

## QUESTION 12

### Apostasy

Next we have to consider apostasy. On this topic there are two questions: (1) Does apostasy pertain to unbelief? (2) Should subjects be freed from the dominion of apostate leaders because of their apostasy from the faith?

#### Article 1

##### Does apostasy pertain to unbelief?

It seems that apostasy (*apostasia*) does not pertain to unbelief:

**Objection 1:** That which is a principle of every sin does not seem to pertain to unbelief, since many sins exist without unbelief. But apostasy seems to be a principle of every sin; for Ecclesiasticus 10:14 says, “The beginning of man’s pride is apostasy from God.” And later on it adds, “The beginning of every sin is pride” (10:15). Therefore, apostasy does not pertain to unbelief.

**Objection 2:** Unbelief exists in the intellect. But apostasy seems rather to consist in an exterior act or pronouncement, or even in an interior act of will; for Proverbs 6:12-14 says, “A man that is an apostate, an unprofitable man, walking with a perverse mouth. He winks with his eyes, presses with his foot, speaks with his finger. With a wicked heart he devises evil, and at all times he sows discord.” In addition, if anyone were to circumcise himself or to worship the tomb of Mohammed, he would be considered an apostate. Therefore, apostasy does not pertain directly to unbelief.

**Objection 3:** Since heresy pertains to unbelief, it is a certain determinate species of unbelief. Therefore, if apostasy pertained to unbelief, it would follow that it is a certain determinate species of unbelief. But this does not seem to be the case, given what was said above (q. 10, a. 5). Therefore, apostasy does not pertain to unbelief.

**But contrary to this:** John 6:67 says, “Many of His disciples went back ...,” i.e., apostatized, and our Lord had previously said of them, “There are some of you who do not believe” (6:65). Therefore, apostasy pertains to unbelief.

**I respond:** Apostasy implies some sort of backing away from God (*importat retrocessionem quandam a Deo*). This happens in different ways, corresponding to the different ways in which a man is joined to God. For a man is joined to God, *first*, through *faith*; *second*, through a *fitting and submissive act of willing to obey His commands*; and *third*, through *certain special things pertaining to supererogation*, e.g., religious life, the clerical state, or Holy Orders. If what is later among these is removed, what is prior remains, but not vice versa.

Thus, it is possible for someone to apostatize from God by withdrawing from the religious life that he has professed, or from the Orders that he has received, and this is called ‘apostasy from religious life’ or ‘apostasy from Orders’.

It is likewise possible for someone to apostatize from God through a mental rebellion against God’s commands (*per mentem repugnantem divinis mandatis*).

However, if he withdraws from faith, then he seems to be backing away from God altogether. And so apostasy, simply and absolutely speaking, is that through which one walks away from faith; and this is called ‘apostasy of faithlessness’ (*apostasia perfidei*). And it is in this sense that apostasy, absolutely speaking, pertains to unbelief.

**Reply to objection 1:** This objection is talking about the second sort of apostasy, which implies a act of willing to recoil from God’s commands and which is found in every mortal sin.

**Reply to objection 2:** What pertains to faith is not only the ‘belief of the heart’ (*credulitas cordis*), but also the public declaration of interior faith through words and deeds; for instance, confessing is an act of faith. And, likewise, certain exterior words or works belong to unbelief insofar as they are signs of

unbelief, in the way that what is healthy is a sign of health.

Now even if the adduced passage can be understood to apply to all sorts of apostasy, it nonetheless applies most truly to apostasy from faith. For since faith is the “first foundation of the things to be hoped for,” and since “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:1 and 6), when faith is removed, nothing profitable (*nihil utile*) for eternal salvation remains in a man. And it is because of this that the passage says, first of all, “The man who is an apostate, an unprofitable man” (*homo apostata vir inutilis*). Faith is also the life of the soul—this according to Romans 1:17 (“The just man lives through faith”). Therefore, just as, when bodily life is removed, all the members and parts of a man withdraw from their fitting disposition, so when the life of justice, which exists through faith, is removed, then disorder appears in all the members: first of all, in the mouth, through which the heart is especially manifested; second, in the eyes; third, in the instruments of movement; and fourth, in the will, which tends toward what is bad. And from this it follows that “he sows discord,” intending to separate others from faith, just as he himself has withdrawn.

**Reply to objection 3:** The species of a quality or form is not diversified by its being the *terminus a quo* or the *terminus ad quem* of a movement, but rather, conversely, the species of the movements follow upon their endpoints.

Now apostasy is related to unbelief insofar as unbelief is the *terminus ad quem* of the movement of one who is withdrawing from faith. Hence, apostasy does not constitute a determinate species of unbelief, but is instead a certain aggravating circumstance of unbelief—this according to 2 Peter 2:21 (“It would have been better for them not to have known the truth than, once having known it, to turn back”).

## Article 2

### Does a ruler, because of his apostasy, lose dominion over his subjects in such a way that they are not obligated to obey him?

It seems that a ruler, because of his apostasy, does not lose dominion over his subjects in such a way that they are not obligated to obey him:

**Objection 1:** Ambrose says, “Even though the Emperor Julian was an apostate, he still had Christian soldiers under him, and when he said to them, ‘Draw your battle line in defense of the republic’, they obeyed him.” Therefore, subjects are not freed from a ruler’s dominion because of his apostasy.

**Objection 2:** An apostate from the Faith is a non-believer. But some holy men have faithfully served non-believing rulers, in the way that Joseph served Pharaoh and Daniel served Nebuchadnezzar and Mordechai served Ahasuerus. Therefore, one should reject the notion that a ruler need not be obeyed by his subjects because of his apostasy from the Faith.

**Objection 3:** Just as one withdraws from God through apostasy from the Faith, so one withdraws from God through any sin whatsoever. Therefore, if rulers lost their right to command believing subjects because of their apostasy from the Faith, then, by parity of reasoning, they would lose it because of other sins. But this is clearly false. Therefore, one should not stop obeying rulers because of their apostasy from the Faith.

**But contrary to this:** Gregory says, “Holding to the statutes of our holy predecessors, we, by our apostolic authority, absolve from their oath those who owe allegiance through loyalty or oath to excommunicated individuals, and we forbid them to maintain loyalty to them in any way until such time as they have made satisfaction.” But as the Decretal *Ad abolendam* states, apostates from the Faith are, like heretics, excommunicated. Therefore, one should not obey rulers who have apostatized from the Faith.

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 10, a. 10), unbelief is not in its own right incompatible with dominion, because dominion was introduced through the law of the nations, i.e., human law, whereas the distinction between the faithful and the non-believers follows upon divine law, which does not remove human law. However, someone who sins through unbelief can be officially sentenced to lose the right of dominion (*potest sententialiter ius dominii amittere*), as sometimes happens because of sins other than unbelief.

Now it does not belong to the Church to punish unbelief in those individuals who have never accepted the Faith—this according to the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 5:12 (“What is it to me to judge those who are outsiders?”). However, she is able to punish by official determination (*sententialiter*) the unbelief of those who have accepted the Faith. And it is appropriate that they be punished by not being able to rule over the faithful among their subjects, since such rule could lead to a great corruption of the Faith. For as has been explained (a. 1), “A man that is an apostate ... devises evil in his heart and sows discord,” intending to separate men from the Faith. And so as soon as someone is pronounced, by an official sentence, to be excommunicated because of his apostasy from the Faith, then by that very fact his subjects are freed from his dominion and from the oath of fidelity by which they are bound to him.

**Reply to objection 1:** At the time in question, the Church in her youthfulness did not yet have the power to hold rulers in check. And so she tolerated the faithful obeying Julian the Apostate in those matters that were not contrary to the Faith, and this in order that a greater danger to the Faith might be avoided.

**Reply to objection 2:** As has been explained, there is a different line of reasoning for the case of non-believers who have never accepted the faith.

**Reply to objection 3:** As has been explained (a. 1), apostasy from the Faith totally separates a man from God. This does not occur with any other sins.