

## QUESTION 33

### Fraternal Correction

We next have to consider fraternal correction. And on this topic there are eight questions: (1) Is fraternal correction an act of charity? (2) Is fraternal correction contained in a precept? (3) Does this precept extend to everyone or does it exist only for prelates? (4) Are those subject to prelates obligated by this precept to correct them? (5) Is a sinner able to give a correction? (6) Should someone be corrected if he is going to become worse because of correction? (7) Should a private correction (*secretam correctio*) precede a denunciation? (8) Should witnesses be called in prior to a denunciation?

#### Article 1

##### Is fraternal correction an act of charity?

It seems that fraternal correction is not an act of charity:

**Objection 1:** A Gloss on Matthew 18:15-18 (“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a gentile or a tax collector”) says, “One’s brother should be reprovved out of a zeal for justice. But justice is a virtue distinct from charity. Therefore, fraternal correction is not an act of charity.

**Objection 2:** A fraternal correction is made by a private admonition (*per secretam admonitionem*). But an admonition is a certain sort of counsel, which belongs to prudence; for as *Ethics* 6 says, it belongs to the prudent man “to undertake counsel well.” Therefore, fraternal correction is an act of prudence and not an act of charity.

**Objection 3:** Contrary acts do not belong to the same virtue. But to support a sinner is an act of charity—this according to Galatians 6:2 (“Bear one another’s burdens and you will fulfill the law of Christ, which is the law of charity”). Therefore, it seems that correcting a brother who sins, which is contrary to supporting him, is not an act of charity.

**But contrary to this:** To correct a wrongdoer (*corripere delinquentem*) is a spiritual work of mercy. But as was explained above (q. 32, a. 1), a work of mercy is an act of charity. Therefore, fraternal correction is likewise an act of charity.

**I respond:** The correction of a wrongdoer is a certain remedy that should be applied against his sin. Now there are two ways in which to think of someone’s sin: (a) insofar as it is harmful to the one who sins, and (b) insofar as it tends to harm others who are hurt or scandalized by his sin, and also insofar as it tends to harm the common good, the justice of which is disturbed by a man’s sin.

Therefore, there are two sorts of correction of a wrongdoer.

The *first* is a correction that applies the remedy to the sin insofar as there is a certain badness in the sinner himself; and this is fraternal correction properly speaking, which is ordered toward the improvement of the wrongdoer. Now removing someone’s badness is the same as procuring the good for him. But procuring a brother’s good belongs to charity, through which we will the good for our friend and do good for him. Hence, fraternal correction is likewise an act of charity, since through it we repel our brother’s badness, viz., his sin. The removal of his badness belongs to charity even more than the removal of an exterior loss or of corporeal damage, by as much as the contrary good of virtue is more closely related to charity than is either the good of one’s body or the good of exterior things. Hence, fraternal correction is more an act of charity than is the healing of bodily illness or the sort of help by which exterior need is eliminated.

The *second* sort of correction is one that applies the remedy to the wrongdoer’s sin insofar as that

sin is bad for others and also mainly insofar as it damages the common good. And this sort of correction is an act of justice, whose aim is to preserve the rectitude of justice between one individual and another.

**Reply to objection 1:** The Gloss in question is talking about the second type of correction, which is an act of justice.

Alternatively, if the Gloss is talking about the first type of correction, then, as will be explained below (q. 58, a. 5), justice is being understood here insofar as it is a universal virtue, in the same way that “every sin is iniquity” (2 John 3:4) in the sense that it is contrary to justice.

**Reply to objection 2:** As the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 6, prudence effects rectitude in the case of the means to an end, concerning which there is counsel or deliberation and choice. Yet since through prudence we do something rightly for the end of a moral virtue, say, temperance or fortitude, the act is principally an act of that virtue toward whose end it is ordered. Therefore, since an admonition which is made in fraternal correction is ordered toward removing our brother’s sin, which has to do with charity, it is clear that such an admonition is principally an act of charity in the sense that charity commands it, whereas it is secondarily an act of prudence in the sense that prudence executes and directs the act.

**Reply to objection 3:** Fraternal correction is not opposed to supporting the weak, but instead follows from it. For someone supports a sinner to the extent that he is not stirred up against him but instead preserves his benevolence toward him. And from this it happens that he takes the trouble to improve him.

## Article 2

### Is fraternal correction contained in a precept?

It seems that fraternal correction is not contained in a precept:

**Objection 1:** Nothing that is impossible falls under a precept—this according to Jerome (“Cursed be he who claims that God has commanded something impossible”). But Ecclesiastes 7:14 says, “Consider the works of God, that no one can correct someone whom he despises.” Therefore, fraternal correction is not contained in a precept.

**Objection 2:** All the precepts of divine law are traced back to the Decalogue. But fraternal correction does not fall under any of the precepts of the Decalogue. Therefore, it does not fall under a precept.

**Objection 3:** Failing to fulfill a divine precept is a mortal sin, and so it is not found in saintly men. But failing to give fraternal correction is found in the saints and in spiritual men. For instance, in *De Civitate Dei* 1 Augustine says, “Not only lower individuals, but also those who occupy a higher level of life keep themselves from reprimanding others—and this because of the shackles of excessive desire and not because of the proper duties of charity.” Therefore, fraternal correction does not fall under a precept.

**Objection 4:** What is contained in a precept has the character of something owed (*habet rationem debiti*). Therefore, if fraternal correction fell under a precept, we would owe it to our brothers to correct them when they sin. But one who owes a corporeal debt to someone, e.g., money, ought not to be content with his creditor coming to him, but should instead seek out his creditor in order to pay the debt. Therefore, it would be necessary for a man to seek out those who need correction in order to correct them. But this seems absurd, both because of the great number of sinners, for whose correction an individual man could not be sufficient, and also because it would be necessary for those in religious life to leave their cloisters in order to correct men, which is inappropriate. Therefore, it is not the case that fraternal correction is contained in a precept.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Verbis Domini* (sermon 82) Augustine says, “If you neglect to correct, then you become worse than the one who has sinned.” But this would not be the case unless through

negligence of this sort one were failing to fulfill a precept. Therefore, fraternal correction is contained in a precept.

**I respond:** Fraternal correction falls under a precept.

However, notice that just as a negative precept prohibits acts of sin, so an affirmative precept leads one toward acts of virtue. Now the acts of sin are bad in their own right and can in no way be done well at any time or in any place, since they are connected to a bad end in their own right, as *Ethics 2* explains. And so negative precepts always obligate one, and they obligate him for all times.

By contrast, acts of virtue ought not to be done in just any way at all; instead, they are to be done observing the appropriate circumstances that are required in order for there to be a virtuous act, viz., that the act be done where it should be done, and when it should be done, and in the way it should be done. And since the disposition of the means to an end corresponds to the character of the end, it is the character of the end, which is the good of the virtue, that must be mainly attended to among the circumstances of a virtuous act. Therefore, if there is an omission of some circumstance of a virtuous act which is such that it totally destroys the good of the virtue, then this is contrary to the precept. On the other hand, if there is some defectiveness in a circumstance which does not totally destroy the virtue, then even though the act does not perfectly attain to the good of the virtue, it is not contrary to the precept. Hence, in *Ethics 2* the Philosopher likewise says that if one deviates a little from the mean, this is not contrary to the virtue, whereas if one deviates a lot from the mean, then the virtue is corrupted in its act.

Now fraternal correction is ordered toward the improvement of one's brother. And so it falls under a precept to the extent that it is necessary for that end, but not in such a way that a delinquent brother is corrected in just any place or at just any time.

**Reply to objection 1:** In all good deeds a man's operation is effective only if God's assistance is present, and yet a man ought to do what he is capable of (*debet facere quod in se est*). Hence, in *De Correptione et Gratia* Augustine says, "Without knowing who belongs to the number of the predestined and who does not belong, we should be moved by the affection of charity in such a way that we wish all to be saved." And so we ought to offer the favor of fraternal correction to everyone, hoping for God's assistance.

**Reply to objection 2:** As was explained above (q. 32, a. 5), all precepts that pertain to offering some benefit to one's neighbor are traced back to the precept about honoring one's parents.

**Reply to objection 3:** There are three ways in which one can fail to do fraternal correction (*correctio fraterna tripliciter omitti potest*).

In the first way, one fails to do it *meritoriously*. For in *De Civitate Dei 1* Augustine says, "If someone refrains from rebuking and correcting those who act badly because he is looking for a more opportune time, or because he fears that if he does so, either they will become worse because of it or they will hinder, pressure, and turn away from the Faith others who are weak and need to be instructed to live a good and pious life, then such an omission seems to result not from disordered desire, but from the counsel of charity."

In a second way, fraternal correction is omitted in such a way as to *incur mortal sin (praetermittitur cum peccato mortali)*, viz., when, as Augustine explains in the same place, "one is afraid of being judged by ordinary people or even afraid of bodily pain or death," and these fears so dominate in his mind that they preempt his fraternal love. And this seems to happen when one presumes with some probability that he could draw his brother back from the sin and yet fails to do so because of fear or disordered desire.

In the third way, an omission of this sort is a *venial sin*, viz., when fear and disordered desire make a man slower to correct his brother's offenses, and yet not in such a way that if it were clear to him that he could draw his brother back from sin, he would still fail to do so because of fear or disordered desire, which he places fraternal charity ahead of in his mind. And it is in this way that holy men sometimes neglect to correct wrongdoers.

**Reply to objection 4:** What is owed to a determinate particular person, whether it be a corporeal good or a spiritual good, is such that it is necessary for us to offer it to him without expecting that he will come to us; instead, we must take due care to seek him out. Hence, just as one who owes money to a creditor should seek him out when the time arrives in order to repay the debt, so, too, one who has spiritual care of another should seek him out in order to correct him concerning his sin.

By contrast, those benefits that are owed not to a determinate person but to all our neighbors in general, whether they be corporeal or spiritual benefits, are such that it is not necessary for us to seek out those to whom we offer the benefits; instead, it is enough that we offer them when they come to us. For this should be taken to be something that occurs “as it were, by happenstance,” as Augustine puts it in *De Doctrina Christiana* 1. It is for this reason that in *De Verbo Domini* (sermon 82) he says, “Our Lord warns us not to neglect one another’s sins—not that you are to seek out what you might reprimand, but rather that you are to notice what you might correct.” Otherwise, we would be prying into the lives of others (*efficeremur exploratores vitae aliorum*), contrary to what Proverbs 24:15 says (“Do not seek after wickedness in the house of the just man, or spoil his rest”). Hence, it is clear that those in religious life would not have to leave the cloister in order to correct wrongdoers.

### Article 3

#### Does fraternal correction belong only to prelates?

It seems that fraternal correction belongs only to prelates:

**Objection 1:** Jerome says, “Let priests endeavor to fulfill this Gospel passage: ‘If your brother sins against you, etc.’” But it was prelates, who have care for others, that used to be signified by the name ‘priests’. Therefore, it seems that fraternal correction belongs to prelates alone.

**Objection 2:** Fraternal correction is one of the spiritual works of mercy. But doing corporal works of mercy belongs to those who are superior in temporal affairs, viz., the rich. Therefore, fraternal correction likewise belongs to those who are superior in spiritual affairs, viz., prelates.

**Objection 3:** One who corrects another moves him for the better by his admonition. But in natural entities the lower are moved by the higher. Therefore, similarly, in the order of virtue, which follows the order of nature, correcting the lower individuals belongs to the prelates alone.

**But contrary to this:** *Decreta* 24, q. 3 says, “Both priests and the rest of the faithful should have the greatest care for those who are perishing, so that by the reprimands of the priests and the faithful the sinners are either corrected or, if they appear to be incorrigible, separated off from the Church.”

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 1), there are two types of correction.

The one is an act of charity and tends specifically toward the improvement of a delinquent brother through a simple admonition. And making this sort of correction belongs to anyone who has charity, whether he be a prelate or someone subject to a prelate.

The other sort of correction is an act of justice and is such that the common good is intended by it. This sort of correction is procured not only by admonishing a brother but sometimes by punishing him as well, in order that others might desist from the sin out of fear. And making this sort of correction belongs to prelates alone, who have not only the power to admonish but also the power to correct by punishing.

**Reply to objection 1:** As Augustine points out in *De Civitate Dei* 1, even in the case of fraternal correction, which belongs to everyone, the care exercised by prelates is weightier. For just as one ought to bestow temporal benefits more on those for whom he has temporal care, so, too, one ought likewise to bestow spiritual benefits—e.g., correction, doctrine, etc.—on those who have been committed to him for spiritual care. Therefore, Jerome means to say not that the precept about fraternal correction applies to

priests alone, but rather that it applies to them in a special way.

**Reply to objection 2:** Just as one who has the resources whereby he can give corporeal help is rich in this regard, so, too, one who has the sane judgment of reason, whereby he can correct the sin of another, should be thought of as superior in this regard.

**Reply to objection 3:** Even among natural entities some act mutually on one another, since each is such that there is some respect in which he is superior to another, i.e., insofar as each is in some way in potentiality and in some way in actuality with respect to the other. Similarly, insofar as someone has the sane judgment of reason in matters concerning which the other is delinquent, he is able to correct him, even if he is not superior to him absolutely speaking.

#### Article 4

##### Is one obligated to correct his own prelate?

It seems that one is not obligated to correct his own prelate:

**Objection 1:** Exodus 19:19 says, “The beast that touches the mountain will be stoned,” and 2 Kings 6:6-7 says that Oza was struck dead by the Lord because he touched the ark. But prelates are signified by the mountain and the ark. Therefore, prelates should not be corrected by those who are subject to them.

**Objection 2:** A Gloss on Galatians 2:11 (“I resisted him to his face”) says, “as an equal.” Therefore, since one who is subject to a prelate is not an equal of the prelate, he should not correct him.

**Objection 3:** Gregory says, “Only one who thinks better of himself presumes to correct the life of holy individuals.” But one should not think better of himself than of his prelate. Therefore, prelates are not to be corrected.

**But contrary to this:** In *Regula* Augustine says, “Have mercy not only on yourselves but also on him,” i.e., your prelate, “who is in greater danger to the extent that he is in a higher position.” But fraternal correction is a work of mercy. Therefore, even prelates are to be corrected.

**I respond:** The sort of correction which is an act of justice through the coercion of punishment does not belong to the subjects with respect to their prelate.

However, fraternal correction, which is an act of charity, belongs to everyone with respect to each person for whom he ought to have charity, if something correctable is found in that person. For an act that proceeds from a habit or power extends to all the things that are contained under the object of that power or habit, just as vision extends to all the things that are contained under the object of the visual power.

However, a virtuous act has to be moderated by appropriate circumstances, and so in a correction by which the subjects correct their prelates a fitting manner must be applied, in order that the prelates might be corrected with mildness and reverence and not with impudence and severity. Hence, in 1 Timothy 5:1 the Apostle says, “Do not rebuke an older man, but treat him as a father.” And the reason why Dionysius found fault with the monk Demophilus is that he had corrected a priest irreverently, striking him and throwing him out of a church.

**Reply to objection 1:** A prelate seems to be treated in a disordered way when he is chastised irreverently or, again, when he is spoken ill of. And this is what is signified by the touching of the mountain and the touching of the ark that are condemned by God.

**Reply to objection 2:** To resist someone to his face in front of everyone exceeds the mode of fraternal correction, and so Paul would not have reprimanded Peter in this way unless he were in some sense his equal with respect to defending the faith. But even someone who is not an equal is able to admonish in private and reverently. Hence, in Colossians 4:17 Paul writes that they should admonish

their own prelate when he says, “Say to Archippus: Fulfill your ministry.”

However, note that when a danger to the Faith is threatening, then prelates should be accused by their subjects even in public. Hence, Paul, who was subject to Peter, publicly rebuked Peter because of an imminent danger of scandal with respect to the Faith. And as Augustine’s Gloss on Galatians 2:14 says, “Peter himself gave an example to superiors, that if at any time they should stray from the right path, they should not disdain to be reproved even by those who are subject to them.”

**Reply to objection 3:** To presume oneself to be better than one’s prelate absolutely speaking seems to belong to presumptuous pride. But to think oneself better with respect to something or other does not smack of presumption, since there is no one in this life who does not have defects.

Again, consider that when someone warns a prelate with charity, he does not thereby think himself greater but instead is giving help to one “who is in greater danger to the extent that he is in a higher position,” as Augustine puts it in *Regula*.

## Article 5

### Should a sinner correct a wrongdoer?

It seems that a sinner should correct a wrongdoer:

**Objection 1:** No one is excused from obeying a precept because of a sin that he has committed. But as has been explained (a. 2), fraternal correction falls under a precept. Therefore, it seems that one should not fail to make a fraternal correction because of a sin that he himself has committed.

**Objection 2:** A spiritual work of mercy is more important than a corporal work of mercy. But one who is in a state of sin should not refrain from doing corporal works of mercy. Therefore, *a fortiori*, he should not abstain, because of some previous sin of his own, from correcting a wrongdoer.

**Objection 3:** 1 John 1:8 says, “If you say that you do not have sin, then you are deceiving yourself.” Therefore, if one is prevented from making a fraternal correction by his own sin, then there will be no one who can correct a wrongdoer. But this consequent is absurd. Therefore, the antecedent is, too.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Summo Bono* Isidore says, “One who is subject to vices should not correct the vices of others.” And Romans 2:1 says, “In what you judge another for, you condemn yourself; for you do the same things that you are judging him for.”

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 3), the correction of a wrongdoer belongs to someone insofar as the right judgment of reason is strong in him. Now as was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 85, a. 2), sin does not destroy the entire good of nature in such a way that nothing of the right judgment of reason remains in someone who sins. Accordingly, reprimanding another’s sin can belong to him.

Still, a certain obstacle to this sort of correction is brought to bear by previous sin, and this for three reasons.

First, because by previous sin one is rendered *unworthy* to correct another. And if he has committed a greater sin, then he is especially unworthy to correct another individual’s lesser sin. Hence, Jerome, in commenting on Matthew 7:3 (“Why do you notice the splinter ...”), says, “He is speaking of those who, while they are themselves liable to punishment for mortal sin, do not allow for the lesser sins of their brothers.”

Second, the correction is rendered inappropriate because of *scandal*, which follows from the correction if the sin of the one making the correction is manifest. For then it seems that the one making the correction is doing it not out of charity, but rather for show. Hence, Chrysostom expounds Matthew 7:4 (“How is it that you say to your brother ...”) as follows: “With what intention? Is it out of charity, that you might save your neighbor? No, because then you would be saving yourself first. You wish not

to save the others, but to conceal your bad acts behind good doctrine and to seek praise from men for your knowledge.”

Third, because of the *pride* of the one making the correction, viz., insofar as, while playing down his own sins, he prefers himself to his neighbor in his own heart and judges his neighbor’s sins with an austere severity, as if he himself were just. Hence, in *De Sermone Domini in Monte* Augustine says, “To accuse someone of vices is the function of good men, but when bad men do it, they are playing the part of another.” And so as Augustine says in the same place, “When necessity forces us to reprimand someone, let us think about whether the vice is such that we have ever had it, and we will then realize that we are men and could have had that vice—or that we have had such a vice and no longer have it—and at that point our common weakness will touch our memory, so that mercy, and not hate, will precede the correction. But if we find ourselves to be in the grips of that same vice, then let us not reprimand, but let us instead sigh and invite him to repent together with us.”

From these considerations it is clear that if a sinner corrects a wrongdoer with humility, then he does not sin or bring a new condemnation upon himself—even though he thereby shows himself, either in his brother’s conscience or at least in his own conscience, to be subject to condemnation for his past sin.

**Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3:** From this the replies to the objections are clear.

## Article 6

### Should one back away from a correction for fear that the individual will become worse?

It seems that one should not back away from a correction for fear that the individual will become worse:

**Objection 1:** A sin is a sort of sickness of the soul—this according to Psalm 6:3 (“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am sick”). But one who is taking care of a sick man does not back away because of the sick man’s contrariness or contempt, since in that case a greater danger threatens, as is clear in the case of those who are delirious. Therefore, *a fortiori*, a man ought to correct a sinner, no matter how much the sinner dislikes it (*graviter ferat*).

**Objection 2:** According to Jerome, “life-giving truth (*veritas vitae*) is not to be dismissed because of scandal.” But God’s precepts pertain to life-giving truth. Therefore, since, as has been explained (a. 2), fraternal correction falls under a precept, it seems that it is not to be dismissed because of scandal on the part of the one who is corrected.

**Objection 3:** According to the Apostle in Romans 3:8, “evil things are not to be done in order that good things might come of them.” Therefore, by parity of reasoning, good things should not be omitted in order that evil things not come of them. But fraternal correction is a certain good. Therefore, it should not be omitted for fear that the one who is corrected might become worse.

**But contrary to this:** Proverbs 9:8 says, “Do not rebuke the scorner, lest he hate you,” about which a Gloss says, “One should not fear that the detractor, when rebuked, will inflict insults, but one should rather take care lest, drawn to hatred, he becomes worse from it.” Therefore, one should back away from fraternal correction when one fears that the individual will become worse because of it.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 1), there are two types of correction of a wrongdoer.

One type belongs to prelates, and it is ordered toward the common good and has coercive power. Such a correction is not to be backed away from because of the consternation of the one who is corrected—both because (a) if he does not wish to be bettered by his own will, then he should be coerced by punishments to desist from sinning, and also because (b) if he is incorrigible, then this is the way to

provide for the common good, as long as the order of justice is preserved, and to deter others by the example of the one. Hence, a judge does not fail to carry out a sentence of condemnation on a sinner because of fear of the sinner's consternation or that of his friends.

The other type of correction is fraternal correction, whose end is the improvement of the wrongdoer and which involves a simple admonition and not coercion. And in a case where it is estimated with some probability that the sinner will not accept the admonition, but will fall into worse things, one should back away from a correction of this sort, since the means to the end should be regulated in accord with what the character of the end demands.

**Reply to objection 1:** A physician uses a certain sort of coercion on the delirious individual who does not wish to receive the cure. And the correction made by prelates, which has coercive force, is similar to this. But fraternal correction is not.

**Reply to objection 2:** A precept is given about fraternal correction insofar as fraternal correction is an act of virtue. But it is an act of virtue insofar as it is proportioned to the end of the virtue. And so when that end is impeded, e.g., when the man is made worse, the act no longer pertains to life-giving truth, nor does it fall under the precept.

**Reply to objection 3:** The means to an end have the character of goodness from their relation to the end. And so when a fraternal correction impedes the end, i.e., the improvement of one's brother, then it no longer has the character of something good. And so when one backs away from a correction of this sort, it is not the case that he is backing away from something good in order that an evil might not occur.

## Article 7

### **In a fraternal correction, does the precept require that a private admonition should precede a denunciation?**

It seems that, in a fraternal correction the precept does not require that a private admonition should precede a denunciation:

**Objection 1:** By the works of charity we ought mainly to imitate God—this according to Ephesians 5:1-2 (“Be imitators of God as dearly beloved children, and walk in love”). But God sometimes publicly punishes a man for his sin without any antecedent private warning. Therefore, it seems that it is not necessary for a private admonition to precede a denunciation.

**Objection 2:** In *Contra Mendacium* Augustine says, “It is from the acts of the saints that one can see how the precepts of Sacred Scripture are to be understood.” But in the acts of the saints one finds public denunciations of hidden sins without a previous private admonition. For instance, in Genesis 37:2 we read that Joseph “accused his brothers of a terrible crime in the presence of their father,” and Acts 5:3-4 says that without any previous private admonition, Peter publicly denounced Ananias and Saphira for fraudulently hiding the price of their land. Even our Lord Himself is not said to have admonished Judas in private before denouncing him. Therefore, the precept does not require that a private admonition should precede a public denunciation.

**Objection 3:** An accusation is more serious than a denunciation. But one can proceed to a public accusation without any previous private admonition; for in *Decreta* it is laid down [only] that “an inscription must precede an accusation.” Therefore, it seems that the precept does not require that a private admonition should precede a public denunciation.

**Objection 4:** It does not seem probable that the common customs of those in religious life are contrary to a precept of Christ's. But it is customary among religious that in chapters the faults of some are recited without any previous private admonition. Therefore, it seems that the precept does not require this.



**Objection 5:** Those in religious life are bound to obey their prelates. But sometimes a prelate commands either everyone in general or someone in particular to tell him if he knows of anything that needs to be corrected. Therefore, it seems that they are obligated to tell the prelate even before a private admonition. Therefore, the precept does not require that a private admonition should precede a public denunciation.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Verbis Domini* (sermon 82) Augustine, in commenting on Matthew 18:15 (“Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone”), says, “Eager for his correction, sparing him the shame. For perhaps on account of shame he begins to defend his own sin, and the one whom you wish to make better, you make worse.” But we are bound by the precept of charity to fear that our brother might be made worse. Therefore, the order of fraternal correction falls under the precept.

**I respond:** A distinction must be drawn regarding public denunciation. For the sins are either public or hidden.

If the sins are *public*, then the remedy is to be applied not only to the one who has sinned, but also to the others who have come to have knowledge of it, in order that they not be scandalized. And so sins of this sort are to be publicly reprimanded—this according to the Apostle in 1 Timothy 5:20 (“Reprove the sinner in front of everyone, so that the rest might have fear”). This means public sins, as Augustine explains in *De Verbis Domini*.

By contrast, if the sins are *hidden*, then what our Lord says seems to be relevant, viz., “If your brother sins against you ...” (Matthew 18:15). For when he offends you publicly in front of others, then he sins against the others whom he disturbs and he no longer sins only against you.

However, since even in the case of hidden sins there can be offenses against one’s neighbors, a further distinction needs to be drawn.

For there are some hidden sins that *do harm, either corporeal or spiritual, to one’s neighbors*, e.g., if someone secretly plots how the city might be handed over to its enemies, or if a heretic privately turns men away from the Faith. And since in such a case the one who sins secretly sins not only against you but also against others, it is necessary to proceed immediately to a denunciation, in order that harm of the sort in question might be blocked—unless, perhaps, someone thinks on solid grounds that the evils in question can be stopped immediately by a private admonition.

On the other hand, there are sins that *do evil only to the sinner and yourself*, against whom he is sinning, because you are injured by the sinner or at least by the knowledge alone of his sin. And in such a case one should intend only to help his sinning brother. And just as a corporeal physician confers health, if possible, without removing any bodily part—though if this is not possible, then he removes the bodily part that is least necessary for the conservation of the life of the whole—so, too, one who is eager to make his brother better should, if possible, correct his brother with respect to his conscience in such a way that his reputation is preserved. This is advantageous, first of all, to the very individual who sins, not only in temporal affairs, in which a man suffers a detriment in many things if he loses his reputation, but even in spiritual affairs, since many draw back from sin for fear of becoming infamous and so, when they see themselves as infamous, they sin without restraint. Hence, Jerome says, “A brother should be corrected in private (*seorsum*), lest, having once suffered shame or embarrassment, he remain in his sin.” Second, the reputation of the sinning brother ought to be preserved, both because (a) when one individual is defamed, others are defamed as well—this according to Augustine, *Epistola ad Plebem Hipponensem* (“When something criminal has been reported falsely or proved to be true of individuals who profess the Holy Name, people earnestly insist upon the issue and make a fuss and bustle about so that this might be believed about everyone who professes the Holy Name”)—and also because (b) others are provoked to sin by the publicized sin of a single person.

Still, because conscience is to be preferred to reputation, our Lord wished that at least at the cost of a brother’s reputation his conscience might be freed from sin through a public denunciation.

Hence, it is clear that the precept requires that a private admonition should precede a public

denunciation.

**Reply to objection 1:** All the hidden things are known to God. And so in this sense hidden sins are related to God's judgment in the same way that public sins are related to human judgment. And yet oftentimes God rebukes sinners with a private admonition, as it were, by inspiring them interiorly, whether they are awake or asleep—this according to Job 33:15ff. (“By a dream in a vision by night, when deep sleep falls upon men ... then He opens the ears of men and, teaching them, instructs them with His teaching, that He may withdraw a man from the things he is doing”).

**Reply to objection 2:** Our Lord, as God, treated the sin of Judas as a public sin. Hence, He was able to proceed immediately to a denunciation. Yet He Himself did not make it public; instead, He admonished him about his sin with enigmatic words.

Peter made public the hidden sin of Ananias and Saphira as the agent of God, by whose revelation he knew of the sin.

As for Joseph, one should believe that he had at some time admonished his brothers, even though this was not written down. Alternatively, one can claim that the sin was public among his brothers; this is why it says in the plural, “He accused his brothers ...”

**Reply to objection 3:** When danger threatens the multitude, then these words of our Lord do not apply, since in such a case your brother who sins is not sinning only against you.

**Reply to objection 4:** Recitals of the sort in question that are made in the chapters of religious are about less serious matters that do not detract from one's reputation. Hence, they are more like the recital of forgotten faults rather than accusations or denunciations.

However, if they were nonetheless such that a brother's reputation would suffer from them, then anyone who made a brother's sin public in this way would be acting against our Lord's precept.

**Reply to objection 5:** A prelate is not to be obeyed when it is contrary to a divine precept—this according to Acts 5:29 (“It is necessary to obey God rather than men”). And so when a prelate commands that he be told whatever is known by anyone to need correction, the command is to be understood in a sound way that preserves the order of fraternal correction, regardless of whether the command is issued generally to everyone or to someone in particular.

However, if the prelate expressly issued a command contrary to the order of fraternal correction set out by our Lord, then a sin would be committed both by the one who issued the command and by anyone who might obey it, since he would be acting contrary to our Lord's precept. Hence, the prelate should not be obeyed. For it is God alone, and not the prelate, who is the judge of what is hidden, and so the prelate does not have the power to issue any commands about what is hidden except insofar as it is made manifest by certain indications, e.g., through reports or certain suspicions. In cases like these, the prelate can issue commands in the same way that a secular or ecclesiastical judge can require an oath of truth-telling.

## Article 8

### Do witnesses have to be brought in prior to a public denunciation?

It seems that witnesses do not have to be brought in prior to a public denunciation:

**Objection 1:** Hidden sins are not to be made manifest to others, since in that case the man would be, as Augustine puts it, more like “one who is promulgating a judicial decision” (*proditor criminis*) than like “one who is correcting his brother.” But one who brings in witnesses makes his brother's sin manifest to another. Therefore, in the case of hidden sins, witnesses do not have to be brought in prior to a public denunciation.

**Objection 2:** A man ought to love his neighbor as himself. But no man brings in witnesses for his

own hidden sins. Therefore, neither should he bring in witnesses for his brother's hidden sins.

**Objection 3:** Witnesses are brought in to prove something. But in the case of hidden things proof cannot be effected through witnesses. Therefore, it is useless to bring in witnesses of this sort.

**Objection 4:** In *Regula* Augustine says, "It should be made known to the superior prior to the witnesses." But to make it known to the superior or prelate is to "tell it to the Church." Therefore, witnesses do not have to be brought in prior to a public denunciation.

**But contrary to this** is what our Lord says in Matthew 18:15-18 [see a. 1, obj. 1].

**I respond:** It is appropriate to pass through the middle when one is going from one endpoint to the other. Now in the case of fraternal correction, our Lord wanted its beginning to be private, as one brother corrected another brother between themselves alone, whereas He wanted the end to be public, so that, namely, [a recalcitrant brother] would be denounced to the Church. And what is appropriately posited in the middle is bringing in witnesses, so that in the first place the brother's sin might be indicated to a few, who might be able to help him and not harm him—in order that at least he might be improved without being disgraced before the multitude.

**Reply to objection 1:** Some have understood the order of fraternal correction to be preserved in such a way that (a) the brother is first corrected in private, and if he listens, then all is well, but (b) if he does not listen, then if the sin is altogether hidden, they claim, one should proceed no further. However, if his sin is already beginning to come to the attention of many by various indications, then one ought to proceed further in the way that our Lord mandates.

But this opinion is contrary to what Augustine says in *Regula*, viz., that a brother's sin ought not to be hushed up, "lest it rot in his heart."

And so one should reply alternatively that after a private admonition has been given either once or more than once, as long as hope for the correction is held onto with some probability, one should [continue to] proceed by means of private admonition. However, once we can know with some probability that private admonitions are not going to work, we should then proceed further to bring in witnesses, no matter how hidden the sin might be—unless perhaps one were to judge with some probability that this will not contribute to the brother's improvement but that he will thereby be rendered worse. For, as was explained above (a. 6), this is a reason for totally backing away from the correction.

**Reply to objection 2:** A man does not need witnesses in order to correct his own sin, and yet this can be necessary for the correction of his brother's sin. Hence, the arguments are not parallel.

**Reply to objection 3:** There are three possible reasons for bringing in witnesses: (a) to show that what one is being rebuked for is indeed a sin, as Jerome says; (b) to give proof of the act, if the act is being repeated, as Augustine says in *Regula*; (c) "to testify that the brother making the admonition has done what he can," as Chrysostom says.

**Reply to objection 4:** Augustine means that the prelate should be told prior to the witnesses because the prelate is an individual person who is able to do more good than the others; but he does not mean that it should be told to the prelate as to the Church, i.e., in his abiding role of judge.