involves belittling His power.

Reply to objection 3: What belongs to presumption is to sin with the intention of persisting in sin,

even while hoping for forgiveness (*sub spe veniae*). This increases the sin and does not diminish it.

However, it is not presumption to sin while hoping to receive forgiveness at some time and planning to abstain from sin and to repent of it (*peccare sub spe veniae quandoque percipiendae cum proposito abstinendi a peccato et poenitendi de ipso*); instead, this diminishes the sin, since one thereby seems to have a will that is less firm in sinning.

Article 3

Is presumption opposed more to fear than to hope?

It seems that presumption is opposed more to fear than to hope (*magis opponatur timori quam spei*):

Objection 1: A disorder with respect to fear is opposed to an upright fear. But presumption seems to involve a disorder with respect to fear; for Wisdom 17:10 says, “A troubled conscience always presumes harsh things,” and in the same place it says, “Fear is a cure for presumption.” Therefore, presumption is opposed to fear rather than to hope.

Objection 2: Contraries are maximally distant from one another. But presumption is more distant from fear than from hope, since presumption implies a movement toward a thing, whereas fear implies a movement away from a thing. Therefore, presumption is opposed to fear more than to hope.

Objection 3: Presumption totally excludes fear, whereas it does not totally exclude hope; instead, it excludes only rectitude on the part of hope. Therefore, since opposites are things that do away with one another, it seems that presumption is opposed more to fear than to hope.

But contrary to this: Two vices that are opposed to one another are contrary to a single virtue, in the way that timidity and rashness are contrary to fortitude. But the sin of presumption is contrary to the sin of despair, which is directly opposed to hope. Therefore, it seems that presumption is likewise directly opposed to hope.

I respond: As Augustine says in *Contra Iulianum* 4, “All virtues are such that not only are there vices that are contrary to them by a clear distinction, in the way that temerity is contrary to prudence, but there are also vices that are in some sense close to them, not in truth but in a deceitfully similar appearance, in the way that cunning is opposed to prudence.” And in *Ethics* 2 the Philosopher likewise says that a virtue seems to agree more with one of its opposed vices than with the other, in the way that temperance agrees with insensibility and fortitude with rashness.

Thus, presumption seems to have a clear opposition to fear—mainly servile fear, which has to do with the punishment which comes from God’s justice and the remission of which presumption hopes for. But in accord with a sort of false similarity, it is in fact more opposed to hope, since it implies a sort of disordered hope in God. And since things that belong to the same genus are more directly opposed to one another than are things that belong to diverse genera (for contraries are in the same genus), it follows that presumption is more directly opposed to hope than to fear. For both presumption and hope have the same object on which they rely—hope in an well-ordered way (*ordinate*) and presumption in a disordered way (*inordinate*).

Reply to objection 1: Just as ‘hope’ is improperly used with respect to something bad and properly used with respect to something good, so, too, with ‘presumption’. And it is in this improper sense that presumption is said to be a disorder with respect to fear.

Reply to objection 2: The contraries that are maximally distant from one another are in the same genus. But presumption and hope imply movements of the same genus, which can be either well-ordered or disordered. And so presumption is more directly contrary to hope than to fear, since it is contrary to hope by reason of its proper specific difference, in the way that what is disordered is contrary to what is

well-ordered, whereas it is contrary to fear by reason of the difference of its genus, viz., *movement that belongs to hope*.

Reply to objection 3: Since presumption is opposed to fear by an opposition of genus, whereas it is contrary to the virtue of hope by an opposition of specific difference, it follows that presumption totally excludes fear even with respect to its genus, whereas it excludes hope only by reason of its specific difference, by excluding hope's well-orderedness.

Article 4

Is presumption caused by vainglory?

It seems that presumption is not caused by vainglory (*non causetur ex inani gloria*):

Objection 1: Presumption seems to rely especially on God's mercy. But mercy has to do with misery, which is opposed to glory. Therefore, presumption does not arise from vainglory.

Objection 2: Presumption is opposed to despair. But as has been explained (q. 20, a. 4), despair arises from sadness. Therefore, since the causes of opposites are opposites, it seems that presumption arises from pleasure. And so it seems that presumption arises from the carnal vices, the pleasures of which are stronger.

Objection 3: The vice of presumption consists in one's tending toward a good that is not in fact possible as if it were possible. But the fact that someone takes what is impossible to be possible arises from ignorance. Therefore, presumption comes more from ignorance than from vainglory.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory says that the "presumption of novelties" (*praesumptio novitatum*) is the daughter of vainglory.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 1), there are two kinds of presumption.

The one is a presumption that relies on one's own power, viz., striving after something as if it were possible for oneself when it exceeds one's own power. And this sort of presumption clearly proceeds from vainglory. For because one desires great glory, it follows that he strives for things beyond his powers in order to attain glory. And these things are mainly new things, which bring greater admiration. This is clearly why Gregory posited the "presumption of novelties" as the daughter of vainglory.

By contrast, the second kind of presumption is that which relies in a disordered way on God's mercy or power, through which one hopes to attain glory without merits and forgiveness without repentance. And this sort of presumption seems to arise directly from pride (*superbia*), as if the individual thinks so highly of himself that God will not punish him or exclude him from glory even as a sinner.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: This makes clear the replies to the objections.