

QUESTION 41

Strife

We next have to consider strife (*rixa*). And on this topic there are two questions: (1) Is strife a sin? (2) Is strife a child of anger?

Article 1

Is strife always a sin?

It seems that strife is not always a sin:

Objection 1: Strife (*rixa*) seems to be a sort of contention; for in *Etymologia* Isidore says, “‘Pugnacious individual’ (*rixosus*) seems to come from ‘dog’s snarling’ (*rictus caninus*), since the pugnacious individual is always ready to argue (*semper ad contradicendum paratus est*), and he enjoys quarreling and provokes the one he contends with.” But contention is not always a sin. Therefore, neither is strife.

Objection 2: Genesis 26:21 says that Isaac’s servants “dug another well, and they fought over this as well.” But it is unbelievable that Isaac’s family should have fought in public without his correcting them, if this were a sin. Therefore, strife is not a sin.

Objection 3: Strife seems to be a sort of ‘particular’ war. But war is not always a sin. Therefore, strife is not always a sin.

But contrary to this: In Galatians 5:20-21 strifes are numbered among the works of the flesh, which are such that “those who do them do not attain the kingdom of God.”

I respond: Just as contention implies a certain conflict of words, so strife implies a certain conflict of deeds. Hence, a Gloss on Galatians 5:20 says that strife occurs “when individuals strike one another out of anger.” And so strife seems to be a sort of private war that is waged among private persons, not by appeal to any public authority, but instead because of a disordered will.

So strife always involves sin. And it is a mortal sin in the one who attacks another unjustly, since inflicting harm on one’s neighbor, even just with one’s hands, does not occur without mortal sin. On the other hand, in the one who is defending himself strife can occur either without sin, or sometimes with a venial sin, or sometimes even with a mortal sin, depending on the different motives he might have (*secundum diversum motum eius*) and on the different ways in which he might defend himself. For if he defends himself only with the intention of repelling the injury being inflicted on him, and if he does so with due moderation, then there is no sin, and it cannot properly be called strife on his part. By contrast, if he defends himself with a spirit of revenge or hatred, or if he does it without due moderation (*cum excessu debitae moderationis*), then it is always a sin, either (a) a venial sin when some slight movement of hatred or revenge is mixed in, or when he does not go too far beyond a moderate defense, or (b) a mortal sin when, with his mind firmly set against the one he is fighting, he goes at him with the intention of killing him or gravely wounding him.

Reply to objection 1: ‘Strife’ does not simply name contention; instead, in the words quoted from Isidore three things are posited that clarify the disorder involved in strife. First, a readiness of mind to contend, which he signifies when he says “always ready to argue”—regardless of whether the other individual speaks or acts well or badly. Second, he delights in disagreement itself, and hence it follows that he “enjoys quarreling.” Third, he provokes others to argue, and hence it follows that he “provokes the one he contends with.”

Reply to objection 2: This passage does not mean that Isaac’s servants were quarreling, but that the local inhabitants were struggling against them. Hence, the latter sinned, but Isaac’s servants, who suffered the false accusation (*calumnia*), did not sin.

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 40, a. 1), in order for a war to be just, it is required that it come about by the authority of a public power. By contrast, strife is effected by a private

affection of anger or hatred. For if the ministers of a ruler or judge, by virtue of their public power, attack certain individuals who then defend themselves, it is not the ministers who are said to be guilty of strife, but rather those who are resisting a public power. And so it is not the attackers who are guilty of strife and sin, but rather those who are defending themselves in a disordered way.

Article 2

Is strife the child of anger?

It seems that strife is not the child of anger:

Objection 1: James 4:1 says, “Where do the wars and contentions among you come from? Is it not from the excessive desires (*ex concupiscentiis*) that battle among your members?” But anger does not belong to the concupiscible appetite. Therefore, strife is not a child of anger (*non est filia irae*), but instead a child of excessive desire (*filia concupiscentiae*).

Objection 2: Proverbs 28:25 says, “The one who boasts and puffs himself up incites quarrels.” But strife seems to be the same thing as a quarrel. Therefore, it seems that strife is a child of pride and vainglory, which boasting and puffing oneself up belong to.

Objection 3: Psalm 18:6 says, “The lips of the fool mix in with strife.” But foolishness differs from anger, since it is opposed to wisdom and prudence rather than to mildness (*mansuetudo*). Therefore, strife is not a child of anger.

Objection 4: Proverbs 10:12 says, “Hatred incites strife.” But as Gregory says in *Moralia* 31, hatred arises from envy. Therefore, strife is a child of envy and not of anger.

Objection 5: Proverbs 17:19 says, “He who contemplates discord plants strife.” But as was explained above (q. 37, a. 2), discord is a child of vainglory. Therefore, strife is, too.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory says, “Strife arises from anger.” And Proverbs 15:18 and 29:22 say, “The angry man provokes strife.”

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), strife involves a certain sort of disagreement that results in deeds, when the one tries to hurt the other. Now there are two ways in which one individual might intend to hurt another.

In one way, by intending without any qualification what is bad for him. And this sort of harm belongs to hatred, which intends to hurt one’s enemy, whether it be openly or in a way that is hidden.

In the second way, the one intends to hurt the other on condition that the other realizes this and fights back—and this is what is implied by the name ‘strife’. This belongs properly to anger, which is a desire for vindication. For it is not enough for the angry individual that he should harm the one he is angry with in a hidden way. Instead, as is clear from what was said above about the passion of anger (*ST* 1-2, q. 46, a. 6), the one who is angry wants the other individual to understand this and to suffer something contrary to his will in return for what he has done. And it is in this way that strife arises from anger.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 25, a. 1), all the irascible passions arise from the concupiscible passions. Accordingly, what arises from anger likewise arises from excessive desire as its primary root.

Reply to objection 2: Boasting and puffing oneself up, which are effected by pride or vainglory, lead to quarreling and strife not directly but as an occasion, viz., insofar as anger is aroused by this when someone takes as an injury to himself the fact that another individual prefers himself to him, and in this way quarreling and strife arise from anger.

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 48, a. 3), anger impedes reason’s judgment, and this is why it bears a similarity to foolishness. And from this it follows that they have a

common effect, since from a defect in reason it happens that one tries to hurt another individual in a disordered way.

Reply to objection 4: Even if strife sometimes arises from hatred, it is nonetheless not the *proper* effect of hatred, since it lies beyond the intention of one who hates that he should harm his enemy openly and by means of strife. For sometimes one who hates seeks to do harm in a hidden way, but when he sees himself prevailing, he intends to do harm by means of strife and quarreling.

Still, as has already been explained, to harm someone by means of strife is the proper effect of anger.

Reply to objection 5: Hatred and discord arise from strife in the hearts of those engaged in strife (*in cordibus rixantium*). And so someone who “contemplates discord,” i.e., who intends to sow discord among certain individuals, takes care that they engage in strife with one another.

In the same way, any sin is able to command the act of another sin by ordering it toward its own end. However, from this it does not follow that strife is the child of vainglory properly speaking and directly.