

## ANGELS AND ANGEL CONVERSE

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WITH the pendulum of contemporary human thought swung so decidedly in the direction of things material, it may be of interest to present a few considerations concerning the citizens of a purely spiritual world—the angels of God. “That there are angels and archangels,” says St. Gregory, “almost every page of Sacred Scripture testifies.”<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory speaks in the language of faith, a language which carries with it for those privileged to understand, the highest possible certitude. Reason, however, substantiates the claims of faith by demonstrating the extreme fitness of the existence of an entirely spiritual order.

Back in the dawn of civilization, man made a first feeble study of his God as revealed to him in the effects of the infinite act of creation. The fundamental lesson he learned was, that in nature there is always order, it is thorough, it is complete. By these humble beginnings his curiosity was piqued, his wonder was aroused, and this wonder led him into deeper study. As he advanced, no doubt he was at times betrayed by his enthusiasm into losing a true perspective. His admiration was more for the effect than for the cause, the created rather than the Creator. He worshiped the sun and the moon. But regaining his balance he went on. And with the progress of civilization, his inspection of nature and nature's ways became more keen, more scientific. But always he found present that same order, that same thoroughness and completeness. In fact, the history of science is, in a sense, the story of man's advance in the knowledge of this characteristic element in God's creation.

The scientist has probed and experimented with nature in all its multiple forms. He has stood in awe at the delicate tracery of the hand of eternal Providence so evident in it all. He has marveled at that ever-present principle of order by which every

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<sup>1</sup> 34th. Homily “De Evang.”

minute detail is brought into the harmony of a thorough and complete perfection. Beginning with inanimate matter, he has studied the varying degrees of this perfection as it ascends through vegetative and sentient life until the natural climax is reached in man, the composition of spirit and matter. But is he to stop there? Is he to imagine that man is the summit of created perfection? Has not all his experimentation and knowledge of Providential order taught him the lesson of completeness?

God's sole intention in creating, the only intention He could have had, was the communication of good. This consists essentially in an assimilation of His creatures to Himself. Now perfect assimilation is had only when an effect imitates its cause in precisely that by which the cause produced it, as heat, for example, imitates heat. God, however, produced creatures by His intellect and will. The completeness of creation, therefore requires that it include creatures imitating God's perfection precisely in intellect and will. These being spiritual faculties the creatures must be spiritual creatures—angels.

Angels, then, do exist. And in following the consequences of such a conclusion we find that, participating God's goodness as they do in intellect and will, they are of necessity very wonderful beings. They are pure spirits and absolutely incorruptible. Their intellects are of course infinitely less perfect than God's but much more perfect than our own. Their wills are free and perfectly united to the Divine Will.

Angels wield a most potent influence over lower creation. This influence, however, does not extend to reading the secrets of human hearts. These, we are informed by Holy Writ, are known to God alone. But they can manipulate inferior natures in the most unusual ways. Thus we see them assuming human bodies as the Archangel Raphael assumed the body of Azarias.<sup>2</sup> With these bodies they seem to perform the ordinary operations of human life, such as eating, drinking and sleeping. But we learn that these are only apparent operations, for Raphael said to Tobias: "I seemed, indeed, to eat and to drink with you: but I use an invisible meat and drink, which cannot be seen by men."<sup>3</sup> What need could a spiritual creature have of physical nourishment?

With such unusual power over lower creation it is not dif-

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<sup>2</sup> Tobias, v, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Tobias, xii, 19.

difficult to understand how they can communicate their thoughts to men. They may assume an apparently human speech. Or they may so affect the internal organism of the body by local motion as to cause dreams or images in the phantasy. These images they make so realistic that man is convinced he is using his own human powers of seeing, hearing, touching and the like. But when we come to the manner in which they converse with one another we are met by a much more puzzling situation.

That they do speak to one another we have ample evidence both from faith and its convincing fitness. God's prophet heard the Seraphim "as they cried one to another and said: Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of His glory."<sup>4</sup> Daniel heard one angel say to another: "Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision."<sup>5</sup> The shepherds, watching on Christmas night heard a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."<sup>6</sup> Then, too, angels are intellectual beings and as such are social beings. They have their societies, their hierarchies, their government. They are not a disordered, chaotic mob, but one coördinated kingdom under one Divine Ruler. If man's inherent tendency to social life cannot be attained without mutual exchange of thoughts and sentiments may we not reason to the same necessity in the social life of the angel world? There seems no other conclusion.

Speech is a direction by one's own will of one's own mental concept in such a way that it becomes known to another. That the angels do speak, we know. But how do they speak? In man the method of communication is quite understandable. He is equipped with a most intricate apparatus for this very purpose. He has lungs with which to breathe, and a diaphragm to control this breathing. He has very highly sensitized vocal cords, a voice box, a tongue and lips. He may also use facial expression, gestures, writing and any other external arbitrary sensible signs. But all this is lacking in the angel. He is a pure spirit, totally devoid of all this marvelous mechanism. How can he communicate his thoughts to his fellow angels?—The answer is extremely simple—he does so by a mere direction of his angelic will.

<sup>4</sup> Isaias, vi, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel, viii, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Luke, ii, 13, 14.

But this brings us face to face with another difficulty. How can angels converse privately with other individual angels? They are all intellectually spiritual creatures and might easily perceive the intellectual communications of one to another, whether meant for themselves or not. In man this difficulty is avoided by natural obstacles hiding his thoughts and insuring his privacy. The chief of these is the will, which can retain the mental concept within or direct it externally. Another is the body whereby the mental concept is excluded from another's vision. And so it happens that even when a man wills to disclose the concept of his mind he can do so only by some sensible sign.

Nevertheless the angels do enjoy a similar privacy but in a much simpler and therefore more perfect manner. For an individual angel can by his will refer his concept to another angel and have it perceived by that angel alone, since this depends entirely upon the will of the one speaking.

The reason that angels cannot naturally know the internal thoughts of other angels arises from the fact that each angel has the power of a free agent over his internal operations. Since this power suffices for the preservation of internal privacy, by the same token it also suffices for the voluntary removal of that privacy in any given case.

With angelic speech is closely allied angelic illumination which is nothing other than the teaching of something previously unknown. Now while every angelic illumination is speech not every speech is illumination. An inferior angel may speak to a superior angel though he cannot illuminate him, since the superior already knows all that the inferior knows and much more.

The same mode of reasoning may be applied to all angels with respect to their speech with God. They surely cannot communicate anything to an omniscient God. But they can ask His advice with regard to their own actions, for example, or speak to Him in admiration and praise of His divine excellence.

Nor does great or small local distance in any way influence their communications. For angelic speech is an entirely spiritual operation and such operation abstracts from time and place.

So generously do these heavenly hosts participate the infinite perfection and beauty of their omnipotent Creator, that even the greatest possible knowledge, acquired by the greatest possible human intellect concerning their celestial nature and powers, can be of necessity only the merest hint of their resplendent reality. St. Paul to whom it was permitted to look in

upon their world could not even begin to express in human language the beauties he saw therein.<sup>7</sup> But from the little given us to know, one's mind is wont to wander off and pleasantly lose itself in contemplation of the ineffable beauty of their heavenly abode, whose streets are of purest gold; the foundations of whose walls are of sapphire, emerald and sardonyx; whose gates are of pearl;<sup>8</sup> and where countless millions of spiritual voices peal forth the melody of their majestic spiritual symphony. One begins to long for the time when God, having benignly helped us by His grace, will gently call us to Himself, to fellowship with these wondrous creatures, to the ravishing sweetness of their angelic harmonies. One longs even to join these sweet voiced troubadours in their unceasing chant of Deity's praise, to sing with them their joyous, never ending song of

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts  
Heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory.

<sup>7</sup> II Cor. xii, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Apoc. xxi, 19-21.

Saint Thomas, "Summa Theol.," I, qq. 50-64; 106-114.

## SUNDOWN

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Lord, to the traffic of the market-place  
That was his arrant soul's inquietude,  
Thou camest, sunbeams faltering at Thy Face,  
To ask, alert and splendid, why he stood  
The long day idle. Stilled all reckoning  
And noisy bartering of levity  
And pleasure's trill, her lashes beckoning,  
He heard one Voice, and saw, and followed Thee.

Now in the falling sun's abating fire,  
These trembling hands into Thy press have cast  
A burden sweet, the fruit of Thy desire.  
O Thou Who art all Good to first and last,  
Though last, shall he be lost among the many?  
Nay, he too at eve shall have a penny.