

God and the Blessed, rain upon Mary the fulness of heavenly joy, but with wings outspread, rapt and motionless in wonder and homage, the Angel of the Annunciation, leading the celestial song, makes a centre and focus for the multitude of the heavenly host. Gazing into the eyes of Mary, love has transformed him into flame. The act for which he was found worthy on earth has become an eternal act. The palm he carried to Mary is his palm almost as much as it is hers.

The two qualities named as his by St Bernard, and which he possesses above all angels, are ideal human qualities not often displayed together—glad confidence or fearlessness, mingled with harmonious grace. These are ungrudgingly attributed to him by angels and saints alike—‘We wish that he should have them’, says St Bernard with great simplicity.

And so, by the crowning Mystery of the Incarnation, Earth, no longer as a shadow, lies athwart the very heart of Heaven.

‘Meliked no other Heaven,’ says Julian of Norwich, speaking for all Christians—‘for I would liever have been in that pain till Doomsday than to come to Heaven otherwise than by Him.’ (*Revelations of Divine Love*).



## ANGELS IN SCRIPTURE

ROSEMARY HEDDON

I AM Raphael, one of the seven angels, who present the prayers of the Saints before the throne and who go in and out of the courts of Heaven. . . . I cannot eat and drink and walk the earth with you; I am less than a breath. Now therefore, give God thanks; for I go unto Him that sent me.’ This quotation, taken from the play *Tobias and the Angel*, by James Bridie, and itself a paraphrase of the scriptural account of Raphael’s farewell to Tobias and his son, sums up the varying angelic activities which are described in the Old and New Testaments. They are shown to us in the courts of heaven, and for this we must depend on the attempted descriptions of visions, descriptions necessarily

failing in words, for their human authors were 'carried up into Paradise, and heard mysteries which man is not allowed to utter' (II Cor. xii, 4), yet, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, conjuring up a picture of power, splendour and light.

Perhaps the simplest and most straightforward is that of Isaias, who speaks of 'the Lord, sitting on a throne that towered high above me, the skirts of his robe filling the temple. Upon it stood the seraphim: the one had six wings and the other had six wings: with two they covered his face, with two they covered his feet, and with two they flew. And they cried one to another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of Hosts, all the earth is full of his glory.' (Isaias vi, 1-3.)

These mysterious six-winged beings, with their changeless worshipping cry, call up an awe-inspiring vision of majesty which is yet, to a certain degree, comprehensible. But turn to the writings of Ezechiel: the language is more poetic, the imagery on a grander scale, the mind whirls with the colour, the movement, the thunder and the light; yet almost baffling as this remains, despite the cold, geographical explanations of commentators, it leaves behind it a hint, a taste, a touch of the wonder and beauty of the angelic host, eternally glorifying God: '. . . this cloud had fire caught up in it, that fringed it with radiance. And . . . in the very heart of the fire, was a glow like amber, that enclosed four living figures. These were human in appearance, but each had four faces and two pairs of wings . . . faces and wings looked outward four ways. Wings of each were held touching wings of other; and when they moved they did not turn round, but each kept an onward course. As for the appearance of their faces, each had the face of a man, yet each of the four looked like a lion when seen from the right, like an ox when seen from the left, like an eagle when seen from above. . . . Each of them marched straight forward, following the movement of a divine impulse. . . . There was that, too, in the appearance of the living figures which put me in mind of flaming coals, or of torches; . . . going to and fro in the midst of the living figures, a glow as of fire, and from this glow lightning came out. So the living creatures came and went, vivid as lightning flashes. And as I watched the living figures, all at once wheels appeared close to them, one at each of the four sides, of strange colour and form. All four were alike,

the colour of aquamarine, and each looked like a wheel within a wheel. Moved they, it was ever one of the four ways the living figures looked; and they did not turn round in moving. As for their size, their height was terrible to look upon; and the whole frame of them, all round, was full of eyes. Onward the wheels moved, when the living figures moved onward, at their side; rose above the earth when the living figures rose above it. They too had a living impulse in them, . . . with the living figures, whose vital impulse they shared, the wheels too moved, and halted, and rose. Over the living figures a vault seemed to rise, like a sheet of dazzling crystal resting on their heads; under this vault each held two wings erect to meet his neighbour's. Each had two turned upward to shadow him, and two turned downwards to veil his body. When they moved, the sound of their wings reached me, loud as waters in flood or thunders from on high, incessant as the hum of a great throng or an armed camp; only when they came to rest did they lower their wings. Above this vault that rested on them, sapphire blue towered up into the form of a throne, nor did that throne seem to be empty; a shape there was above it, as of one enthroned, and all about him it was filled with amber-coloured flame. Upwards from his loins, downwards from his loins, an arch of light seemed to shine, like rainbow among the clouds on a day of storm; there was brightness all about him.' (Ezech. i, 4-28.) C. S. Lewis must have had this passage in mind when, in his novel *Perelandra*, he describes the forms assumed by the 'eldila': 'Darting pillars filled with eyes, lightning pulsations of flame, talons and beaks and billowy masses of what suggested snow, volleyed through cubes and heptagons into an infinite black void . . . and far off between the peaks on the other side of the little valley there came rolling wheels. There was nothing but that, . . . concentric wheels moving with a rather sickening slowness one inside the other. . . . And suddenly two human figures stood before him . . . they were burning hot like white-hot iron. The outline of their bodies seemed to be faintly, swiftly undulating as though the permanence of their shape, like that of waterfalls or flames, co-existed with a rushing movement of the matter it contained. . . . Whenever he looked straight at them, they appeared to be rushing towards him with enormous speed: whenever his eyes took in their surroundings,

he realized that they were stationary.'

In the Russian ballet exhibition shown in Edinburgh a year or two ago, there were some sketches for costumes of cherubim, and here again, the same influence could be seen. Formalized 'faces' looked both backward and forward from high arched wing structures, which, together with an arched halo, gave the effect of a triptych, whilst the wings themselves, patterned with a design of stylized eyes recalled: 'Eyes were everywhere, on body and neck and hand and wing and wheel too, for each cherub had its own wheel.' (Ezech. x, 12.)

And one last glimpse of the angels in heaven, this time seen through the eyes of St John, when he describes his vision of the struggle with Satan: 'Fierce war broke out in heaven, where Michael and his angels fought against the dragon . . . the great dragon, serpent of the primal age, was flung down to earth; he whom we call the devil, or Satan, the whole world's seducer, was flung down to earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a voice crying aloud in heaven. The time has come; now we are saved and made strong, our God reigns, and power belongs to Christ, his anointed. . . .' (Apoc. xii, 7-10.)

But angels, as their name indicates, are messengers, and it is in this guise that they appear most frequently in scripture. Their missions would appear to fall into two distinct categories. In most of the appearances in Old Testament times they seem not only to bear a message from God, but also to be the agents of God's intervention. The first angels mentioned are those at the gate of the Garden of Eden: the Lord himself pronounced the edict of banishment, but he 'posted his cherubim before the garden of delight, with a sword of fire that turned this way and that, so that he could reach the tree of life no longer' (Gen. iii, 24).

Later there is the mysterious vision of Abraham at Mambre, where the three 'men' appear to him. We are told that he 'had a vision of the Lord', and throughout the account of this meeting, and the prophecy of Isaac's birth, one is referred to as 'the Lord', but in the account of the destruction of Sodom, which follows immediately after, the other two are definitely named 'angels': 'It was evening when the two angels reached Sodom. . .'. Then follows the testing of the inhabitants, and the warning given to Lot, in which it is clear that they are to be the agents of destruc-

tion: '... take them out of the city, all that are thine. Our intent is to destroy this place; the ill repute of it goes from bad to worse, and the Lord knows of it, and has sent us to destroy them.' (Gen. xix, 13.)

It is the destroying angel who brings death to the first-born of the Egyptians, whilst sparing those of the Israelites, who shelter beneath the sign ordained by God: 'The Lord will pass on his way, smiting down the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and the jambs of a doorway he will pass by that house, and will not let the destroying angel enter your homes to do them injury.' (Exod. xii, 23.) Yet though these are harsh times, and a stiff-necked people, we also see the angel protecting and preserving. It is an angel who is sent to lead the Israelites through the desert to the Promised Land, but at the same time he is to be their leader in the paths of righteousness: 'And now I am sending my angel to go before thee and guard thee on thy way, and lead thee to the place I have made ready for thee. Give him good heed, and listen to his bidding; think not to treat him with neglect. He will not overlook thy faults, and in him dwells the power of my name.' (Exod. xxiii, 20, 21.)

When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was besieging Ezechias in Jerusalem, the destroying angel of death struck down the enemy with pestilence, so that the dead numbered 'a hundred and eighty five thousand men in the Assyrian camp; when morning came, and men were astir, nothing was to be seen but the corpses of the dead'. (Is. xxxvii, 36.)

But not all the Old Testament appearances are the occasions of death and pestilence. In particular, there are two delightful stories, the first, of the angel who appeared to Balaam, when Balac had sent for him, in order that he should curse the advancing host of Israelites, and the second, already referred to, the story of Tobias, when the angel Raphael assumes human form, in order to reward Tobias for his faithfulness, save Sara from possession by the devil, and restore Tobias's sight. Humour may not be an attribute of angels, but one cannot deny it to the authors of these two stories.

In New Testament times, however, the angel appears on the scene more often simply as the bearer of a message from God, though, as in the case of Zachary, there are occasions where more action is called for. It is in these later appearances that the element

of holy fear is stressed. In earlier manifestations it goes almost without saying that the beholders or listeners are struck with fear. In most cases, the occasion itself is sufficiently fearful: the ladder which Jacob saw going up into heaven: 'a stairway for the angels of God to go up and come down. . . . When he awoke . . . Jacob said to himself, Why, this is the Lord's dwelling place, and I slept here unaware of it! And he shuddered; what a fearsome place is this! he said. . . .' (Gen. xxviii, 12, 16, 17.) Now, when the angelic messengers would seem to appear under kindlier circumstances, almost without exception their first words of greeting to men are, 'Fear not.' 'Zachary was bewildered at the sight, and overcome with fear; but the angel said, 'Zachary, do not be afraid. . . .' (Luke i, 13.) Even our Lady, greeted by the angel Gabriel as 'full of grace', receives the same reassurance, though we are not told that she feared, but rather that 'she was much perplexed at hearing him speak so, . . .' (Knox), or that she 'was troubled at his saying . . .' (Douay). In these appearances we are given no hint as to the visible form assumed, though later, at the Resurrection and the Ascension, the angels are described in greater detail: 'they . . . could not find the body of the Lord Jesus. They were still puzzling over this, when two men came and stood by them in shining garments.' (Luke xxiv, 3, 4.) But something in their aspect still fills the beholders with awe. We are told that they 'bowed their faces to the earth in fear', while Tobias and his son, familiar, though they have been with the angel Raphael, under the guise of their good friend Azarias, are so filled with awe when he reveals himself, that 'they were both mazed with terror, and fell down trembling, face to earth . . . for three hours together, face to earth, they gave thanks to God.' (Tob. xii, 16, 22.) And this last sentence gives the key, perhaps, to this fear. It is not as messengers, but as God's messengers that they are feared; the worship and reverence they receive only for him: 'All this, I, John, heard and saw, till, hearing and seeing it, I fell down as if to worship at the feet of the angel who revealed it to me. But he said, Never that; I am only a fellow servant of thine, and of thy brother prophets, and of all who hold fast the words which this book contains. Keep thy worship for God.' (John xxii, 8, 9.) Bearing in mind, then, that higher than man though they be, we are all together created to give glory to God, we may truly join

in saying, 'The angels praise thy majesty, the dominations adore it, and the powers are in awe; the heavens and the virtues of heaven and the blessed seraphim celebrate it with united joy. With these we pray thee join our voices while we say with lowly praise: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory.'



## TOO GOOD TO BE USED

THOMAS GILBY, O.P.

WHEN at length Job's comforters had done their reasonable best to justify God's ways with man according to their own theological preconceptions, *the Lord answered him out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*<sup>1</sup> Let a scholastic psychologist bear in mind that closure to the debate when he sets out to outline how we should use our faculties in our life with God.<sup>2</sup>

Using is what we do with utilities, and these as such are expendable objects which though not valuable in themselves do serve a higher purpose. Hence it is not the same as cherishing, which is what we do with things dear in themselves, or as enjoying, which is what we do with things that give us pleasure. Three kinds of good, *bonum utile*, *bonum honestum*, and *bonum delectabile*—that is the classical division, and our environment is shot through with it in many and varying forms.<sup>3</sup>

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Note, St Thomas warns us, the division is rather of contrasted notions than of different things.<sup>4</sup> For what is useful from one aspect can be worthy and delightful from another, thus a police-

<sup>1</sup> Job xxxviii, 1, 2, 7.

<sup>2</sup> A continuation of 'Having our Faculties', *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, xi, pp. 499-510, May, 1957.

<sup>3</sup> Ia. v, 6, c. ad 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ad 2.