



## Aquinas on Satan as a Theologian-Exegete

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RECOGNIZING IN SATAN some traits of a twisted theologian is quite a common theme. Pope Benedict XVI recalled this motif recently, while referring to *A Short Tale of the Anti-Christ* by Vladimir Soloviev:

To lure Jesus into the trap, the devil quotes from the Holy Scripture. . . . The devil reveals himself to be an expert on the Scripture, who is able to cite the Psalm accurately. Indeed, this whole conversation during the second temptation of Christ seems like a dispute between two scribes: the devil appears to be a theologian.<sup>1</sup>

In the second temptation of Christ (Matt 4:6), Satan uses the words of Sacred Scripture against the One who—as the Eternal Word—has spoken those words first. Therefore, the crucial idea behind the theme of “Satan as a theologian” is to recognize his perverse will to turn theology—and especially exegesis—into the weapon against God himself. This theme may also be found in the works by St. Thomas Aquinas. It is discussed in more systematic way only in the passage from *Lectura super Matthaeum*, while in other works it appears only in the form of dispersed remarks. Still, these intuitions are so interesting that it is worthwhile to collect and discuss them.

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. A. J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 35–36.

### *Inanis Gloria*

Matthew describes the second temptation of Christ in the following way:

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt Lord your God.'" (Matt 4:5–7)

While tempting Jesus, the devil quotes from Psalm 91[90]:11–12, misinterpreting it in a deceptive way. Hence, Satan acts here as a twisted theologian-exegete, who tempts the Saviour with false interpretation of Scripture. The devil's tactic in this second temptation is a very interesting and unique one when compared to other Biblical passages: it is one thing for the devil to deceive prophets by, for example, putting false prophecies into their mouths, but quite another to misinterpret the text which really comes from God. For, in the latter case, Satan is not creator of words but their deceptive commentator.

It is worth noting that Holy Scripture not only mentions these two ways of destroying God's words by Satan (namely, by creating false words only attributed to God and by falsely interpreting authentic words of God), but teaches also about at least two others: the devil may "snatch" (*rapit*) the word (Matt 13:19<sup>2</sup>) and distort the true word of God (Gen 3:1, against Gen 2:16–17). In the context of this paper, the most important way of manipulating God's words is, of course, the one where the devil presents himself as a theologian-exegete who explains these words. And precisely this perverse behavior drew the attention of Aquinas, who devotes a relatively large portion of *Lectura super Matthaeum*<sup>3</sup> to this issue. Since this work is the main source to become acquainted with Aquinas's approach to this subject, I will refer mostly to this commentary<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> "Omnis qui audit verbum regni, et non intelligit, venit malus, et rapit quod seminatum est in corde eius" ("When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path").

<sup>3</sup> See *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (Marietti nos. 331–32).

<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning that the theme of "Satan as a theologian-exegete" is completely absent from the question *De tentatione Christi* (q. 41) in *Summa theologiae* [ST] III, even though the second temptation is elaborately discussed there. It seems that this issue is firstly undertaken by Thomas during his work on

However, before discussing the main rules of such devil's exegesis, I would like to characterize briefly its wider context, constituted by the aim and place of the second temptation.<sup>5</sup> Firstly I will analyze its goal, because it was the thing that determined the devil's choice of precisely such a place of temptation.

a. The aim of the second temptation is to persuade Jesus to fall into the sin of desire of vainglory (*inanis gloria*).<sup>6</sup> This temptation is similar to the one that took place in Paradise, where the serpent told Eve, "your eyes will be opened" (Gen 3:5). Aquinas believes that these words were used precisely to tempt to the desire of vainglory.<sup>7</sup> Satan tempts Jesus to the same end with the words "if you are the Son of God," which are immediately followed by the call "throw yourself down." Such sequence is very typical for devilish temptation:

The devil always strikes with two arrows: for on the one hand he leads him to vainglory, on the other hand to homicide.<sup>8</sup>

b. The second temptation takes place in Jerusalem, "on the pinnacle of the temple" (*pinnaculum templi*). This venue was carefully chosen by the devil, though at first sight it may seem inappropriate.<sup>9</sup> As the aim of the second temptation is to arouse a desire of *inanis gloria*, the devil wants the place of this temptation to be associated with prestige, and more precisely with the glory of being a teacher. For being a teacher and a master involves some dangers. Natural desire in pursuing knowledge of truth can become deformed in many ways. Such deformation happens, for example, when

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*Catena aurea* (*Expositio in Matthaeum*, 1263–1264), is later discussed in *Lectura super Matthaeum* (1269–1270), but disappears from *ST III* (1272–1273). On the relationship between *Lectura super Matthaeum* and the *Catena aurea*, see Jeremy Holmes, "Aquinas' *Lectura in Matthaeum*," in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weindandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 73–98, at 86–90.

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas's theology of temptation of Christ is discussed in detail in J.-P. Torrell, *Le Christ en ses mystères*, vol. 1 (Paris: Desclée, 1999), 224–42.

<sup>6</sup> See *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 321).

<sup>7</sup> See *ST III*, q. 41, a. 4, corp.

<sup>8</sup> *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 329) (all translations from *Super Matt* are taken from *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, vols. 1–2, trans. J. Holmes, B. Mortensen [Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013]).

<sup>9</sup> See *ST III*, q. 41, arg. 2.

it is pride which is the aim of the study.<sup>10</sup> The devil is perfectly aware of this mechanism and—by his tempting—strives to change the motivations of people who seek truth and to lure outstanding scholars to fall into the desire of vainglory.<sup>11</sup>

Interpretation which links the venue of the second temptation with vainglory desired by the teachers—that is, by the experts in Holy Scripture (namely the theologians)—was borrowed by Aquinas from older tradition<sup>12</sup>. It is worthwhile to quote one of the passages collected by St. Thomas in his *Catena aurea*:

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<sup>10</sup> See: *ST II-II*, q. 167, a. 1, corp.; *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 189, and *ST II-II*, q. 167, a. 1, corp.: “Ipsa enim veritatis cognitio, per se loquendo, bona est. Potest autem per accidens esse mala, ratione scilicet alicuius consequentis: vel in quantum scilicet aliquis de cognitione veritatis superbit, secundum illud *I ad Cor.* 8, [1], *Scientia inflat*; vel in quantum homo utitur cognitione veritatis ad peccandum” (“For the knowledge of truth, strictly speaking, is good, but it may be evil accidentally, by reason of some result, either because one takes pride in knowing the truth, according to *1 Cor.* 8:11, ‘Knowledge puffeth up,’ or because one uses the knowledge of truth in order to sin”; all translations from *ST II-II* are taken from: *Summa theologiae: Secunda secundae* 92–189, trans. L. Shapcote, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón [Lander: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012]). See also *ST II-II*, q. 163, a. 1, ad 3: “Appetitus scienatiae causatus fuit in primis parentibus ex inordinato appetitu excellentiae. Unde et in verbis serpentis praemittitur: *Eritis sicut dii*; et postea subditur: *scientes bonum et malum*” (“The desire for knowledge resulted in our first parents from their inordinate desire for excellence. Hence the serpent began by saying: ‘You shall be as Gods,’ and added: ‘Knowing good and evil’”).

<sup>11</sup> See *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 330): “Sed quare supra pinnaculum? Glossa: ‘Quia in illo loco docebant’. Unde significat quod diabolus magnos de inani gloria tentat. Contra quod Apostolus *I Thess.* c. II, 6: *Nec quaerentes ab hominibus gloriam, neque a nobis, neque ab aliis*” (“But why ‘upon the pinnacle’? The Gloss: ‘because they were teaching in that place.’ Hence it signifies that the devil tempts the great concerning vainglory. Against which the Apostle says, ‘nor sought we glory of men, neither of you, nor of others’ (*1 Thess* 2:6)”).

<sup>12</sup> See *Catena super Matt* 4, lec. 3: “Remigius. Pinnaculum sedes erat doctorum” (“Remig. The ‘pinnacle’ is the seat of the doctors”; all translations from *Catena Aurea* are taken from *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels*, vol. 1, *St. Matthew*, 2nd ed. [Oxford and London: J. H. J. Parker and J. Rivington, 1864]). On references to the theology of Church Fathers in the commentary on Matthew, see L. J. Elders, “The Presence of the Church Fathers in Aquinas’ Commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. P. Roszak and J. Vijgen (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 2015), 257–85, esp. 262–68.

Gloss: He set Him on a pinnacle of the temple when he would tempt Him through ambition, because in this seat of the doctors he had before taken many through the same temptation, and therefore thought that when set in the same seat, He might in like manner be puffed up with vain pride.<sup>13</sup>

The desire of vainglory is closely related to the vice of pride (*superbia*). For it is the pride which is the cause of vainglory. "Pride covets excellence inordinately: while vainglory covets the outward show of excellence."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, by choosing this particular place as venue of his temptation, Satan wants to induce Christ to fall into vainglory of being someone great, being an outstanding master and teacher. He wants to make Christ manifest His greatness ostentatiously.<sup>15</sup> But while tempting Jesus, Satan exposes himself. Because it is precisely pride which is his first and foremost sin, disabling him from submitting willingly to God and from serving him.<sup>16</sup>

Can it be said, therefore, that the devil, while trying to induce the vainglory of a teacher in Christ, presents himself as a teacher, and so also a theologian-exegete? Does Satan arrange sort of a theological debate with Jesus, showing off his knowledge of Holy Scripture by quoting a Psalm? Although St. Thomas does not mention this directly in his analysis of the second temptation, we can assume with much probability that he might agree with such a conclusion. Because the devil's first sin is a pattern for sins of all human beings. Satan tempts with the same things he has fallen into himself.<sup>17</sup> He tempts to pride because he is guilty of this sin himself. So if he tempts to vainglory coming from theological knowledge, then we can find also in him pride of someone regarding himself as an expert in theology.

### *Depravatio*

Posing as a commentator on the Holy Scripture, Satan "transforms himself into an angel of light"—*transfiguratur se in angelum lucis* (2 Cor 11:14). He

<sup>13</sup> *Catena super Matt* 4, lec. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 162, a. 8, ad 2.

<sup>15</sup> See *ST* III, q. 41, a. 4, corp.

<sup>16</sup> See *ST* I, q. 63, a. 2, corp.

<sup>17</sup> See *ST* I, q. 114, a. 3, ad 2: "Si qua peccata absque instinctu diaboli perpetrantur, per ea tamen fiunt homines filii diaboli, inquantum ipsum primo peccantem imitantur" ("When man commits sin without being thereto instigated by the devil, he nevertheless becomes a child of the devil thereby, in so far as he imitates him who was the first to sin" (trans. L. Shapcote, *Summa theologiae, Prima pars* 50–119, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón [Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012], 600). See also *ST* III, q. 8, a. 7, corp.

does so in order to attract his victims with the appearances of good and to tie human beings with himself more effectively.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the devil needs the “disguise” of an angel of light—in this case of an expert on the Bible, for his aim is to deceive his victims with the deformed meaning of Holy Scriptures. So Satan uses the authority of the Bible to “deceive the simple” who are unable to recognize the true meaning of the word of God.<sup>19</sup> Hence the devil’s exegesis from the very beginning is oriented toward misrepresentation, and not toward the primary aim of exegesis, namely, explaining the word of God, which is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). For God’s word is a path to salvation and in God’s intent is meant to have a fourfold effect: to teach the truth, to reject the falsehood, to free from evil, and to lead toward goodness.<sup>20</sup> By disguising himself as an angel of light, Satan wants to prevent these God-intended effects of the Holy Scriptures from coming into life. On a side note, it is worth mentioning that this use of 2 Corinthians 11:14 in relation to Satan’s action in the second temptation was borrowed by Aquinas from St. Ambrose, whom he quoted in the *Catena aurea*.<sup>21</sup>

How do we describe in brief the devil’s approach to the text of Psalm? Satan *depravat auctoritatem sacrae Scripturae*, that is, he “twists the authority of Sacred Scripture.”<sup>22</sup> The verb *depravo*, which is used here, is taken from 2 Peter 3:16, which in its Latin translation—as quoted by Aquinas—goes as

<sup>18</sup> See *Super 2 Cor* 11, lec. 3 (nos. 406–407); *In oratio Domini*, a. 6 (no. 79): “Facit autem duo Diabolus dum tentat: quia non statim proponit illi quem tentat, malum aliquod apparens, sed aliquid quod habeat speciem boni, ut saltem in ipso principio per illud removeat eum aliquantulum a proposito suo principali, quia postmodum facilius inducit ipsum ad peccandum, quando illum vel modicum avertit. Apostolus, II Cor. XI, 14: ipse Satanias transfigurat se in Angelum lucis” (“... in tempting a man the devil does two things. Thus he does not at once suggest to him something that has an appearance of evil, but something that has a semblance of good, so as thereby, at least in the beginning, to turn him from his chief purpose, while afterwards it becomes easier for him to induce him to sin, when he has turned him ever so little from that purpose: ‘Even Satan disguiseth himself as an angel of light’ (2 Cor xi, 13)”; trans. L. Shapcote in *The Three Greatest Prayers* [London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1937], 25).

<sup>19</sup> See *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 331).

<sup>20</sup> See *Super 2 Tim* 3, lec. 3 (nos. 124 and 127); See also *ST I*, q. 1, a. 1, sc.

<sup>21</sup> Ambrosius, *Super Lucam*, bk. 4 (*De tertia tentatione Christi*). See also Aquinas, *Catena super Matt* 4, lec. 3: “Sed quia satanas transfigurat se sicut angelum lucis et de Scripturis ipsis divinis laqueum fidelibus parat, utitur testimoniis Scripturarum, non ut doceat, sed ut fallat” (“But as Satan transfigures himself into an Angel of light, and spreads a snare for the faithful, even from the divine Scriptures, so now he uses its texts, not to instruct but to deceive”).

<sup>22</sup> *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (nos. 331 and 332). See also *Super 2 Thess* 2, lec. 1 (no. 31).

follows: “Indocti et instabiles depravant Scripturas ad suam ipsorum perditionem.” Based in this passage, St. Thomas will make the notion of *depravatio* his crucial concept to refer to twisting the meaning of Holy Scriptures. The exact nature of this *depravatio* may be more specifically described by referring to two passages from the Scriptures, where two powerful metaphors can be found. Hence, the *depravatio* may be described as:

(1) *Stealing*. This metaphor is taken from Jeremiah 23:20, which mentions the prophets “who steal my words from one another”—*qui furantur verba mea*.<sup>23</sup> The one who twists (*depravat*) the texts from Sacred Scriptures—and may be called a *depravator*—is therefore a thief, because he commits a subtle “spiritual stealing,” namely he “steals the true understanding [*verum intellectum*] from the words of Sacred Scripture.”<sup>24</sup> The aim of such stealing is of course to substitute this true understanding with the false one, which is not in accordance with the intents of the true prophets.<sup>25</sup> This stealing may also be viewed as a concealment (*occultatio*) of the true meaning of the word of God.<sup>26</sup> The thief who commits such trespass does not act on his own, but also implicates those who agreed to this spiritual stealing.<sup>27</sup>

(2) *Adultery*. This metaphor is in turn taken from 2 Corinthians 2:17, which in Latin goes as follows: “Non sumus sicut plurimi, adulterantes verbum Dei.” In its Greek original, which is the basis for contemporary translations, instead of *adulterantes*, we find the verb *kapēleuō*,<sup>28</sup> which means “to peddle”—therefore in English this verse goes as follows: “We are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word.” I find it interesting that the same expression *non adulterantes verbum Dei* appears also in the Latin of 2 Corinthians 4:2, where the Greek original uses the verb *doloō*, which means “to corrupt” or “to ensnare.” Of course, Aquinas relies on a Latin version and regards the notion of adultery (*adulterium*) as useful in clari-

<sup>23</sup> This metaphor may be associated also with Matthew 13:19. Aquinas comments in *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1 [no. 1124]: “Capitur a furibus, quia detinetur mens a cogitationibus, et ita rapitur; et hoc est quod dicit Venit malus, scilicet diabolus, quia malus non natura, sed perversitate: et rapit, scilicet occulte, seducendo, et inducendo vanam cogitationem” (“He is seized by robbers, because the mind is detained by thoughts, and so he is snatched away. And this is what he says, ‘there comes the wicked one,’ namely the devil, because evil is not by nature, but perversity, and snatches away, that is, secretly, by seducing and by introducing vain thoughts”).

<sup>24</sup> *Super Psalmos* 49, no. 9.

<sup>25</sup> See *Super Ier* 23, no. 8.

<sup>26</sup> See *Super Psalmos* 49, no. 9.

<sup>27</sup> See *Super Psalmos* 49, no. 9.

<sup>28</sup> In New Testament, it is *hapax legomenon*.

fying the nature of *depravatio Scripturae*.

Now, the adultery in its spiritual sense occurs when the “the words are twisted into another sense” or when they are twisted into some other end, like “for the sake of gain or seduction.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore such adultery is either (1) about change in the understanding of the words’ meaning or (2) about change in understanding the purpose to which given words were written down. There are various goods one may achieve by explaining or preaching the word, but the worst case is when their very purpose is changed: when “praise of God and salvation of their neighbor” is replaced with “monetary gain” and “own glory.”<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that, regardless of whether the explanation of God’s word is true or not, already the preaching or explaining Sacred Scriptures for the sake of one’s own glory should be viewed as *depravatio Scripturae*, for explanation of God’s words in its essence should be always aimed at *propter laudem Dei et salutem proximi* (the praise of God and the salvation of their neighbor). And the word of God should be “proposed in the proper way” (*debito modo*), otherwise it will not lead the people to the intended salvific goal.<sup>31</sup>

The metaphor of adultery allows us to turn our attention to one more issue, namely to the heretical approach to the word of God, which consists

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<sup>29</sup> *Super Psalmos* 49, no. 9.

<sup>30</sup> See *Super 2 Cor* 2, lec. 3 (no. 76): “Item non adulterantes verbum Dei, id est, praedicantes vel propter quaestum, vel propter favorem laudis. Sic enim mulieres adulterae dicuntur quando recipiunt semen ex alio viro ad propagationem prolis. In praedicatione autem semen nihil aliud est quam finis seu intentio tua, vel favor gloriae propriae. Si ergo finis tuus est quaestus, si intentio tua est favor gloriae propriae, adulteras verbum Dei. Hoc faciebant pseudo-apostoli qui propter quaestum praedicabant. Infra IV, 2: *Neque adulterantes verbum Dei*, etc. Apostoli autem praedicabant neque propter quaestum, neque gloriam propriam, sed propter laudem Dei et salutem proximi” (“Hence he says, ‘for we are not as many, adulterating the word of God,’ i.e., preaching for gain or for praise. For thus are women called adulteresses, when they receive seed from another man for the propagation of children. In preaching, the seed is nothing less than your end or intention. Therefore, if your end is gain, if your intention is your own glory, you adulterate God’s word. This the false apostles were doing who were preaching for gain. ‘We renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness nor adulterating the word of God’ (2 Cor 4:2). The apostles preached neither for monetary gain nor their own glory, but for the praise of God and the salvation of their neighbor”; trans. F. R. Larcher, B. Mortensen, and D. Keating in *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, ed. J. Mortensen, E. Alarcón [Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012]). See also *Super 2 Tim* 2, lec. 2 (no. 62).

<sup>31</sup> *Super 2 Cor* 4, lec. 1 (no. 119).

in adding some false doctrines to the explanation of God's words.<sup>32</sup> Hence, heretic *depravatio* is about mixing together true and false understanding of the Scriptures. So it is the first case (1) of spiritual adultery. Someone who understands the Divine word precisely in such false way behaves like a wolf (*lupus*), while someone who explains God's word for one's own gain (case 2) is a hireling (*mercenarius*).<sup>33</sup> So the metaphor of spiritual adultery relating to Sacred Scriptures is specified further by introduction of two very capacious metaphors, derived mainly from John 10:8–18,<sup>34</sup> but also from Matthew 7:15<sup>35</sup> and Acts 20:29.<sup>36</sup> Introduction of the metaphor of a wolf “in sheep's clothing” turns us back to the theme of the devil tempting as an “angel of light,” with which we have begun. For the first meaning of the Johannine *lupus* is precisely *diabolus*.<sup>37</sup>

Metaphors of spiritual stealing and spiritual adultery are intertwined in a coherent way. The adultery, or the “infidelity” to the true meaning of some word, which is replaced with some false meaning or “sold” for some gain (*lucrum*), is possible only when the true, God-intended meaning is removed, which is what happens through spiritual stealing. Therefore, stealing of the true meaning and adultery committed with false sense form the essence of the *depravatio Sacrae Scripturae*, which is the true name of the devil's exegesis.

The devil is not only the ultimate *depravator Sacrae Scripturae*, but also a head (*caput*) of all those who twist the meaning of God's words.<sup>38</sup> For the devil is a head of all the wicked, whom he governs not through internal influence, but through external temptation, to induce them to fulfil his goals.<sup>39</sup> They become his ministers, who likewise twist Sacred Scripture in order to “deceive the simple.”<sup>40</sup> For the devil is *exemplar omnium Scripturas depravantium*—“exemplar of all twisting of the Scriptures.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore

<sup>32</sup> *Super 2 Cor 4*, lec. 1 (no. 119); *Super 2 Cor 2*, lec. 3 (no. 76); *Super 2 Tim 2*, lec. 3 (no. 67).

<sup>33</sup> See *Super 2 Cor 4*, lec. 1 (no. 119).

<sup>34</sup> See *Super Ioan 10*, lec. 3 (nos. 1402 and 1405).

<sup>35</sup> “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”

<sup>36</sup> “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.”

<sup>37</sup> See *Super Ioan 10*, lec. 3 (no. 1405): “Lupus iste tripliciter accipitur. Primo quidem diabolus tentans; Eccli. XIII, 21: *Sed si communicabat aliquando lupus cum agno, sic peccator iusto*. Secundo vero haereticus mactans . . . Tertio tyrannus saeviens.”

<sup>38</sup> See *Super Matt 4*, lec. 1 (no. 331).

<sup>39</sup> See *ST III*, q. 8, a. 7, corp.

<sup>40</sup> See *Super Matt 4*, lec. 1 (no. 331).

<sup>41</sup> *Super Matt 4*, lec. 1 (no. 332).

to understand the devil's tactics and recognize ways of twisting used by his ministers, we need to analyze the devil's exegesis of Psalm 91(90):11–12.<sup>42</sup>

### Three Ways of Twisting

Satan believes that by tempting Christ he can know something more about Christ, expose him, and thus make him vulnerable—but in reality, he only exposes himself in this process. Also his deceptive way of interpreting Sacred Scripture is exposed. On the basis of devil's exegesis of Psalm 91[90]:11–12, Aquinas recognizes three specific ways of *depravatio*.

(1) When some expression from Sacred Scripture “speaks about one thing, and is explained as about another” (“dicitur de uno, et exponitur de alio”).<sup>43</sup> This occurs when some expression is wrongly referred to Christ, for example when some Old Testament passage or phrase refers to someone righteous, but is explained as referring to Christ.<sup>44</sup> Such precisely is the

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<sup>42</sup> On a side note it is worth mentioning that the issue of *depravatio Scripturae* may be also associated with 2 Corinthians 3:6, where St. Paul states “the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life.” This is the Aquinas's exegesis of these words in *Contra errores Graec* I, ch. 31, ver. 11–27: “Sed dicendum quod neque littera novi Testamenti neque veteris occidit nisi per occasionem; sed occasionem mortis ex littera accipiunt aliqui dupliciter. Uno modo in quantum ex littera sacra accipiunt occasionem erroris, et hoc est commune tam litterae veteris Testamenti quam novi; unde et Petrus dicit II Canonicae ult. cap. quod in epistolis Pauli ‘sunt quaedam difficilia intellectu quae indocti et instabiles depravant sicut et caeteras Scripturas ad suam damnationem.’ Alio modo in quantum ex praeceptis in littera sacrae Scripturae contentis sumitur occasio male vivendi, dum per prohibitionem concupiscentia augetur et gratia adiuvens non confertur; et sic littera veteris Testamenti dicitur mortalis, non autem littera novi.” (“But a correct formulation should say that neither the letter of the New Testament nor that of the Old kills, except occasionally. Occasion of death some take in a twofold sense. In one sense, in so far as the sacred text is an occasion of error, something common both to the letter of the Old as well as the New Testament; hence St. Peter says in his second letter (3:16) that in the letters of St. Paul there are some things hard to understand, which the ignorant an unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do not understand the scriptures. In another way, in so far as the precepts contained in Holy Scripture become the occasion for evil living, concupiscence being intensified by its prohibition when helping grace is not given; and in this way the letter of the Old Testament is said to be deathdealing, but not the letter of the New”; trans. G. H. Duggan and P. D. Fehlner, in J. Likoudis, *Ending the Byzantine Greek Schism* [New Rochelle, NY: Catholics United for the Faith, 1992], 153).

<sup>43</sup> *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 332).

<sup>44</sup> This idea is borrowed from St. Jerome, as confirmed by *Catena super Matt* 4, lec. 3: “Hieronymus. Hoc enim in Psalmo 90, 11 legimus; verum ibi non de Christo, sed de viro sancto prophetia est. Male ergo diabolus interpretatus Scripturas” (“Jerome. This verse we read in the ninetyeth Psalm, but that is a prophecy not of

case of explaining Psalm 91[90]:11–12 as referring to him. For this passage concerns “the members of Christ . . . who need the protection of the angels,” and not Christ himself, who does not need such guardianship.<sup>45</sup> Here we can recognize some influence of John Chrysostom, whom Aquinas cites in the *Catena aurea*: “Vere enim Filius Dei Angelorum manibus non portatur, sed ipse magis Angelos portat” (“For the Son of God in truth is not borne of Angels, but Himself bears them”).<sup>46</sup> Moreover, one of the verses of this Psalm goes “lest you strike your foot against a stone” (Ps 91:12), which in Latin is “ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum.” The verb *offendo* may mean “to strike” or “to hurt,” but also “to offend.” Due to this ambiguity, referring these words to Christ may suggest that he is capable of offending God by committing a sin.<sup>47</sup> Obviously, such possibility must be definitely excluded.<sup>48</sup>

The rule of “dicitur de uno, et exponitur de alio” may concern not only wrongly referring some Old Testament text to Christ, but may also involve New Testament itself. Aquinas gives Jesus’s words “The Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28) as an example. If you interpret these words as stating that the Father is greater than the Son of God but ignore the fact that it refers to Son of God in his human nature (*secundum quod homo*), then you twist words of Jesus. Therefore, at the heart of this way of *depravatio Scripturae* lies seemingly correct understanding of a biblical text, which in fact is deformed due to wrong reference.

(2) The second way of twisting is hardly distinguishable from the first one. Here the rule of deforming of meaning is as follows: “bringing in a text to something for which it is not a text” (“inducere auctoritatem ad aliquid, ad quod non est auctoritas”).<sup>49</sup> Also in this case Aquinas gives an example. Romans 12:20 quotes from Proverbs 25:21–22 (“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire on his head”). If you juxtapose this passage with Deuteronomy 32:35 (“Vengeance is mine, and recompense”), as St. Paul does in Romans 12:19–20, then it is clear that according to Paul you

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Christ, but of some holy man, so the Devil interprets Scripture amiss”).

<sup>45</sup> *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 332).

<sup>46</sup> *Catena super Matt* 4, lec. 3.

<sup>47</sup> The origin of this connotation between stone and sin may be found in *Catena super Matt* 4, lec. 3: “Glossa . . . Vel per lapidem potest intelligi omnis peccati occasio et ruinae” (Glossa . . . Or by the stone may be understood every occasion of sin and error).

<sup>48</sup> See *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 332).

<sup>49</sup> *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 332).

should not “do this to someone so that he will be punished by God.”<sup>50</sup> It seems, though we do not have any certainty, that Aquinas refers here to the case of someone who does a good deed in order to ensure that its beneficiary will be punished by God. Therefore, two ideas have been wrongly associated with each other: that the vengeance should be left to God; and that one should do good even to his enemies. But it is wrong to conclude on this basis that the aim of doing good to your enemies is to make them punished by God.

The devil also makes use of this way of deception:

The devil did exactly this, because the Scriptures mean that the just man is protected by the angels in such a way that he does not fall into danger; “a helper in due time in tribulation” (Ps 9:10). But the devil expounds it that a man should throw himself into danger, which is to tempt God.<sup>51</sup>

Hence, the fact that God looks after the righteous does not mean that they should deliberately expose themselves to dangers. Thus, false interpretation of Scriptures becomes the cause of a sin: the attempt to tempt God.

(3) The rule of the third way of *depravatio* is as follows “when someone accepts from the Scriptural text what is in his favour, and dismisses that which is contrary to him” (“illud quod est pro se, de auctoritate accipere, et aliud quod est contra se dimittere”).<sup>52</sup> So, in this instance, deformity is caused by selective approach to Sacred Scripture. The word of God is not treated as a measure of truth, but used as confirmation of some subjective and false belief. Thus, this way is about focusing on just one part of Scripture instead of taking it in its entirety—to put it simply, about taking it out of context. It is a typically heretical approach (*mos haereticus*).<sup>53</sup> This way of *depravatio* may be easily recognized in the tactics used by the devil against Christ. For the two verses of Psalm 91[90] quoted by Satan—verses 11 and 12—are immediately followed by a very significant verse 13:

“You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.”

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<sup>50</sup> *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 332).

<sup>51</sup> *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 332).

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<sup>53</sup> *Super Matt* 4, lec. 1 (no. 332).

Obviously, this passage cannot be to Satan's liking, so he simply ignores it in his deceptive interpretation of preceding verses.

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Satan as a theologian-exegete? Aquinas confirms that we may regard the devil in such manner. Of course, Satan as a theologian-exegete is perverse and deceptive to the core, striving to twist the true meaning of words of Sacred Scripture. While quoting from the Bible, he transforms himself into an angel of light, to draw those who will likewise twist the meaning of Sacred Scripture, following his rules of exegesis. Therefore, Aquinas would agree with Vladimir Soloviev and Benedict XVI that interpretation of Sacred Scripture may indeed become a tool of the devil—who acts as a theologian-exegete. N.V