Ordinatio I, distinction 47, the single question: “Is divine permission an act of the divine will?”

1 Concerning the forty-seventh distinction I ask whether divine permission is an act of the divine will.

For the affirmative:

Otherwise, it seems that God could not know with certainty that a given person is going to sin, since he does not know a future contingent apart from the determination of his own will; but it does not appear that God has any act concerning a sinner except permitting him to sin (for he has neither a willing nor a willing-against with respect to the sinner); so if permitting is not an act, God will not be certain about that person’s future sin, since there will be no determination of his will so as to allow him to know that future contingent with certainty.

2 On the contrary:

Permission is listed with the other expressions of the divine will.¹ Now command is not an elicited act of the divine will; therefore, a fortiori, neither is permission.

[I. Reply to the question]

3 I reply:

In us one can distinguish two kinds of acts of will: willing and willing-against. Both are positive acts, and if they concern the same object, they are contrary acts, which we also express by different words: namely, loving and hating.

4 And both of these in us can be further distinguished. Willing can be either efficacious or restrained. We call willing efficacious when the will is not just pleased with the thing willed but immediately brings it about, if it can; and in the same way we call willing-against efficacious when the one who wills-against something does not merely hinder it but, if he can, completely destroys it. A restrained willing is one in which the thing willed is pleasing, and yet the will does not bring it about, even though it could; a restrained

¹ The expressions (signa) of the divine will are prohibition, command, counsel, operation, and permission. See Thomas Aquinas, ST I.19.12.
willing-against is one in which the thing willed-against is displeasing, but the will does not prohibit it from existing, even though it could.

5 So in us restrained willing-against, properly so called, is apparently the permission of some evil that I know. After all, I am not said to permit something about which I know nothing, or something that is done by someone else that pleases me; rather, I am said to permit some bad thing, done by someone else, that I know about, and that I do not prohibit.

6 The expression of an efficacious willing, if it is done directly by the will, is the carrying out of an act; if it is done by another, it is a command. The expression of a restrained willing-against, in us, is perhaps counsel, or else persuasion or (in other words) admonition. The expression of a restrained willing-against is permission or dissuasion, and the expression of efficacious willing-against is prohibition.

7 Now this distinction could be applied in God’s case as well. Thus, just as his one act is both a willing and a willing-against—and this without any contrariety or dissimilarity in that act in itself—so too it can be said that with respect to some of the objects willed in that act his willing is efficacious, and likewise that his willing-against with respect to some objects is efficacious; but with respect to others, it is not. And then it could be said that God’s willing-against objects that he wills-against but does not will to prohibit is a restrained willing-against; and this willing-against on God’s part can be called his permission, and thus it is an act in God insofar as his will goes forth over an object that is related in this way to the divine will.2

8 But if this is not acceptable because God’s willing-against anything that actually exists would seem to involve some sadness on God’s part as well as an imperfection in his willing and in his will, then it can be said that permission as something external to God, or as expression, is what has been brought about but is contrary to divine command; and this is the permission that is the expression of the divine will. But there is nothing in the divine will itself that corresponds to this except God’s not willing to prohibit something from being done, in other words, God’s not willing-against it; and that is a negation of a positive divine act, and consequently not a positive act.

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2 Reading et ita est in Deo actus in quantum transit super obiectum sic se habens ad voluntatem (Σ) for the edition’s et ita actus in Deo, in quantum transit super obiectum, sic se habet ad voluntatem divinum.
And as for what is called “willing to allow,” this can be understood not as God’s having a direct willing concerning what he permits, but rather a reflexive act. For this person will sin or this person sins is presented to the divine will. First his will has no willing with respect to this (for God cannot will that this person sin); second, he can understand his will’s not willing this, and then he can will his will’s not willing this. And that is what is meant by saying that God wills to allow and voluntarily allows, that he wills to permit and voluntarily permits. Similarly, in the case of Judas, when Judas is presented to the divine will, first God has a not-willing of glory for Judas—not, at first, a willing-against, according to the final position in distinction 41—and then, second, he can reflect on that negation of an act and will it. And thus he willingly or voluntarily does not elect Judas-who-will-be-a-sinner-to-the-last and wills-against glory for him.

[II. Reply to the initial argument]

In reply to the first argument [n. 1], I explained in distinction 41 how God does not foresee future sin solely in virtue of knowing that he will permit a person to remain a sinner to the end, and thus the person will be ultimately worthy of damnation; in addition, he must know that he will cooperate with this person in an act of sinning and will not cooperate with an act whose omission is a sin of omission. Nonetheless, concomitant with either of these permissions is God’s foreseeing that he will not will that this person sin. And thus it is clear in what way divine permission is an act of will and in what way it isn’t.

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3 Cf. Reportatio IA d. 47 nn. 7–8.
4 Reading offertur with the overwhelming majority of mss against the edition’s offert (AR).
5 Cf. I d. 41 n. 45.
6 Reading et nolitionem gloriae (CQ) for the edition’s et nolitionem gloriae, sed non volitionem gloriae.
7 Cf. I d. 41 n. 50.