

The Fall of Lucifer

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The Catholic Faith presents us with the divinely revealed Economy of Salvation: God's plan to reveal His goodness by creating and calling his rational creatures to freely share in his eternal goodness. Hence, our faith is eminently positive, it is about eternal happiness that is offered to us in Christ, the Incarnate Word of the Father. God's plan of Salvation includes the freedom of His creatures. Revelation shows us how creatures, first the angels and later mankind at the suggestion of the enemy, abused that freedom. Because God is merciful to mankind, that plan was not foiled by original Sin, but set the state for the greater revelation of His loving kindness in the drama of the Redemptive Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. By his cross, He both saved mankind and destroyed the works of the Devil. (cf. Heb. 2:14, 1 Jn. 3:8). Divine Revelation affords us with abundant information about the invisible spiritual world around us: first of all, concerning angels and how they assist us in our journey to Heaven (cf. Heb. 1:14). We also have a considerable knowledge about the fallen angels and how they wish to hinder our salvation. Many good books and paintings have given Catholics a broad view of their activities of the spirit for and against our lives.

In this essay we wish to ask why some of the angels fell from grace. In particular, why would Lucifer, who by nature was the most magnificent of all God's creatures, have chosen to rebel against God and seek to destroy His plan, thus destroying himself in the process? In this paper we will explore the hypothesis that Lucifer and some of his followers, after all the angels had been given a knowledge in faith of the Incarnation, became bitterly prideful against the high dignity of this God/Man who in this way would

usurp their rightful place of pre-eminence in Creation. For this reason these spirits rejected God and his plan forever. We will then further reflect on Lucifer's motive to kill Jesus and show how the Devil "was a murderer from the beginning." (John 8:44)

Before speculating about what could have been, we first need to establish and verify the certain knowledge we have concerning the angles. Angels are purely spiritual creatures: they "have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness."¹ God created nine choirs or types of angels and each angel is a separate individual. God created all the angels as good and "in sanctifying grace."² At the very instant of their creation, God infused the angels with sufficient supernatural knowledge to make an irrevocable decision for or against God and His plan. The knowledge they had was sufficient and not complete at that time.

The will and knowledge of angels is very different than man's. The angels' knowledge is entirely intuitive, comprehending in the first instant all that they can naturally know about any particular object of name. This is why their choice was taken in an instant and was, by its very nature, irrevocable. It is said that angels have an "inflexible free-will."³ Man, by contrast, due to his composition nature of body and soul, can only come to knowledge progressively (rationally). In conformity with this plodding character of his rational nature, man is designed to continually renew and deepen his called to conversion by making many successive choices for God throughout his life. Since man

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 330

² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 62, Art. 3

³ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1. Q. 63, Art. 3, 3 m

is so “short sighted” he makes many mistakes... he fails to see all the consequences of his choices. Given new light, therefore, man is capable of revising his former decisions, for the better or for worse.

Angels who used their supernatural knowledge of faith well and decided for God were beatified. That is, they received beyond “natural perfection” of their “angelic nature.”⁴ The perfection of their nature is so complete that “the beatified angels can neither merit nor advance in beatitude.”⁵ The angels received their beatitude immediately after choosing God. While angels have an inflexible free-will, this does not mean they cannot make any choices. After an angel is beatified his free-will is so perfected that he is incapable of choosing sin, because He is immediately united to the infinite goodness of God which is the final object of every created will. When this is manifest and possessed, the creature cannot deviate from this possession, for herein is its freedom completely realized.. The perfected will of the angels is a great good and a more truly “free” will than that of humans wrestling with sin. “Hence there is greater liberty of will in the angels, who cannot sin, than there is in ourselves, who can sin.”⁶

As for the angles who misused their sufficient knowledge and rejected God and His plan, they are said to have “fallen” and are called demons. Though they had been created good, by their act of rebellion was they sinned, falling out of grace. They bear the unending consequences of their infidelity: never shall they be blessed with the beatitude they were created for. Their choice occurred in an instant and is eternal. They can

⁴ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1. Q. 62, Art. 5

⁵ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1. Q. 62, Art. 9

⁶ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 62, Art. 8

never repent. Thrown out of Heaven, they seek to interfere with God's plans, and are destined for hell.⁷ "There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death."⁸

It is the general consensus of tradition that the highest of the created spirits, Lucifer, led the rebellion against God⁹ and influenced the other reprobates. Hence, there is particular importance to the sin of Lucifer. Lucifer was the highest of all the angels. The greatest of all God's creation and yet he "sinned at once after the first instant of his creation"¹⁰, forever giving up the perfection he could have merited in the state of grace! After Lucifer fell, he persuaded many other angels to rebel against God as well. "The sin of the highest angel was the cause of the others sinning; not as compelling them, but as inducing them by a kind of exhortation."¹¹ "Satan or the devil and the other demons are fallen angels who have freely refused to serve God and his plan. Their choice against God is definitive. They try to associate man in their revolt against God."¹²

⁷ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 64, Art. 4, c

⁸ CCC 393

⁹ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 7

¹⁰ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 6, c

¹¹ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 8, c

¹² CCC, 414

So what was the sin of Lucifer? St. Thomas explains that “the first sin of the angel can be none other than pride.”¹³ Lucifer was so “inflated with pride, he wished to be called God”¹⁴ “Without doubt the angel sinned by seeking to be as God.”¹⁵

St. Thomas then clarifies that he did not want to be as God in equality “because by natural knowledge he knew that this was impossible.” Rather he wanted to be as God in his likeness. St. Thomas then explains what he means: “he sought to have final beatitude of his own power, whereas this is proper to God alone... he sought to have dominion over others; wherein he also perversely wished to be like unto God.”¹⁶ As Scripture says, “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! ... You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high... I will make myself like the Most High.’” (Isaiah 14:12-14)

So the sin of Lucifer was a deep sin of pride. Yet what caused Lucifer to be consumed with pride? We know that the angels were given all necessary knowledge to make a final decision for or against God in their first moments after their creation. As quoted earlier from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we know that Lucifer “freely refused to serve God and his plan.” This implies that Lucifer was given some kind of knowledge concerning God’s plan and that he should have willingly agreed to serve this plan. So just what did the angel know that caused him to rebel and say “I will not serve”? (Jeremiah 2:20) It is difficult to say with certainty, but some theologians have ascribed to the following thesis: Lucifer and at least some of the other angels were

¹³ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 2, c

¹⁴ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 3, c, quoting St. Augustine

¹⁵ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 3, c

¹⁶ Ibid

given some knowledge about God's intent for the Incarnation. Seeing the ramifications this mystery would have for themselves, they rebelled. Matthias Joseph Scheeben gives a wonderful summery of this view in his book, *The Mysteries of Christianity*. He explains:

“According to a rather commonly propounded view, the angels before their fall had received a revelation of the future incarnation of the Son of God... the consequence would necessarily follow that the angels had to adore as their God the Son of man thus presented to them in human form... Of course this was a great humiliation for the angels... They had to acknowledge that in spite of their sublime natural perfections they had no claim to the divine sonship.”¹⁷

Scheeben goes on to explain this hypothesis naturally explains the fall of Lucifer very well. God reveals to the angels his intent of the incarnation and by agreeing to serve and adore the Son of Man, they are beautified and their nature perfected. Lucifer was so consumed by his own glorious nature and rejected “that God preferred human nature to [his] lofty nature, and even made him dependent on a man for his own highest and noblest prerogative.”¹⁸ And so in his pride he refused to serve the incarnation as the means of grace for his own beatification and chose to rely solely upon his own glorious nature.

Then what? “So, after the sin of pride, there followed the evil of envy in the sinning angel, whereby he grieved over man's good, and also over the Divine excellence,

¹⁷ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, p. 268-269

¹⁸ Scheeben, *Mysteries*, p. 269

according as against the devil's will God makes use of man for the Divine glory."¹⁹ Lucifer falls, convinces other angels to fall with him, and in his envy seeks to destroy God's plan for man. As scripture says, "through the devil's envy death entered the world." (Wisdom 2:24)The fact that the devil was envious of man is further evidence that Lucifer knew of the Incarnation. "For at his creation man had received and could have received no privilege capable of arousing the angel's envy."²⁰

Think about it. What could have caused the highest of all creation to be filled with envy toward something so far beneath him, unless he knew that man was to rise above him? Additionally he would be required to serve this plan. Here pride giving rise to envy makes sense; Lucifer felt himself too important to accept a demotion from the highest position in all creation. Consumed with his own greatness, he became swollen with pride and in his pride desired to halt God's plan and prevent his own demotion.

There are several passages in the Summa that lend material support to this theory: "There is another knowledge of the angels... it is the knowledge whereby they see the Word, and things in the word. By such vision they know mysteries of grace, but not all mysteries: nor do they all know them equally; but just as God wills them to learn by revelation... Some of these mysteries they knew from the very beginning of their creation."²¹ Of course Lucifer would be included in this knowledge since he was the highest of all.

¹⁹ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 2, c

²⁰ Scheeben, *Mysteries*, p. 270

²¹ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q 57, Art. 5, c

Of these mysteries of grace concerning the Word, St. Thomas specifically refers to the Incarnation saying there are two ways we can speak of the Incarnation: in a general way and a more specifically to its “specific conditions”. Concerning knowledge of the Incarnation “it was necessary for all of them to be instructed in this mystery from the very beginning.”²² Concerning knowledge of the Incarnation as to specific conditions, “not all the angels were instructed on all points from the beginning.” This implies that some angels were instructed on the Incarnation at the moment of their creation.

St. Thomas in the section quoted from above, refers to St. Augustine’s affirmation that the angels knew of the Incarnation from the beginning. St. Augustine refers to “the mystery of the kingdom.” From the context it is very clear that St. Augustine sees the Incarnate Jesus as the mystery of the kingdom calling this mystery “both in the form of God and in the form of a servant” and “the Only-begotten Son.” The angels “were not even kept in the dark about that mystery of the kingdom of heaven, which was revealed at the appropriate time for our salvation, so that once delivered from this exile we might be welcomed into their company... They would scarcely be ignorant of this... that is, by the authority of him who is their Lord, both in the form of God and in the form of a servant... so that we may be equal to the angels of God.”²³ Evidently the belief that the an-

²² *ibid*, m1 (It is important to note that in this reply St. Thomas seems to be referring to two separate moments, the instant of their beatitude, and later from “the very beginning” which I am taking to mean the moment of their creation, as it clearly does earlier in the corpus of this article: “the very beginning of their creation.” If it could be shown that St. Thomas saying “the very beginning” in reply 1 meant the same as “the commencement of their beatitude” then this passage could not be taken to mean that angels had knowledge of the Incarnation.)

²³ St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad Literam* (The Literal Meaning of Genesis), Book V 19 (in some versions it is not 19 but 38)

gels knew something of the Incarnation at their beginning goes back at least as far as St. Augustine.²⁴

Elsewhere it is clear that St. Thomas agrees with St. Augustine on this issue. When discussing whether it is necessary to believe in the Mystery of Christ for salvation, St. Thomas states in the objection, “Now even the angels were in ignorance of the mystery of the Incarnation.” Then in the reply to this objection, he refers to St. Augustine, “The mystery of the Kingdom of God was not entirely hidden from the angels, as Augustine observes. (*Gen. ad lit. v. 19*)”²⁵ This reference here is the very same passage mentioned in the above paragraph, which indicates that angels knew of the Incarnation at their creation. St. Thomas’ appeal to the authority of Augustine in the reply, makes sense only if he agrees with Augustine on this point.

In another section, St. Thomas says that, “All the angels had some knowledge from the very beginning respecting the mystery of God’s kingdom, which found its completion in Christ; and most of all from the moment when they were beatified by the vision of the Word.”²⁶ The context makes it clear that “from the very beginning” refers their creation. While the angels had some knowledge of Christ at their creation, they were much further enlightened when they were beatified.

Lucifer having knowledge of the Incarnation matches perfectly with St. Thomas’ statement that “After the sin of pride, there followed the evil of envy in the sinning angel,

²⁴ St. Augustine here is arguing about the knowledge the angels had at their beginning, and does not specify if he means the beginning of their creation or of their beatitude. Taken at face value, he seems to mean their creation, as the whole context concerns itself with creation, but this passage could be read to refer to their beatitude.

²⁵ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. II, Q. 2, Art, 7, 1 & 1 m

²⁶ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 64, Art. 1, 4 m

whereby he grieved over man's good, and also over the Divine excellence... [since] God makes use of man for the Divine glory."²⁷ The context of this passage is about how Lucifer felt immediately after the fall. The greatest way God has used man for Divine glory was with the Incarnation. We know that after the fall, God did not enlighten the fallen angels regarding the mysteries. Therefore Lucifer grieving over man's good and God's intent to use man for Divine glory must refer to what Lucifer knew before he fell. And this would include knowledge of the Incarnation. Therefore the belief that Lucifer fell over God's intent to unite Himself with humanity is completely consistent with St. Thomas and must be at least plausible.

Scripture itself reveals as much in Revelation 12. Revelation 12 begins with "a great portent" that appears in heaven. The sign is of "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet." This woman is about to give birth when a "great red dragon" appears, and while sweeping down "a third of the stars of heaven", tries to kill the woman's male child "who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron." War breaks out between the angel Michael and the dragon "was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan."

Lets take a closer look at what we know about Revelation 12. We know from P. Pius XII and P. Paul VI that the woman in some way refers to Mary.²⁸ We know the child is Jesus as he is the King that rules with a rod of iron. We know the Dragon in some way refers to Lucifer because he is identified as being the Devil (vs. 9). We can also

²⁷ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 3, c

²⁸ Pius XII, *Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum*, # 24; Paul VI, *Signum Magnum*, opening statement

learn from St. Thomas²⁹ that this event involves what took place at the fall of the angels; for he uses the verse “His tail swept down a third of the stars” to refer to the fall of the other angels at Lucifer’s prompting. This gives us a very exact time reference as the fall of Lucifer and the angels happened at the moment of their creation and only once. If St. Thomas is correct in using this verse to refer to Lucifer causing the fall the demons, then the reference to the woman and her child must refer to what Lucifer “saw” when he fell. Therefore God’s plan of the Incarnation through Mary is precisely what the prideful Lucifer rejected and refused to serve when he fell.

Lucifer’s pride then churned envy within him. According to St. Thomas, Lucifer had pride first, then envy. We read in the book of Wisdom “through the devil’s envy death entered the world.” (Wisdom 2:24) Envy says, “If I cannot have it, neither will you!” Envy seeks to destroy. Jesus taught that the devil “was a murderer from the beginning.” (John 8:44) Jesus calling the devil a murderer may not be surprising. But it is striking that Jesus says that he was “a murderer from the beginning.” Jesus here is alluding to a timeframe: “the beginning.”

We know that the Lucifer wanted to kill Jesus during his earthly life as Jesus indicated that the people wanted to kill him because “Your are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning.” We know that Satan entered Judas to betray Jesus so he could be killed. We know what the devil did and we know he did it out of pride and envy. But the question remains, what did Lucifer hope to gain by killing Christ?

²⁹ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, Q. 63, Art. 8, c

At this point let us entertain a possibility that may be just speculation that gives a plausible explanation while remaining consistent with everything previously established. Lucifer was the highest of all creation, second in the universe only to God. God then shows him his intent of uniting himself with humanity and thus exalting man above him. For Lucifer this would mean a demotion. To add insult to injury, Lucifer would have to serve the plan in order to obtain his own beatification. In his pride he said, "I will not serve" and rejected God and his plan. Pride inspired envy and Lucifer saw in the Incarnation an opportunity. If God was to Incarnate Himself into mortal flesh, if he killed the Incarnation, he could eliminate the #1 position, he would advance from #2 to #1, and prevent his own demotion in the process.

After all is said and done, we must ask why we should reflect upon the fall of Lucifer. What benefit to us could possibly come from such abstract and negative speculation? If it was by accepting the Incarnation that the angels were beatified, then we are reminded of God's plan to beatify us in time for Heaven through accepting and serving Jesus as well. If it was the prideful rejection of the Incarnation that spurred the fall of Lucifer and the demons, then we may gain insights into man's own struggles and falls. For like Lucifer, man's fall is connected with pride: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) The Catechism observes that Lucifer reflected his own rebellion in his "words to our first parents: "You will be like God."³⁰ There is some similarity in the sanctification and damnation of the angels and of man. To better understand the details can help us to better understand our own journey and destination.

³⁰ CCC 392

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