

Ambrogio Catarino's Doctrine of the Devil's Fall: Christocentric Reflection on the Origin of Evil

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SIXTEENTH-CENTURY Dominican theologian Ambrogio Catarino tends to get a “bum rap” in the scholarly press. Consider, for example, Pierre Mandonnet's comments about Catarino in last century's *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*.¹ Specifically with regard to Catarino's teachings on predestination and grace, Mandonnet complains of Catarino's “disregard for traditional theology,” his “impudence,” and “his lack of theological sense” (not to mention “scruples”), intellectual qualities demonstrated by his willingness to “create new theological currents”—his willingness, that is, to promote novel doctrines. In honor of Catarino's faults, Mandonnet goes so far as to label a certain sixteenth-century proclivity to deviate from traditional teaching *catharinisme*. “Catharinism,” suggests Mandonnet, “embodies most especially the *déviation*s of theological humanism”; yet this *ism*—or at least the man for whom it was named—enjoyed “the high protection . . . of the Roman court,” thereby evading the condemnation that some humanist and all Protestant *déviant*s received.² Somewhat less overtly antagonistic towards Catarino is Daniel Kennedy, who describes the Dominican thinker as an “eccentric genius, who . . . was frequently accused of teaching false doctrines, yet always kept within the bounds of orthodoxy.”³ Kennedy's and Mandonnet's depictions of Catarino coincide in

¹ Pierre Mandonnet, “Frères Prêcheurs,” in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. 6.1 (Paris: Letouzey and Ane, 1903–1972), 912–13.

² Ibid.

³ Daniel Kennedy, “Lancelot Politi,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic*

representing the man—specifically with regard to the role he performed as a *theologian* of the Reformation period—as intellectually unprincipled, given to “opinions” which were (in Kennedy’s words) “singular,” dogmatic notions which failed to conform to any obvious *norm* (such as, say, traditional Catholic thought).⁴

In what follows I advance a rather different picture of Catarino *qua* Catholic theologian. I hope to demonstrate that Catarino’s theological reflections were, in fact, rather principled; that is, they were *normed* by specific dogmatic commitments and a certain intentional stance, at least, towards traditional teaching. Catarino’s theological reflections and dogmatic decisions were governed by his conviction regarding the *absolute* nature of God’s determination to become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. In Catarino’s understanding, God’s decision to become incarnate was neither contingent upon, nor logically subsequent to, his foresight of humankind’s fall into sin and need for redemption. Rather, the Son of God purposed to join his own nature to human nature in the particular man Jesus from the very moment—so to speak—he decided (with his Father) to create a rational creature called “man” *per se*. To employ recent theological parlance, Catarino adopted a supralapsarian Christology.⁵ His doctrine of the motive(s) for the Incarnation, which drew upon a certain strand of traditional Christian thought, informed his theology broadly, and so informed specific dogmatic convictions. I suggest, then, that ideas advanced by Catarino which could appear to epitomize eccentricity, theological “impudence,” a “disregard for traditional theology,” and/or a “lack of theological sense” might assume a more intelligible and even—from contemporary perspective—theologically attractive character when their relation to his more fundamental conviction regarding the motive(s) for Christ’s Incarnation is recognized and given due attention. I will attempt to demonstrate as much in the balance of this essay by exploring one of Catarino’s doctrines which might, *prima facie*, seem most indicative of a “lack of theological sense”—his doctrine of the Devil’s fall.⁶

Church, ed. Charles Herbermann et al., vol. 12 (London: Encyclopedia Press, 1914), 213.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁵ Cf. Edwin Christian van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶ For exposition of Catarino’s doctrine of the Devil’s fall I rely chiefly upon his *De angelorum bonorum gloria, et lapsu malorum*, which is included in his *Opuscula*, vol. 1 (Lyon, 1542; repr. Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg Press, 1964), 144–60, referenced subsequently as *Opuscula*, and his *Enarrationes in quinque priora capita libri Geneseos* (Rome, 1551), referenced subsequently as *Enarrationes*.

The Devil's Fall in Catarino's Thought

From the very outset of his 1542 *De angelorum bonorum gloria, et lapsu malorum* Catarino acknowledges the relatively novel character of his account of Lucifer's fall from glory. In fact, he introduces the work with some prolegomenal comments upon novelty and Christian doctrine. He confesses the wisdom of the aphorism that admonishes that "we should not receive new doctrines into the Church, nor suffer their reception," but insists that this should be received *cum sale*—"with salt." After all, he notes, the Jews rejected Christ's teaching on the grounds that it was novel. Catarino admits the existence of a certain kind of novel teaching that "ought to be rejected as false" merely on the basis of its novelty—"that which is new in such a way that it does not have the testimony of antiquity." He has in mind, no doubt, dogmas promoted by magisterial reformers Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger; even—by this time—Calvin. But there are "new doctrines" which *do* have "the testimony of antiquity." That which occasioned Jewish antagonism towards Christ was his proclamation of the *novum testamentum*, a reality (and a doctrine) genuinely "new" in its arrival (and articulation), yet witnessed to by, for example, the prophet Jeremiah when he announced: "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (cf. Jer 31:31).⁷ It is irresponsible, then, to reject too quickly a doctrine as "novel" merely because it has no *exact* antecedent. One must ask, rather, whether a "new" doctrine has or lacks antiquity's *testimony*.

Catarino hopes to demonstrate that his understanding of the Devil's fall does, in fact, own the testimony of the Scriptures, the Fathers, and the best of the Scholastic theologians. Thus he begins exposition of his own doctrine by surveying the teachings of earlier theologians on Lucifer's fall. "It was the opinion of the ancients," he notes, "that envy (*invidia*) was that sin of the Devil, from which occurred his fall and ruin."⁸ Of course, envy discovers its own, deeper roots in the sin of pride (*superbia*): "for envy is not the cause of pride, but pride of envy."⁹ In some sense, then, "all agree regarding the fall of Lucifer and his companions, that pride cut them off from their highest good." Indeed, Scripture identifies pride "as the beginning of all sin" (cf. Sir 10:15). But pride often assumes concrete form as envy: "[T]he proud man, on account of his pride, desires to excel beyond his limit; therefore, when he sees the good of another, he thinks his own excellence to be diminished or injured by that good, and he

⁷ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 144.

⁸ Ibid., 146.

⁹ Ibid., 146–47.

begins to envy.”¹⁰ Envy precipitates apostasy from God. The envious individual “regards some object, and loves it more than God, on account of which he turns himself away from God.”¹¹

Identifying *invidia* as “that sin of the Devil, from which occurred his fall and ruin,” implies a rather obvious question: “If envy was the Devil’s sin, towards whom (I ask) were his envy and spite (*livor*) directed?”¹² According to Catarino, the ancients testified that Lucifer’s envy was specifically directed towards *humankind*. So Cyprian of Carthage, “who lived not long after the Apostles,” wrote:

From this source [envy], even at the very beginnings of the world, the devil was the first who both perished (himself) and destroyed (others). He who was sustained in angelic majesty, he who was accepted and beloved of God, when he beheld man made in the image of God, broke forth into jealousy with malevolent envy—not hurling down another by the instinct of his jealousy before he himself was first hurled down by jealousy, captive before he takes captive, ruined before he ruins others. While, at the instigation of jealousy, he robs man of the grace of immortality conferred, he himself has lost that which he had previously been. How great an evil is that, beloved brethren, whereby an angel fell, whereby that lofty and illustrious grandeur could be defrauded and overthrown, whereby he who deceived was himself deceived!¹³

To Cyprian’s testimony Catarino adds that of Basil of Caesarea, who noted in a homily on *invidia*: “What urged the devil, the beginner of evil, to wage fierce war against man? Was it not envy? It was through envy he came to war openly against God; enraged against him because of his bountifulness to man, but avenging himself on man because he is powerless against God.”¹⁴ And finally Catarino cites Augustine, who in *De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* observed: “Several authors say . . . that what brought about [the Devil’s] fall from the supernal regions was his jealous grudging of the man being made to the image of God.”¹⁵ Of course, the

¹⁰ Ibid., 147.

¹¹ Ibid., 146.

¹² Ibid., 147.

¹³ Ibid. I cite Cyprian from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986–1990), 492.

¹⁴ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 147. I cite Basil from Phyllis Graham, “On Envy: A Sermon by St. Basil,” *Angelus Online*, www.angelusonline.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=2883&mode=mode=thread&order=0&thold=0, accessed 6 February 2009. Catarino’s citation omits the latter half of the final sentence (beginning with “enraged”).

¹⁵ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 147. I cite Augustine from Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *On Genesis: A refutation of the Manichees, Unfinished literal commentary on*

venerable Bishop of Hippo went on to distance himself from this explanation for the Devil's fall, a point which somewhat undermines the sweeping nature of Catarino's conclusion, which reads: "From these [citations], therefore, [it appears] the opinion held by the ancients was that the Devil fell because of envy, which was agitated by man and the glory to which the Devil saw man predestined."¹⁶

The Scholastic theologians, Catarino argues, departed from the Fathers on this point. "Although they all conceded that the Devil was jealous of man and tortured by his envy, they did not teach that this envy was the reason for his fall." In seeking to determine that "reason for his fall," the Scholastics looked, rather, to the Devil's pride (*superbia*), and enquired into the peculiar effect of that pride; they asked, that is, what perverse longing (*concupiscentia*) ensued from Satan's primal arrogance. And "all, whether recent or more distant, seemed to agree in this: that the Devil somehow desired (*appetere*) divine majesty."¹⁷ In this judgment, Catarino observes, Scholastic thinkers had biblical backing; the words of the prophet Isaiah, traditionally understood, relate Lucifer's damning desire: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, . . . I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Is 14:13–14).¹⁸

The Scholastics could not agree, however, on what exactly diabolical desire for "divine majesty" entailed. Catarino identifies three broad medieval schools of thought regarding the precise *object* of the Devil's appetite.¹⁹ The first school denied that Lucifer coveted genuine "equality with God," on the grounds that Lucifer "would have known that this was impossible to obtain." Thomas Aquinas—whom Catarino does not cite in this particular regard—explained: "[Lucifer] could not seek to be as God in the first way [that is, 'by equality'], because by natural knowledge he knew that this was impossible: nor was any passion fettering his mind, so as to lead him to

Genesis, The literal meaning of Genesis, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 438.

¹⁶ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 147. Jeffrey Burton Russell identifies both Irenaeus and Tertullian as proponents of the idea that envy of man lay at the root of Lucifer's fall: see *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (London: Cornell University Press Ltd., 1981), 81, 93. Giovanni Papini asserts: "Everyone believes, now, that Lucifer, driven by his insolent pride, 'against his Maker lifted up his brows,' as Dante put it. But the early Church Fathers, the first theologians, did not think of pride at all. According to many of them, the cause of the Archangel's fall was envy, envy of man." Giovanni Papini, *The Devil: Notes for a future diabolology*, trans. Adrienne Foulke (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), 29.

¹⁷ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 147.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 147–48.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148–49.

choose what was impossible . . . as sometimes happens in ourselves.”²⁰ Indeed, no rational being “can desire his own destruction, which would follow from the desire for divinity [*ex appetitu divinitatis*].”²¹ Thus this school argued that the Devil actually desired not divine equality, but that “supernatural beatitude” promised to those—angelic or human—who obtain their *summum bonum*, the *visio Dei*, and thereby experience some greater union with, or likeness to, God. This “supernatural beatitude” was, of course, legitimately promised to Lucifer; he sinned, then, not so much in wanting it, but in wanting “to obtain it by his own strength [*ex propria virtute*], and not by divine help [*ex divino auxilio*], as the Lord had purposed.” Catarino dismisses this position with rather curt logic, noting that if Lucifer knew genuine “equality with God” was impossible, he also knew that obtaining his supernatural end by virtue of his own strength was impossible. The argument fails, in other words, to escape the trap of its own logic and initial premise—that the Devil could not possibly will an impossibility.²²

The second school identified by Catarino rejected the premise that Lucifer could not will an impossibility. Even if Lucifer might have foregone *pursuit* of “equality with God” in recognition of such equality’s unattainable status, he could nevertheless have *wanted* it—and therein he would have sinned already.²³ Though he names no names, Catarino describes the position of Duns Scotus; interestingly, he offers no refutation of Scotus’s logic.²⁴

The third school identified by Catarino held that Lucifer both desired “equality with God” and believed it possible to obtain. If Catarino’s representation of this school is accurate, it largely made no attempt to refute the logical arguments of the preceding schools; rather, it appealed more forcefully to the biblical text cited above. “Those words of Satan

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 63, a. 3.

²¹ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 148. Cf. Thomas, *ST* I, q. 63, a. 3: “No creature of a lower order can ever covet the grade of a higher nature; just as an ass does not desire to be a horse: for were it to be so upraised, it would cease to be itself.”

²² Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 148. Catarino notes a variation of this position, which suggested that Lucifer forsook his supernatural end and pursued his *natural* end (with the natural happiness entailed therein). Lucifer’s sin, according to this theory, lay chiefly in holding that supernatural end for which God ordained him in contempt. This would appear to be Thomas’s doctrine: see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 200–4. Catarino is equally dismissive of this theory, observing that diabolical desire to obtain one’s *natural* end apart from God’s provision hardly amounts to wanting to “ascend into heaven” and “be like the Most High,” to quote the words of the Prophet (*Opuscula*, vol. 1, 148).

²³ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 148.

²⁴ See Russell, *Lucifer*, 201.

appear to express . . . an appetite for something *possible*. . . . He says, 'I *will* ascend into heaven. . . . I *will* be like the Most High.'"²⁵ The words attributed to Lucifer communicate a desire to be equal to God and genuine hope—however desperate—of obtaining that goal. Rightly identifying that diabolical desire is a matter of faithfulness to the biblical text, not of reasoning from *a priori* logical commitments. Again, Catarino offers no condemnation of this school's argument.

Catarino's sympathies apparently lie with the positions of the latter two schools. He merely hopes to synthesize their basic insights into Lucifer's perverse desire (and hope) for "divine majesty" with the doctrine of the Fathers. Towards that end, he identifies three criteria that a doctrine of the Devil's fall must meet. First, it must do justice to Lucifer's words "I will be like the Most High"—that is, it must insist that Lucifer desired at least "a certain divine quality [*quiddam divinum*]." Second, it must maintain that what he desired was—at least to his thinking—genuinely possible to obtain: "for he says 'I will (*ero*),' which word undoubtedly conveys hope (*spes*) for the desired thing." And third, it must take into account the doctrine of the ancients; it must maintain that Satan's appetite for "a certain divine quality" was somehow, simultaneously, envy of man.²⁶

What devilish misdeed—or mis-desire—in ages past can fulfill (or rather, has fulfilled) these terms? Here Catarino takes a step back to reflect on the reality and nature of angelic beings *per se*. The angels, he notes, were created by God at the dawn of time; indeed, the introductory words of the Christian canon—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—indicate God's creation of the angels, for "by the appellation 'heavens' all the angels are understood."²⁷ Contra "the insanity of the Manicheans," who discovered in the demons an instance of some eternal evil principle, and "the intolerable error of Porphyry," who posited "a *genus Demoniorum* which was fallen by nature," Catarino insists that all angelic beings were created good. In creation, he further notes, the angels received from God "the gift of grace (*dono gratiae*)"—therein, the supernatural qualities of "love for God," "faith" in God's promise of some highest good and final end, and "hope" for the same were infused into them.²⁸ The angels

²⁵ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 148–49. Emphasis mine.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁷ Catharinus, *Enarrationes*, 180; see also Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 149.

²⁸ Following Duns Scotus, Catarino also identifies the gift of sanctifying *gratia* granted Adam in the beginning with *charitas Dei*; see Diomedes Scaramuzzi, "Le idee scotiste di un grande teologo domenicano del '500 ('The Scotist Opinions of a Significant 16th Century Dominican Theologian')": Ambrogio Catarino," *Studi Francescani* 5 (1933): 213–17.

were *not* created “perfect,” or with that “perfect beatitude” which comes from seeing God “face to face”; they were, rather, “candidates for that beatitude which consists in the vision of God face to face.” Catarino emphasizes this point: “[The angels] did not yet have this vision, but expected it and hoped for it, and even contended for it.”²⁹

The promise of seeing God—with the perfect beatitude corresponding to that vision—was not made unconditionally to the angels. Indeed, Catarino notes, the angels were “to merit that beatitude in a certain manner,” by observing “a certain commandment,” a “law of love.” Angelic experience mirrored soon-to-be human experience at this point. Just as man’s progress towards his supernatural end would hinge from the very first upon his observance of a *specific* command (“not to eat from the fruit of a certain tree”), angelic progress towards the (same) supernatural end hinged upon angelic obedience to a *specific* command—a mandate which transcended the mere dictates of (angelic) nature. But what precisely did God demand of the angels? In his 1551 Genesis commentary Catarino pulls back the curtain on God’s first words to his angelic creatures:

After the Lord God had made [the angels] . . . he said, “Listen to me, my angels, and learn that which I decreed in my eternity, before I made anything at all. This is my plan: I intend to communicate myself to my creation, according to my omnipotence, in some immeasurable way, in order to lift that creation up to myself. . . . And this is the [particular] creature which I have chosen, [to which I will communicate myself]; he is not among you, neither is he yet created: I will create him, and now I show him to you.” And so in the appearance and figure of man God revealed to his angels his Son Jesus Christ. And he said, “Worship this man, with whom I am well pleased above all creatures. Render to him your deference and your honor, just as to your God. For even if he will be a man, he will no less also be God, on account of that divine hypostatic union with my Word, two perfect and unmingled natures obtaining. If you will obey my command, he will be your God, your happiness, your eternal beatitude. I promise this man to you as the one who will give you beatitude, and so likewise I promise myself to you, since we are one with our Holy Spirit. In this man, therefore, consists your life.” Thus said the Lord God to his celestial spirits.³⁰

God commanded his angels to worship Jesus Christ, the God-man, whose Incarnation already constituted the chief matter of God’s *consilium*. Somewhat more prosaically, Catarino explains in his earlier treatise: “God revealed [to the angels] that great mystery of the eternal Word which

²⁹ Catharinus, *Enarrationes*, 180–81.

³⁰ Catharinus, *Enarrationes*, 183.

would at length assume our nature in such a way that the Word himself would become flesh through the union of natures in a single subject, . . . in which [event] God would become man, and through this God would be called 'man,' and man 'God.'" To this revelation was appended the divine mandate: "Moreover, there was the commandment of God himself to them, that they should all adore that God-man, if they wanted to obtain his beatitude and glory."³¹ Catarino discovers biblical evidence for this primordial command to worship the to-be-incarnate Christ in Hebrews 1, where the Apostle notes that "when God [brought] the only begotten [Son] into the world, he said: 'let all the angels of God worship him'" (Heb 1:6).³² In Catarino's understanding of this text, God "[brought] the only-begotten [Son] into the world" when he first *revealed* to the angels his intention to see his Son become man, long before that actual event.

There was a peculiar logic undergirding God's command to worship Christ in some pre-incarnate but embodied form: Christ, by his very being, would make (and in some sense had already made) creaturely attainment of the *summum bonum*, the vision of God "face to face," possible. The bridging of Creator and creation, which occurred already in God's *determination* to join divine and human natures together in Christ, permitted God to bless both angelic and human rational creatures—in and of themselves so intrinsically unworthy—with that supernatural end (without diminishing the necessity for them to "contend" for, and in some way "to merit," that end). This point is developed more fully in Catarino's works on the motive(s) for the Incarnation; here he simply notes with reference to the angels: "For they too were destined for salvation (*salus*) through the man who was Christ."³³ Thus the promise of eternal life which God, according to the Apostle Paul (cf. Tit 1:2), made "before the ages of the world [*ante tempora secularia*]" was made "to the Angels, who alone were to be found 'before the ages of the world' capable of receiving and accepting that promise."³⁴

It was this revelation of the future Incarnation of the Word—the joining together of divine and human natures in the man Jesus—along with the command to *worship* the person resulting from this future event which occasioned Lucifer's fall. Unlike "the most holy Michael, . . . Gabriel,

³¹ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 149.

³² Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 149.

³³ *Salus* here has the somewhat imprecise meaning of obtaining one's end, rather than the precise meaning of recovery. With the tradition more generally, Catarino believes fallen angels are incapable of "salvation" in the latter sense.

³⁴ Catharinus, *Enarrationes*, 183.

Raphael, and Uriel,” who “accepted God’s commandment at once” and immediately complied, Lucifer chose to mull over (*secum cogitare et disceptare*) God’s mandate. Rumination soon turned to jealousy and anger—or so Catarino suggests, exposing the Devil’s very own train of thought:

What kind of thing is this which God wants for himself? And with what justice has he decreed to establish this commerce [*commercium*] with man, whose nature (as [Lucifer] rightly understood) is inferior to our own? Why has he not rather granted this honor to an Angel, whose nature is in every way much more sublime than that of man?” . . . Therefore, as he pondered this thing, he came to think God’s plan unbecoming and unfair. . . . “What sin have we committed, that we should be deprived of this gift?” If he wants to give this thing, would he not give it to us with much more propriety than to man?³⁵

Lucifer’s thoughts eventuated in the darkening of “his intellect” and the depravation of “his will”—“he began . . . to envy man, and vehemently hated Christ, whom he entirely wanted to kill and destroy.” Thus, Catarino notes, Christ himself testified regarding the Devil: “[H]e was a murderer [*homicida*] from the beginning” (cf. Jn 8:44).³⁶ In Catarino’s understanding of Christ’s words, Lucifer’s murderous intent predates the proper creation of man; it was Christ himself whom Lucifer wanted to murder—*Christicide* translates into *homicide* by virtue of the incarnate Son’s human nature.

Of course, further devilish deeds and desires—as well as divine responses to the same—could be traced through the beginning and progress of human history in Catarino’s thought; here, however, his doctrine of the Devil’s *first* sin and fall is complete, and we must circle back to investigate whether Catarino’s account of Lucifer’s fall meets the criteria which he established for a successful doctrine of the same. In recognizing the Incarnation—and therefore Jesus Christ—as the peculiar object of the Devil’s envy, Catarino retains something of the Fathers’ identification of “envy of man” as Lucifer’s initial sin. Lucifer envied “man” *in genere*, since it was “man” in general whom God blessed when his Son assumed human nature, as well as the particular man Jesus, in whom divine and human natures were conjoined without confusion. Moreover, Catarino’s doctrine does justice to the biblical (and Scholastic) identification of the Devil’s desire to “be like the Most High.” It was, after all, a “certain divine quality” that Lucifer desired for himself when he coveted hypostatic union between his own and the divine natures. Lucifer desired “divine majesty . . . not indeed through any transmutation or corruption of himself, so that from

³⁵ Ibid., 183–84.

³⁶ Ibid., 184.

an angel he should become God and cease to be an angel, but through a union of natures—namely, his own and the divine—within the same subject, the divine Word.”³⁷ If the man Jesus Christ was and is God by virtue of his divine nature (and identity as the second person of the Trinity), Lucifer too *might have been* God had the Son assumed Lucifer’s angelic nature. Finally, Catarino’s doctrine escapes the trap of positing some impossible desire in a being that knew the boundaries of possibility only too well. Lucifer’s desire to have his own nature joined to the divine nature could—at least in theory—have been realized. “Just as . . . man approached divine majesty through that union of natures, so it might have been with [Lucifer].” Indeed, Catarino reasons, the joining of divine and angelic natures in a single subject “would seem to be more appropriate [than the joining of divine and human natures], since [the angel] is a more dignified creature.”³⁸

Of course, the criteria that Catarino established for a successful doctrine of the Devil’s fall were drawn from Patristic and medieval teachings on the subject in question; thus Catarino can—at least to his thinking—claim the “testimony of antiquity” for his doctrine, notwithstanding the fact that he has advanced a rather novel account of Lucifer’s fall from glory. It would be interesting, at this point, to trace the fortunes of his doctrine. It certainly encountered its share of skeptics. Not least of them, from an early date, was the Genevan reformer John Calvin, who noted in his own commentary on Genesis the existence of “curious sophists” who—addressing the issue of “what had impelled Satan to contrive the destruction of man”—“feigned that he burned with envy, when he foresaw that the Son of God was to be clothed in human flesh.” Calvin dismissed Catarino’s doctrine as “frivolous,” arguing that “since the Son of God was made man in order to restore us, who were already lost, from our miserable overthrow, how could that be foreseen which would never have happened unless man had sinned?”³⁹ But others found Catarino’s doctrine of the Devil’s fall more appealing. The Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suarez (d. 1617) defended Catarino’s doctrine several decades after the Dominican’s death (1553); more recently Matthias Joseph Scheeben (d. 1888), German Catholic theologian of some repute, has found Catarino’s account of Lucifer’s fall from glory persuasive.⁴⁰

³⁷ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 150.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. and ed. John King (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 82.

⁴⁰ For Suarez’s teaching see *De angelis*, lib. 7, cap. 13, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1856), 880–91; for Scheeben’s defense of Catarino’s doctrine see *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1961), 268–69.

My intention here, however, is not to illumine the doctrine's fate, but to highlight the intra-systematic relationship it sustained to Catarino's conviction regarding the motive(s) for Christ's Incarnation, towards the end of highlighting certain features of his thought more broadly. Whether Catarino could claim the "testimony of antiquity" for his account of Lucifer's fall with any credibility is—of course—debatable; it must, in any case, be acknowledged that his doctrine did not find its origin or impetus immediately in Patristic or medieval teaching. The sheer difference between his doctrine and those of earlier theologians precludes the possibility of any direct inheritance: certain Fathers did identify Satan's first sin as envy provoked by man's great privileges, but they also identified those privileges—*creatio ad imaginem Dei*, and elevation over all creation, not that privilege (as it were) of seeing human nature joined to the divine nature in hypostatic union. What, then, prompted Catarino's rather unique account of the Devil's fall? We need not resort to the exaggerated and unhelpful language of Giovanni Papini, who suggests that "this most singular interpretation of Satan's fall came like a blinding flash" to "the learned Catarino."⁴¹ Rather, we should recognize "this most singular interpretation of Satan's fall" as an intellectual implication or consequence of Catarino's Christology.

Christ's Incarnation in Catarino's Thought

Catarino advanced his doctrine of Christ's Incarnation—his conviction, that is, that God's Son would have become incarnate "even if Adam had not sinned"—in multiple works. Two treatises are specifically devoted to the subject: the first—rather significantly, I suggest—immediately precedes his treatise on the Devil's fall in his 1542 *Opuscula*; the second is appended to his 1551 Genesis commentary.⁴² His arguments for the absolute nature of God's determination to become man also figure critically in his biblical commentaries (that on Genesis as well as one on the New Testament epistles, both published in 1551), as well as his 1543 *Claves duae*.⁴³ The last work, which Guy Bedouelle has rightly labeled Catarino's "manual of theology," is particularly noteworthy.⁴⁴ Given the

⁴¹ Papani, *The Devil*, 32, 33.

⁴² Catharinus, *De eximia praedestinatione Christi* (*Opuscula*, vol. 1, 114–43); *Pro eximia praedestinatione Christi annotatio specialis in commentaria domini Caietani* (Rome, 1551).

⁴³ Catharinus, *Commentaria in omnes divi Pauli et alias septem canonicas epistolas* (Venice, 1551); *Claves duae ad aperiendas intelligendasque scripturas sacras perquam necessariae* (Lyon, 1543).

⁴⁴ Guy Bedouelle, "L'introduction à l'Écriture sainte du dominicain Ambrosio Catharino Politi (1543)," *Protestantesimo* 54 (1999): 280.

broad theological scope of its subject matter, *Claves duae* arguably provides the greatest insight into the critical relationship which Catarino's understanding of the Incarnation sustains to his other doctrinal convictions. Despite the emphasis upon the (non-redemptive) motive(s) for the Incarnation in Catarino's works, his teaching on this point has attracted almost no scholarly interest. Only Diomedes Scaramuzzi has commented upon Catarino's doctrine of the Incarnation at any length, drawing attention to the Scotistic character of Catarino's teaching in order to demonstrate Catarino's appreciation for, and intellectual dependence upon, Scotus more generally.⁴⁵ Scaramuzzi's argument regarding Catarino's intellectual relationship to Scotus is compelling; however, it is unfortunate, for those interested in the substance of Catarino's theology, that he does not exposit Catarino's own arguments for a supralapsarian Christology—some of which go beyond Scotus's teaching—more fully.

Here only a cursory overview of Catarino's position on Christ's Incarnation can be given. I cite, first of all, *Claves duae*, in order to illumine the primal and *fundamental* character which God's decision to become incarnate owns in Catarino's theological perspective:

[God's] very own Son and Word, who was the highest wisdom and the true light, saw everything which could be made, and everything which would be made by his Father, and realized that everything would not be "very good" in and of itself. . . . Thus, in order that he might be satisfied with his works and render them "very good" (since he himself was, simultaneously with his Father, composing all things), he decreed to join (*coniungere*) himself to his creation, and in a certain manner to graft himself into that creation, by a most marvelous and eternal grafting.⁴⁶

Thus freeze-framing God's earliest inclination, as it were, to "join himself to his creation," Catarino exhibits his *own* understanding of the relationship between Christ's Incarnation and all created reality. For Catarino, Christ's future Incarnation—bridging the gap between Creator and creation *per se*—permits the benediction "very good" to grasp *all* created reality within its compass (and so to fill the ears of every rational creature). In other words, the goodness of God's creation was from the very first, and in its totality, rooted in that "certain affinity" which God contracted with creation in the Incarnation.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Diomedes Scaramuzzi, O.P., "Le idee scotiste di un grande teologo domenicano del '500: Ambrogio Catarino," *Studi francescani* 29 (1932): 296–319; 30 (1933): 197–217.

⁴⁶ Catharinus, *Claves duae*, 88.

⁴⁷ Catharinus, *Enarrationes*, 177.

In his treatises on the motive(s) for Christ's Incarnation, Catarino discloses further reasons why God should have determined *ab initio* to "join himself to his creation," reasons which rob Adam's first sin of any claim to having necessitated God's assumption of human nature in time.⁴⁸ Indeed, the primary motives for Christ's Incarnation flow from God's own attributes: divine omnipotence, for example, requires omnifarious display, and no act has greater potential to parade God's power than that "which joins Creator to creature."⁴⁹ So also God's wisdom, goodness, and providence are most brilliantly reflected in the Incarnation.⁵⁰ From an emphasis upon God's attributes further motives for the Incarnation unfold; God's wisdom, goodness, and providence are directed specifically towards angels and men, rational creatures who benefit in specific ways from God's assumption of human nature. Catarino identifies three overarching motives for the Incarnation in relation to the particular needs of human creatures.

First, God wanted to "elevate" human nature, in order that he might enter into some more definite relationship with human creatures—a relationship defined by their progress towards himself as their greatest good and final end; progress defined by works of faith and charity. Apart from Christ's Incarnation there could have been no such relationship between God and humankind, for "our nature was most distant from the height of God, not only because we were a created thing, but because we were a *corporeal* created thing."⁵¹ Human nature, then, uniquely participated in that general goodness which Christ's Incarnation granted to creaturely reality; it was, after all, "our nature" and "our flesh" to which "he betrothed himself" in particular. Christ's (future) Incarnation rendered human nature a fitting recipient of those gifts—especially grace and original justice—which served to elevate human nature in the beginning.

Second, God wanted to provide human creatures with a moral "example"—one specific human being whom they might observe and imitate while "in the way," *en route* to their greatest good. Human creatures, Catarino notes, were predestined—from the very first—to be conformed to Christ's image in heaven; "thus it was necessary that he should be [to them] an example, in order that [they] might conform themselves to him in the way."⁵²

Third, God always intended—in culmination of the relationship he would contract with humankind—to raise human creatures to heaven,

⁴⁸ Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 117–24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 117–18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 118–24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 123. Emphasis mine.

⁵² Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 124.

where they might enjoy that “perfect beatitude” flowing from the vision of himself. And Christ’s Incarnation was required for this particular consummation of human history: “For earth—that is, man who [is] of the earth—could not suitably ascend into heaven unless some commerce and affinity was first contracted by the lowering of heaven itself to earth, with the intention that our kind [*genus nostrum*] would be carried just like a bride into the house of her husband.”⁵³ Transition to “heaven” at the end of the age carries an ontological implication for human creatures: those who obtain that end are glorified. Thus Catarino notes that Christ, who has become humankind’s *redemptor* on account of Adam’s sin, would have been humankind’s *glorificator* in any case: “He would have come to carry us into heaven, and to glorify us.”⁵⁴ But the relationship between Christ’s Incarnation and humankind’s consummation extends even further. According to Catarino, Christ becomes—and always was intended to be—the object of humankind’s consummated vision, the “God” who is physically seen “face to face,” and thus the source of “*perfect* beatitude.” Vision of Jesus Christ pertains specifically to the glorified human creature’s corporeal element (or, in Catarino’s words, the “inferior part”); human creatures will contemplate the invisible God with spiritual eyes. Without Christ’s Incarnation, however, there could be no *perfect* beatitude for human creatures: “man himself would not be perfectly happy without Christ, since our eternal life consists not only in knowledge of the Father, but also in knowledge of Jesus Christ. . . . For in him our inferior part is made happy, and so the whole man is made happy.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

Catarino’s doctrine of the motive(s) for Christ’s Incarnation deserves fuller exposition; however, the above summary will suffice to draw some conclusions regarding the intra-systematic relationship between Catarino’s Christology and his account of the Devil’s fall. Catarino’s conviction regarding the absolute nature of Christ’s Incarnation clearly owns a certain systematic priority in relation to his doctrine of the Devil’s fall. In Catarino’s theological perspective, Christ’s Incarnation does not require—that is, it does not follow from—Lucifer’s apostasy, abjection from heaven, and subsequent corruption of humankind; indeed, that is rather the point of Catarino’s teaching on the motive(s) for Christ’s Incarnation! But Lucifer’s fall could only have occurred according to the pattern suggested by Catarino if Christ’s Incarnation was both purposed *and* revealed

⁵³ Catharinus, *Enarrationes*, 177; see also Catharinus, *Opuscula*, vol. 1, 124.

⁵⁴ Catharinus, *Enarrationes*, 178.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

according to the pattern he suggests for *that* reality. Thus Papini notes regarding Catarino's theory on the Devil's fall: "The first advocates of the new theory accepted as essential premises the ideas of Rupert, splendidly developed by Duns Scotus, with regard to the Redemption. Duns Scotus, as we know, wished to demonstrate that the Incarnation would have occurred in any event, even had Adam not fallen."⁵⁶

It would be wrong, however, to reduce Catarino's doctrine of Christ's Incarnation to a mere *premise* in relation to his doctrine of the Devil's fall. Catarino's peculiar convictions regarding Christ's Incarnation positively *fuelled* his understanding of Lucifer's fall from glory. In Catarino's theological perspective, the Incarnation undergirds and informs God's relationship with every aspect of his creation. God's decision to assume human nature constitutes, as it were, a *primal* and *fundamental* choice that implicates all God's dealings with humankind, the angels, and creaturely reality *per se*. It is God's chief decree—subsequent to, but already anticipated in, God's decision to create as such. It is appropriate, then, that God's earliest revelation to rational creatures should consist in disclosure of his plan for the Incarnation. To put the matter somewhat crudely, God couldn't wait to tell someone outside the circle of his own triune being what he was going to do. But even this does not express the matter adequately. Revelation of the Incarnation to the angels did not merely follow from divine anticipation of a determined goal combined with garrulity. There was, as noted previously, a specific logic undergirding God's commandment to the angels to worship the *incarnate* Son—they too would be beneficiaries of his peculiar person and work; they too would discover, in time, perfect beatitude in and through him.

In broader analysis of Catarino's thought, then, one should note how the doctrine of the Incarnation—given his peculiar perspective on that reality—necessarily informed the major dogmatic loci of his theology. If one will trace the patterns of Catarino's thought, one cannot discuss the being, origin, and destiny of humankind, the angels, the demons, or creation broadly without reference to the incarnate Son. Thus the Incarnation informs cosmology, anthropology, angelology, diabolology, and eschatology, for a start. The Christocentric character of Catarino's theology *in toto* (and thereby the Christocentric character of specific dogmas which he advanced, such as that regarding Lucifer's fall) constitutes the basis of my initial suggestion that Catarino's thought might be theologically *attractive* to a contemporary audience, should anyone bother to start paying the sixteenth-century Dominican thinker serious attention. My

⁵⁶ Papini, *The Devil*, 32.

suggestion takes into account what Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt has described as a recent “tilting in Scotus’s direction” on the question of “whether, if human beings had not sinned, God would have become incarnate.”⁵⁷ In Bauerschmidt’s judgment, “there seems to be a growing agreement that one ought to think of the Incarnation first in terms of perfecting creation . . . rather than repairing it.”⁵⁸ Surely such a “tilting in Scotus’s direction” renders significant and noteworthy a theologian who, to cite Scaramuzzi, offered “a more complete, thorough, and vigorous demonstration of [Scotus’s] thesis [regarding the Incarnation] than we have found in any of the pure-blood Scotists.”⁵⁹ Indeed, in Catarino one might find a theologian who pushed Scotus’s doctrine of the Incarnation somewhat further, or at least drew greater theological implications from the recognition of the Incarnation as so proper and central to God’s original intentions.

Of course, whether Catarino’s theology *in toto* or specific doctrines that he advanced do ultimately appear more attractive to contemporary eyes depends too much on theological trends, confessional identities, and subjective tastes. But surely recognition of the Christocentric character of his doctrine can serve—regardless of how attractive one finds his actual conclusions—to subvert the rather typical scholarly representation of Catarino noted in the opening of this article. Divorced from his doctrine of Christ’s Incarnation, Catarino’s account of the Devil’s fall could seem to exemplify theological “impudence,” a “disregard for traditional theology,” and/or a “lack of theological sense.” Considered in relation to his doctrine of Christ’s Incarnation, Catarino’s account of the Devil’s fall calls these characterizations of his thought into question. Was Catarino’s theology truly marked by an impudent disregard for traditional Catholic thought? As should now be clear, Catarino was sensitive to the need for some “testimony of antiquity” to his doctrines. And his teaching on the Devil’s fall did draw upon “traditional theology” in a certain way. It was broadly informed by the reflections of preceding theologians on the issue

⁵⁷ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Incarnation, Redemption, and the Character of God,” in *John Paul II & St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2006), 31.

⁵⁸ Bauerschmidt, “Incarnation, Redemption, and the Character of God,” 31–32. Bauerschmidt identifies a trend in Catholic thought; he points to Karl Rahner’s teaching on the Incarnation as evidence for this “tilting in Scotus’s direction.” Edwin Christian Van Driel’s work *Incarnation Anyway*, referenced previously, evidences a trend among Protestant thinkers to conceive the Incarnation along lines loosely anticipated by Scotus, Catarino, et al.

⁵⁹ Scaramuzzi, “Le idee scotiste di un grande teologo domenicano del ’500: Ambrogio Catarino,” 197.

of Lucifer's apostasy; it was specifically informed by a perspective on Christ's Incarnation that was affirmed by Rupert of Deutz, Alexander of Hales, and Albert Magnus, and given definitive shape by Duns Scotus, Gabriel Biel, and a host of Franciscan thinkers.⁶⁰ So also Catarino should be acquitted—at least with regard to his teaching on the Devil's fall—of demonstrating a “lack of theological sense.” His teaching *was* principled and governed by specific convictions regarding Christ's Incarnation and those divine intentions for rational creatures—angelic and human—which provoked the Incarnation. Revision of the scholarly portraits of Catarino *qua* theologian is clearly needed. Consideration of his teaching on the Devil's fall will not provide sufficient material to *perfect* any such revision, but perhaps it provides sufficient material to indicate that Catarino, as a starting point, might best be approached and understood as a Catholic *Christocentric* theologian of the Reformation period. N V

⁶⁰ See Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), 163–70.