

QUESTION 163

The Sin of the First Man

Next we have to consider the sin of the first man, which was because of pride (*quod fuit per superbia*): first, his sin (question 163); second, the punishment for the sin (question 164); and third, the temptation by which he was induced to sin (question 165).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Was the man's first sin pride? (2) What did the man desire in sinning? (3) Was his sin more serious than all other sins? (4) Who sinned more, the man or the woman?

Article 1

Was pride the sin of the first man?

It seems that pride (*superbia*) was not the sin of the first man (*superbia non fuerit primi hominis peccatum*):

Objection 1: In Romans 5:19 the Apostle says, "Through the disobedience of one man many were made sinners." But the sin of the first man is the sin by which all became sinners by Original Sin. Therefore, it was *disobedience*, and *not pride*, that was the sin of the first man.

Objection 2: In *Super Lucam* Ambrose claims that the devil tempted Christ in the same order by which he overthrew the first man. But as is clear from Matthew 4:3, when he says to Him, "If you are the son of God, command that these stones become bread," he tempted Christ in the first place by gluttony. Therefore, the first sin of the first man was *gluttony* and *not pride*.

Objection 3: Man sinned at the devil's suggestion. But as is clear from Genesis 3:5, in tempting the man, the devil promised knowledge. Therefore, the man's first disorder was his desire for knowledge, which belongs to [the sin of] curiosity. Therefore, the first sin was *curiosity* and *not pride*.

Objection 4: A Gloss on 1 Timothy 2:14 ("The woman was seduced with the lie") says, "The Apostle correctly calls this a seduction by which she was persuaded of something which, even though it was false, was thought to be true, viz., that God had forbidden them to touch that tree because He knew that if they touched it, they would become like gods—as if He who had created them as human beings was denying them divinity." But to accept this involves unbelief. Therefore, the first sin of man was *unbelief* and *not pride*.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiasticus 10:15 says, "Pride is the beginning of every sin." But the sin of the first man is the beginning of every sin—this according to Romans 5:12 ("Through one man sin entered the world"). Therefore, the sin of the first man was pride.

I respond: It is possible for many movements to come together for a sin, and the one among them that has the character of the first sin is the one in which a disorder is first found. Now it is clear that a disorder is first found in an *interior movement* of the soul rather than in an *exterior act* of the body; for as Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 1, "The body's holiness is not lost as long as the soul's holiness remains." But among the interior movements, the appetite is moved toward the end prior to being moved toward what is sought for the sake of the end. And so the man's first sin existed where it was possible for there to be a *first desire for a disordered end*.

Now in the state of innocence man was set up in such a way that there would be no rebellion of the flesh against the spirit. Hence, it was impossible for the first disorder in a human desire to stem from the fact that man desired a sensible good which a carnal desire would tend toward outside the order of reason. It follows, then, that the first disorder in a human appetite arose from the fact that man desired some spiritual good in a disordered way. But he would not have been desiring in a disordered way if he had desired that spiritual good in accord with the measure fixed in advance by God's rule. Hence, it follows that man's first sin lay in the fact that he desired some spiritual good beyond its measure. Hence,

it is clear that the man's first sin was pride.

Reply to objection 1: The man's disobeying God's command was not something that he willed for its own sake, since the disobedience could not happen without a presupposed disorder in the will. Therefore, it follows that he willed it for the sake of something else.

Now the first thing that he willed in a disordered way was his own excellence. And so his disobedience was caused by pride. And, in *Ad Orosium*, this is just what Augustine says: "The man, puffed up with pride and obeying the serpent's prompting, disdained God's commands."

Reply to objection 2: Gluttony likewise had a place in the sin of the first parents; for Genesis 3:6 says, "The woman saw that the tree was good for eating and fair to the eyes and delightful to look at, and she took of the fruit and ate." Yet it was not the goodness and beauty of the food that was the first motive for sinning; instead it was the prompting of the serpent, who said, "Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods." And in desiring this, the woman fell into pride. And so the sin of gluttony flowed from the sin of pride.

Reply to objection 3: The desire for knowledge was caused in the first parents by a disordered desire for excellence. Thus, the serpent began with the words, "You will be like gods," and then added, "knowing good and evil."

Reply to objection 4: As Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 11, "The woman would not have believed, at the words of the serpent, that they had been barred by God from something good and useful, if she had not already had in her mind a love of her own power and a sort of proud presumption concerning herself." This should not be understood to mean that the pride preceded the serpent's prompting; instead, it means that immediately upon the serpent's prompting, her mind became puffed up, and from this it followed that she believed that what the demon was saying was true.

Article 2

Did the pride of the first man lie in the fact that he desired to be like God?

It seems that the pride of the first man did not lie in the fact that he desired to be like God (*superbia primi hominis non fuerit in hoc quod appetierit divinam similitudinem*):

Objection 1: No one sins by desiring what befits him according to his nature. But being similar to God befits man according to his nature; for Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make man to our image and likeness." Therefore, he did not sin by desiring to be like God.

Objection 2: It seems that the first man desired to be like God in order that he might acquire the knowledge of good and evil, since this was suggested to him by the serpent: "You will be like gods, knowing good and evil." But the desire for knowledge is natural to man—this according to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 1 ("All men desire by nature to know"). Therefore, he did not sin by desiring to be like God.

Objection 3: No one wise chooses what is impossible. But the first man was endowed with wisdom—this according to the Ecclesiasticus 17:5 ("He filled them with the knowledge of understanding"). Therefore, since every sin consists in a deliberated desire, i.e., in an act of choosing, it seems that the first man did not sin by desiring anything impossible. But it is impossible for man to be like God—this according to Exodus 15:11 ("Who is like you among the strong, O Lord?"). Therefore, the first man did not sin by desiring to be like God.

But contrary to this: In commenting on Psalm 68:5 ("Then did I restore that which I did not take away"), Augustine says, "Adam and Eve wished to seize divinity, and they lost happiness."

I respond: There are two kinds of likeness (*duplex est similitudo*):

One is a likeness of *complete equality* (*similitudo omnimodae aequiparantiae*). And the first

parents did not desire this sort of likeness to God, since such a likeness to God does not fall under the apprehension—especially the apprehension of a wise individual.

The second is a likeness of *imitation* (*similitudo imitationis*) of the sort that is possible for a creature with respect to God, viz., insofar as the creature participates in its own mode in some sort of likeness of Him. Hence, in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 9, Dionysius says, “The same things are like God and unlike God: like God, in accord with a possible imitation, and unlike God, insofar as things that are caused have less than the cause.” Now any good that exists in a creature is a sort of participated likeness of the First Good. And so, as has been explained (a.1), by the very fact that a man desires a spiritual good beyond his measure it follows that he is desiring likeness to God in a disordered way.

Still, notice that, properly speaking, a desire is for a thing that is not yet possessed. And as regards the rational creature’s participating in a likeness of God, a spiritual good can be examined with respect to three aspects:

First, with respect to the *very esse of the nature*. This sort of likeness was impressed from the very beginning of creation both (a) on *man*, of whom Genesis 1:26-27 says, “God made man to His image and likeness,” and (b) on the *angel*, of whom Ezechiel 28:12 says, “You were the seal of likeness.”

Second, with respect to *cognition*. This likeness the angel also received in his creation; hence, in the words just quoted, after it is said, “You were the seal of likeness,” it is immediately added, “full of wisdom.” By contrast, in his own creation the first man had not yet arrived at this point in actuality, but only in potentiality.

Third, with respect to the *power of operating*. Neither the angel nor the man had yet acquired this likeness in actuality at the beginning of creation, because in both cases something remained to be done in order to arrive at beatitude.

And so when the two of them, viz., the devil and the first man, desired likeness to God in a disordered way, neither of them sinned by desiring a likeness that belonged to his nature. Instead, the first man sinned by desiring a likeness to God with respect to the knowledge of good and evil, as the serpent had suggested to him—so that, namely, (a) he might decide for himself by the power of his own nature what would be good to do and what would be evil to do, or even that (b) he might foreknow by himself what good or what evil was going to occur. And, secondarily, he sinned by desiring a likeness to God with respect to his own power of operating—so that, namely, he might by the power of his own nature act in such a way as to attain beatitude. Hence, in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 11 Augustine says, “A love of her own power cleaved to the mind of the woman.” On the other hand, the devil sinned by desiring a likeness to God with respect to power. Hence, in *De Vera Religione* Augustine says, “He wanted to enjoy his own power rather than God’s.” Yet there was something with respect to which both of them desired to be equal to God, viz., each wanted to rely on himself while disdaining the order of God’s rule.

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through with respect to the likeness which belongs to nature and which, as has been explained, man does not sin by desiring.

Reply to objection 2: It is not a sin to desire likeness to God simply speaking with respect to knowledge. However, to desire a likeness of this sort in a disordered way, i.e., beyond one’s own measure, is a sin. Hence, in commenting on Psalm 70:19 (“Who will be like You?”) Augustine says, “He who desires to be God in his own right wills to be like God in a perverse way—like the devil, who refused to submit to Him, and the man, who refused to keep His commands as a servant.”

Reply to objection 3: This argument goes through for the case of a *likeness of equality*.

Article 3

Was the sin of the first parents more serious than all other sins?

It seems that the sin of the first parents was more serious than all other sins (*peccatum primorum parentum fuerit ceteris gravius*):

Objection 1: In *De Civitate Dei* 14 Augustine says, “The wickedness in sinning was great when not sinning was very easy.” But it was especially easy for the first parents not to sin, since they did not have anything within them that impelled them toward sinning. Therefore, the sin of the first parents was more serious than all other sins.

Objection 2: The punishment is proportioned to the fault. But the sin of the first parents was punished most severely, since from that sin “death entered into this world,” as the Apostle puts it in Romans 5:12. Therefore, that sin was more serious than other sins.

Objection 3: As *Metaphysics* 2 explains, the first thing in each genus is the greatest. But the sin of the first parents was the first of all the other sins of men. Therefore, it was the greatest sin.

But contrary to this: Origen says, “I do not think that anyone who is situated at the highest and most perfect level leaves that level and falls all of a sudden; instead, it must be that he descends little by little and one step at a time.” But the first parents stood at the highest and most perfect level. Therefore, it is not the case that their first sin was the greatest of all sins.

I respond: There are two sorts of seriousness in a sin that can be taken into account. One is from the *species itself of the sin*, in the way that we say that adultery is a more serious sin than simple fornication. The other sort of seriousness in a sin has to do with *some circumstance of place or person or time*.

Now the first sort of seriousness is more essential to a sin and more important. Hence, a sin is called serious more because of it than because of the second sort of seriousness. Therefore, one should claim that, according to *the species of the sin*, the sin of the first man was not more serious than all other human sins. For even if pride by its genus has a sort of ‘excellence’ in relation to the other sins, the pride by which an individual denies God or blasphemes God is a greater sin than the pride by which an individual desires likeness to God in a disordered way—and, as has been explained (a. 2), the latter was the sort of pride that belonged to the first parents.

On the other hand, as regards the *situation of the persons who were sinning*, that sin had the most seriousness because of the perfection of their state.

And so one should reply that the sin in question was the most serious sin *in a certain respect (secundum quid)*, but not the most serious sin absolutely speaking (*non simpliciter*).

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through for the seriousness of a sin that arises from *the circumstances of the sinner*.

Reply to objection 2: The magnitude of the punishment that followed upon that first sin corresponds to the sin not as regards the quantity of its proper species, but insofar as it was the *first* sin, because the innocence of the first state was shattered—and once this innocence had been removed, the whole of human nature became disordered.

Reply to objection 3: In those things that are ordered *per se*, what is first has to be the greatest. But there is no such ordering among sins; instead, one sin follows incidentally (*per accidens*) after another. Hence, it does not follow that the first sin is the greatest.

Article 4

Was the sin of Adam more serious than the sin of Eve?

It seems that the sin of Adam was more serious than the sin of Eve:

Objection 1: 1 Timothy 2:14 says, “Adam was not seduced, but the woman was seduced with the lie.” And so it seems that the woman’s sin proceeded from ignorance, whereas the man’s sin was from certain knowledge. But a sin of the latter sort is more serious—this according to Luke 12:47 (“The servant who knew his master’s will and did not act according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes, but he who did not know his master’s will and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes”). Therefore, Adam sinned in a more serious way than Eve did.

Objection 2: In *De Decem Chordis* Augustine says, “If the man is the head, he should live better and precede his wife in all good deeds that are done, so that she might imitate her husband.” But if the one who should act better sins, then he sins in a more serious way. Therefore, Adam sinned in a more serious way than Eve did.

Objection 3: A sin against the Holy Spirit is the most serious sort of sin. But Adam seems to have sinned against the Holy Spirit, since he sinned while thinking about God’s mercy—and this belongs to the sin of presumption. Therefore, it seems that Adam sinned in a more serious way than Eve did.

But contrary to this: The punishment corresponds to the sin (*culpa*). But as is clear from Genesis 3:16ff, the woman was more grievously punished than the man was. Therefore, it seems that she sinned in a more serious way than the man did.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 3), the seriousness of a sin has to do more principally with the *species of the sin* than with the *circumstances of the person*. Therefore, one should reply that if we consider *the situations of both persons*, viz., the woman and the man, then the sin of the man is more serious, since he was more perfect than the woman. On the other hand, as regards *the genus itself of the sin*, the sins of the two are equal, since pride was the sin of both of them. Hence, in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 11 Augustine says, “The woman excused her own sin by an unequal sex, but with an equal pride (*in impari sexu sed pari fastu*).”

But as regards the *species of pride*, the woman sinned in a more serious way, and this for three reasons:

First, the woman was more puffed up with pride than the man (*maior elatio fuit mulieris quam viri*). For the woman believed that what the serpent suggested to her was true, viz., that God had forbidden them to eat from the tree in order that they might not attain a likeness to Him. And so, when she willed to attain this likeness to Him by eating from the forbidden tree, her pride raised itself up to the point that she willed to obtain something against God’s will. By contrast, the man did not believe that [what the serpent had suggested] was true. Hence, he did not will to attain a likeness to God against God’s will; instead, he willed to attain that likeness through his own power (*per seipsum*).

Second, the woman not only sinned in her own right, but she also suggested a sin to the man. Hence, she sinned both against God and against her neighbor.

Third, the man’s sin was mitigated by the fact that, as Augustine puts it in *De Genesim ad Litteram*, he consented to the sin “out of a certain friendly benevolence by which it often happens that God is offended in order that a man not go from being someone’s friend to being his enemy. The handing down of God’s sentence indicates that he should not have done this.”

And so it is clear that woman’s sin was more serious than the man’s sin.

Reply to objection 1: The woman’s seduction followed from her being puffed up with pride beforehand (*ex praecedenti elevatione*). And so this sort of ignorance does not excuse the sin, but instead aggravates it, since by her ignorance she was raised up to a greater pride.

Reply to objection 2: This argument goes through for the circumstance of the person’s condition,

because of which the man's sin was more serious *in a certain respect*.

Reply to objection 3: The man did not think about God's mercy to the point of having contempt for God's justice, and it is the latter that makes for a sin against the Holy Spirit. Rather, as Augustine puts it in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 11, "Since he had no experience of God's severity, he believed the sin to be venial," i.e., easily forgiven.