

QUESTION 42

Sedition

We next have to consider sedition (*seditio*). And on this topic there are two questions: (1) Is sedition a special sin? (2) Is sedition a mortal sin?

Article 1

Is sedition a special sin distinct from other sins?

It seems that sedition is not a special sin distinct from other sins:

Objection 1: As Isidore says in *Etymologia*, “The seditious individual is someone who creates dissension among minds and engenders discord.” But when someone provokes a sin, he does not sin by any genus of sin other than the one that he provokes. Therefore, it seems that sedition is not a special sin distinct from discord.

Objection 2: Sedition implies a certain sort of division. But as was explained above (q. 39, a. 1), the name ‘schism’ is similarly taken from ‘scissor’. Therefore the sin of sedition does not seem to be distinct from the sin of schism.

Objection 3: Every special sin that is distinct from other sins either is itself a capital vice or takes its origin from some capital sin. But as is clear from *Moralia* 31, where both sorts of vices are enumerated, sedition is counted neither among the capital vices nor among the vices that arise from the capital vices. Therefore, sedition is not a sin distinct from other sins.

But contrary to this: In 2 Corinthians 12:20 acts of sedition (*seditiones*) are distinguished from other sins.

I respond: Sedition is a special sin that shares something in common with war and strife, but differs from them in certain respects.

It agrees with them in implying a sort of disagreement (*importat quandam contradictionem*).

On the other hand, it differs from them in two ways:

First, war and strife imply actual mutual fighting, whereas something can be called sedition regardless of whether there is actual fighting of this sort or just a preparation for such fighting. Hence, a Gloss on 2 Corinthians 12:20 says that acts of sedition are “disturbances leading up to fighting,” viz., when someone prepares himself to fight and intends to fight.

Second, they differ because war properly speaking is against strangers and enemies, and it involves, as it were, a multitude against a multitude, whereas strife is one against one or a few against a few. Sedition, on the other hand, occurs between the parts of a single multitude disagreeing among themselves, e.g., when one part of a city is incited to a disturbance against another part.

And so the reason why sedition is a special sin is that it has a special good to which it is opposed, viz., the unity and peace of a multitude.

Reply to objection 1: A seditious individual is one who engenders sedition. And given that sedition involves a type of discord, the seditious individual is one who creates not just any kind of discord, but discord between the parts of a given multitude. Moreover, the sin of sedition exists not only in the one who plants the seeds of discord, but also in those who dissent from one another in a disordered way.

Reply to objection 2: There are two ways in which sedition differs from schism.

First, schism is opposed to the spiritual unity of a multitude, i.e., ecclesiastical unity, whereas sedition is opposed to the temporal or secular unity of a multitude, viz., the unity of a city or of a kingdom.

Second, schism does not imply any preparation for a corporeal fight but implies only spiritual dissension, whereas sedition involves preparing for a corporeal fight.

Reply to objection 3: Sedition, like schism, falls under discord. For both of them are types of

discord, not of one individual with respect to another individual, but of the parts of a multitude with respect to one another.

Article 2

Is sedition always a mortal sin?

It seems that sedition is not always a mortal sin:

Objection 1: As is clear from the Gloss cited above (a. 1), sedition implies a disturbance that tends toward fighting. But as was established above (q. 40, a. 1 and q. 41, a. 1), fighting is sometimes just and permissible and not always a mortal sin. Therefore, *a fortiori*, sedition can exist without mortal sin.

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 1), sedition is a certain type of discord. But discord can exist without mortal sin and sometimes even without venial sin. Therefore, the same holds for sedition.

Objection 3: Those who liberate a multitude from a tyrannical power are praised. But this cannot be easily done without some dissension within the multitude, where one part of the multitude is trying to retain the tyrant, while another part is trying to overthrow him. Therefore, sedition can be committed without sin.

But contrary to this: 2 Corinthians 12:20 prohibits acts of sedition along with other things that are mortal sins. Therefore, sedition is a mortal sin.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), sedition is opposed to the unity of a multitude, i.e., of a people or city or kingdom. Now in *De Civitate Dei* 2 Augustine says the wise define a people to be “not just any assembly of a multitude, but an assembly united by a consensus of law and a communion of welfare.” Hence, it is clear that the unity that sedition is opposed to is a unity of law and communal welfare. It is therefore clear that sedition is opposed to both justice and the common good. And so it is a mortal sin by its genus, and it is a graver sin to the extent that the common good, which is attacked by sedition, is a greater good than a private good, which is attacked by strife.

Now the sin of sedition belongs first and principally to those who provoke the sedition and who sin the most seriously, whereas it belongs in the second place to the ones who follow them and disturb the common good. By contrast, those who resist them and defend the common good should not be called seditious—in the same way that, as noted above (q. 41, a. 1), those who defend themselves are not called pugnacious (*rixosi*).

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (q. 40, a. 1) the sort of fighting that is permissible is done on behalf of the common good. But sedition is perpetrated against the common good of the multitude. Hence, it is always a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 2: Discord with respect to what is not manifestly good can exist without sin. But discord with respect to what is manifestly good cannot exist without sin. And sedition is this sort of discord; for sedition is opposed to the welfare of the multitude (*opponitur utilitati multitudinis*), which is manifestly good.

Reply to objection 3: As is clear from Philosopher in *Politics* 3 and *Ethics* 8, a tyrannical regime is not a just regime, since it is ordered not toward the common good, but toward the private good of the ruler. And disturbing this sort of regime does not have the character of sedition—unless perhaps when the tyrant’s regime is disturbed in such a disordered way that the multitude suffers a greater loss from the ensuing chaos than it does from the tyrant’s rule. It is instead the tyrant who is seditious and who feeds discord and sedition among the people subject to him, so that he can more securely dominate them. For a regime is tyrannical when it is ordered toward the proper good of the ruler accompanied by harm to the multitude.