DAILY COMPASS
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MADE FOR THE TRUTH

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Vices contrary to faith

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Vices contrary to faith

Faith can be weakened or destroyed by vices, which are divided into three groups. General unbelief, heresy and apostasy are the three categories of the first group and consist of resistance to preaching about faith or contempt for this preaching. This is an important issue because today th

ose who don't believe, who have doubts, are considered virtuous.

Today, the lesson is dedicated to vices contrary to faith. As we know what Faith is, we also need to understand that there are vices that can destroy Faith, that will distance us and preclude us from eternal Salvation.

St. Thomas in the Secunda secundae of his Somma Theologica dedicates six questions to vices against the Faith, from quaestio 10 to quaestio 15. They are six questions that assist theological reflection to understand what those vices are, those tendencies which can become firmly rooted in a person and that destroy the most precious gift of Faith.

St. Thomas structures these themes into three main groups:

1 - The reflection on lack of faith, which is divided into: general unbelief, heresy and apostasy.

2 - Blasphemy, that is, non-recognition, diminishing the goodness of God, through acts and also the will.

3 - The blindness of the mind and the dullness of the senses, very serious diseases that risk taking us away from God's paths.

Let's start today with the first block of questions (quaestiones 10-11-12) that treat precisely: general unbelief, heresy and apostasy.

What does St. Thomas mean in general by lack of faith?

Lack of faith is essentially resistance to the preaching of the faith or contempt for this preaching. It is not so much the unbelief of those who do not know, but of those who do not want to know and therefore resist the preaching of the Church in the widest possible sense, that is, they choose not to be open, are closed to, escape or even despise communication of the faith.

Thus St. Thomas says that lack of faith is the gravest of sins, in relation to moral virtues, while hatred of God is the gravest in relation to charity. It is important to reiterate this because in our age the person who lacks faith, who doubts, who accepts nothing that is not proven, is considered to have the attitude of a virtuous person; in truth it is a defect of the intellect that remains closed to the order of natural realities, and it is a defect of the will that decides not to open itself to truths that go beyond a person's reason.

What distinguishes heresy from unbelief?

Heresy is that incredulity which belongs to those who adhere and profess their faith in

Christ, but then corrupt His dogmas and by their will choose to adhere to one aspect rather than another, by virtue of what they themselves believe to be true.

St. Thomas explains.
" (A man) though he intends to assent to Christ, yet he fails in his choice of those things wherein he assents to Christ, because he chooses not what Christ really taught, but the suggestions of his own mind."(article 1, quaestio 11).

Responding to one of the possible objections that could be made to this thesis, St. Thomas explains that heresy must be evaluated according to two aspects: the proximate end and the remote end.

One can commit adultery to steal; therefore, committing adultery (hence the species of that vice) concerns the immediate end, the proximate end, whereas, since I commit adultery to steal, the remote end is theft; therefore adultery arises from theft, the proximate end is motivated by the remote end.

St. Thomas says it's the same situation with heresy, he explains:

"As to the case in point also, the proximate end of heresy is adherence to one's own false opinion."

It's the attachment to one's own ideas which turn out to be false, preferring one's own idea to the Truth taught by Christ. However, adherence to my own idea, which is precisely the species of the sin of heresy (the species of a sin is identified by the proximate end), can be derived from a remote end. What can this remote end be? St. Thomas gives the example of a heresy committed to obtain an important place in society, power, honors, or to avoid being excluded from a social or family context, etc.

These remote ends are very important to keep at bay and are rooted in deadly sins; the fight against the deadly sins therefore eliminates or reduces the remote end of the sin of heresy. The sin of heresy itself, however, consists in the attachment to one's own idea in contrast with the revealed truth.

Does heresy have the truths of faith as its object? The answer is yes.

St. Thomas describes one of the objections presented in the second article:

Objection. *"We find the holy doctors differing even about matters pertaining to the faith, for example Augustine and Jerome, on the question about the cessation of the legal observances: and yet this was without any heresy on their part. Therefore heresy is not properly about the matter of faith.".*

St. Thomas' answer. *"By no means should we accuse of heresy those who, however false and perverse their opinion may be, defend it without obstinate fervor, and seek the truth with careful anxiety, ready to mend their opinion, when they have found the truth," because, to wit, they do not make a choice in contradiction to the doctrine of the Church. Accordingly, certain doctors seem to have differed either in matters the holding of which in this or that way is of no consequence, so far as faith is concerned, or even in matters of faith, which were not as yet defined by the Church".*

1 - Heresy is not simply holding a false opinion. There is a significant difference between heresy and error, in that error is a defect of intelligence that seeks, but, if the intelligence remains open to the truth, there is not that element of heresy, or obstinacy, the obstinacy to which St. Thomas refers.

2 - The Church has developed its understanding of the faith over centuries. Throughout the history of the Church, there have been questions that have been continuously discussed, questions that still leave doubts, but when the Church decides to bind, at that point one cannot obstinately oppose a truth that the Church has already defined as the truth of faith.

In quaestio 12, St. Thomas treats the theme of apostasy.

What is apostasy?

It is the abandonment of the Faith in general. It is therefore not the opposition on one or more articles of faith, but it is the abandonment of the Faith in all its aspects. This can happen in two ways:

a- An abandonment of the adhesion of the heart

b- The abandonment of the public profession of faith by word and deed.

This means that faith can be abandoned in its entirety, not only internally but also through those external acts that no longer correspond to the true and proper faith. The two aspects cannot be separated: the internal act of faith is not enough, the external act of faith is also needed with words and actions that demonstrate this profession of faith. Think of the great temptation of the early centuries of offering the famous grain of

incense to the deity. Here one could say: I offer the grain of incense, but internally I do not adhere. But by offering the grain, or giving the external impression of an act of worship, is equivalent to apostatizing the faith even if internally one has a thousand reservations.

In the second article, St. Thomas specifies how confession of the Faith is necessary for Salvation. And he specifies that it does not mean that we must always profess our faith everywhere, but he says:

"It is necessary to do so in specific places and times, that is, when the omission of this profession of Faith would compromise the honor due to God or even to the benefit of one's neighbor". Usually, the instruction of the Faith is above all the task of the pastors of the Church, by ordinary means; but when faith is in danger, all are bound to this public profession of faith and also to curb - says St. Thomas - "the impertinence of heretics".

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