

**From the Realms of Glory:
Contours of the Angelic World**

**by
Abraham Kuyper**

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The original contains chapters on good angels and on fallen angels. These have been separated into two shorter volumes—one on the good and one on the fallen. This volume is about the good angels; the other and shorter one, about satan and his cohorts of devils and demons, under the title:

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Dedication

This translation is dedicated to two persons

(1)

Abraham Kuyper, the original author
A man who never hesitated to challenge
the status quo
Who liberated the Dutch peasants
From their liberal oppressors
In the Name of Christ
A century after his death he continues
To inspire and model Christian social engagement
in many countries around the globe

(2)

Frances Ann Prins-Boer, Co-editor
Several of my books have been dedicated to her
For she has always been ready to share her talents,
time and our common resources
The perfect encourager and administrator
Without her, none of these publications
Would have seen the light of day.

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Preliminary Questions

You're facing a unique, challenging and interesting book about angels. Here are some questions you may never even have thought about, let alone ask. Try to form an answer *before* reading this book and its companion volume and then answer the questions again *after* reading it all and see how you have grown or changed in your perceptions. Have fun!

1. What happens to TIME at the End of Days?
2. Who or what is the Angel of the Lord?
3. Who are the Sons of God in Genesis 6?
4. Are angels created in God's image like us humans?
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Introduction

Translator's Chat

Like many of Kuyper's books, this is a collection of weekly essays Kuyper most likely wrote on Sunday mornings for publication in one of his papers in lieu of attending church. I refer you to other items on this same website page that talk about his writing life and style, especially to the Introduction to my translation of Kuyper's *The Ascent of the Son--The Descent of the Spirit* and on this same website page, to get it directly from the horse's mouth, even more especially the article "The history and nature of Kuyper's Meditations".

The shape of the original Dutch-language version of this book is a collection of thirty-six chapters on angels, both good and fallen, most chapters having seven to eight pages. I have divided this book into two volumes, this one dealing with the good angels; the other, with satan¹ and his cohort of fallen angels. So, this volume on the good angels translates the original chapters 1-25 and 33-35 into my chapters 1-28, while the original chapters 26-32 and 36 make up the 8 chapters of the companion volume.

As to titles, I have borrowed a leaf from Billy Graham, who titled his memoirs with a famous line of a famous song: "Just as I am."² I think you will recognize the songs from which I borrow. This book is entitled *From the Realms of Glory: Contours of the Angelic World*, while the other goes by *For Still Our Ancient Foe: Contours of Satan's World*.

Among Kuyper's admirers are some who criticize him for his attitude towards women. I had hoped to use inclusive language in this translation by, among others, the use of feminine pronouns for angels. However, as I proceeded, I discovered that the use of feminine pronouns for angels in our current cultural situation would skew this book into the direction of either feminism or lesbianism. Hence, I stuck

¹ Throughout this book I do not "upper-case" or capitalize the word "satan," except where grammatical demands intervene, for he simply does not deserve this honour. All references to God, including Jesus, on the other hand, are "upper-cased" or capitalized. I reject the democratization process that has flattened references to the Divine by "lower-casing" them.

² I may well be the first Reformational writer to borrow approvingly from Graham. He has also been given coverage on the GUEST ARTICLES page in a lengthy number of popular articles covering his death and his life in his capacity as a "Fellow Traveler," probably also a "oncer" in the body of Reformational literature.

to the masculine references for angels. Sorry, sisters. If it now is skewed in the direction of masculinity, well, that is the spirit in which it was originally written; it was the spirit of the day and Kuyper did not free himself from it in this respect. I could not think of an alternative acceptable to all. In compensation, I am quite sure most women readers might not have appreciated my referring to fallen angels, satan and his henchmen—or should it be henchwomen?—in the feminine. At least, I have never heard a feminist demand such a reference. Any explanation, anyone? It must of course be admitted that in the Bible pronouns referring to all angels, good and bad, are in the masculine, but that can be explained as a cultural preference for men that is common to almost all cultures and writings in the past as well as the present, including my own. Apart from those pronouns, the Bible nowhere stipulates angelic gender, though I have not read of any female angelic appearances; they all appear as males.

You, reader, will need to muster all your intellectual prowess to follow the sometimes circuitous route that Kuyper follows to make his points. That is not always easy. As a translator I had to struggle hard and go through several edits to make it all as clear as possible, hopefully more than mud! Imagine sentences so long that one became ten in the translation! I deeply admire and appreciate Frances Anne, my wife, for her involvement, patience and encouragement in this process.

Though I have tried to update the language and style somewhat, I confess that it still bears the mark of a century-old treatment of what has become an arcane subject for the current generations alive. References to foreign authors, publications and movements long forgotten are replete. I have tried to identify many in footnotes, but some required more time and effort to dig up than I had available.

The Relevance of Kuyper

Kuyper has written tome upon tome and many of them have been translated, some decades ago, others more recently. Most of these translations have been published in print, but a few are published as ebooks as on this KUYPERIANA page as well as on < www.lulu.com >, and on Christian Classics Ethereal Library of Calvin University-- < www.ethereallibrary.com >. This ebook will hopefully become available at all three places.

It is clear that the community of in-print translators centred in Grand Rapids MI, and the publisher in Bellingham WA, all consider these century-old books worthy of translation and republishing. Time and again writers and readers affirm that these old books—and articles—are relevant even today. Kuyper was a prophet; he understood the currents of his own time and foresaw their relevance and effect far into the future. Today, this very day, I received an article about Kuyper from a scholar / author in which he affirms the relevance of Kuyper’s insights for our own day, an affirmation that is found in almost all the republications and contemporary discussions about them. Dr. Clinton Stockwell of the Chicago Metropolitan Center wrote, “Although Kuyper wrote a full century ago, his convictions, analyses, and solutions...are relevant today.”³ I come across many such comments repeatedly. Again, I refer you to the KUYPERIANA page. Evangelicals and many African scholars who have discovered Kuyper, repeatedly testify to the liberation they experienced from their narrow theological confines inherited from missionaries and most of their organizations.⁴

I confess to a long-standing hesitation about this translation. While many of Kuyper’s publications are quoted left and right, I have hardly ever seen a reference to this book.⁵ It does not seem to have captivated other writers or the reading public. I believe this to be due to the fact that most Reformational or Kuyperian writers are more interested in social, cultural, political, economic, scientific and other subjects than more spiritual ones like this one. In addition, though Reformational scholars heavily criticize the Enlightenment, they may be more influenced by that movement than they are aware, possibly another reason for the scarcity of writings among them on a subject so prominent in Scripture.

However, if you check out the subject of angels on the GUEST ARTICLES page of this website, you will find a number of non-Reformational publications on the

³ Clinton Stockwell, “Abraham Kuyper and welfare reform: A Reformed political perspective.” *Pro Rege* of Dordt University, September 1998.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion go to Jan H. Boer, *Christians and Muslims: Parameters for living together*. Vol. 8-2 in the series *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*. Belleville ON: Essence Publishing, 2009 AND Bukuru, Plateau State, Nigeria: ACTS, pp. 54ff. See also the ISLAMICA page on this website.

⁵ Coincidentally (?) enough, the very week I wrote this sentence I came across several references to Kuyper’s book in A. De Bondt, *De Satan*. Baarn, the Netherlands: Bosch & Keuning, n.d., but probably around 1945 or 1946. The latest endnote in De Bondt’s book is dated 1945. Since then, I have been alerted to Rob van Houwelingen’s *Hemelse reisbegeleiding*, a recent Dutch book that refers to Kuyper’s but does not quote or summarize from him. It is presented as a partial Dutch preview under “Angels” on the GUEST ARTICLES page of this website.

subject and quite a number more on the internet. So, if Kuyperian writers have shown no interest, others have. This book is being translated partially for their benefit, while it also seeks to encourage Kuyperians to develop an interest. I see signs that Kuyperians are beginning to regret their one-sided interest in Kuyper and are turning to his “spiritual” side as well.

One feature of this book I appreciate is Kuyper’s abundant use of the *phenomena of Scripture*, an approach that safeguards him from the fundamentalist cum evangelical emphasis on “proof texting.” The term has different meanings in Biblical studies, but as I use it, it refers to extracting secondary meanings from a passage that concentrates on another more central point, but that is used to support another issue. If you want to know the difference between “proof texting” and using the phenomena, well, just read your way through these two “angel books” and you will get the drift of this comment. I recently read a popular book by Sally Gary-- *Affirming: A Memoir of Faith, Sexuality, and Staying in the Church*,⁶ -- in which she traces her very detailed journey from an extreme fundamentalist proof-texting reading of Scripture to a more wholistic one. It gives a more complete picture of the distinction than I can offer you in this chat.

One feature that may require a bit of patience from some Protestant readers is that in the first few chapters Kuyper is pre-occupied with Roman Catholic traditional views on angels, but that’s the historian in him that always forces itself to his Kuyperian surface. These chapters *do* contain issues and insights that I, the translator, have found interesting. But don’t worry, after a few chapters, the Catholic tradition recedes to the background and various versions of “modernism” take centre stage as unorthodox and even anti-God culprits.

Continuing on the above matter, sometimes it seems Kuyper is flogging a horse to *near*-death, which is different from flogging a dead horse. That can sometimes lead to impatience on the part of the reader—and the translator!—, but then you stumble across precious nuggets in the midst of that flogging so that you end up grateful for having read the passage—and for someone for having translated it. So, read on and look for those nuggets. I will not define or describe them, for my precious nugget could be your worthless stone, but when you recognize one, enjoy, ponder and appreciate.

⁶ Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2021.

In some ways Kuyper represents a classic traditional scholastic Reformed tradition that sees everything, literally everything as done by God. A couple of extreme examples: "...satan does nothing without God doing it through him." Or: "The head of the fallen angels appears as satan already in the Garden and it is he who was appointed by God to tempt the humans to make a decision against God's will."⁷

Some Calvinistic churches and their members still adhere to this rather rigid logic, but I confess to hesitancy with respect to such absolute claims. This is just one but by no means only example of how even Father Abraham needs to be read critically. So, give your critical instinct free rein by weighing all you read and come out the wiser.

The above paragraph is a demonstration of Kuyper's struggle between speculation and logic on the one hand and faithful reading of Scripture on the other, especially not going beyond Scripture where it is silent. These two books are full of warnings against speculation and encouragement to stay within the bounds of Scripture. In this context, he makes generous use of Scripture, including its so-called "phenomena." At the same time, the book or books are replete with terminology like "of course," "naturally," "it follows," all terms tasting of logic that not infrequently smell of speculation. The following is an example:

It is in the nature of things that the one through whom you are created is closer to you in your consciousness than the one out of whom you are created, the reason being simply that the one through whom you were created stands in between you and the one out of whom you came into being.

Here Kuyper posits a natural (or sociological?) "principle" on basis of which he describes the relationships that exist between the divine Trinity on the one hand and created angels and humans on the other. To me this smells of speculation. So, yes, there is this struggle you will become aware of as you proceed. I sometimes wonder whether Kuyper was conscious of this tension.

⁷ The reference here is to what James K. A. Smith calls "The scandal of sheer grace: When mercy offends." *Calvin Theological Journal*, November 2021, pp. 309-320. According to most Westerners, the thought that *God* appointed satan to tempt humans is deeply offensive and irrational, but Smith, no died-in-the-wool kind of Reformed philosopher, explains the meaning of this sentence and defends it.

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If anything is typical of Kuyper, it is his comprehensive or wholistic approach to all of life. This is a book on angels, a topic that would be considered deeply spiritual by many readers. Well, it *is* deeply spiritual, but a spirituality with its feet on God’s good earth. He spreads himself (thin?) all over. He shows his typical appreciation for the scientific developments of his day and draws upon them, but, of course, they are mostly outdated. After some struggle, I decided to translate these passages as they are, but with occasional more current insertions that are not found in the original. They are just kind of snuck in without alerting the reader. You may well recognize such comments.

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Kuyper shows his typically wide grasp of philosophy and history, especially developments that emerged from the French Revolution, an event that repulsed Kuyper for its rejection of God and His revelation, while recognizing that there were many legitimate reasons for that and other revolutions. He is widely known for his anti-revolutionary approach, but that refers specifically to the godless nature of the French Revolution and its far-reaching fallouts, not to revolution in general. I believe the Kuyperian community in the Netherlands made a serious miscalculation when it enthroned the term “anti-revolutionary” in their political jargon, even turning it into the name of their political party. It left the general population with the impression of a deeply conservative worldview and, I suspect, even encouraged and imprinted a more general conservative attitude in the minds of its followers. Actually, the popular use of the term “conservative” is not even reflective of the more dynamic Reformational approach, especially as it is developing in North America..

Household Matters

1. The title of each chapter is marked by an asterisk (*) to make it easy for you to find it.
2. All the footnotes are mine, the translator. Sometimes they add supplementary information; sometimes, criticisms; sometimes, questions; sometimes they are chatty comments you do not often find in footnotes.

3. Except for demands of grammar, the names of satan and his henchmen are all in lower case, that is, not capitalized. This, in fact, marks this entire website on which this document was first published. Satan and his cohorts do not deserve the respect implied by initial capitals; they are too evil for that. The opposite also holds true: All nouns, pronouns and other words referring to any member of the Trinity are capitalized as Peter J. Kreeft wrote—and practiced:

“Throughout this book I have insisted on capitalizing ... all pronouns referring to the deity, contrary to current convention. My justification (is) ... for clarity’s sake, as well as theologically, out of respect and adoration (which are also contrary to current convention!).”

Peter J. Kreeft, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven...but Never Dreamed of Asking*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982, copyright page.

With angelic greetings,

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Chapter 1*

The Existence of Angels

*The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection,
and that there are neither angels nor spirits,
but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.
--Acts 23:8*

Professor George Ernst Stahl (1660-1734), in addition to being a practical scholar and personal physician to the King of Prussia, was also an especially ingenious chemist and profound thinker. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, he drew attention to himself by creating a theory about sickness and healing that is known by the term “Animism.” He published a three-volume work under the title *Theoria Medica Vera* (Halle 1707), which even at the beginning of the nineteenth century still had enough prestige to be retranslated and republished in both German and Latin. The German edition is by Von Ideler and appeared in three volumes in Berlin in 1832.

The connection of Stahl’s treatment to the subject of this book, namely angels, is clear from his theory itself. Its essence is that sickness is to be regarded as the result of disorder in the relationship between soul and body. Stahl recognized the soul as the centre or fulcrum of the body. The body must serve the soul or spirit. Whenever the body goes astray, the soul will resist and force the body back into its ascribed role. These attempts of the soul to restore the body to its healthful functions were in fact, according to Stahl, directed against the real, powerful serious diseases. The only function of the doctor was to support this movement of the soul and to remove whatever stood in its way.

While we will leave this theory for what it is, it continues to draw attention in an effort to raise the scientific reputation of medical knowledge and intervention. The significance that this theory ascribes to the role of the soul in relation to disease is itself too valuable to dismiss outright. Even though this Animism enjoys few supporters today (+/- 1900 AD) in the West, it does point a finger to what remains *the* open question in medical science, namely psychiatry.

It is striking that the name given to this system, namely Animism, is used in our century for a similar system but in a totally different context. Currently Animism is mostly regarded as an expression of an enchanted world in which ethnic groups around the world ascribe various natural phenomena and all kinds of life experiences they cannot explain through known natural causes, to all kinds of mysterious spirits, either benign or malevolent. This popular worldview played a role not only in previous centuries, but still is adhered to in many traditional societies.⁸ The Lama high priest in south China still daily occupies himself with catching evil spirits in bottles or jars, which are then securely sealed to make escape impossible.

This so-called Animistic religion has in common with Stahl's medical Animism that both systems seek to explain a *physical or natural* phenomenon by *spiritual* causes, which are then sought in the effects of unseen agents acting on the material. With Stahl, that unseen being was seen as the *soul* that affects the body, while in the world of ethnic Animism these invisible spiritual beings were seen as either good or evil spirits that influence the life and adventures of those whom these spirits either threatened, pursued or protected and blessed.

Thus one can instantaneously recognize the relationship between those two systems with the teaching about angels. With angels we also come in touch with an enchanted world of spiritual beings that, according to God's Word, have a powerful effect over our human lives, whether beneficial or malevolent. The angels who retained their original holiness have beneficial effects on us; the fallen and demonized angels under the leadership of satan⁹ are our malevolent tempters.

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Not everyone believes in the real existence of such spiritual beings or in their ability to influence our human lives. What we read in Acts 23:8 about the majority worldview has been the reigning view for all times and continues even till today. It can be said that those whose belief is restricted to the empirical, still do not believe in a resurrection of the body or in the existence of angels. The other side of the

⁸This remains the dominant popular view in much of Black Africa in the twenty-first century. See Jan H. Boer on <www.SocialTheology/boeriana> for various publications on wholistic health care in the enchanted world of Nigeria.

⁹ Because of his totally negative role, I have long refused to capitalize "satan" in all my writings and translations. He does not deserve such respect.

coin is also true: Those who believe in a resurrection also accept the existence of angels. There is indeed a connection between accepting the resurrection and the existence of angels. The secularists for whom there is nothing beyond the physical, believe that life ends as soon as the physical stops functioning. For them, belief in the existence of creatures *without* a physical aspect, whether dead humans or angels, is simply absurd. The reverse is also true: All those who believe in a resurrection also accept that a person is more than her physical appearance that we can observe; that after death this spiritual aspect, though separated from the body, continues to exist and that thus the existence of a spiritual being without a body is quite possible. From that perspective there is nothing strange in accepting the existence of angels, who are purely spiritual beings without physicality.

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In the battle between these opposite convictions, believers have noticeably been pushed back and daily lost terrain. By the end of the nineteenth century, life, having become very flat, plain and pedestrian, had neither eye nor heart for a world of divine poetry that hides behind the curtain of the visible.

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When this flat and dull spiritual, disenchanted atmosphere penetrated the world of theologians, it was no surprise that belief in angels was increasingly pushed back. As was the case with Balthasar Beckler,¹⁰ the attack would usually begin by denying the existence of demons and of satan. Once the stage had been reached where belief in evil spirits was so thoroughly mocked that public opinion wanted no part of it, the attack on good angels took hold so that people could not rest before the heavens were also totally depopulated and disenchanted, with nothing but an unending empty space remaining.

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That which theologians initiated along this line, was perfected by natural scientists. From there on everything was to be explained according to the patterns of natural

¹⁰ **Balthasar Bekker** (1634 – 1698), born in Metslawier, Dongeradeel, Friesland, was a Dutch minister and author of philosophical and theological works. Opposing [superstition](#), he was a key figure in the end of the [witchcraft](#) persecutions in [early modern Europe](#). His best known work is *De Betoverde Weereld* (1691), or *The World Bewitched* (1695). [Balthasar Bekker - Wikipedia](#).

life. The explanation of all phenomena was to be sought in empirical causes. Materialism was enthroned. This talk of spiritual angels was considered sufficient for the time the operations of natural forces were not yet known. Thus they were ascribed to mysterious causes. That even allowed for witches with all their abominations.

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But now that the natural sciences have made such phenomenal progress and are able to explain nearly everything according to natural causes, faith in angels and spirits was herewith totally routed. Of course, not *everything* could now be explained, but the natural sciences were making such gigantic strides that there was no doubt that before long almost everything that was considered mysterious would soon be subject to rational explanation from observable causes. All belief in the existence of the enchanted spiritual world was now to be dismissed as preposterous and out of date. That was all medieval and obscurantist which our enlightened age had forever done away with.

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For theologians this created more than a trifling difficulty. Even though belief in the infallibility of Scripture had been abandoned, it could not be denied that Scripture affirms belief in angels and spirits and that it disapproves of their rejection. Even in the life of Christ here are frequent references in His sayings and parables to angels. In the Gospels this occurs no less than forty-two times; in Acts, twenty-one; in the Pauline epistles, twenty-eight; and on nearly every page in the book of Revelation.

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This phenomenon demanded an explanation. Attempts to explain this were made with the final conclusions being as follows. Animism undoubtedly existed in Israel from the beginning as well as among its neighbours, but Israel did not create an actual doctrine of angels of her own. This perspective was allegedly developed by the Persians, while the Jews, following the example of others, developed theirs after the Babylonian exile in a style all their own. During the centuries between the exile and John the Baptist, this foreign teaching of angels took deep roots in

Israel and became part of their worldview. Hence, Jesus' contemporaries fully accepted this spiritualistic assumption of good and evil spirits that influence human lives. Only the Sadducees, being more developed and civilized, kept themselves free from such superstitions.

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However, in the areas of Nazareth and Capernaum, where Jesus and his disciples grew up, this perspective was popular and common. Thus it was that Jesus adopted this popular viewpoint and shared it with the disciples. Those among moderns who had more respect for Jesus and could not view Him as a product of His time, taught that Jesus knew better and did not personally believe in angels or spirits, but adjusted himself to popular opinion, because the existence of angels had been deeply embedded in the religious world of His contemporaries.

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Without going into deeper explanation here, it should be recognized in passing that the most recent research has effectively knocked the bottom out of these theories. Though he was an unbeliever himself, James Darmesteter,¹¹ a learned scientist, wrote a completely opposite conclusion in his French book. According to him, it was not the Jews who borrowed their view of angels from the Persians, but that the Jewish perspective was taken over in Persia. Though these arguments went back and forth, in the meantime, while awaiting further developments in this area, it will be well to stay clear of these kinds of critical theories about angels in the Scripture that were even taught children in catechism classes.

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It is much more surprising that in our age, just now that science has broken with all enchanted belief in the existence of angels and spirits, a mighty movement out of the mystery of life has emerged that feverishly defends the existence of invisible spirits and their effect on us. We refer to so-called "Spiritism." It is remarkable that, while scholars began to debunk the belief in angels and spirits, in Emanuel Swedenborg a seer arose who, on basis of his own experience, plead the reality of the effect of invisible spirits in his life. However, Swedenborg did not have many

¹¹ James Darmesteter (1849-1894) was a French author, [orientalist](#), and [antiquarian](#).

followers; he gathered only a small circle around him that was prepared to affirm his perception of eternal things. But what remained a largely static phenomenon with him, in our day grew into an extensive movement. In country after country, then here, then there, men and, especially, women arose who announced that, whether by knocks or some other way, they were in touch with beings they did not see nor were they visible to the eye, and who introduced themselves as spirits from the invisible world. Initially, the reaction was one of unbelieving smiles, but they insisted on their assertion. Nothing could dissuade them that they had real contact with the world of spirits. And seeing that the manifestations of these spirits did not restrict themselves only to the invisible, but revealed themselves by knocks, by the movement and dancing of tables and by the movement of a pencil and pencil writing, they soon succeeded in attracting a sizable crowd of believers, including both followers of Christ and deniers of His Name, and more or less convinced them of their assertions. Christians who allowed themselves to be caught up in this net were, of course, not believers who lived close to the Scriptures; they were more of the emotional type.

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Soon two different schools of thought emerged. On the one hand, there were those who grabbed hold of these manifestations as a welcome proof of a supernatural world. On the other hand, there were those who constructed a system based on this Spiritism. Though they did this in a great variety of ways, the result was that they turned Spiritism into a separate faith, almost into a sect. Now this group of Spiritists in our country, the Netherlands, is very small, but it does have a talented speaker in the retired preacher Roorda van Eysinga,¹² whose thoughts went deep and whose style would involuntarily pull you along.

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But abroad, especially in America, the number of these Spiritists is impressive and their literary output puts us to shame. They are publishing an extensive series of magazines in many languages so that by now they have developed a fairly large

¹² Roorda van Eysinga (1870-1925) Born a Dutchman, he was raised amidst revolutionary ideals: when he was a child, his family had to relocate to Switzerland after his father was declared persona non grata by the Dutch government, and there his parents befriended the anarchist thinkers.... He published his intention of committing suicide and did so in 1925.

library. We no longer count them in tens of thousands, but in the millions. Even more surprising is that this Spiritism finds few adherents among the lower classes, but mostly among the wealthy and cultured people who are not satisfied with the materialism of this age.

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If you wonder about the connection between this Spiritism and the doctrine of angels, the answer is not far sought. As we already saw with the Sadducees, denial of the resurrection and of angels goes hand in hand. The question about whether souls have a posthumous existence and whether there are angels is basically one and the same. Understand well: angels are not dead persons, not in the least. Angels have an independence of their own. However, belief in angels depends wholly on whether one believes or rejects the existence of immaterial, spiritual and invisible beings. If one accepts such existence, one can also accept a posthumous existence of the soul as well as of angels. On the contrary, if one rejects all this, belief in resurrection and in angels both fall by the wayside. Though Spiritism does not directly concern itself with angels and appears to occupy itself exclusively with the spirits of the dead, this recognition of the continued existence of the non-physical spirits of the dead paves the way for accepting the possibility of angels.

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It is necessary to point to this connection in this context, because it demonstrates how deeply embedded the need of our human nature is to acknowledge the existence of a spirit world. For what purpose is there in philosophers, theologians and scientists, after having harnessed their best efforts, then to disavow the living species of angels as they are revealed to us in God's Word? Soon, through the back door, a similar belief in the spiritual world once again asserted itself, but now in a much more drastic format. Belief in angels continued to quietly and inspiringly permeate the Church of God. It hurt no one and was no obstacle to anyone. And now, after scholars have exhausted themselves in destroying this elevating belief in angels, it has been replaced with the noisy, ever expanding movement of Spiritism. One does well to recognize that with the emergence of Spiritism, theologians who are not too far out in left field, once again turned to the old enchanted view and asked themselves whether they would not do better to

restore that old perspective to honour, rather than to engage in Spiritism. In the first print of *Herzog's Real Encyclopaedie*, one Lic. Bohmer proposed that the assumption of angels was nothing but a passing impression of our *sensus divinitatis*, but in its second edition of 1897, Robert Kubel enthusiastically defends the old belief. There really is no other choice. You will acknowledge the angelic world as God has revealed in His Word or, as soon as you reject the latter, you will revert to the Animism of idolatrous peoples, not directly, but step by step, the first step being the search for communion with the dead who have already left us.

Chapter 2*

Angels in Oblivion

*Do not let anyone who delights in false humility
and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.
Such a person goes into great detail what he has seen,
and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.
--Colossians 2:18*

It cannot be denied that among the *Gereformeerden*¹³ of our day, i.e. Kuyper's time of writing, as well as among Protestants in general, angels do not enjoy the attention one might expect from Scripture. True, one does not find people among faithful Calvinists who, like the Sadducees of old and the free thinkers of our time, deny the existence of angels. Nor are there those who incredulously shake their heads at what Scripture tells us about angels. But that does not mean that angels take a significant place in their faith life and perspective.

To be sure, we listen ecstatically and in awe to the song of angels in the fields of Ephrata; we know that angels served our Saviour after His temptation in the wilderness and in Gethsemane; on Easter we remember how angels descended and rolled the stone from the grave; at the Ascension we hear the angels speak to the Apostles; and in the book of Revelation the future with the Lord is often depicted in the company of angels. We can confess and accept all this without having answered the question for ourselves about the place of angels in God's creation, which service they provide in the great work of grace and what is their relationship to us personally and to the salvation of our own souls. This is the precise point where *we have to seriously complain that our awareness of God's angels has shriveled far too much at the expense of the quality of our lives and of our souls.*

¹³ *Gereformeerd*—This refers to the denomination established by Kuyper under the name "*Gereformeerde Kerken*." Its adjective is "*Gereformeerd*," same as its adherents. Since there are so many Reformed denominations in the country, we will use the Dutch term to refer to this particular denomination, its people and traditions. This denomination has recently re-merged with the historical national state church, the *Hervormde Kerk* (Reformed Church), from which it seceded in the nineteenth century, to form the *Protestantse Kerken van Nederland* (Protestant Churches of the Netherlands). *Be it known that all the footnotes in this translation are the translator's, not Kuyper's.* They occasionally take on a personal or even humorous tone—one of my foibles!

Our Heidelberg Catechism, in its explanation of the third petition in the Lord's Prayer, *consciously* assumes, that "Your will be done" means among other things, "Help everyone carry out the work he is called to as willingly and faithfully *as the angels in heaven.*"¹⁴ This has almost been totally forgotten. *Out of the hundred who pray the Lord's Prayer, we dare claim that there are at least ninety who regularly pray along with this third petition or even pray it themselves, but without even for one split second giving any thought to the service angels perform.*

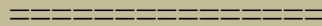
The claim that Calvinists are too far estranged from the doctrine of angels is thus no exaggeration. They hardly ever mention or talk about angels. In our writings, they are largely ignored. In church classes such as Catechism there is hardly any mention of the application of angels to our own lives.¹⁵ It is publicly realized how in all churches angels are mentioned very seldom. True, there is a certain degree of dreaming and fantasizing going on about angels, especially among our women, but this sort of interest in angels basically has nothing to do with Scripture; it is more of an art product. Both in painting and sculpture, artists have conjured up all sorts of charming and graceful angelic figurines who captivate us. Similarly, in poetry writers have gradually introduced these pseudo-angels, even making them sing on their own, but these are very different from the angels in Scripture.

Especially engravings or sketches of dying babies taken out of their crib by an angel has for sentimental reasons become extremely popular. And thus, completely outside of the Confessions or Scripture, these pseudo - or phantom angels gradually came to be seen as a kind of poetic being that populated the world with its construction of winged figurines. That image of pretty angels then gradually infiltrated popular daily life. There is hardly a young mother who has not called her little darling, "angel." Amongst young couples it is very common to address each other in their letters as "my angel." Out of all of this, it has become crystal clear that people no longer take the actual existence of angels seriously, but that their use of the word "angel" only refers to the poetic name of an attractive and pleasantly-

¹⁴The Heidelberg Catechism is a major doctrinal pillar of many Reformed churches. This third petition is found in the answer to Question 124. This translation was adopted by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1975.

¹⁵ During my seminary years (1960s), a very orthodox professor, when asked about the role of angels, obviously did not know what to do with them. Yes, he admitted, they serve us, but we do not depend on angels; we depend on God. End of story. No further details.

imagined being. They use that name only to substantiate their ideal fantasy, whether for young people to express the love in their hearts or for that of a young mother. This distortion is the first to be resisted once we no longer accept that poetic image from the art world but turn to that of Holy Scripture.



The answer to the question how it came about that among us Protestants-- and thus also among Calvinists--spiritual involvement with the angels of Scripture retreated so drastically, is undoubtedly that this is to be sought especially in our opposition to Catholic practice and doctrine. During the Reformation, people had the sad spiritual experience of all sorts of intrusive barriers distorting the relationship between souls searching for salvation and Christ. The personal, self-conscious and direct communion between the Christ and one's soul was much weakened. A few people of stronger spirit, including certain Catholic orders, continued to relate more directly to Christ, but for the larger crowd of believers direct communion with Christ had almost become an unknown issue for the soul. There were all kinds of barriers inserted against communion with the Saviour: priests, bishops, the Pope in Rome, Mary, the saints and (romanticized) angels. It was only after overcoming all these links in the chain that a certain degree of communion with the Saviour was (re-)established, but it was a much weakened version that had lost its vitality and intimacy because of all these barriers. This situation externalized the religion and explains that a truly searching spirit that was free of superstition, could not find peace with God.

With Martin Luther in the lead, many thirsted for this peace, and dared to make heroic attempts to break up that chain of barriers and to commune directly with Christ and thus find a peace that neither the church establishment nor the creaturely heaven could help them achieve. In the course of this history they undermined the dependence of the conscience on the clerics, upended the worship of Mary, pushed aside the (imagined) service of the saints and banned the worship of angels from the church. All these factors had created barriers between the soul and the Mediator. It was only out of spiritual thirst for free communion of the soul with the Saviour that all of this was exorcised without hesitation, in the full awareness of sure consequences to come.

It is from the above perspective that the attitude of the Gereformeerde churches in the Netherlands concerning the worship of angels as evidenced in Article 26 of the Belgic Confession must be seen and evaluated.¹⁶ Though this article inveighs only against the mediating role of the saints, in this context the saints must be seen on one line with angels; what holds for saints, also holds for angels.

When you read this beautiful Article 26 in one sitting, you will not detect even the slightest hint of hostility towards Rome. Instead, this confession speaks of the *sole advocacy or intercessory function of Christ* only in terms of the blessed triumph in the heart of God's elect, from where it then moves on to confess that finally, finally all intermediaries have been removed and full communion with the Saviour restored. It reads in full,

For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth is there anyone who loves us more than does Jesus Christ. Although He was "in the form of God," He nevertheless "emptied Himself," taking the form of "a man" and "a servant" for us, and made himself "completely like His brothers." Suppose we had to find another intercessor, who would love us more than He who gave His life for us, even though "we were His enemies?" And suppose we had to find one who has prestige and power, who has as much of these as He who is seated "at the right hand of the Father" and who has "all power in heaven and on earth?" And who will be heard more readily than God's own dearly beloved Son?

So then, sheer unbelief has led to the practice of dishonouring the saints, instead of honouring them. This was something the saints never did nor asked for, but which in keeping with their duty, as appears from their writings, they consistently refused.

¹⁶ The Belgic Confession is the oldest confession of the Christian Reformed and related denominations, written by Guido de Bres back in the sixteenth century. Article 26 is reproduced here in its entirety. For the full Confession go to < [BelgicConfession.pdf \(crcna.org\)](http://BelgicConfession.pdf(crcna.org)) >. I have introduced a few changes in punctuation and capitalization to conform to this entire essay as well as to the entire website. Throughout this translation I capitalize every reference to divinity and decapitalize every reference to satan, the devil c.s.

We should not plead here that we are unworthy—for it is not a question of offering our prayers on the basis of our own dignity but only on the basis of the excellence and dignity of Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is ours by faith.

Since the apostle, for good reason, wants us to get rid of this foolish fear—or rather, this unbelief—he says to us that Jesus Christ was “made like his brothers in all things,” that He might be a High Priest who is merciful and faithful to purify the sins of the people. For since He suffered, being tempted, He is also able to help those who are tempted.

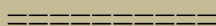
And further, to encourage us more to approach Him, he says, “Since we have a High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, who has entered into heaven, we maintain our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to have compassion for our weakness, but one who was tempted in all things, just as we are, except for sin. Let us go then with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace in order to be helped.”

The same apostle says that we “have liberty to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus. Let us go then in the assurance of faith....”

Likewise, “Christ’s priesthood is forever. By this He is able to save completely those who draw near to God through Him, who always lives to intercede for them.”

What more do we need? For Christ Himself declares: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to My Father but by Me.” Why should we seek another intercessor? Since it has pleased God to give us the Son as our Intercessor, let us not leave him for another—or rather seek, without ever finding. For, when giving Christ to us, God knew well that we were sinners.

Therefore, in following the command of Christ, we call on the heavenly Father through Christ, our only Mediator, as we are taught by the Lord’s Prayer, being assured that we shall obtain all we ask of the Father in His Name.



We may not delete anything from this stirring Confession, because it provides convincing proof of how, entirely without aversion to or unbelief in angels, but exclusively and only out of spiritual thirst for the Saviour, it has pushed aside the worship of and advocacy by angels. After all, the service provided by angels is clearly and emphatically affirmed in Article 12 of the Confession, where it states, “*He has also created the angels good, that they might be His messengers and serve His elect.*”

Similarly, Question 124 of the Heidelberg Catechism holds up the angels as an example for us in the prayer that everyone of us “carry out the work he is called to as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.” However firmly this has been affirmed, it cannot be denied that the spiritual decisiveness with which we in this way opposed the worship of angels in the Catholic Church, unnoticeably led us to focus too much on the contrast and, therefore, relegated the positive confession of angels and their service to the background.

That’s just the way it is with our sinful nature. We, human beings, have difficulty maintaining the correct measure of things. Maintaining balance is a gift few people have. And thus we swing from one extreme to the other.¹⁷ This is the source of that communal sin either to exaggerate or to underestimate; either to overrate or to minimize; or what academics call in Latin *per excessum* or *per defectum*. Now Rome succumbed to exaggeration and excesses where angels are concerned, but it cannot be denied that, in their zeal to combat this excess, Calvinists on their side also failed to maintain the right balance and similarly fell into excess, but to the *defectus* side of things. As we pointed out above, that is how certain images of (phantom) angels were adopted more from the world of poetry and romance than from God’s Word. It is even the case that among those that have distanced themselves from God’s Word, we hear more references to angels than in families that live close to God’s Word. And this is just where, when Spiritism emerged

¹⁷ This thought has become a prominent component of Reformational analysis of other schools of thought.

from its mysterious background, it found its most fertile soil in Protestant countries.

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If you wonder what Rome has taught with respect to the veneration of angels, you must acknowledge that the Council of Trent expressed itself soberly. It determined that “the worship of and calling upon the saints, the angels and the sanctified souls who taste heavenly delight is not against the first commandment.”¹⁸ This is demonstrated with this question, “In reaction to a royal decree prohibiting anyone from behaving like the king or from seeking royal splendour, who would be mad enough to deduce from that decree that showing any respect to magistrates was prohibited? Though in the Catholic scheme of things Christians are instructed to adore angels after the example of the saints in the Old Covenant, they thereby do not honour them with the level of veneration they bring to God.”¹⁹

Furthermore, Rome repeatedly pointed out that the saints of the Old Covenant venerated even (human) kings.²⁰ And then the question was raised whether the veneration and honour accorded to earthly rulers should not also be accorded to these high beings whose glory outshines that of kings. “Even love ... must force us in view of the fact that the angels pray for us, protect us, and carry our prayers to God’s throne. From this perspective we must call upon them, for they constantly see the Face of God, and have willingly accepted their assignment to support our salvation.” The Catholic *Catechism* continues, “Not in the least is meant here a veneration that would be at the expense of or in competition with God’s honour. To the contrary, the honour of God is elevated the more this service of the saints and of angels elevates humans and challenges them to the imitation of the saints.”

¹⁸Kuyper quotes from *Cat. Rom. P. III.c.II. 9.4.*—a reference the translator has not traced. This Catechism was composed by Pope Pius V in follow up of the Council of Trent. We Protestants would refer here to the first instead of the second commandment.

¹⁹The translation of this quote is from Kuyper’s Dutch version, not directly from the Latin original. This holds true as well for the next few quotations from that document.

²⁰Genesis 23:7, 12; 42:6; I Kings 24:9, 25:23; II Kings 9:6,8; I Chronicles 29:20.

As you can see, this is all expressed very soberly. It is emphatically taught that the honour shown to angels must be something totally different from the veneration accorded to the Eternal Person. The honour accorded to angels must be comparable to the respect we have for the magistrates whom God has placed over us. That honour must be far from competing with or reducing the glory of our God. It is said that nothing glorifies the Most High more than continuing in the same service as the angels and saints. In addition, every declaration that supports these considerations is richly highlighted and supported with examples from the Scriptures and is organized in such a way that it is almost impossible not to recognize the intention of preventing misuse. Unfortunately, none of this has helped. As of now, misuse of the word remains a common practice. And what's more, this misuse arose definitely from official dogma.

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In Colossians 2:18, there is a declaration about the service of angels that is helpful for our point of departure. It reads: *“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.”* In that letter, the holy apostle observes how already then there were attempts in this young church to restrict the freedom of believers, to limit it and to insert various intrusions between them and the Saviour. This disturbed Paul greatly. He understood and foresaw the problems this separation of the Head from the members would cause by breaking up the unity of the Body of Christ. With that in view, he encourages the Colossian believers not to allow anyone to impose all sorts of rules about food and drink, or celebrating new moons or Sabbaths, which, though they were all valid in the past, when they were a shadow of things to come, have since been abrogated now that Christ has fulfilled all they foreshadowed. Having said that, Paul continued, *“Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.”*

The above shows that at that time the heresy had already infiltrated the congregation that felt the veneration of Christ did not suffice and therefore introduced the worship of angels. That is, they concocted various ceremonies by which they worshipped angels. This intentional religious honouring of angels was defended by a call to false humility on the part of the faithful. They were to walk in this false humility and on its basis take their refuge in the veneration of angels. So, the very thing that was so powerfully experienced during the Reformation and

what Article 21 of the Belgic Confession so movingly countered, namely veneration of angels in the church, was based on the proposition that we were unworthy to approach God directly. He who directly called upon Christ as his Saviour, was considered lacking in humility. He had too high a view of himself as if this could be achieved directly without the assistance of intermediaries. Only spiritual pride could move us to call upon the Saviour directly; a meek and humble believer would not do so. She had too low an opinion about herself; she did not consider herself justified. She was humble and wanted to remain humble. That is why she would not approach Christ herself but stopped at the gate where she met the saints and angels to have them convey her prayers to the King in His palace through their mediation, and from that palace have the grace and mercy of the Saviour applied to her. Thus this “false humility and service of the angels” are directly related. These heretics sought to instill a false concept of humility into the congregation. Once this false humility had gotten a foothold, the service and veneration of angels automatically followed according to the dynamics of that culture.

The result of this would be that the same things they had so painfully experienced during the age of Reformation, namely that communion with Christ lost its intimacy and, secondly, that through all this veneration of saints and angels that intruded between Christ and the soul, they found themselves distancing more and more from the Saviour. These heretics, along with their provocative practices and the resulting spiritual impoverishment, are to be blamed for instilling the desire to penetrate into things that have not been seen. We know nothing about angels except that which God has revealed in His Word. These heretics were not concerned with what the Holy Spirit had revealed to us, but only with their own alleged spiritual experiences. They thus abandoned the basis of the faith in order to develop their own point of departure in the subjective experience of a subjective fantasy.

This is what the holy Apostle calls the fruit of worldly reasoning or logic that is contrary to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. It is not a true but a false humility that considers a child of God and redeemed of the Lord incapable of approaching her Saviour directly. All veneration of angels or saints that intrudes between the soul and the Saviour, damages the faith. That is why the holy Apostle urges the

church of Colossae to turn away from these heretics whose ideas had “*an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship..., but they lack any value...*” with God (Colossians 2:23).

Chapter 3*

Ban on Angel Worship

*Then the angel said to me,
“Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited
to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’”
and he added, “These are the true Words of God.”
At this I fell at his feet to worship him.
But he said to me, “Do not do it!
I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers
who hold to the testimony of Jesus.
Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”
(Revelation 19:9-10)*

Remember Paul’s warning in Colossians 2:18 not to “let anyone who delights in false humility and in the worship of angels” lure you into angel worship. This definitely cuts off all so-called veneration of and involvement with the world of angels that is based on the assertion that we are too low and too sinful in ourselves to appear before the holy throne of God and therefore need the intercession of saints or angels. Indeed, Rome has sought to assert that Paul was addressing a form of angel worship that had come from Persia, but without any solid basis for this claim. In neither the foregoing nor in what follows does the holy Apostle point in any way to foreign influences, but rather to the attempts of some *within* the church to influence members and to the unworthy means applied to the situation. In this context he summarizes this falsely imbibed “humility” and the resulting worship of angels. That the worship of angels did not need to be imported from Persia becomes crystal clear from the example of the holy Apostle John, who, during the vision he experienced on Patmos, twice prostrated himself before an angel to worship. When something like this happens twice even to an apostle as spiritual as John, what then is more natural than that a similar tendency is also found among the ordinary believers at that time and that some power-hungry members would misuse this tendency to establish power over them? And so, seeing the serious danger to the Colossian church and through her to the church of all ages hiding under this cloak, the holy Apostle Paul warned them not to be lured into such angel worship.

Neither is there even one single word that would indicate that the veneration of angels that is being rejected here was a kind of worship of angels as if they were gods. This context affirms the very opposite. The use of the word “humility” here indicates clearly that this angel worship at Colossae rests on the false conviction that believers may not directly approach God in Christ but needed the mediation of saints and angels. Calling upon an angel to pray and plead to intercede for him with Christ, and then for Christ in turn to plead with God, already indicates thereby that Paul is not venerating such an angel as a god but, rather, as a *higher* being that exercises influence on the dispensation of grace by the Most High. The distinctions advanced by Catholic theologians between *Latreia*, the highest adoration that belongs only to God and Christ, and *Dulia*, the lower degree of veneration that is applied to angels and their peers, is wholly irrelevant here. It is definitely the case that Catholic theologians also protest the idea that the worship that should be reserved for God the Creator only, may be applied also to any creature. They declare decisively that the highest form of worship, i.e., *Latreia*, is reserved only for God.

However, they also insist that the lower veneration that belongs to angels and falls under *Dulia*, is a *religious* veneration, for the motivation that drives it is religious in nature. Thus the basis for this veneration lies in the awe in which God Himself is held and that compels them to honour in angels the *supernatural graces* that God has embedded in them, and the *dignity* wherewith He has dressed them as well as the *power* with which He has equipped them. Herein it becomes clear that it is an attempt to interpret such angelic veneration as something totally different, for example, from the honour we reserve for our governments. They regard the latter veneration as a *civil* one, while the veneration demanded for angels is definitely of a *religious* nature. It is exactly here that both the danger and the cause are found that are embedded in this doctrine to go even further astray in practice.

After all, the saints, no less than angels, are God’s servants whom He equips with power and majesty. We honour them not for their own sake, but for what it has pleased God to embed in them. When it comes to service and qualification, both are on the same line. It will not do to contend that angels outrank humans, since Scripture frequently declares that humans will judge angels, while the incarnation of the Word has forever elevated our human race above the angelic host. If we still

insist that the respect we owe our authorities is merely of a *civil* nature, but that the veneration we owe angels is *religious* in nature, then we make a distinction here with far-reaching consequences that *must* and does lead to our evaluating them higher and superior to earthly creatures.

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In this context, our forefathers frequently referred to Revelation 19:10 and 22:8. In Revelation 19 we are shown in apocalyptic vision the moment of the final judgement. John hears from afar the joyful cheers of the saved ones in heaven, who shout, “*Hallelujah! Salvation and honour and power belong to our God*” (:1). He sees how “*the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fall down*” before God’s face in order to worship Him. This solemn moment grabs John so as to totally move him. As the angel says to him, “*Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’*” John loses control of himself. He feels incapable of obeying such a powerful command and he falls down before the angel to worship him. But the latter will not tolerate this. To the contrary, he immediately responds, gently reprimanding John, “*Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*” (:10). But the vision John beheld was so overwhelming and left him so ecstatic that, as he came to the end of this apocalyptic vision, he could not resist offering spiritual worship to the angel. After all, in Revelation 22:8-9 we read, “*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me.*” And again, it is the angel himself that rejects this spiritual worship relentlessly as he warned in Chapter 19:10 above.

Now it must be noticed that we are not dealing here with a brother of weak faith, but with someone no less than the holy Apostle John, whom we find here at the zenith of his spiritual experiences, not in a moment of spiritual breakdown, but completely taken up into the glorious vision that has overcome him. It is just at such a rich moment that this man, so weak in spirit, is already down on his knees to lose himself in the sin of false worship. It is an angel that twice rejects such homage and gently chides John, reminding him that only God may be worshipped. Being an angel, he is not a *higher* being but a *fellow servant* who is a peer to the prophets of old and to the faithful who have preserved the word of prophecy.

You cannot get away with saying that this angel protests such homage as if he were God. This simply cannot be. It is wholly unreasonable to suppose even for one moment that the holy Apostle John would have entertained the thought that this angel is either God Himself or one of the false gods. No one will dare to insist on such an atrocious explanation. The angel does not answer with “I am not God,” but he only points out that he is not some sort of higher being but a peer to John, for prophets, angels, apostles and martyrs are all servants and thus also mutual servants of the Lord. Thus John is not reprimanded because he upholds wrong doctrine but only because he unthinkingly allowed himself a sinful deed *in practice*. He did not intend to worship God Himself in this angel, but, lost in respect and awe, he knelt before the angel as if he were a higher sort of being and so came to inadvertently pay a level of homage to the angel that is to be reserved for God alone.

Thus we have every right to turn the angel’s word to John against every form of homage to angels that, without treating them as gods, nevertheless offers them the kind of veneration that is an extension to our worship of the Highest Being. Note well that the angel does not say, “Don’t worship me, for I am only a *creature*.” No, but he deprives John of every idea that he outranked John, as if an angel had such high dignity above a servant of the Lord that he was to be venerated. It is from this perspective that he so forcefully emphasizes that he is a *fellow servant*, i.e., one who is equal to John in the same service cadre. And just as one cabinet minister does not outrank his colleagues, his fellow servants, in respect, but is one with them in status, so also such a display of honour by one servant of the Lord to another is inappropriate.

In order to make this even clearer, he points out that an angel is not higher than a prophet, not even higher than *any* child of God who safeguards prophecy. In other words, the cutting away of all expressions of superiority is based on the fact that this is not about a *higher sort of being*, but that angels and humans are fellow servants and that in the service of God these fellow servants may not accept such honour from each other.

This is expressed even stronger when we compare the angel’s reprimand with the declarations of Peter and Paul in Acts 10:26 and 14:14ff. When Peter arrives at

centurion Cornelius' place in Caesarea and the latter recognizes him, he falls on his knees before Peter and worships him. Peter does not tolerate this. *"Arise," he commands, "I am only a man myself."* According to Acts 14, after the healing of a crippled man by Paul and Barnabas, the citizens of Lystra, concluding that the two were gods, wanted to slaughter an animal for an offering to them, Paul and Barnabas were shocked, rushed into the crowd, shouting, *"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you."*

It is remarkable that here we meet up twice with the contrast between God and humans. The centurion Cornelius of Caesarea and those citizens of Lystra were Pagans who imagined that there were demigods and many gods who needed to be revered. Over against that false opinion both Peter and Paul declared, *"Do not kneel before us, for we are not gods, but humans just like you."* But you read nothing of this in Revelation 19:20 or 22:8. Nothing is said here of a contrast between a god and a human being, but exclusively of the assumed contrast between a higher and lower creature. For that reason, John is told that angels and humans all together form one holy company in the service of the Lord and that together and mutually they are fellow servants.

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It is worthy of attention that in the writings of the New Testament there is mention of neither doctrine about nor practice of such veneration of angels as asserted by the Catholic Church, not even one single word. Neither our Saviour nor any of His disciples present us with even one single passage supporting such a veneration of angels. That cannot be explained by a claim that during that time little attention was paid in general to angels. To the contrary, in Jesus' days on earth, angels appeared very frequently. Jesus often spoke of angels. After His ascension to heaven we see more than once in the Acts of the Apostles that angels intervened salvifically and admonishingly between parties so that we hear much about angels speaking. But no matter how much you read and re-read the New Testament, not even the weakest recommendation can be found about angel worship. Only three times is there mention of angel worship, namely in Colossians 2:8; Revelation 19:10 and 22:8, and every time it is not to recommend such worship, but to disapprove of it and to decisively warn against it.

Catholic theologians have sensed this difficulty acutely and attempted to find support in the Old Testament what could not be found in the New. They even sought support for their opinion in the Apocryphal books. Apart from the apocryphal Tobias 12:12, they depended on Genesis 32:26; Exodus 23:20; Numbers 22:31; Joshua 5:14 and Judges 13:17. Let us therefore take a closer look at each of these passages.

Firstly, *Genesis 32:26*—Here we find the story of Jacob wrestling at Peniel. In verse 24 we read that at early dawn “a man wrestled with him till daybreak” and Jacob said to the man, “*I will not let you go unless you bless me.*” There, according to Roman theologians, you see how Jacob asked an angel for his blessing, which is proof that he honoured this angel highly. Be it noted:

- Firstly, that nothing is said here about angels, only about a man. It is only in the context of Hosea 12:2, 4 that an angel is mentioned.
- Secondly, Jacob did not worship this man but wrestles with him and tries to force him to bless Jacob.
- Thirdly, even if Jacob had worshipped this man (about which we read nothing), his example is not in the least incumbent upon us. It would be disapproved just as in the example of the Apostle John in Revelation 19:10.

The reasoning process here is all too unconventional: Jacob’s wrestling with an angel would be incumbent upon us, while John’s action earned disapproval?!

With respect to the undeniable fact that Jacob asked for a blessing from this man at Peniel, let us take note of two things.

- First, in Scripture asking for a blessing is very common as Jacob’s own history demonstrates sufficiently: Jacob also expected such a blessing from his father Isaac.
- Secondly, in so far as it is maintained that blessing has a higher sense here, this man with whom Jacob wrestled revealed Himself as God and not as an angel. In Genesis 32:28 it says, “...*you have struggled with God,*” while in verse 30 we read, “*I saw God face to face....*”

This totally invalidates the Catholic appeal to this chapter.

Secondly,²¹ in Exodus 23:20 the Lord says to Israel, “*See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since My Name is in him.*” Catholics translate the phrase “Pay attention to him” as “Venerate him” (*observare* / honour). This translation cannot be upheld, for in Hebrew it includes a prefix that means “*from.*” It always alerts us that we must be on our guard against what might come from another person to us. Religious veneration is in no way demanded and there is nothing here that cannot just as well be said of Moses. It is only at the end of this quotation that there is a word that cannot be said of a human being, but therewith demonstrates that it does not refer to an ordinary angel either. Angels cannot forgive sins and neither can it be said that they carry the Name of God within them. For this reason our forefathers have declared this angel a Christophany, i.e., a revelation of the Son of God in human form. Even if veneration were demanded here—which is in no way the case--, there is nothing here that refers to veneration of angels.

Thirdly, Numbers 22:31 tells the story of how the “angel of the Lord” appeared to Balaam and how the latter, upon recognizing the angel of the Lord, “bowed low and fell facedown.” To draw any conclusion from the story about our obligation towards the angel, it must first be shown that we Christians are under obligation to follow this *Pagan* Balaam’s example, something altogether unreasonable.

Fourthly, Joshua 5:14 tells how Joshua, standing by the Jordan River, saw a man there dressed as an army commander with a sword in his hand. Joshua took him to be an ordinary army officer and asked him, “*Are you for us or for our enemies?*” When the man answered, “*Neither. I am the commander of the army of the Lord,*” Joshua fell face down to the ground in reverence and asked, “*What message does my Lord have for His servant?*” It is clearly shown here, according to Catholic theologians, that Joshua revered the angel with a spiritual veneration.

²¹If you find it difficult to follow Kuyper’s number scheme here, be comforted by knowing that Kuyper is no stranger to bemuddled grammar and that he occasionally inserts a secondary sequence within an original one. Confusion by any standard. I have tried to make it easier to follow here by the use of indentations.

Let the following be observed:

- Nothing is said here about an angel;
- Joshua initially failed to show any special reverence until that man introduced himself as “commander of the army of the Lord;”
- This commander of the army of the Lord was Christ. Thus, we acknowledge that Joshua engaged in spiritual reverence here, but deny that this was reverence for an angel.

Fifthly, Judges 13 tells the story of Manoah, who was under the impression that “a man of God” had approached his wife, but he did not realize that it was an angel of the Lord (:16). Nevertheless, Manoah wanted to provide an offering to this man of God, so that the angel himself had to say, “*If you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the Lord.*” Once he realized he was dealing with an angel of the Lord, he asked, “*What is your name, so we may honour you...?*” He did not make this offer to an angel but to the Lord. After this appearance, Manoah said to his wife that it was not an angel that he saw, but God Himself. Observe the following:

- Manoah’s example is not like a law for us, for he wanted to make an offering to the *man* of God;
- The angel pointed away from himself to the Lord;
- Manoah got the impression that this was not an ordinary angel but, rather an anthropomorphic appearance of God.

So, one can see that these references to the Old Testament in no way confirm Catholic doctrine. Their appeal to the Old Testament cannot deny in the least that neither Jesus nor His Apostles make any mention of veneration of angels, but, instead, the two times the New Testament does refer to it, it is only to disapprove of the practice.

CHAPTER 4*

Guardian Angels and Homage to Angels

See that you do not look down on these little ones.

*For I tell you that their angels in heaven
always see the face of My Father in heaven.*

Matthew 18:10

We still need to take a closer look at the Catholic doctrine that angels are the ambassadors and messengers of the Most High. It is thus, according to them, in keeping with the angelic status and rank for us to pay them the homage that is proper with the majesty of their Sender. We acknowledge this in principle. When the prime minister or president of a powerful country sends us a representative, our governments receive such an ambassador with more pomp and circumstance than a representative of an international scientific or philanthropic organization. In some countries such traditions run deeper than in others, but in most this calls up all sorts of questions of interest regarding etiquette and rank. Often a great difference exists between the reception of a powerful and less powerful messenger's sender, if not in etiquette in the case of equal status, then in the manner in which the person is treated. Even though it is unreasonable for us to insist that we can learn the best way to determine our stance with respect to angels from diplomatic traditions, it is acknowledged that there is a generally recognized concept at its basis that should not be ignored. In our opinion, a representative cannot be judged or treated according to the dignity of his own person, but, rather, to the status and reputation of his sender. He does not come to us on his own and does not plead his own cause, but only that of his superiors. That is exactly why it is appropriate that a representative be judged less for his personal rank than for the status of his sender. He is not to be revered as if he were the sender himself, for then he would no longer be a representative. That is why it never happens that a representative is honoured as one would the sender. The honour with which a government receives an incumbent prime minister is always much higher than the highest honour accorded to a representative.

If we apply all this to angels, it never follows—and the Catholic Church does not hold to this—that we should honour an angel representing God at the same level as we would God Himself. This may never happen. But it does follow from this—and we readily acknowledge this—that an angel representing God needs to be received with the respect consonant with the majesty of his Sender. It would, however, be inappropriate to bow down before and worship an angel, for this is an homage reserved only for God.

The tradition to bow down and worship a human being was originally found only among Pagans when they suspected a person was especially holy as did Nebuchadnezzar to Daniel (Daniel 2:46) and as, later in the New Testament, centurion Cornelius of Caesarea did to Peter. The Scriptures always disapprove of paying such divine homage to a person. Undoubtedly this superstitious tradition penetrated Jewry from out of the Pagan world around them. We repeatedly read that this or that person would bow down before Jesus and worship Him, but this should not lead us to expect that such persons believed in Jesus' divinity. There is no evidence for that. This would be totally inexplicable. Among those who would so bow down and worship, there would definitely be some who did this under the impression of His divinity, but one still has to at least partially explain this attitude as coming out of residual Pagan morality. Those who did so acted literally according to Jesus' divine right, but often without realizing it. They were like Caiaphas, who, *without being aware of it*, glorified the work of the Mediator truthfully, as one who had to die on behalf of the people to prevent the entire nation from disintegrating.

Thus our conclusion can only be that we must regard an angel sent to us by God with deep reverence, but that may never be to the same degree of veneration that we reserve for God and His Christ. Now, if you want to call such veneration of an angel "*dulia*" and that of God "*latreia*," well and good, provided the use of *dulia* does not exceed the limit of what we are allowed to ascribe to a creature. The angel also is and remains a *fellow creature* with us. The assignment with which he comes to us from God does not entitle him to a supernatural level of veneration any more than a Government that is clothed with some of the majesty of God may not demand a level of reverence that exceeds creaturely limits. The Government outranks even an angel. After all, it is called "gods" in the Holy Scripture, because

it is assigned sovereignty by God Himself, while angels never behave as sovereign but always as “serving spirits.”

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Even herewith the decisive issue has not yet been determined. The foregoing leads only to the conclusion that when the Lord God sends us an angel as His messenger *and that angel approaches us visibly*, we need to regard him with reverential humility. We really don't need the Catholic Church to preach this to us. Amongst us Protestants, in so far as we faithfully hold to the confession of our forefathers, when an angel appears visibly to us in our house or at our bedside or on the road, who would not be filled immediately with the appropriate level of reverence? This veneration could have such a powerful and overwhelming effect on us that, just like the Apostle John, we would be inclined to fall on our knees before the angel. Only after realizing that we are facing a mere fellow creature, would we resist excessive and unauthorized veneration.

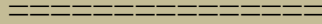
But, and this is the core of our objection, the Catholic Church speaks not only of such veneration when someone actually experiences the appearance of an angel, but also in general, *when there is no trace of an angel anywhere*, we don't experience one, don't see one, know nothing of his presence, and at most try to draw attention to him on our own initiative. If this only referred to a case in which an angel had indeed appeared at some earlier occasion, and from this memory his presence is imagined and he is thus regarded with a certain degree of reverence, this may be acceptable. An impression of a particular appearance can linger long after. That impression can later be revived. In this manner it is possible that, even after his disappearance, thoughts of veneration for such an angel can remain long afterwards.

But even here the objection holds that such an angel always appears in human form, as a phantom figure, and that this human form is not normal for him in heaven. Nevertheless, it is not wrong to suspect that Mary later would fondly remember that glorious face of angel Gabriel and think about him in silent reverence.

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It is a totally different situation if you have never experienced an angelic appearance and thus have never seen one. Where this is the case, the image of an ambassador from the King of Kings is nothing more than fiction. Then you cannot be conscious of an angel sent to you as ambassador by God. With the lack of such an experience, you will never have an occasion to properly venerate such an angel nor will you be able to draw on your memory for such an image and recall this encounter in the past with reverence. The very comparison to a messenger from an earthly ruler will be meaningless to you. After all, you do not honour a messenger from an earthly ruler who only exists as an illusion, but only when he is actually sent to you or you have a memory of such from the past. No matter how powerful the ruler of a country may be, no one thinks of venerating an ambassador from him from afar simply because we know he exists and is used in the service of his sender for the benefit of his own and other countries. In such a case, the mission is lacking as well as every personal point of contact. Thus there is no call whatsoever for any veneration. Even if such a representative were to enter our home, if he does not come with an assignment from our Prime Minister or was some time in the past accredited by our authorities, every official display of honour will be downgraded..

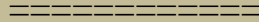
And yet is this the only correct comparison with our relationship to angels? We know the Lord our God uses angels, that they serve Him, that they are employed to aid those who will inherit salvation, but we don't see them, we don't know them, they are no longer sent to us personally in a visible way so that for us they are unfathomable agents. It is only out of a tradition of over eighteen centuries that these angels allegedly appeared to some individuals as well as from a few stories about their activities that we can form a weak and vague image of them from afar, but all concreteness and consciousness of personal contact is lacking. Even an image of such an appearance does not help us, for, since angels are *spiritual* beings, the illusion of visible figures with wings is snatched from fiction, not from reality. Thus the entire comparison of angels with messengers of an earthly authority simply evaporates. It could be valid were there a personal angelic appearance to you, but it lacks all application now that it is not a question of how to receive an angel, but rather how you *in your imagination* would deal with totally *unfamiliar* angels.



I have one final objection. It is often said that, though we no longer have a direct personal angelic experience, every elect person has her *guardian angel* who is intentionally assigned to her. It is therefore reasonable that we regard this personally-assigned angel with a certain degree of reverence and fear and grant him the mutual love of our heart. We will later deal with the question whether each elect person has such an angel. It must be said ahead of time that even if there were such personal guardian angels, such an angel would always remain hidden from us. Even that personal guardian angel will not appear to us. If he does watch over us, he does so in a mysterious way as an invisible spirit and cares for us remotely. Even if one is convinced that the teaching about guardian angels is indeed found in Scripture, we would still be stuck with the same objection that has occupied us earlier. Here again the unknown prevents all personal veneration. We may believe that there is such an angel. We may believe and accept that God takes care of and protects us in a special way through such an angel, but we don't know him, we have not seen him and from our side we lack all personal contact with him. In addition, even if we could draw any conclusions from our belief in such an angel, this would never cover Catholic theory. The Catholic Church demands this veneration not only for one's guardian angel but for all angels in general.

In the Gereformeerde Kerken the congregation addresses the angels when the people sing "Praise, praise the Lord, you His hosts, whose joy it is to wait upon His wings." Thus at least we cannot be accused of being unconcerned about angels or do not have a place for them in our liturgical practices.

But it makes a great difference whether we call upon our heavenly fellow creatures to join us in glorifying our God or whether we stir up each other and ourselves to venerate those angels in a religious sort of manner. We can and may try to reflect on the angels. We can imagine their holiness as did Christ in the Lord's Prayer. We may consider ourselves blessed in the awareness that they are advancing our salvation. But all of this is far from an intentional and stately veneration that would blend in with a religious or spiritual reverence aimed not at God but at His creaturely angels.



And now a brief consideration of the question itself about the guardian angel. Belief in guardian angels is fairly common not only among Christians but also among the unbaptized. Pagans from ancient times already entertained such images. Muslims imagine that every person is accompanied by both a good and an evil angel. Even the Church Father Origin²² imagined that a good angel constantly accompanied him on his right and an evil one on his left. Catholics similarly believe we all have a guardian angel assigned to us. And instead of all Protestants having rejected this belief, it continues to play a minor role even today among Lutherans. Indeed, not a few among respected Reformed theologians consider the thought valid on basis of Scripture. However, the Reformed added the restriction that such holds only for the elect, not for every person. Among our Reformed theologians we have only to mention the names of Hieronymous Zanchius,²³ Andreas Rivetus²⁴ and Johannes Maccovius,²⁵ respectively theologians from Italy, France and Poland, to be reminded that belief in guardian angels had its defenders also among our most prominent Reformed theologians.

Zanchius wrote in his *Tractatis de Angelis*, "It is most likely true and in accordance with Scripture that every elect, ever since her birth, is assigned a specific and special angel." Maccovius, known for his participation in the Synod of Dordt, wrote in his *Loci Communes*, "We confess that every elect has assigned to him his own special angel from birth to death." Rivetus writes in his *Catholicus Orthodoxus*, "It is not against Scripture, nor is it unlikely, that God has assigned to each elect person his own specific angel from birth to death, in addition to other angels that come to his aid under various circumstances." The Dutch theologian

²² Origin (185 AD-254) is the principal founder of Christian theology who tried to enrich the ecclesiastic thought of his day by reconciling it with Greek philosophy.

²³ Hieronomous Zanchius (1516-1590)-- **Girolamo Zanchi** (Latin "Hieronymus Zanchius," thus Anglicized to "Jerome Zanchi/Zanchius", was an [Italian Protestant Reformation clergyman](#) and educator who influenced the development of [Reformed theology](#) during the years following [John Calvin's](#) death. [Girolamo Zanchi - Wikipedia](#)

²⁴ Andreas Rivetus (1572-1651) was professor of theology at the University of Leiden.

²⁵ Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644) was a Polish Reformed theologian who spent much of his time at the University of Franeker, Friesland, the Netherlands. Kuyper wrote a book, published in 1899, about him.

Gisbertus Voetius²⁶ resisted all of that in his *Tractatus de Angeli Tutelaribus* and since then the idea of a special guardian angel has mostly been given up.²⁷

Those who retain belief in guardian angels based that belief on Matthew 18:10, Acts 12:15 and Hebrews 1:14. In Matthew 18:10, Christ warns us not to look down on children, “*for ...their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father in heaven.*” In Acts 12:15 we are told that when Peter returned from prison and knocked on the door to Mary’s house, those praying for him inside did not believe it was Peter knocking. They said, “*It must be his angel.*” And in Hebrews 1:14, we read that angels are “*ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.*”

It would not be a good idea to deny that these three passages do somewhat suggest that the Lord God not only supports us through His angels in general, but also that among the thousand times ten thousand angels surrounding His throne some individual angels have been assigned to care for the elect in a special way. Hence, we will not judge those who, along with Zanchius, Rivetus and Maccovius, have this belief. It is not that unreasonable to assume there is a certain degree of order in heaven as well as a certain division of labour. It is even difficult to reject the notion that various angels are assigned to specially care for this or that elect. But we resist when the above verses are used to *prove* an ordinance of a personal guardian angel.

That is not what these texts say. When we read that angels are sent out to serve the elect, this is said in all generalities. It only says that the Lord God also uses angels in His work of saving His elect, but without even the least stipulation. The story in Acts 12:15 that Mary’s guests talk of “Peter’s angel” definitely shows that they, in common with their contemporaries, entertained an image of a specific guardian angel. However, this does not in the least assure us that they had it right. If even today, twenty centuries later, there are still all kinds of errors circling around in the Church, how much more would this be the case among the early Christians who had neither Confession nor Catechism and among whom the truth had not had the time to penetrate their consciousness.

²⁶ Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) Dutch Reformed theologian. He was the first to write a comprehensive theology of mission.

²⁷ These translations are from Kuyper’s Dutch translation, not from their original Latin.

Actually, it is only in Matthew 18:10 that one can find a certain level of support for these feelings, but not so much in the words themselves. Jesus' statement that "*their* angels...always see the face of My Father..." does indeed say that *this group* of children has *a group* of angels that has a special relationship with them, but by no means that each one has a *special* angel looking after him. Just imagine a host of ten thousand angels assigned to communal service to the elect. Jesus' words would be equally valid, even though nothing was said about a personal guardian angel.

However, it must be emphasized that in Jesus' environment this belief in a personal guardian angel was common, that Jesus knew this and left the impression that He affirmed this belief. This is definitely not a scientific proof, but it does have a certain weight that supports those classic theologians. Even though this passage does not bear the weight of certainty, *God's elect do know that angels also have a role in serving them on their way to salvation, that a host of angels watches over their souls and that these celestial guardians see the face of the Father day and night.* This should suffice us, especially since we read or notice nothing of a more personal relationship. But we must be on our guard that this angelic service never tempts us to move our trust in our eternal salvation away from God and place it on an angel who will forever remain a creature.

Chapter 5*

Angelic Appearance Tied to Special Revelation

*It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.
--1 Peter 1:12*

For our knowledge about angels we are restricted exclusively to Scripture. In our own dispensation there are no more angel appearances. We do know and believe on basis of the witness of Scripture that God's angels continue to work in us, to affect us, but they do so without our noticing it. As a comparison, we can even say that their works in the spirit are similar to many physical processes in our body. We are physically able to absorb the virus of contagious diseases such as scarlet fever, small pox or Covid-19 without noticing any of it, but that nevertheless is active within us to develop the disease that may not be noticed till days later. The medical term for that period is called "incubation." Similarly, fresh air can have a strengthening and healing effect on us without our noticing it directly. That working on our physical body can be beneficial or detrimental without our being aware of the danger, but it is a generally-acknowledged feature.

And so it is generally acknowledged among those who confess the Holy Scripture that even now both good and evil influences from angels and demons affect us, again without being noticed. We are not arguing that we experience no influence from the spiritual world, but only that angels no longer visibly appear to us, that they do not audibly speak to us and that we cannot observe them. In contrast, they *were* observed in the distant past and that's where we need to be guided by the stories which are told us only in the Scriptures.

It is possible for some to object that also from the Pagan world there are all sorts of myths and legends about the appearance of supernatural beings. There are

traditions from all over the world about higher beings affecting people and their fate. However, one cannot regard them as a source of knowledge about the world of angels. It is, of course, perfectly natural that the memory of angelic appearances in the Garden of Eden or to Noah's family were originally found among all nations and peoples. In connection with this traditional memory, a condition of distraught spirits and fear soon gripped people on their dead-end maze so that under the influence of a distorted imagination, many in good faith have ended up with all sorts of legends about angelic appearances. Thus we readily acknowledge that in this tradition among the nations there may be a kernel of truth. We only deny that these traditions can teach us anything certain about angels. For this knowledge we remain always and exclusively dependent on Holy Scripture. It and it only is the exclusive source of our knowledge—*Sola Deo Gloria*.

If you ask whether these stories of the angelic world are spread evenly across all of Scripture, we notice immediately the opposite. The appearance of angels in some parts of Scripture is strong and overwhelming at times, which is then followed by long periods in which there is not a single reference to angels. It can be observed that one book in Scripture has much about angels, while in another there is almost complete silence. There is no book in the Bible where angels are mentioned more frequently than the Revelation of John, while in Proverbs there is not a single reference to angels. Such difference can also be detected *within* the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses.

Angels appear frequently in Genesis; only a few times in Exodus and Numbers and not at all in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Thus one should not imagine that angels have a powerful and impressive effect throughout Scripture, from the Garden of Eden to the demise of the holy Apostles. To the contrary, angels have a prominent presence during the course of divine revelation, namely at its *beginning*, its *end* and in its *centre*, while during the intervening centuries their appearances are of much less significance. Of course, the centre or midpoint of the entire revelation is the appearance of the Messiah in the flesh, the coming of Christ into this world.

And now our attention is inadvertently drawn to the fact that exactly during the central period of this holy history, angels appear more frequently and more powerfully than ever before. It is as if when the King of God's Kingdom makes an

appearance on earth, His angelic host accompanies Him and enhances the splendour of His arrival. As was never even thinkable before the central period nor after it, the angels place themselves forefront and centre throughout the history of Jesus' coming to earth. Not only John the Baptist appears as a herald of Christ to announce His coming, but next to John, yes, even before him, you see God's angels appear announcing first the birth of John the Baptist to Zachariah and later the birth of the Son of God to Mary. Angels descend in great legions to sing to the praise of Emmanuel around the crib of Bethlehem. And again it was the angels who watch over the child Jesus as Herod searches for the "new-born King of the Jews." And just as the angels are prominent at the coming of Jesus into this world, so also at His ascension. In Gethsemane it is angels who comfort and support Him. On resurrection morning it is angels who roll away the stone and guard His grave, while they deliver their heavenly message to the mourning women. And when the days of His appearances are past and Jesus has ascended into heaven, it is once again the angels of God who greet the King of God's Kingdom and shout the heavenly prophecy of Jesus' return in the ears of the Apostles. And as the demeanour of angels draws attention at the coming of Jesus into this world as well as at His departure, so we see them appear when the years have come when He will openly commence His Messianic work and complete his principal battle with Satan. Even at his temptation in the desert the angels came and served Him.

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There really is no room for difference of opinion that during the period of the Revelation, which for us is the heart and soul, and from which the most exact and detailed reports have reached us of angelic appearances, they have been the most brisk and spirited. And if we move from Jesus' first coming to earth to what we are told about His *return* on the clouds, we are captivated by the same phenomenon. We have access to the prophecies about His return from Jesus Himself in the Gospels, from the Apostle Paul in his letters and from John in his book of the Revelation. No matter which of these sources we consult, we are informed that the return of the Lord will be accompanied by actual appearances from the world of angels. That these future appearances of angels are described in greater detail in Revelation is to be ascribed to the fact that John's prophecy is that much more detailed. It is important to note a principal point here with respect to angels,

namely, that we find exactly the same prophecies in Matthew 25:31, in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 and others as were shown to John on Patmos in glorious visions.

But if we move away from His coming and return, i.e., from the centre and the end, back to the beginning of it all, it strikes us how angelic acts were frequent and meaningful at that time. We read of the Cherubim in the Garden of Eden, of the many angelic appearances in patriarchal history and of the time Israel was developing into a nation state. This continues at the time the covenant is getting established. But throughout the long centuries during which Israel lived in the land of milk and honey, the Revelation quietly progressed but one notices as good as nothing of angels appearing. As in Jesus' own life, many angelic appearances took place at the beginning and the end, but very little during the more quiet intervening years of His life on earth. So it was with Israel. At the beginning of the Revelation there was a wealth of angelic activity; the same at the end, but during the intervening years and centuries angels appear very seldom. This is, of course, connected to the fact that in many books of Scripture there is not much of an emphasis on the appearance of angels or their significance. Very little in Isaiah, much in Zechariah, also in the Psalms, but most of it as the Kingdom of God has come near and, what is especially noticeable, very much in the teachings of both Jesus and the Apostle Paul whom He called on the road to Damascus to spread the knowledge of His name amongst the Pagan nations.

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The above is associated with another phenomenon to which we also need to pay attention. It is remarkable that, before the Fall, when sin had not yet entered the Garden of Eden and it was splendour all around, there is no mention of angels. In Job 38:7 it is written of the creation that the children of God-- and they can be no one else but the angels—sang joyfully and the morning stars jubilated. In contrast, the creation story makes much mention of the creation of the elements, of spices and plants, of birds and fish and, of course, of human beings, but not a single word about the creation of angels. Were we in our imagination to dress up the Garden, there is no doubt that in our phantasy and fiction we would encircle Adam and Eve with halos and angels and would have populated the still empty Garden with angels.

But that is not how Scripture depicts the Garden. We read of animals being brought to Adam, but not a word about angels. Angels are not mentioned till the glory of the place begins to fade and sin has disturbed its splendor. This is the very first time we read of the Cherubim and that meeting is hardly a friendly and loving appearance, but one that is so terrible that Adam and Eve go into hiding. *It was sin and curse that first elicited an angelic appearance.*

But this is not in the least to say that the service of angels is exclusively the result of the disturbance caused by that sin and curse. That would be absurd. The service of angels to God goes on into eternity and never stops. But what does follow is that we begin to observe this service first after sin has entered. Apart from that, this angelic service is a hidden ministry, a mysterious unobservable service. So, this happens only when the integrity of life has disappeared and turmoil has come that we see this angelic service in such an extraordinary manner, but always in connection with the deeds of God by which He resists the turmoil, brings healing and prepares for and continues the restoration of all things.

It is especially in the last days, when the battle between that gracious saving power of God and the destructive power of satan has reached its climax, that the visible and observable appearance of angels comes into renewed vivid display. It would be no exaggeration to assert that, if sin had not come and the integrity of our lives had not been disrupted, angels would pass us by quietly and unobserved without ever adopting visible and external form. Put in opposite terms, this visible and wonderful service of angels took place exclusively in connection with the saving grace of God and thus began only when that saving operation started and did so in the strongest way where that saving operation intervened the most aggressively. What we saw earlier, namely that angelic appearances happened more frequently at the beginning, the centre and at the end of this salvific dispensation, is completely in keeping with the last observation, even about the frequency of these appearances when Christ appeared in the flesh.

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From all of the above we can deduce that angelic appearances are not normal but abnormal, that human beings rank lower when they need such appearances and higher when the need for them has disappeared. Therefore, it is completely natural that under the original old covenant dispensation the people of Israel continually needed these appearances, while in the Church of the new covenant, they ceased. Undoubtedly there is mutual contact between the angels and us even under normal circumstances, but then that contact is purely spiritual and needs no material support. *Also in the Kingdom of Glory there will definitely be contact between the mystical Body of Christ and God's angelic hosts, but there is nothing from which we can deduce that these hosts will appear in visible form. This will no longer be necessary, since God's children in this state of glory enjoy a rich spiritual life and have direct contact with angels in a more mystical, spiritual manner.*

This is similar to our worship of God. Looking at the Pagan world in its degraded state, it is clear that the human race has a need for a visible form for God and thus carves for itself idol representations of God. They need to *see* their gods, for otherwise they cannot communicate with them. But God's children, to the contrary, are called upon by Jesus to worship the Father in spirit and in truth and thus can do without such visible representation.

That the Lord our God in His unsearchable mercies finally had His beloved Son appear, who said, "He who has seen Me, has seen the Father," was for no other reason than to meet us in our weakness. In the Garden there was fellowship with the Eternal Being without Emmanuel in the flesh. Apart from sin, the incarnation of the Word was even unthinkable as was the visible appearance of angels. According to divine ordinances, all spiritual communion should be practiced and enjoyed in a *spiritual* way. When the need for visible appearance arises, this is undoubtedly a sign that adherence to God's ordinances has been derailed.

By way of comparison, we can observe the same in our bodily mode. The fact that we carry blood within us and even live out of that blood would under normal circumstances have remained a mystery for us. It is as the fruit of sin and curse that human blood gets poured out through murder, through accident as well as through sickness or healing, through deep distress or mutilation-- and thus becomes externally visible.

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There is a need to add to the last remarks. For our knowledge of the world of angels, in so far as we derive this from Scripture, we must not only note what it tells us about angels, but similarly what it tells us about devils and demons. It is remarkable how our observation regarding angels' appearing most often at the beginning, the centre and at the end of the Revelation, also holds for devils. The principal attack of the devil has three aspects: first in the Garden, then in the desert on our Mediator, and then, later, at the end of days, when the "man of sin" or the Antichrist shall be revealed. Nowhere do we have so many stories about demonic powers and about those possessed by them than from the days of Jesus' first coming and later at His return. As we will see later, we may never regard devils and demons as anything other than fallen angels, who have not clung to their station but have left their own abode. Even the book of Job makes it look as if Satan still always appears among the children of God, i.e., in the company of angels, as God's disobedient servant but who can nevertheless neither stir nor move without God's will.

Unfortunately, the use of the term "angel" introduces confusion here, in so far as the word has been turned into the clang of sanctified tones for us, for which reason it seems strange to us hearing the devil classified among the angels. Since the Scripture itself provides us with examples as in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 1:4, this is not a paramount objection. As criminals and children of God are both human, so seraphs and demons share the same nature, namely that of angels. It is well known that in psychology it is easier to collect data from the history of evil people in the city than it is from the silent majority out in the country. The reason for this is that the former tend to create newsworthy events, while we notice little of our rural folk. It should therefore not surprise us that fallen angels provide us with all kinds of data that we do not receive from the loyal angels simply because of their quiet operating style. Therefore, for knowledge about the nature of angels, their appearance in and disappearance from the world of humans, we must not only search the Scripture about the faithful angels, but pay just as much attention to reports about devils and demons. Though they allow us only a mere glance of dark

shadows, even the shadows have weight and interest for gaining knowledge about the angels of light.

Chapter 6*

Personal Relationship to Angels

Including Guardian Angels

*He makes winds²⁸ His messengers,
Flames of fire His servants.
Psalm 104:4*

There is truth in Schleiermacher's²⁹ 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 leaning 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

²⁸In its footnotes, the NIV allows for "angels," which is more appropriate for the subject.

²⁹[Friedrich Schleiermacher - Wikipedia](#)

and also as we create imaginary images of their life. And then there must be 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 dominant 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. That a human appearance with the glow of eternal youth on its face and surrounded with a halo to look like heavenly glory, with 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 Orange³⁰ or of Guido de Bres³¹ 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 only *thinking* about the heroes and martyrs of the past.

We should not regard this in too a 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. Every nation has that experience. 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.

³⁰ 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 >.

³¹ 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 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 ancestors 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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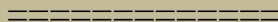
Herewith we need to add another kind of observation.

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 chapter, it must not be ignored that the kingdom of satan and his demons also belongs 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 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 we are much more concerned about the existence of angels 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 the 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 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 actually 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 being aware in any way 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 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 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 seems to diminish 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 think of or wish that the other stars were similarly populated with living beings and, longing for connections, we raise 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 us 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 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. 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 vaguely 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 role assigned to human as ruler or steward 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 is 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 mysteriously 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 clear indication of 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 or 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 as we humans is on basis of our first creation in Adam and our re-creation in Christ, but it 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 view of human unity with angels in their essence.

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),³² 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 attribute his beginning directly to God without the mediation of a father and 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 help³³ the angels but Abraham’s descendants, which, 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 His 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

³²In the text, the NIV has “angels,” but in a footnote it allows “sons of God.”

³³Kuyper has “*aanneemt*” (adopt or take on) where the NIV has “helps.”

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.

With the foregoing in view, it was extremely imprudent and incautious that the early Christian Church already 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 angels³⁴ 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 only in marginal ways and in the degree of their holy development, but in principle we share one common 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

³⁴The 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 is often thought to refer to the descendants of the godly Seth. That translation and explanation would undermine Kuyper’s example here.

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 this to be about lust on the part of angels, stamps both humans and angels with the same sensual sexual life. The 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 Nephilim³⁵ 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” 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 Philo³⁶ and Flavius Josephus,³⁷ and, following them, by Justin Martyr,³⁸ Clemens³⁹ and Tertullian,⁴⁰ 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

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ Philo of Alexandria (20 BC- 50 AD) was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Egypt.

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ Justin Martyr (100 AD- 165 AD)—a Samaritan, **was an early Christian apologist and philosopher.**

³⁹ Clemens of Alexandria (?-215 AD)—a presbyter in the Alexandrian church and a connecting link between Christian Gnosticism and the church.

⁴⁰ 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."

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.

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.⁴¹ 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 provoked His anger against the human race. However, it must not be forgotten that even a prominent theologian like Estius⁴² 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 little understood situation is, furthermore, expressed in a language and choice of vocabulary very foreign to us. Already in Genesis 6 :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

⁴¹ For Seth, see Genesis 5:3-8.

⁴² Willem Hessels Estius (1542-1613)—A Dutch Catholic commentator on the Pauline Epistles. [Willem Hessels van Est - Wikipedia](#)

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, but it is expressed in terms that cannot stand the test 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 always 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.⁴³

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*.

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Moses associates the story he is about to tell with the above; he tells us that since the above was the case and many more daughters were born, God’s sons saw that

⁴³This paragraph is my translation of Kuyper’s Dutch translation of Calvin’s original Latin.

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 to be sought among humans. Thus the sons and daughters are opposite 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, 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 “*Been*,” 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*⁴⁴ of Israel” living among the Pagan nations “and took their daughters in marriage.” It occurred

⁴⁴ The NIV here has simply “the Israelites.”

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

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 1:6, where we are clearly taught how the angels “went after other flesh,”⁴⁵ 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 1:6 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*” (1:4). 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

⁴⁵ The NIV here has “abandoned their home,” which could mean they left their tribal area for that of Israel and married Israeli women.

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).⁴⁶ 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.

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*”⁴⁷ (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, for Jude speaks not only of Sodom and Gomorrah, but also of the cities around them. Since he does not name

⁴⁶ 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, they were used as examples bearing the punishment of eternal fire.”

⁴⁷ The NIV has it as “*They married any of them that they chose.*”

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 1:7), 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 major objection.

This last explanation is confirmed by the context. Angels are not referred to here, 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 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 Genesis 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 some 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. ⁶The 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 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?” 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 angelic 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, *Benee 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.*”⁴⁸ Psalm 89:7 translates as “*Who in the skies above can compare with the Lord? Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings?*”⁴⁹ In both cases the Hebrew “*Benee 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.*”⁵⁰

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.

⁴⁸ Kuyper here has “gij kinderen der machtigen” which would emerge in English as “you children of the mighty ones.”

⁴⁹ Kuyper here has “Wie is den Heere gelijk onder de *kinderen der sterken?*” meaning “children of the mighty.”

⁵⁰ The NIV allows “sons of God” for angels in a footnote, same as Kuyper.

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.

Chapter 10*

The Daughters of Men

*He makes angels⁵¹ His messengers,
Flames of fire His servants.
Psalm 104:4*

In the previous chapter we 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,⁵² 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”⁵³ 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.

⁵¹ The NIV has “winds” but allows “angels” in the footnote.

⁵² Sethites—descendants of Seth. Cainites—descendants of Cain.

⁵³ 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.*”⁵⁴ 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.*”⁵⁵ 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.*”⁵⁶ If we set aside the inserted word “other” that is not even in the

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ See footnote 16.

⁵⁶ 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 had 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 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. Ambrosius⁵⁷ 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

⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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.

⁵⁸ 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.

Chapter 11*

Ethereal Body

*He makes angels⁵⁹ His messengers,
Flames of fire His servants.
Psalm 104:4*

In the three previous chapters we combatted and hopefully have sufficiently disposed of the thought that, apart from some incidental differences, angels share the same nature with us. No, we are not the same sort of being; their nature is different from human nature. However, we cannot just leave it at that.

Another question arises immediately whether the Scripture gives us sufficient information to form some kind of image of the nature of angels or, at least, gives us some idea about the difference between their and our nature. Here we must definitely guard ourselves against the urge to draw too many conclusions but be content with what Scripture offers us. At the same time, Scriptural data suffice to give some direction to our reflections. We can never penetrate into the being of an angel. We cannot even do that with animals. Here, too, we must confess of the angels that only *their* spirit knows what an angel actually is. Nevertheless, comparisons can provide us with enough data to be somewhat specific.

The first thing we need to emphasize is that the Scripture teaches us that angels, as spiritual beings, in their essence have no physical bodies. We are not going back to Genesis 6 or 1 Corinthians 11. Please remember that the strength that some draw from those passages to present both humans and angels as one in nature was especially based on the notion that they possess physical bodies. Every appeal against us based on those texts

83xx concerning their physicality has been rejected in the previous chapters. It should not surprise anyone that we continued to emphasize this, for till this very day the idea that angels possess bodies continues to be defended enthusiastically by men of otherwise sound confession and outstanding scholarship.

⁵⁹ The NIV has “winds” here but allows “angels” in the footnotes. Kuyper has “engelen” or “angels.”

The issue is not as simple as some tend to think. In the past, the “official” church had to struggle long and hard to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. It was not until 1215 AD that the Lateran Council⁶⁰ revised the doubtful declarations of the Council of Nicea on this subject in 787 AD. Even now the Nicean tradition still hovers over the Greek Orthodox Church so that that church more than anyone else still engages in angelic veneration with the approval of the clergy. To the contrary, for our spiritual fathers who kept the church close to Scripture, Jesus’ statement in Luke 24:39 was sufficient. When Jesus appeared to His disciples after the resurrection, they thought they were dealing with a spiritual being, but Jesus invited them to come near and touch Him. He said, “*Look at My hands and My feet. It is I Myself! Touch Me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and blood, as you see I have*” (Luke 24:39). Since, so we reason, angels are spirits, it follows that it belongs to their nature to exist without flesh and bone, and thus without body.

Our opponents were not about to be defeated by this appeal to the clear Word of God. “We admit,” they respond, “that there is no flesh and blood, but being without these is something totally different from being without body. Does not the Apostle call the congregation the body of Christ? Does he not say that even wheat has a body (1 Corinthians 15:37-38)? And does he not emphasize that there are not only earthly bodies but also “heavenly bodies,” quite apart from whether according to :41 this refers to the sun, moon and stars? Then they ask whether the Scripture itself, when it describes Cherubim and Seraphim for us, does not encourage us to adhere to a physical image. It is pointed out that every time angels appear, it is always in bodily form. They are seen, people speak to them and we are shown their dress and the glow of their appearance. Both their coming and going is noticed. It is further emphasized that Paul places human languages next to those of angels. Speech and language are

84xx unthinkable without bodily organs that we use to speak. Finally, it is asked whether being purely spiritual is not the exclusive privilege of the King of kings.

⁶⁰ The Lateran Council was a series of five councils held between 1123-1517 AD

And must not every creature be subject to bodily restrictions? These are all weighty considerations that deserve further testing.

In the first place, there is the undeniable fact that Scripture always describes Cherubim and Seraphim in bodily forms. It is especially the description of Seraphim in the prophet Isaiah that automatically comes to the foreground here both because it is clearest of all and because it continues to govern our current image of angels. Angels are said to be winged people.

We accept that in chapter 6 of Isaiah, angels do indeed appear that way. In a vision, Isaiah sees the heavens open and the angels around the throne are observable beings for him. Each angel has six (not two) wings so they can hover without any anchor point and simultaneously cover their faces before God's glory. But does this picture allow us to portray angels as winged bodily beings? It seems to us that such a portrayal would bring us problems. Does Isaiah not also *see* the Lord Himself in this same vision *sitting* on His throne? As if that were not enough, does the vision not also speak of a *royal robe* in which the Lord our God is dressed, the *seams* of which fill the temple? If one were to argue that because the angels appear as winged people with bodies, they must therefore be winged beings, one would also have to conclude that the Lord our God is not a spirit but an observable or visible being that is sitting and thus resting on something outside of Himself, dressed in a seamed robe. If you sense that even thinking in such terms is next to blasphemy and that this image of Jehovah on His throne in this vision only serves to make the Invisible perceptible, what reason do you then have to follow a different hermeneutic when it comes to Seraphim? God is a Spirit and the angels are spirits. But because the spiritual in the vision is not visible without presenting an imaginary figure, both the Lord Himself as well as His angels are made to appear as specific figures. But as little as Isaiah from here on imagined God in a visible form, so is it unreasonable for him in chapter 6

85xx to conceive the angels in general, or, at least, the Seraphim, to exist as such winged bodily beings. What happened here in this vision is exactly the same when we imagine Justice as a blindfolded apparition with a sword in hand or Time in former ages with scythe and hourglass. Justice and Time per se are invisible and therefore we need to think in terms of created entities in our human imagination.

That's how it is in Scripture as well. Whenever there is a vision, everything adopts form and figure in order to make it speak to us through that form.

In addition to the above, whoever wants to proceed with such presentations as we are offered in Isaiah 6 as if they were photographic copies of reality, will involve herself in insolvable difficulties when she enters Scriptural terrain. The Scripture speaks of Cherubim in different terms from Seraphim not once but repeatedly, always indicating their differences. Genesis 3:24 reads, "*He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden Cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the Tree of Life.*" In the book of Exodus, at the raising of the tabernacle, as well as in 1 Kings 6 and in 2 Chronicles 3 when Solomon's temple is under construction, the Cherubim are presented as two human figures with wings that incline themselves over the "mercy seat" of the Ark of the Covenant. In Ezekiel chapters 1, 9 and 10 the Cherubim are presented in animal form with mysterious wheels that move in every direction. In Revelation we finally see the return of these same animal-like figures but now accompanied by twenty-four presbyters or elders.

These changes do not generate the least objection, provided we recognize in them only *visionary* images of spiritual beings that are presented to us. They are not chosen arbitrarily but designed to always express what these angels are and do. Of course, for those who see those images as representations of photographic reality, such variations are totally unacceptable. They cannot accept Cherubim at one time as a winged human being and at another time as animal-like beings with multi-directional wheels. This would lead them to posit all sorts of Cherubim that are so different from each other that they can hardly be classified under the one single name.

We will return later to the question about an angelic hierarchy, but already now it must be

86xx observed that Scripture consistently speaks of angels as being creatures of one kind, so that the names of Cherubim and Seraphim along with wagons, thrones and other apparitions, cannot possibly be considered as different or separate beings but can only be understood in terms of the services to which they are called. On this basis every appeal to Isaiah 6 and those other similar passages to prove the

physicality of angels must firmly be rejected. Who so sees them does not understand the nature of these visions.

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Neither does it advance the assertion that angels are bodily beings by pointing to their bodily appearances as we read about them in Scripture. That such bodily appearances have occurred we readily accept. In some of these stories the question may arise whether they tell of a visionary seeing or of an occurrence in reality. However, there are many passages in which the physical appearances are depicted in such graphic terms that denying their reality does violence to Scripture. We do not hesitate for a moment to fully accept their reality.

But how on earth does anyone draw the conclusion from these stories that angels *an sich* are bodily beings? With all of these appearances only human forms are observed dressed in ordinary clothes. There *is* something strange about them that is often described as a bright light surrounding the apparition, but often this draws so little attention to itself that initially the difference is not even noticed. The person to whom the angel appears only gradually begins to realize that he is dealing with an unusual personage. Should we on basis of this, claim that angels wear a certain style of clothes that they copied from us humans? This is unreasonable. In addition, such appearances would totally contradict what we are told about these Cherubim and Seraphim and would lead to irreconcilable conflict with the stories. These visions and stories can only be reconciled if, together with our fathers, we confess that angels are purely spiritual beings that

87xx sometimes appear to us in visions and at other times in anthropological forms they adopt. Already in the creation account we are shown how God can create a human body without it having a human soul. Adam's body was ready even before God blew the breath of life into him and also before a living soul came into existence. It can in no way be thought of for anyone else to accept the creation of such a human body that provides a momentary service after which it is dissolved and disappears. As to the question how an angel can use such an unusually created body as instrument, one has only to point to victims of possession in which a fallen angel or demon can reside in and speak using the body of the possessed and their auditory organs of speech. Even now it remains an unresolved puzzle how *our*

souls use our bodies and, even more, how a soul of one person can have such a powerful effect on the souls of others as in hypnotism. We will thus be careful not to try to solve the question of how an angel can make use of such a body. Only, we deny our opponents the right to doubt the reality of this all on basis of our ignorance.

We can summarily treat the issue of “the tongues of angels” as in 1 Corinthians 13. The proof that some have tried to deduce from these “tongues of angels” rests on a totally distorted conception of the function of language. A language is definitely not a mere composite of words uttered in audible sounds. When at night you lay slumbering without uttering a word, your language has definitely not disappeared but resides within you. Now picture for yourself a moment in the night during which the entire nation is asleep and not a single word is spoken by anyone, your language would continue to exist without any obstacle. The sound is the way we make utterances in our human language, but it is absolutely not the language itself.... While we humans are physical or bodily beings, it belongs to our wellbeing that our human language can express itself in audible sounds. But this coincidence is only because we must have a body due to our nature. Already amongst us humans there is the written language, the eye language, the language of our gestures and so much more that show that we can definitely exchange information and thought without the use of our

88xx speech organs. Whether a given group of beings has a language is a matter of whether they have a common worldview and possess the means to exchange thoughts. Thus angels are spiritual beings who do not have similar speech organs at their disposal for the practice of community in their world of thought, but practice it at a purely spiritual level. This means they possess language skills just like us humans, perhaps even at a level higher than ours. Denial of the above would be a painful thought for us humans when we die and would almost certainly lead to the justly rejected notion of soul sleep of the dead. When we die, the spirit in us separates from our body and we no longer have control over our bodies till the resurrection.⁶¹ This will always be experienced by us humans as a lack, because

⁶¹ I draw your attention to Gordon Spykman’s discussion on the relation of body and soul. I translate; I do not “do” theology, but it may show to what extent Reformationals have moved beyond Kuyper towards a more integral relationship. See Spykman’s *Reformational Theology: A new paradigm for doing Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, pp. 243-245.

possession of a body and along with the soul using the body to express itself belongs to the core of our being. But in this state of separation the soul of the child of God will not be muted or dumb in this sense that our whole thought-world will have disappeared and all fellowship between Christ and His saved ones in that thought-world cut off. To be sure, the mode of this fellowship is different from our situation in life on earth, but it *does and will* exist; we can speak of a language of the dead as Paul speaks of the language of people and of angels. Does he not refer to the “unspeakable words” that were whispered to him in his vision and that, according to that expression, differed sharply from our normal speech? It is safer to regard angelic language in terms of the miracle of tongues as practiced in the earliest Christian community and not to read I Corinthians 13 and 14 separately from each other.

In this way only one last opinion remains that regards purely spiritual existence a divinely granted privilege and that requires a body for all creatures, and thus also for angels. But this theory means something totally different from what is usually meant by the physicality of angels. It in no way demands that we regard angels as a sort of winged youths, but is satisfied if in some way we acknowledge that, in order for them to be something, to have a real existence, they have a certain shape or form whatever that may be. This would put an end to the false conception held by many of only being mere thought or pure power.

Chapter 12*

Spiritual Beings

89xx

*For by Him were all things created:
things on heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible, whether thrones
or powers or rulers or authorities;
all things were created by Him and for Him.
Colossians 1:16*

Do not be confused by the assertion that all creatures, thus also angels, must have a certain form or figure or a certain way of life. One can fully acknowledge this without believing in the physical existence of angels. In English grammar, for example, our verbs and nouns have fixed forms without anyone getting it in his head to attribute physicality to such words. Even though there is good reason to accept that angels also have a certain form or way of existence, this does not prove in the least that they therefore have some type of body.

Confusion can arise due to the fact that the term “body” has more than one meaning. Sometimes, in Dutch at least, “words” is sometimes called the body of thought or one can speak of the “student body.” There is always that word “body” that crops up in such contexts in various languages, certainly in its Latin (*corpus*) and Dutch (*lichaam*) forms, even in the West African Hausa language (*jiki*) and, of course, English.

This situation opens the door to a worrisome confusion of speech. Those who adhere to the physical embodiment of angels mislead you by this varied use

90xx of the word “body.” If they have outmaneuvered you, at the conclusion they will create the impression as if this body language refers to “body” in actual literal sense. Let it be clearly understood here that we in no way deny that angels are shaped by God and thus have a specific form of existence, which would be unthinkable without some kind of form. We also acknowledge that the use of these varied and unreal meanings of the term, this angelic form can be presented under

the image of “body,” but it is inadvisable to make use of such variations, because it almost inescapably leads to confusion, for when speaking of the physicality of angels, the term is usually taken in a very specific context.

The main issue at stake here is whether matter and spirit are indeed two distinguishable items or whether matter is to be regarded as frozen spirit or spirit as heated and evaporated matter. Since most of our readers are not accustomed to dealing with such issues, allow me this example. The twosome snow and steam in their different forms of appearance offer an interesting similarity to the twosome of matter and spirit. Snow is something like white matter; steam rising quickly in the process of evaporation gives us the image of a free spirit.

The various schools of pantheism insist that it is wrong to contrast matter and spirit to each other as opposites. To them, matter and spirit are one and differ only in their appearance. Consequently, if you look for the bodily in matter, then all spirit also shares in the bodily. In the reverse, even a dead stone shares in the spiritual. Similarly, it is naturally claimed that matter and power are merely two forms of the same thing. Along with that, the contrast that we tend to make between soul and body does not actually exist. In this framework all contrasts fall away; there is no distinction except in appearance. One who nevertheless continues to believe in the existence of angels will also have to assert that, like us, an angel also exists bodily. However, it is not as if an angel possesses a physical body, except in the sense that as spiritual being he automatically is also physical. Those who in this way defend the physicality of angels all insist that our souls possess physicality and must be conceived of as a finely-tuned damp cloud that penetrates the matter of our body. They end up not being able to ascribe pure spirituality to the Lord God. They

91xx covertly hint that not only must we ascribe physicality to angels and to our souls, but also to God almighty.

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We should not be too surprised at the wandering ways of the human spirit. When the light of God’s Word no longer lights our pathway and we have to look for the solution to the riddle of life on our own, it is unavoidable that we end up in foolishness. For we humans have the need to imagine that our thoughts represent reality in our broken nature and that that which we cannot fathom in our

imagination loses its existence for us. In this sense, idolatry was an attempt to stop the spread of atheism. When we can no longer imagine our god, he ceases to exist in our human thought world, but it was precisely to maintain faith in the divine that people gave their god an image or form presented in fixed thought.

If, in contrast, the light of the Word of God enlightens us, then resistance develops against this sinful drive and we are given knowledge of the existence of two totally different worlds, the one spiritual and the other material. These two may be oriented towards each other, but nonetheless they are of a totally different sort, each subject to its own laws, each provided its own powers, in their destinations pitted against each other through the working of their own energy. We then become aware of these two separate and yet intertwined worlds, not derived from our own thoughts but from God's Word that in faith grips us.

That we as human beings can hold on to the existence of these two worlds simultaneously can only be explained by the fact that we personally belong to both; through our souls to the spiritual world; through our bodies to the material world.⁶² The Scripture calls these the visible and invisible things, expressions that by further analysis can easily lead to confusion. For example, magnetic and electrical powers are to a certain degree also invisible, even though they hardly belong to the invisible things of Colossians 16. For average ordinary conversation, the Scriptural expression fully suffices. It is the visible things that we observe and learn to understand in their operation through research, but it is the invisible things that can be grasped only through faith. The relationship between these two is a secret of God Almighty and will never be traced by human wisdom.

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92xx So, having established this contrast, the Scripture teaches us in Colossians 1:16 that angels do not belong to the visible, but exclusively to the invisible things. It reads, "*For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.*" Everyone agrees that these thrones and powers etc. are nothing but angels. In similar trend, in Hebrews 1:14, Psalm 104:5 and

⁶²⁶² Again, do we detect a residual spirit-vs-matter or soul-vs-body here? That would go against the very core of Reformational thought as it developed after Kuyper.

other texts, they are referred to as spirits. Spirits and invisible beings are the same thing in this context. While we humans, according to our nature, exist in body and soul and thus participate in both worlds, it is characteristic of angels that they do not belong to both but participate only in the spiritual and as such stand over against us humans. Animals, angels and humans exist in a certain hierarchy: the animal participates only in the visible world; the angels only in the invisible world; while it is the high privilege of humans to be granted moving in *both* worlds and to rule in *both*. The difference between the human being and the angelic being is thus made clear. The human begins by being a little less than the angelic; as a new-born he appears to belong exclusively to the visible, but as the human further develops, he eventually comes to stand above the angelic since he then comes to wear the crown in both the visible and invisible worlds, the crown that God Himself places on His image bearer.

This purely spiritual nature, accompanied by the lower rank of angels is made even more clear in Scripture when you pay attention to what we are told about *fallen* angels. Even though demons are *fallen* angels, they nevertheless retain the nature and essence of angels. They can serve excellently in helping us understand the nature of good angels. And what is it we learn about the possessed of whom Scripture gives us such a sad story in such great details? Before anything else, demons have no body and are exclusively spiritual, which is the reason they are capable of invading other beings. It is only their invisible, purely spiritual nature that enables them to invade a human being and to control the relationship between soul and body of the individual person and thus to utilize his body, more specifically, his organs of speech as if they were their own.

93xxaa It is therefore that nothing is noticed of their eviction, nothing seen, except that the pitiful subjection of the possessed disappears. Jesus tells us the well-known parable that such an evicted or exorcised demon later reinvades the same person accompanied by numerous other demons. We are even told that the same person can host a legion of demons simultaneously. It is especially remarkable that we learn they can invade not only a humans but also animals. “Allow us,” so they pleaded with Jesus, “to invade these pigs.” Jesus allowed them and the entire herd, ravenous with possession, plunged from the steep mountain ridge into the sea (Matthew 8:30-32).

The stories told in the Middle Ages about bodily appearances of the devil or some other demon are in irreconcilable conflict with Scripture. Good angels *can* make appearances but only in a visible form that God momentarily creates for them. The devil could similarly appear to us in human form if God were to create it for him and allowed him to use it as he would see fit. The fantastic figure in which satan is often depicted is thus nothing but the product of imagination. This form has no reality.

There is good ground to suspect that satan, who attempts to imitate Christ in everything, aims at a pseudo-incarnation in the flesh. The evil spirits clearly reveal a desire no longer to be restricted to a spiritual existence but also to have access to a physical or bodily shape. The possessed amply demonstrate this sufficiently; the plea to Jesus to be allowed to invade the pigs confirms their aversion to their purely spiritual existence in a surprising manner. Precisely because they have corrupted their spiritual nature in its depth, their devilish nature forces them to try to escape from their exclusively spiritual existence. They do so as a human being who has ruined his body often tries to liberate himself from his body by means of suicide. Where the inner harmony is totally broken, nothing is so fearful as to be forced to continue to exist in the order to which God has assigned us. That satan sought to embody himself in Judas was basically the same tendency as Judas, once satan had invaded him, tried to exit from this visible world through suicide. The demons among angels want to force their way out of the invisible into the visible world, just like the demonic figures among humans, in the reverse, want to exit from the visible into the invisible world.

94xx Scripture even reveals to us that this tendency of satan to principally fix a place for himself in this visible world, will one day succeed—only to become the very means by which his rule will be completely torpedoed. The terrible revelation about the “man of sin” and the “the son of perdition” that is partially given to us in the book of Daniel, but even more so by Paul, shows us in connection with what Revelation announces about the reign of the beast and his prophets, that the last word has not yet been said about this stupendous struggle.

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Without getting ourselves involved in all kinds of hair-splitting and misleading distinctions, we continue to adhere to the confession of our fathers that angels are bereft of all physicality and have no share in this visible world. True, to briefly mention this point once more, those who reject this belief have appealed to Matthew 14:26, where we are told how the disciples, when they saw Jesus walking on the water, thought they were seeing a phantom, apparition or ghost. Here you see, so they argued, a spirit in that physical figure. They could not have imagined this if, according to their judgement, a spirit or ghost has no body.

Over against the above, be it observed that, first of all, whatever the disciples prior to their appointment as apostles thought, is not the revelation of truth. They came to Jesus fully accepting the worldview of their day and were not led into the truth until they were taught by Jesus. Secondly, it is a mistake to confuse a ghost or apparition with an angel. They understood a ghost not as an angel, but as the spirit of a dead person that was hovering about in a weakened bodily form. Such apparitions that so often would loom up in disturbed consciences, depicted so real and sharp as sometimes threatening figures and approach us in our fearful dreams, are nothing but the fruit and product of our own fears that, with the help of our imagination, create a figure. Thus Matthew 14:26 has nothing to do with the question of the physicality of angels. That profound and extremely weighty question is solved with every assurance by the authoritative statements in Scripture. It was and is as Jesus put it, “...*a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have*” (Luke 24:39).

If you pit the above over against how through the course of the ages people have sinned and suffered, simply because they

95xx continued to insist on the physicality especially of the devil and his demons, but also of witches or whatever henchmen were associated with satan, then we are once again reminded of the grace by which we are allowed to live in the clear light of God’s Word, and of the darkness into which the world plunges itself for those who avoid that light of Scripture. It is the giving up of this one truth, namely, that God has created the distinct difference between the spiritual and the material, and between the visible and invisible creatures, that has for centuries wrung thousands upon thousands in the noose of fear, that opened the door to the most godless desecration and that brought many to the scaffold or to the stake. Superstition has

nestled itself in many hearts by nothing more effective than preaching the physicality of spirits and thereby perturbing the life of nations. Perhaps today we find ourselves in a better position, but you are making a mistake if you think this means a higher development of the human race, for belief in the physicality of spirits faded away only because belief in spirits themselves faded away. Currently, a more mystical spirit has made a comeback to the nations, which has pushed back some of the cold, sober rationalism that led to the breakdown of belief in angels. In this context, it is remarkable how gradually apparitions are increasing that point us to the physical contact of the visible within us to the spiritual world. The world outside of God and His Word has no other choice than to either close the soul to all consciousness of the angelic world in a dry and cold manner and to be submersed into the material, or belief in the spiritual world makes a comeback that seeks a material point of contact with that world.

The light has been sown here only for them who, on basis of the authority of God's Word, know angels, whether good or fallen, only as invisible beings with whom we have no contact initiated by us and who cannot have any effect on us, except where they are assigned by God as instruments in His service. In her Communion liturgy the Church has therefore rightly placed the relevant section of this liturgy at the foreground and prevented as unworthy of participating in the holy sacrament not only murderers and divorcees or those who live their lives in rebellion and sedition, but definitely also those who seek sinful contact with the spiritual world. That kind of contact, however devised, always has false assumption at its basis that they, whether good or fallen angels, have a certain physicality at their disposal.

Chapter 13*

Servant Spirits

*(He) lays the beams of his
upper chambers on their waters.
He makes the clouds His chariot
and rides on the wings of the wind.
Psalm 104:3*

Thus the main difference between human and angel is that the angel is only a spirit in nature, while mankind is both spiritual and physical. This places the angel at a lower level of perfection and the human at a higher. *In the creational hierarchy, the angel occupies a lower rung; the human a higher one.* However, here an objection surfaces that we cannot leave unchallenged. It can and actually has been asked whether pure spirituality does not enjoy a higher status than a mixture of spirit and matter. This issue was forcefully raised along with the perfectly reasonable comment that the Lord God is above all; that, in fact, He is uppermost and that it is said of Him, “God is a Spirit.” If consequently, so the argument continues, angels are also pure spirits, then they bear the image of God in a higher sense than we, God’s children, do. From this it is concluded that they are not below humans in rank but higher. It is too bad, we might counter, that your conclusion contradicts the Scripture, which most certainly testifies that God is purely spirit. This tells you, they say, that some spirits are without body. But Scripture with the same certainty also teaches that the rank of angels is lower than that of humans. Is not all this drivel about angels outside of Scripture useless prattle? There must be a mistake in logic hiding somewhere.

The question is: what is that mistake? It cannot be doubted for even a moment that the mistake is found in the

97xxa totally false comparison between Creator and creature. The essence of the Creator is simply beyond any comparison. And even though both God and angels are spirits, we may never ignore that the one word “spirit” is used here in two very different senses. When God is depicted as a Spirit, the reference is to the *uncreated* Spirit, while with reference to angels it is about *created* spirits. The Church has justifiably emphasized that angels are *created* spirits. In doing this, it followed the traditional track of Reformed theologians for centuries. (There were Reformed

theologians before there were Reformed churches as, for example, St. Augustine, though not always consistently.) That speaks for itself, you might say, and that is true, but you should see here how important it is to place this fact in the foreground and not for a moment lose sight that here we have the reason that all comparison between God as Spirit and angels as spirits automatically dissipates.

The tendency to give this a different interpretation has surfaced in the Christian Church repeatedly from the beginning. Pantheism, for example, has sought to undermine the foundation of the church from the beginning and tended to see in angels a kind of transitional being between God and human beings. A bridge, you might say, between the Uncreated and the created. They serve more as an emanation from God as a realization of His holy powers and abilities. It is even quite possible that Polytheism owes much of its origin to angelic and spiritual associations. Currently, many teach that Polytheism began with Animism, which comes down to the same thing. Animism consists of nothing else but the veneration and worship of all sorts of mysterious spirits that, whether for good or bad, govern our human life. It can even be said that the two thoughts, namely the false idea of angels being superior to humans so that it would be a human goal to “angelize,” i. e., to become angels themselves, and, secondly, to consider them eternal, i.e. uncreated, basically derive from the same mistaken notion.

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In order to put to rest all such blather, the more orthodox theologians emphatically continued to hold on to the truth of Psalm 104:4, which tells us that God has *made* the angels; He *created* them. “*He has made the angels as spirits and His servants as flames of fire.*”⁶³ Attempts have been made

98xx to offer a different translation and to claim that nothing is said here of angels, but that the verse must be translated as “*who makes His winds His messengers, flames of fire His servants,*” so that it is about wind and fire (lightning). This explanation holds no water. It would be acceptable if it intended to say that He made His servants into (or “as”) flames of fire, but that is not possible if it means to say that He made the flames of fire into His messengers. In addition, in verse 3,

⁶³ This is a translation of Kuyper’s version of this text. The NIV has “*He makes winds His messengers, flames of fire His servants,*” but the footnote allows “angels” for “messengers.” Read on and you will find Kuyper rejecting the NIV version. This kind of confusion “confuddles” much of this page and the following. Keep it in mind as you read.

wind is already mentioned, so that it would make no sense in the flow of this Psalm to have the winds appear once more in verse 4. Finally, observe that this glorious Psalm 104 speaks *first* of heaven and *then* of the earth. In the earthly part, it first praises the earth itself, then the earth's elements and then its inhabitants.

Subsequently, the Psalm praises the heavens; first, heaven itself, then the elements of heaven and then its inhabitants, that is, angels. It is only if we see angels in verse 4 that justice is done to the beautiful symmetry of this holy poetry. This is then how it emerges:

Heaven (:2), heaven's elements (:3) and the heavenly inhabitants (:4).

The *earth* (:5-9), the earth's elements (:10-16), and its inhabitants (:17-30).

This interpretation cuts off all argumentation and in addition receives its seal from Hebrew 1:7 by expressly adding these words from Psalm 104:4, "...to His angels He says 'His angels make spirits and His servants a flame of fire'."⁶⁴ The reader of these words should guard against a misunderstanding. It would be much clearer for us if it read, "...who created His angels as spirits and His servants as flames of fire." This is indeed the intention. It is only that in Psalm 104 both the works of creation and of providence over all things are praised in the *present* tense.

"He wraps Himself in light as with a garment; He stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of His upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds His chariots and rides on the wings of the wind" (:2-3).

In completely the same tone, depicting in the

99xx present what happened once in the past in order to indicate its continued existence, we read the following, "*He makes His angels spirits*" (:4). For an explanation here this must be pushed back from its poetic present tense to its historical past and thus understood as if it literally says, "Who made His angels, i.e., created them, as spirits and His messengers are flames of fire." This "flames of fire" refers to the ethereal existence of angels and is, according to the context, a closer explanation of the word "spirits." The fleeting nature of the flame, its elusiveness, its rarity, thinness and immateriality, is, together with the lustre and

⁶⁴ Again, note the variant reading in the NIV.

glow of the image of the spirit, like the face of saints that is surrounded by a wreath of fire like Moses' face shone with a fiery glow after meeting God on Mount Horeb.

If one wants to gain a clearer insight in this deep distinction between the Uncreated Spirit and the created spirit in connection with the distinction of *our* bodily existence versus the immateriality of angels, it will be fitting to be extremely careful without being completely silent. The Uncreated Spirit itself is only Spirit, but not in the sense of some sort of limitation. It isn't that we humans are spirit and body, while the Lord God is only one of these two. To the contrary, *the Uncreated Spirit stands above both spirit and material*. As creation shows, this Uncreated Spirit bears the power of omnipotence in Himself to call into being both the spiritual and the material world through the power of His Word. So, if the Craftsman always stands above His work in power and essence, it follows that the Lord God, even though only spiritual, nevertheless possesses in His omnipotence the potential for the creation of the material world and is thus above both the spiritual as well as the material creatures in power and majesty. Indeed, God is the only and purely Uncreated Spirit, but in addition He also *possesses* the entire material world. That world is His, His creation, His product, within the range of His power and potential.

That is *not* the case with the created spirits. A created spirit does not possess a material sphere of life, except the Uncreated grant this to him. If God does not grant him, he will lack it for eternity; only when the Lord grants him this materiality does its possession belong to his being. This then is the explanation: it pleased God to give to the spiritual being that we call "human," not only spiritual existence, but also a material aspect. Angels, on the other hand, have been given only a spiritual existence, while the material is

100xx withheld from them. While we may expect that the angels, being only and purely spiritual, would be nearer to God, but far from it. In fact, it is the reverse: humans belonging to both the spiritual and the material, unlike the angels, can be the image bearer of Him, Who is the eternal Uncreated Spirit, but Who at the same time also created a material world to glorify Himself in that world.

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Now that we have finally arrived at this point, it is possible to give a proper response to a question we have earlier touched upon, namely, *whether the angels, like humans, have been created in God's image*. Usually the question is answered affirmatively, also in the various Reformed dogmatics that have been published over the years. However, this came about without deep thought and in spite of this lending support to the teaching of Socinus⁶⁵ about the lordship of humans over the created world. This was a heresy for which we do not have the space for further explanation, but which came down to denying the original divinity of Christ, Who climbed up the ranks till He reached that lordship referred to in Genesis 1:28. He *became* God not on basis of His essence but of His dignity and worth. This led to supporting the association of the image of God exclusively to the *moral* excellence of humanity while overlooking the cardinal point of *His rule over the material creation*. Of course, this was not the intention of our Reformed theologians when they spoke of the creation of angels in the image of God. They took it that, in distinction from animals, humans *had moral and rational aspects* in which the source of their excellence was located. They owed this excellence to their being created in God's image. And since the angels share in such a moral and rational existence, it was concluded that they, too, were created in that image. However, this was a superficial opinion which we Gereformeerden may not follow. That position on this point definitely requires correction.

First of all, it must be observed that in all of Scripture there is not a single mention of angels being created in God's image nor of angels *developing or becoming* this image. The entire picture in Genesis 1:26 is that only humans are created after God's image—*“Let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness.”* It does not talk about *beings in general* created after this image, out of which humanity subsequently emerged, but only about *human beings*, as we read in Genesis 1:27 where it emphatically states, *“So God created man in His Own image; in the image 101xx of God He created him.”* This is repeated in the story of the Great Flood: *“...for in the image of God has God made man”* (Genesis 9:6). In the New Testament, wherever the term “image of God” is used, the reference is not to angels but to the elect among the children of man who are to be reshaped into that image.

⁶⁵⁶⁵ [Fausto Sozzini - Wikipedia](#)

This should be enough to incline us to deeper thought. The question where in Genesis 1 there is reference to the creation of angels is not answered clearly. But the Lord Himself says in Job 38:7 that at the creation of the earth “*the morning stars sang together joyfully and the children of God shouted for joy.*”⁶⁶ This obviously refers to angels. Thus the creation of angels is included in Genesis 1:1. God created the heavens before the earth and in that one word “heaven” everything that belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven is included. The rest of Genesis 1 speaks exclusively of the further creation and the preparation of the earth. In all this the pre-existence of angels is assumed. It is in this context that Genesis 1:26 receives greater emphasis. If there were beings made in God’s image *before* humans were created, the declaration of that verse would make no sense. The statement “*Let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness*” introduces us to something totally new, to something unknown. It is the introduction to the granting of the crown of creation, which the human race receives because that species and that species alone is created after God’s image.

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But there is more to be said. When you read Genesis 1 objectively, you will have to agree that being created in God’s image does not in the first place refer to human rationality and morality. The rest of the story aims at something totally different: not at our rationality and morality but at our *royal* existence. Here the basic inseparable character or nature is not servitude but its opposite, governance —“*...fill the earth and subdue it*” (Genesis 1:28). It certainly is true that we are able to govern only because of our rationality and morality and because of our relationship to God. Thus it is correct that these features are also inseparable from the image in us. However, the end goal is our governance function; it stands at the foreground and forms the main focus. In connection with the above, Psalm 8:6 teaches us that the difference between angels and humans is precisely this, that not of angels but of humans it says “*You put*

102xx everything under his feet.” The reconciliation and deliverance offered us definitely aims at liberating us from injustice, but even in the New Testament the end goal towards which everything is guided, is and remains that the Mediator, as

⁶⁶ The NIV has “*...the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.*” A footnote allows “sons of God” for “angels.”

Son of God and Son of Man, subdues all things under His feet and reigns as King on His throne. After the judgement it will also be given to the redeemed “*to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne*” (Revelation 3:21). The saints in Revelation approach the throne as priests, but also as *kings*, which is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Genesis 1:28.

If over against the above, you place all that the New Testament testifies about the actual character of angels, it becomes crystal clear that angels are *not* called to reign but that their creation ordinance is and remains to be servants, are called to serve and in this service find their meaning in being and existing. You should immediately sense the contrast here. In God Himself, His omnipotence, His sovereignty, His royal majesty and His governance trumps everything else. Consequently, this characteristic is also in the *foreground* of the image of God. It follows from this that humans that carry His image are called to royal reign before anything else. Again, in contrast, angels are excluded from all ruling functions, deprived of all royal honour, destined only to serve, the sole reason for their bliss. Of course, we are not suggesting that humans are not at the same time servants and called to serve, but the difference lies in the fact that human service culminates on the throne, while angels remain servants and never reach a higher rank. *This being the case, it is definite that this governance function on the part of humans is precisely the unique and full expression of being created in God’s image and shows even more clearly that angels lack exactly that which constitutes the uniqueness of the Divine image and thus cannot possibly have been created in that image.*

Should the governance ascribed to humans consist primarily in a certain moral and spiritual governance, it would probably be understood differently, but that is not so. The clear words of Scripture in Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8 point out that it is a false or pseudo spirituality to regard the governing function assigned to humans as primarily spiritual in nature.

The governing function assigned to us is indeed a governance

103xx over the created. At first glance very materialistic, Psalm 8:6-8 reads, “*You made him ruler over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet:*

all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.”

The Psalmist does not at all consider the above unspiritual, for he continues immediately with a word of praise, “*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth!*” It follows from this that for the exercise of this governance function of a body was a *sine qua non*, that is, the fleshly, the material. That is the avenue through which humans can have living contact with the visible creation. Reversely, angels, not being called to governance, did not require these material facets and thus were granted only a *spiritual* existence from their Creator.

So, here we have everything coming together. Humans, who on basis of their creation in God’s image, needed to be kings and to possess this governing function over all the works of God’s hands, therefore are granted both spiritual and material existence. Angels, on the other hand, who were not created after God’s image but chosen for service, appear as purely spiritual beings. It is simply impossible for angels to have been created after God’s image. The very idea itself conflicts directly against all that Scripture reveals about both God’s image and the servant role of angels. What eventually follows automatically from the above is that human governance will in time cover angels also, because of the former’s majority.⁶⁷ The Apostle Paul asks, “*Do you not know that we will judge angels?*” (1 Corinthians 6:3). It speaks of itself that judging is the highest form of governance that one creature can practice over another.

⁶⁷ I confess to not comprehend this majority claim nor its source.

Chapter 14*

Essence and Personality

*Praise the Lord, you His angels,
you mighty ones who do His bidding,
who obey His word.
Psalm 103:20*

Objections have been raised to our opinion that angels are only serving spirits and that, unlike humans, they are not called to reign with Christ over the creation or sit with Him on His throne. To counter this, appeals have often been made to Ephesians 1:21 and Colossians 1:16. There is mention of “*rule and authority, power and dominion*” in Ephesians and of “*thrones or powers or rulers or authorities*” in Colossians. We agree that these high titles refer to angels. That being the case, and these titles applying to all sorts of angels, we are asked how we can insist that angels are created exclusively to serve and that reigning over other created beings is not part of their calling.

Our answer to these objections can be short. There are two kinds of thrones or powers, with only one of these belonging to the essence but not the other. A father, on basis of his essence, has authority over his children; the queen in the beehive rules on basis of her nature. But when a mother grants her servant power and authority over her children, that servant indeed exercises power, but that is a power foreign to her nature or position that has been laid on her and whereby she in no way loses the serving character of a servant. As to the father, his authority over his children belongs to his essence; the servant’s authority does not belong to her essence.

It is the same difference as that which exists between Christ and the kings of the earth. With Christ, kingship belongs to His essence. Even in the days of His self-imposed suffering, He was and remained

105xx called to kingship in His internal and hidden being from moment to moment, without ceasing. Christ’s kingship is not a foreign authority imposed on Him but one that is included in His role as Mediator. The situation with respect to the kings of earth is very different. Theirs is like the maid or servant to whom the mother temporarily entrusts her children. That is the reason Paul so emphatically

says that the Government is a servant or maid of God. There is not a single magistrate or ruler who possesses even the slightest authority over others in his deepest being. The mightiest of emperors is the equal to the shabbiest beggar as human before God. Also, both are sinners. With a father, authority belongs to his essence, but not so with a king.

If you apply this difference to angels, even where they are described by those terms in Ephesians and Colossians above, they cannot be compared to a father but only to a maid in the nursery or a magistrate in the context of the people. To be sure, God grants angels all sorts of power and authority over the elements, the nations and individuals. It is in these temporary positions that these high titles apply to them, but as they exercise their authority, they do so as servants; their power is not of their essence. Angels are sometimes “dressed” in a human body in order to appear to people in the service of God, but this body remains foreign to them. God occasionally grants a certain temporal power and authority to angels in His service to carry out His will, but that power and authority remains foreign to them.

It is only with humans that things are different. The human is called to reign over the entire creation *by nature*. Humans are inclined to this authority by creation ordinance. Humans possess in their essence all the properties from where this authority flows naturally—as long as they do not fall into sin. Because of the corruption of human nature, this authority is not exercised properly and whatever good does emerge is only the result of “common grace.” But think, for example, of sin being deleted and disappearing from its very root, the human authority over all creation would still be natural as it was in the Garden and will be once again in the Kingdom of Glory. In both contrast to and like the Government, an angel is on earth dressed with a certain authority only temporarily in the service of God by an extra-ordinary assignment. That he temporarily carries the title “Majesty” and is called by all those titles in Ephesians and Colossians,

106xx does not in any way change his position among creatures. He remains a *servant* spirit before and after; the exercise of his authority over creation remains foreign to him, is not native to him, while this authority is natural to humans.

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Having described the position of angels in the above, we need to bring up the issue how we are to think of the basic being, the essence, the core of angels. We can never dismiss this question offhand. It is impossible to so penetrate into the essence of beings other than ourselves that we understand their nature and see through them clearly. The oratorical question of the Apostle “*For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him?*” (1Corinthians 2:11) remains true. We can penetrate even the being of an animal only at a superficial level. And because angels are a different kind of being from us humans, we must acknowledge that only an angel knows the spirit of an angel. It is only by comparison that we can create a vague and floating image of the essence of an angel from the few features Scripture shows us.

We must first of all protest against the general popular concept of angels as if they were a sort of soft, timid being more inclined to the feminine than to the masculine. It is easy to think in those terms when angels are compared to sweet children or someone identifies them as angels of goodness and grace, but the witness of Scripture directly opposes such an image. According to Scripture, we must rather think of angels as strong, energetic humans, animated by positive, optimistic spirits. Listen to Psalm 103:20, “*Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word.*” The image Scripture holds before us is nothing like timid, sheltered women, and even less like blushing, hesitant children, but much more like warriors, heroes, or courageous soldiers. They do not pull back or withdraw, but are aggressive; not almost collapsing, but bristling with resilience; not slyly moving aside and giving way, but shining with holy courage.

Hence, the Psalmist continues to address the angels as an army, “*Praise the Lord, all His heavenly hosts*” (:21). In Psalm 68:17, angels are compared to military chariots: “*The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands.*” The Psalmist understood those chariots

107xx as God’s angels, but he borrowed the image of chariots from military vehicles used in battle like we use artillery in our day. We readily admit that angels always were and remain “heavenly” or celestial by nature and that we must distinguish all that is heavenly from what might remind us of our earthly crudity, coarseness and uncleanness. But we must also protest against the image of angels as weak and almost vanishing in themselves. To the contrary, they are expressions

of strength and holy animation. They glow with eternal youth and celestial energy. Even the name “Cherubim” to which we will return a bit later, is far from child-like weakness. The prophet Ezekiel describes them in very different terms. Also the name itself, borrowed from the movement of chariots, makes one think more about the mighty speed of military equipment that rumbles at lightning speed through the streets.

What the Scriptures tell us about the fallen angels leads us to no other conclusion. Even though satan and his cohorts have distanced themselves from God, they retain the nature of angels in their fallen state. If they were timid and weak by nature, satan would never have been presented to us as bulging with power. But all we read of satan and his demons constantly raises the image of violence, overconfidence and recklessness. The possessed person is manhandled and torn; the demon that is exorcised returns with seven other demons to overcome the man. Satan approaches Jesus in a powerful appearance. Even at the end, satan and his unholy angels are pictured as waging war with Michael and God’s good angels. From where would all that power and energy in the fallen angels have come, if at the core of their being they were powerless, weak and lacking all energy?

We conclude from all this that we are to think of angels as powerful, impressive, enthusiastic and courageous spirits, who do not hold themselves back but fill the heavens with their battle cry before their God. Does not the Cherub with his flaming sword at the gate of the Garden give us the same impression? And how would this word of comfort from Psalm 34:7—“*The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.*”—be of any benefit to you if you did not first of all think of them in terms of power and motivated by courage and enthusiasm?

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108xx We should not waste our time with the question how such animated strength can reside in an angel that exists only as spirit. After all, even with humans, our actual strength does not reside in our bodies but in our souls. When the bond between body and soul is broken due to addiction or intoxication, even the body of the strongest of heroes turns into a mere sandbag. When someone falls, he loses all his strength. In sleep, our muscles are dormant and powerless. It is

when our soul is aroused in an heroic spirit, it is from the soul that the self-exceeding strength of a hero energizes his blood and muscles. The strongest spirit that exercises power and influence in wide-spread circles can inhabit the weakest body. It is the spirit within us that energizes our strength, not our muscular system. Where our muscles are stretched to their limit, it is still the will of our spirit that controls them and determines whether or not to use them. We have no reason at all to be surprised at the lack of body of these strong heroes. The greatest energy can reside in God's angels, even though they are only spiritual beings.

True, we do not comprehend this mystery and it remains a life-long puzzle for us how our souls that we have never seen and whose place of residence we don't even know, can emit such power. But that power is there and when our own soul, that is our *human* spirit, enervates it, why should we be surprised when the same thing takes place in the spirit of an angel? Even hesitation at this front amounts to surrendering our faith in God. Is the Lord God not the pure uncreated Spirit and is it not out of that Spirit, which is the Father of all spirits, that all power, energy and all omnipotence emerge? Even in physical nature we constantly observe how with magnetism and electricity, in steam, flame and various minerals, there reside unseen and hidden energies that only wait for the right combination to explode.⁶⁸ The horrendous power of explosives in the hands of warring armies and fleets and, unfortunately, even in anarchical mobs, clearly demonstrate what source of strength can hide in places inaccessible to the eye and to observation. And so there is nothing to prevent us from thinking of God's angels as purely spiritual beings but who through their creation have been assigned great strength and mighty energy by God, powers and energies, as we will see later, that exceed our human limits by far.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Paul quite intentionally refers to "angels full of

109xx energy."⁶⁹ We further read, "*He will...give relief to you who are troubled.... This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels.*" In the original it has "*angeloi tes dynameos autoe,*" which means "angels who are instruments of divine energy." It is not as if angels were left powerless and without strength into whom power occasionally

⁶⁸ I regard the amazing development of science and technology as the very explosion Kuyper predicts.

⁶⁹ The NIV here has "powerful angels."

descends from God whenever it pleases Him to use them as His instrument. No, the potential, energy and power resides permanently in them. Though always dependent on God, it is nevertheless, as with us humans, so much ingrained in them that they are like a secondary cause in the work of God. That power, potential and energy with which they are created can be restrained but can also be recruited into operation. It can work on nature and on us humans and within us humans on both our bodies and spirits. But in whatever manner it is either suppressed or activated, this power is always under the control of the angel's spirit that withholds or exercises it; it all depends on the Word of God descending in him.

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Based on the above, there is no doubt that angels must be ascribed personalities. Already the fact that some angels have names is sufficient proof. And when they speak, they use the first person "I" just like we humans do. The angel before whom the Apostle John wants to bow in his vision forbids him, saying, "*Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you*" (Revelation 22:9). The angel Gabriel said to Zechariah,⁷⁰ "*I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God*" (Luke 1:19). Also the holy men of God address angels as *persons*: "*Praise the Lord, you. His angels*" (Psalm 103:20). Even our Mediator treats satan during the temptation in the desert fully as a person: "*Away from Me, satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'*" (Matthew 4:10).

This *personal* existence of angels means first of all that they are self-conscious. An angel knows he exists; he gives account of himself; whatever he does it is not against his will. And as an angel is conscious of his own existence and works, so is he conscious and knowledgeable of what is happening among his fellow angels and, in so far as necessary, of what is happening on earth among people. Without deciding to what extent angels' knowledge encompasses our human life on earth, it is certain that during their appearances they are totally aware of the circumstances which they have entered and know what is happening around them every moment.

110xx

Secondly, this personal existence of angels also means something else to which we must pay attention: *not all angels are equal*. Among us people our personality

⁷⁰ The NIV has "Zechariah;" Kuyper has "Mary," an obvious slip of the pen.

shows that we are our own, our selves, possess our own character and show tendencies that distinguish us from other persons. No two persons are totally alike and it is from this individual dissimilarities that frictions among us emerge. Similarly, we must regard angels as being with their own personalities, distinguishable from other angels by characteristics. For God, angels are not an immense mass of celestial servants who are used for all kinds of services regardless of who they are. But while their services are different and varied, so also are they different in gifts and talents as God equips them head for head and angel for angel.

To see it differently would amount to totally going against the analogy of God's creation. Every flower has its own variations; amongst animals their songs vary and among birds their plumage. God calls the stars by name, star by star, for He alone knows their function and destination and is strong in His power. How could it be that only in the angelic world deadly uniformity and dullness would reign? And if you consult the Scripture, the proof lies in the variegated names of Seraphim and Cherubim, of angels and archangels, of thrones and rulers, that we ought to realize that the angelic world is far from uniform. If you check out some of the appearances and you hear the names of some angels whispered or you hear every angel speak at his own tone and in his own individual language, then all your doubt should evaporate and you'll know how also in the celestial world above that endless variation reigns there as much as it does here among humans. In all of this it has pleased God to let the riches of His omnipotence sparkle. However distant we are from angelic life, we may never think of them as melting into one undifferentiated mass. Each angel is an individual and it is in the number of celestial individuals that the hosts of the Lord find their strength.

Chapter 15*

Lack of Personal Process

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 judgment on the great Day.
Jude 1:6

111

If an angel is a *person*, then it belongs to his essence not only to be his *own I* or *ego*, but also to be part of a *community* of angels and to take his *own* place in that community, that is a personal position with a special calling and purpose. A stray person living a wild and lonesome lifestyle on a vacant island is not a person. One is a person only when in the midst of human society with its contrasts and distinctions, develops her own character.⁷¹ And though the development and character formation in the angelic world are subject to totally different laws from what they are among us humans, especially so after the Fall, an angel emerges only as a *personal* angel in and through his relationship with fellow angels.

Scripture provides us with clear traces of such community and cooperation among angels. As soon as the angel appears in Ephrata's fields, a massive "heavenly host" appears as well, perhaps thousands and ten thousands, that welcomes Emmanuel in one holy accord of jubilation. On the island of Patmos, it was revealed to John how the angels would take on the final battle against satan under Michael's banner. When on earth a person repents and a sinner is saved, angels jubilate together as they once sang joyfully when the glory of the original creation glittered forth. This communal life and cooperation is so closely tied up with their

112xx nature that they are constantly introduced to us as a military company, a host, an army that finds its identity in a well-organized context, in communal action and that devotes all its energy to one and the same goal.

We will discuss this cooperative angelic style further when we broach the subject of angelic service. It is enough for us here if it is clear that Scripture depicts angels

⁷¹ I wonder how Kuyper regarded mentally-challenged people, who may physically be among people but who psychologically live in isolation.

as living in an angelic *world*, and forming in that world such a strong organically cohesive angelic *community* that there is enough data to portray the *personal* life of each individual angel. For although it is true that every angel that has not fallen does nothing but carry out the will of God from moment to moment, the fact that some angels are occasionally called to some special task, does not exclude that they also have ongoing ordinary assignments. *These ordinary tasks are imprinted in the nature of all of them and holds for all.*

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Since every angel has a personal life that they live in organic relationship with the entire angelic world, we may automatically conclude that they are also rational and moral beings and that, like human beings, they have received the gifts of consciousness and of a will of their own. Without these abilities, personal life is unthinkable. That Scripture indeed presents angels to us as gifted with reason and will is in no way to be doubted, but one must also pay attention to this one single fact that some also have sinned and that they will be judged. Sin is the decay of morality, while judgement without moral transgression is unthinkable. Now the Scripture says of 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*” (Jude 1:6). We also find this in Peter; it is wholly confirmed for us in what is revealed in the Revelation of John about the end of this dispensation. In the past, it was a common practice to simply “prove” that angels possess the ability to know and to will by deducing certain facts and information from Scripture that “prove” that angels indeed have certain knowledge and carry out the deeds at their own will. This was to be attributed to the fact that the good angels were discussed under one theological discipline, while the fallen angels appeared under the doctrine of sin. With

113xx deeper thought, it will immediately be realized that the nature of angels can be deduced from fallen as well as from good angels. Just like human nature resides not only in holy men of God, but as well in the sinners and the godless, because both are human, so one must also pay attention to both good and fallen angels in order to understand angelic nature, since both are and remain angels. Looking at the foregoing, the certain fact that angels *could* fall into sin and that, in fact, a large host of them actually did, is already adequate proof that they are not without a

moral life that has some relationship to the moral life of humans. If the above shows convincingly that angels are gifted with a free will and capable of choosing between good and evil, it follows that they also possess a rational consciousness. A moral life is unthinkable without a rational consciousness. When you make a choice before you activate your will, you must possess the ability to think about the choice before you, to distinguish between good and evil and to anticipate your responsibility the way the deed, whether good or evil, will end up.

These conclusions are perfectly confirmed through the general drift of Scripture. When the Lord Jesus says in the Lord's Prayer that the will of our Father who is in heaven happens in perfect manner by the angels, this must serve as an example to us that should bring to our lips the prayer, "*Your will be done as in heaven (by your angels), so on earth.*" Two points are implied in the above. Firstly, moral fulfillment of the will of God takes place in the angelic world. Secondly, this moral fulfillment among angels has enough in common with human moral life, that they can be compared to each other. If angels were *not* to possess a moral life, the above quotation from Jesus would not refer to fulfilling the will of the Father. If, furthermore, their moral life were of a totally different sort from ours, Christ would not have taught us to pray that our fulfillment of God's will would be like theirs. The *Our Father* makes mention of only one holy will, that of our God, as it is given us in His moral law; and of that one will and one law we are recommended to pray that we be given the strength to fulfill it as the angels in heaven do. Nothing is to be

114xx added to this. Since it is confirmed that there are angels who have sinned and that these angels will therefore be faced with the judgement on that Great Day, while the good angels live in conformity with God's will, then the fact that they cannot be denied moral life, stands.

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114xx Nevertheless—and this must not escape your attention—there is a most remarkable difference between the moral life of angels and that of humans. Nothing more has been revealed about this difference, but it is clearly enough indicated in Scripture as soon as you pay attention to the Fall of angels. The human race fell after being enticed and tempted by a fallen angel, but the angel fell on his

own, without any external input. At least, we are not notified of any external cause of the angelic fall. Since there is no mention anywhere of a third kind of moral being besides angels and humans, with a view to Scripture, we may not seek the cause of the angelic fall except in their own nature. Related to this, fallen humans are susceptible to reconciliation and salvation, but the fallen angel is irrevocably subject to damnation. The fallen human is a sinner; the fallen angel, a devil. In this contrast between sinner and devil the difference sharply emerges that principally *must* exist between the moral lives of the two.

To all this, we must add that we never discover a single trace in Scripture of good angels being admonished or encouraged to grow in holiness and perfection. It is never denied in so many words that there can be increase and progress in sanctification, but we must be careful in allowing ourselves to draw any conclusion from that. Good angels always appear as pure angels, whose heavenly perfection catches our eye.

Thus, there definitely is a difference between the moral life of an angel and that of a human being. Both have the freedom of the will to choose between moral good and moral evil and, in addition, God's judgement will be applied to the moral evil of both. But the two are differentiated in that the angel becomes evil of himself and, having become evil, remains evil and is irretrievably damned. But one who chooses the good out of himself is no longer subject to temptation but is immediately perfect. To the contrary, the human falls only due to temptation, but, once fallen, is still redeemable. In both the good and the bad the human undergoes an active process that in the path of sin

115xx inclines one to hell, but on the path of godliness leads to growth, mercy and, eventually, to heaven. We may not be able to explain this deep difference, since Scripture is not very explicit here. But this is clear so far that the ground of this difference is to be sought in the fact that, unlike humans, the angel is not subject to the law of development or of growth, while this process, progress or development, whether good or bad, is inseparable from our human life in every aspect.

It is inseparable from our *body*: that of the little girl develops into adult stature and from there on begins to shrink and loses her stature to old age. Inseparable also

from our *knowledge*: it begins without any content but increases through rearing, education and her own trial and effort, but then, as old age approaches, becomes weak through weakness of memory and the crimping in of rational power. It is also inseparable from our *moral* life, whether on the path of sin or of sanctification. As to this moral aspect, the baby girl begins by being almost untouchable and only with the further development of her personal life do sin and injustice develop further or, should grace intervene, develop further in godliness and sanctification.

The fact that we humans experience such a process in every aspect, from less to more and are subject to the law of development, is related to the fact that we *live in time*. Once time passes away and we are faced by the eternal morning, then this process shall cease. Then we will all have reached the measure of the perfect person in Christ without the temptations of sin and without hurtful suffering. The process will have reached its culmination and we humans will have reached our permanent state in celestial salvation. Even without the Fall and sin, this transition or this process of development in time would take place and we humans would reach our permanent state in heavenly salvation. This is what Adam would have reached if he had not fallen: he would have lived with his God in eternal salvation. That permanent, eternal state was the promised reward.

Now we must consider that angels exist outside the framework of time, received their habitation in eternity and thus live under those circumstances that will also govern the state of redeemed humanity. Then it will no longer seem strange to us but natural even that this process of development does not apply to angels, for with them their woe and weal is decided all at once for eternity. The law of their life is not one of gradual development, whether good or bad, but

116xx of permanent immutability or stability. This difference is only to be explained from God's creation ordinance, Who has determined the state, the circumstances and the lot of humans as well as of angels. Of course, God here is free to choose. Because every new-born human physically sees the light first as a weak and tender infant, but then develops into full maturity could and would not prevent God from creating Adam at once in a mature state and Eve similarly in the full measure of an adult woman. This process of development, essential for all of us, could not be thought otherwise with respect to Adam and Eve. And thus our God remained the Omnipotent Who could create two kinds of moral beings: the

angel as a moral being in his *eternal* habitation that all at once was a spiritual and mature being; the other, a human as moral being *in time* that could only gradually achieve spiritual perfection through the process of development. It deserves to be observed that a human sinner can develop from impiously bad, then from bad to evil and then from evil to devil, but that fallen angels all at once become complete evil, turn into devils at once and can never become worse than they were once upon a time.

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Because of that difference, we will never comprehend the origin of moral evil, the actual root from which sin sprouted. This would be possible if its origin were within the cycle of *human* life. But this was not so; sin was there outside of our human world. It poisoned us with a poison that came to us from the angelic world. Therefore, the origin must be found in a world ever foreign to us and that we will never fully understand. Although the angels are the closest to us, they still have their own nature and life so that we can place ourselves in their thought life, in their struggles and work, only at a very superficial level.

However poetry has tried to penetrate this mystery by means of feeling and emotion, it has not opened it up for us. It must be ascertained that poetry has more than once tried to sidetrack our thoughts and thus led us against Scripture. We have several times run into poets entertaining the idea that the actual fall of angels was the physical blending of angels with the beautiful daughters of men, all of it based on a false exegesis of Genesis 6. We are not about to come back to this suspicious and implausible explanation of that chapter. We have clearly given account in the foregoing as to why this entire theory must be

117xx scrapped. When it comes to the origin of sin in the angelic world, we must remember that, according to Scripture, the angels fell before the creation of humans. The head of the fallen angels appears as satan already in the Garden and it is he who was appointed by God to tempt the humans to make a decision against God's will.⁷²

⁷² The reference here is to what James K. A. Smith calls "The scandal of sheer grace: When mercy offends." *Calvin Theological Journal*, November 2021, pp. 309-320. According to most Westerners, the thought that *God* appointed

Due to lack of data, we cannot make out whether there is a causal connection between the fall of the angels and the creation of humans. Those so deluded imagine for themselves that the angels, originally being alone and feeling blissful in their state of blessedness, felt thoroughly demoted when they discovered that it had pleased God to create humans at a higher rank, this time beings after His image and likeness. By this means they were not only demoted to second rank, but they saw themselves appointed to *serve* these new beings, acknowledge their majority and to subject themselves to human judgement. This would definitely be a possibility that might be grounded on the statement of Jude 1:6—“...and the angels who did not keep their position of authority but abandoned their own home....” Both of these statements bespeak dissatisfaction with the lot to which God assigned them.

The “principle” by which one lives is the same with a moral being as the root or seed kernel in the world of plants. As all data are contained in a seed kernel that governs the germination and growth of a plant, so also in a moral being everything is co-ordinated by one’s “principle” that will determine her character and nature. As it can be said of a girl who prefers to be a boy and therefore imitates the manners of boys, that she is denying the principle of her feminine nature,⁷³ so it can be said of an angel who envies a person’s humanity that he is resisting the principle of his creation as angel. When Jude says they have left their home would in the current context refer to the surrounding circumstances where God placed them.

There are two things that determine our lives. There is our inclination or *principle* that works within us and, secondly, there is the *position* wherein we find ourselves in the midst of the world.⁷⁴ It follows from this that these angels resisted the divine ordinances for their *inner life* as well as His ordinances for their *position in the world* by their fall. That is, they resisted both their inner life principle as well as their ordained “house.” In both of these they assaulted the majesty and honour of Him, Who, as their God,

satan to tempt humans is deeply offensive, but Smith, no died-in-the-wool kind of Reformed philosopher, explains the meaning of this sentence and defends it.

⁷³ Remember this was written a century ago. Today, many Reformational Kuyperians have moved on to a different perspective.

⁷⁴ Is this the Dooyeweerdian distinction between structure and direction?

118xx had ordained them. There is truth hiding in this idea that is fully acceptable and about which we are not going to argue; it does definitely contain a hint, while it does not exhaust the subject. The root of all sin must always be found in the very depth of life, which in turn remains for humans as well as for angels their relationship to God. Therefore, those poets were undoubtedly inspired who, cut off from envy of humans, sought the root of the nature of devils in the resistance of the creature to subject himself to God without condition or reservation.

Chapter 16*

The Moral Disposition of Angels

119

*No one knows about that day or hour,
not even the angels in heaven,
nor the Son, but only the Father.
Mark 13:32*

There are three things in connection with the *personal* life of God's angels to which we must draw your attention. There is not only the *fall* of a huge crowd, but, secondly, also the *judgement* that will come over them. And then there is *election* to which the saints among the angels are subject eternally.

To begin with the third, the fact that angels can also be among the elect is clearly affirmed in 1 Timothy 5:21, where the holy apostle wrote, "*I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism.*" This is not an incidental addition but a very solemn apostolic instruction that demonstrates how the apostle related to angels in his own consciousness and ascribed their excellence and holiness only to *grace*.

It has been alleged that we must understand that among these "*elect angels*" some have occupied especially high or prominent places. They allegedly were allowed to penetrate deeper into God's holy palace and stand nearer the Throne of Grace—an explanation in no way supported in Scripture. If it read "and *His* elect angels," one could take this as a reference to a small number of angels that constituted Jesus' lifeguard, but that's not what it says. It is a very general phrase: "and *the* elect angels." Nothing here allows us to separate a small number of especially privileged angels from the rest, as if Paul meant only that small group apart from the rest. The word "elect" refers to *all*, since there is no limitation expressed.

However, we may not for this reason place the election of angels at the same level

120xx with the election of the human children. Our election is for our salvation through compassionate grace, but the election of angels has no connection to the operation of this compassionate grace. Their election is about *not* to fall and hence,

not having fallen, they naturally share in salvation. Even the angels who are in celestial bliss do not possess their starting point and further support in themselves. Their salvation flows out of God. Since the angels have a personal life, its root, its first germ from which their salvation sprouts, lies not in them but in the God of election, so that their songs of thanksgiving echo eternally, jubilating that all they receive, all grace, all free mercy is from the Eternal one.

It is much more difficult to penetrate into the election of angels than into that of humans. Nothing has been revealed to us on this subject so that we need to openly confess our ignorance here. We recognize the necessity of this angelic election, for the possibility for *all* angels to have fallen must not be denied, which would lead to a total depopulation of God's angelic world. In fact, it would have turned the creation of this noble venture into a failure. We also observe *the fact*, for the holy apostle announces it emphatically. And finally, it is certain that their election was not for their justification so much as a preventive for them *not* to fall.⁷⁵

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The judgement that will overcome angels is as puzzling as their election. Paul asks, "*Do you not know that we will judge angels?*" (1 Corinthians 6:3). It is easy to understand that *fallen* angels will be judged. Already immediately upon their fall a temporary judgment overcame them. There is nothing mysterious in that in the Day of Days that is coming, this judgement will be solemnly confirmed and excruciatingly fulfilled. But the first puzzling question is whether *good* angels will also be subject to judgement and, secondly, what will be *our* human involvement in this judgement in case it be assigned to us.

With respect to the *first*, some have expressed the opinion that Paul was aiming exclusively at the fallen angels, which would mean we would only judge the fallen angels, that is, the devils and demons. This, however, is not acceptable since in Scripture devils and demons are nowhere mentioned without any appellation to the word "angel." Where angels are mentioned without any appellation, as is the case right here, the reference is always to

121xx good angels. This is also the case here, even though we acknowledge that they who have received the right to judge good angels are of course also qualified

⁷⁵ The adage that "prevention is better than cure" would thus represent the oldest of ancient inspired wisdom!

to aid in judging fallen angels. If this be the case, then the judgement over good angels will be equal in status to that over the anointed children of God. Jesus does say that the children of God will not be judged, but this must mean of course that they will not be *condemned*. The Scripture teaches clearly after all that both the godless and the saints will appear before the judgement seat of Christ to receive the reward for what they have done in their lives, whether good or bad. If you apply this to angels, then it seems that the angels as moral persons are judged before entering the eternal morning, the *fallen* ones to be punished with eternal condemnation, while the good angels are to be declared holy and be publicly acknowledged as such.

The *second* question still awaiting our attention is the meaning of the clause “*that we shall judge the angels*” (1Corinthians 6:3), an issue that requires very careful research. Over this point also we have nothing but this one very general statement. There are two questions—editor: yes, questions upon question in good Kuyprian style-- that come to mind here. The first is whether we as redeemed human children will exonerate the good angels and condemn the bad ones. The second, whether we will participate in the judgement of each individual person. If you accept the first, then you also accept that at the creation of humans, angels faced the moral question to either accept the creation of humans above them or to take revenge. The evil angels would have been envious about the creation of humans and gone into resistance mode, while the good angels, without yet understanding the purpose of the human creation, would have adjusted themselves out of reverence for God. And now at the End of Days, the glory and the excellence of humans would sparkle so clearly that all doubt would dissipate and it would become clear how these evil angels unjustifiably resisted the creation of the human race, while the good angels involved themselves justifiably. Our judgement of the angels would thus be that the creation of humans would be justified at the end.

However, without rejecting these thoughts completely and even acknowledging that they contain a kernel of truth, it is still difficult to agree that this was Paul’s intention. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is not discussing a general moral judgement, but more specifically judgement about *differences*. I believe you

122xx remember it well. Christians in Corinth took each other to the pagan court. Paul disapproves of this practice and asks whether they cannot appoint some

brothers from their midst who could serve as referee when such differences arise. Pressing this issue, he asks, “*Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!*” (1Corinthians 6:3). The only possible explanation is that, as we will sit with Christ on His throne and in fellowship with Him, are called to reign, so also will we have part in fellowship with Christ in judging angels. After cutting away all sin and darkness that sin casts over us, it will be given us also to clearly fathom the nature of angels as it was granted to Adam in the Garden to fathom the nature of animals. We will know as we are known, no longer seeing as in a mirror but into the core or essence of things. It is this holy, deeper, richer knowledge that will enable us to stand in judgement over angels.

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In the *third* place, not only their election and their judgement, but also the *fall* of angels affects their personal life. The above calls for a discussion again of a point we have already dealt with: the necessity of the fall, that it was possible at all. Personal life in moral self-consciousness is unthinkable without a feeling of responsibility and accountability, the latter in turn not existing unless we are aware that we ourselves do the choosing and for this purpose possess moral freedom. However much we must confess that even this personal free choice of the will is God’s gift and thus is causally related to the ordinance of the Almighty, for us and our consciousness this is and always remains *our* choice. We make this choice of the will with every moral deed with varying degrees of clarity of consciousness. After each choice of the will lies one principal choice that determines for once and for all the direction wherein which we steer our little vessels. This principal choice determines the course of our moral life, whether we go east or west, north or south, i.e.,

123xx towards God or away from Him. It is a choice of two possibilities: away from God, that is the *Fall*; towards God, that is *salvation*. This may and must freely be expressed: the possibility of falling was the unavoidable condition for making the moral and personal lives of angels possible. In the angelic world, the moral struggle was resolved at once by this single principal choice. Those who chose the good, lived blissfully from there on in the service of the Lord without moral struggles. To the contrary, those who chose evil lived on without repentance

or any attempt at restoration; they were miserable in their enmity and hatred against almighty God and against humans whom He had created.

The principal choice by Adam also has a huge influence on our subsequent life, but with us the struggle continues. On a smaller scale and in smaller measure, the will to choose comes back regularly. This is the process of our moral life, whether to the good or to the evil, but with angels the issue is done with all at once. *For* God and then fully holy; *against* God, and then completely evil.

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Herewith enough has been said about the *moral* life of angels, but now the question arises as to the nature and the dimensions of their *rational* life, that is, their understanding and knowledge. Here, too, we must not speculate beyond what is revealed to us and so we restrict ourselves to gathering and organizing the few data Scripture offers us.

Here, too, we take our point of departure with the fallen angels and do so for good reason. When a good angel makes an appearance and we see to what knowledge of things he has access, that in no way determines that this voluminous and precise knowledge has been granted to this angel for good. One would think that the Lord God, as often as He sends out an angel for an extraordinary task, would deliberately grant him the knowledge he needs for carrying out his assignment. In such a case it would become clear that he has the ability to absorb such special knowledge of the relevant circumstances and persons. However, the angels in general would *not* be in possession of an all-encompassing knowledge of *all* circumstances and *all* children of men.

This objection falls away with *fallen* angels. They did not receive knowledge as a gift of grace, but have access only to the extent of the knowledge they stole at their fall and carried with them to the

124xx place of perdition. For our knowledge of what an angel knows, it is very important to focus on the behavior of satan in the Garden and of the possessed in Jesus' days. It shows indeed that the knowledge of angels is decreasing to a large extent even in the specifics. In the Garden, satan demonstrates complete familiarity of the circumstances. He knows Adam and Eve. He knows what God said to them

at the creation. He is completely in the know of things. It is this exact knowledge that he adduces to trick humans into their Fall. With satan in the Garden it is not guesswork nor a tricky milking for information. He knows the persons and circumstances, behaves as if in full control and realizes that he by far exceeds human knowledge.

We see the same thing with the possessed in Jesus' days. The evil angels that had invaded the possessed knew much more than the human whose spiritual life they had subdued. You can see this from their knowledge about Christ. The people they invaded stare themselves blind on the Son of Man. They don't know Jesus as yet. They do not yet understand that in Him God's Messiah appeared, but the evil angels that live in him know this very well and do not keep it a secret: "*Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!*" (Luke 4:34). That's the sort of exclamations we hear whenever Jesus meets with possessed individuals. They know He is the Christ, the Son of God and they know this Son of God has come to break their power and announced it clearly for all to hear. They do not even resist Him. From the failed temptation in the wilderness they know they are at the losing end. They know Jesus' power so well that they ask Him for a favour: to allow them to invade a herd of pigs. That amounted to surrendering their possession of this person and to tolerate even the most unclean of animals.

The temptation in the wilderness especially comes to mind here. When, apart from John the Baptist, no one had as yet confessed Jesus as Christ, satan appeared in the wilderness with full knowledge of Jesus' majesty and mission. Jesus was no stranger to him. He knows very well who this Son of Man wandering alone in the desert is. Not only does he know Jesus personally, but he also has deep insight in what, in the midst of the loneliness in His heart and emotions, must be swirling around inside Him. All those cunning temptations take Jesus' circumstance

125xx into account and were therefore so powerful. Satan even demonstrates deep knowledge of Scripture. Did he not respond at the second temptation, "*For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully'*" (Luke 4:10)? Similarly, satan knows who among Jesus' disciples is tempted the most easily. He is aware of Peter's prominence among them and therefore aims especially at breaking him. When that fails, he turns to Judas, sure that he will not escape satan's clutches. Throughout the New Testament, satan acts as we know

him from the book of Job. He was totally familiar with Job's person and circumstances. It is thanks to this knowledge that he was able to approach Job with these fearful temptations with which he victimizes this ancient leader.

Now, it will not do to draw direct conclusions from Satan's knowledge to the knowledge of *all* angels. As amongst us humans not everyone has the same level of insight; the power to penetrate into things is very small with some and great with others; so it must be also in the angelic world, a feature that follows naturally from the nature of personal life. Among Jesus' disciples, the apostle James leaves a totally different impression from that left by the likes of John or Paul. If the first one has limited knowledge, the other two have broad and clear knowledge. All personal life features differences, distinctions and diversity of attributes.

This holds also for the personal life of angels and thus their insight and knowledge is also diverse. This shows up especially in the unique position Satan occupies among the fallen angels. He is their head. His superiority is so decisive and so overbearing, that there is no trace of a challenge to his reign. The others are demons or devils, but he is *the* devil, *the* Satan, *the* opponent of God. He and he alone is the king in this unholy forest and goes around like a lion seeking whom he will devour. Thus we are sure about this diversity. Satan has a knowledge that far surpasses that of the ordinary devils and thus also of other angels. But however we emphasize these differences, it does appear that angels have the inclination to be familiar with all the specifics of our human life and that Christ's knowledge is no stranger to them. The knowledge of the things of this world as well as of heaven has not been withheld from them.

Chapter 17*

The Knowledge of Angels⁷⁶

*No one knows about that day or hour,
not even the angels in heaven,
nor the Son, but only the Father.
Mark 13:32*

p. 126xx

Not enough has been said so far about the knowledge *of* (not *about*) angels. We have shown that at least the more highly gifted angels possess an exact knowledge of what is happening in many places on earth. Even demons recognized the Messiah immediately and understood He could destroy them. However, none of this enables us in any way to look into the root of their consciousness, their level of comprehension or their knowledge.

The question arises whether what we know about their *moral* life, namely, that with angels all processes, all growth and all development from less to more is lacking, also holds for the *knowledge* of angels. After the moral choice that turned the most exceptional angel into a satan, the faithful angels became good and holy all at once; they did not *gradually* grow in grace and holiness. The question is now whether this also holds for their *knowledge*. Can it also be said of their knowledge that it became complete all at once and did not allow for further development?

We must answer this question in a dual sense, because a thinking being has a dual knowledge track. The one that belongs to our core emerges naturally during the course of our development. The other is foreign to our being and comes to us from *external sources*. Thus emerges the knowledge of the difference between justice and injustice, between love and hatred, beauty and ugliness and so much more, from our core. On the other hand, the knowledge that there exists a city by the name of Lagos and that it is located on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean comes to us from external sources. You need to constantly keep this distinction in mind.

With us

⁷⁶ As translator, I was tempted to just skip this chapter: It is just too full of unfounded or dubious speculation. However, to preserve the integrity of the flow of Kuyper's reasoning, here it is. Enjoy the challenge!

127xx humans, both of these types of knowledge come to us, at first slowly and without special effort, but then further as we continue to develop as human beings. An infant in her crib understands none of this—beauty or ugliness, love or hatred. It does discover the difference between warm and cold or between breast milk and water, but deeper developments are still slumbering. During the maturation process, the sense of morality and beauty begins to develop, but *from within*, even though it may be influenced from the outside. So it is with us humans with the knowledge that the world around us teaches us: it begins from nothing and gradually increases but does not belong to our essence or core, because it comes to us from the outside.

Compare this with the state of knowledge of angels, then what has been told us about them leads us to conclude that the *first* kind of angelic knowledge is mature from the start and does not undergo further development. However, the *second* kind is also subject to increase with angels. After the fall of satan, the good angels immediately fulfill God's will perfectly, which means they must know that will perfectly. How could they possibly carry out an unknown will or law?

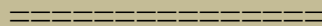
Consequently, their knowledge of good and evil, of holy and unholy, of justice and injustice must be mature in them immediately, so that it should not be said that they originally come to this knowledge gradually by way of a certain degree of development, simply because angels are not subject to growth and development. A boy grows to become a youth and goes on through manhood to full maturity, but an angel lives in eternal youth and knows neither growth nor development.

Therefore, it is impossible and unthinkable that this first type of knowledge, emerging as it does from the angel himself, because it is created in him, should develop first. He thus has access to this knowledge immediately and perfectly. Already in the Garden, satan does not give the impression of a novice. From start to finish, his knowledge is mature. Also in the wilderness, he does not need to learn about Jesus, for he knows Him; he understands His being and calling through and through. The demons in possession of a person do not need to learn about Him from preaching, for they understand immediately whom they are confronting and openly say to Him, "*What do You want with us, Jesus of Nazareth. Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God*" (Mark 4:34).

Apart from this first type of knowledge that was immediately complete with angels, they also have this other kind of knowledge that they learn about "by the

seat of their pants” through experience and facts. When a sinner comes to Christ, the angels jubilate and sing for joy, not at the beginning but only after they are informed and thus receive the knowledge from the outside. They learn about the

128xx multiformity of God’s wisdom in His work of redemption only gradually from the Church of Christ on earth. There is a depth to the work of redemption that they are eager to look into, but that they can never fathom to the bottom, because, not being in need of redemption themselves, they can never fully comprehend the redemption of sinners. Jesus even says to His disciples that there is a certain kind of knowledge that remains hidden even for the angels. He said, “*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,⁷⁷ but only the Father*” (Mark 13:32). *This* type of knowledge definitely is on the increase with angels. It starts from scratch. Along the way it is enriched through revelation and increases as events develop. Here there is thus increase, enlargement, progress, and growth; here one angel does not only differ from another, but even the same angel from himself over the course of time.



How do angels achieve the first knowledge or, for that matter, the second? And how far does the terrain of both extend? To continue the comparison with humans, we restricted ourselves earlier to discussing from the first type of knowledge to knowledge about the distinction between good and evil, love and hatred, justice and injustice. As is generally known, this direct knowledge of Adam was much more extensive and will be with humans in the Kingdom of Glory. When God brings the animals to Adam for him to name them, he displays a knowledge of the animal world that did not come to him from observing the external characteristics of a lion or a bull or eagle, but a knowledge with which he was infused at creation. He immediately recognized the being, the essence, of these animals and named them according to their nature. We have also been promised that, though we currently see with a darkened reason as through a mirror, the time will come when we will know as we are known. We are known by God not through His observing us and through that avenue *learns* to know us but immediately, since He sees our inmost being. Since we are told that in the Kingdom of Glory we will know as we are known, this implies we will likewise immediately know the whole of creation

⁷⁷ Here Kuyper inserts “(i.e., in his Mediator’s consciousness).” Are we approaching Trinitarian speculation here?

in so far as we are in organic relation. Of course, this will not be as God knows us, for

129xx He has not received that knowledge from anyone. He has this knowledge on His own, while we possess knowledge that is either imprinted in us at creation, or revealed or announced to us or discovered by us from the outside. This means that our knowledge of creation, both in the Garden and in the Kingdom of Glory, is not only acquired from the outside, but also was and will be ingrained at and from creation.

Some of this already holds in our current dispensation. You are mistaken if you think that you received knowledge of a lion only through observation. What you see of a lion is its hair, colour, form, movement and sound. But how could observation of these features lead to the conclusion that this was a lion, if the image of a lion were not created in your consciousness? The image remains hidden in your consciousness until one day you see a lion either in your imagination or physically before you. Then you recognize what you already carried in hidden form. The observed image resonates with the image hidden within you and that's how you know it is a lion.

God has imprinted such knowledge even in animals. A pigeon that has never seen a hawk recognizes him immediately and flees. The chamois that sees a flying vulture or eagle for the first time, detects danger immediately. Even a predator knows where the heart of its victim is hidden and knows immediately how to attack it at its deadliest place in the body with its claw or beak. As it is said that as an animal knows its predator, so it can also be said that a predator knows its victim, not through observation or experience but immediately and instinctively. Even though now our human knowledge is weakened by sin, it must be that the image of animals as well as of nature and our fellow human beings is imprinted in us by God during creation. Our spirit is definitely not a blank piece of paper on which the images observed are drawn. Within us there hides a collection of images, of which the cover is opened, when we observe its parallel image from the outside.

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If that is the case with animals and humans, then we may deduce from this that the knowledge that angels have is similarly imprinted and created, but in a much more perfect measure. In the Kingdom of Glory, human knowledge will be superior to that of angels, but even if the knowledge of both differs in degree, that of angels must already now agree, not with the knowledge that we gradually amass during this earthly dispensation, but with that found among the redeemed. If the knowledge

130xx angels possess is not gradually achieved and not subject to increase, then it speaks for itself that they could not have obtained it out of themselves but should have received it during their creation. A shade of God's knowledge must have been cast over their spirit so that they know the things immediately, provided they carry their image within themselves. It is said of devils that they believe there is a God and they shudder with fear. From this we may conclude that angels, both good and evil, have God's knowledge in common, in so far as they need it. Even if a human person at first gradually achieves God's knowledge, with the angels this knowledge must be equal to that in Adam, imprinted immediately at creation. Similarly the knowledge possessed by angels about the Son of God did not come to them from the outside but is given to them at their creation. And thus they have knowledge of us humans, not because they observe and spy on us, but because angelic knowledge of humans is created in them, much like Adam received his knowledge of animals at creation. But it is true that angels can never know us humans as we, who are human ourselves, know other humans. No one knows the spirit of another person than the person herself. In so far as angels are interested in knowing the human world in order to carry out their calling, the requisite knowledge is completely imprinted in them at their creation.

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The above, it should be understood, is about *general* knowledge that does not include the special knowledge about certain individuals or of incidental happenings or of the future. These last items belong to the *second* type of knowledge that an angel can first gradually make his own as new persons enter the picture, events happen or the future unveils itself. That the infant Jesus is born in Bethlehem is not knowledge coming from within themselves. This knowledge is obtained either by God revealing it or by their observing it themselves. The choice between these two

is difficult to make even when the first seems closer to the truth. The angel Gabriel was sent; his message was laid upon his lips. He did not search for Mary but knew instantly where to find her. That the Lord God would share such knowledge with His angels seems a bit strange, at least, if you think of God as standing outside the special events of life. But we confess with the Church of Christ that the knowledge of all things, all persons and all events is complete in God even before

131xx they happen. As David put it, “All these things were written in the Book of God before they would happen and before they were.”⁷⁸ It will quite naturally happen when the Lord completely shares the knowledge the angels need to fulfill their task. There is no guess work here or surmising, for the knowledge of an angel is *certain* knowledge that completely agrees with the facts.

If you ask whether an angel knows the hidden thoughts of people and removes the veil that hides the future from us, we need again to answer with a dual response. Already amongst people, the possibility exists to know partially what is in their hearts and to know the future partially. To the extent that someone’s thoughts and deliberations are the fruit of the driving power in his heart, it is frequently very possible to know what goes on inside that person, what drives him and what he is planning without any information being shared.

When a thief breaks into your house, you don’t guess or suspect; you *know* his intention even though he doesn’t say a word. If the angels know the driving motive in our hearts, then it speaks for itself that they also know to a certain extent what we are tossing about in our hearts. Satan’s temptations show all too clearly that, generally speaking, our inner tosses are known to him, but it does not follow in any way that he *fully* fathoms a person. There always remains a world of internal deliberation that is governed by our will or arbitrary discretion which naturally evades the *human* eye not only but also remains hidden to the angel. Only what germinates from the seeds in our hearts according to established life patterns can be known by them, not that which is planted in our hearts from the outside.

It is not different with respect to the knowledge of the future. Here, too, we must distinguish between two items, namely, between that which ripens as a fruit out of a seed *known* to us and that which is the result of interaction between factors

⁷⁸ If this is a Biblical quote, I could not find it. I suspect it to be an indirect quote from Kuyper’s own hand.

unknown to us. With the first sort of upcoming events, proper research into the present enables us to know beforehand what the future will bring, but our knowledge about the second type of upcoming events is nil. For a political example from the nineteenth century, that France and Russia, through their cooperation, would control the politics of Europe was not difficult to predict, but that the Czar would die at a young age and the changes this brought into the relationships between these two wealthy countries, could not be foreseen by anyone. For a twenty-first century example, Nigeria was dominated by two political and wealthy giants, both larger than life personalities. With their corruption publicly exposed, we all knew where the future was likely to take the country. Suddenly, almost at the same time, the Lord took both away and the future once again became open and unpredictable.⁷⁹

132xx

Applying the above to angels, we profess that they definitely know the future in so far as it is the result of causes flowing out of the present. But that future remains veiled for them as well as for us humans in so far as intruding factors will alter the future. Knowledge of potential changes here are possible only to the extent that God reveals the future. As prophecy grants us humans a glance into the future that we would never have known without that prophecy, so the Lord God can reveal the future to the angels according to His pleasure and thus broaden their view of the future.

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This finally brings us to the question about how far the angels have knowledge of the secrets of godliness and the mysteries of salvation. This knowledge could not have been imprinted at their creation nor could the creation have imprinted it, simply because grace as the way to restoration did not enter until *after* creation's harmony was disrupted. Angels could not have knowledge about the mysteries of salvation except, like us humans, by way of divine revelation. They now undoubtedly possess a certain degree of knowledge about these mysteries. After all, they serve Christ and know Him. Salvation comes to the elect through them. Since this is impossible and unthinkable without any knowledge of the mysteries

⁷⁹ Does it need to be announced that this last incident is the translator's update?

of salvation, it follows that they would have been introduced to the mysteries of salvation as well as of sin.

However, the Scripture is clear enough that the knowledge angels possess of the mysteries of salvation is not on the same wavelength with the mysteries to which Christ introduces His elect. This becomes clear from the explanation that they are eager to look into those mysteries as well as from the calling of the congregation to make known to the angelic world the multifaceted wisdom of God that shines forth in the salvation of sinners. This should not lead to astonishment. A person who has not experienced sickness and subsequent healing does not know that sickness nor the medicine for its healing from experience. This knowledge remains external and can never be a knowledge based on experience.

And so it is here. The good angels did not fall. Thus they do not know sin from experience. Unbelief is unknown to them personally. They remain upright and therefore cannot understand the salvation that comes from justification. It is as with a woman who hears stories of maternal pain and joy,

133xx but who has not experienced and tasted these emotions herself. So it is also with angels with respect to both sin and salvation, restricted to external knowledge that may be rich and glorious and may perhaps elicit a song of praise to the Comforter, but that can never include the deeper knowledge of sin and grace, which can come only through *personal* experience of fallen and redeemed people. So, angels are well acquainted with the mysteries of grace; they even serve to advance them. They shout for joy before the Face of God because of its wonderful outcome and they mix their angelic singing with the song of the saints. But with all of this, their knowledge remains superficial and is not tasted or experienced internally by their own spirit.

Chapter 18*

The Angelic World

*For by Him all things were created:
Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,
Whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;
All things were created by him and for him.
Colossians 1:16*

p. 134

Now a question arises about the *world* of angels. In preceding chapters, it has already been pointed out that angels, being moral creatures of a higher order, cannot exist as individuals by themselves, but have been created in mutual relationships. They are not accountable just to themselves. The law of their lives cannot be that of Cain, where everyone is his own keeper and has nothing to do with brother or sister. Angels form their own world. As we speak of the world of animals, the world of art and that of humans, so we can speak of the world of angels or, if you prefer, of an angelic *kingdom* that is on the same wavelength with the animal *kingdom*, the plant *kingdom*, the mineral *kingdom*, etc. The significance of this is that all angels together form one unit, one organism. That being the case, they are subject to a single legal system and depend on each other in their calling and destination, but they are far from being mere endless copies from one cookie cutter. There are so many differences among them, that they comprise a multi-formative unit in which they supplement each other and depend on each other.

One angel taken by himself and cut off from all the others, would not have a life. His love would shrivel in

135xx his heart. His existence, dependent on community, would wither. He would die out in his loneliness in so far as it is possible for an angel to languish. This is all so true that the same holds among fallen angels. Satan and his cohorts help and support each other. They work together towards one plan. One demon brings seven more to destroy a human soul. A legion of demons invades one single possessed person. When it comes to open warfare, the demons form one closed battle array that marches against Christ and His angels.

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The possibility to penetrate the life and strife of the angelic world is extremely low for us in this dispensation. We know nothing about it outside of Scripture. We may not be “wise” beyond Scripture and the Scripture provides us with only such a few scanty indications that clarity and completeness of presentation are out of the question. There are a few indications that we must read together to discover what they teach us about the world of angels.

We must first of all pay attention to terms such as “host of heaven,” “*Mahanaim*”⁸⁰ and “chariots,” all terms Scripture uses to refer to angels. Scripture gives many names of angels, even though their most common epithet is simply “angel.” Now, little can be deduced from the general word “angel,” since in both the Hebrew and Greek languages it means nothing but “messenger” or “emissary.” Literally, “angel” should be translated as “emissary” or “messenger.” That some translations do not so treat the term is not without its consequences.⁸¹ In fact, it has been accompanied by undeniable unease as the original intention of “messenger” was veiled behind the foreign “angel” and thus led to misunderstanding.

136xx In Revelation 1:20 even the NIV uses “angel” when the actual reference is to a human being. In the NIV, the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 are all introduced by angels, though it allows for “messengers” in the footnotes. This produced confusion and lack of clarity that would not have occurred if the term had been translated as “messenger,” “emissary” or some other synonym. “*Apostle*” actually means the same and emphasizes being sent. They are *ambassadors* or *envoys*. A teacher is sent for Christ’s sake, which explains clearly why the teachers of these seven churches are referred to as “ambassadors” or “emissaries.” But if you translate them as “angels,” then confusion is caused between a human being and an angel. It creates the impression that the leaders of these congregations are a sort of special being. The same objection is found in Malachi 3:1, where the coming of John the Baptist is prophesied in some translations as “angel.” That this prophecy does not refer to Christ but to John the

⁸⁰ Mahanaim-- < [Mahanaim Definition and Meaning - Bible Dictionary \(biblestudytools.com\)](http://biblestudytools.com/mahanaim-definition-and-meaning/) >.

⁸¹ Kuyper engages here in a discussion of a Dutch translation that would be too detailed for our purposes. Hence, I take some liberties here. What we call “angels” in English is a translation of the original “*melachim*” (Old Testament Hebrew) and “*Angelo*” (New Testament Greek). In the English NIV, many of these occurrences are translated as “messenger” while it sometimes allows for “angel(s)” in footnotes. Kuyper’s objection to the Dutch word “*engel*” means he would also object to the English equivalent “angel;” in both cases it is simply an imitation or borrowing from the Greek “angelos.” I do not understand Kuyper’s objection to the use of adopted and adapted foreign vocabulary; all languages so borrow; that’s how they grow and develop.

Baptist is clear from Mark 1:4-6. But what is the reason some translations here speak of “angel?” The original means “messenger” or “ambassador.” The point here is precisely the sending of John as ambassador or herald of Christ. When it is translated, as it is in the NIV, as “messenger” it is perfectly clear, but presenting John as an angel makes one think of someone special, which is definitely not the intention here. In Haggai 1:13, the same word is used, but there it is translated correctly as “messenger” or a synonym—the same original, but translated differently for no reason, unless it be different translators. Again, in some versions, in verses like Isaiah 42:19, 44:26 the same original is translated as “messenger” or “servant” but in the same translations it may be “angels” elsewhere. Since this holy Person in whom the presence of God is revealed is to be understood as the Second Person of the Trinity, then it seems very odd that the Son of God, appearing in *human*

137xx form, is introduced as an angel in some translations, while to the contrary, the title “Messenger of God” exactly and accurately emphasizes His being sent. That’s enough for now on this subject, as long as it has been confirmed that the term “angel” is nothing but a pseudo-term that simply means “messenger” and thus expresses not the core or being but only the calling of these holy beings. It can tell us nothing about the world of angels.

The same goes for terms like “spirit,” “child(ren) of God,” “morning star,” “saint,” “watchmen” by which some translations refer to angels, whether as a rule or as an exception. In so far as these names cannot only teach us the calling of *angels* but also partially their core being, they still do not tell us anything about the cooperative and social life of angels in one and the same world.

It is different with those other words like “host,” “army,” “*mahanaim*,” “chariot,” and “mighty ones.” All these names allude to a certain order, gradation or hierarchy. A host is not a loose pile of individuals or of independent soldiers. They form a coherent whole, wherein some soldiers are organized into a single division. Same with the term “army” or “military” that refers to a unified mass of soldiers who stand in relation to each other, wage battle as an armed whole together under one commander, not everyone on his own or at his own risk. “*Mahanaim*” means “army camp” where the army is not at battle, but either before or after the battle is resting in their safe camp and sheltered in their tents. But this word includes an

image of unity, that did not come together accidentally but belongs together according to good order. Even while resting, it is always ready to go to battle as a coherent whole. As to “chariots,” be it observed that from ancient times, they have always brought to mind an image of organization and cohesion. They evoked images of connections between chariots or wagons, of horses, of soldiers and of weaponry. The chariot could join battle only when all these four items were present in their proper cohesive proportion. Furthermore, chariots would not stand alone all by themselves, but

138xx they formed one unit that together would approach the enemy at the front lines. The presentation of angels together comprising God’s battery of chariots, just like those other names “host,” “army” and *Mahanaim*,” definitely suggests cooperation, order and coherence. From these collective terms one can deduce that angels form a cohesive angelic world. We should not think of angels as lonesome muses or pillar saints but much more in terms of constantly busy servants of God who together fulfill God’s will in good order and cohesive connections.

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But there is more. It is not only that angels bear different names that point to their cohesiveness and mutual connections, but also it cannot be denied that angels differ from each other. At the beginning of this chapter we already suggested that we should not think of angels as coming from the same cookie cutters, as copies of the same model. A factory that makes bronze statues has models; as often as the same model is being followed, similar statues emerge. They look like each other like two drops of water. You cannot successfully decorate your room with all such identical statues. A friend, who gives you four identical statues, does not render you a service. How will you arrange these four statues? You could display them in four different rooms, but it would not be possible to arrange them all in one room precisely because they are identical. The same issue would arise with four identical paintings or portraits. What can you do with them? You could arrange them each in a different room, but to hang them all in one room to form one cohesive whole would be unthinkable. This is a general rule: to arrange things in groups that are connected and cohesive you need dissimilar and different objects, not identical ones. Try decorating with nothing but identical roses, all equal in height, colour and bloom in a sizable garden. This simply will not do. Resemblance prevents

arranging things cohesively. You are turned off by a florist who has acres and acres of identical plants.

If you apply this to moral beings, you will come to the same result. It can be said of the animal world that an aviary

139xx with nothing but a hundred yellow canaries will be an unpleasant experience. A menagerie with panthers or wolves is boring due to monotony. Even amongst humans a gathering of a few men or women, all of the same age, same social status, similar proclivities or positions is totally incapable of portraying the cohesion of organic life. In contrast, our generation portrays its diversity, enriches life and allows its social coherence to shine forth.

So it is also in the angelic world. Were they all similar to each other, uniform and of the same position, there would be no social cohesion, no organic harmony, and actually no angelic world or society. But since there are different kinds among angels, and differences of personalities, as well as of status and calling, then it speaks for itself that out of this diversity among angelic life, even without exterior input, a cohesive whole and an actual angelic world should emerge.

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With Scripture before us, it can hardly be denied that such differences and diversities indeed exist among angels. Scripture speaks of Cherubim and Seraphim, of authorities, powers, thrones, principalities and even of an Archangel. It speaks of these differences in such a way that it will not do to place Cherubim under the same umbrella with the other angels. It appears to be the intention of Scripture to isolate Cherubim as a kind of angel that has his own place in the angelic world. Reformed theologians, especially those in the early phase of the Reformation, did not acknowledge this very enthusiastically. Their resistance to the hierarchical worldview of the Catholic Church played a role here. Especially during the second half of the Middle Ages, Catholic theologians focused on the immovable foundation of their ecclesiastical hierarchy and were of the opinion that people would be more convinced if that hierarchy were a reflection of a heavenly hierarchy. So they eagerly grabbed hold of the opinion of the Pseudo-Dionysius

Areopagita,⁸² who taught that there was a well-ordered hierarchy among the angels. The author of that work pretended to be the Dionysius Areopagita⁸³ from the circle of the Apostle Paul and tried to find support for his opinion in the apostle's authority. It soon became clear

140xx that this man lived centuries later and had no connection to the real Dionysius. We do not need to pursue this point any further. Leaving the false authority of this Pseudo-Dionysius aside, the only question that remains for us is whether Scripture supports his opinion. His idea was that there were three grades of angels. The highest rank was reserved for the thrones, the Cherubim and the Seraphim; the second, for the powers and rulers; the third, for the ordinary angels, the Archangels and the authorities. Later, a new classification was added that had nine different levels. Within these levels subdivisions were distinguished. Still later came the scholastic classification into angels that stood before God and the serving angels. The first trace of such a classification was found among the Jewish Rabbinical scholars,⁸⁴ who classified angels into ten different grades. The difference between these two classifications was that the Rabbinical scholars simply associated each individual classification with a specific kind of being, while the Catholics introduced the notion of a hierarchical climb in grade and dignity.

Gereformeerden resisted especially the Catholic scheme, but so far this resistance was completely legitimate. The ecclesiastical hierarchy that had completely distorted the core of Christ's Church was not to be supported by a completely imaginary presentation of a similar hierarchy in the angelic world. But it must be admitted that, through their resistance against this imaginary hierarchy, they went too far when they completely erased as good as all distinctions among angels. Where they did not intentionally erase this distinction, they did not justify it sufficiently. Later, when their resistance to Rome was toned down, things gradually improved and it was accepted that there are a certain order and certain

⁸² Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite was a Greek author, Christian theologian and Neoplatonic philosopher of the late 5th to early 6th century, who wrote a set of works known as the Corpus Areopagiticum or Corpus Dionysiacum.

⁸³ Dionysius the Areopagite was an Athenian judge at the Areopagus Court in Athens, who lived in the first century. A convert to Christianity, he is venerated as a saint by various denominations.

⁸⁴ Rabbinicals-- Jewish scholars among the rabbis, who served as leaders, teachers and judges in Jewish synagogues.

distinctions among angels, a position that, due to improved exegesis, is shared by theologians of every tradition. This result would never have been resisted if

141xx more emphasis had been laid on the clear distinction that Scripture makes between satan on the one hand and his devils and demons on the other. Everyone agrees that the fallen angels are not equal in rank, but that satan is their head and possesses much greater power than do his cohorts. It is not the devils in general, but *satan* who is emphatically called “the ruler of this world;” and it is not on the devils in general but on *satan* that the guilt is laid for all hostility against God that is found among angels and humans. If this holds for fallen angels, then it also holds for angels in general. Then such distinctions must have been based on their creation ordinance and thus must hold as well for the good angels. Whatever consequences one ascribes to the fall of angels, it could never have resulted in giving extra power to one of them, if God had not created him as a much more powerful being to begin with.

Chapter 19*

Cherubim and Seraphim

*The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble;
He sits enthroned between the Cherubim,
Let the earth shake.
Psalm 99:1*

142xx

Among the celestial beings that have special names, the Cherubim and Seraphim are the most noticeable, but there is this difference between them that the Cherubim appear throughout Scripture, while the Seraphim appear only once, namely in Isaiah's calling vision (Isaiah 6:2). For this reason it would not do to name them in one breath if the figure of Seraphim were not described in such detail and if they were not assigned a task that had at least some resemblance to that of the Cherubim.

What both figures share is their *wings*. Both the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies and the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are provided with wings. Special emphasis is laid on these wings; their numbers vary from two through four to six. From these wings of Cherubim and Seraphim it has been wrongly concluded that all angels have wings, so that all angels were generally depicted with wings. This representation was mastered especially in the arts. This image of winged angels has become so dominant through the centuries, that it is difficult for us to picture an angel without wings. In the reverse, when we are shown a painter or sculptor working on a sacred formation of wings, we know she is working on angels. To avoid misunderstanding, *let it be clearly said here that not the arts but God's Word teaches that*

143xx ordinary angels always appear without wings; it is said only of the Cherubim and Seraphim that they cover their faces with wings and fly with wings.

It must be added that their wings exist only in certain presentations that God gifted to our imagination. Hereby remember what we argued earlier in detail that angels have no bodies but only a bare spiritual existence. When they are nevertheless presented in a vision with a winged body, this is all purely meant to appeal to our imagination. Since we humans exist as soul and body and cannot imagine

something without a body or with purely spirit, it has pleased God to introduce these spiritual beings in visible figures in such visions. This is not because they really do have visible bodies, but, rather, because we cannot see a purely spiritual being. When we think of the trilogy of Faith, Hope and Love in terms of a cross, an anchor and a burning heart, we know very well that these are merely products of our imagination. So also the Cherubim and Seraphim are depicted for us as winged beings, even though we know very well that they have neither body nor wings. Thus you should never imagine for yourself a heaven populated by beings with bodies and wings, others with a head of an eagle or lion or bull. You will find nothing like that there; all such presentations serve exclusively to indicate to us the presence of purely spiritual beings. As it is said of the Garden that God appointed Cherubim to guard the entrance and if this story also mentions a sharpened sword, you should not think of Adam as having *seen* the Cherub as a winged being with a sword in his hand. Such a depiction serves only to help us feel the presence of such a mighty but purely spiritual being appointed by God.

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You should in no way draw the conclusion from the above broadly drawn presentation of these Cherubim and Seraphim that they have no value for you as products of your imagination. When God introduces us to these powerful creatures in such form or image, there is always a reason

144xx that He does so in this and not in some other form. It is because in that culture *this* representation of *such* symbolic figures best symbolizes the inner traits of these spiritual beings, their means of operation and their calling. If they were depicted as figures with a thousand eyes, they would not really have that many eyes, but that image of a thousand eyes would indicate that they have the ability to look into all nooks and crannies of God's creation, that their knowledge and power of observation surpasses ours by far as does their vigilance in God's service. Their wings also do not indicate that they actually have wings, but they do show they are different from us as birds differ from land and marine animals. Land and marine animals are tied to a fixed place, they are restricted in their movements and incapable of going beyond their natural habitat. Birds, on the other hand, thanks to their wings, are totally free to raise themselves high above land and sea.

If you apply this to a comparison between us humans and Cherubim, it will show that they do not have our restrictions and limitations; in fact, they have no restrictions at all and move wherever their will or task takes them. That they in turn or simultaneously are depicted with the head of a human or eagle, or bull or lion, does not in any way indicate that they bear these heads in heaven but only that they have within them the power represented by these heads. The impression of the lion's majesty, the bull's strength, the penetrating look of an eagle's eye and the consciousness of the human, helps us to know the impression that the Cherubim as spiritual beings will one day make on us. All these statues and figures are thus not photographic depictions of Cherubim or Seraphim, but, rather, divine artistry that images spiritual beings in visible form.

When you understand all this correctly, you will also realize why it is possible that these various depictions that we see in Scripture so often differ from each other. The Cherubim that the prophet Ezekiel draws for us display by their wheels that are inflamed by a holy glow, a very different picture than the images of Cherubim that stood in the Tabernacle and in Solomon's Temple. Something that would lead to insolvable difficulties if in both of the above scenes the actual form of the Cherubim were photographed: the two photographs would need to display the same image. All difficulties

145xx would fall away if you knew that the presentations were meant to be imaginary. It would be totally natural for the figure to be changed every time a picture was taken to show another side of their lives. If you have no eye for this, you will constantly get confused when reading Scripture and will often run into difficulties. To the contrary, if you have learned to distinguish between reality and imaginary presentation, you would enjoy every changed and even contrary presentation, for they would enrich your knowledge of the angelic world and of the essence of angels.

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We will now first focus on the Cherubim and begin with observations about this name.⁸⁵ Based on the above analysis, the word "Cherub" would mean "to seize upon" or "attack," i.e., to lay your hand on someone with fury and *force majeure*.

⁸⁵ Here Kuyper engages in a brief etymological analysis of the term based on the Dutch language. We will pass.

It belongs to the core of police officers that they have the right and power to lay their hands on a person and arrest him. So the word “Cherub” would indicate that they are mighty beings appointed by God, who have the right and power to lay their hands on another creature with a strong arm to resist, to ward off or repel or arrest. This is an interpretation that fully concurs with the first appearance of Cherubim in Scripture. When they first appear, they are placed as watchmen at the entrance to the Garden. This is as a sentinel or police officer posted at the entrance to the royal palace to keep out uninvited guests. The name has a dual perspective. First, there is an expression of power, such power that they can use force; secondly, there is their calling to resist and defend God’s holiness with this power against unholy belligerents.

The appearance of Cherubim in the Tabernacle and in Solomon’s Temple is not in conflict with this. What actually took place in the Tabernacle and the Temple?⁸⁶ What was separated through sin in the Garden, was re-united in Tabernacle and Temple. Before the Fall, God and Adam lived in holy communion in the Garden. Since there was no sin, there was no need for Cherubim to keep sinful humans away from God. But when sin entered the picture and thus the relationship between God and Adam was broken, the Cherubim

146xx were needed to defend God’s holiness against human sacrilege. Now, in Tabernacle and Temple, the mystery was revealed through God’s mercy to re-unite the holy God with sinful humans, in order that the sinful humans be freed from sin. Tabernacle and Temple are thus “Tents of Gathering” or “Tents of Meeting,” that is, of re-uniting God and humans. The Garden was the first such tent; God and humans lived together. Since then, they lived separately, but in the Tabernacle God turns back to humans and the communion between Creator and creature is restored. Were the communion with God established in the Tabernacle and the Temple in such a way that humans, prior to their entering the Tabernacle, were truly free from sin, the Cherubim would have no calling there. But this was *not* the case. The person entering the Tabernacle, that is, the High Priest, was indeed free from sin, but only symbolically, not in reality. The blood of bulls and goats could not take

⁸⁶ Though the significance of the Tabernacle was unique, similar structures existed among the Pagans surrounding Israel; It was not something *de novo* or unique to Israel. See my research paper, “Immanuel: God with Us: Structure, Meaning, and History of the Tabernacle” on the Boeriana page of this website. See there also material that further complements this chapter.

away sin itself, it could only point to this happening. Thus this person who approached God actually was and remained a sinner. When the first High Priest, Aaron, entered the Holy of Holies for the first time, it was a sinful person who appeared before the holy God. This fact, this coming of a sinful person before a holy God, it was *this*, the stepping in between them in the Tabernacle by the Cherubim, that rendered their function here as necessary as it once was in the Garden. However, this entering in between took place in a different way. In the Garden, it was to resist the sinner and drive him away. In the Tabernacle, it was to allow the sinner to approach with the blood of reconciliation, but with the wings raised and extended to protect the majesty of God against defilement from the unholy. It is only when the actual reconciliation in Christ has come, that the Cherubim retreat, the veil tears from top to bottom and the communion with God is once again open to the redeemed sinner.

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146xx In this context one feels immediately that the work of the Cherubim in the Garden and in the Tabernacle is basically the same and differs only in the manner of their appearance according to their assigned distinctions. Associated with this is also the opinion that the Lord is a God who lives between the Cherubim (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6). The presence of the Lord God was in the Tabernacle and, later, in Solomon's Temple. This is my resting place, the Lord had said, there I shall live. Thus, the phrase "God lives between the Cherubim" does not refer to Cherubim in heaven,

147xx but to the Cherubim in the Tabernacle and in the Temple and is thus a declaration that there, in the Holy of Holies, His presence between the Cherubim is revealed.

What is the function of these Cherubim in the Tabernacle? Do they serve in reconciliation? Not at all. The Ark of the Covenant stood there, with the Law inside and the Mercy Seat as its cover, a sign of Reconciliation, but the person administering the rite of reconciliation was not the Cherubim but the High Priest Aaron and his successors, who represented Christ. The Cherubim did nothing but spread their wings over the Mercy Seat and by extension over the entire Holy of Holies where Aaron and his successors would enter and serve. They did this

majestically, for in the Temple, the Cherubim statues were no less than ten yards high and their wings five yards long. They were colossal figures that rose high above the Ark of the Covenant like a tree, while their wings arched high above the Ark like a broad roof of feathers. The wings of each Cherub touched those of the others to symbolize the arched roof more clearly. Actually, the Cherubim symbolized nothing but that the Lord God protected His holiness from all contamination and to separate Himself even from the Mercy Seat on which the blood was spilled by the broad wings of the Cherubim. Through His Cherubim, God Almighty isolated His holy presence even from what served as reminder of sin and sacrilege on the Mercy Seat. He, the Lord, hides Himself in the Holy of Holies behind the Cherubim wings to ensure that the separation between His holiness and all that is sinful be absolute and complete. Thus the phrase “Who lives between the Cherubim” expresses at least two truths: first, He is the Covenant God who is concerned about His people Israel; second, He is that *holy* God who separates Himself from His people by means of these Cherubim.

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147xx As the Cherubim stand between God and *Adam* in the Garden and between God and *Israel* in the Tabernacle, so the same Cherubim hover between God and *this earth*. That world itself is sinful; it bears the curse and has become unholy. Where, as in Psalm 18:10, God is said to descend to earth, there the same Cherubim enter to divert the unholy on this earth from the holy. We read there that “*He mounted the Cherubim and flew,*” and that the darkness in the firmament was under His feet as a sign of His holy anger. We see this image also in the prophet Ezekiel, where the Lord God returns to His people and to the spiritual temple like Psalm 18:11, riding on a Cherub or as Ezekiel puts it, mounted on Cherubim.

148xx This illustration is also born from the image in the Tabernacle. When the Cherubim slide in between God and the Mercy Seat with their broad wings, the image is created that *beneath* the ark with the Mercy Seat, the Cherubim spread their wings over it and that the Lord God is *above* those wings as if His holy presence were carried on their wings. Of course, it does not mean that the Cherubim needed to render God assistance nor that the Lord had to be carried and moved around by them. All such thinking is totally incompatible with God’s majesty and omnipresence. The only thing here is that the Lord God radiates His

majesty and omnipotence in a special way through the Cherubim and that the latter insert themselves *before* the creature as soon and as often as the creature with his sinful nature threatens to besmirch the glory of God.

It is therefore wrong when the Cherubim are introduced exclusively as supporters of the majesty and power of God. They are also definitely *guardians* of God's holiness. It is in this capacity that they guard the entrance to the Garden, cover the Seat of Mercy with their wings and position themselves between God and earth as soon as the Lord, as in Psalm 18 and Ezekiel, descends to this sinful world. In the Revelation of John, they take their place in heaven as do the four animals, next to the twenty-four elders, as representatives of redeemed humanity. The explanation for this is that after Golgotha, the curse has been taken away and reconciliation has been achieved not merely symbolically, but actually. From that hour on there is no further sacrilege or "unholiness" to be resisted and they surround the throne of God as His guards. As far as their presentation as animals goes in Ezekiel and Revelation, observe that animals are sacrificed in the Temple as sinless beings and therefore are sacrificed on the altar in the place of sinful humans in order to depict in the innocence of the animal the innocence of the holy Lamb of God. Presenting the Cherubim as animals is definitely a reference to their separation from sin just as this befits the guardians of God's holiness.

Not all has been said. In God's creation, animals have the peculiar significance of those creatures in which the majesty and power of God is revealed even more than in humans. One has only to see a lion to feel himself miniscule compared to the lion's majesty and power. And while God's omnipotence

149xx guards His holiness, it was only natural that His majesty must radiate in the guardians of God's holiness.

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There is yet a short word to be said about the Seraphim. They are not at the same level with Cherubim, for in Isaiah 37:16 the latter also appear. Nevertheless, they share things from more than one perspective. They appear in human form and are covered with six wings, but they differ in office and calling. The Seraphim do not spread their wings to divert sin from God, but in order to cover themselves and to fly. Their actual function is to serve at the altar of reconciliation. A Seraph

descends, takes a burning coal from the altar and burns sin from Isaiah's lips. The name "Seraph" means an angel that burns out or cauterizes. They also serve as guards to protect God's holiness from sin, but while Cherubim only divert sin, Seraphim burn them out and thus bring about reconciliation. The Cherubim symbolize the *Law*; the Seraphim more *Grace*. But the inner life of both is full of praise, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!"

As to the wheels in Ezekiel 1:15-21, called "*ophanim*" in Hebrew, the Rabbinals have interpreted them as a separate sort of angels, but falsely so. That the Cherubim appear in Ezekiel as having fiery wheels around them that move in every direction indicates that the same Jehovah, who locked Himself up in Israel and in Solomon's Temple, His resting place, would be the God of all people and nations. He would descend on the Cherubim and would move to all quarters of the earth. Thus these wheels are also to be understood symbolically. They point to the Lord God leaving his place of rest in order to move over the entire earth on the Cherubim and bless all nations and their people with His salvation.

Chapter 20*

Thrones and Authorities

*Far and above all rule and authority, power and dominion,
and every title that can be given, not only in the present age
but also in the one to come.
Ephesians 1:21*

150xx

In addition to the Cherubim and Seraphim, Scripture also makes mention of Thrones, Powers, Authorities and Dominions as forming certain groups in the angelic world. This is not said on basis of Romans 8:38-39. When the Apostle Paul exclaims, “*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*”—the context here does not *force* us to interpret these Powers and Authorities as a certain group of angels, and they *can* be thought of as the Powers and Authorities that are appointed among earthly humans. If we pay careful attention to the sequence of these terms, we see how the Apostle regularly refers to these words in pairs, constantly mentioning two different and opposing creatures: 1—death and life; 2—present and future things; 3—heights and depths; 4—in between those *angels* on the one hand and *authorities and powers* on the other. If we were to take these Authorities and Powers also as a kind of angels, then this fourth couplet would lack the contrast found in the others. What might have been even more worrisome, if there were no mention of the persecutions to which the earthly Authorities subjected Christ’s Church. There *would* then be mention of what the *angels* could do to us, but not of what had already been done and would

151xx do over time by the established powers on earth.

If you understand these Powers and Authorities to refer to the rulers and kings on earth, then everything falls in place. Then, besides the contrast between Death and Life, Heights and Depths, Present and Future things, there would also be a very significant contrast between angels as the Powers of *heaven* and the Authorities as the Powers on *earth*. It is clear from Titus 3:1 that Paul indeed uses the expression

“Rulers and Authorities” also for rulers and magistrates on earth, for we read there, “*Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities.*” No one takes this expression to refer to angels. Already in Luke 12:11 we meet the same couplet when Jesus says to His disciples: “*When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say....*” On basis of these passages it is decisive for us that in the conclusion of Romans 8 the “Rulers and Authorities” are found on earth, not in heaven.

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It is quite a different case with *Ephesians 3:10*. There it is expressly stated that we have to do with Authorities and Powers who are in heaven, not on earth. We read there, “*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms....*” Here all doubt is erased. These words do not allow us to think about earthly magistrates. The emphatic addition “*in the heavenly realms*” forbids it. The context here pleads with us also in connection with *Ephesians 1:21* to think of heavenly powers, not earthly. We read there that Christ is seated at the right hand of God in heaven, “*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title than can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His (Christ’s) feet.*” The opinion that the reference here is to heavenly powers is not compelling. It is also possible to explain these words that Christ has been elevated above all princes and kings here on earth, not only for now but for eternity. But it must not be forgotten that with that interpretation the heavenly powers are excluded, while the context insists emphatically that not only the earthly but also the heavenly creatures are subject to Christ and that thus all things lay at His feet. From that perspective it appears to prefer the view

152xx that Christ is raised in heaven as King of the kings on earth. It is most likely to be exclusively explained that this is also the situation with heavenly princes and rulers, so that not only on earth but also in heaven all power must yield to the power of the risen Mediator. We must keep an eye here on the fact that the Mediator is “*the person Jesus Christ,*” so that the remarkable here is that the

princes and rulers in the angelic world are also subject to the *human* person Christ Jesus.

This likelihood almost turns into certainty if we pay attention to Colossians 1:15-16. There we read of the part the Son of God had in creation: “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in haven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.*” If the authorities on earth were a special kind of creatures whom God since the beginning distinguished from other people, and endowed them with a higher nature, like a lion among the animals in the forest, or the queen in a beehive, it would be possible to understand these words of Paul as referring to earthly authorities. But that is not the case. Princes and rulers on earth are people like all others. They move about just like others and are to be distinguished from them not because of their different nature but only by their dress and adornments. What clinches it all is that these Authorities conform so little on this earth to creation, that the Scripture does not know of any authorities on earth except because of sin and, thus only after the Fall. Where, as in Colossians 1:15-16, there is talk of Authorities, Powers and Rulers that originated already at creation, the reference *cannot* be to *earthly* kings, but *must* be to the rulers among God’s angelic host.

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152xx The above is proven by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:22, where we read: “*Jesus Christ...has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him.*” The term “Thrones” does not occur here at all, while “Angels, Authorities and Powers” are spoken in one breath, which would naturally not be a proper way of expressing it if it referred to angels in *heaven* and kings on *earth*. The kings of earth are never referred to as powers. That would have required the reading “the angels and the thrones.” Now that

153xx there is no mention of thrones but only of “Angels, Authorities and Powers,” it is possible to interpret this differently, instead of referring to the angelic world and to the authorities appointed over and within that world. Add to this that in Daniel 10:13 Michael is mentioned as “*one of the chief princes*” and elsewhere there is reference to an *Archangel*, it can no longer be denied that indeed

there is a certain order in the angelic world, a classification into various military orders that have heads appointed over them that are referred to as Thrones, Powers, Rulers and Authorities. This helps us understand more correctly what the Lord Jesus said in Gethsemane, “*Do you think I cannot call on My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?*” (Matthew 26:53). “Legion” is not just a number, but among Romans it was a term that today might be called “regiment.” If, for example, a contractor needs 12,000 workers, he cannot express this by “three regiments” simply because regiment is not just a certain number of people, but also that number of people in a fixed classification under specific heads. When Jesus says that His Father can put twelve legions at His disposal and qualifies God’s angels as legions in the Roman army, this tells us that God’s angels are organized into specific formations and fight under specific heads just like soldiers.

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153xx In this context it should be pointed out that the satan in Jesus’ day bore the name *Beelzebub* and through this name was distinguished from and elevated above the other demons. Jesus did not contest this opinion; He Himself used that name for satan. “*Beelzebub*” is a weakened version of *Baal Zebub*, whom we meet in 2 Kings 1:2 as an idol whom the Philistines worshipped at Ekron. Literally, this name means “Baal of the Fly,” a name that tends to puzzle us but which can be rationally explained when you think of the terrible plagues of all sorts of winged insects that can overcome the people and animals of the East with its hotter climate. Those flies are not our rather tame and innocent Western type, but more of the blood-sucking variety, as well as poisonous insects like mosquitoes that make life in those regions so unbearable in the summer and spoil the

154xx pleasure of the season day and night. At times it is not possible to defend yourself against them. The power to prevent this plague from emerging is ascribed to Baal, which led to the epithet “*Baal Zebub*” or “*insect god*,” a cult centred at Ekron, whose Philistine inhabitants venerated this Baal.

The Jews likened satan’s action to the poisonous and poisoning effect of this idol. It would be buzzing over the people with no defense against them, pricking their souls day and night with poison. It would cause them suffering of repentance and

self-accusation in the soul after being pricked with the poison of satan just like the poisonous sting in their blood from the fly.

Later attempts to explain “Beelzebub” as either as “enemy” or as “ruler of the house”⁸⁷ can be safely laid to rest. These are all explanations from commentators who have never experienced the insect plague in the East and could therefore not imagine the similarities between satan and the plague. But it is because of the name “Beelzebub” that satan is often depicted as a ruler or commander in paintings. In connection with this, Jesus says that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand and thus satan’s kingdom must collapse when the demons are evicted by Beelzebub. Thus the fallen angels form not only a world of themselves, their own society, but also their own kingdom over which there is only one commander whom the others are obligated to obey. Anyone wanting to retain friendship with these evil spirits and be safe against their plague, would not call on the demons but, more specifically, on this Beelzebub, for it is he who uses his fallen comrades. Satan not only has the title “Ruler of the world,” but also “King of demons” and “Head of the devils.” Thus, along this route, the fact is confirmed that angels do not stand alongside each other as loose individuals, but that they are organized and subject to their Heads.

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It does not follow from all the above that we must understand these Thrones, Rulers, Powers and Authorities as separate kinds of angels. Cherubim and Seraphim are presented to us as a unique kind of their own in distinction of the other angels.

155xx They form their own group with their own nature and calling, but that is not the same with the Thrones etc. Among us humans we also have kings c.s. on thrones; under the king there are the ministers or secretaries; under them, provincial authorities, and then follow the mayors and reeves of cities, towns and villages—and all of these together have access to armed power to maintain law and order. But when we point to all those authorities, we are not talking about separate groups of people who differ from us in character and calling, for they are all

⁸⁷ Original: “*Vorst der woning.*” Without doing more research, I do not know the source of this phrase or the exact translation it requires since there is more than one possibility.

persons who move around like the rest of us but who have been entrusted with the mantle of power. And so it is with angels when we read that among them are these Thrones, Powers and Authorities. *The terms “Thrones,” “Powers,” “Rulers” and “Authorities” are titles assigned to some individual angels who have therewith received the authority to rule over their peers.*

Do not forget that angels lack patriarchy; there is no paternity amongst them. They do not know such designation and it is even unthinkable among them. The mutual cohesion of generations among humans originates with us by way of the birth process without the intervention of authorities, and the father who is assigned authority over his family—all of this is lacking among angels. Should one refuse to believe that among angels a few outstanding individuals are appointed as heads over their fellows, then all organic connections, all order, all rules and all mergers would be lacking and the entire angelic world would consist only of loose individuals, an idea that, in view of our continuing commentary on Scripture, would be contradictory. Even if there were no separate mention of these Thrones and Authorities in the apostolic letters, we would still have good reason to accept the existence of heads among angels. In a human world without birth connections such heads or leaders would simply be indispensable. But since these apostolic letters *do* speak of such Thrones and Authorities, and also show that even among the fallen angels there exists such an arrangement under appointed heads, there is no room left for doubt and the existence of such princes among angels *must* be accepted.

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In the meantime, the mistake must not be made to place those angelic princes on a par with our earthly kings.

156xx Kings did not originally belong to the human world; they are there only because of sin. The Apostle Paul says emphatically in 1 Corinthians 15:24 that one day all these authorities will be destroyed. Originally, they were inserted into our human life by God and therefore to be obeyed. Nevertheless, they are so inserted that they do not belong to our nature and therefore their power is external. Numerous kings who did not possess any royal superiority over their citizens, have

reigned over nations, but who were so short of moral, intellectual or practical sense that many of their subjects outshone them.

That is not how it is among angels. The power to rule among angels is not temporary but holds for all time, throughout all the ages that this angelic world existed and still does. These rulers have not been installed because of sin but arose immediately at their creation. That satan was able to pull so many along with him into perdition was because already before his fall he had such a prevalence of power over his cohorts. It is because of this that the ruler's dignity amongst angels is portrayed neither by royal robes nor by a crown on the head. Instead, it rests in their exceptional excellence that these princely angels received power at creation above their comrades. Among us humans this is comparable to the dignity that comes with genius, not with the office of authority. Among us there is an authority in the arts, in the economy, in scholarship, etc. There are by the grace of God princes among poets; Rembrandt rules among painters; academics reign in the terrain of scholarship; the kings of the stock market are well known in our commercial cities. This authority of genius and of talent is not laid upon us from the outside but exists of itself within us together with rules whether acknowledged or not. God wanted and ordered that kind of authority and has inclined these geniuses at their creation and had it come to fruition through His providential guidance. Resistance to such authority amounts to resistance to His ordinances, a sin of which often people of only half the talents are guilty.

But it is not so in the angelic world. There, there is no resistance to authorities or against angelic genius. Even among the fallen angels, satan's superiority is fully acknowledged. When examined carefully, this authority amongst angels is fully comparable to the authority of genius among humans. Just like princely genius amongst humans,

157xx so these princely angels are so inclined by God Himself, equipped by Him with these excellent gifts on which their power over their cohorts depends.

Whether or not these "Thrones," "Rulers," "Authorities" and "Powers" are simply names piled on top of each other to express this multiformity of angelic genius and through it the multiformity of one angel over another, remains undecided here. At any rate, this branching out does not develop mechanically but is created

organically. It is only the circumstance that the angelic world is constantly depicted symbolically by military images, that pleads for the notion that a certain orderly division of power exists, which then obviously points to lower and higher geniuses among angels, who, consequently, exercise their authority in smaller or larger jurisdictions on basis of their respective excellence. But in no way may the thought of hierarchy sneak into this situation. A hierarchy is always *mechanically* organized, while the angelic world is organized *organically*. In the animal kingdom, there are kings of the forest and other powerful animals under *them*, but it knows of no hierarchy.

There remains finally only the question how we must understand those Powers. Some see in them the powers of nature, an explanation that, in connection with Thrones and Authorities, is not healthy. For this reason we commented earlier that Rulers on earth are supported and served by police and military who are not themselves rulers but work for them. It is possible that the apostle, in order to express the well-ordered life of these celestial powers, understood the Powers to be the agents who ensured the effectiveness of the power of these Heads over their assigned territory, but this should not be understood mechanically as if there were police among the angels. It is rather to be understood in the sense in which past leaders like Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin ruled over our churches, not through the words from their lips that would not reach most people, but through the service of lesser geniuses who translated or interpreted his words.

Chapter 21*

The Habitat of Angels

*And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven,
having the key to the Abyss and
holding in his hand a great chain.
Revelation 20:1*

Before we move on to the relationship between the angels and Christ, we still need a brief word about the *world* of angels in connection with the concept of *place*. A commonly held idea about this subject is that we need to think of God's throne high above ourselves and that this throne is surrounded with a cloud of angels that are so pressed together that only their wings and heads can be seen. Of course, this is only fantasy, not reality. Angels have no body and thus also neither observable wings nor visible faces. All such representations are excellent, as long as they serve to give us an *imaginary* portrayal of the spiritual. The Lord led us in this as He interpreted angelic life for us by means of dreams and visions. But such presentations are damaging as soon as we mix the imaginary depiction with the real thing and hereby lose sight of the *spiritual* nature of angels. We are best equipped to counter this danger when we examine the question of the angelic world in connection with our concept of place separately, even though we realize full well that such a discussion may demand more effort than most readers can muster.

So long as the discussion about place is in connection with a material subject, it is not beyond our thought or presentation. We are accustomed from childhood on to think of physical subjects only in place. It is impossible for us to think of a stone, an animal or a human being except in terms of place.

159xx

When we raise our thoughts about such material things to our God, Who is a *Spirit*, we confuse our concepts immediately. We confess God's omnipresence, which means He is not restricted to any particular place, but neither does it mean He is *nowhere*, but, to the contrary, He is *everywhere* and every place is filled with His

presence, not just partially but entirely, the entire place. By this principle, God is present on, under and above the earth as Psalm 139:8 teaches us that God is even present in hell: “*If I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*”⁸⁸ This may not be weakened as if it says, “If I make my bed in hell (or ‘the depths’), Your all-seeing eye penetrates there as well.” No, it says, “*You are there.*” If the Lord had no presence in hell, hell itself would be a limitation on God’s presence and set boundaries for Him. He may be elsewhere, but not there. This scene would constitute the end of His omnipresence, which is endless by definition and thus does not allow restrictions on Him. This knowledge leaves us so dissatisfied that we have the need to think of God in heaven and to call upon Him as “Our Father, Who is in heaven.” But the Scripture also teaches us that the Lord God had chosen Mount Zion as His place of rest; that He physically lives in the Mediator with the fullness of His divinity; that He resides in the hearts of His redeemed and that the Church of Christ is the dwelling place or habitat in the Spirit.

Returning from the topic of the *place* of God back to ourselves, reflecting on our *bodies* should not cause us a problem, since we are all too aware how this body is definitely tied to place, but we could be confused as soon as we think of our *soul*. Of course, we are conscious of the fact that our soul must have its habitat in our body and is thus tied to place to a certain extent, but we also know that at death the soul leaves the body without our noticing it and without seeing how it separates from the body and to what place it goes.

More, when we acknowledge that our soul has its habitat in our body, its exact location in our bodies is puzzling to us. It is possible to amputate arms and legs without the soul separating from the body, but whether the soul as it were fills our whole body or hides in our heart or mind cannot be determined with certainty except by guesswork on grounds of probability. Our Fathers generally thought that the soul occupies the entire body, in view of the fact that the existence of our soul is examined and tested by God even deep into our kidneys.

160xx But everyone senses that such a declaration will always fall short of full and conclusive certainty, no matter how many plead for this view.

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⁸⁸ Kuyper has “hell” here. The NIV has “depths” in the text, but allows for “*sheol*” in a footnote.

Summarizing all of this, we arrive at the conclusion that the search for place will pretty well continue for a long time to come as long as we are dealing with something physical, but becomes *extremely* difficult and threatens us with confusion as soon as the subject turns to *spiritual* beings, whether it is about *God* or about *our souls*. Since angels are also spiritual beings, it can already be concluded from the above now that here, too, our reasoning power falls short of a firm conclusion.

We can go further to confess that even with physical objects our reasoning quite frequently leaves us in the lurch, when we want to examine them with respect to place. When we think, for example, of the speed of light, then we humans can figure out that the light of the sun moves towards us with an incredible speed, which we then record in impossibly large numbers on paper, which run so high that every image of the movement from place to place as well as the passing through this immense intervening space, is totally beyond us. Something that is even stronger and more amazing, as soon as we move our attention from *light* to *human thought* and think of the speed of that light which, together with our thought, crosses not only the earth but the entire universe in a split second. Looking at all of this more closely, we have to confess that the concept of place remains clear to us as long as we restrict ourselves to physical objects within our reach, for whose location and movement we can account. However, it becomes troublesome and leaves us in the lurch as soon as we pay attention to a material power with indeterminate speed or we *move* from the material to the spiritual realm in order to determine the movement of the spiritual.

And so we see that the difficulty of determining place definitely is not restricted to angels but faces us constantly, every time we cross the borders of the normal realm of physical objects. We know that in the mind of an elderly person, memories of an entire life lay gathered up, sometimes in the most minute details. In her memory there are hundreds of persons whom she has met and known. If you are hesitant, you only have to converse with her and see how

161xx the words, the images, the memories tumble out of that head. It is all in her head, for otherwise it could not come out. But who in the world can form even the slightest idea about the *manner* in which that immense mass of words, memories, images, consciousness and concepts are compressed onto each other in

that head and how these “things” leave their place in that head in order to be expressed in language? All of this wraps itself in a mystery that forces us to acknowledge our ignorance and to worship our Creator, who created our human brains by His wondrous power.

It becomes even more puzzling for us when you pay attention to your mother tongue. Where does that language reside? It does not exist only when spoken, for the ancient Hebrew, Greek and Latin languages are still there, even though they have practically died out. When you think of the night when most people are sleeping and few words are spoken, your language is still there. So, please, where is it? Not only in books, for even if they were all burned, your language would still exist. Nor does it live only in John or Abdullahi, for all of us, one after another, all who speak your language die, but your language itself does not die. Your language thus exists in the collective consciousness of your people, but I challenge you to point to the *place* where it can be found.

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All this needs to be accorded some prominence in order to show how extremely difficult it is to solve the question of *place* as soon as we leave the ordinary realm of the material and observable things. This difficulty is also applicable to the world of angels. Now it is true that ever since the German philosopher Kant, attempts have been made to avoid this problem by simply asserting that *place* is the product of our imagination; we construct it. We humans have received a kind of brain that can only think in terms of *time* and *place*, but that this does not mean that time and place actually exist.

This kind of philosophical gymnastics does not bring us one step closer. Even when you try to clarify this by placing yourself before a glass door with red, blue, yellow and green panes, no matter how long we stare at any of the panes and the coloured landscape before us, we are fully aware that these different hues are not inherent to that landscape.

162xx When we open the door, that illusion of colour disappears and the landscape lies before us in its own actual tints and colours and we are definitely able to distinguish between the actual and the artificial colourations before us.

Besides, *colour* is something very different from *place*. A table in the dark is completely colourless, but this does not keep us from realizing that the table is there. But if I raise the concept of place, the issue of the table's existence is resolved for me. Something that is, that exists, must be somewhere in some place. If you respond that this holds true only in your imagination, that does not help any, for what is nowhere and thus has no place, ceases to exist for me. That I cannot think in terms beyond time and place is due to our creation. If we human beings are created in God's image, also in our rationality, it follows that the concept of place that is totally inseparable from my thought and consciousness, has not just been plucked out of the air, but is in me only because it is in God and from God created in me.

Of course, we can say that our idea of place is originally in God in a higher form than in us, so that a faint shadow of what in Him is perfect, is found in us, but we must not deceive ourselves that such a concept is merely a kind of human prism through which we view and construct the world. A philosopher like Kant may have proposed this theory and it may have been accepted by various schools of wayward philosophy, but for us, followers of Christ, such a popular and useless theory is impossible to entertain for even a moment as long as we believe in the creation of humans in God's image.

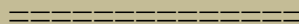
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After this rather broad but necessary introduction, we return to the question about *place* in the angelic world. From the fact that we are dealing here with purely spiritual and, therefore, little understood beings, it follows that it is impossible to solve our problem with any degree of precision. We do not need to point out that angels are not omnipresent, for then they would be God. Omnipresence means lack of all limitations on and restrictions of place as that is found only in the Endless One. And since angels are restricted beings, it follows that they have their limitations, something that is

163 confirmed in Scripture. They appear in specific places. Think of the angel with Hagar in the desert (Genesis 16:7-14) or the angel Gabriel who appeared to Zechariah at the altar in the Temple (Luke 1:11-20). God placed the Cherub at the entrance to the Garden. In Gethsemane an angel comforted Jesus. In Revelation we

read constantly of angels that descended, who stood somewhere and then withdrew. One might object that this may all be true in cases where angels appeared, but this says nothing about the actual normal life of angels when they are not appearing somewhere. This again has a dual answer. First, if angels are without place, they would not be able to appear. Secondly, the Scripture gives us the image of being tied to a place, not as if we could speak of angels who are *not* in a specific place.

You see this especially in fallen angels or demons. These are said to reside in a possessed person, sometimes many in the same victim. There is this story that demons not only lived in a specific person and then left him, but also that, exiting from the man, they entered a herd of pigs. There was no angelic appearance involved here. No one saw these demons either when they were in the person or when they left him nor when they entered the herd of pigs. Their effects were visible, but no one saw them. Nevertheless, the Scripture speaks about what these demons did and what happened to them in such a way that they found themselves in a *specific place* and moved from that place *to another*. Similarly, the Apostle Paul says that these fallen angels are “spiritual evils in the air.” Elsewhere, they are presented as bound with chains in the darkness. Generally the Scripture gives us the impression that the good angels are with God *in heaven*. With Scripture before us, we may and cannot come to any other solution but that angels, as limited beings, are definitely bound to a specific place. It can be said of angels, “He is here; he is not there.” At the same time, no matter how tied they are to a place, Scripture shows them moving about from one place to another. At one time, their place is *here*; the next time, *there*. It all depends on the place where they are assigned to do God’s will at any given moment.



As to the question about where that place might be, we must naturally answer: Not in the physical, but in the spiritual world-- two worlds,

164xx each of which is subject to totally unique ordinances so that it is not fitting to apply God’s ordinances for the physical world to the spiritual. Rather, as soon as we cast our eye on the spiritual world, we must withdraw our thoughts from all

that flows out of the physical world. This gives occasion for various apparently contrasting images that require a brief explanation.

Of fallen angels we are told that they are lying in the place of darkness, bound with chains as if in prison. But elsewhere we read of contrasting images such as satan running around like a roaring lion, that he appears to Jesus in the desert, invades the heart of Judas and falls out of heaven like lightning. We also read of many fallen angels nestling as demons in the hearts of people. At one time they are depicted as bound in the prison of darkness but the next thing shows them moving into every direction.

However, this is only an apparent contrast. Is it not clear that a bodiless spirit cannot be held bound in iron chains and that thus this kind of image is not intended to point us to an actual place where they reside, but only to indicate that they have been robbed of all their power, are disabled from attacking God and can serve only as satan's instrument? As observed earlier, elsewhere they are said to reside in the air, but, again, not to suggest that they float in some cloud, moving along with it, but only to indicate that they live outside of our earthly economy and thus may not be identified with us. It *is* true that to make this intelligible to us, images of demons are sometimes derived from the physical world, something we cannot do without, but throughout we need to always remember that angels are spiritual beings that belong in the spiritual, not in the physical world and whose *place* therefore is not in a physical place but in a spiritual one.

But what is *place* in a spiritual sense in distinction of a *physical* place? The place of material items is measurable in terms of length and breadth and adjusts itself to the measurement of the object to be placed there. When a material object moves, it does so over a distance that is also measurable and requires a route that needs at least be wide and long enough to accommodate the object. A subway travels a measurable distance and must pass through an entrance that must be wide, high and long enough to allow the cars to pass.

All such restrictions fall away with spiritual beings. The physical

165xx is no obstacle to a spiritual being. It penetrates or pierces its way through it or somehow goes around it. The soul leaves a body as well as a room without the

walls of either body or room preventing it from leaving. Physical obstacles play no role here.

With angels we are not dealing with length, breadth or height; even with their movements these dimensions play no role. We lack all data to imagine all of this properly. The first part of this chapter, therefore, points to God as Spirit, to the soul as a spiritual entity and to language and thought as spiritual factors in order that we, while thinking about the place and movement of angels, would not waste our energy by thinking of the requirements for movement of physical beings, but, instead, borrow our concepts from the space and movement of *spiritual* things. You can see an entire legion of fallen angels reside in a single possessed person. *No* time passes between the sending of an angel and his appearance in a place. Hypnotism offers us an example of the penetration of the soul of one person into the heart of another without anyone noticing anything at all of such penetration. In your sitting room, the way along which you walk, and yes, even in your heart, one or more angels may be present to carry out God's will in you without anyone noticing anything. In the physical world, an object cannot be in the same place as another. Similarly, in the spiritual world, one spirit cannot be in a place occupied by another. In both worlds, one excludes the other and every being occupies his own place at any given moment.

But this fixed law does not hold as soon as you try to establish a mutual connection between the material and the spiritual world. This is because, in terms of the physical world, a place occupied by a physical being is in no way accessible in a spiritual way to a spiritual being. If you open and dissect a human corpse, you see every bit of space occupied by bone and flesh, by blood and nerves, but you will not find an open space anywhere that is designed for the soul. Nevertheless, the soul dwelt there, simply because it is not physical but spiritual, and is therefore not hindered by the material place that is occupied.

And that's how it is with God's angels. They are not outside of but *in* the universe; but even if on our earth, in our world, every nook and cranny is occupied by material, by plant, animal, human being, or by air, none of this prevents an angel to descend into the world and stay there, possibly next to you, or even within you. Only your soul, being a

166xx spiritual entity itself, is impenetrable for them. They can be right next to your soul and be active in your soul, but *not in the place* of your soul. And this is also applicable to their movement. Even their movement or replacement is not subject to the law of material beings but to that of *spiritual* movement and replacement. If you wish to reflect on the spiritual movements and replacement of angels, movement in your word or thought offers you a better example than the movement of foot or arm.

Chapter 22*

Angels and Christ

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

167xx

The question on the table now is whether or not there is any relationship between angels and Christ. Scripture teaches us clearly that Christ is “the Mediator between God and humans,” but does He also occupy such a position and in the same manner with respect to angels? Many who hear this question, flippantly dismiss it by saying that since angels are not sinful, there is no need for a Mediator here. Furthermore, it is clearly written that Christ has not adopted angelic nature but that of the seed of Abraham and thus of humans. Besides, there is only one Mediator and He, according to 1 Timothy 2:5, is only for humanity. It is doubtful that this issue can be finalized so quickly. At least, no one less than Calvin took a somewhat opposite position and he has been followed by many Reformed scholars.⁸⁹

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In order to reach greater clarity on this point, we do well to distinguish sharply between two important differences,

168xx namely between what flows forth from *creation* and what from *re-creation* or *restoration*.⁹⁰ As far as *creation* goes, the second Person of the Trinity has a different relationship to it from both Father and Holy Spirit. It is declared to us widely and clearly that “*for us there is but one God, the Father, from Whom all things came and for Whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ,*

⁸⁹ This footnote is a translation of a passage embedded in the main text that is deemed to be of little interest to the average reader. “One can consult the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* of theologians Walaëus, Polyander, Rivet and Thysius, at Disputatio XII, article 33, to which I prefer to refer you, thanks to Bavinck’s wonderful translation, especially since this dogmatic work, originated from four professors of one faculty during the blossoming of our theology, who have more than *personal* authority.”

⁹⁰ I take this formula to be an early expression of the subsequent Reformational duo of “grace” and “nature.”

through Whom all things came and through Whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6). In addition we have: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1, 3). It all exists through the Word. So also in Hebrews 1:2, where we are told that through His Son, God “made the universe.”

To dig deeper into these things would divert us from our subject. Further exploration of this belongs to the doctrines of creation and the Trinity and has been treated in my books *The Work of the Holy Spirit* and *E Voto*. Here we are content with the finding that the unique relationship between the Son of God and creation exists in this that all things have come into being *out* of the Father but *through* the Son. They exist and will continue to exist for the time being. That the same also holds for the angels follows from these Scriptural declarations—1 Corinthians 8:5; John 1:1-4; Ephesians 3:9 and Hebrews 1:2, but is stated with special force in Colossians 1:16- 18, where we read, “*For by Him (i.e. Jesus, the Son) all things were created: things on heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*” The spiritual world, including the angels, are created *through* Christ. It is in the nature of things that the one *through* whom you are created is closer to you in your consciousness than the one *out of* whom you are created, the reason being simply that the one through whom you were created stands in between you and the one out of whom you came into being. If all creation is *out* of the Father but *through* the Son, the rule applies here as well that you as creature relate first of all and most closely to the Son, and *through* Him to the Father *out of* whom you have come to be. Applying this to angels, they also have a closer relationship to the Son *through* whom they were created and exist and have a more distant or hidden relationship to the Father *out of* whom they were created.

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169xx With reference to that closer relationship that exists between every creature and the Son, Calvin and many after him have attempted to express that relationship by the term “Creation Mediator,” a term that has nothing to do with “Reconciliation Mediator.” But something needs to be added here. The position of

Mediator of reconciliation came into being by the Son adopting our nature and thus becoming one with us, like us in every respect except sin, and thus as a *human* being Jesus Christ came to stand between us and God. This does not hold for the Creation Mediator. After all, the Scripture emphatically says, “*He has not taken on angelic nature, but that of the seed of Abraham*” (Hebrews 2:16).⁹¹ Colossians 1:15 even says that He is “*the first born over all creation,*” which must not be understood that He *became* Mediator between the Father and creation by first becoming a creature Himself. By existing *before* all things, not as creature among other creatures, but as the Son of God and as the Eternal Word, it is He *through* whom all things were created and exist together. Reconciliation requires unity of the Mediator with *nature* since He has adopted human nature, but with the Mediator of *Creation* the relationship lies *not* in His nature but in His work, in His deeds, i.e., it is *through Him* that all things were created.

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169xx We ought to notice that this relationship between Christ and Creation holds not only for humans and angels, but also for animals, plants, in short, for all material and powers. After all, *all things* are created *through* Him, and this very general statement includes the non-rational and non-self-conscious creation. But should we isolate the *self-conscious* creatures, that is, angels and humans, from the rest of creatures, we notice that the relationship between the Son of God and these self-conscious creatures carries a deeper and fuller character. As in stars, plants, animals, etc., we find not only power, wisdom and majesty in the conscious creatures, but also something of a totally different character, self-consciousness and holiness. Here a certain spiritual relationship between the Son of God and the creature shows up. This is the strongest among people, since the Son is the Image of the invisible God and we are created after that Image.

170xx Though this is not the case to the same degree with angels, they also have a rational and moral existence as well as a self-consciousness, an inclination towards eternal existence and susceptibility towards salvation, all things lacking totally with the *non-self-conscious* creatures. Here is the reason that with the latter we generally point to their creation *through* the Son, but with people and angels this relationship is expressed in somewhat stronger terms. It is depicted as “Creator

⁹¹ The NIV has: “For surely it is not angels He helps, but Abraham’s descendants.”

Mediator” on basis of the fact that the Son *was* the Head of both the human and angelic races from the beginning and will be so eternally. This does not mean He became that first through His incarnation but He was this *from the beginning*, thanks to the creation of humans and angels and without His needing to become an angel or a human Himself in order to become the Head of all. The question can be raised whether the Son of God might not have adopted the form of an angel at least temporarily and thus served as the Angel of the Covenant or the Angel of His Presence, etc. But this question, to which we will return later, has nothing to do with what currently engages us, namely, that we are going back here to the eternity before Creation, when there were neither humans nor angels.

So far, this question arouses few objections. It can even be said that until now there is very little difference of opinion among followers of Christ over this doctrine. But this is not the end of it. We read in Colossians 1:20 that it was the Father’s pleasure that through Christ, after peace was made through His blood shed on the cross, He “*would reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*” At first glance, these words give the impression as if angels also need reconciliation. This we read in Ephesians 1:9-10 that God “*purposed in Christ, to put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one Head, even Christ.*”

We can no longer avoid the question in how far the Reconciling Mediator, the Son, has any effect on the world of angels. The notion that He as Son, through Whom all things are created, is also the *Creation Mediator* is quite acceptable, but that is not the concern in Ephesians 1:9-10 and Colossians 1:19-20. Both texts undoubtedly refer to the *Mediator who brought reconciliation* through the blood on the

171xx cross, as is so expressly added in Colossians 1:20. And so the question arises how to understand all this.

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To answer this question we need to return to the fall of the once good angels, but who have since become devils and demons. This fall of the angels indicates that they were capable of falling originally, but now it can be said of the good angels that they are protected against all dangers of falling. At one time, the holy angels

were also subject to the possibility of falling, but that possibility no longer exists for them. For them the preservation of the saints holds. Thus a change has taken place in their mode of existence. Originally, they could fall, but no longer. Their inability to fall does not emerge from their own strength but flows out of the power of God Who upholds them. The power of protection may well be called “preserving grace” without it following even in the least that this “preserving grace” could be the fruit of the cross. To convince yourself of this, you need only to reflect on the circumstances in which Adam would have found himself if he had *not* fallen. Would he have remained as he was forever? Definitely not. Adam was also created so he could fall, but if he had victoriously overcome the first principal temptation, the possibility for him to fall would cease. In the Covenant of Works the reward to anyone who did not fall was to gain *eternal life*, which naturally meant that the danger of falling would be diverted. By comparison, it follows from this that this “preserving grace” that keeps the holy angels upright and preserves them in their holiness, does not flow from *re-creation* or restoration but from *creation*. Angels and humans were both created by God so that their standing firm in the face of that principal temptation rendered them invulnerable to all further temptation.

The difference between angels and humans was only this that the fallen angels became irretrievably lost, while the fallen humans remained susceptible to salvation and, once redeemed, would achieve preservation of the saints. With respect to standing up to the principal temptation, angels and humans were in the very same boat. If Adam had not fallen, the possibility of his falling would be withdrawn from him. Same with respect to the angels that were faithful, the possibility

of falling would be diverted forever. Reconciliation does not play a role with angels. It plays no role with the *fallen* angels, because they are beyond redemption; it plays no role with the faithful angels, because they have no need for reconciliation, only preserving grace, which is based on creation ordinances themselves.

May the term “grace” not lead anyone astray. There are two kinds: the grace of creation and of reconciliation. Even if sin had never made its appearance among either humans or angels, everything they would receive would be from unlimited

grace coming to us from the pure pleasure of God. Thus creatures possess nothing that has not come through the free grace of their Creator. This grace takes on different characteristics, depending on whether it reaches out to the creature in whom God delights or to the guilty sinner in compassion. Job of the Old Testament said, "He would not even trust his holy angels," in order to strongly show the difference between the original glory of God and the glory He bestowed on His angels out of grace. Even in this context there is nothing like a Reconciling Mediator when it comes to angels. Thus, when discussing angels, we always stay on the terrain of *creation* without taking even the tiniest step into that of *re-creation*.

We get a very different picture when we fix our eyes on the relationship between the angelic world and born-again or re-created humanity. It speaks for itself that there was a certain connection between both according to the creation ordinance. Such a connection exists between all parts of God's creation. We see that clearly when we compare human and animal, animal and plant, plant and material, and even between our earth and the firmament above us. We have been successful in demonstrating all kinds of connections through the telescope. The universe is not an instrument composed of loose unrelated parts, but an organism of which all parts stand in mutual relations to each other through all kinds of connections. Undoubtedly, between the angelic and human worlds there were originally also such connections based on the creation, but this connection has been disrupted by sin. When the angelic world split into the two parts of good and fallen angels, in its Fall, the human world chose to follow the fallen angels and broke its connections with the good angels, so that we do not see the Cherub at the entrance to the Garden in a positive relation to human beings and protect them, but

173xx taking a position *against* them. In so far as it depended on humanity, from here on the latter would only have relationships with the world of devils, while all connections with the good angels were cut off. That such a relationship was eventually restored is not due to human choice but, rather, to God's mercy. It was God who restored our relations with the good angels, but, of course, now in a totally different manner from that in the original creation. From now on, the good angels were assigned a task or service in the *Kingdom of grace*. They now served in the great work of redemption. They are sent out for the sake of those who will inherit salvation. This newly established relation is no longer the original normal

one that was to exist into eternity, but an extraordinary, temporal and passing one that is to hold until the work of redemption has been completed and born-again humanity be incorporated into the “body of Christ,” that is, the Church, in heaven.

From the above perspective, the meaning of Ephesians 1:10 becomes clear immediately. According to the holy Apostle, God has “*according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together....*” This tells us that the world above and that on earth had lost their creation-based harmonious relationship. As said before, the original relationship between the angelic and human worlds was broken. But it was not to remain that way. This connection would one day be restored, in “the fullness of time,” that is, when the work of redemption is completed. This would happen through Christ in His position as Reconciling Mediator, because He would lead lost humanity back to God as born-again humanity “under one Head.” This refers to the *organic* concept, that of a *body*. Imagine for yourself all the parts of the body disconnected and separated from each other. There would no longer be a body. But if you return all these parts back into the body under one head, then the organic connection is restored and the body has been re-composed. And so it is also here. Angels and humans were pulled asunder; they missed their common Head, but now, thanks to the work of redemption, re-born humanity again is susceptible to the

173xx restoration of the original organic relationship with the angels and thus with heaven and earth to be re-united under the one Head, Christ.

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Colossians 1:19-20 says almost the same thing. We read there: “*For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven....*” But there is a difference here in that, in distinction from Ephesians 1:10, there is mention of redemption. It says that He is “*to reconcile to Himself all things, whether...on earth or... in heaven.*”

This requires a few final words of explanation. “*Reconciliation*” can mean “*remove guilt*” but also “*to re-unite an existing separation.*” It is used here in the latter sense. The Greek term here means literally “*to fully take away the estrangement.*”

There is nothing here about reconciliation of sin, but, rather about reviving the lost harmony and dissolving the estrangement and separation. This fits totally in the given interpretation. The harmony that existed in God's creation between the angelic and human worlds was broken. It could not be restored since fallen humanity was not susceptible to that. It does not say that God would reconcile angels and humans as *persons* in Christ, but the reference is to the angelic *world* and to the human *world*, as we read "*the things on earth and the things in heaven.*" "Things" is not a word that can be applied to angels or people; they are not things but *persons*. Those two worlds were in an unnatural relationship; the original harmony no longer existed; an estrangement and separation had taken place. That separation could only be ended in Christ. It is He who at the fullness of time of both angelic and human worlds will restore that original harmony. That it says that God will reconcile both of these worlds *to Himself*, is only natural. All disharmony, all disruption in the creation order is opposed to God. It is only when this disruption disappears and the harmony He wants will again sparkle in its original splendour, that He will have reconciled all things to Himself.

Chapter 23*

The Angel Gabriel

*Then Michael, one of the chief princes,
came to help me, because I was detained
there with the king of Persia.
Daniel 10:13*

175xx

The relationship between the angelical world and Christ raises two other questions: first, who are the angelic persons called Michael and Gabriel?; second, might Christ have appeared as an angel in the Old Testament?

We could have researched the first question when we discussed the *world* of angels, but that was postponed since everything here depends on the other question, whether Michael might have been Christ in Old Testament form. That every angel has his own *name* cannot be doubted. We read of the stars that God calls them all by name; because He is strong, not even one is missed. We are assured that every redeemed human being will one day receive a “white stone”⁹² with a *new name* inscribed on it “that is known only to him who receives it” (Revelation 2:17). How then is it possible that only the spiritual beings we call “angels” would be deprived of the privilege of such a name? He even gives names to house pets and to domesticated work animals that have a sound to which these animals will eventually adapt, so that even dairy cattle will come when their names are called. It must be admitted that these animal names are only to be used by creatures; for God, they have only a species name according to their nature. When

⁹² While the six English translations I checked do indeed all have “white stone” here, Kuyper uses the term “witte keursteen.” “Witte” means “white.” The term “keur” has various meanings that include reference to “judging.” In ancient times, at the end of a pilgrimage, the pilgrim would receive a victory token, a *white marble stone*. That was a public sign of victory or success that everyone could see and recognize. Who was to make the judgement? Of course, the judge! The judge would make his announcement by giving an accused person a stone, either a white one or a black one. If he gave him a black stone, he was deemed guilty; if a white one, he would be exonerated-- < Digibron.nl, De witte keursteen >.

Adam gave animals their names in the Garden, it was not an individual name for each animal,

176xx but only a species name for each kind of animal. The reason is that animals do not have a *personal* existence. With the angels, to the contrary, who, like people, are persons, this kind of concern falls away, so that they not only have names that serve for ease of identification, but automatically and even necessarily give out their own personal names. So, it is not strange at all that in Scripture some names appear of personal angels, even though, being outside of our human traffic and social intercourse, they usually appear simply as “angel” without a name being mentioned.

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Scripture provides us with the names of only two angels, Michael and Gabriel. We won't deal with Raphael and Uriel, who only appear in the apocryphal books. Only in connection with Michael and Gabriel may we mention the Archangel since here the official title and the personal name coincide. As far as Gabriel is concerned, every Christian child knows how an angel appeared to Zechariah in the Temple, who said to him, *“I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and have been sent to speak to you, and to tell you this good news”* (Luke 1:19). A few months later, this same Gabriel was sent to Mary in Nazareth and exclaimed, *“Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you”* (Luke 1:28). Less attention is generally paid to the same angel Gabriel's earlier appearance in Daniel's vision. Daniel 8:16-17 reads, *“I heard a man's voice...calling, ‘Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.’ As he (Gabriel) came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. ‘Son of man,’ he said, ‘understand....’”* We find something similar in Daniel 9:21-22: *“...while I (Daniel) was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision.’”* We learn two things here: first, Gabriel belongs to the

177xx seven angels mentioned in Revelation 8:2, who stand before God’s face; secondly, Gabriel’s function was to announce the revelation of God to the human race. Every time it says that he has something to reveal, namely, the meaning of the revelation.

Since ancient times, three interpretations of this Gabriel have been entertained in the Church. By far, most interpreters see him as a created angel who belongs to the seven most prominent angels and carries the name “Gabriel.” Others agree that he is a created angel, but deny that Gabriel is a personal name. According to them, Gabriel means “man of God.” They prefer to translate Daniel 8:16 as “You, man of God, give Daniel to understand the vision.” The third party recognizes Gabriel as an *uncreated* being and dares to ask whether Gabriel might not be the Holy Spirit just as Michael would be the Second Person of the Trinity.

To begin with the *third* opinion, the motive was to erase every distinction between angels in order to vigorously oppose angel veneration. However, this opinion holds no water. How could the Holy Spirit ever say, “I am a man of God, who stands before Him”? And how could He ever say to Mary that the Holy Spirit will come over you? Nor would it conform with the overall tone of Scripture for the Lord to say in Daniel 8:16, “*You, man of God, give Daniel to understand the vision.*” When one receives a command and carries it out, he serves as a subordinate to the one who gave the command. This cannot occur with respect to the Holy Spirit, since the Third Person equals the First and Second Persons in dignity. True, the Son of God has humiliated Himself and adopted the form of a servant. The Scripture tells us this took place *voluntarily*, and had as its basis a friendly agreement between the Father and the Son.

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The second opinion, namely that “Gabriel” is not a personal name but the name of a species and that it should be translated as “man of God,” was especially defended in Germany.

178xx Yes, there was a created angel, but he was not named, and was referred to as “man of God.” We should not accept this theory. For one thing, it would be totally unnatural for an “angel of God” to be referred to as “man of God.” If this were addressed to human beings, it would be possible, but not where, as in Daniel

8:16, this is given as a high command from God on His throne to one of His angels. It is written there that the Lord said to him, “*Gabriel*,” which would then be, “*You, man of God, give Daniel to understand the vision*,” which would make no sense. Secondly, it would have to be “man of God,” but that is not the case. In the original Hebrew, this is “*Geber el*,” while “Gabriel” is a composited name as in “Fredrick,” which is composed of two root words “vrede” or “peace” and “rijk” or “domain,” thus meaning “peaceful domain.”⁹³ Thirdly, this explanation disagrees with Daniel 9:21, where we read, “...while I was still in prayer, *Gabriel*, the man I had seen in the earlier vision....” If one were to interpret “Gabriel” to mean “man of God,” then it would say, “...while I was still in prayer, the man, the man of God, came to me,” which obviously cannot be. It will not allow us to think that this angel would have said to Zechariah, “I am a man of God, who stands before God.” If Zechariah had the impression that he was dealing with an angel of God and not with a human being, Gabriel would have had to introduce himself as an angel. Had he said “I am a man of God,” it would have led Zechariah astray. In addition, one can sense how offensive it would have been if the angel sent to Mary to announce the coming of Christ to her, had introduced himself not as an *angel* but as a *man*.

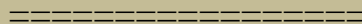
So, there is no choice but the common idea that Gabriel must be regarded as a created angel, who came with a personal name. However, one must keep in view that it is a translated name. Gabriel is a Hebrew name and thus the translation of the name was given to this angel in “the tongue or language of angels” (see 1 Corinthians 13:1). For example, a person named “Van den Berg,” which means “Of or from the Mountain” would in the past often call himself “Montanus” (Latin for “Mountain”). Translating names into Latin was a common practice in earlier centuries. Looking at it from this perspective, “Gabriel” can definitely mean “man of God,” but it can also mean “the strong, the mighty one of God.” This is quite fitting since angels elsewhere are called “the strong and mighty ones.” But now that this angels directly says, “I am Gabriel

179xx who stands before God,” it is obvious that he should be classified among the seven angels of Revelation 8:2. We read there, “*And I saw the seven angels who stand before God.*” These seven angels must not be confused with the “seven spirits” of Revelation 1:4, where it says, “*Grace and peace to you from Him Who*

⁹³ As in some other places in this book, the discussion is a Dutch etymological item that would be too complicated in English for this book and not helpful. Hence, I sort of slide over it.

is, and Who was, and Who is to come, and from the seven spirits before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness....” Here the reference is to the Holy Trinity. First, the Father is mentioned, “*Who is, who was and Who is to come.*” Then comes the Holy Spirit and then the Son, but presented in such a way that both are depicted during their appearance as human beings. The Son of God in his form as Mediator as “*Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the First Born of the dead, and Ruler of the kings of the earth*” (Revelation 1:5). And so, likewise with the Holy Spirit, not as the Third Person but in His work as the Spirit of council and strength, of knowledge and the fear of God, Who goes out among humans. To think of “seven angels” inserted between the Father and the Mediator would lead to hopeless confusion. Thus, we leave the “seven spirits” for what they are and take into consideration only the “seven angels” we find in Revelation 8:2 and elsewhere.

These seven angels are distinguished from the others as the supporters closest around God’s throne. That is, those angels who together with the others serve God, stand closest to the Eternal Being, not because of greater personal dignity but because of higher service. We cannot make out whether the number seven must be understood literally, for as a sacred number it can also be used in general to indicate a certain great number in sacred territory. But this does not actually matter. It is enough that we know how a certain number of angels serve as God’s guards, not in the public court, nor in the holy, but in the Holy of Holies, and amongst these one is mentioned by name, Gabriel.



179xx Besides Gabriel, there is this Michael, the opinion about whose significance as to his person and feelings is equally divided. With him also the question arises whether we are dealing with a created or with an uncreated angel. Is Michael the personal name of one of the angels? Determining the difference is not as easy with him as it is with Gabriel. On the one hand, with the name Michael we definitely stand

180xx on firmer ground. While the name Gabriel is associated with just that one angel, we find among Israel’s genealogical tables no fewer than ten persons who

carry the name of Michael.⁹⁴ Literally, the name means “Who-as-God,” a name that could easily persuade us to apply it only to a Divine Person. Since people also bear this name during ancient times and in different countries, it follows that we cannot draw any conclusions from the name itself. This is even less the case with the name of the Prophet Micah, which is a shortened form of the same name and means exactly the same. It means “Who-is-as-God.” The difference between these two names is only that *Micah points to the Covenant God, i.e. Jehovah*, and is thus closer associated with the work of redemption, while that of *Michael points to God as Creator* in His majesty and is not related to grace. It is a name more fitting for an angel.

It is safest if we look at all the places in Scripture where Michael is mentioned successively in their context. The name appears first in Daniel 10:13, 21, where Daniel quotes the heavenly figure who appeared to him on the bank of the Tigris River and saying,

¹² “Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. ¹³ But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. ¹⁴ Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future....”

Similarly, the story continues in :20-21,

²⁰ So he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; ²¹ but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.)

And then for the third time we read in Daniel 12:1, “*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.*” Completely separated from what is said about Michael in Jude 1:6 and Revelation 12:7, we need first to examine the significance of Michael in the above texts from Daniel.

⁹⁴ They are found in Numbers 13:13; 1 Chronicles 5:13, 14; 6:40; 7:3; 8:16; 12:20; 27:18; 2 Chronicles 21:2, and Ezra 8:8.

In the quoted passages from Daniel, there is reference to a radiant vision that came to him and wherein he was shown the future of his people Israel. This does not depict a quiet panorama for it makes Daniel a participant in the battle that is waged in the spiritual world and that is the basis of the same battle here on earth. Turbulent agitation, disturbances and convulsions will take place among the peoples and nations as well as in the world of thought among humans,

181xx all movements that are intercalated as links in the mighty process of history by means of which God Almighty prepares the coming of His eternal Kingdom. Such disturbances are encouraged on the one hand by devils and demons, who incite not only individual persons against the Lord and His Anointed One, but also the nations. It is over against these demonic influences and operations from the sphere of devils onto our human world that God pits the salvific influence and holy operations from the sphere of His holy angels. That is the reason we may never think of the angelic world as in a state of complete rest. Restlessly the fallen angels seek to destroy the world of people and equally restlessly the good angels watch in the service of God so that the demonic powers are constantly exorcised and broken. We will return to this important subject later, when we discuss what the angels do for us humans. At this point we merely weld in this explanation on the run in order to shed light on those texts in Daniel.

In both places Daniel is given an insight from behind the curtain into the battle waged in the angelic world to advance the Kingdom of God and to resist the power of satan. The Kingdom of God was embodied at the time in the people of Israel. Should the cause of Israel perish, to put it reverently, then the cause of God's Kingdom on this earth would also be lost. *The struggle between the Kingdom of God and that of satan at the time was completely absorbed in the struggles between Israel and the surrounding nations that sought to ensnare her.*

Herewith it is totally understandable how at the time satan waged war against God in two ways: first, to encourage a falling away of Israel; secondly, to strengthen the Pagan nations against Israel. If you keep an eye on how this war was waged simultaneously among the spirits above and among the people on earth, you will understand how here also there was this dual war and struggle. On the one side, there was the war between Israel and the surrounding nations here on earth and on

the other side between the demons and the good angels for Israel's preservation. As the texts cited earlier above show, the angels who were leaders in the battle were named "Princes," and as we have also seen earlier, some angels also bore the name of "Authorities" and "Powers." Among these angelic Princes who were the leaders in this spiritual struggle between Israel and the nations, there seem to be many and among these many it appears that some had weightier tasks and assignments than others. There is not only mention of Princes among the angels, but also of a few among them who were called "*the first Princes*" (Daniel 10:13).

Among the top commanders in this all-encompassing struggle in God's service, we find Michael. He is therefore called "*one of the chief princes.*" It states there that the one sent says to Daniel, "*No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.*" The same in Daniel 12:1 we read, "*...Michael, the great prince who protects your people....*" Aside from the question whether we are to regard the messenger from God who appeared to Daniel at the Tigris River and spoke these words as Christ, *it is clear from all the above that at least here, Michael is not the Christ.*

There are those who regard Michael as Christ, but they add that Michael here is titled "one of the chief princes," and that Christ as "Head of all angels" cannot possibly bear that title. A chief has people of about equal status next to him who are his peers. This can never be applied to Christ. The statement "*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise*" is a manner of speaking that does not depict the Son of God as Mediator. Besides, even if one insists on maintaining the mutual equality of angel to angel at any price and sees the Son of God in Michael, that's not the end of it. If he is one of the princely angels, what of the other angels of which he is one? They cannot all be Messiahs. If you do not want to do violence to the text in Daniel and you want to read what it says without prejudice, then only one explanation is possible, namely that *we understand Michael to be a created angel who is first in dignity of service and is chief commander in the battle for God's Kingdom with all the power required for that position.*

Chapter 24*

The Angel Michael

*And there was war in heaven.
Michael and his angels fought against the dragon,
and the dragon and his angels fought back.*

Revelation 12:7

As far as Michael in the book of Daniel goes, there can be no reasonable doubt that we must take him with this name and in that book as a *created* angel, one who occupies a princely position and who among these princely angels is the head. It does not follow from this that he was a sort of guardian angel of the people of Israel. Under Michael's leadership the good angels fought against the fallen angels under Satan for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Through the long centuries, from the days of Moses till Golgotha, all other nations had forsaken the Kingdom of God. It was still standing only in Israel. It speaks for itself then, as it says in Daniel 12:1, that Michael stands before "the children of Daniel's people, near God."⁹⁵ This is so not because Michael and Israel are united through a special divine ordinance, but because they share a common goal associated with the purposes of the Kingdom of God. Since the question of guardian angel, that has been touched upon both here and in a previous chapter but will later be placed back on the table, we leave it for now to fix our eyes on other places where Michael is mentioned—Jude 1:9 and Revelation 12:7. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 will also be brought into the discussion, since there is mention there of the *Archangel*, while in the Jude text Michael is called "the Archangel."

We begin with Jude 1:9, where we read,

184xx *"But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"*

⁹⁵ This probably is Kuyper's own translation from a manuscript different from the NIV. See the NIV for an alternative translation.

To understand these words, we must first get a clear picture of Jude’s subject in his pamphlet. He is inveighing against a kind of people who are elsewhere called Nicolaitans⁹⁶, and who already in the very first apostolic churches sneaked an extreme danger into the congregation of the Lord. These people were sinners from before who allowed themselves to be baptized without repentant hearts, because they had the impression that the liberty of the Gospel offered them license for a sinful life style. It appears that originally they were not Pagans but Jews, a deduction one can make from the fact that Jude points them to the fall of angels, to the happenings about Sodom and Gomorrah, to Cain, Moses and Biliam—all historical events and persons about whom the Pagans knew nothing, but of which the Jews had heard it all. These Jews were totally estranged from the honour of Israel; they had fallen into a fully sinful Pagan lifestyle due to the infiltration of Pagans into their country.⁹⁷ It appears they were shamelessly pushing especially for the carnal sin of lust and even entertained a certain far-reaching contempt for their divinely appointed rulers. So Jude is inveighing against this carnality and against contempt for authorities. That such unfaithful and unholy Jews were so easily inclined to break with Pharisaic Judaism and had themselves baptized should not surprise us. The strict maintenance of the law in its most legalistic format on the part of Jewish leaders would naturally have been resisted by such libertarian freethinkers. When they heard the preaching of the Gospel that promised a salvation based not on law so much as on the freedom of the spirit through faith, it was only natural for them, completely misunderstanding the Gospel, to join this movement. It should be realized that at that time as now, the slogan “zeal without knowledge” (Romans 10:2) was a popular slogan intended to bring more and more people to Christ. This was a natural result of that early strongly-pushed agenda.

In order to strongly warn the faithful against these false infiltrators, Jude points to the judgements of God that earlier came over similar spirits among both angels and humans. The fall of angels only sprouted from the challenge of satan and his cohorts to the rule of God

⁹⁶ Nicolaism was an early Christian sect mentioned twice in the Book of Revelation of the New Testament. The adherents were called Nicolaitans, Nicolaitanes, or Nicolaites. They were considered heretical by the mainstream early Christian church. According to Revelation 2:6 and 15, they were known in the cities of Ephesus and Pergamum.

⁹⁷ Kuyper’s idea of their infiltration into the land may be questioned since their entire environment was Pagan since long and outside of the Palestine of the day. It was the Jews who had infiltrated Pagan societies.

185xx Almighty. This uncoupling from the authority of God, once it had also penetrated the *human* world, had a dual result, namely that awful carnal sin had bestialized people as in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) and, secondly, that people had come to despise the divinely appointed authorities as in the days of Korach.⁹⁸ It is over against these Nicolaitans that Jude points to the example of Michael the Archangel, who, far from despising God's ordinances embedded in creation, did not dare touch the residue of God's majesty that still shone in the devil, but honoured it, leaving the judgement to God.

This should not be misunderstood. There is nothing worthy of reverence in satan that was generated by himself. In satan there is no majesty, but you cannot explain this by his fall but by the fact that he is a creature. There is no majesty in a creature. This is the major point of the discussion right now. There is majesty only in God. If it pleases God to lay some of His Majesty on a creature, whether angel or human, it is irrelevant whether that creature is holy or unholy, but it is incumbent on us to honour that majesty even when it resides in the deepest-sunk creature, *because it is God's majesty*. If that majesty depended on the presence of some degree of holiness in the creature, then you would be obligated to honour a king or magistrate only as long as he is a good and honourable regent. Where that is not the case, he might be rejected. It is as with a child that has to honour his parents so long as they are worthy and loving, but as soon as that changes, he might withhold them their honour and respect. However, since the attributed majesty does not depend on their worthiness, love and holiness, but only through God's doing, your parents' sin cannot excuse you from obedience to the fifth commandment. Not even one like the vicious Roman Emperor Nero can free you from this obligation, no matter how much he tyrannizes and rages, to pray for him and to honour the majesty of God that rests on him in his person. If this obligation holds for the human creature, then, of course, it also holds for every other creature, including angels. Since, as we have seen, also in the angelic world a certain level of divine authority is exercised through the thrones, powers and rulers, the richly-gifted among the angels do not exercise their authority on basis of their own right, but only on basis of God's arrangement. This being the case, this authority remains, whether such an angel remains good or becomes evil, as Gabriel sings

⁹⁸ For the story of Korach go to Numbers 16:1-17:15 and the website < [Korach | Reform Judaism](#) >.

praises to God or as satan positions himself as God's opponent. And as little as holy men like Peter

186xx or Paul have the right to resist Emperor Nero because of his evil reign, so Michael is not to challenge satan his authority in so far as he exercises it according to God's ordinances.⁹⁹

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The above digression was necessary to make it transparent and clear why Michael did not challenge satan's authority, but also how Jude made an example of Michael's attitude towards his fellow Christians. A superficial reading often leaves the impression as if Michael were actually allowed to vilify satan, but did not due to his excessively unassuming personality. That, of course, would totally deflate Jude's words. Many could easily come to think, "Well, yes, fine, but I'm not that unassuming and I don't have to act like an angel. Thus, what Michael did not dare, I do." This thought of "I dare" is embedded deep in our sinful hearts. There is hardly a child who does not occasionally demonstrate what she dares to do against her parents at home, her teachers at school, or others in authority over her. Younger sisters or brothers often seek to improve their standing by daring to stand up against their senior siblings. Many wives find a secret satisfaction from demonstrating they dare to stand up to their husbands who have been placed over them by God. And where in our families such daring receives encouragement and even generates a certain honour, it is easy to understand how on the street, youths and mobs of adults find pleasure in challenging the police and before long the freedom-loving crowd dares to challenge everyone in high authority. Those with fewer gifts now dare to challenge all whom God has endowed more richly. Even in all sorts of associations and organizations it has become common to challenge or dare those in authority. For this reason, it is very necessary that this false concept of daring or not daring be ripped out of Jude 1:9 root and branch. That Michael did not dare was not in the least due to an unassuming personality but out of respect for God's ordinances. Michael, like all creatures, was encouraged by God to honour these ordinances, even if at times this was beneficial to satan.

⁹⁹ This sentence is not clear to me. Might the second part of it not contradict the main thesis here?

Looked at from this general viewpoint, the principle is the same for both us and Michael and so his example can be applied to us. He was not allowed to attack the residue of God's ordinances found in Satan no matter how deeply the latter had sunk. And so with us, we may not

187xx override the ordinances of God, not even if a Nero morphs into a devilish despot.

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If you understand all of the above, then the question has been decided whether we should regard Michael as a created angel or as Christ in His divinity. If Michael's example is for us as creatures, then he must also be a creature himself. Otherwise Jude's discourse would hold no water and he would have chosen the wrong example. Something that corroborates the above is that, according to Jude 1:9, Michael is thought to have said, "I do not judge you; I leave the judgement to God." That can only be said by someone who is a creature himself, but would make no sense if the speaker were God Himself. No one should argue that Christ "*made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant*" (Philippians 2:7), for there is reference in Jude 1:9 to the days of Moses, the time when the incarnation of the Word had not yet taken place. From all of this we can arrive at no other conclusion than that in Jude 1:9 as well as in Daniel 10 and 12, Michael appears as a created angel, who is presented as an example of a creature to us, who are also creatures.

As far as the case about Moses' body is concerned, this is outside of our argument, but for the sake of better light, it may be better to provide clearer insight in this matter, since there remain many for whom the words of Jude 1:9 are a total puzzle. Moses is an exceptional person as his entire history shows. Like no other prophet before or after him, he has seen God face to face. Related to this is the fact that he died in a way different from ours, for we read in Deuteronomy 34:5-6: "*And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He (the Lord) buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is.*" It may therefore not be said that he ascended to heaven like Elijah, but nevertheless he is on par with Elijah in so far as he appeared with Elijah on Tabor Mountain with Christ to announce to Him His end that He was to fulfill

in Jerusalem (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36).¹⁰⁰ We are not told how to explain this event; speculation will not help us and is even illegitimate, but we do learn from Jude 1: 9 that satan made a claim on Moses' body and that Michael made a counter claim. When satan appealed to his right given by God, Michael withdrew and left the decision about disposal of Moses' body up to God.

188xx As Hebrews 2:14 puts it according to Kuyper's translation, satan has "the violence of death," an expression we should not take as brute superior power and violence, but, instead, in the sense of power granted to him.¹⁰¹ In the original Greek a word is used that elsewhere expresses "sovereignty." Satan does not possess this power from within himself. That would not be possible, since he is a creature; he possesses it only on basis of God's ordinance. We should not understand this as if it was decided by divine decree that satan was to have authority over death. It means that, according to God's creation ordinance, satan was accorded such significance and high position that, should he fall, everyone who chose for him as a fallen creature would automatically come under his power and would have to experience his frightening superior power from the root of his life through death and the destruction of the grave. We often think that when we serve satan, we only place our souls under his power, but that's not how it works. We cannot control our souls without simultaneous control of soul and body, the whole person. One who submits to satan also gives him the right to his body, a right that satan exercises in our death and, after dying, even to our corpse. That is why the corpse must be destroyed. Michal found it intolerable that satan would demand his right over Moses' corpse. That is why he challenged satan, but when satan insisted on his right, Michael withdrew, not for lack of courage and even less for respect for satan, but only out of reverence for God's ordinance. He therefore dared not to pursue the matter and left the decision to God. How that decision actually worked out is said most clearly in Deuteronomy 34:6 that God Himself, not a human person, who buried the corpse, and that no one has ever found the grave. God is able to transfer our bodies from their earthly state to their state of

¹⁰⁰ For Mount Tabor go to < [Mount Tabor - Wikipedia](#) >.

¹⁰¹ The NIV here has "the power of death—that is, the devil." This might have changed Kuyper's comments here.

glorification even through the channel of decomposition, even if a wild animal has completely devoured us. But He can also achieve this without the process of decomposition. You only have to think of Psalm 16:10—“...*You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will Your Holy One see decay.*”

However this all may be, with respect to Jude 1: 9 our conclusion cannot be but that Michael was a creature, a *created creature*, that as creature was given us as an example, but as creature did not himself dare judge, but gave it over to God. From this it follows naturally that *we must understand the Archangel of 1 Thessalonians 4:16 also as a created angel and not as Christ*. In Jude 1:9 Michael is depicted in so many

189xx words as “Archangel.” When we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 that Christ Himself “*will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God,*” then it remains definitely possible that we are to understand “the voice of the archangel” as “with the voice *as if* of the archangel.” Even with this understanding, the Archangel remains distinct from Christ, and Michael remains another person.

As to the question whether the title “Archangel” is applied exclusively to Michael or whether it applies to the seven angels who stand before God’s throne, no firm conclusion can be offered, since Scripture is silent here. He can just as well appear as the Archangel in the sense that he is the only one of the Archangels, as in Daniel 10:13 he is one of the princes, so that Gabriel could just as well be an Archangel.

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We can be shorter about Revelation 12:7-8. There the name of Michael appears in this announcement, “*And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.*” Far and away, most commentators on this place do not regard Michael as the created angel, but, rather, as Christ and Him as Head of the angels. The reason this explanation is preferred was obvious. The vision that came to John on Patmos, after the incarnation and the ascension, when He was settled in heaven and was clothed with power and glory, dealt not only with His Church on earth and the saints in heaven, but also with all

angels around God's throne. This being the case, one can only judge that after the ascension, it is Christ as our Mediator who served as supreme commander over the hosts of God's angels in heaven. From this the conclusion was drawn that where the angels waged battle against satan, it was not their former head, the created angel Michael who served as their head but Christ as the strong Michael who delivered the battle of the spirits against the dragon and his cohorts. There is no other basis for this explanation. The text itself announces Michael's name without any addition and we only find him as the commander of the angelic hosts who undertakes the battle of the spirits against the dragon and his evil regiments.

The difference here does indeed come down to a contention over words. No believer in Scripture will deny

190xx that after Jesus' ascension, all angels, including the most gifted ones, were subjected to Christ as our Mediator; that He, taking command over the angels, can be assigned the name Michael is similarly without dispute. The question comes down to only this, whether the subjection of the angels to Christ means that the Archangel Michael is relieved of his command so that the Mediator replaced him or, perhaps, that the angelic host, together with Michael as their commander, are together placed under Christ. In the first scenario, Michael would have stepped down and Christ Himself take over command. In the second scenario, Christ would have designed the attack and assigned it, but it would have been carried out by the Archangel Michael under His high command. Most commentators choose the second alternative and understand the child in Revelation 12:4-5 to be the Child Jesus and the "pregnant woman," Mary. From that perspective, they say this Michael cannot be the same person, since he seeks to rescue the Child. However, this does not in the least solve the issue, since the Patmos vision does not depict historical events from the past, but what is predicted for the future.

190b There is another reason that we are inclined more towards the last explanation. Marginalizing Michael in order to replace him with the Mediator appears to us as incongruent with His Mediator status as well as with the stability of God's creation ordinances. Christ became *human*, not *angel*. He was incorporated into our human race in order for our race to be incorporated into Him,

but He has not been incorporated into the corps of angels. His taking Michael's place would run counter to the nature of his Mediator status. He was the Head of the angels according to His creational position just as He was the Head of all of creation, or, as it reads in Colossians 1, the first born, i.e., clothed with honour over all creation. That He as Mediator became the head of angels in a narrower sense comes from the fact that the angelic world was created to be subservient to the human world. "*We will judge the angels.*" If one tries to incorporate Christ into the world of angels, then one overturns the entire divine ordinance.

Similarly, it appears to us that inserting Christ as another Michael does not tally with the creation ordinance. Among us humans, it is possible for one person to take the place of another. In such a case, the dismissed person steps back and no longer serves. It is precisely this that is unthinkable in the

191xx inviolable divine ordinance. To de-activate an angelic prince is a worldly thought that may not be carried over onto heavenly things. Nevertheless, no one needs to remain in uncertainty as far as the main issue here is concerned. In Daniel 10 and 12 as well as in Jude 1:9, Michael is definitely a *created* angel. If it were that Michael in Revelation 12:7 was to be understood as Christ, this would nevertheless never be anything else than the name of a created angel who, in order to indicate his supremacy, took on the name of the Mediator in the way of delegation.

Chapter 25*

The Angel of the Lord

*See, I will send My Messenger,
who will prepare the way before Me.
Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking
will come to His temple; the Messenger
of the covenant, whom you desire,
will come, says the Lord Almighty.
Malachi 3:1*

192xx

As to the relationship that exists between the angelic world and Christ, we need to pay attention to what we learn from the Old Testament about the “Angel of the Lord,” also known as the “Angel of His Presence” and the “Angel of the Covenant.” We read about this wonderful Person in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Judges, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Hosea, Zechariah and in Malachi. Ever since ancient times the conviction held sway that we must understand this Angel as none other than the Mediator or, if you will, “the Eternal Word” about which John teaches us in his Gospel. Should there be sufficient grounds for this conviction and should we think of the “Angel of His Presence” as an actual angel, it would follow that the Son of God not only became flesh and “found as a human being,” but that He also in a similar way participated in the life and being of angels, whether this was only temporary or permanently so. It is obvious, to the contrary, that this Holy Appearance is translated in our translation as “Angel,” but we should not think of an angel, but, rather only of a Messenger of His Presence, also known as an “Ambassador of the Lord” or an “Ambassador of the Covenant.” Then the opinion stands that the Mediator already during the Old Covenant appeared in various ways, but He did

193xx *not* do so as an angel, so that we cannot derive any conclusions from such appearances about His relationship to the angelic world.

The “Angel of the Lord” appears unexpectedly in Genesis 16:7. When Hagar escaped from Abraham’s tent to the desert of Sur after Sarah disciplined her, the Angel of the Lord found her near a water spring. A superficial reading could

easily lead to seeing this as an ordinary angel, especially since the original Hebrew does *not* have the definite article “*the*” here. If you read this more carefully, you will soon discover that it *could* not be an ordinary angel. In verse 10, the Person said to Hagar, “*I will... increase your descendants.*” An angel could not have said that. He *could* say, “God will increase your descendants,” but not that he could do that himself. After all, the creation of humans is a function that only the Creator can manage, not a created angel. Hagar soon realizes she is not dealing with just any old angel but with Jehovah Himself, and therefore it says in verse 13, “*She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God Who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One Who sees me.”*” During Hagar’s second flight (Genesis 21:14-20), now into the desert of Beersheba, the Angel of the Lord appears to her a second time. Here, again, the appearing Person actually informs her that He is God Himself, for He says to Hagar, “*I will make him (her son Ishmael) into a great nation.*” Here also He identifies Himself through a deed, not one based on creation but by a providential order that can only come from God and not from a created angel (Genesis 21:18). This becomes even clearer from what God, according to Genesis 17:20, says to Abraham, “*And as for Ishmael, I have heard you...I will make him into a great nation.*” In the first place it is the Angel of the Lord Who makes a promise; in the second, it is God Himself making the same promise. An additional certainty is that the first person “I” of this angel was the “I” of God Himself. The third appearance of this very holy Person is at Abraham’s near sacrifice of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. We read in Genesis 22:11, “*But the Angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!...now I know that you fear God, because you have not held from Me your son, your only son.’*” The speaker here is the Angel of the Lord and He says that Abraham did not withhold his son from Him Himself, i.e., from God. According to :15-17, this comes out even stronger with the second call from the Angel, when He says, “*I swear by Myself, declares the Lord, I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.*” We read a similar story in Genesis 31:11-13, where the “Angel of God” appears to Jacob and says to him, “*I am the God of Bethel...where you made a vow to me.*” Later, on his deathbed, Jacob blessed

194xx Joseph and his sons, saying, “*May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Jacob walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this*

day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm... (Genesis 48:15-16). He prophesies that the same Angel of God will also bless Joseph's sons.

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In the second period of Israel's history where Moses is the central focus, these same facts are repeated. The same Angel of the Lord appeared again, this time at the burning bush, where He says to Moses, "*I am who I am*" and somewhat later added, "*This is My Name forever*" (Exodus 3:14-15). At the crossing of the Red Sea, the same "Angel of God" appears and leads Israel through the dried-up Sea (Exodus 14). Later, He appears to them in a "pillar of fire" out of which the same Jehovah addresses the people (Exodus 13:21-22). During a similar appearance in Exodus 23:20, when the Lord emphatically points to the close relationship between that angel and Himself. We read there, "*I sent the angel ahead of you to protect you along the way that you follow. Be careful before His face and obey His voice. Do not embitter Him, for My Name resides within Him*" (Exodus 23:21).¹⁰² Since the Name, as our readers will remember, expresses the Being of God in His revelation, then this means that God Himself is in this Angel. Thus you will understand verse 22, "*If you listen carefully to what He says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.*"

In connection with this, we see this same wonderful Person appear at Bokim under Gideon and to Manoah, and every time you see this interchange between the Angel and God Himself. About Bokim, we read in Judges 2:1, "*The Angel of the Lord went up...to Bokim and said, 'I have led you out of Egypt.... I said 'I will never break My covenant with you'.*"¹⁰³ With respect to Gideon, we read the following in Judges 6:11ff, "*The Angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak...*" and then says in verse 14, "*Then the Lord turned to him.*" After that, in verses 20-21, the Person speaking is identified as "the Angel of God." And then we read in verse 23, "*But the Lord said to him, 'Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.'*" And then we have the story of Manoah, the father of Samson, about whom we read first in Judges 13:3-21, "*The Angel of the Lord appeared.*" Then Manoah's wife—her name is not revealed—identified Him as "a Man of God" who then identified

¹⁰² This Exodus quote is a translation of Kuyper's Dutch text. The NIV reads differently.

¹⁰³ Here we have a typical Kuyperism: A quotation within a quotation within a quotation! Sorry for the confusing quotation marks that pile up in such situations, but Kuyper experienced no such obligation.

Himself by the Name “Wonderful,”¹⁰⁴ Manoah then laments in verse 22, “*We are doomed to die.... We have seen God.*”

From here on, both in the Pentateuch (the Books of Moses) and in the historical books about the later period, we continue to read that

195xx God appears, but we no longer hear of the Angel of the Lord. Only in Isaiah 63:9 there is a reference to the past when Jehovah once again reminds them that the “Angel of His Presence” redeemed them “in His love and mercy,” using language that leaves no doubt that all this is in reference to God Himself. In Hosea 12:5 it is announced that Jacob behaved himself royally when he struggled with the Angel at Peniel so that that appearance of God to Jacob also seems to have been an appearance of the Angel of the Lord.

And then, of course, this same Angel of the Lord appears many times not in reality but in the visions of Zechariah in chapters 1-6 and 12, again incessantly exchanging between “God” and “the Angel of the Lord,” a feature that shows that the Angel as it were takes God’s place. So, a whole series of visions to which the “God speak” in Malachi 3:1 attaches itself by saying, “*I will send my messenger¹⁰⁵, who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,*” says the LORD Almighty.”¹⁰⁶ Of this “Angel of the Covenant” it says in verse 3 that it is He who will come to judge and purify, while in verse 5 we are told it is Jehovah, the Lord Almighty Himself, who will do the judging: “*And I will come near to you for judgement. I will be quick to testify against...(those who do not fear Me, says the Lord Almighty.*”

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Putting all this together, it must be acknowledged that this “Angel of the Lord” or “Angel of His Presence” or “Angel of the Covenant” appears not as a creature. Instead, He is simultaneously distinguished from God but also can be said to be

¹⁰⁴ The NIV has “beyond understanding” in Judges 13:18.

¹⁰⁵ Kuyper slips in here “(John the Baptist).”

¹⁰⁶ As so frequently happens, the NIV here translates Kuyper’s “angel” into “messenger,” a practice that plays into the hands of so many modern Christians who are uncomfortable with the notion of angel. Of course, in this particular case it appears to refer to John the Baptist, a *human* messenger.

God Himself, is speaking as God and is confessed to be God. Malachi's prophecy with its clear distinction between an angel who prepares the way (3:1) and the Angel of the Covenant who was to appear on the road are obviously John the Baptist and the Messiah. In Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 1:76 and 7:27, the New Testament affirms all this so strongly that we must reverentially confess that the Person who speaks as the Angel of the Lord and the Person whose "I" expressed Himself as Christ are indeed one and the same. But herewith it is then concluded that the expression "Angel" for this illustrious Person is either a wrong translation or a traditional expression. In response to Manoah's

196xx request to this wonderful Person to tell him His Name, He answers that it is "Wonderful" (*Pele*). You read this next to Isaiah 9:6 and you find that there too it is said of the Messiah, of the child about to be born, that His Name is "Wonderful... and Mighty God." The Messiah, the Angel of the Lord and God Himself speak out of the same consciousness. There is definitely a distinction, but in no way can we regard the Angel of the Lord as a created creature, as just another angel among all the others.

And so we come back to our earlier observation that the translation would have given less confusion, if the Hebrew word had been translated "Messenger of the Lord," "Messenger of His Presence" or "Messenger of the Covenant," translations that the original allows. Even if one does not want to go in that direction and one insists on the translation of "Angel," this word can only have been used as a traditional expression. For example, a huge bear or colossal deer may be described as a "monster," even though these animals are not really monsters; the word refers to their size; it is a traditional expression. In the same way, the word "angel" can be used in a traditional way when a mother calls her child "angel" even though it is a human child. Similarly, the word "angel" can be applied to the Messiah. In this setting the term is understood as a being that carries out an assignment in the Name of the Lord. Though the Messiah carries out His assignment in the highest and most perfect way, the epithet "Angel" can be applied to Him in a traditional sense.

We decisively reject any other explanation. After all, to speak of an "uncreated angel" not in the sense of a messenger or representative, but in the sense of an actual angel, makes no sense. The Son of God became human, but not as an

“uncreated human,” for His soul and body are creaturely just like our soul and body. If one wants to insist that the Son of God really did become an angel, then whatever in Him consists of angel must have been creaturely just like all other angels. In itself this would be quite possible even as the Word became flesh. But the Holy Scripture nowhere teaches

197xx this and insists that He did *not* adopt the angelic nature. Besides, how did this Angel of the Lord appear? Naturally, according to all the stories, in *human* form. Especially the stories about Manoah and Jacob at Peniel erase all doubts here. An angel is a spirit but cannot appear to us as a spirit. Attempts have been made to retain this contradiction by the suggestion that the Son of God first adopted the form of an *angel* and then, subsequently, the angel adopted a *human* form. We totally reject this contradictory theory and insist that it must be translated either as “the Messenger of the Lord” or “Angel.” In the expression “the Angel of the Lord” has the traditional meaning of an ordinary angel as God’s messenger. From this it would follow automatically that all that is recorded about the “Angel of the Lord” teaches us nothing about the relationship between the angelic world and Christ.

For the sake of completeness, we need to add a short word here about the three men who appeared to Abraham from the oak tree forest at Mamre in Genesis 18. Some regard these three as the holy Trinity, but the story does not allow that, while marginal notes in some translations reject this opinion. Genesis 19:1 indicates that two of them were angels and that, according to Genesis 18:33, one of the three was Jehovah Himself, for we read, “*When the Lord had finished speaking to Abraham, He left.*” And then, “*The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening.*” It would do violence to the story if one loses sight of the sharp distinction between Jehovah and the two companions. That Abraham initially thought of his guests as three ordinary travelers proves clearly that the Lord and these angels did not appear in divine lustre but in the form of three ordinary travelers who wore ordinary clothes. Whoever believes and confesses that all human beings, one by one, both soul and body, from moment to moment, exist individually through the will and power of God, and they as well as their dress could be atomized in a moment if the Lord were to cease upholding them for even a second, will not find it inconsistent that the same God, for the time He considers them necessary for the carrying out of His

council, has omnipotently at His disposal any human form or dress, in order to make this

198xx human form and dress suddenly fade away once His plan has been completed. Of course, what came into existence in this manner and then disappeared was not a genuine human being of our flesh and blood. The three men Abraham saw were not part of our human race and for whom you should not look among the redeemed in heaven. They were instruments whom God used at that moment and who then faded away into nothingness after they had completed their assignment. This would be unthinkable for anyone who denies that God instantaneously created Adam as a human being in the Garden through the power of His Word. However, it would be quite thinkable for one who thankfully glorifies God's omnipotence in the instantaneous creation of Adam and Eve.

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In this connection it should be observed that with the revelation of God in the Garden nothing is said of appearance in human form or of such an Angel of God. Similarly, the revelations to "Abraham His friend" were not through the Angel of the Lord. All these revelations were direct revelations of Jehovah. The more distant revelation via the Angel of the Lord does not take place with Abraham but with Hagar and her son Ishmael in the desert. From this we can conclude that the revelation of the Eternal Being originally had a more direct character both in vision and reality. In Genesis 15:12ff, in the vision during which Abraham fell into a deep sleep, he sees "a smoking firepot with a blazing torch" passing in between the two halves of his offering but no Angel of the Lord. Even more remarkable is that with Moses, when the clear and full revelation is about to be given to him, it is the Lord who appears to him face to face and the glory of the Lord is shown to him by the rock. The first revelation to Israel is not the pillars of cloud and fire, but the Face of the Lord, that is, the more direct revelation, which can no longer remain with Israel after its fall. From now on, as with Hagar, it is the Angel of the Lord who brings the work of God with and for Israel to completion. *So it would appear that the Angel of the Lord is a revelation of Jehovah that has a limited character, that wraps itself in mist in which the full and rich communion with the Eternal Being retreats till the days the new dispensation breaks forth, when the Word becomes*

flesh and the Christ becomes one of us as our Brother to reveal to us the full light of Truth in His Person through His Word.

If you ask whether any creature of God can ever see Him in His essence,

199xx the answer is definitely negative. His essence being what it is, He is and remains the invisible God, who lives in an inaccessible light. It is His divine glow that dims every human eye, including the eye of the soul. But it is something different to perceive God and to see the Holy in His essence. Even we people do not see each other's essence, but we do perceive each other in some way. With us this happens through our bodies and our bodily gestures. But God has no body; He is Spirit and nothing but Spirit. However, this does not mean He lacks the means to make His presence perceivable. Were He to lack that means, the Eternal One would be less perfect or complete than a human being. He can make His Holy Presence perceivable much better than we can, both in the spiritual as well as in the visible. It is for this reason that the Psalmist perceives the voice of God in the thunder and that Israel perceived Him above the Tabernacle in a pillar of fire. Yes, one day the communion between the Eternal One and us will be so perfect and complete that nothing in His creation will obscure Him from us, but all His creation will reveal Him to us. Then we will see God as He is.

If we now put aside the sin situation, that is, the Garden and the Kingdom of Glory, that revelation of God will be as it were automatic and God and all that surrounds Him will be perceived directly by all His saints. But once sin intervened, creation became beclouded and hid the same God that was earlier revealed. For this reason all sorts of extraordinary means were invoked in order to still generate light in the midst of darkness. In the sphere of nature, after the sun has set, recourse is taken today to electric light, but in the past, to the candlestick, as Jesus Himself called the special revelation. As to the means by which God took extraordinary recourse in order for His elect to perceive in the midst of the darkness of sin you find the direct appearance of Jehovah in human form, the pillar of fire, the appearance of the Angel of the Lord till, lastly, the Counsel of God approached its fulfillment, the Word became flesh and God appeared in Christ.

Chapter 26*

The Calling of Angels¹⁰⁷

*Praise the Lord, you His angels,
you mighty ones¹⁰⁸ who do His bidding,
who obey His Word.
Psalm 103:20*

259xx

In this chapter we are going to discuss the task that God has assigned the angels, i.e., their calling embedded in their creation by divine ordinance, to the work they are to perform, to the “occupation” with which they busy themselves, to their relationship to us humans and of ours to them, matters which are basically the same for both the good and fallen angels.

Primary in the calling of angels is their obligation to *praise God*. In Isaiah 6:3 we hear the Seraphim sing, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty,*” while in Revelation 4 the Cherubim raise their voices with “*Praise the Lord, you His angels.*” These are the sounds that echo throughout the Scripture. The concept of angels in the Scripture is so closely identified with angelic praise of God by many as if that is their only calling. We will no longer talk about the fact itself of their praise. But we do need to add some further explanation about the nature of this praise.

When we speak of praising God, we almost automatically think of loud voices, of praise in worship, and of praise as the singing of hymns. Most of us would not even understand such praise other than praise at the top of our voices. Whoever will engage in praise must be able to *speak* and to *sing*. In the sad atmosphere of the voiceless, praise also is silenced. This situation has brought it about that most people, when they hear of angelic praise, naturally think of it in terms of worship and song with loud voices. Since there is no song without voice, this has also led to

¹⁰⁷ From here on the chapter headings deviate from the original due to Kuyper’s insertion of seven chapters on the fallen angels, the translation of which appears in the companion volume. He then picks up the good angels again in chapters 33-35 in the original, which constitute chapters 26-28 in this volume.

¹⁰⁸ For “mighty ones” Kuyper has “*krachtige helden*” or “powerful / strong heroes,” terminology that will play a role in this chapter.

thinking of angels as bodily creatures and that the various arts and sculpture depict the angelic world as an immense crowd of

260xx beautiful children's faces resounding the praise of Jehovah.

Since we have determined that angels are purely spiritual beings and thus by definition possess no bodies, then the entire presentation above falls away; there is no mouth or voice and the idea of praising the Lord becomes puzzling for us, even more so since praising the Lord is not marginal to their calling but gives us the impression it is the all in all of their task. How then is it to be understood that angels without body or voice nevertheless expend themselves in praising the Lord?

260 For the solution to this problem one can take two directions. One can insist that a spirit can also generate the movement of sound waves directly or maintain that the essence of praise is not in the sounding off itself but in the internal movement of the spirit.

The first solution can be that you immediately think of the wind that can sigh, sigh and rustle or produce a sharp and penetrating sound without the involvement of any organ. In such a situation there is a direct driving and rustle generated, the effect on the sound waves of which is to create sound. It is asked why a celestial spirit cannot have such a direct effect on the sound waves without needing the throat organ to which we humans are bound. And why would it be impossible for angels to produce sound and song in the same way even if deprived of every bodily sound organ? We should not forget that our speaking and singing are actually nothing but the effect of the *soul* on the sound waves. Our speech organs and nerves are nothing but links through which the connection between our souls and the atmosphere is established. Imagine for a moment that we could be released from our dependence on our speech organs and nervous system—and you'd have the situation currently existing among angels.

Now this solution to the issue at hand is not all that ludicrous and to assert that the spirit cannot have a direct effect on the atmosphere is narrow-minded and one-sided. The Scripture does not hesitate to time and again speak of the voice of God in the thunder, even though with Him the thought of organs of speech is even further removed than with angels. What makes accepting this theory even more difficult than with angels is that, yes, the earth has an atmosphere, but it is difficult

to imagine an atmosphere in the spirit kingdom and, where this does not exist, all our theories about sound and sound generation fall by the wayside.

The second solution takes us in a completely different direction. So it is said

261xx that actual praise is not a matter of making sounds but lies in the disposition and inner movement of our soul. If only sound is generated, this is not praise. Neither is an organ unaccompanied by singing praising God in the real sense of the word. Actual praise is thus not found in the sound so much as in the disposition of the soul. That soulful disposition, that inner movement of the soul that trembles with joy before the Lord, can also be found in our silence, even with a deaf mute person, and thus also with God's angels. Actually, there is no problem here. God does not listen to the tone, but, rather to the exhaling of the soul. And so the angels of God also praise the Lord their God in the inner movement of their spirits and God, Who Himself is a Spirit, receives the utterances of the spirits in a wholly spiritual manner.

There is, of course, partial truth in all of this. It is all about praise from the heart more than about praise with the tongue. The custom that broke into many churches from the outside, namely to appoint someone from show business who may have a powerful voice even though his soul is far removed from God's holiness, is to be disapproved. A bird sings only to create sound, but a human being sings with soul and body both. It is from there that the Psalms of David in the congregation of the faithful, even if the organ is not of the best quality or the organist not the most gifted, and even though the singers are hardly virtuosos, a totally unique beautiful sound is created that has an ardent and fervent quality that often moves even outsiders. It must be acknowledged that even a mute person, or even a dying person no longer able to speak, let alone sing, can nevertheless be filled with praise to God in the depth of her soul.

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Though we fully accept the above, over against that stands the fact that such silent vibration of the soul for joy in God can only be given the name "praise" in a traditional sense. God Himself at our creation embedded in us the urge and the need to express what fills the soul with sounds. It is said that God Himself listens to the sounds, for He who has implanted our ears, also hears and listens. Nothing

so frightened the saints of the Old Testament as they thought that from their death to the resurrection they would be disabled from raising their voices. They knew that upon their death they would lay their bodies aside, that they would lose their voice and that thus no one can praise God in the grave.

262xx But this was not enough for them; they wanted more. God had created them soul *and* body. That was the reason they longed and panted for that day of glory when they would have body and soul together again in order to once again sing out the full praise of the Lord with full voice and pure, holy tone. Although we admit that even in the soul there can be a God-glorifying disposition that turns the praise of lips into praise for God, we nevertheless need to make a distinction between the God-glorifying disposition of the soul and the exit from the soul into the voice of praise. As closely related as they are, they are *not* the same. It speaks for itself that the angels can possess that God-glorifying disposition and that inner movement of adoration in the spirit, that God tests those spirits, notices its disposition and searches for this movement of spirits. It will not do to characterize this enactment fully carried out in the spiritual realm as praise.

And thus we have a choice before us: Either with the angels there can be praise in the traditional sense or you must acknowledge the possibility also for angels to sound forth their song and praise in the world of tones without our speech organs. It occurs to us that much can be said in favour of the last choice. Also, where in Scripture, apart from their earthly appearances, we are told of the angels before God's throne and in the heavens, not only the internal glorification of God's Name but especially the praise of angels and their songs of praise are frequently placed in the foreground. Angels and angelic songs are two images that are constantly wedded in Scripture. Even before humans were created, angels sang when the morning stars sang blissfully and the children of God jubilated. The song of the angels at Bethlehem was so movingly beautiful that even now, after twenty-one centuries, it still echoes in our ears and hearts. The angelic song in Revelation 14 holds for us no future other than that in which this singing, praising and jubilation of angels before God's throne will be the holy music of eternity. We accept the entire Scripture via the impression, not that the birds or we humans sing, but that now the angels react to our song with certain weak echo. Rather to the contrary, the angels are the singers of excellence, who lead us, who set the tone for us, and from

whom we humans learn to praise and jubilate before our God. In the Kingdom of Glory all this beauty from the angelic world

263xx would remain hidden, if that angelic singing would occur only if it took place in a hidden spiritual manner. We would then live with angels eternally without ever noticing them at all and our human song would never, never! harmonize with that of the angels before God's throne. This is not the presentation we receive in Scripture. The life of people and of angels in the Kingdom of Glory is depicted rather as a holy society whose songs merge according to Scripture. Turn to Revelation 4:9-10 where Cherubim offer glory, honour and thanksgiving to Him Who sits on the throne and lives there in all eternity, while the saints fall down before Him, worship Him and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power.*" The coherence between the angelic and the human song is also clear. Once the angels have sung theirs, the saints take their turn with their song constituting an echo of what the angels sang.

Very definitely then we also receive the impression that in the Kingdom of Glory the angels will raise songs of praise that are perceptible to the saints. The song at Bethlehem was a prologue to that celestial choir. Our current lack of hearing that angelic singing is a deprivation of the higher celestial musical enjoyment that has come over us due to sin. We cannot deal expansively here with the world of tones and music in our present life, but that there is a connection between celestial music and that which we are granted here on earth, is not likely to be doubted. The Psalmist puts it so beautifully, "*As they make music they will sing, 'All my fountains are in you'*" (Psalm 87:7). She who can already now be fanatic with a delightful instrument, with musical virtuosos and with rich performances, should ask herself about their significance compared to the glorious music of the spheres that one day will be heard by God's children, as the heavenly orchestra before the throne of God Almighty will one day grab us and move us along in full and clear play with tones in the root of our being to the praise of God's eternal love and to the praise of the Lamb that was sacrificed and that will echo throughout all the heavens. Anyone who ever heard the silver tones of the Alps-horn roll high over the mountaintops, along the fields of ice and snow, and then hear it repeated over and over many times by echoes, knows already now how mightily such glorious

music from on high and from afar can move the depth of the soul. How glorious it will be when not a Bach but a Gabriel

264xx sets the tone and all the heavenly choirs break out into worship, praise and holy jubilation before our God, Who alone is great.

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Because of the above, every thought about sound and voice being restricted to our atmosphere is to be relinquished. To be sure, we only know it in our own context, but I am sure you realize that in the world of music and tone there hides a much more noble and higher creation than mere sound waves in our earthly atmosphere and that He Who created all that for us on this earth, restricted it to our current existence and tied to this atmosphere. We do not know how that which for us is currently restricted to our atmosphere will be revealed in the Kingdom of Glory. But this we do know, that one day we will rise in our glorified bodies without and outside of our atmosphere, and that in that state of glorification we will praise and jubilate not only in the spiritual sense but with our tongues released eternally to offer “*the fruit of our lips*” (Hosea 14:2). Paul speaks of “unspeakable words” or “words that cannot be uttered.” There is mention of resounding trumpets. In Revelation John hears voices. But that’s all we know. Precisely because we know nothing of the manner in which the world of tones will reveal itself in the Kingdom of Glory, we are unable to say anything about the way that tone world already now operates before the throne of God and even much less about divine ordinances as they apply to tones in spheres for which He has not created our kind of atmosphere.

Nevertheless, the beauty of the angelic tonal world should also be experienced and enjoyed by us humans. Therefore, there should be a relationship and agreement between their tonal world and ours. The tonal world of animals may not be designed to translate the movements of the human soul or to have an effect on that movement of our souls other than in a very general way via the beauty of these sounds. Even though in the music of animals it is only animal emotions that are translated, our ability to appreciate their song and their listening to a melody that we may whistle, demonstrates that the world of tones for animals and humans is one and the same at its roots. That is also how it is between us and angels. Their

music emerges from *their* lives, from *their* existence and is taken from *their* experiences. That life, that existence, those experiences are different from ours and thus their song will never be felt and enjoyed in all its depth except by an angel. But just because angels are that much closer to us than the nightingale or the owl and

265xx though they do not have a human heart, they do have a rational spirit in common with us, which is the reason their song is so unbelievably more moving and fervent for us than the song of other creatures penetrate our souls and delight us. It is not as if their song is directed at or for us. Their song aims at God and *only* at Him; they praise the Almighty. But if in the future there are only children of God who live together on the glorified earth who no longer enjoy anything but the glorification of the Almighty, then the song of angels that will lead them in this praise exercise will be the most blessed one they will experience. This then will be the magnificence of the redeemed that, after the multitude of angels have exhausted their jubilation, they will be replaced by those purchased by the blood of the Lamb. Those who echo the song of those who lead will surpass them in the excellence of their song, for as beautiful as the jubilation of angels before God may be, even more beautiful is that of the redeemed.

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So much for the praise of angels, but we need to add something in contrast. Over against praise, there are the curse, malediction and ridicule. As soon as an angel falls, praise morphs into turning against God and he now follows his devilish nature. That is why at the beginning of this chapter we repeated several times that we must always regard the good and the fallen angels from the same perspective. Both utter sounds before God, but while the sounds of the good angels constitute songs of praise and worship, they have degenerated among the fallen angels into tones of malediction, blasphemy and cursing. The world of devils is not silent either, except that they shriek, scream and rant to overpower the songs and jubilation of the good angels.

You can observe the same contrast in the human world. Human beings are also wired to express themselves before God and He is wired to turn these utterances into an outlet of praise and worship. But if a person falls away from God, then

hers also morphs into their opposite. She who was to sing a psalm, provokes God with a song of disgrace and dishonor; who was to praise, curses; who was to worship and adore, blasphemes; who was to jubilate, slanders. What we call swearing is the natural result of sin. That such sinful utterances remain restrained for a very long time is to be explained by the fact that many lives are insipid and weak in their utterances. They know neither: They don't praise and they don't curse. They do nothing. They hardly live. And one does not observe the utterances of their lives. But something

266xx untoward happens in the lives of such people that enflames their anger and they are aroused out of their rest, and, *voilà*, there comes the curse over their lips that had been hiding in their heart for all this time, but only now forces itself over the lips. It is only when she is born again and her soul turns to the living God that this changes and the need arises no longer to curse, but to bless; no longer to blaspheme, but to praise. If after that, her life turns into turmoil, it is no longer the curse that forces its way over the lips, but the prayer for God's help and the praise of His Name.

And so it is in the world of the fallen angels as well. With them, too, the created urge to be involved with God and to express themselves before Him has not been withdrawn from them through the fall. That same urge remains active in their fallen state, but with opposite effect. Every bird makes a sound, but the night owl that cannot sing, screeches and emits the most atrocious sounds. So in the world of devils and demons all utterings of the spirit are falsified, every utterance is a discord and turned into a dissonance and all beauty has become hideous and ghastly. We know this so well that we are accustomed to describe wild screeching and shrieks among people as a "hellish racket" or some equivalent and recognize the devilish smirk of demons in their evil burst of sneering laughter.

Chapter 27*

War Among Angels

*And there was war in heaven.
Michael and his angels fought against the dragon,
And the dragon and his angels fought back.
Revelation 12:7*

267xx

Angels find their calling and their joy in praising and worshipping God.

However, this does not take up their total existence. Apart from praise, they have two other tasks assigned to them. They also have to *fight* and to *serve*. In this chapter we will treat their fight; in the next, their service. After these two chapters, we will close this book.¹⁰⁹

It is clear from Scripture that angels are indeed also called to wage war, to strive, to battle. Already at the first appearance of an angel in sacred history¹¹⁰ there is a Cherub with a *flaming sword* in hand (Genesis 3:24). This does not mean that the angels of God wear a sharpened sword on their belt, but this imaginary picture at least points to their military nature and to their life's task as warriors. In addition, angels in Holy Scripture are often described in military terms;¹¹¹ they are addressed as "strong heroes" or "mighty men or "men of valour;" sometimes we read about armed cavalry units. In Ps 68:17 we read of "chariots" as in "*The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands upon thousands.*" These are chariots for battle as they were used in those days, with their drivers attempting to create horrible destruction among the enemy. We should be careful about the appearance of the supreme commander to Joshua at the Jordan

¹⁰⁹ In the original, the last chapter deals with fallen angels, but in this translation, that chapter constitutes the final chapter of the companion volume.

¹¹⁰ I am not sure why Kuyper considers Biblical history any more sacred than history in general, since God is behind the curtain of all history. Neither am I sure of the majority stance on this question among the Reformational school of thought.

¹¹¹ Kuyper indeed uses military terminology like "*heirschare*" and "*legerschare*," that were units that could fight as units independent from the larger army. However, their English translations sometimes detour around such terms. "*Heirschare*" for example becomes "Lord Almighty" in Psalm 46:7.

268xx River, since this could lead to regarding the being who appeared as the Messiah, rather than an angel. But what comes to our notice is that in Gethsemane Jesus speaks of “twelve legions,” or, as we might put it today, “twelve regiments” of angels whom the Father could bring to Jesus’ side, a term also borrowed from military language. Of particular relevance here and what could produce a sharp difference of opinion but that also decides the issue is Revelation 12:7ff, “*And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.*”

This, however, does not at all mean that fighting, battling and waging war belong to the actual and permanent tasks of angels. To the contrary, the call to battle arises first when an enemy shows up and that calling will forever disappear as soon as the last enemy has been overcome. Before the Fall, war was unthinkable in the angelic world, and it will be unthinkable again in the Kingdom of Glory. Against whom would they wage war when there is no enemy? And against whom would they sharpen their sword once there will be no more enemies? While praising and serving belong to the actual, permanent and happy life task of angels, waging war is a marginal and temporal calling, but still a calling for which they are wired and for which they possess the required propensities. They were not originally and especially equipped and armed for this war when it broke out after the fall, but they possessed all they would need for it, since and because of their creation. For example, the heroism, the holy courage and the flaming enthusiasm for which the angels are praised was not first infused in them after the fall, but it already resided in their breasts and was brought out during the emerging struggle.

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So, there is not the least of doubts that angels are not only praisers and servants of our God, but also soldiers and heroes. But now arises the extremely difficult question what we humans have to think about all this. Angels being spirits without bodies, and nothing but spirits, how can they join battle whether against each other or against outside third parties? How wonderful that poets can help us sing about this and painters depict it in vigorous lines and glaring colours, but, looking at it carefully, is all this more than poetic imagination whereby the *actual* image of a bravely and seriously fought battle just fades from our sight?

269xx We need to dig somewhat deeper into this question to dig ourselves up out of our present vagueness to arrive at a more correct and closer depiction. In the first place, we need here to briefly consider the so-called *soul sleep*, a subject that appears to lie beyond our main topic, but that upon further thought is directly related to it. Most of us know what is meant by “soul sleep,” a subject to which Calvin devoted an entire book. The reference is to people who have died, who at death have laid aside their bodies and who will not receive another body before the Lord’s return, but who in the meantime continue to live solely as soul. *So the question is about the kind of life people without bodies have with only a soul.*

This circumstance is very much like that of *normal sleep*. According to the proponents of soul sleep, the dead unconsciously exist in some sort of darkness until the Day of Judgement, without knowledge, activity, emotions or enjoyment—a circumstance very much in common with sleep. Christian theologians, before and after Calvin, have always resisted this stance, but have emphasized that Christ’s redeemed enter salvation immediately upon their death and that they are assured of immediately entering into the presence of their Saviour, live with Him and share in heaven’s glorious joy.

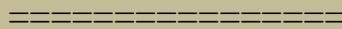
However true and complete this answer seemed to be, it was not enough. Experience has taught us that with respect to the doctrine of soul sleep, passing over a certain element of the subject has led the believers astray. If you were to ask today’s believers about this point, you will generally find that many believe that the situation of believers after death leaves nothing to be desired. This can go so far that people hardly give any thought to the great change that the return of Christ will bring to the circumstances of the saints, something which causes all longing for the Lord’s return, the *Maranatha*, to wither in the soul. People still do pray for His return in the sense that they would like Him to return during their lifetime here on earth. As we get older, we begin to realize that it may not happen while we are still alive. This attitude leads to indifference on the part of many, thinking, “I will die before ‘it’ happens; it no longer matters to me; I will go to heaven before that time.” This is very wrong. According to Jesus’ definite promise, all who are in their grave will hear the voice of the Son of Man, and thus all the redeemed of the Lord, no matter from what century,

270xx will be affected by His return. We should be confessing that after our death we are separated from our bodies and continue to exist only in our souls. During this temporary condition we will enjoy the richness of salvation, but we will not enjoy the *full* glory until the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords has brought the last enemy to his knees and established His Kingdom fully for eternity.

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The issue being what it is as per above, there arises a second question: How can a redeemed who lives only in her soul and thus lives only spiritually, since she lacks her body, enjoy her salvation and devote the love of her soul to God and her Redeemer? In the comparison with sleep above, it is unquestionably true that even in our sleep we lose the use of and control over our bodies. When you sleep, you don't hear, for when you hear you are awake again. Sometimes you may talk in your sleep, but you are not aware of it. You may move without intention. Whatever the body does during sleep, it does so unintentionally and without the involvement of the will; it just happens arbitrarily. The operation of the soul and body on each other is canceled. Well, they are not *totally* canceled, for when the body is sickly or it is influenced by intemperate use of food and drink, we can definitely feel this in our dreams. Thus the comparison does not fully hold. But even when we speak only of cancellation, so much of it is true that also in our sleep we experience a situation wherein the soul is more or less separated from the body. It is for this reason that Scripture often compares death with sleep and borrows all kinds of language from our nocturnal life to clarify issues connected with death. It must be admitted, therefore, that in our discussions about the condition in which the separated soul exists, we take too little of the deprivation into account and the lack in which the dead exist during this separation from the body. *We are created soul and body. It is only when they are together that we exist in our full humanity.* During the intermediate state where we lack the body, we are missing something and find ourselves in an unnatural circumstance that will end only at the resurrection. All of this is lost when we think of our dead or even of ourselves after death and imagine that during this intermediate state we have nothing left to be desired and that we will feel no deprivation of any kind even if we would never receive our bodies back.

271xx It is over against this error that the Church of Christ has always emphatically and seriously insisted on the distinction between the two stages of our eternal lot. First there is existence only of the soul till the Judgement; secondly, there is the existence of body and soul together that from there enters into full glory. In so far as this separation of body from soul has something in common with sleep, during this first phase we may definitely think of sleep in this context. But what is not acceptable, something that both Calvin and all our Gereformeerde theologians resisted very strongly, is the notion that during this first phase of the intermediate state the soul would submerge into a state of unconsciousness and slumber on without any sensitivity, lacking all experience, joy and action. We acknowledge that this is partially the case with sleep, even though in sleep as well as in our dreams there are all sorts of unknown mysteries, of which we would discourage anyone to speak. But in any case, our spiritual capabilities also need rest during sleep; they require rest from their labour, for which reason the submersion of our spirit cannot go unnoticed. In death, however, the soul does not doze, but, rather, *through death the redeemed soul awakens to a clarity it has never experienced before, in order to behold her God and Saviour in eternal light*—“*I desire to depart and be with Christ*” (Philippians 1:23).



Now we have arrived back at our main current subject, namely, the war of angels. We are now facing a similar question for both angels and the souls of the dead: How is it possible for a rational creature without body, existing only in the soul or spirit, to receive emotions, have experiences, exist consciously and have power to affect others? Herewith we touch upon the war and struggle on the part of the angels. They exist only in the spirit just like the redeemed after death exist only in the soul. If a person who exists only in soul or spirit, whether angel or human, has no consciousness, receives no emotions and cannot express himself, then fighting is unthinkable for angels. However, should the contrary be the case, namely, that he exists in clear consciousness, can receive emotions and impressions and can express himself forcefully, then he possesses all the requirements for an intra-angelic war.

Now we all fully agree that a redeemed after his death, though existing only in the soul without a body at his disposal, nevertheless is definitely conscious of himself, knows

272xx what is taking place around him, receives impressions, experiences blissful emotions and is capable of expressing himself before his God and Saviour in the inner movements of his soul. None of us doubt this. Without that firm trust, death would be the king of terror for us, something that should not happen to a child of God. If we acknowledge the same thing about the separated soul, it follows directly that there is not a single objection to confessing of angels, who exist only in spirit, that they also are conscious of themselves and others, are fully conscious of what is taking place around them, receive impressions and emotions, and can have an effect on their fellow angels, all this through the power that goes out from them. Thus all difficulties have been dissolved, for this is sufficient for waging real war between the good and evil angels. Such possibility is much clearer among angels than among the souls of the dead. As to the souls of people, we still always confess that they have been created or wired to express themselves through the body. This does not hold true for angels. They do not lack anything, for they are not designed for bodies. Their whole nature is wired to directly affect each other spirit to spirit.

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How all this is possible remains an impenetrable mystery for us about which holy revelation has not provided us any further light, and if you stick soberly to Holy Scripture, can do nothing about other than apply the two comparisons that Scripture supplies. The one comparison has to do with what lies *above* humans and angels; the other with what lies *below* them. Above humans and angels there is the Lord God of Whom the Holy Spirit testifies to us that He is purely Spirit so that we must keep all bodily depictions of the divine Being far from us. We confess with Christ that God is pure and only Spirit or, as our ancestors put it, *the most pure Spirit*. In the Lord God we worship a purely spiritual existence but that should keep us from imagining that He has a less clear consciousness. We confess that the clarity of God's consciousness rises far above that of all creatures. Far be it from us to think of an unmovable and untouchable God. Instead, we confess that the Lord God is touched even by the deepest and most hidden movements in our

soul life. Instead of imagining that, since God is purely Spirit, no power to struggle can come out of Him, we believe that all

273xx power comes from Him, that there is no power except that which comes from Him and that He is a terrifying wrestler against His opponents. This being the case with God Who is pure Spirit and exists only as Spirit, it follows that there is nothing strange about believing also of angels, who are only spirits, that they too have consciousness, emotion and utterance in full and strong measure and that they also are ready and equipped for battle.

The foregoing was the comparison to what is *above* us. Now we move on to a comparison with what lies *below* humans and angels, such as plants and animals. Plants also wage war amongst themselves. A parasitic plant climbs its way to the top of a tree and smothers it to death. A cactus with its sharp needles forces itself upon weaker plants and kills them. However, with plants this struggle takes place outside of any consciousness. It is a struggle between life and death but is waged only with physical power. In the animal world the character of this battle is elevated and rises higher and higher—not so with the very low animals, but definitely among the higher ones. The lion and the eagle know their enemy and choose their prey. They know the most deadliest spot of their prey. They have the skill to aim the weapons of teeth, beak and claw to the right spot. However, they do not struggle *only* with tooth and claw, but also with a kind of spiritual weapon: Their fierce attack, their roaring and their battle cries by which they generate fear in their prey and extinguish their victim's courage. In the comparison between plant and animal the war among animals takes place at a much higher level.

But if you compare that predator among animals with human beings, then the animals lose hands down. With humans the physical is much less significant and the spiritual much higher. Humans choose and create their weapons; they outwit their prey and catch the much stronger lion in tangled netting. The struggle becomes even more spiritual and less physical when it is a case of human versus human. But be aware of the lower, coarse kind of person who abuses and calls out rude names, who rages and raves, thrashes with his fist and kicks with his feet. And then there is the more noble person who carries on his struggle from his chair, only with the spirit and the use of pen or word, a battle with nonphysical spiritual weapons. Neither does this comparison in any way yield the conclusion that

spiritual battle is unthinkable and that waging war can only be carried out with physical means. To the contrary, the battle becomes finer, more powerful and noble to the extent that the physical falls away and the spiritual gets the upper hand.

Now, applying the above to the angels, we have arrived. If we proceed along this way and let go of the last residue of the physical,

274xx then we still have pen and ink as in the past, the breath of our lips and all our modern digital tools and we are finally left with only the spiritual for the most elevated of battles. That is precisely what we find with the angels. We do not know how communion between two pure spirits takes place; no one can tell us. But this is certain, that the angels have communion amongst themselves, know about each other, reach and touch each other, move about with each other, receive impressions from one another and can have effect on each other. This is all that is necessary for a depiction of their mutual battles.

Since all angels have the above properties in common, then by definition it holds not only for the good angels, but also for the evil ones that both types can affect each others' world and can engage each other in war. Scripture reveals this to us very clearly. Under the leadership of their commanders, the good angels fight for the honour of God against the fallen angels in order to resist and break their power, subdue them and to prepare them for a ultimate defeat. That battle never stops. Even treaties are unthinkable between the two groups of angels. There is between these friends and enemies of God a struggle of life and death, wherein there is no respite or reprieve and that continues relentlessly. It is a battle of spirits that is fought for a spiritual goal with spiritual weapons and can never be considered less serious than one with sable, sword and gun fought on the battle front. It has a much more serious character. A purely spiritual struggle such as between different theologians or theological schools effects a much deeper development of the spirits than does a physical battle at the military front.

Chapter 28*

The Service of Angels

*Are not all angels ministering spirits sent
to serve those who will inherit salvation?
Hebrews 1:14*

275xx

The first task of angels is to *praise* God; the second is to *fight* for the Name of their God; the third, to *serve* their God—praise, fight, serve. Of course, it is not possible to separate the last two from each other in the full sense of the word. The fight is itself an act of service. He who joins battle is serving. Neither is it possible to separate in the full sense of the word what the angels do for God and what for us humans. Their battles for God always become battles for the benefit of the recipients of God's grace. "*The Angel of the Lord gathers an undefeatable heavenly guard around him who obeys God's will.*"¹¹² In Psalm 91:11-12, the promise reaches out even beyond the Messiah: "*For He will command His angels concerning you... They will lift you up in their hands.*" Him as the principal focus first, but in, under and after Him also His redeemed. Do note that we need to take the distinction between praising, fighting and serving as they are intended, namely, *in general*.

When we speak of angelic service, the all-encompassing question immediately arises whether God in His work of preserving the entire creation performs this work directly or through the instrumental means of angelic service. In order to avoid confusion here, it is necessary to distinguish sharply between the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary* angelic service. Here one must avoid the mistake of including what takes place under *extraordinary* service in the quality and nature of their *ordinary* service. The angels have performed extraordinary service and will continue to do so in connection with their work for God's special revelation, which

276xx is currently on a temporary pause, but that will in due time be revived at the return of the Lord along with new signs and wonders. Even with the return of Christ and the Judgement Day, the angels will once again perform their

¹¹² A translation of a Dutch versified version of Psalm 34:7.

extraordinary services. In the nature of the case, it is just this extraordinary service, with which we are best acquainted, that springs into view and offers us the most concrete form, while we know the most common and ordinary service only in the most general terms. This situation has tempted many to develop their ideas about angelic service almost exclusively on basis of their extraordinary service and thus create an image of their service that is in sharp contrast with the experience of the faithful and with the ordinary facts of life.

To prevent such confusion and to cut off such misunderstanding we will keep the two separate. The extraordinary service of angels would never have surfaced if sin had not entered and had not been reacted against by the Covenant of Grace. This extraordinary service entered immediately after the Fall, when the Cherub arrived at the entrance to the Garden to guard it with his sharpened sword. From here on and throughout Scripture we see the angels insert themselves between the two in extraordinary ways for at least three reasons: partially to announce God's council and will; partially to resist the unholy powers; partially to honour and protect His Christ through His people. The fallen angels appeared in a destructive manner at Sodom and Gomorrah, over Sannacherib's army (2 Kings 18:13), and at Araunah's threshing floor. The good, on the other hand, are announcing God's will to Abraham and Jacob, to Manoah, Zechariah, Mary, in the vision of Zechariah and on the island of Patmos., rescuing and protecting the tents of the Patriarchs, as the people of Israel exit Egypt, wander around in the desert, receive the law at Sinai, invade Canaan, and wage war against its Pagan peoples. This entire extraordinary service finds its central focus in serving Christ, whose arrival they announce, about whose birth they jubilate, whom they serve in the desert, support in Gethsemane, roll the stone away from His grave, meet Him at His ascension and will accompany Him upon His return. The Son of Man will appear with his holy angels. While we await the Day of Days, we overhear them in heaven thankfully emitting an echo of the song of the Lamb that was slain. This extraordinary angelic service began in the Garden, stretches out over the centuries and will finally end when the last enemy has been defeated and God will be "all in all." They carried out this extraordinary service in the Garden, with the Patriarchs and in Palestine, but also in Egypt, Babylon and Greece, and

277xx probably also in connection with the jailer in Philippi. They have usually carried out this extraordinary service after they made an appearance in a visible,

observable form. As far as we can check it out, these appearance were always in human form, so human in fact that the people to whom they appeared first thought them to *be* human beings. Of course, they did not create the form of their appearance themselves but received it for their assignment from Him, who alone can create. That form did not remain with them but dissolved as soon as they had fulfilled their task. That task took various forms. At one time it was a matter of delivering a message, an announcement about God's council and will as in the case of Abraham about the birth of Isaac and of Mary about the birth of Christ. At another time, it was about God's revenge or punishment as when Sodom was to be destroyed or with the strangling plagues in Egypt, the pestilence in Jerusalem or the army of Sennacherib who mourned the death of 185,000 soldiers all at once. At still another time, they were assigned the task of rescuing people as in Lot's exit from Sodom or the young men from the burning oven or Peter from the jailhouse, this last one twice even.

It is not difficult to form a general impression of their extraordinary service. It may be added that they did not perform these tasks without the required understanding and tools and definitely not without holy sympathy. After all, they themselves were eager to look into the salvation they announced and when a sinner repented, the angels raised the roof of heaven with their jubilation.

We don't want to penetrate deeper into this extraordinary service. Further discussion of each occasion during which the angels of God took action in the context of this extraordinary service belongs in *holy history*. Here we can only point out the *general* character of this extraordinary service so far and will again at the end of days, when Emmanuel with his holy angels will appear for judgement.

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We now return to the subject of the *ordinary* service of angels and repeat the question whether we have to think of our God's providential reign as generally performed through tools of angelic service or whether He bypasses them and works directly, immediately. I trust you understand the difference under discussion here. When God afflicts someone with a disease, is it that God Almighty causes this sickness in us to well up directly through a word of His will, or does He employ the service of an angel? Similarly, when

278xx the Lord God performs a saving or protecting deed for our benefit, does He do this directly through the word of His power, or does He use an angel as an instrumental link? To put it more generally, when God, at whatever location or time, guides, arranges and influences the destiny of the earth or that of the nations and persons, should we imagine this as a direct achievement through God's will, word and power, or as coming from God but carried out by angels? The first option is the more popular. Many dismiss the service of angels and push them to the margin of their thinking and regard all actions from God that affect us as immediate and direct action by Him. For our consciousness it is as if a lightning bolt strikes us or like the voice of God that comes to us as echoes in the thunder. If you were to ask whether this conception does indeed conform to what the Lord God Himself reveals to us in His Word, it would be difficult to answer affirmatively.

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First of all, the above would raise the question why the Lord God would not be doing His own extraordinary work immediately, i.e. direct and without any other means or why the intervention of angels would constantly be used for His extraordinary works of wonder. However impressive angelic words and actions may be, that impression allegedly would still be much deeper, if the same words and actions had come directly from God.

Secondly, we see how Scripture itself actually makes a distinction between direct and immediate actions by God on the one hand and by His use of means on the other. At Sinai it is repeatedly pressed on our hearts that we should not regard the voice that spoke as anything but the voice of God Himself. Moses often speaks of this. There was no other nation besides that of Israel that had heard the voice of the living God from the midst of the fire. But when Israel could no longer bear this and prayed that God no longer speak to them immediately and directly but, rather, indirectly and through the use of means or agent, it so happened. The angels had rendered service to place the Law in the hand of the medium or mediator, but this may never be explained that the direct speech of God Himself had been withdrawn. And then, after Israel's backsliding in the desert, the Lord Himself said that He will withdraw from his direct presence among Israel and replace Himself instrumentally through the service of angels. *"I will not go with you, but I will send*

279xx *an angel before you.*"¹¹³ This gives the impression that there are two possibilities: either a direct deed of God or a deed accomplished instrumentally through the service of a creature, often that of an angel.

Thirdly, it can hardly be denied that the further we penetrate nature with our knowledge, it increasingly appears to us that the original connection reaches even beyond where we hardly had suspected. This has become more clear especially in the medical field. We did not understand the nature of a disease or how it originated. We did understand the common cold or a simple wound, but not how cholera, pestilence, typhus or any other sickness managed to invade us. There was talk of contagion, but we sought solutions in vain. Since then, however, the microscope has enabled us to dig deeper and more carefully to determine what takes place in the human body when such sicknesses ravish it. It has been discovered that there is a small sort of creature called "bacilli" ("bacillus" for singular) or "microbes," which multiplies very rapidly and that has to do with the start and finish of a disease. But naturally herewith we have not yet arrived, for where do these creatures come from, how do they suddenly show up only to go into hiding for years. Above all, who sends these bacilli to one person and bypasses the other? Although there must be a deeper cause behind these bacilli, we have made a step or two of progress in our knowledge and have learned that diseases for which we used to give a direct explanation, in fact, need a more mediate, instrumental or causal explanation.

This turns out to be the case in every area or discipline, even with respect to appearances in the sky. Research into wind and storm has already been partially successful. Experience with agriculture is the same: crops of lesser quality, failed harvest and other conditions that we used to explain directly, now appear to have entered via indirect means. Even in the field of psychology the conviction is growing that both the body and the after-effects of the DNA of earlier generations can have an effect on the psychological conditions of the current living generation. Ongoing psychological research will confirm that the truth of the theory that the soul has abilities without original connections or causes, simply rests on ignorance and imagination. In almost every field, whether higher or lower, the grossly physical or the refined spiritual, it increasingly appears that there is neither

¹¹³ It is often difficult to find out just where Kuyper is quoting from. This current quotation may be from Exodus 33: 2-3, but it is incomplete and not in the original order. Well, Kuyper is Kuyper!

accident, fortune or luck, but that everything moves mechanically by cause and effect, as for example, by wheels and springs and by established powers, directed and controlled by the systematic management of Him Whom we worship as our Father in heaven.

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280xx *Already these three grounds should incline us to make space for the proposition that the providential governance of the Lord our God does not operate in either violent and sudden jumps or in giant steps, nor in immediate or direct steps as in creation, but gradually vibrates and quavers in the creaturely realm, moves in descending order from higher to lower, in which process the angels also fulfill an instrumental or mediate service.*

Added to the above, Scripture offers us at least a few statements of a more general character that *honours* this perspective rather than condemns it. One of the most important of these statements is found in Hebrews 1:14, where we read, “*Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*” It will not do to restrict this to the few select to whom an angel has appeared. In fact, it does violence to the word of the apostle. Bringing all the facts together, we observe that there are not even fifty people to whom an angel has appeared in connection with their salvation. How then can we say that *the* angels are sent out to the specific persons who will inherit salvation? This kind of language is completely general and must therefore also be understood in general terms. Undoubtedly, included in these notions is the fact *that there is not even one single person who inherits salvation without involving the service of angels in this work of grace.* Whether such a select dies in old age or its eyelids close to the light of life in the crib, the service of angels in either case cannot be denied.

This general tendency holds also for what our Saviour said about little children: “*that their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father in heaven*” (Matthew 18:10). That this refers to the angels of children *who will be saved* is clear from the context. The subject is “these little ones.” With an eye to these little ones, Jesus said, “*See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.*” Jesus holds that there is a certain personal relationship between these angels and those children

and therefore refers to them as the angels of the little ones. In connection with Hebrews 1:14, this tells us that the angels who stand before the throne of God have a continuous involvement with the elect on earth, even if they are to be counted among the small ones. This is definitely not a doctrine about guardian angels. We take these to be angels who specifically protect us and care for us, while in the Matthew passage we are taught that *God Himself* takes care of His elect *through* angels.

Thus we do not deny that in

281xx heaven there is a division of labour among God's angels. It is rather the opposite that is unthinkable. The metaphorical language about military-type organization that is frequently used in Scripture does not indicate the prevalence of chaotic confusion in the least. We will definitely need to accept that the service of angels for the elect, including the little ones amongst them, is properly arranged, distributed and orderly, so that not all angels simultaneously have to care for all, but a specific one is assigned to a specific person, whether permanently or temporarily.

But even with the personal service they render to God's elect, angels do not do so by personal choice, sympathy or on their own initiative and in this capacity advocate on our behalf with God. It is the opposite: It is our Father in heaven Himself who recruits one or more angels He assigns to us and orders them to serve us in a specific manner. However, it must be noted that this angelic service is not as by mere mechanical means, but, rather, it is a service rendered by high and godly officials who enter our needs with their own consciousness and carry them in their hearts.

That is why it can be said that angels pray for people. In Zechariah 1:12 an angel is sent out to pray on behalf of Jerusalem for God to have compassion over this holy city. In Revelation 8:2-3, it is an angel who carries the prayers of the saints to God. Even though in the Zechariah passage it is the "Angel of the Lord" who does the praying and this prayer sort of flows or merges into the Messiah's advocacy prayer, it is sufficiently clear from their joyful jubilation when a sinner repents, that they do not serve as mere tools, but are involved with their hearts and have adapted to the needs of God's elect in their own spiritual consciousness.

Add to this in the last place the surprising statement of Jesus in Luke 16:22 that the poor man Lazarus, when he died, was carried by God's angels and laid in Abraham's lap, and you cannot fail to acknowledge that Scripture definitely teaches a steady and continuous involvement of God's angels with His elect, and then, of course, of specific angels. Jesus weaves this tendency freely into the parable, without any circumstance forcing him. To just say that Lazarus died would have been sufficient for a complete story, but for our encouragement and consolation during our dying, the Saviour fully tells us on His own initiative that the angels of God are with us also during our dying and that, after we have passed away, they carry God's elect triumphantly into heaven. They are and remain *spirits*, and as such

282xx they are near the spirit of God's child during his dying moments, meet him at the entrance to the Father's house and lead him into God's heaven.

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As to the ordinary service of angels to God's elect there can hardly be any difference of opinion; Scripture speaks too clearly for that; it is not just about a specific angel dedicated especially to you, as if the others are of no concern to him. Not only *one* angel meets you at your dying moment, but many. Not only *one* angel jubilated when you finally repented, but a whole group. Neither can we say that the specific angels supporting us are always the same. God is free to assign whom He wishes. He can always assign the same angels to you, but He can also alternate according to our need or employ other angels, with the understanding that it is certain and undeniable that the Lord God arranges His works of grace for His elect so that the service angels render is a prominent component.

In chapter eight of the companion volume it will be shown how in this context this relates to the service the *fallen* angels render to tempt and allure us and to murder our souls when we slip. Right now we only mention this, and merely add that their service has an effect on our physical as well as our spiritual life. Though angels are and remain spirits, this hardly prevents them from working on our bodies any more than they do on our souls, because they are also spirits.

We now come to the last question that is currently a popular topic, namely, whether this angelic service restricts itself exclusively to the elect and thus would

have no relationship to other people nor to the powers and elements of nature. We are strongly inclined to choose *against* this exclusive approach, even though we readily admit that this angelic service carries this specific and tender character only with respect to God's elect. We speak of this very hesitantly, since Scripture does not specifically address it, while our knowledge rests only on Scripture. If their service were directed exclusively to the redemption of the elect, then the angelic hosts, assuming the human race had not fallen, would have no service to perform and once the last elect had been saved, these angels also would have no service left to render. All of this is simply unthinkable. Such a world of holy beings has not been called to life without an ongoing glorious task for life.

283xx Then there is still this, that *the angelic service to God's elect is by definition connected to their life in association with other people and with their life in nature*. If angelic service were isolated from the life of the rest of the human race and from life in nature and its elements, they would also not be able to fulfill their service to the elect. On these grounds *we are convinced that the instrumental service of angels in Providential rule extends to all parts and regions of the universe*. However, we do not dare claim that this is always and everywhere the case and even less do we dare to determine the manner in which this instrumental service of angels takes place. Where Scripture is silent, we are as well.