

QUESTION 35

Acedia

We next have to consider the vices opposed to the joy of charity, both (a) to joy with respect to the divine good, and acedia is opposed to this joy, and (b) to joy with respect to our neighbor's good, and envy is opposed to this joy. Hence, we must first consider acedia (question 35) and then envy (question 36).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Is acedia a sin? (2) Is acedia a special vice? (3) Is acedia a mortal sin? (4) Is acedia a capital vice?

Article 1

Is acedia a sin?

It seems that acedia is not a sin:

Objection 1: According to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 2, the passions are such that we are neither praised for them nor blamed for them. But as Damascene points out, and as was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 35, a. 8), acedia is a passion, since it is a species of sadness or sorrow (*tristitia*). Therefore, acedia is not a sin.

Objection 2: No corporeal defect that occurs at fixed hours has the character of a sin. But acedia is like this. For in *De Institutis Monasteriorum* 10 Cassian says, "The monk is troubled with acedia chiefly around noontime (*circa horam sextam*). It is like a fever that attacks at a fixed time and that inflicts the sick soul with hot flashes that flare up at regular and fixed hours." Therefore, acedia is not a sin.

Objection 3: What proceeds from a good root does not seem to be a sin. But acedia proceeds from a good root; for in the same book Cassian says that acedia "comes from one's lamenting that he does not have spiritual fruit and from his extolling in his mind monasteries that are located at some distance from his." But this seems to belong to humility. Therefore, acedia is not a sin.

Objection 4: Every sin is to be avoided—this according to Ecclesiasticus 21:2 ("Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent"). But in the same book Cassian says, "Experience has shown that the onslaught of acedia is not to be avoided by fleeing, but to be overcome by resisting." Therefore, acedia is not a sin.

But contrary to this: Whatever is forbidden in Sacred Scripture is a sin. But acedia is like this; for Ecclesiasticus 6:26 says, "Bow down your shoulder and carry her," i.e., spiritual wisdom, "and be not saddened (*non acedieris*) in her bonds."

I respond: According to Damascene, acedia is "a sort of heavy sadness" (*quaedam tristitia aggravans*) that presses down on a man's mind in such a way that no activity pleases him (*ut nihil ei agere libeat*), in the same way that what is sour also lacks heat (*sicuti ea quae sunt acida etiam frigida sunt*). And so acedia involves a sort of weariness with respect to acting (*taedium operandi*), as is clear from this Gloss on Psalm 106:18 ("Their soul hated every sort of food"): "And some say that acedia is a listlessness of mind (*torpor mentis*) that neglects to undertake good things."

Now a sadness of this sort is always bad, sometimes even in its own right (*etiam secundum seipsam*), and sometimes in its effect (*secundum effectum*).

The sadness is bad in its own right when it is sadness over what appears bad but is genuinely good, just as, contrariwise, delight is bad when it is delight over what appears good but is genuinely bad. Therefore, since a spiritual good is genuinely good, sadness over a spiritual good is bad in its own right (*secundum se*).

However, even a sadness over what is genuinely bad is bad in its effect if it burdens a man in such a way that it draws him back totally from good works; hence, in 2 Corinthians 2:7 the Apostle says that he

does not want one who is repenting to be “too engrossed” with sorrow over his sins.

Therefore, since acedia, as it is being understood here, names a sadness over a spiritual good, it is bad in two ways, both (a) in its own right and (b) in its effect. And so acedia is a sin, since, as is clear from what was said above (q. 10, a. 2), something bad in an appetitive movement is what we call a sin.

Reply to objection 1: The passions are not sins in their own right; however, insofar as they are applied to something bad, they are blameworthy, just as they are likewise praiseworthy when applied to something good. Hence, sadness does not in itself name anything either praiseworthy or blameworthy. Instead, moderate sadness over what is bad denominates something praiseworthy, whereas sadness over what is good and, again, immoderate sadness, denominate something blameworthy. And it is in this way that acedia is posited as a sin.

Reply to objection 2: The passions of the sentient appetite both (a) are able to be venial sins in their own right, and (b) incline the soul toward mortal sin. And since the sentient appetite has a corporeal organ, it follows that because of certain corporeal changes a man becomes more prone to certain sins. And so it can happen that, corresponding to corporeal changes that take place at fixed times, certain sins assail us more.

Now every corporeal defect in its own right disposes us toward sadness. And so, around noontime, those who are fasting, when they now begin to feel hunger and to be oppressed by the heat of the sun, are more assailed by acedia.

Reply to objection 3: What belongs to humility is that a man, considering his own defects, should not extol himself. But it does not belong to humility that one should disdain the goods that he has from God; instead, this belongs to ingratitude. And acedia follows from this sort of disdain; for we are saddened by things that we think of as bad or vile.

Therefore, one must extol the goods of others in such a way that he nonetheless does not disdain the goods that have been provided to him by God, since in that case they would be rendered sorrowful to him.

Reply to objection 4: Sin is always to be fled, but a sin’s attack has to be overcome sometimes by fleeing and sometimes by resisting:

(a) *by fleeing*, when continuous thought increases one’s incentive to sin, as in the case of lust, and this is why 1 Corinthians 6 says, “Flee from fornication;” and

(b) *by resisting*, when persevering in thought removes the incentive to sin, where this incentive arises from superficial apprehension.

It is the latter that occurs in the case of acedia, since the more we think about spiritual goods, the more they become pleasing to us; and with this acedia ceases.

Article 2

Is acedia a special sin?

It seems that acedia is not a special sin:

Objection 1: What belongs to every vice does not constitute a special type of vice. But every vice makes a man to be saddened by the opposite spiritual good; for instance, lust makes a man to be saddened by the good of continence, and gluttony makes him to be saddened by the good of fasting. Therefore, since, as has been explained (a. 1), acedia is sadness over a spiritual good, it seems that acedia is not a special sin.

Objection 2: Since acedia is a certain type of sadness, it is opposed to joy. But joy is not posited as a special virtue. Therefore, neither should acedia be posited as a special vice.

Objection 3: Since *spiritual good* is a certain general good that virtue desires and vice flees from,

it does not constitute a special type of virtue or vice except because of something added to it that narrows it down. But if acedia is a special vice, there does not seem to be anything except labor (*nisi labor*) that narrows *spiritual good* down to acedia. For some flee from spiritual goods because they are laborious, and this is why acedia is a sort of weariness. Now to flee from labors and to seek corporeal rest seem to pertain to the same thing, viz., laziness (*ad pigritiam*). Therefore, acedia is nothing other than laziness. But this seems false, since being lazy is opposed to being solicitous (*pigritia sollicitudini opponitur*), whereas acedia is opposed to joy. Therefore, acedia is not a special vice.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory distinguishes acedia from other vices. Therefore, it is a special sin.

I respond: Since acedia is sadness over a spiritual good, if *spiritual good* is taken generally, acedia will not have the character of a special vice, since, as has been said (obj. 1), every vice flees from the spiritual good that belongs to its opposed virtue.

Similarly, one cannot reply that acedia is a special vice insofar as it flees from a spiritual good because that spiritual good is laborious, i.e., either troublesome to the body or an obstacle to the body's pleasure. For this would not differentiate acedia from the carnal vices by which one seeks rest and pleasure for the body.

And so one should reply that there is a certain ordering among spiritual goods. For all the spiritual goods that exist in the singular acts of the virtues are ordered toward the one spiritual good which is the divine good, with respect to which there is a special virtue, viz., charity. Hence, it belongs to each virtue to rejoice over its own spiritual good, which consists in its own act, but the spiritual good by which one rejoices over the divine good belongs specifically to charity.

Similarly, the sadness by which one is saddened by the spiritual good that exists in the acts of the individual virtues belongs not to a specific vice, but to all the vices. By contrast, to be saddened by the divine good, over which charity rejoices, belongs to a special vice that is called acedia.

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

Article 3

Is acedia a mortal sin?

It seems that acedia is not a mortal sin:

Objection 1: Every mortal sin is contrary to a precept of God's Law. But acedia does not seem to be contrary to any precept, as is clear to one who runs through the precepts of the Decalogue. Therefore, acedia is not a mortal sin.

Objection 2: Within the same genus, a sin of deed is not a lesser sin than a sin of the heart (cf. *ST* 1-2, q. 72, a. 7). But to back away by deed from a spiritual good that leads to God is not a mortal sin; otherwise, everyone who did not observe the counsels would thereby commit a mortal sin (*mortaliter peccaret*). Therefore, to back away in one's heart because of sadness from spiritual works of this sort is not a mortal sin. Therefore, it is not the case that acedia is a mortal sin.

Objection 3: No mortal sin is found in perfected men. But acedia is found in perfected men; for in *De Institutis Coenobiorum* 10 Cassian says that acedia "is known more to those who live solitary lives and is a frequent and vexatious enemy of the hermit." Therefore, acedia is not a mortal sin.

But contrary to this: 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, "The sadness of the world works unto death" (*mortem operatur*). But sadness of this sort is acedia, since it is not sadness in accord with God, which is contrasted with the sadness of the world, which works unto death. Therefore, acedia is a mortal sin.

I respond: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 72, a. 5 and q. 88, aa. 1-2), a sin is called mortal

when it takes away one's spiritual life, which exists by means of the charity through which God lives within us. Hence, a sin is mortal by its genus when it is contrary to charity in its own right and because of its proper character.

Now acedia is a sin of this type. For, as was explained above (q. 28, a. 1), rejoicing over God (*gaudium de Deo*) is a proper effect of charity, whereas acedia is sadness over spiritual good insofar as it is the divine good. Hence, by its own genus acedia is a mortal sin.

Still, one must take note of the fact that, in the case of all sins that are mortal by their genus, they are mortal sins only when they attain their completeness (*suam perfectionem consequuntur*). But the consummation of a sin lies in the consent of reason; for we are speaking here of human sin, which consists in a human act, and the principle of a human act is reason. Hence, if there is a beginning of sin just in the sentient appetite and it does not attain to the consent of reason, then the sin is venial because of the incompleteness of the act. For instance, in the genus *adultery* a disordered desire that exists just in the sentient appetite is a venial sin, whereas if it reaches all the way to the consent of reason, then it is a mortal sin. So, too, the movement of acedia sometimes exists just in the sentient appetite, and this because of the flesh's repugnance toward the spirit, and in that case acedia is a venial sin. However, sometimes it reaches all the way to reason, which consents to fleeing from, and finding abhorrent, and detesting the divine good, with the flesh prevailing altogether over the spirit. And in such a case it is clear that acedia is a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 1: Acedia is contrary to the precept about keeping holy the Sabbath, which, insofar as it is a moral precept, commands the mind's resting in God, and which the mind's sadness over the divine good is contrary to.

Reply to objection 2: Acedia is a mental withdrawal not from just any spiritual good, but from the divine good, which the mind has to adhere to by necessity. Hence, if one is saddened by the fact that someone urges him to do acts of virtue that he is not obligated to do, this is not the sin of acedia. Rather, the sin of acedia occurs when one is saddened over what he needs to do because of God.

Reply to objection 3: In saintly men one finds some incomplete movements of acedia, which nonetheless do not reach all the way to the consent of reason.

Article 4

Should acedia be posited as a capital sin?

It seems that acedia should not be posited as a capital sin:

Objection 1: As was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 84, aa. 3-4), a capital vice is a vice that moves one toward acts of sin. But acedia does not move one to act, but instead draws one back from acting. Therefore, it should not be posited as a capital vice.

Objection 2: A capital sin has children assigned to it. Now in *Moralia* 31 Gregory assigns six children to acedia, viz., wickedness (*malitia*), rancor (*rancor*), small-mindedness (*pusillanimitas*), despair (*desperatio*), listlessness with respect to precepts (*torpor circa praecepta*), and the mind's wandering about into illicit things (*vagatio mentis circa illicita*). But these do not seem to arise properly from acedia. For instance, rancor seems to be the same thing as hatred, which, as was explained above (q. 34, a. 6), arises from envy. Wickedness is a genus with respect to all vices, and the same holds for the mind's wandering about into illicit things. Listlessness with respect to precepts seems to be the same thing as acedia, whereas small-mindedness and despair can arise from any kind of sin whatsoever. Therefore, acedia is not appropriately posited as a capital vice.

Objection 3: In *De Summo Bono* Isidore distinguishes the vice of acedia from the vice of sadness, explaining that the vice is sadness insofar as one *draws back from* something serious and laborious to

which he is obligated, whereas it is acedia insofar as he *turns himself toward* undue rest. And he claims that rancor, small-mindedness, acrimoniousness (*amaritudo*), and despair arise from sadness, whereas idleness (*otiositas*), sluggishness (*somnolentia*), mental importunity (*importunitas mentis*), corporeal restlessness (*inquietudo corporis*), instability (*instabilitas*), talkativeness (*verbositas*), and idle curiosity (*curiositas*) arise from acedia. Therefore, it seems that either Gregory or Isidore incorrectly designates acedia as a capital vice with its children.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory claims that acedia is a capital vice and has the children enumerated above.

I respond: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 84, aa. 3-4), a vice is called a capital vice when other vices are prompt to arise from it in its role as a final cause (*secundum rationem causae finalis*). Now just as men do many things because of pleasure, both in order to attain pleasure and also having been moved by its impetus to do something, so, too, they do many things because of sadness, either in order to avoid it or by rushing into doing certain things because of its burden. Hence, since, as was explained above (a. 1), acedia is a certain sort of sadness, it is appropriately posited as a capital sin.

Reply to objection 1: By weighing down a man's mind, acedia keeps him from doing those deeds that cause the sadness. But it nonetheless leads his mind toward doing certain things, either things that are consonant with the sadness, such as crying (*sicut ad plorandum*), or things by which the sadness is avoided.

Reply to objection 2: Gregory correctly designates the children of acedia. For since, as the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 8, no one can remain for a long time without pleasure and with sadness, it is necessary for something to arise from the sadness—and this in two ways: (a) the man withdraws from what causes the sadness, and (b) he passes on to other things in which he takes pleasure, in the way that, as the Philosopher notes in *Ethics* 10, those who cannot rejoice in spiritual delights shift toward corporeal pleasures. In fleeing from sadness, the process is such that a man first flees from what causes the sadness and, second, he fights against what engenders the sadness.

Now the spiritual goods that acedia is saddened by include both the end and the means to the end. Fleeing from the end is effected by *despair*, whereas fleeing from the goods that are the means to the end is effected (a) by *small-mindedness* as regards the arduous goods that fall under the counsels, and (b) by *listlessness with respect to precepts* as regards those goods that belong to justice in general. As for fighting against the spiritual goods that cause the sadness, sometimes this battle is against men who are leading one toward the spiritual goods, and this is *rancor*, whereas sometimes it extends to the spiritual goods themselves, and this is *wickedness* properly speaking. And insofar as one passes on to exterior pleasurable goods because of the sadness, *wandering about into illicit things* is posited as a child of acedia.

This makes clear the response to the objections concerning the individual children of acedia. For wickedness is being taken here in the way just explained and not as a genus of vices. Again, rancor is being taken here for a certain sort of indignation, as has been explained, and not for hatred in general. And the same thing should be said about the others.

Reply to objection 3: In *De Institutis Coenobiorum* Cassian likewise distinguishes sadness from acedia, whereas Gregory more appropriately calls acedia sadness. For as was explained above (a. 2), sadness is not a vice distinct from others insofar as one withdraws from serious and laborious work or insofar as one is saddened by any other causes, but only insofar as one is saddened by the divine good. But this belongs to the nature of acedia, which turns to an inappropriate rest to the extent that it rejects the divine good.

Now the things that Isidore posits as arising from sadness and acedia are traced back to the things that Gregory posits. For instance, *acrimoniousness*, which Isidore posits as arising from sadness, is a certain effect of *rancor*, whereas *idleness* and *sluggishness* are traced back to *listlessness with respect to precepts*, which someone who is idle overlooks entirely, and which someone who is sluggish fulfills in a

negligent way. All five of the other things that he posits as arising from acedia have to do with the *mind's wandering about into illicit things*. Insofar as it resides inside a mind that wills inappropriately to diffuse itself to diverse things, it is called *mental importunity*; insofar as it belongs to the cognitive power, it is called *idle curiosity*; insofar as it pertains to speech, it is called *talkativeness*; insofar as it belongs to the body's not remaining in the same place, it is called *corporeal restlessness*, viz., when through the disordered movement of his members one exhibits the mind's wandering; and insofar as one moves to diverse places, it is called *instability*. (Alternatively, instability can be taken for constantly changing one's mind (*secundum mutabilitatem proposito*).