

SIN IN THE STATE OF INNOCENCE

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T. THOMAS, in his tract on the Production of Man,¹ gives us an idea of what our condition while on earth would have been like, if our first parents had remained faithful. Before considering the phase which we have chosen to treat of in this paper, namely, our condition with regard to righteousness, we might note that, among men in the state of innocence, there would have been a certain amount of inequality, but this inequality would in no way imply imperfection in any individual.² The reason for this inequality lies in the fact, as St. Thomas notes, that "man worked not of necessity, but of his own free-will, by virtue of which man can apply himself, more or less, to action, desire, or knowledge; hence some would have made greater advance in virtue and knowledge than others. There might also have been bodily disparity. For the human body was not entirely exempt from the laws of nature, so as not to receive from exterior sources more or less advantage and help. . . . So we may say that . . . some would have been born more robust in body than others, and also greater, and more beautiful, and in all ways better disposed; so that, however, in those who were thus surpassed, there would have been no defect or fault either in soul or body."³

The cause of this inequality could be either on the part of God, inasmuch as "He would exalt some above others; so that the beauty of order would the more shine forth among men," or "on the part of nature as above described, without any defect of nature."⁴

With this short and incomplete summary of the condition of man with regard to knowledge and his body, we will now consider man's condition with regard to righteousness. St. Thomas

¹ *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qq. 90 to 101.

² Ia, q. 96, a. 3.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*, ad 3m.

teaches⁵ that man born in the state of innocence would have been born in the state of grace. This grace, however, would not have been natural to him, but would have been conferred on man, by God, as soon as he had received a rational soul. For grace was not natural even to Adam, but was a supernatural gift. St. Thomas points this out when he says: "The very rectitude of the primitive state, wherewith man was endowed by God, seems to require that . . . he was created in grace. . . . For this rectitude consisted in his reason being subject to God, the lower powers to reason, and the body to the soul; and the first subjection was the cause of both the second and the third; since while reason was subject to God, the lower powers remained subject to reason. . . . It is clear that such a subjection . . . was not from nature; otherwise it would have remained after sin; since even in the demons the natural gifts remained after sin."⁶

We well know that this subjection did not remain after the fall, for as St. Augustine says: "As soon as they . . . forfeited Divine grace, they were ashamed of their nakedness, for they felt the impulse of disobedience in the flesh, as though it were a punishment corresponding to their own disobedience."⁷ Thus as soon as man lost grace the flesh refused to obey the soul, and from this St. Thomas concludes: "We may gather that the inferior powers were subjected to the soul through grace existing therein." Thus having shown the necessity for grace in the primitive state, St. Thomas concludes: "This grace, however, would not have been natural, for it would not have been transfused by virtue of the semen; but would have been conferred on man immediately on his receiving a rational soul."⁸

Thus having seen that man would have been created in grace, that his reason would have been subject to God, the lower faculties to the reason and the body to the soul, we next inquire whether in such a state man could have sinned. Many of us have an idea, that if Adam had not sinned, sin would never have been committed by his descendents, or what is more, it would not have been possible for man to sin. This, however, is not the teaching of St. Thomas. Perhaps this would not be sur-

⁵ Ia, q. 100, a. 1, corpus et ad 2m.

⁶ Ia, q. 95, a. 1.

⁷ *De civitate Dei*, xiii, 13.

⁸ Ia, q. 100, a. 1 ad 2m.

prising to us if we would recall that even in our exalted state, if our first parents had remained faithful, we would nevertheless have been inferior to the angels and to Adam the most perfect of all men. Yet it was possible for them to sin. Why then should it have been impossible for us to have sinned?

Bearing these facts in mind, we may now consider the arguments of the Angelic Doctor. In the first place he notes that it would have been unfitting for the children to have perfections at birth that the parents lacked at the time of begetting: "It is clear that at their birth they (children) would not have had greater perfection than their parents at the time of begetting. Now the parents, as long as they begot children, would not have been confirmed in righteousness. For the rational creature is confirmed in righteousness through the beatitude given by the clear vision of God; and when once it has seen God, it cannot but cleave to Him Who is the essence of goodness, wherefrom no one can turn away, since nothing is desired or loved but under the aspect of good. I say this according to the general law; for it may be otherwise in the case of special privilege, such as we believe was granted to the Virgin Mother of God. And as soon as Adam had attained to that happy state of seeing God in His Essence, he would have become spiritual in soul and body; and his animal life would have ceased, wherein alone there is generation."⁹

St. Thomas leaves no doubt with regard to the fact that Adam did not enjoy the Beatific Vision while on earth. He treats this in a separate article: "Now it is clear that man cannot willingly be turned away from beatitude, since naturally and necessarily he desires it, and shuns unhappiness. Wherefore no one who sees the Essence of God can willingly turn away from God, which means to sin. Hence all who see God through His Essence are so firmly established in the love of God, that for eternity they can never sin. Therefore, as Adam did sin, it is clear that he did not see God through His Essence."¹⁰

We may sum up these arguments of St. Thomas thus: Man can sin unless he is confirmed in grace. This confirmation in grace comes only with the Beatific Vision, except in case of a special grace as was given to the Blessed Virgin. Adam did not enjoy the Beatific Vision, otherwise he would not have sinned.

⁹ *ibid.*, a. 2.

¹⁰ Ia, q. 94, a. 1.

Since then he was not confirmed in grace, it follows that his children were not, since the children do not have anything by nature that is lacking to the parents.

Again in his beautiful tract on the Angels, St. Thomas points out that: "An angel or any other rational creature considered in his own nature, can sin; and to whatever creature it belongs not to sin, such creature has it as a gift of grace, and not from the condition of nature. The reason of this is, because sinning is nothing else than a deviation from the rectitude which an act ought to have; . . . That act alone, the rule of which is the very virtue of the agent, can never fall short of rectitude. . . . Every created will has rectitude of act so far only as it is regulated according to the Divine will, to which the last end is to be referred: . . . Thus only in the Divine will can there be no sin; whereas there can be sin in the will of every creature; considering the condition of its nature."¹¹

Before passing on it is worthy of note to mention here that this impossibility of sinning in those who enjoy the Beatific Vision in no way interferes with or destroys free-will. The power to sin does not belong to the perfection of free-will, but it is rather an imperfection. "Hence it belongs to the perfection of its liberty for the free-will to be able to choose between opposite things, keeping the order of the end in view; but it comes of the defect of liberty for it to choose anything by turning away from the order of the end; and this is sin. Hence there is greater liberty of will in the angels, who cannot sin, than there is in ourselves, who can sin."¹²

Since then it would have been possible for us to sin in the state of innocence, we now inquire what would have been the nature of the first sin—could we have committed any of the sins we now commit? Before considering it we would note that St. Thomas does not treat this question with regard to the offspring, but only with regard to our first parents. We shall therefore give his doctrine on this point and from it we will readily see that it would have applied also to the descendents of Adam.

St. Thomas informs us that the first sin was not one of disobedience, but of pride. "Though the woman was deceived before she sinned in deed, still it was not till she had already

¹¹ Ia, q. 63, a. 1.

¹² Ia, q. 62, a. 8 ad 3m.

sinned by interior pride. For Augustine says (*Gen. ad lit.* xi, 30) that, *the woman could not have believed the words of the serpent, had she not already acquiesced in the love of her own power, and in a presumption of self-conceit.*"¹³ Further on he adds: "If any object, as some do, that he (Adam) was not guided, when tempted, though he was then most in need of guidance, we reply that man had already sinned in his heart, and that he failed to have recourse to the Divine aid."¹⁴

Elsewhere he tells us why it was pride, and pride alone, that could have been the first sin: "It is evident that inordinateness is in the inward movement of the soul before being in the outward act of the body. . . . Now among the inward movements, the appetite is moved towards the end before being moved towards that which is desired for the sake of the end; and consequently man's first sin was where it was possible for the appetite to be directed to an inordinate end. Now man was so appointed in the state of innocence, that there was no rebelling of the flesh against the spirit. Wherefore it was not possible for the first inordinateness in the human appetite to result from his coveting a sensible good. . . . It remains therefore that the first inordinateness of the human appetite resulted from his coveting inordinately some spiritual good . . . and this pertains to pride."¹⁵

We next inquire what would have been the nature of the spiritual good that man would have inordinately desired. The Angelic Doctor, in treating of the nature of the sin of our first parents, tells us that it consisted in coveting God's likeness. They did not, however, desire to be absolutely like God, "since such a likeness to God is not conceivable to the mind, especially of a wise man. . . . But the first man sinned chiefly by coveting God's likeness, as regards knowledge of good and evil, . . . that by his own natural power he might decide what was good, and what was evil for him to do; or again that he should of himself foreknow what good and what evil would befall him. Secondarily he sinned by coveting God's likeness as regards his own power of operation, namely that by his own natural power he might act so as to obtain happiness."¹⁶

¹³ Ia, q. 94, a. 4 ad 1m.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, ad 5m.

¹⁵ IIa IIae, q. 163, a. 1.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, a. 2.

From this we see that the first sin was not due to the choosing of something evil, but the choosing of something good in an evil manner. St. Thomas makes this clear when he points out the two ways in which sin can be committed in the act of free-will: "Mortal sin occurs in two ways in the act of free-will. First, when something evil is chosen; as man sins by choosing adultery, which is evil of itself. Such sin always comes of ignorance or error; otherwise what is evil would never have been chosen as good. . . . In another way sin comes of free-will by choosing something good in itself, but not according to the proper measure or rule; so that the defect which induces sin is only on the part of the choice which is not properly regulated, but not on the part of thing chosen. . . . Such a sin does not presuppose ignorance, but merely absence of consideration of the things which ought to be considered. In this way the angel sinned, by seeking his own good, from his own free-will, insubordinately to the rule of the Divine will."¹⁷

As we stated above, we see no reason why this doctrine of St. Thomas would not have applied also to the children of Adam. To have committed sin, other than the wishing of good in an inordinate manner, would have presupposed ignorance or error on their part; ignorance, however, would not have been in them: "Ignorance is privation of knowledge due at some particular time; and this would not have been in children from their birth, for they would have possessed the knowledge due to them at that time. Hence, no ignorance would have been in them, but only nescience in regard to certain matters. Such nescience was even in the holy angels."¹⁸ Further on he adds: "Children would have had sufficient knowledge to direct them to deeds of righteousness, in which men are guided by universal principles of right; and this knowledge of theirs would have been much more complete than what we have now by nature, as likewise their knowledge of other universal principles."¹⁹ From this it is plain that, although the children of Adam would have had to acquire all their knowledge,²⁰ and as a result would not have attained the perfection of knowledge enjoyed by Adam, nevertheless, they would have had sufficient for

¹⁷ Ia, q. 63, a. 1 ad 4m.

¹⁸ Ia, q. 101, a. 1 ad 2m.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, ad 3m.

²⁰ *ibid.*, corpus et ad 1m.

their state, so that ignorance and error would have been unknown to them. If it was a matter to which their knowledge did not extend, we answer with St. Thomas: "It might also be said that he would have been divinely guided from above, so as not to be deceived in a matter to which his knowledge did not extend."²¹

To sum up: St. Thomas teaches that in the state of innocence there would have been inequalities both with regard to bodily and spiritual perfections, without, however, implying any imperfection in those who were thus surpassed. All men would have been born in grace, a supernatural gift, which, however, did not do away with the possibility of their sinning. Their first sin would have been one of pride; once they had thus sinned, the perfect subjection of their reason to God, of their lower faculties to the reason, would have been lost and all sins would have been possible to them.

²¹ Ia, q. 94, a. 4 ad 5m.

