ON THE FALL OF THE DEVIL

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1. The verse ‘What do you have that you have not received?’ applies to angels too; from God come only good and being and every good is being and every being is good

Student. Does the phrase from St Paul, ‘What do you have that you have not received?’ [1 Cor. 4: 7], apply only to men or to angels as well?

Teacher. No creature has anything of itself. How can something that does not have being of itself, have anything of itself? In short, if there is only one who creates and whatever is created is from that one, it is clear that he who creates and what he has created is all there is.

S. That is clear.

T. Also, the Creator himself and what has been created can only be from that same Creator.

S. That too is clear.

T. He alone has of himself all that he has, while other things have nothing of themselves. And other things, having nothing of themselves, have their only reality from him.
S. I do not quite see what you mean by ‘other things have their only reality from him’. For who else brings it about that the many things we see pass from being to non-being are not what they were even if they do not pass wholly into nothingness? Or who else makes something not to be save the one who makes whatever is to be? Again, if something is only because God makes it, it is necessary that what is not is not because he does not make it. For just as the things which are from him have some being, so the things which are not or which pass from being to non-being have it from him that they are nothing.

T. It is not only the one who makes that which was not, to be, or that which is, not to be, who is said to make a thing to be or not to be. He who could bring it about that something is not, yet does not do so, is said to make it be, and he who could make something be, yet does not, is said to make it not be. Just as both he who strips someone and he who could prevent this but does not are said to cause someone to be nude or undressed. But the former is properly said to cause it and the latter improperly. When the latter is said to make another nude or unclothed, all that is meant is that when he could have he did not bring it about that the other was not stripped or remained dressed.

In this way God is said to do many things that he does not, as when he is said to lead us into temptation when he does not prevent temptation that he could, and to cause what is not since he could make it be and does not. But if you consider the things which pass into non-being, you will see that it is not God who causes them not to be. For not only is there no essence he does not make, but nothing he does make could last if he did not preserve it, for when he stops preserving what he made, it is not the case that he turns what was a being into non-being, as if he caused non-being, but only that he stops causing it to be. And even when in anger, as it were, he destroys something by taking away its existence, the non-being is not from him; rather when God’s creative and preserving causality is removed, the thing reverts to the non-being it had of itself before it was created and does not have from God. If you were to ask someone for the cloak you had lent when he was naked, he does not receive his nakedness from you, but by the fact that you take back what is yours, he reverts to the condition that was his before you clothed him. Indeed, just as from the highest good only good comes, so from the highest being only being comes, and all being comes from the highest being.
Since the highest good is the highest being, it follows that every good is being and every being is good. Hence nothing and non-being do not come from God, from whom come only good and being.

S. I clearly see now that just as good and being are from God alone, so only good and being come from God.

T. Take care not to think, since we read in Sacred Scripture (or say in quoting it) that God causes evil or non-being, that I am criticizing or denying what is said there. But, in reading Scripture, we ought not to attend so much to the impropriety of the words that covers truth as pay attention to the propriety of the truth that is hidden under various kinds of verbal expression.

S. To do what you suggest would occur only to someone stupid or desirous of cavilling over Scripture.

T. Let us turn the discussion back to where it began and see if it can be maintained that only man, and not the angel, has all that he has from God.

S. It is obvious that the phrase applies to angels as well as men.

2. Why it seems that the devil lacked perseverance because God did not give it to him

S. It follows that the angel who perseveres in truth, does so because he has perseverance, and he has that because he received it, and he received it because God gave it to him. It also follows that he 'who does not persevere in the truth' [John 8: 44] does not persevere because he does not have perseverance, and he does not have it because he did not receive it, and he did not receive it because God did not give it to him. So tell me what his fault is, seeing that he did not persevere because he was not given perseverance, without which gift he could do nothing. I am in fact certain, unless I misunderstand, that the devil could only be justly damned by him who is supremely just and he could not be justly damned if the fault was not his.

T. Why do you conclude from the fact that the good angel receives perseverance because God gave it to him, that the bad angel does not receive it because God does not give it to him?

S. From this: if for the good angel the giving is the reason for its having received, the reason the bad angel lacks the gift will be that he has not received it; and given that the giving has not taken place, it follows necessarily that he has not received it. Indeed, we all know
that when we do not receive what we want, its not being given is not a result of our not receiving it, but we do not receive it because it is not given. Those who raise this question do so, as far as I can see, because of this argument: If the good angel received perseverance because God gave it to him, then the bad angel did not receive it because God did not give it to him. I do not remember ever having heard a response to this.

3. That God did not give it because he did not accept it

T. But that does not follow. It can be the case that something’s not being received is not explained by the fact that it was not given, even though the giving is always the cause of receiving.

S. Then, given the not-giving, it is not necessary that not-receiving follow, and then there could be a receiving even where there is no giving.

T. Not so.

S. Give me an example.

T. If I offer you something and you take it, my giving does not derive from your receiving, but you receive it because I offer it, and the giving is the cause of the receiving.

S. Right.

T. What if I offer the same thing to someone else and he does not take it? Is it because I do not give that he does not take?

S. It seems rather that you are said not to give it to him because he does not take it.

T. So here it is not non-giving that is the cause of the not-taking, whereas were I to imagine myself not to have given, that would indeed be the cause of your not receiving. It is one thing for something to be the cause of something else and another that, given the thing, something else does not follow. Burning is not the cause of the fire, but fire the cause of burning, but given burning, it is always the case that there is fire.

S. I will grant you that.

T. Do you see then that, if you have received because I have given, it does not follow that he who has not received has not received because I did not give to him, yet it follows logically that, if I had not given, he would not have received?

S. Happily I do see that.
T. Do you still doubt that just as an angel who perseveres does so because he accepts the perseverance that God gives him, so the angel who does not persevere is not given perseverance by God because he does not take it?

S. There is still something I do not understand. You have enabled me to see sufficiently only this, that, from the fact that the good angel receives because God gives, it does not follow that the bad angel did not receive because God did not offer it to him. If you indeed want to say that God did not give him the gift of perseverance because he did not receive it, I ask you why he does not take it. Either this is because he did not have the capacity or because he did not want to. If he did not have the capacity or the will to take it, God did not give it to him. And if God did give it to him, it is certain he would have had it. But if he cannot have the capacity or the will to accept perseverance save as a gift from God, in what did he sin by not taking that for which God did not give him either the capacity or the will to receive?

T. But God did give him the will and the capacity to receive perseverance.

S. Then he received what God gave him and he had what he received.

T. He received it and he had it.

S. Then he received and had perseverance.

T. He did not accept it and therefore did not have it.

S. But did you not say that God gave and that he received the will and capacity to accept perseverance?

T. Yes. But I did not say that God gave him the acceptance of perseverance, but only the will and the ability to accept it.

S. But if he willed to and could, he received perseverance.

T. The conclusion does not follow necessarily.

S. I do not see why if you will not show me.

T. Have you never undertaken something with the will and the capacity to carry it out and then not done so because you changed your mind before completing it?

S. Often.

T. Then you could have wanted to persevere in that in which effectively you did not persevere.

S. I willed but did not persevere in my desire and thus did not persevere in the activity.
T. Why did you not persevere in the desire?
S. Because I did not want to.
T. And yet as long as you did will to persevere in the activity, you willed to persevere in that will?
S. I cannot deny that.
T. Why then say that you did not will to persevere in that willing?
S. I would answer again that I wanted to persevere, but did not persevere in that willing, if I did not see the prospect of an infinite regress, with you forever asking me the same thing and I always answering the same.
T. Then you should not say, ‘I did not will to persevere in willing because I did not will to persevere or to will my willing’. When you are asked why you did not persevere in the action that you had willed and could persevere in, answer, ‘Because I did not persevere in willing it’. And if you are asked why you have not persevered in willing it, you should introduce another motive for the defect of that willing, and not the not persevering in the will to will. For your answer only repeats what was asked, that is, you did not persevere in the will to persevere in the activity.
S. I see that I did not understand what I was saying.
T. So tell me in a word what is persevering in the doing of something, as the argument requires.
S. I want to say, to bring it to term, to complete it.
T. Let us then say, in a similar fashion, that to persevere is to will it all the way.
S. All right.
T. When then you do not bring to term what you willed and could do, why did you not bring it to term?
S. Because I did not will it all the way.
T. Let us similarly say that the devil, who had the will and the capacity to receive perseverance and the will and the capacity to persevere, did not receive perseverance and did not persevere because he did not will it all the way.
S. But I will ask you again why he did not will it all the way. For when you say that he did not will all the way what he willed, that is like saying: what he willed before he did not will later. Why then is it the case that he no longer wills what he willed before, except that he does not have the will? I do not mean the will that he had before, when he willed, but the one he no longer has, when he does not will.
Why does he not have this will, save because he did not receive it? And why did he not receive it, except because God did not give it?

T. I say again: it is not the case that he does not have it because God did not give it, but God does not give it because he has not accepted it.

S. Show me that.

T. He freely abandons the will he had and, just as he accepted having it as long as he had it, so he was able to accept the hanging on to what he abandoned and because he abandoned it he does not accept it. Therefore, his not accepting to hang on to what he abandoned is not because God did not give it, but God did not give it because he did not accept it.

S. But is it not clear that he does not will to keep it because he abandoned it, but he abandons it because he does not want to keep it? When something is had, not wanting to keep it precedes abandoning it, and one wills to let something go because he does not want to keep it.

T. The will to retain is not always prior to the will to abandon.

S. Show me when it is not.

T. When you do not want to retain something for its own sake but let it go, like a burning coal in the bare hand; then perhaps the not wishing to hang on to it is prior to the desire to abandon it, and thus you wish to abandon because you do not wish to retain. Before you have it, in fact, you do not want to hold it in your hand, and you could not let go of it before you had it. But when you hold something only for the sake of something else, you want to abandon it only for the sake of something else, and you want more the other thing that you cannot have unless you abandon what you have, then the will to abandon is prior to not wanting to retain. For when the miser wills to keep his money and prefers food which he can only have if he gives up some money, his will to give or abandon the money comes before his willing not to keep it. For he does not will to give because he does not will to keep it, but he wills not to keep it because he has to give it in order to get food. Prior to having money, he wants to have and keep it, and, when he has, it is not the case that he does not will to keep it when there is no need to let it go.

S. That is true.

T. So not wanting to keep does not always precede letting go, but sometimes wanting to let go comes first.
S. I cannot deny it.

T. So I say that the devil did not will what he should have willed when he should have willed it, not because he lacked the will (and lacked it because God did not give it to him), but because, willing what he ought not to have willed, he drove out the good will when the bad will supervened. Therefore God did not give him the good will to persevere, and he did not receive it, not because God did not give it, but on the contrary, God did not give it because he gave up willing what he should have willed, by abandoning and not retaining it.

S. I grasp what you say.

4. How he sinned and wanted to be like God

T. Do you still doubt that the devil did not will to keep what he had because he willed to abandon it and not vice versa, that is, that he willed to abandon what he had because he did not wish to keep it?

S. I do not doubt that it could be that way, but you have not yet made me certain that it was. First show what he wished to keep that he did not have, in order that he might will to abandon what he had, as you showed in the case of the miser. Then if nothing can be shown to contradict it, I will confess that I do not doubt.

T. You do not doubt that he sinned, because he could not be unjustly condemned by a just God, but you are asking how he sinned?

S. Yes.

T. If he had served justice with perseverance, he would neither sin nor be unhappy.

S. So we believe.

T. No one serves justice except by willing what he ought, nor abandons it save by willing what he ought not.

S. No one doubts that.

T. Therefore by willing something that at the time he ought not to will, he abandoned justice and thus sinned.

S. That follows, but I am asking what he willed.

T. Whatever he had, he should have willed.

S. Certainly he should have willed everything that he had received from God, nor could he have sinned by willing that.
T. Hence he willed something that he did not have and that he ought not to have willed then, as Eve willed to be like a god before God willed it.

S. I cannot deny that either.

T. But the only things he could will were justice, or what was useful to himself or the fitting. ¹ And happiness, to which every creature aspires, is constituted by the fitting.

S. We can see this in ourselves, since we do in fact will only that which we see as just or pleasant.

T. The devil certainly could not have sinned by willing justice.

S. True.

T. So he sinned by willing something that pleased him and that he did not have and that he should not then have willed, but that could increase his happiness.

S. He could not sin in any other way.

T. And you recognize, I think, that, by inordinately willing more than he had received, his will exceeded the limits of justice.

S. I see clearly now that the devil sinned either by willing what he should not have or by willing what he should have. And it is evident enough that he willed more than what he should have, not because he did not will to maintain justice, but he did not maintain justice because he willed something else, something that required the abandonment of justice, as you have helped me see in the example of the miser apropos of money and food.

T. And when he willed what God did not want him to will, he inordinately willed to be like God.

S. But if God can only be thought of as unique, as that than which nothing greater can be thought, how could the devil will what he could not think? He was not so obtuse of mind that he failed to know that nothing other than God can be thought to be like him.

T. Even if he did not will to be wholly equal to God, but something less than God against the will of God, by that very fact he inordinately willed to be like God, because he willed something by his own will, as subject to no one. It is for God alone thus to will something by his own will such that he follows no higher will.

S. So it is.

T. Not only did he will to be equal to God in presuming to have

¹ The Latin is commodum. An Italian translator renders this as piacere. Sometimes 'pleasant' will be used when the context seems to support it.
his own will, but he even willed to be greater by willing what God did not want him to will, because he put his own will above God's.

S. I do not think anything could be clearer.

T. Therefore although the good angel accepted perseverance because God gave it, the bad angel did not receive it, not because God did not give it, but God did not give it because he did not receive it, and therefore he did not receive it because he did not will to.

S. You have responded so satisfactorily to what I asked that I cannot waver as to the truth of what you say or the rigour of your proof.

5. That before the bad angels fell the good angels could sin

T. Do you think that the good angels too could sin, before the bad angels fell?

S. I think so, but I would like an argument to that effect.

T. You know for certain that if they had not been able to sin, they would have served justice necessarily, not freely. But then they would not have merited from God the grace to be saved while the others fell, since they would have retained a rationality they could not have lost.

S. So reason shows.

T. Therefore [if that were the case], those who fell, if they had not sinned but could have, would have been so much greater than the others and more truly just and would have merited grace from God. From which it would follow that the elect among men would be better and higher than the good angels and would not substitute for the reprobate angels because men who take their place would not be as they should have been.

S. So those suppositions have to be rejected.

T. And the good angels could have sinned prior to the fall of the bad, in just the way that we have shown that the latter did in fact sin.

S. I do not see how it could be otherwise.

6. How the good are confirmed in their condition and the evil in their fallen state

T. Therefore, the angels that loved the justice that they had, rather than the more that they did not have, received as reward in justice that
good their will renounced out of love of justice, and they remained in secure possession of what they had. And they were so elevated that they could have whatever they willed and not see what more they could have willed, and thus they cannot sin. But those who preferred to the stability of the justice in which they had been created what God did not yet will to give them according to his just decision, lost the good that they had and did not obtain that which induced them to depreciate justice. Thus the angels are divided into those who, adhering to justice, can enjoy all the goods they will, and those who, having abandoned justice, are deprived of whatever good they desire.

S. Nothing could be more just nor beautiful than this distinction. But if you can tell me, I would like to hear what the advantage was that the good angels justly renounced, thereby achieving perfection, and that the bad angels, by unjustly desiring, fell.

T. I do not know what it could have been, but whatever it was, it is sufficient to know that it was something that could have increased their greatness and which they had not received when they were created, in order that they might achieve it by merit.

S. Then we have looked into this matter sufficiently.

7. The question whether the will and its turning toward what it should not is the very evil that makes them bad, and why it is that a rational creature cannot of himself turn from evil to good as he could from good to evil

S. But I do not know how it is that, when I want to think we have exhausted the question, I then see other problems germinating, so to say, from the roots of the question resolved. Indeed, although I see clearly that the perverse angel could not have fallen into an immoderate demand of the good except through some immoderate desire, I am not a little worried as to whence comes this immoderate will. For if he was good, then he fell from so much good into so much evil on account of a good will. Again, if he was good, God gave it to him to be so, since he had nothing of himself. Therefore, if he willed what God gave him to will, how did he sin? Or if he had this will of himself, he had some good that he did not receive. But if it is evil, it is something, and so again it seems that it can only be from God, from whom is everything that is something. So too it can be asked how he sinned by having the will that God gave him, or how God
could give him an evil will. Therefore if this evil will was from the devil himself, and is something, he has something of himself and not every essence is good, nor will evil be nothing, as we are wont to say, since a bad will is something. Or, if a bad will is nothing, he was gravely damned on account of nothing and for no reason. And what I say of will can be said of concupiscence or desire, since both concupiscence and desire are instances of willing, and just as there is a good and bad will, there is a good and bad concupiscence and a good and bad desire.

But if it is said that the will is a thing and is good when it turns to that which it ought to will, and is called an evil will when it turns to what it should not, it seems to me that what has been said of the will can be said of the turnings of the will. I am also puzzled when I consider this inclination to evil on the part of the will, because God makes such a nature, that he then raised to such a height, capable of turning from what it ought, yet incapable of returning to what it ought after having turned away, since it seems that such a creature ought to have from its Creator the power to do the good for which it was created rather than the evil it was created to avoid. This is something that can also be asked of our nature, since we believe that no man can have a single good will except as a gift from God, while he can always have a bad will if God should only permit it.

8. That the will and its turning are not evil itself

T. I do not think it can be denied that either the will or the turning of the will are real [things]. For although they are not substances, they cannot be shown not to be essences, since there are many essences besides what are properly called substances. Nor is a good will more real than a bad will, nor more good than the other is evil. For the will to give mercifully is not more real than the will to take violently, nor is the latter more evil than the former is good. If then an evil will is the same evil thanks to which one is called evil, the good will will be the same good whereby one is called good. But a bad will will be nothing if it is the very evil that we believe to be nothing. Therefore a good will will be nothing, since it is no more real than a bad will. And then we will not be able to deny that the good itself whereby the good are good is nothing, since it is a good will that will be nothing. But no one doubts that it is false that a good
will or good itself is nothing. Therefore a bad will is not itself the evil which makes men evil, just as a good will is not itself the good which makes men good.

What I have said of will can also be said of the inclination of will. The conversion from theft to giving is no greater than that which converts the same will from generosity to avarice. And so too for the other things that I said of the will.

S. What you say is what I too think.

T. Therefore neither a bad will nor a depraved conversion of will is the very evil whereby an angel or man becomes evil, which we say to be nothing, nor a good will or a good conversion of will the good whereby they become good.

9. That injustice is evil itself and is nothing

S. So what is the evil that makes them bad and the good that makes them good?

T. We should hold that justice is the good whereby they are good or just, both angels and men, and that whereby the will itself is called good and just; and injustice is the evil that is only a privation of the good, and makes angels and men bad and makes their will bad. So we should say that injustice is nothing but the privation of justice. As long as the will originally given to a rational nature is simultaneously oriented to its rectitude by the same act with which God gives it, thus not only inclined to rectitude, but created right, that is, oriented to what it ought do, as long as, I say, the will remains in that rectitude that we call truth or justice, it was just. But when it distanced itself from what it ought and turned against it, it did not remain in the original rectitude in which it was created. And when it abandoned it, it lost something great, and acquired in exchange only the privation of justice we call injustice and that has no positive being.

10. How evil seems to be something

S. When you say that evil is the privation of the good, I agree, but none the less I see that good is a privation of evil. And just as I perceive in the privation of evil something else comes to be that we call good, so I note that in the privation of the good something comes