

Chapter 6*

Personal Relationship to Angels and Guardian Angels

*He makes winds¹ His messengers,
Flames of fire His servants.
Psalm 104:4*

There is truth in Schleiermacher's² remark that the question as to whether angels exist or not has no influence on our actions, since they no longer appear. Schenkel said something similar that even if it were there, the angelic world does not touch our conscience. We, on the other hand, agree with the contrary, namely that thoughts about the angelic world have an elevating effect on our souls. Of course, reflecting on the Eternal Being or on our Saviour does this even more. From that perspective, it cannot be argued that we do not need that world for our moral life. Well, indeed, angels would only be important if merely thinking about them would have a sanctifying effect on us, but then the possibility of basing your belief in angels would dissipate. Belief in angels does not rest on what we consciously experience in our heart, but on the holy tradition that lies before us in God's Word. The reason for the existence of angels is not found mainly in what we think about angels, nor in the personal contact that we may foster from our side, but principally much more in the fact that *it pleased God to be served by angels*.

Consequently, both points require separate discussion. We must first search out the meaning of our consciously living into the angelic world and after that their provisional objection. Both of these points must then be pursued in connection to the question about the *existence* of angels.

This is the first question: Can our conscious contact with the world of angels have sufficient meaning to find this a reason for their existence? We base ourselves here on the assumption that there are no more angelic appearances in our personal lives or in that of today's church. The result is that from our side our contact with that world is only thinkable if we think about angels as we sing to them as in Psalm 103 and also as we create imaginary images of their life. And then there must be

¹In its footnotes, the NIV allows for "angels," which is more appropriate for the subject.

²[Friedrich Schleiermacher - Wikipedia](#)

agreement that the fruit of our contact with the angelic world is not great, not strong and not dominant in our spiritual life.

This has two causes. One, our contact with them happens so seldom and, on the other, that contact is always hovering. Among the constituency of our readers at least, the first will not be argued against. There are even those who as good as never think about angels and who can hardly claim that they have ever experienced spiritual uplift while thinking about them. Even though we acknowledge that this thinking about angels is more common in some other circles, but that direct angelic influence is never so paramount among them that it rules their moral life. Where this influence is stronger, this usually evokes the shadow side. The more a believer trusts in his angel, the more his direct trust in his Father in heaven diminishes and ends up in the background.

But we need also to pay attention to the second cause of the weakness of this contact with angels, namely that we have no idea about such angels. Some have tried to encourage accepting a concrete form for angels, but more serious persons know that this figure is a product of our poetic imagination—the fruit of imagination, not of reality. A human appearance with the glow of eternal youth on its face and surrounded with a halo to look like heavenly glory, while two wings protruding from the shoulder blades, betrays a supernatural origin, is not a portrait so much as phantasy and is not faithful to what the Scriptures tell us about angels. We admit that our attempts to have contact with the angelic world are not the most dominant and influential factors in our moral life.

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Nevertheless, it will not do to completely ignore this influence all together, something that we can best make tangible by a comparison to the power of the holy tradition of our ancestors. The heroes and saints, the martyrs and the fighters from previous centuries do not exist for us in the sense that they appear to us personally. Spiritism may say all it wants about communion with the spirits of the dead, but to watch or listen to it never produces an experience of spiritual upliftment. Rather, it is more in the nature of playful curiosity. Never have we heard of an appearance of

the spirit of William of Orange³ or of Guido de Bres⁴ that addresses our current generation with enough holy reverence and seriousness to inspire and fill us with holy enthusiasm. All the media reports about this have turned out to be meaningless, gibberish, without any higher impulse, bearing no signs of higher origin. And so we repeat what we've said earlier, we don't even have any contact with the heroes and martyrs from among our ancestors via direct appearances. To be sure, people have often felt a need for this, but it is our poetry that has conjured up what reality denied us. In fact it is in poetry and drama that has often laid on the lips of actors a full exchange between the living and those who have gone before, but all of this was and remains phantasy, not reality. So, even attempts at contact with ancestors restrict us to *thinking* about the heroes and martyrs of the past.

We should not regard this in a too restrictive sense. We do not mean that all contact with previous generations was lacking, since we do direct our conscious thoughts to someone from those centuries. This also definitely takes place. But we have a much stronger bond with our ancestors through the effect upon us of the general national or ecclesiastical or even family traditions. We feel a strong bond with previous generations. The stories and the glory of our ancestors have reached us and are adopted by us as part of our own glory. As a child is proud of the honour and praise of her father because its own pride develops along with that of her father, so there exists in every nation with a rich history a degree of pride in their ancestors and it continues to claim that fame for its own purposes. Unfortunately, as has happened all too often, this can degenerate into a false patriotic self-elevation. Our own nation also knows all about that. But neither can or may it be denied that the memory of our ancestors or of our national tradition, of our sense of unity with the glory of the past, also exercise a certain beneficial influence upon us.

³ William of Orange—[William III](#) (1650 –1702), also widely known as [William of Orange](#), was sovereign Prince of Orange from birth, Stadtholder of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Guelders, and Overijssel in [the Dutch Republic](#) from the 1670s and King of England, Ireland, and Scotland from 1689 until his death in 1702. < <

www.bing.com/search?q=prince+william+of+orange+dutch&FORM=QSRE1 > AND

<en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_of_Orange#:~:text=From%20Wikipedia%2C%20the%20free%20encyclopedia%20William%20of%20Orange,Orange-Nassau%20and%20the%20United%20Provinces%20as%20a%20state >.

⁴ Guido de Bres— [Protestant reformer](#) and theologian, a student of [John Calvin](#) and [Theodore Beza](#) in Geneva. De Bres compiled and published the [Belgic Confession](#) (1561) (*Confessio Belgica*) still in use today in Belgium and the Netherlands. It is also used by many Reformed Churches all over the world. <

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guido_de_Bres >.

A positive influence that can also feebly operate during stable times, but especially at acute times such as when the national spirit wakes up from its slumber, it can sometimes affect us powerfully. Every enemy considering an attack on our fatherland knows that, besides our army and our fortresses, it has also to deal with our national traditions. Under such circumstances, our history can appear like a radiant wreath before us. The noble and holy then steps into the foreground. Human mutilating weakness and sin fade into the shadows. The result is that memory of the past and a bond with the foregoing generations can, via tradition, arouse enthusiasm, animate us and equip us for courageous deeds.

The above is the best comparison with the influence on our human lives from contact with the angelic world. In both cases the personal aspect is missing. We see neither angels nor ancestors before us, but we know of both that they have performed heroic deeds in the past—our ancestors on the battle field, on their death pyre or in the halls of politics; the angels in the tents of the Patriarchs, with the army of Sanhereb or by the crib in Bethlehem. We also know that both had certain other connections with human life in the past. In both cases we have to do not with specific persons or angels, but, rather, with the *world* of angels and with the *world* of our ancestors, both of which represent a certain degree of purity and sanctity in our imagination.

But there is a difference, quite significant actually. We can see the heroes of the past before us in our imagination and can trace their deeds in all details. The generations of our fore-parents still are alive before us and contact with them is still anchored in our blood. With the angels, however, we are dealing with a totally different sort of being. They are not humans; they share the nature of angels. Their portrayal and form is foreign to us. They are not one with us, but very different. All relations with them are defined by the fact that they, along with us, are *creatures*, fellow servants of the Most High and that the Lord God is served by them even now for the benefit of our human world.

But no matter how broadly we depict that difference, angels will always form their own world, their world is in contact with us humans and we also receive from them the image of a holier, untainted, higher world than ours. If it is undeniable that it has a beneficial effect on us as soon as we free our hearts from the mostly low and degenerated world in which we live, in order to elevate our hearts and senses to a

more noble and pristine life, then it is also undeniable that reflecting on the angelic world can have an elevating and inspirational effect on us. That was exactly the intention of our Saviour when, by means of the Lord's Prayer, He lifted up our praying soul to envisage the perfection in which the angels do the will of the Father. That envisaging wakes us up to a holy imitation and on its own lays the following prayer on our lips that we carry out Your will as this happens among the angels around Your throne: "*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" From that perspective, we must insist over against Schleiermacher and Schenkel, that they have undermined and contradicted the Lord's Prayer and that, by placing themselves *above* our Saviour, they imagine themselves to be wiser in the things of heaven and of the spirit than He who was sent to us by the Father.

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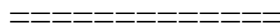
Herewith we need to add another kind of observation.

The angelic world of which we have spoken thus far, is the holy pristine sphere of the spirits around God's throne, but as we have observed in this article, it must not be ignored that the kingdom of satan and his demons also belong to that world. In so far as the question emerges about the adequacy of the reason for the existence of angels, we need also to pay attention to our relationship to the *fallen* angels. It is noteworthy how in history the conviction that in spiritual attacks and struggles we are often dealing directly with invisible *evil* spirits, left a much stronger impression than if there were an intervention in our hearts by *good* angels.

This psychological phenomenon is easily explained by the more fearful tension that affects our hearts when attacked by evil spirits. It is as if the curtain that hides the invisible things from our eyes, is opened half way so that we are struggling directly with evil spirits face to face. It is not that these demonic operations *always* display that specific and very sharp character. To the contrary, all sorts of demonic spirits affect the world, even our own hearts, without our being clearly conscious of it. But sometimes it seems in a holy struggle, when it comes to attacks, that we are exposed to a direct and personal attack from satan. In such a case, the effect of evil angels takes on such a clearly observable character, that the existence of another being with whom we are struggling is no longer doubted by us. The story about Martin Luther in Wartburg, when he thought to be seeing the devil

personally, was no more than a projection of the senses on to what actually happened spiritually and is fully in line with what Jesus said to Peter, “*Satan, get behind me!*” This occurred when Peter protested the idea that his Master was to enter glory via suffering. *Strange though it may sound, it is undeniable that the real existence of angels assures us much more in contact with fallen angels than with the good ones.*

But it is true that such struggles with satan as of man to man, do not occur in everyone’s life and therefore should not be attributed to ordinary spiritual experience. It all depends on someone’s character and temperament, on social position and history. Many pass on without ever having been led through such a fearful and deep struggle. When reading the Psalms, they can hardly imagine that those mournful tones about the bonds of death and hell were not the fruit of a high-strung imagination. After all, satan attacks exactly that which is in the most orderly state and which is God’s most precious gift or the most difficult and painful calling. That is the reason that satan’s personal attack was the fiercest on Adam in the Garden and on Jesus in the desert. The main attack was not on Abel or Seth but on Adam and Eve, also not on John the Baptist or Nathaniel, but on Peter. When centuries later, conditions for Christians were more favourable and orderly, it was Luther who experienced the most fearful suffering. Even in our own day, you will hear those among God’s children who were led through very deep valleys, complain the most about fearful attacks. They alone have these sharp and sensitive ears to listen and catch what is whispered to them from out of that evil atmosphere of angelic life and encourages them. Here also Schleiermacher and Schenkel were wrong when they spoke of the angelic world but almost ignored the demonic angel world. It cannot be said of the evil angels and their attacks that they do not have influence on our utterances and consciousness of our moral life.



And now a few words about the outdated objection that so resists our belief in the existence of angels. That objection is that angels are imperceptible and, since they lack physicality, do not lend themselves to being reflected in our imagination. There was this man in Jesus’ day who was possessed by a legion of devils, “legions” pointing to many thousands. Jesus exorcised this pitifully-possessed man by having the devils invade a drove of pigs who then tumbled off the steep

mountain cliff into a nearby lake and drowned (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:11-17; Luke 8:26-39). That all sounds so foreign to us and therefore incomprehensible, that our imagination simply falls short. But it is remarkable how in Jesus' day this action of evil angels struck people as normal, realistic, and is thus presented to us in such a tangible way. In bygone days it was customary for picture Bibles to depict exorcisms in such a way that you would see a small sort of animal come out of a possessed person that represented the exorcised demon. Of course, these old pictures never meant to suggest that demons look like such animals, but they simulated an animalistic form to point to the sinful, subhuman nature of these devils and thus represented their reality, their actual existence and their real visible exit from the possessed person. In other words, it was not a depiction of the event but an imaginary version of it.

And this is the point that touches the question about the existence of angels. They are not figments of the imagination; they are real. They have to be somewhere. If they originally were not in the possessed man but came from elsewhere and then later left him, then they did so in one way or another but in a *real* way. Were the angels physical beings, then they would be tangible; it would be possible to catch them, dissect them and do research in their existence, but that is not the case. As we will show later, a demon, like an angel, is completely incorporeal and immaterial. Both good and evil angels are exclusively spiritual beings imperceptible to our senses. We cannot see them, hear them, touch them, catch them or observe them. It is this that brings many people to superficially declare that they therefore do not exist.

It is precisely for this reason that in microscopic findings in contemporary health research there lies a secret that has something to tell us even in relation to angels and demons. God works every sickness and disease. He alone. We fancied ourselves for many years in our superficiality that the Lord God always caused all these diseases directly. We did not know how He did it. We could not imagine just how He did it. A sickness was a sickness. We did detect various symptoms; they made us suffer. But no one saw the sickness itself, its roots or its essence, for that remained beyond our senses. This is what is called "the enchanted world." In contrast, today we know that the Lord God does not always work a sickness directly but often uses the medium of very small creatures that we, all too prematurely and without making the necessary distinctions, classify as animals, but

they at least appeared to really exist even though humanity has lived for centuries and centuries without understanding anything of these little sickness-causing debilitating creatures. It is not known from where, but these bacteria, viruses and bacilli come to us and invade us. As we read of those possessed that thousands of demons can live in a human soul simultaneously, so we have learned that thousands and ten thousands bacteria and viruses can live in the hidden recesses of our bodies .

So, there really is here thus the possibility of a certain comparison. It is the Lord God who works certain influences in our bodies and others in our souls. In both cases we imagined that He does all this directly. But, seen in clearer light, it appears to a microscopically-trained eye that in sicknesses the Lord often uses the services of these small creatures. Similarly, with respect to a spiritually equipped eye at the moral level, God often uses the service of good and bad angels.

*But here's a remarkable phenomenon that while medical experts accept the existence of viruses, bacilli and bacteria, they do not generally believe in the existence of angels. At the same time, there are many believers who treasure the existence of angels but who do not want to hear of viruses etc. in the case of sickness. The medical doctor recognizes that all this works with physical means in the body, but in spiritual cases she recognizes the direct and immediate causes. Those who believe accordingly will eventually come to the only true conclusion that God uses instruments in both of these fields; i.e., He uses *means*. A believer has an open eye for both, the mysterious spread of the root of a sickness and simultaneously for the rich world of angels, whether in positive holy developments or in negative unholy developments.*

Chapter 7*

Of the Nature of Angels

*For surely it is not angels He helps,
but Abraham's descendants.
Hebrews 2:16*

The nature of angels is different from that of humans. Every attempt to identify their natures as the same must definitely be rejected. Such identification was very popular during the nineteenth century. Many regarded angels as ideal humans. People sang and jubilated especially about small children, not because they were as angels in heaven, but because by dying they had become angels. The “cherubim from on high” offers testimony how in the past this vision was applied to dead infants. For ages and even today it is still so deep within us to constantly call them “angels” with their beautiful, young and innocent faces, and, especially when they die young, to regard them as actual or real angels. Later on, this image was expanded to include adults who either displayed special love for us or who excelled in devotion or godliness. Once this latter attitude won the day, it was only logical to see in this “angelization” the realization of our human nature. There was no accounting for this development as to how this happened, but, it was thought, the nature of each person was partially animalistic or devilish and partially angelic. It was our calling to shake ourselves free from the animalist and devilish aspects in us till there remained only our angelic side. It was also popular to think that we hover between worm and seraph and that our pantheistic destination or purpose was to eventually become god-like. Indeed, Darwinism had already blossomed in poetry even before it emerged in the sciences with only this difference that the worm was replaced by the ape. Though it makes a difference in the moral field, with respect to our human nature it is all the same whether you regard the human race emerging from a chimpanzee or elevate him to an angel. In both conceptions the line or border between the two natures is crossed. While the human being is popularly treated among animals in our science textbooks, others recognize more of an ethical, highly spiritually attuned being.

The tendency of humans to assume the existence of fellow creatures on other planets has significantly contributed to the above vision. As soon as we turn our eyes upward and behold the stars in the firmament, our earth diminishes to almost nothing. And when astronomy and other modern sciences teach us how our globe is only one planet amongst those encircling the sun and that this sun with its planets makes up only a miniscule part of the entire universe, then our earth along with us, its inhabitants, becomes so infinitesimally small and insignificant, we can hardly fathom the thought that the human race is the reigning element in all of God’s creation and thus its spiritual centre. This then urges and prompts us to also

think of or wish that the other stars are similarly populated with living beings and, longing for connections, that raises the question whether those other beings could be of a sort similar to us.

There are three major perspectives here. One is that when we die on this earth, we move on to another star, so that over time the others will gradually be populated by us. Another opinion is that angels are simply higher beings in other spheres in space. The third is that, apart from angels and humans who have passed on, there are beings that are somewhat similar in formation and inclination as we humans and who, via riper and more mature development, were able to elevate themselves to a level higher than ours.

More recently, this last conception has become more popular even among scientific circles. This sort of higher developed being is then sought especially on planet Mars. Our experts think not only to know many geographical data about that planet better than on our own world, but some fancy seeing proof of human labour in some direct light rays they observe. Leaders of thought do not hesitate to express the opinion that the inhabitants of Mars are busy sending us signals in order to make contact with us. And though recently these exaggerated fantasies have lost much of their popularity, there are still among leading scientists some who insist that Mars is populated by some sort of human beings and that these inhabitants have developed further than we here on this backward earth.

We will now leave these odd theories about Mars behind us for what they are worth. They are mentioned here only to prove how strong our inclination is to find fellow creatures in other places. It is this same tendency that has led us to erase the border between humans and angels. We do this on the one hand in art by “angelizing” humans and, on the other hand, by magically turning angels into a kind of higher human being. Even our Gereformeerde theologians are not altogether free from this confusion. More than one teaches that angels are created in God’s image just like human beings, and that, without going deeper into the subject, is apparently accepted on the flimsy basis of the pleasant sound of it. However, the border between human and angelic natures is hereby erased. It is part of humans to reflect God’s image in their own, deepest essence. This cannot be said of angels without classifying the two under another single but higher conception.

The above misunderstanding has its origin in our search for the image of God exclusively in our logical and moral aspects. Supposedly, we had those higher attributes in common with angels and thus we imperceptibly began to attribute these characteristics of God's image also to angels. In order to come to a full explanation of what the image of God in humans actually means, is a task that lies outside our current parameters. Nevertheless, at least in one single point, it is worth the effort to show how false this contentious conception is.

Regardless of how vague the image of God is described in Scripture, there is this one unambiguous point from the beginning that part of the image of God is to be understood as *the reigning or stewarding assigned to humans over all creation*. Even before there was any talk of higher-minded human reason and morality, let alone of his original righteousness, this human rule over all creation was broadly and extensively treated in Genesis 1:28-30. According to Genesis 1:26-27, that ruling function is a major theme, something that our confession expresses so wonderfully when it presents all of creation as called to serve mankind and for humans to serve God. Thus we are regents over all creation under God. This is the deep power and authority that the Lord expressed so puzzlingly in Mark 9:23, "*If anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.*" This power, this authority appears with the reborn and reconciled child of God so that whoever bears the likeness of the Son and thus displays the image of God in purer, clearer features, eventually passes away in the glorious expectation of reigning with Jesus as king, indeed to sit with Him on His throne.

Not the least doubt can therefore arise that this power and reign is not merely something marginal but inseparable from us. Where that royal honour and power is lacking, the image of God is lacking, since God Himself is sovereign and almighty over all things, who rules over all His handiwork. We can say that angels were created after God's image only if, as with humans, we can ascribe such ruling power to them as fundamental to their being.

This definitely is not the case. In Psalm 8 there is already a definite pointer to the contrast that the power over creation was assigned not to angels but to the Son of Man. In other respects, humans were a "little lower" than the angels, but humans had this advantage over them, namely, that God empowered them to rule over the

works of His hands. And should the text of Psalm 8 leave any doubt that this distinction may be maintained that sharply, then the apostolic declaration in Hebrews 2:5-8 removes all uncertainty. With a decisive appeal to Psalm 8:6-7, we read in Hebrews, *“It is not to angels that He subjected the world to come,”* but to the Son of Man. Angels are neither *above* us nor *next* to us; they are definitely *under* us. After all, they will not judge us, but we them (1 Corinthians 6:3), and while we as human beings are assigned royal reign as belonging to our core, it is said much more of angels that they have a serving function, not a ruling one. This is the reason the Apostle asks, *“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”* (Hebrews 1:14). This does not mean that they now and then provide services, something that can also be said of the Son of Man and even humans. As the context makes abundantly clear, a serving spirit constitutes the actual core and character of angels; it is their essence. In all of Hebrews 1, Christ as Son of Man is distinguished from angels and it is demonstrated with repeated appeal to the Old Testament that lordship belongs to Him, not to angels. The exercise of lordship is as natural to the Son of Man as serving is to angels. In Revelation 1 and 2, the ministers of the Word are not called “angels,” because the former have been given authority, rulership, over the church but, to the contrary, because the nature of their office is that of a servant. The terms “angel of the congregation” and “servant of the congregation” mean the same. The surprising use of the word “angel” in Revelation 1 and 2 does not generate the least objection for one who understands Hebrews 1 and 2.

The view of angels as carriers of God’s image in the same way that we humans are on basis of our first creation in Adam and our re-creation in Christ, must be abandoned on basis of the foregoing. Angels do not share our nature with us and neither are they our brothers or sisters. Our belief in angels can only be corrected when we quit imagining that we share a certain essence with them and recognize clearly that humans and angels are two different beings, each of which belongs to its own world. Jesus said in Luke 20:36 that those who are saved can no longer die, “for they are like the angels.” It is precisely this likeness that prevents them from being the same. By the likeness to which Jesus points He means that there is no reproduction among the saints in heaven any more than there is among angels. *“For they will neither marry nor be given in marriage.”* None of this can lead to the conclusion of human unity of essence with angels.

As to the objection that angels are also called “children of God” and as such must also carry His image, be reminded that the Lord God is also called “Father” in the sense of “Creator” as in the sayings “Father of all flesh” and “Father of all lights.” These expressions indicate adequately that in this sense angels are also called “sons of God” (Job 1:6),⁵ referring not to being born so much as being created by God. As in Luke 3:38 Adam is called “son of God,” this similarly does not refer to his spiritual awakening but only to indicate that Adam can only thank God directly for his beginning without the mediation of a father or mother.

Of course, this does not in the least deny that angels are spiritually inclined and participate in whatever characterizes spiritual life. We do not minimize this in the least. We even acknowledge that the upright angels are in some way spiritually superior to us. Only, this spiritual stamp on their essence does not fully express the content of the image of God. There is more to that image and it is that “more” that angels lack. That extra or “more” is part of our human nature, but not of angels.

From that perspective, it is not contradictory to claim that their nature and ours *must* differ. This came to light at the incarnation of the Word as the apostle emphasizes strongly in Hebrews 2:16 that Christ does not help⁶ the angels but Abraham’s descendants, a direct contradiction that, according to the context, definitely expresses the difference between angelic and human natures. In the preceding it is explained that the Mediator shares in the flesh and blood of all humanity (:14) and this taking on of flesh and blood is explained in that He does not take on angels but *us*, since flesh and blood are foreign to angels but part of us. According to :17, He “had to be made like His brothers in every way,” brothers who were no angels but humans of flesh and blood and precisely for this reason the opposite of angels. The deep mystery of the incarnation would not have any purpose if mankind were a kind of angel. All the depth of this holy mystery is based on the fact that there were beings of a different and higher nature than the angels. That is to say, that God also created human beings not with an angelic nature, but that in their human nature reached the crowning and terminal point of God’s creation.

⁵In the text, the NIV has “angels,” but in a footnote it allows “sons of God.”

⁶Kuyper has “*aanneemt*” (adopt or take on) where the NIV has “helps.”

With the foregoing in view, it was extremely imprudent and incautious that already the early Christian Church interpreted the well-known story of Genesis 6:1-5 about the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” as referring to angels. Our Gereformeerde theologians have mostly avoided this mistake and explained this story in terms of the comingling of the Cainites with the descendants of Seth. Outside of the Gereformeerde tradition the aforementioned explanation still has many supporters, even among scholars and faithful believers.

This opinion has involuntarily erased the borderline between angelic and human natures—and still does. Were it that angels⁷ could take for themselves any woman they chose and have children with her, it would necessarily follow that angels and women were of the same nature.

Although sexual comingling happens among animals that differ from each other somewhat, this is observed exclusively among animals that, though different in incidental features, do belong to the same classification, as, for example, horse and donkey. And be it noted that the result of this unusual comingling, namely the mule, cannot procreate. We will return to this important point in a later chapter, but we are here pointing to the serious danger that is implied in this false explanation of Genesis 6:1-5. Whoever sticks to this explanation is forced to recognize a special relationship with angels, since they are thought to differ from us in marginal ways and in the degree of their holy development, but in principle we share one nature.

A similar misunderstanding arose with respect to 1 Corinthians 11:10, where we read that the woman ought to have a sign of submission on her head “because of the angels.” This is often understood to mean that the woman must turn her face away to prevent angels from being tempted to sin by her beauty, an interpretation that disregards whether this sin was tolerated by evil or good angels. In this context we cannot delve deeply into the meaning of this strange-sounding apostolic pronouncement, but it does need to be pointed out in the context of *this* writing that each interpretation that considers that this is about lust on the part of angels, stamps both humans and angels with the same sensual sexual life. The

⁷The reference here is to Genesis 6:2, not 9:2 as is mistakenly written in the original. The NIV here has “sons of God,” which are often thought to refer to the descendants of the godly Seth. That translation and explanation would do away with Kuyper’s example here.

popular consideration that even in Scripture there is talk of the comingling of animal and human, even though these two also have different natures, is invalid, since here only the zoological similarity between their bodies is in view, while such horrible atrocities are always without purpose and without fruit, which was *not* the case in Genesis 6:4, for there children were produced.

Chapter 8*

The Sons of God in Genesis 6

*The Nephilim⁸ were on the earth in those days—
and also afterward—when the Sons of God
went to the daughters of men and had children by them.
They were the heroes of old, men of renown.
Genesis 6:4*

The story about the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men,” to which we drew attention already in the previous chapter, requires further attention. In years past this was not necessary since, as already commented, the Gereformeerden were basically united in their decisive warding off these angel theories. However, in our time there is need for a more detailed treatment, because these false theories have also penetrated us from German Lutheran circles. Here Luther was undoubtedly the main culprit, for he had revived the idea that the “sons of God” were angels.

In ancient times this explanation was respected, first among Jewish writers and then adopted by some Fathers. This opinion was entertained already by Philo⁹ and Flavius Josephus,¹⁰ and, following them, by Justin Martyr,¹¹ Clemens¹² and

⁸ The Nephilim are mysterious beings or people mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. They are large and strong; the word Nephilim is loosely translated as giants in some Bibles but left untranslated in others. Some traditional Jewish explanations interpret them as fallen angels. The main reference to them is in Genesis, but the passage is ambiguous and the identity of the Nephilim is disputed.

⁹ Philo of Alexandria (20 BC- 50 AD) was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Egypt.

¹⁰ Josephus (37 AD- 100 AD) was a first-century [Romano-Jewish historian](#), best known for [The Jewish War](#), who was born in [Jerusalem](#)—then part of [Roman Judea](#)—to a father of [priestly](#) descent and a mother who claimed royal ancestry.

¹¹ Justin Martyr (100 AD- 165 AD)—a Samaritan, **was** an early Christian apologist and philosopher.

¹² Clemens of Alexandria (?-215 AD)—a presbyter in the Alexandrian church and a connecting link between Christian Gnosticism and the church.

Tertullian,¹³ all writers none of whom practiced independent research. But as soon as the commentators among the Church Fathers came aboard, this Jewish theory was permanently abandoned. Throughout the Middle Ages, Catholics forcefully rejected it, until Luther once again restored this abandoned interpretation to honour during the Reformation. Under the powerful influence of his name and spirit, an inclination and preference to defend the theory again arose among Lutheran theologians. Afterwards, this perspective would easily have been forgotten for good if it were not for three circumstances converging to revive it in this century with extraordinary force.

The *first* of these three was the desire of the Rationalist movement to interpret these oldest stories in the Bible in terms of Pagan mythology. Since stories about gods who were involved in sinful sexual relations with beautiful women constantly emerged from that mythology, and a kind of demigods emerged from this comingling, it seemed proper to interpret Genesis 6 as coming out of that Pagan mythology. This, too, was about heavenly beings who were enchanted by these beautiful women and about giants that resulted from this unholy sexual dalliance.

The *second* circumstance that encouraged the revival of this almost forgotten perspective was the tendency towards pantheism, a new philosophy that eventually found its natural acceptability in Darwinism. The stone, the plant, the animal, the human, the angel—it all had to be forced into a hierarchy or ladder that would constantly lead to higher development but without a border and that would lead to distinctions and differences. Nothing seemed to support this pantheistic conception more than an authenticated Bible story about physical comingling of angels and humans that resulted in a kind of intermediate creature, half angel and half human.

Finally, the third circumstance that encouraged the promotion of this theory must be sought in the revival of an orthodox Lutheran spirit in Germany. In the past, Genesis 6:1-5 was for long a dividing line between Luther and Calvin. Luther had more or less defended the angel theory, while Calvin denounced it. Over time, Luther's hermeneutics won the day. This led to a reaction and push to revive Luther's perspective.

¹³ Tertullian was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. He was the first Christian author to produce an extensive corpus of Latin Christian literature. He was an early Christian apologist and a polemicist against heresy, including contemporary Christian Gnosticism. Tertullian has been called "the father of Latin Christianity" and "the founder of Western theology."

The convergence of these three movements together led to a derailment of hermeneutics into the wrong direction. It is to that three-fold action that we attribute the revival of the controversy among German theologians whether the sons of God in Genesis 6 were to be understood again as angels. Though some of them resisted this development, the authority of the majority among them was decisive so that soon the traditional Lutheran perspective crept back in. No one will deny that most modern theologians preferred the angel interpretation. Eventually, some Gereformeerde theologians were dragged along and brought to an on-the-fence position, which is the reason it is not redundant for us to pay more extensive attention to the topic in Genesis 6. It needs to be understood in the congregations why the choice our Reformed fathers made in this respect brings us on the right track.

The controversy about Genesis 6:1-5 is exclusively between the angel and the Sethite theories. The former takes the “sons of God” to refer to angels; the other, to the faithful pious on earth.

For the sake of completing this entire scene, it must be remembered that the Jews inserted a third interpretation between the first two. With an appeal to Psalm 82:1,6, the “great assembly” i.e., according to Kuyper’s translation, “the great of the earth,” some defended the singular theory that the “sons of God” refers to the prominent, patristic, noble families of the land, while the “daughters of men” refers to beautiful daughters from among the lower classes. What is claimed here is simply marriage below their class on the part of the sons of the elite. Such a misalliance would be so abhorrent in God’s eyes that it evoked His anger against the human race. However, it must not be forgotten that even a prominent theologian like Estius¹⁴ could write in all seriousness that this comingling of the aristocratic families with the middle class was indeed horror in God’s eyes but it was not such an evil that it alone constituted the reason for the great flood.

Leaving all this curiosity aside for what it is worth, we now come to the text itself. That it represents serious difficulties to the commentator can hardly be denied. The story speaks of circumstances in which we can hardly place ourselves, because they are so esoteric to us and because we know so little about it. The story of this

¹⁴ Willem Hessels Estius (1542-1613)—A Dutch Catholic commentator on the Pauline Epistles. [Willem Hessels van Est - Wikipedia](#)

little understood situation is, furthermore, expressed in a language and choice of vocabulary very foreign to us. Already in :1 we bounce up against “When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters of men were born to them.” What is the meaning or purpose of this comment? Did the human race not multiply ever since its beginning? And is it not natural to assume that from the beginning daughters were born as well as sons? You can take that comment superficially, as if it serves only to introduce the subject of women from whom evil proceeded, and is expressed in terms that cannot stand being tested for even a moment.

It becomes an entirely different matter if one assumes an era during which the development of the human race was not gradual but took place in clearly distinguishable spurts. There may have been an era of minimal births that was followed by a period during which births suddenly increased. There is nothing to insist that procreation always followed the same steady pattern. It is quite possible that initially, for reasons we will not further examine here, population growth was slow. There is absolutely nothing in these early Bible stories that suggests fast population growth. We get much more the impression of small and few families. There are thus no objections to assume that only after human life had reached a certain development, a second era followed during which the number of births greatly increased. Even now experience teaches us that the greater the degree of incest the fewer the births, but birth increases when incest decreases. If we made that assumption, then the sentence “When men began to increase in number on the earth,” (Genesis 6:1) would easily be explained. The sentence would indicate that now a period had arrived of greater population growth.

This evokes the question whether the insertion “and daughters were born to them” should still be taken literally as is commonly done. Naturally, it does not mean that until now *no* daughters were born to them. The story’s author did not have to guard against such a misunderstanding. That daughters were born earlier on speaks for itself. Moreover, Moses himself declared this in Genesis 5:4ff. But it *would* mean that the number of female births increased significantly, at least if till now fewer females were born compared to males *or* if their number began to noticeably exceed that of males. Such a situation would easily explain the increase in population growth. We read of men having their first child at age 90 and even at 162 (Genesis 5:18) and only after that, had sons and daughters in great numbers

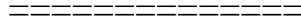
and then pass away after eight or nine centuries. Does this not logically lead to the thought that shorter lives were reserved for women than for men and that these many sons and daughters were born to different women whom they married *ad seriadum*? A greater number of women along with a smaller number of men would completely fit these circumstances and explains better than anything else the rapid multiplication of our race during a second era. We do not reject the idea that polygamy may have been involved, but that does not follow necessarily from a majority female birth rate.

This explanation would be reasonable if the life span of women were that much shorter, so that serial marriages with several women became the rule. If it is objected that the Jared text appears in chapter 5:18-20 and thus precedes chapter 6, may I take the liberty of responding in the words of Calvin in his commentary:

The story of Genesis 6 must be retrograded to a period earlier than the 500th year of Noah. Moving over to the flood story, Moses offers a retrospective consideration of the multiplication of our race and the accompanying increase in the development of sin.¹⁵

Thus there is neither cause nor reason to regard the beginning of Genesis 6 as a run-up, provided we do not mistakenly imagine that, since in our day population increase is gradual and that male and female births balance each other, therefore the earlier development of our race went by a similar rate, equally gradual and equally balanced. Even at the initial bodily development of infants, the law that governs this growth is totally different from the law that applies to adults. Convinced that Genesis 6:1 is of serious significance for us and has something to say to us, we therefore understand this verse in this sense that the point of time had now arrived for the human race to “get its shot,” if we may thus express it. It is like your body develops very slowly as a child, after which we undergo a development spurt and, within a short time, reach our full growth and become adult. Similarly, in the multiplication of our human race there may have been periods of limited and moderate growth, after which in a sudden spurt we spread out into every direction. With this spreading out we now connect the second fact that female births were more noticeable for a long time and that *many more daughters were born than before*.

¹⁵This paragraph is my translation from Kuyper’s Dutch translation, not of the original Latin in which Calvin wrote.



Moses associates the story he is about to tell with the above; he tells us that since this was the case and many more daughters were born, God's sons saw that the daughters of men were very beautiful. Here is where we come to the so called *crux interpretum*, the crucial point for commentators, for these words evoke the question how we are to understand these "sons of God" and why these daughters are called "daughters of men." We do not hesitate to acknowledge that, seen superficially, this apparent contradiction fully favours the angel theory. As it appears, this is about sons and daughters with God being the Father of the sons while their maternity is sought among humans. Thus the sons and daughters are opposite to each other, and God to human being. This contradiction, if it were allowed to proceed, would naturally decide the issue and force us to adopt the angel theory.

Over against this, we have already remarked that the Hebrew here is uncertain. In our language, we have two separate words for "son" and "child," but the Hebrew usually expresses both concepts in one and the same word. Both "child" and "son" are usually called "*Ben*," or in a composite word using "*Ben*," as in names like "*Ben-Jamin*," "*Ben-Hadad*" that most people recognize. In the plural this is generally expressed as "*Benee*," so that Scripture speaks umpteen times of "*Benee Israel*," which no one translates into "sons of Israel" but always as "children of Israel." And so Scripture speaks of "*Benee Elohim*" and "*Benee Jahveh*" (Deuteronomy 14:1), without it ever being translated other than the "*children of God*" and "*children of the Lord*." There is not a single translation that turns this into *sons of God* or *sons of the Lord*. If we want to follow the common translation of Genesis 6:2, it should not be "the *sons of God*" but, rather, the "*children of God*," regardless whether we understand these children to be angels or pious human children. Even if we admit that the Hebrew expression "*Benee ha-Elohim*" could also be used for angels, we would have to totally disregard the sexual differences. Understood that way, we would translate it not as "sons of God" but simply "children of God," in which case the entire contrast between sons and daughters would fall away in this context.

There is no doubt that it would be better to have translated "*Benee*" not as "sons" but as "children," which then would read "that the *children of God* saw the

daughters of men.” There is a noteworthy place in Judges 3:5-6 that is worth comparing “*nasla*” with Genesis 6:2. It tells the story of “the *children*¹⁶ of Israel” living among the Pagan nations “and took their daughters in marriage.” It occurred to no one to translate it as “the sons of God,” even though here the word “*Benee*”, is the same word that also appears in Genesis 6:2. Not of course that it did not speak for itself that only “sons” could take the daughters for their wives, but just because this spoke for itself, it did not need to be expressed. So, whether one supports the angel theory or, with Calvin, thinks of the Sethites, in both cases it is advisable not to speak of “*sons* of God” but of “*children* of God.” There is nothing that requires us, for the sake of retaining the contrast with “daughters,” to translate “*Benee*” into “sons.” In Judges 3:5, “*Benee*” is also contrasted to daughters, but no one has emphasized this contrast here. Furthermore, the marriageable maiden does not appear here in contrast to the “son,” but to “young man” or simply “man.” Were the intention here to contrast the two genders to each other, it would not have been translated “the sons saw,” but “The *young men* of God saw the daughters of men.”

Our conclusion can only be that the translation into “sons of God” would be totally unusual, and that we stick to the standard rule of translation, for this is not excluded by the sense of it. In addition, even if the term “sons of God” were retained, the intended contrast is not there, for then another word for “sons” would have been required.

Chapter 9*

Sethites and Canaanites

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days...
when the sons of God went to the daughters of men
and had children by them.
They were the heroes of old, men of renown.
--Genesis 6:4

¹⁶ The NIV here has simply “the Israelites.”

The main question now demanding a decision is whether “*Benee ha-Elohim*” in Genesis 6:2 , i.e., “the children of God,” are to be understood as angels or as God-fearing human children on earth. According to some, this is not even an open question, for Scripture itself gives a clear answer and chooses for angels. For this they appeal to the epistle of Jude :6, where we are clearly taught how the angels “went after other flesh,”¹⁷ a memory, so they argue, that can only point to Genesis 6.

We hesitantly acknowledge that if this were indeed the case, the question would have been answered also for us. Should there be an inspired scripture that said God condemned the angels because they went after other flesh, we would readily give in. However, as we shall see, this is not what Jude :6 says. Jude points out to the believers of his day how so shortly after the beginning of the Church, some had “*secretly slipped in to change the grace of God into a license for immorality and who deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord*” (:4). This strong, blunt addition to :4 also indicates that for Jude the main principal evil was found in the rejection of the majesty of God, in the failure to acknowledge God as Ruler and Christ as our Lord. He furthermore points the faithful to three horrible examples of disobedience, namely, what happened with the angels, with Sodom and with Israel in the wilderness. He says of the first two, “*And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these He has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgement on the great Day.*” He then continues with the following, “*In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion*” (:6-7).¹⁸

This is then understood as if Jude charged that, like the angels, those cities had prostituted themselves and gone after other flesh. Thus the sin of angels consisted of physical lust. They gave in to their fleshly lust in a way that was contrary to their nature.

¹⁷ The NIV here has “abandoned their home,” which could mean they left their tribal area for that of Israel and married an Israeli woman.

¹⁸ I have inserted the NIV Biblical text, but here is the more literal translation of Kuyper: “As Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them practiced prostitution and went after other flesh, were used as examples bearing the punishment of eternal fire.”

But is this interpretation of Jude's words correct? We must immediately reject it, because in Genesis 6 there is no reference of any kind to prostitution but only to marriage. We read, "*They took women from all among them that they loved*"¹⁹ (Genesis 6:2). This expression "They took women" appears nowhere in Scripture except in discussions about marriage. Neither does this concept fit the further depiction of "going after other flesh." This expression can be used only for someone who is flesh himself or for who was destined to have his own kind of flesh.

The men of Sodom did not sin in the sense of the first of the above options, but in the last. That they followed after other flesh does not mean that they pursued other than their own flesh, for as *humans* they sinned together with other *humans*. Neither can this "other flesh" refer to the contrast between male and female, since, according to the law of nature, the male is wired to go after the female. The sin of Sodom was in going after its own flesh. Male went after male. Thus the meaning of going after other flesh can only be that they went for another flesh than was intended for them. This cannot be said of the angels, since *all* flesh was denied them. Neither the one nor the other gender was intended for them. Even if it were thought that the words used earlier, "like the angels, those cities had prostituted themselves and gone after other flesh" refers to the angels, one can never find the comparison except in the common feature of the sin of the angels and that of Sodom, namely both gave in to their lust in a way that went directly against God's ordinance.

However, even this does not have to be accepted, if one notices that Jude speaks not only of Sodom and Gomorrah, but also of the cities around them. Since he does not name the other cities and not all were guilty, he refers to them in general by saying, "*In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion*" (Jude :7), which means cities who made themselves guilty in the same way and were therefore destroyed along with Sodom. It does appear there is a remaining grammatical difficulty here. "All this" is masculine in the Greek, while the word for "city" is feminine. In Greek grammar this is not a preponderant objection.

¹⁹ The NIV has it as "*They married any of them that they chose.*"

This last explanation is confirmed by the context. Angels are not referred to here casually, but the actual sin for which they are condemned is clearly described. They had not protected their origin but left their place of habitation. This clearly refers to what is generally called “the fall of the evil angels.” If one brings Genesis 6 into this context, that fall would not have preceded the fall of Adam but occurred much later. But this is not possible, since satan, the king of the fallen angels, already appears in the Garden and brings the sin in from his sinful world. This would either create a contradiction with Genesis 3 or there would be a dual fall of angels, first before Adam’s fall and the second shortly before the Flood. As every reader will admit, the Scripture knows nothing about a second angelic fall. This would bring us an irreconcilable contradiction with what we know of the good angels, that, like the saints on earth, persevered in their state.

If on the basis of the above it must be contested that Jude in his verse 6 must have intended to explain Genesis 6, we will now return to Genesis 6 itself and try to present a completely free explanation of it. Against the opinion that the “children of God” refers to angels, it must be argued that the remark that completely controls the context, namely that there is not a single reference to sin in Genesis 6 that could be attributed to anyone but mankind. According to the interpretation we are rejecting, the sin mentioned here is mainly to be attributed to angels. The text forces us to acknowledge that it is definitely the “sons of God” who are culpable here, not the “daughters of men.” But if we take “sons or children of God” to refer to angels, then it is not the beautiful human women that are culpable, but definitely the angels. The “daughters of men” are not even judged here; they are not the issue here. It is not even claimed that these daughters intentionally tempted the “children of God” with their beauty. We are only told that the former allowed themselves to be taken in marriage as women. How would it be possible for girls coming from the world of guilt and sin to be blamed for marrying pious young men? Even if marriage with an angel were imaginable, what sin would the women have committed in preferring an angel to a human? All of this only proves that we must not seek the sin in Genesis 6 among the daughters of men but among the children or sons of God. To continue to insist that these children or sons of God represent angels, it will have to be demonstrated from the story itself that the evil under discussion is not to be attributed to mankind but mainly to angels. This simply is

impossible. The entire story resists this opinion. It is actually on the first objection that the controversial explanation suffers its shipwreck.

What does the story teach us about admitting the guilt intended here? It is expressed clearly in 6:2-3 and is in addition put into doubt by the context. We are told that, after having committed the sinful marriage, the Lord God said, *“My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years”* (:3). Thus God’s contention is definitely with the children of men and only with them. The anger of God is directed to mankind because His children had sex with the daughters of humans. The sin in question is said to consist of flesh, that is, they allowed themselves to be led by fleshly considerations instead of spiritual ones. The threatened punishment is not intended for angels or some other beings, but exclusively for humans, for after 120 years the world of that day would undergo its judgement. The sentence “His days will be 120 years” does not mean, as Lactantius and others interpreted it, that the human life span, that until now had reached 700, 800 and even 900 years, would now be reduced to 120. Instead, it tells us that judgement of the Flood would descend after 120 years. This same conclusion that this is all and only about *human* guilt also leads to insight into 6:5-6, where we read,

“The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.”

This uses even stronger language. If you accept that “God’s children” in :2 refers to angels, then the initiative here is taken not by humans but by angels. Then the evil inclination did not arise among humans but among angels. Then there is no talk of special evil on the part of humans but, to the contrary, of the deep guilt into which the angels contracted. Then the Lord would not have regretted creating humans on earth but angels in heaven and the punishment would not have been a flood but the condemnation of angels into eternal perdition. The broad and extensive description of God’s thought here demonstrates in an irresistible manner that it is not directed to any angel, but, rather, wholly and exclusively to the children of men. And since, according to :2, the sin emerges and is practiced by the

sons or children of God, this already makes decisively clear that the sons or children of God are not angels but human.

Though the above has decided the case, there is still more to add. Firstly, if we were to declare the angels the guilty party, which angels would we be thinking of? The good or the bad? Of course, it could not be the good ones, because of what we already wrote earlier about the impossibility of a second fall in the angelic world. Thus, it could only be the fallen ones. Such monstrous thoughts could come only from them, not from the holy ones. But if we were to take the bad ones, how could these then ever be called the “children of God?” Or was it not the bad angels who, because of their fall, lost their high status? And would they not immediately have ceased being reckoned among the children of God? In the book of Job we read how the “children of God,” that is to say the good angels, appeared before God, but how satan, clearly by his own name, was distinguished from them.

Secondly, do not forget that if we accept the angel theory, they must have adopted human bodies and have lived among people as fellow humans for a long time. After all, it is not a question of a momentary sin but of a marriage with the “daughters of men.” We accept that the adoption of a human body is imaginable for an angel. Repeatedly we have reports of angel appearances during which angels move among people as people, a point that will be treated separately later. But it must not be forgotten that the angel himself is completely incapable of adopting such a body. An angel can never do that unless God creates it and gives it to him. In such a situation these fallen angels would have had to create such a body themselves in order to commit such a sin—and this is completely unthinkable. They could not possibly possess such a body without God. If such a body is lacking, the sinful action in this story is simply impossible. We must add that a human body in which the angels appeared, would not turn them into humans and thus sexual comingling would be excluded.

Thirdly, it must even be denied that, regardless of the context, *Bene ha-elohim*, that is, children of God, would refer to angels. There are those who appeal to Psalm 29:1; 89:7; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7 and Daniel 3:25 to support their insistence that in Scripture “children of God” can mean angels as well as faithful humans, but a more precise consultation of these texts does not encourage us to go in that direction. Psalm 29:1 is translated as “*Ascribe to the Lord, you mighty ones...glory*

and strength.”²⁰ Psalm 89:7 translates as “*Who in the skies above can compare with the Lord? Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings?*”²¹ In both cases the Hebrew “*Bene Elim*” is used. In Daniel 3:25 it is a Pagan who says that he sees a fourth figure together with the original three walking in the burning oven. The fourth is “like a son of the gods.” In Job 38:7 the morning stars and the angels are placed on the same parallel level: “*While the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.*”²² Actually, it is only in Job 1 that angels are referred to in a conclusive and convincing manner as children of God. But there it is a completely different case from Genesis 6. In Job 1 it is completely clear from the context that this is not about humans but about angels, even if only that the scene takes place in heaven, not on earth. In Genesis 6 the opposite is the case.

There is totally nothing in this context that would tempt the reader to think of the “children of God” as angels. In the foregoing it was exclusively about angels as about the serpent and the Cherub. In all of Genesis 1-6 there is not even the slightest indication that angels should be distinguished from children of God. Over against that, in the foregoing chapters there is a very clear contrast between the two parts of the human race—on the one side there is a circle where the fear of God thrives; on the other side, a circle that wanders away from God. So, we have two circles: In the one you see how the human race after the fall develops, while the other represents a small circle that distinguishes itself from the former and is moved by a higher inspiration by God. And thus it speaks for itself that the reader, having read Genesis 6 and now learning about the daughters of men that were taken in marriage by the lineage of the godly, could not think of anything but the comingling of the two circles, that of the world and that which became the Church of God.

²⁰ Kuyper here has “gij kinderen der machtigen” which would emerge in English as “you children of the mighty ones.”

²¹ Kuyper here has “Wie is den Heere gelijk onder de *kinderen der sterken?*” meaning “children of the mighty.”

²² The NIV allows “sons of God” for angels in a footnote, same as Kuyper.

Chapter 10*

The Daughters of Men

*He makes angels²³ His messengers,
Flames of fire His servants.
Psalm 104:4*

In the previous chapter we have explained that Genesis 6:1-5 makes no mention of angels. It remains for us to pay attention to two theories that tend to be advanced against this one and only true explanation. The first objection emerges from the expression “daughters of men.” If it was thought that the Sethites had sexual intercourse with the Cainites,²⁴ the following statement would be impossible, “God’s sons” or the children of God looked at the daughters of *men*, but that’s what they were doing so far: They married no one else but the “daughters of men.” But then the text should have read that they looked at the daughters from that other circle, the daughters of the godless, of the fallen, of the Cainite tribe. That this objection should have been raised is only too obvious; it should not surprise anyone, and it is not difficult to show how baseless it is. To be sure, all belonged to the human race, the children of Seth as well as those of Cain. But allow us the question whether in our own day, do not all belong to this *world* as well, both believers in the Lord as well as the despisers of His Name? But is it then not just as normal *now* as it was in the Scriptures *then* to say that God’s people are not to have sexual relations with the “people of this *world*?” And just as the phrase “people of the *world*” gradually began to refer to those circles whose cultures were in and of the world, so also in Scriptural language the term “human” or “people”²⁵ arose in contrast to the Holy God and to refer to the narrower and closer meaning of those people who were only people or humans and who were considered fellow humans, but without any element that would give them special status or elevate them as humans.

²³ The NIV has “winds” but allows “angels” in the footnote.

²⁴ Sethites—descendants of Seth. Cainites—descendants of Cain.

²⁵ The key word of Kuyper here is “*mens*” (singular) or “*menschen*,” (plural) which I translate as “people” and “human” (beings).

There are four places in Scripture that may serve as example of this use of the word “people” or “human” in contrast to the “people of God” or the “men of God.” There is Judges 16:7, where Samson says to his wife Delilah, “*If anyone ties me with seven fresh thongs that have not been dried, I’ll become as weak as any other man.*” The translators have not translated this correctly, for it says literally in the Hebrew “one of the people” (*Ke’achad ha-adam*). Samson excludes himself here from the circle of humans as one gifted by God with unusual powers and explains that he would become an ordinary person like everyone else.

Psalm 73:5 reads, “*They are not in difficulty as people or humans and are not plagued as people or humans.*”²⁶ To be sure, the contrast here is not “God’s nation and the people,” but there is a similar kind of contrast. It is this that under God’s mysterious rule some extremely godless people thrive and experience no suffering, only to be destroyed in eternity. And these people so exceptionally treated by God, are distinguished from other humans as was Samson. “*They are not in difficulty as humans and are not plagued as humans.*”

The intended use of the word “human” here is expressed much clearer in Isaiah 43:4 and in Jeremiah 32:20. The well-known passage of Isaiah 43:4 reads, “*From then on, because you were precious in my sight, you have been glorified and I have loved you, therefore have I given people in exchange for you and people in exchange for your life / soul.*” According to 43:1, God addressed the above words to Jacob: “*This is what the Lord says—He who created you, o Jacob, He who formed you, o Israel.*”²⁷ Regardless of whether one applies these words to Jacob personally, to Jacob’s people as a nation, to the spiritual people of the faithful or to Israel’s King as Messiah, the fact is that the subject here is always a person (singular) even though it says, “*I have given people (plural) in exchange for you.*”

The meaning of this unusual way of expressing is fully explained in Jeremiah 32:20, where we read, “*You have, o Lord, established peoples in Israel as well as (other) people.*”²⁸ If we set aside the inserted word “other” that is not even in the

²⁶ I have translated Kuyper’s own translation here. It is somewhat different from the NIV text. This book leaves me no choice in this regard.

²⁷ See footnote 16.

²⁸ See footnote 16.

original, then we have here in our text as well as in Judges 17:7 the clear contrast between God's Israel and the ungodly human race.

From this it appears that the word "*humans*" serves the same purpose here as elsewhere. In addition, the word "world" and the expression that the children of God looked at the daughters of men / humans is perfectly explained as if it said that the children of God saw that the daughters of the worldly people were beautiful. It can hardly be denied that the afore-mentioned objection, no matter how right it sounds, disintegrates as soon as we consider Scripture's use of language.

Let it be understood that this one and only correct interpretation of Genesis 6:1-5 is, in addition, confirmed by the otherwise incomprehensible insertion "they married *any of them they chose*" (:2). If this saying were about angels it would make no sense, but it makes great sense if we interpret it as about the children of God who married daughters from within the worldly environment. Remember that until now they had not done that. They regarded their choice for marriage partners from a restricted circle, not from all; they made their pick only from the daughters of believing families. That former restriction melted away. They no longer limited their choice to the daughters of believing families, but now they took wives from among all they found attractive, so long as they were beautiful.

The second objection we pointed to at the beginning of this chapter flows naturally out of the above. People also ask whether marriage with an unbelieving girl was really such an extraordinary atrocity that it became the reason for the Flood. If comingling of angels and humans has taken place, then we indeed face such an unprecedented atrocity, that an exceptional judgement like the Flood would be reasonable. But how is the entire drift of this story that reaches its climax with the Flood, to be explained if it is only about mixed marriage? If some monster were born out of such comingling, then it would be understandable that only eradication would be the choice judgement. If only humans were born from humans, why would it not have been possible to bring the new generation to repentance?

We will respond to this objection with three remarks. First, be it noted that the Church of God at that time had no organizational presence but existed wholly in families and generations. It would thus have been totally impossible for the Church

of God to survive and stand, if the families and generations were spiritually poisoned and if the wife, whose influence in family life is so dominant, were hostile to serving the Lord. The reckless man who chose his wife only on basis of her physical beauty would not have the power to neutralize her influence. Comingling of the saints with the godless can only result in the shrinkage and disappearance of the community that fears and serves God, i.e., in the destruction of the Church of God and, in addition, in the shipwreck of the entire council of God, who only for Christ's sake was merciful to this world and saved her.

The second comment is that choosing a woman only because of her beauty, constitutes a total revaluation of life. We should definitely not devalue beauty; a woman's beauty is a gift of God that she may not downgrade by prancing about in her vanity. Even Calvin points out that a woman's beauty is an important consideration in the choice of marriage. But only, the soul is more important than the body, the essence more than the form, internal beauty that remains into eternity more than external beauty that fades. If someone in the process of making a marriage choice would not ask about the inner person, nor about the spiritual adornment of the soul, nor to observe the true value and dignity of a girl as human being, but would only concentrate on physical beauty, he displays in all this a deep, deep fall that threatens a general spiritual destruction of our entire sacred community.

Our third observation is about these assumed monsters that would have been born from such a marriage. There is not a single word in the text about monsters, but only about giants and ancient heroes on earth, who were not monsters but men. Also after the Flood, there are repeated references to these giants, so that every attempt to regard these giants in Genesis 6:4 as anything but humans who were men of great physical stature and unusual physical power falls away. The language of the story itself cuts it off from every image of a monstrous being, half human, half angel. It does not say that these giants had just surfaced, but that they were there already. In addition, this comingling often generated such giants already before this time, like ancient men of renown such as Lamech in Genesis 4:19ff.

Our conclusion can be no other than that in Genesis 6:1-5 we are told that the community of the godly, especially but not exclusively descendants of Seth, gave up their isolation that is so indispensable for the Church of God. It began to merge

with the worldly and herewith began the threefold sin that threatens God's Church with destruction, uproots the foundation of marriage and exchanges our human spiritual character for a sensual life. If this process had not been interrupted, the Church, the sanctity of God's ordinances and the nobility of our race would all have been surrendered. That is the disaster that the Lord God saved us from by the Flood.

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We can discuss only briefly the second text to which appeals are made about the comingling of angels with humans, namely 1 Corinthians 11:10, where we read the puzzling words, "*For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.*" Two interpretations of this text surfaced successively—and both need to be rejected. The first opinion was that "angels" here refers to elders, while the second averred it refers to bad angels who were sexually aroused when they discovered these women.

The first interpretation points to Revelation 2-3, where the leaders of the churches at Smyrna, Laodicea and others are called "angels" by Christ. Consider that Paul here in 1 Corinthians 11 similarly calls these leaders "angels." Then explain Paul's saying that it would be too much of a temptation to them to have a large crowd of women before them with uncovered heads. Ambrosius²⁹ already pleaded for this opinion, while later this reading was used to support the celibacy of the Catholic clergy. But it is not acceptable. When it is said in Revelation 2-3, "*To the angel of the Church at Laodicea write*" (Revelation 3:14), there is an insertion that precludes every misunderstanding. It is not possible for us to write to an angel; the addition of "Church" says it all.

In contrast to the above, no one at Corinth would presume that Paul, speaking of angels, could have meant anything but angels. This interpretation is also non-anthropological. A woman's hair may be an ornament that adds to her beauty, but the temptation of the beauty of a woman is mostly hidden in the face and figure. If

²⁹ Ambrosius Alexandrinus, a Latinization of the name of Ambrose of Alexandria (before 212–c. 250), Egyptian theologian and saint.

Paul had judged that the elders were tempted too easily and he wanted to avert that danger, he would have failed by not insisting on head covering.³⁰

Anyone supporting this train of thought does not comprehend the creativeness of female vanity. From ancient time on to ours, experience has shown that women have a deep understanding of the art of feminizing their head covering and place it on their head so as to enhance their beauty. If the leaders were sitting in the gallery upstairs and women in the hall below, this explanation could perhaps hold water. But since the leaders always sat below on the main floor, while in the Greek world, the women moved upstairs to the gallery, this explanation is totally misplaced, apart from the fact that it does not find any support in the context of this verse.

It is not much better with respect to the second explanation we had in mind, one which in the context of these chapters is the most dangerous. This opinion has it that Paul ordered women to come to church with a hat on, for without that, they could trigger the carnal sense of fallen angels and even of the good ones. Over against this, it must be observed that there is no question here of fallen angels, since these are never mentioned in Scripture without an additional insertion and then after their fall. So, if one wants to explain this place in the above sense, one must take Paul's words to refer to good angels of whom it is said on basis of Psalm 34:8 and 138:1 that they are present in the gathering of the faithful.

Regardless of whether these two verses may thus be interpreted, there are two objections to this interpretation of 1Corinthians 11:10. First, it is not acceptable to think of the good angels as subject to sinful temptations. As the saints in heaven are no longer subject to temptations, so also has every tendency towards temptation been removed from the good angels.

Secondly, an angel, assuming he was subject to temptation, would of course not only be capable of looking enticingly at women in church and, if he wanted something uncouth, he could see women's faces everywhere. Thus, therefore this interpretation must also be decisively rejected, all the more so, since for him also it holds that in this entire context there is no mention of carnal temptation but of something totally different.

³⁰ Here follows a sentence that has little or no connection with the current subject: "Islam tends to be more at home in this dangerous terrain." No further reference. I left it out.

As Calvin correctly observed, in 1 Corinthians 11:1-15 Paul is not in any way dealing with the temptable beauty of women but of their desire to break open the God-ordained hierarchy that places them below men. He expresses it in a short, pithy manner: “*De ordinibus hic agitur.*” That is to say that the subject here is the hierarchy that defines everyone’s rank in relation to others. The context makes this clearly possible. God is the head of Christ; Christ is the head of the man; the man is the head of the woman. In those days, an uncovered head signaled one’s independence and freedom. The head cover of the woman thus does not serve as a veil to cover her beauty but exclusively to indicate that she had a man as her head, whether father or husband. That’s how it had to be in the social order of that day. Should a woman react negatively and say, “That order is valid at home, but not in Church. There I am freed by the Lord and thus take my covering off,” that would amount to contempt for the civil order as a Christian, to push it aside. That is why Paul places such an emphasis on the “natural order” being as valid in Church as it is embedded in creation and is therefore not to be ignored but honoured. The woman is there out of and because of the man. That is the divine creation ordinance that was not cancelled by Christ, but like all other divine creation ordinances, was *confirmed* by Christ and maintained. The woman retains her divinely appointed position both in and outside of the Church. She would entirely misjudge the nature of the Christian religion if she were to intentionally cast aside her socially recognized position in the Church. Since this symbol has changed over the years in society, the sin in question is no longer attending Church without head covering, even though this remains important from another perspective, but rather in participation in the worldly struggle for emancipation. Should you ask what all this has to do with angels, ask yourself what else could have been the sin of angels than just that desire for emancipation that would not acquiesce to the position that our Sovereign God had prepared for them.