

## St. Thomas Aquinas

# The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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### IRRELIGION, i.e. BY WAY OF DEFICIENCY (Questions [97]-102)

#### OF THE TEMPTATION OF GOD (FOUR ARTICLES)

We must now consider the vices that are opposed to religion, through lack of religion, and which are manifestly contrary thereto, so that they come under the head of irreligion. Such are the vices which pertain to contempt or irreverence for God and holy things. Accordingly we shall consider: (1) Vices pertaining directly to irreverence for God; (2) Vices pertaining to irreverence for holy things. With regard to the first we shall consider the temptation whereby God is tempted, and perjury, whereby God's name is taken with irreverence. Under the first head there are four points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) In what the temptation of God consists;
  - [\(2\)](#) Whether it is a sin?
  - [\(3\)](#) To what virtue it is opposed;
  - [\(4\)](#) Of its comparison with other vices.
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**Whether the temptation of God consists in certain deeds, wherein the expected result is ascribed to the power of God alone?**

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wherein the result is expected from the power of God alone. Just as God is tempted by man so is man tempted by God, man, and demons. But when man is tempted the result is not always expected from his power. Therefore neither is God tempted when the result is expected from His power alone.

**Objection 2:** Further, all those who work miracles by invoking the divine name look for an effect due to God's power alone. Therefore, if the temptation of God consisted in such like deeds, all who work miracles would tempt God.

**Objection 3:** Further, it seems to belong to man's perfection that he should put aside human aids and put his hope in God alone. Hence Ambrose, commenting on Lk. 9:3, "Take nothing for your journey," etc. says: "The Gospel precept points out what is required of him that announces the kingdom of God, namely, that he should not depend on worldly assistance, and that, taking assurance from his faith, he should hold himself to be the more able to provide for himself, the less he seeks these things." And the Blessed Agatha said: "I have never treated my body with bodily medicine, I have my Lord Jesus Christ, Who restores all things by His mere word." [\*Office of St. Agatha, eighth Responsory (Dominican Breviary).] But the temptation of God does not consist in anything pertaining to perfection. Therefore the temptation of God does not consist in such like deeds, wherein the help of God alone is expected.

**On the contrary,** Augustine says (Contra Faust. xxii, 36): "Christ who gave proof of God's power by teaching and reproof openly, yet not allowing the rage of His enemies to prevail against Him, nevertheless by fleeing and hiding, instructed human weakness, lest it should dare to tempt God when it has to strive to escape from that which it needs to avoid." From this it would seem that the temptation of God consists in omitting to do what one can in order to escape from danger, and relying on the assistance of God alone.

**I answer that,** Properly speaking, to tempt is to test the person tempted. Now we put a person to the test by words or by deeds. By words, that we may find out whether he knows what we ask, or whether he can and will grant it: by deeds, when, by what we do, we probe another's prudence, will or power. Either of these may happen in two ways. First, openly, as when one declares oneself a tempter: thus Samson (Judges 14:12) proposed a riddle to the Philistines in order to tempt them. In the second place it may be done with cunning and by stealth, as the Pharisees tempted Christ, as we read in Mt. 22:15, sqq. Again this is sometimes done explicitly, as when anyone intends, by word or deed, to put some person to the test; and sometimes implicitly, when, to wit, though he does not intend to test a person, yet that which he does or says can seemingly have no other purpose than putting him to a test.

Accordingly, man tempts God sometimes by words, sometimes by deeds. Now we speak with God in words when we pray. Hence a man tempts God explicitly in his prayers when he asks something of God with the intention of probing God's knowledge, power or will. He tempts God explicitly by deeds when he intends, by whatever he does, to experiment on God's power, good will or wisdom. But He will tempt God implicitly, if, though he does not intend to make an experiment on God, yet he asks for or does something which has no other use than to prove God's power, goodness or knowledge. Thus when a man wishes his horse to gallop in order to escape from the enemy, this is not giving the horse a trial: but if he make the horse gallop without any useful purpose, it seems to be nothing else than a trial of the horse's speed; and the same applies to all other things. Accordingly when a man in his prayers or deeds entrusts himself to the divine assistance for some urgent or useful motive, this is not to tempt God: for it is written (2 Paralip 20:12): "As we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to Thee." But if this be done without any useful or urgent motive, this is to tempt God implicitly.

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God, if having the means at hand, without reason he chooses a dangerous course, trying whether he can be delivered by God."

**Reply to Objection 1:** Man also is sometimes tempted by means of deeds, to test his ability or knowledge or will to uphold or oppose those same deeds.

**Reply to Objection 2:** When saints work miracles by their prayers, they are moved by a motive of necessity or usefulness to ask for that which is an effect of the divine power.

**Reply to Objection 3:** The preachers of God's kingdom dispense with temporal aids, so as to be freer to give their time to the word of God: wherefore if they depend on God alone, it does not follow that they tempt God. But if they were to neglect human assistance without any useful or urgent motive, they would be tempting God. Hence Augustine (Contra Faust. xxii, 36) says that "Paul fled, not through ceasing to believe in God, but lest he should tempt God, were he not to flee when he had the means of flight." The Blessed Agatha had experience of God's kindness towards her, so that either she did not suffer such sickness as required bodily medicine, or else she felt herself suddenly cured by God.

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## Whether it is a sin to tempt God?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that it is not a sin to tempt God. For God has not commanded sin. Yet He has commanded men to try, which is the same as to tempt, Him: for it is written (Malach. 3:10): "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in My house; and try Me in this, saith the Lord, if I open not unto you the flood-gates of heaven." Therefore it seems not to be a sin to tempt God.

**Objection 2:** Further, a man is tempted not only in order to test his knowledge and his power, but also to try his goodness or his will. Now it is lawful to test the divine goodness or will, for it is written ([Ps. 33:9](#)): "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet," and ([Rm. 12:2](#)): "That you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God." Therefore it is not a sin to tempt God.

**Objection 3:** Further, Scripture never blames a man for ceasing from sin, but rather for committing a sin. Now Achaz is blamed because when the Lord said: "Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God," he replied: "I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord," and then it was said to him: "Is it a small thing for you to be grievous to men, that you are grievous to my God also?" ([Is. 7:11-13](#)). And we read of Abraham ([Gn. 15:8](#)) that he said to the Lord: "Whereby may I know that I shall possess it?" namely, the land which God had promised him. Again Gedeon asked God for a sign of the victory promised to him (Judges 6:36, sqq.). Yet they were not blamed for so doing. Therefore it is not a sin to tempt God.

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**I answer that,** As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)), to tempt a person is to put him to a test. Now one never tests that of which one is certain. Wherefore all temptation proceeds from some ignorance or doubt, either in the tempter (as when one tests a thing in order to know its qualities), or in others (as when one tests a thing in order to prove it to others), and in this latter way God is said to tempt us. Now it is a sin to be ignorant of or to doubt that which pertains to God's perfection. Wherefore it is evident that it is a sin to tempt God in order that the tempter himself may know God's power.

On the other hand, if one were to test that which pertains to the divine perfection, not in order to know it oneself, but to prove it to others: this is not tempting God, provided there be just motive of urgency, or a pious motive of usefulness, and other requisite conditions. For thus did the apostles ask the Lord that signs might be wrought in the name of Jesus Christ, as related in Acts 4:30, in order, to wit, that Christ's power might be made manifest to unbelievers.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The paying of tithes was prescribed in the Law, as stated above ([Question \[87\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). Hence there was a motive of urgency to pay it, through the obligation of the Law, and also a motive of usefulness, as stated in the text quoted---"that there may be meat in God's house": wherefore they did not tempt God by paying tithes. The words that follow, "and try Me," are not to be understood causally, as though they had to pay tithes in order to try if "God would open the flood-gates of heaven," but consecutively, because, to wit, if they paid tithes, they would prove by experience the favors which God would shower upon them.

**Reply to Objection 2:** There is a twofold knowledge of God's goodness or will. One is speculative and as to this it is not lawful to doubt or to prove whether God's will be good, or whether God is sweet. The other knowledge of God's will or goodness is effective or experimental and thereby a man experiences in himself the taste of God's sweetness, and complacency in God's will, as Dionysius says of Hierotheos (Div. Nom. ii) that "he learnt divine thing through experience of them." It is in this way that we are told to prove God's will, and to taste His sweetness.

**Reply to Objection 3:** God wished to give a sign to Achaz, not for him alone, but for the instruction of the whole people. Hence he was reproved because, by refusing to ask a sign, he was an obstacle to the common welfare. Nor would he have tempted God by asking, both because he would have asked through God commanding him to do so, and because it was a matter relating to the common good. Abraham asked for a sign through the divine instinct, and so he did not sin. Gedeon seems to have asked a sign through weakness of faith, wherefore he is not to be excused from sin, as a gloss observes: just as Zachary sinned in saying to the angel ([Lk. 1:18](#)): "Whereby shall I know this?" so that he was punished for his unbelief.

It must be observed, however, that there are two ways of asking God for a sign: first in order to test God's power or the truth of His word, and this of its very nature pertains to the temptation of God. Secondly, in order to be instructed as to what is God's pleasure in some particular matter; and this nowise comes under the head of temptation of God.

## Whether temptation of God is opposed to the virtue of religion?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the temptation of God is not opposed to the virtue of religion. The temptation of God is sinful, because a man doubts God, as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)). Now doubt about God comes under the head of unbelief, which is opposed to faith. Therefore temptation of God is opposed to faith rather than to religion.

**Objection 2:** Further, it is written (Ecclus. 18:23): "Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God. Such a man," that is, who tempts God, says the interlinear gloss, "prays for what God taught him to pray for, yet does not what God has commanded him to do." Now this pertains to imprudence which is opposed to hope. Therefore it seems that temptation of God is a sin opposed to hope.

**Objection 3:** Further, a gloss on Ps. 77:18, "And they tempted God in their hearts," says that "to tempt God is to pray to Him deceitfully, with simplicity in our words and wickedness in our hearts." Now deceit is opposed to the virtue of truth. Therefore temptation of God is opposed, not to religion, but to truth.

**On the contrary,** According to the gloss quoted above "to tempt God is to pray to Him inordinately." Now to pray to God becomingly is an act of religion as stated above ([Question \[83\]](#), [Article \[15\]](#)). Therefore to tempt God is a sin opposed to religion.

**I answer that,** As clearly shown above ([Question \[81\]](#), [Article \[5\]](#)), the end of religion is to pay reverence to God. Wherefore whatever pertains directly to irreverence for God is opposed to religion. Now it is evident that to tempt a person pertains to irreverence for him: since no one presumes to tempt one of whose excellence he is sure. Hence it is manifest that to tempt God is a sin opposed to religion.

**Reply to Objection 1:** As stated above ([Question \[81\]](#), [Article \[7\]](#)), it belongs to religion to declare one's faith by certain signs indicative of reverence towards God. Consequently it belongs to irreligion that, through doubtful faith, a man does things indicative of irreverence towards God. To tempt God is one of these; wherefore it is a species of irreligion.

**Reply to Objection 2:** He that prepares not his soul before prayer by forgiving those against whom he has anything, or in some other way disposing himself to devotion, does not do what he can to be heard by God, wherefore he tempts God implicitly as it were. And though this implicit temptation would seem to arise from presumption or indiscretion, yet the very fact that a man behaves presumptuously and without due care in matters relating to God implies irreverence towards Him. For it is written ([1 Pt. 5:6](#)): "Be you humbled... under the mighty hand of God," and ([2 Tim. 2:15](#)): "Carefully study to present thyself approved unto God." Therefore also this kind of temptation is a species of irreligion.

**Reply to Objection 3:** A man is said to pray deceitfully, not in relation to God, Who knows the secrets of the heart, but in relation to man. Wherefore deceit is accidental to the temptation of God, and consequently it does not follow that to tempt God is directly opposed to the truth.

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## Whether the temptation of God is a graver sin than superstition?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the temptation of God is a graver sin than superstition. The greater sin receives the greater punishment. Now the sin of tempting God was more severely punished in the Jews than was the sin of idolatry; and yet the latter is the chief form of superstition: since for the sin of idolatry three thousand men of their number were slain, as related in Ex. 32:28 [\*Septuagint version. The Vulgate has "twenty-three thousand."], whereas for the sin of temptation they all without exception perished in the desert, and entered not into the land of promise, according to Ps. 94:9, "Your fathers tempted Me," and further on, "so I swore in My wrath that they should not enter into My rest." Therefore to tempt God is a graver sin than superstition.

**Objection 2:** Further, the more a sin is opposed to virtue the graver it would seem to be. Now irreligion, of which the temptation of God is a species, is more opposed to the virtue of religion, than superstition which bears some likeness to religion. Therefore to tempt God is a graver sin than superstition.

**Objection 3:** Further, it seems to be a greater sin to behave disrespectfully to one's parents, than to pay others the respect we owe to our parents. Now God should be honored by us as the Father of all (Malach. 1:6). Therefore. temptation of God whereby we behave irreverently to God, seems to be a greater sin than idolatry, whereby we give to a creature the honor we owe to God.

**On the contrary,** A gloss on Dt. 17:2, "When there shall be found among you," etc. says: "The Law detests error and idolatry above all: for it is a very great sin to give to a creature the honor that belongs to the Creator."

**I answer that,** Among sins opposed to religion, the more grievous is that which is the more opposed to the reverence due to God. Now it is less opposed to this reverence that one should doubt the divine excellence than that one should hold the contrary for certain. For just as a man is more of an unbeliever if he be confirmed in his error, than if he doubt the truth of faith, so, too, a man acts more against the reverence due to God, if by his deeds he professes an error contrary to the divine excellence, than if he expresses a doubt. Now the superstitious man professes an error, as shown above ([Question \[94\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#), ad 1), whereas he who tempts God by words or deeds expresses a doubt of the divine excellence, as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)). Therefore the sin of superstition is graver than the sin of tempting God.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The sin of idolatry was not punished in the above manner, as though it were a sufficient punishment; because a more severe punishment was reserved in the future for that sin, for it is written ([Ex. 32:34](#)): "And I, in the day of revenge, will visit this sin also of theirs."

**Reply to Objection 2:** Superstition bears a likeness to religion, as regards the material act which it pays just as religion does. But, as regards the end, it is more contrary to religion than

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***Reply to Objection 3:*** It belongs essentially to the divine excellence that it is singular and incommunicable. Consequently to give divine reverence to another is the same as to do a thing opposed to the divine excellence. There is no comparison with the honor due to our parents, which can without sin be given to others.