

Pride or Envy?

Some notes on the reason the Fathers give for the devil's fall)*

It was in the course of his stay in Rome that Jerome wrote his long letter to Eustochium (*epist.* 22) explaining how a virgin ought to behave. The second half of the work contains a warning against vanity and self-satisfaction (ch. 27). The author does not however feel it necessary to caution his addressee against the particular kind of boastfulness which wealth and station engender. Instead he is confident (for he knows her genuine humility) that neither she nor her mother has any room for the pride that caused the devil to fall.

Jerome ascribes the devil's fall to pride on three further occasions. Some years earlier in letter 12,2 he had affirmed that this had been the only reason for it. The reason he gives was evidently felt to be in some degree axiomatic, for in this passage the devil's downfall forms part of a list of warning examples that also includes the Jews and the Pharisee who prayed ostentatiously in the temple. In a later letter (69,9,6) Jerome says everyone knows it was arrogance that overthrew the devil. He gives the same explanation in his commentary on Isaiah at 2,3,4. There is a slight change of emphasis in his commentary on Ecclesiastes (2,1). Here he maintains that the devil fell through abundance of good things.

That the devil's ruin was due to pride was always the more widely held view. It seems that the first of the Fathers to give it clear-cut expression was Origen¹⁾. In a homily on Ezechiel that only survives in Jerome's translation (9,2) he declares most emphatically that the devil fell because of pridefulness, arrogance and conceit. Athanasius a century after him puts it down to the same cause. Chapter five of his treatise on virginity states that Satan was brought down from heaven to hell not by fornication, adultery or stealing but because of overweening pride (ὕπερηφανία). Similarly Pseudo-Athanasius calls it φούσῳσις at *syntag.* 2,16. Of Jerome's own contemporaries Chrysostom in his homily on Isaiah 6,1 (3,3) thinks it is this overweening pride that has made the devil

*) Abbreviations of works are taken from Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* or *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, where editions are also given.

¹⁾ Athenagoras had used the word ἐνυβρίζειν at *leg.* 24,5.

what he is. He here refers explicitly to Isaiah 14,13, where the speaker exclaims upon Lucifer's fall and tells how he had said in his heart, «I will exalt my throne above the stars of God». Another homily of Chrysostom's on II Thessalonians (1,1) makes ἀπόνοια the cause of his fall. This is then glossed as ὑπερηφάνια. Ambrose too cites the passage from Isaiah to show that pride was responsible (*in psalm. 118 serm. 7,8*). From the fifth century three passages may be mentioned where pride is said to have led to the devil's downfall. These are to be found in the title to Cassian's *inst.* 12,4, in chapter forty-three of Gerontius' life of the younger Melania, and in the preface (par. 1) to the first part of Quodvultdeus' work *de promissionibus*. At the same period Theodoret's catalogue of heresies (5,8) quotes not only Isaiah 14,13 but Ezechiel 28,17 and I Timothy 3,6 as well as other texts in order to prove the point. In the following century the same reason is given thrice by the 'Regula Magistri' (11,2. 13,73. 15,50) and once by Caesarius of Arles in sermon 200,5. It is therefore clear that pride was widely adduced by the Fathers of both East and West.

Notwithstanding that it was so common to assert that pride had caused the devil's fall, this was not however at any time the only explanation. Others of the Fathers pronounced instead that his envy of mankind had been the cause²). Though a good deal less popular, this view was never without adherents. Already Irenaeus had dated the devil's apostasy to the time when he envied God's creation (4,40,3 cf. 5,24,4). In the 250's Cyprian explicitly assigns the blame to envy in chapter four of his treatise on that topic. Somewhat later Pseudo-Cyprian expresses a similar view during a sermon on the parable of the sower (*serm. de cent.* p. 81). Later still Orientius in the fifth century says in his poem that the devil fell from heaven because he was jealous (*comm.* 1,460). In the East a homily of Saint Basil had given the same reason (11,4) and warned that the devil was always keen to infect Christians with the same vice.

In the Fathers that have been mentioned there is no sign of being faced with a dilemma. Each of them names either the one cause or the other and makes no attempt to reconcile the two. There is however an exception. Augustine alone seems to have been aware of the incongruity and have felt the need to resolve it. Whereas in a tractate on Saint John's gospel he thought envy was the reason (5,19), pride had been to blame in his pamphlet 'Against Secundinus' (17) and once again at *gen. ad litt.*

²) The devil's envy is mentioned in Wisdom 2,24.

4,24. Further on in this latter work (11,16) Augustine brings the two explanations together and seeks to fit both into an acceptable time-scale. He notes that scripture does not say when pride brought down the devil, but it is clear to him here that it preceded and occasioned his envy of man³). Both are named as causes in his treatise on virginity (31,31). It appears that Augustine's suggestion for harmonizing the two was not without influence, for just a few years later a solution that is similar is found in the dialogues composed by Cassian. At *conl.* 8,10,3 the devil is said to have fallen first because of pride and then through envy. The speaker in 8,9 had assumed that envy of Adam and Eve was the reason.

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³) According to Augustine pride is the mother of envy cf. *TLL* VIII 447,18 ff. (read instead 140,22,54 and add in *psalm.* 100,9). He also makes pride lead to envy in *psalm.* 58 *serm.* 2,5.