

QUESTION 82

Devotion

Next we have to consider the acts of religion: first, the interior acts (questions 82-83), which, given what was said above, are the more important; and, second, the exterior acts (questions 84-100), which are secondary.

Now the interior acts of religion seem to be devotion and prayer. Therefore, we must first discuss devotion (question 82) and, second, prayer (question 83).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Is devotion a specific act? (2) Is devotion an act of [the virtue of] religion? (3) What is the cause of devotion? (4) What is the effect of devotion?

Article 1

Is devotion a specific act?

It seems that devotion is not a specific act:

Objection 1: That which has to do with the *mode* of other acts does not seem to be a specific act. But devotion seems to have to do with the mode of other acts; for 2 Paralipomenon 29:31 says, “The whole multitude offered victims and praises and holocausts with a devout mind.” Therefore, devotion is not a specific act.

Objection 2: No specific act is found in diverse genera of acts. But devotion is found in diverse genera of acts, viz., in corporeal acts and also in spiritual acts; for someone is said to meditate devoutly and also to genuflect devoutly. Therefore, devotion is not a specific act.

Objection 3: Every specific act belongs either to an appetitive power (*virtus*) or to a cognitive power. But devotion is not appropriated to either, as is clear to anyone who runs through the individual species of acts, enumerated above (*ST* 1, q. 78 and *ST* 1-2, q. 23, a. 4), of the appetitive part [of the soul] and of the cognitive part. Therefore, devotion is not a specific act.

But contrary to this: As was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 21, aa. 3-4), it is through acts that we gain merit. But devotion has a specific reason for gaining merit. Therefore, devotion is a specific act.

I respond: ‘Devotion’ comes from ‘vowing’ or ‘devoting’ (*devotio dicitur a devovendo*), and so the ones who are called ‘devout’ are those who devote themselves to God so as to submit themselves totally to Him. For this reason, in times past among the Gentiles the ones who were called ‘devout’ were those who devoted themselves to their idols unto death for the sake of saving their army, as Titus Livius reports about the two Decii.

Hence, devotion seems to be nothing other than a sort of willing (*voluntas*) to hand oneself over promptly to whatever has to do with the service of God. Hence, Exodus 35:20-21 says, “The multitude of the children of Israel offered their first fruits to the Lord with a prompt and devout mind.”

Now it is obvious that willing to do promptly whatever pertains to serving God is a certain specific act. Hence, devotion is a specific act of the will.

Reply to objection 1: The mover imposes a mode on the movement of the movable thing. But as was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 9, a. 3), it is the will that moves the other powers of the soul to their acts. And so, since devotion is an act of will on the part of a man who is offering himself to God in order to serve Him who is the ultimate end, it follows that devotion imposes a mode on human acts, regardless of whether they are acts of the will itself with respect to the means to the end or the acts of the other powers that are moved by the will.

Reply to objection 2: Devotion is found in diverse genera of acts not as a species of those acts but in the way that the motion of the mover exists virtually in the movements of the movable things.

Reply to objection 3: Devotion is an act of the appetitive part of the soul and is, as has been explained, a certain movement of the will.

Article 2

Is devotion an act of [the virtue of] religion?

It seems that devotion is not an act of [the virtue of] religion:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), devotion has to do with someone's handing himself over to God. But this is done especially through charity; for in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, Dionysius says, "Divine love engenders ecstasy, allowing them to be not lovers of their very selves, but lovers of those things which they love." Therefore, devotion is an act of charity more than of religion.

Objection 2: Charity precedes religion. But devotion seems to precede charity, since in the Scriptures charity is signified by fire, whereas devotion is signified by fat, which is the matter for fire. Therefore, devotion is not an act of religion.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 1), by religion a man is ordered just toward God. But devotion is also had with respect to men. For some are said to be devoted to certain holy men, and servants are said to be devoted to their masters—in the sense in which Pope Leo says, "The Jews, as if devoted to the Roman laws, said, 'We have no king but Caesar.'" Therefore, devotion is not an act of religion.

But contrary to this: As has been explained (a. 1), 'devotion' comes from 'vowing'. But a vow is act of religion. Therefore, so is devotion.

I respond: It belongs to the same virtue both (a) to *will* to do something and (b) to have a prompt will for *doing* it, since the two acts have the same object. For this reason, the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 5, "Justice is that by which men *will* what is just and *do* what is just."

Now as is clear from what was said above (q. 81), *doing* what pertains to divine worship or service obviously belongs properly to religion. Hence, it also belongs to religion to have a prompt *will* to execute things of this sort—which is what it is to be devout. And so it is clear that devotion is an act of religion.

Reply to objection 1: It belongs immediately to charity that a man hand himself over to God by adhering to Him through a certain union of spirit. But a man's handing himself over to God for works of divine worship belongs immediately to religion and mediately to charity, which is a principle of religion.

Reply to objection 2: Bodily fat is generated in digestion by natural heat (*generatur per calorem digerentem*), and bodily fat also conserves natural heat itself as its nourishment.

Similarly, charity causes devotion insofar as one is rendered prompt in serving his friend, and charity is also nourished by devotion, in just the way that any friendship is conserved and augmented by exercising and thinking about friendly deeds.

Reply to objection 3: Devotion that is directed toward God's saints, living or dead, does not stop with them but passes on to God, since we are venerating God in God's ministers. By contrast, the devotion that servants are said to have for their temporal masters is of a different type, in just the way that serving temporal masters likewise differs from serving God.

Article 3

Is contemplation, or meditation, a cause of devotion?

It seems that contemplation, or meditation, is not a cause of devotion:

Objection 1: No cause impedes its own effect. But subtle meditations on intelligible things oftentimes impede devotion. Therefore, contemplation, or meditation, is not a cause of devotion.

Objection 2: If contemplation were a proper and *per se* cause of devotion, then it would have to be the case that what belongs to a higher contemplation would excite more devotion. But the contrary

appears to be the case, since a greater devotion is frequently excited by a consideration of Christ's passion and of other mysteries having to do with his humanity than by a consideration of God's greatness. Therefore, contemplation is not a proper cause of devotion.

Objection 3: If contemplation were a proper cause of devotion, then it would have to be the case that those who are more fit for contemplation would be more fit for devotion. But we see the contrary of this, since devotion is often found more in simple men and the female sex, in whom one finds a lack of contemplation. Therefore, contemplation is not a proper cause of devotion.

But contrary to this: Psalm 38:4 says, "In my meditation a fire shall flame up." But it is spiritual fire that causes devotion. Therefore, meditation is a cause of devotion.

I respond: The *extrinsic* and principal cause of devotion is God, of whom Ambrose says in *Super Lucam*, "God calls those whom He deigns to call, and He renders religious those whom He wants to, and if He had willed it, He would have made devout Samaritans out of those who were not devout."

However, on our part the *intrinsic* cause has to be meditation, or contemplation. For it has been explained (a. 1) that devotion is a certain act of the will directed toward a man's handing himself over promptly to the service of God. But every act of the will proceeds from some sort of thought (*consideratio*), because the object of the will is an *understood* good (*bonum intellectum*). This is why in *De Trinitate* Augustine says that the will arises from intelligence. And so it must be the case that meditation is a cause of devotion, viz., insofar as it is through meditating that a man conceives of handing himself over to the service of God.

There are two sorts of thoughts that lead one to hand himself over to the service of God:

The first has to do with God's goodness and His gifts (*est ex parte divinae bonitatis et beneficiorum ipsius*)—this according to Psalm 72:28 ("It is good for me to adhere to God, to place my hope in the Lord God"). And this thought excites love (*excitat dilectionem*), which is a proximate cause of devotion.

The second, having to do with the man, is his thinking about his own defects, because of which he needs to rely on God—this according to Psalm 120:1-2 ("I have lifted my eyes to the mountains, from whence help will come to me. My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth"). And this sort of thought drives out presumption, by which one is prevented from subjecting himself to God as he relies on his own strength (*dum suae virtuti innititur*).

Reply to objection 1: It is thinking about things that are apt to excite love for God that causes devotion. By contrast, thinking of anything which is irrelevant to this and which distracts one's mind from such things impedes devotion.

Reply to objection 2: Whatever pertains to [Christ's] divinity is such that in its own right it excites love to the highest degree and, as a result, excites devotion, since God is to be loved above all things. But because of the human mind's weakness, the mind is such that just as it needs to be led by the hand by certain sensible things known to us to the *cognition* of divine things, so too it needs to be led by the hand to the *love* of divine things. The most important of these sensible things is the humanity of Christ, since in a Preface [for Christmas time] it says, "... in order that when we know God visibly, we are thereby caught up in the love of what is invisible." And so things that belong to Christ's humanity especially excite devotion, in the manner of being led by the hand, even though devotion has to do principally with those things that belong to His divinity.

Reply to objection 3: Knowledge—along with whatever else pertains to greatness—provides an occasion for a man's relying on himself and so not handing himself over totally to God. Hence it is that things of this sort occasionally impede devotion, and that devotion abounds in simple men and in women because they suppress pride (*elationem comprimendo*). However, if a man perfectly submits his knowledge and any other perfection to God, then by that very fact his devotion grows.

Article 4

Is joy an effect of devotion?

It seems that joy (*laetitia*) is not an effect of devotion:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 3), it is the passion of Christ that mainly excites one to devotion. But a sort of affliction in the soul follows upon thinking about the passion—this according to Lamentations 3:19-20 (“Remember my poverty, the wormwood, and the gall,” which pertains to the passion, and then, “I will be mindful and remember, and my soul will languish within me”). Therefore, pleasure (*delectatio*) or delight (*gaudium*) is not an effect of devotion.

Objection 2: Devotion consists principally in the interior sacrifice of one’s spirit. But Psalm 50:19 says, “A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit.” Therefore, affliction is more an effect of devotion than is agreeableness (*iucunditas*) or delight (*gaudium*).

Objection 3: In *De Homine* Gregory of Nyssa says, “Just as laughter proceeds from joy, so tears and groans are signs of sadness.” But it happens that some individuals break out into tears because of devotion. Therefore, joy (*laetitia*) or delight (*gaudium*) is not an effect of devotion.

But contrary to this: The Collect [for the Thursday after the Fourth Sunday of Lent] says, “... in order that we whom vowed fasting castigates, holy devotion might itself also make joyful.”

I respond: Devotion *in its own right* and *principally* is a cause of mental joy, whereas *as a consequence* and *incidentally* it is a cause of sadness. For it has been explained (a. 3) that devotion proceeds from two sorts of thinking:

(a) It proceeds principally from thinking about God’s goodness, since this sort of thinking pertains, as it were, to the terminus of the movement of a will that is handing itself over to God. And pleasure follows *per se* from this sort of thinking—this according to Psalm 76:4 (“I remembered God and was delighted”). However, this sort of thinking incidentally causes a certain sadness in individuals who do not yet enjoy God fully—this according to Psalm 41:3-4 (“My soul thirsts for the living God,” and later, “My tears have been ...”).

(b) As has been explained (a. 3), devotion is caused secondarily by thinking about one’s own defects, since this sort of thinking pertains to the terminus *from which* a man withdraws through the movement of a devout will—in order, namely, not to exist on his own (*ut non in se existat*), but to submit himself to God. Now this sort of thinking contrasts with the first sort. For in its own right it is apt to cause sadness as one mulls over his own defects, whereas incidentally it causes joy, viz., because of his trust (*spes*) in God’s help.

And so it is clear that delight (*delectatio*) follows primarily and *per se* from devotion, whereas a “sorrow that accords with God” (1 Corinthians 7:10) follows secondarily and incidentally.

Reply to objection 1: In thinking about the passion of Christ there is (a) something that saddens one, viz., the human defectiveness which was such that Christ had to suffer in order to destroy it, and (b) something that makes one joyful, viz., God’s graciousness towards us, which provided us with liberation from this defectiveness.

Reply to objection 2: The spirit which on the one hand is troubled by the defects of the present life is delighted on the other hand by thinking about God’s goodness and by trusting in God’s help.

Reply to objection 3: Tears flow forth not only because of sadness but also because of a certain tenderness of feeling, especially when what is being thought about is something delightful with an admixture of something sad. For instance, men often cry because of a feeling of piety when they recover their children or close friends whom they thought had perished. And tears proceed in this way from devotion.