

QUESTION 114

The Attacks of the Bad Angels

Next we have to consider the attacks of the bad angels. On this topic there are five questions: (1) Are men attacked by demons? (2) Is it proper to the devil to test, i.e., to tempt? (3) Do all the sins of men stem from the attacks or temptations of the demons? (4) Can the demons work genuine miracles in order to seduce men? (5) Are the demons who are conquered by men restrained from further attacking men?

Article 1

Are men attacked by demons?

It seems that men are not attacked by demons:

Objection 1: The angels assigned to guard men are sent by God. But demons are not sent by God, since the demons' intention is to make souls perish, whereas God's intention is to save them. Therefore, demons are not assigned to attack men.

Objection 2: It is not a fair fight (*non est aequa conditio pugnae*) when someone weak is exposed to battle against someone strong, or when someone ignorant is exposed to battle against someone clever. But men are weak and ignorant, whereas demons are powerful and clever. Therefore, God, who is the author of all justice, should not permit men to be attacked by demons.

Objection 3: The attacks of the flesh and of the world are enough to test men. But God permits His chosen ones to be attacked for the sake of testing them. Therefore, it does not seem necessary for them to be attacked by demons.

But contrary to this: In Ephesians 6:12 the Apostle says, "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against Principalities and Powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places."

I respond: As far as the attacks of the demons are concerned, there are two things to take into consideration, viz., (a) the attacks themselves and (b) what the attacks are ordered toward.

An attack itself proceeds from the wickedness of the demons, who out of envy try to prevent a man's progress and out of pride arrogate to themselves a likeness of God's power, assigning determinate servants to attack men in the same way that the angels serve God in determinate roles for the sake of saving men.

On the other hand, the way in which the attacks are ordered itself stems from God, who knows how to use evils in an orderly way by directing them toward goods.

By contrast, as far as the good angels are concerned, both the guardianship itself and the way in which the guardianship is ordered are traced back to God as their first author.

Reply to objection 1: The bad angels attack men in two ways.

First, they prompt (*instigant*) them to sin. And in this sense they are not sent by God to attack men, though they are sometimes permitted to attack men according to God's just judgments.

Sometimes, however, they attack men by punishing them. And in this sense they are sent by God, in the way that, according to 3 Kings 22:22, a deceitful spirit was sent to punish Ahab the king of Israel. For punishment is traced back to God as its first source. And yet the demons who are sent to punish men carry out the punishment with an intention different from the intention with which they are sent. For they themselves punish out of hatred or envy, whereas they are sent by God because of His justice.

Reply to objection 2: In order that the fight might not be unfair, the balance is restored on man's

side—principally through the help of divine grace and, secondarily, through the guardianship of the angels. Hence, in 4 Kings 6:16 Elisha said to his servant, “Do not fear. There are more with us than there are with them.”

Reply to objection 3: Attacks that come from the flesh and the world would be enough to test human weakness, but they are not enough for the demons’ wickedness, which makes use of both the flesh and the world to attack men. Still, by God’s plan this redounds to the glory of the elect.

Article 2

Is testing, i.e., tempting, peculiar to the devil?

It seems that testing, i.e., tempting (*tentare*), is not peculiar to the devil:

Objection 1: According to Genesis 22:1 (“God tempted Abraham”), God is said to tempt. Also, the flesh tempts, and so does the world. And man is likewise said to tempt both God and man. Therefore, tempting is not peculiar to a demon.

Objection 2: Testing is done by one who does not know something. But the demons know what is going on with men. Therefore, the demons do not test them.

Objection 3: Temptation is a path to sin. But sin consists in an act of will. Therefore, since, as is clear from what was said above (q. 111, a. 2), the demons cannot affect a man’s will, it seems that it does not belong to them to tempt men.

But contrary to this: 1 Thessalonians 3:5 says, “Lest perhaps he that tempts should have tempted you,” and a Gloss adds, “that is, the devil, whose role it is to tempt.”

I respond: To test or tempt is, properly speaking, to make a trial of a thing.

Now a trial is made of a thing in order to find out something about it. And so knowledge is the proximate end of someone who tests.

However, sometimes a further end is sought from this knowledge, and this end may be either good or bad—good, as when one wants to know how someone stands with respect to knowledge or virtue in order to help him advance (*promoveat*), and bad, as when someone wants to find this out in order to deceive or subvert him.

Given this, we can understand how testing or tempting is attributed to different individuals in different ways:

A *man* is sometimes said to tempt or test someone just in order to find something out, and it is in this sense that tempting God is said to be a sin. For a man who is uncertain, as it were, presumes to test God’s power. On the other hand, a man tests or tempts another man sometimes in order to help him and sometimes in order to harm him.

Now the *devil* always tests or tempts in order to do harm by urging a man to sin. And it is in this sense that tempting is called his peculiar role. For even if one man sometimes tempts another man in this way, he does so insofar as he is a servant of the devil.

By contrast, God is said to test or tempt someone in order to find something out, in that manner of speaking in which He is said to ‘find out’ what He causes others to know. Hence, Deuteronomy 13:3 says, “The Lord your God tempts you, in order that it might be made public whether you love Him.”

Now the flesh and the world are said to tempt instrumentally or materially, viz., insofar as it is possible to know what sort of man someone is by the fact that he succumbs to or resists the desires of the flesh or by the fact that he shows disdain for the fortunes and adversities of the world. In addition, the devil uses the world and the flesh in order to tempt men.

Reply to objection 1: The reply to the first objection is clear from what has been said.

Reply to objection 2: The demons know what is going on with a man exteriorly; but only God, who is “the weigher of spirits” (Proverbs 16:2), knows men’s interior condition, on the basis of which some are more prone to one vice than to another. And so the devil tempts a man in order to discover his interior condition, so that he can tempt him toward a vice to which the man is more prone.

Reply to objection 3: Even if a demon cannot affect the will, nonetheless, as was explained above (q. 111, aa. 3 and 4), he can in some way affect a man’s lower powers, by which the man’s will, though not coerced, is nonetheless inclined.

Article 3

Do all sins stem from the temptations of the devil?

It seems that all sins stem from the temptations of the devil:

Objection 1: In *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, Dionysius says, “The multitude of demons is the cause of all evils for both themselves and others.” And Damascene says, “All malice and impurity have been devised by the devil.”

Objection 2: One can say of every sinner what our Lord said of the Jews in John 8:44, “You come from your father, the devil.” But this is true insofar as they sinned at the devil’s prompting. Therefore, every sin stems from the devil’s prompting.

Objection 3: Just as angels are assigned to guard men, so demons are assigned to attack men. But all the good things we do stem from the prompting of the good angels, since divine gifts are delivered to us by the mediation of the angels. Therefore, all the evil things we do likewise stem from the devil’s prompting.

But contrary to this: *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus* says, “Not all of our evil designs are prompted by the devil; rather, often they emerge from the movement of our free choice.”

I respond: There are two ways in which something can be called a cause of an effect: first, *indirectly*, and second, *directly*.

An agent is said to be a cause of an effect *indirectly* when it causes a disposition for that effect. In such a case the agent is said to be an *occasional* or *indirect* cause of the effect—as, for instance, when the one who chops the wood is said to be a cause of its being burned. And in this sense one should say that the devil is a cause of all our sins, since he himself prompted the first man to sin, and that sin resulted in a proneness to all sins within the whole human race. This is also the sense in which to understand the passages from Dionysius and Damascene.

By contrast, something is said to be a cause of an effect *directly* when it acts directly to bring about that effect. Given this sense, the devil is not a cause of every sin, since not every sin is committed at the devil’s prompting; instead, some sins are committed because of our freedom of choice and because of the corruption of the flesh. For as Origen says, even if the devil did not exist, men would still have a desire for food and sexual pleasure and other such things, and there can be many disorders with respect to these desires if they are not curbed by reason—especially given that our nature has been corrupted. But it is within the power of free choice to curb these desires and to bring order to them. So, then, it is not necessary that every sin should stem from the devil’s prompting.

However, if any sins do stem from the devil’s instigation, then, as Isidore says, “men are now deceived into committing those sins by the same blandishments by which our first parents were deceived.”

Reply to objection 1: The reply to the first objection is clear from what has been said.

Reply to objection 2: Even if certain sins are perpetrated without the devil's instigation, men still become the children of the devil through those sins in the sense that they are imitating the one who committed the first sin.

Reply to objection 3: A man is able to fall into sin on his own, but a man cannot make progress in merit without God's help, which is given to him by the mediation of the ministry of the angels. And so the angels cooperate in all our good works, whereas it is not the case that all our sins proceed from the prompting of the devil. However, there is no genus of sin that is not at some time or other committed at the prompting of the devil.

Article 4

Can demons seduce men by means of genuine miracles?

It seems that demons cannot seduce men by means of genuine miracles:

Objection 1: The action of the demons is especially evident in the works of the Antichrist. But as the Apostle says in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, the Antichrist's "coming is according to the working of Satan, in all power and signs and false wonders." Therefore, *a fortiori*, at other times it is only false miracles that are worked by the demons.

Objection 2: Genuine miracles are effected through a certain change in bodies. But demons cannot change a body into another nature, since, as Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 18, "Nor do I believe that the human body can in any way be converted by the art or power of the demons into the members of a beast." Therefore, the demons cannot work genuine miracles.

Objection 3: An argument is not efficacious if it is open to opposite conclusions. Therefore, if genuine miracles can be worked by the demons in order to promote falsehood, then genuine miracles will not be efficacious for confirming the truth of the Faith. But this is absurd, since Mark 16:20 says, "... the Lord working with them and confirming their word with the signs that followed."

But contrary to this: In 83 *Quaestiones* Augustine says, "It often happens that miracles worked by means of the magical arts are similar to the miracles worked through the servants of God."

I respond: As is clear from what was said above (q. 110, a. 4), if 'miracle' is taken in the proper sense, then neither demons nor any other creature can work miracles—only God can, since a miracle, properly speaking, is something done outside the entire order of created nature, and every power belonging to a creature is contained within that order.

However, 'miracle' is sometimes used in a broad sense for something that exceeds human power and understanding. And given this sense, demons can perform 'miracles', i.e., works that astonish men insofar as they exceed their power and understanding. For even a man, to the extent that he does something that lies beyond the power and understanding of another man, inspires in that other man admiration at what he does, so that it seems that in some sense a miracle has been performed.

Notice, however, that even though demonic works of this sort, which seem like miracles to us, do not satisfy the true notion of a miracle, they are nonetheless real entities in certain cases. For instance, through the power of demons the Pharaoh's magicians made genuine snakes and frogs (Exodus 7:12 and 8:7). And as Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 20, "When the fire fell from heaven and consumed Job's household at one blow along with his herds of cattle, and when because of a storm the house collapsed and killed his children, all of which were works of Satan, these things were not imaginary."

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine says in the same place, the works of the Antichrist can be

called ‘lying signs’ “either (a) because the mortal senses are going to be deceived by imaginary apparitions, so that the Antichrist will seem to do what he does not in fact do, or (b) because even if they are genuine wonders, they will still draw those who believe them into falsehoods.”

Reply to objection 2: As was explained above (q. 110, a. 2), corporeal matter does not obey good or bad angels at will in such a way that demons might be able by their power to transmute matter from one [substantial] form into another; however, as Augustine says in *De Trinitate* 3, the demons can use certain seminal principles that are found in the world’s elements in order to bring about effects of this sort.

And so one should say that all the transmutations of corporeal things that can be effected by natural powers, to which the aforementioned seminal principles are relevant, are such that they can be effected by the operation of the demons, using seminal principles of this sort—as, for instance, when certain things are transmuted into serpents or frogs, which can be generated through putrefaction. By contrast, those transmutations of corporeal things that cannot be effected by the power of nature cannot in any way be brought about in reality by the operation of the demons—as, for instance, that a human body should be changed into the body of a beast, or that the dead body of a man should come to life again. And if some such thing should seem to be done by a demon’s action, then it is not a reality but a mere appearance.

This sort of appearance can occur in two ways.

First, it can occur *from within*, insofar as the demon is able to affect a man’s imagination or even his corporeal senses in such a way that, as was explained above (q. 111, aa. 3 and 4), something appears to be otherwise than it really is. (In fact, this is also sometimes done, it is said, by the power of certain corporeal bodies.)

The second way is *from without*. For given that a demon can make a body of any shape and form out of elemental air in order to assume that body and appear visibly in it, he can for that same reason place any corporeal form around a given corporeal body so that the body appears to belong to the species of that form. This is the point that Augustine makes in *De Civitate Dei* 18, “A man has a phantom, which in his imagining or dreaming takes on the form of innumerable kinds of things, and this phantom is presented to the senses of other men as if embodied in the likeness of an animal.” This should not be understood to mean that the man’s imaginative power, or the image it has, is itself presented as numerically the same embodied thing to the senses of others. Rather, it should be understood to mean that a demon who forms a likeness in the imagination of one man is also able to present a similar likeness to the senses of another man.

Reply to objection 3: As Augustine says in *83 Quaestiones*, “When magicians do things such as the saints do, they are done for a different end and by a different law. For the magicians do them seeking their own glory, whereas the saints do them seeking the glory of God. And the magicians act through certain private arrangements (*per quaedam privata commercia*), whereas the saints act by way of public administration and by the order of God, to whom all creatures are subject.”

Article 5

Is a demon who is conquered by someone restrained for that reason from further attacks?

It seems that a demon who is conquered by someone is not for that reason restrained from further attacks:

Objection 1: Christ conquered His tempter in the most efficacious way. Yet afterwards his tempter attacked Him again by inciting the Jews to kill Him. Therefore, it is not true that the devil, once

conquered, ceases to attack.

Objection 2: To inflict punishment on someone for losing a battle is to incite him to fight more fiercely. But such incitement conflicts with God's mercy. Therefore, conquered demons are not restrained.

But contrary to this: Matthew 4:11 says, "Then the devil left Him," i.e., he left Christ, who had conquered him.

I respond: Some claim that a demon, once conquered, cannot tempt any other man with respect to the same sin or any other sin. By contrast, others claim that he can tempt other men, but not the same man.

The latter view is more plausible, but only if one adds 'for a certain period of time'. Hence, Luke 4:13 says, "All the temptation being ended, the devil departed from Him for a time." There are two reasons for this:

The first stems from God's mercy. For as Chrysostom says in *Super Matthaem*, "The devil tempts men not for as long as he wants to, but for as long as God permits him to. For even if God permits him to tempt a man for a short time, He drives him away because of our weak nature."

The second reason stems from the devil's cleverness. Hence, in *Super Lucam* Ambrose says, "The devil is afraid to persist, since he shrinks from being defeated more frequently."

Yet it is clear from what is said in Matthew 12:44 ("I will return into my house from whence I came out") that the devil sometimes returns to someone he has left.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2: The reply to the objections is clear from what has been said.